

II. Chapter 1

Introduction

by Debbie M. Thorne

Welcome to the second edition of Texas State University's online edited collection devoted to the continuous pursuit, fortification, and fulfillment of our shared values, including a diversity of people and ideas, spirit of inclusiveness, integrity, respect, and the free exchange of ideas in a supportive environment. *Cuentos and Testimonies II: Students' Voices, Inclusion, & Anti-Racism* not only welcomes student voices to this important conversation, it respects their dignity, honors their actions, and teaches us that the process of understanding, appreciating, and living with differences is inherent to our personal and collective hope and growth.

For this collection, editors Dr. Octavio Pimentel and Miriam F. Williams and invited current students and former students to share essays, stories, and reflections on events, activities, and programs related to diversity and inclusion, broadly construed. Because of the dedication and innovation of the editors, students bear witness to the turmoil and triumphs around inclusion, equity, and justice. Their stories are compelling and I encourage you to do what I have done for each chapter over the past few weeks and months – read, reflect, read again, keep reflecting, and take action.

Many readers are aware that Texas State's San Marcos location sits on sacred space, the ancestral land of many tribes. For more than 11,000 years, people have chosen to live, thrive, and evolve right here. In *Places in Motion*, Jacob



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Kinnard writes that sacred places, seem to have “power fallen from the sky.” This power is only revealed to those who are fully attuned to the fact that people make places and places make people. So, how will we, as Texas State, use our collective power to reshape ourselves, this place, and the world around us? Most importantly, how do we continuously educate and empower our students to take their rightful and formidable roles in society, including reshaping it?

What follows are 14 selected essays that demonstrate a range of compelling perspectives, difficult experiences, known obstacles, and creative solutions for forging those rightful paths.

A gymnast for 14 years, Aja Stills reflects on her background as a Black woman gymnast and shares insights on how her environment shapes her identity. Aja moved to a different gym where the coach demands, “We need to change everything.”

Anastasia Vastakis recounts experiences of sexual assault and the challenges faced by women during the course of their daily lives. She discusses laws, movements, famous cases under compelling subtitles, including “Keep your wits about you,” and “It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Olivia Hinojosa discusses her first semester of graduate school as a painful experience that forced her to search for answers and eventually led to a identity transformation. She describes herself as “a queer Xicana from a Texas border town ... destined to be underrepresented within any field of academia.”

After 10 years in the technology field, Rozelle Monroe transitioned from a working information technology professional to student. He details how his personal experiences reveal disparities in American culture that he believes may lead persons of color to doubt or even mistrust themselves

Victoria Kuykendall describes her struggle with ADD, dyslexia, anxiety, and depression, including a key turning point – realizing a documentary she saw on disabilities gave her an outsider’s perspective of her disability. Her story ends with a hope that readers will be more kind and less dismissive to people with ADD or a learning disability.

From a young age, Elisa Serrano experienced language barriers in environments not welcoming to non-English speakers. Many times, she did not speak up or protest when she or members of her family were misunderstood. She did not always initiate communication for fear of being ridiculed. Her goal in sharing some of these experiences is to highlight all that we can learn from her silence and the silence of others.

Jack Rodriguez shares his personal story of how, after 19 years of stuttering, he enrolled in an intensive two-week therapy clinic run by Dr. Farzan Irani at Texas State. Jack gained self-acceptance and a passion to help others, resulting in his senior honors thesis, “The Stuttering Game,” which he hopes provides inspiration so that others never give up in their journey of finding their voice.

Sarah Rose describes the patriarchal fears and concerns propagated by the family, friends, and instructors around her. She ends with the hope that love and personal strength may offer a path to forgiveness.

Elizabeth Esparza offers professional insights from her experiences helping people in crisis. She uses Hurricane Katrina and its impact on people experiencing poverty to make her point that, during periods of crisis, the needs of the impoverished should not be dismissed by the belief that, “We are all in the same boat.”

With a Panamanian and African American heritage, Jhmar Dixon writes about responses to his dual culture and ethnic complexity. In discovering diversity as a student, where he is surrounded by “smart, open-minded, educated people,” he realizes that stereotypes about Hispanics and African Americans don’t apply to him.

Lindsey Villalpando provides an account of her painful journey as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. With the support and comradeship of her fellow Latinx sisters at Texas State, she begins to believe that “being different does not equate to being wrong.”

Quetzin Pimentel and Dr. Charise Pimentel, son and mother, share reflections on college choice and the role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Quetzin recalls memories that shaped his decision to attend an HSI institution, including attending cultural events at Texas State featuring Hispanic speakers. His mother says, “While not perfect, Texas State University, through the leadership of its faculty and students, has established a Hispanic-friendly campus with numerous Hispanic-centered programs, projects, events, and organizations.”

Jesus A. Jimenez-Lopez and Dr. Octavio Pimentel describe how the increasing number of HSIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that advocate for people of color offer a supportive and understanding environment where students’ needs can be met. The essay concludes that Texas State is on the right path for increasing its attractiveness to marginalized groups and its popularity among students of color.

Clarise Blanco and Amanda Scott discuss how the methods and practices in the post-Covid classroom might transition to meet the needs of teaching and learning in innovative ways, both in-person and online. They cite how the university’s

Honors College and the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute have worked to meet students where they are.

Please join me in thanking Dr. Miriam F. Williams and Dr. Octavio Pimentel for their outstanding dedication and professionalism in conceiving and continuing to produce the *Cuentos and Testimonies* series. This second collection of essays and the people who bravely shared them will stay on your mind and in your heart. They inspire great hope for the future, while demonstrating the variety of ways our students are already shaping and improving society.

Many thanks to Tina Guerrero and Carolyn Miller, Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, for their dedication and work in finalizing the website for this edited collection.



Dr. Debbie M. Thorne

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II. Chapter 2

"We Need to Change Everything"

by Aja Stills

Our hearts were beating out of our chests, bodies dripping with sweat, trying not to fidget under her intense gaze. My teammates and I had been working extremely hard ever since she walked into the building an hour into our practice. She hadn't said a word, but she didn't need to in order to strike fear into our hearts because, as a gymnast, nothing is more intimidating than the moment the owner of the gym shows up out of the blue to analyze your every move. We were excused to get a drink of water, but as soon as we returned it was time to start cross tumbling for our floor routines. The gym owner was an extremely critical judge with unbelievably high standards, so as I slid into my beginning pose with determination pulsing throughout my entire body, my floor music began signaling the start of my routine.

When my first teammate finished her routine, she was hit with a harsh sting of disappointment. The gym owner told her she was sloppy and couldn't control her body even if her life depended on it. I flew into my first tumbling pass, landing, then shuffling to my second. She had no sympathy for the second gymnast either, telling her that she couldn't even do the

basic skills that those in lower levels already knew how to do. I was nearing the end of my routine and my breathing had become increasingly rapid; however, I couldn't decipher if it was fatigue from my routine or having everyone's eyes



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glued to me, including the cheerleaders who patiently waited as we encroached on their practice time. Drawing in a much needed breath, I took off for my third and final pass. The gym owner told the third gymnast that her routine was just simply hard to watch and that maybe gymnastics wasn't the right sport for her. As for the fourth gymnast, well, I had just finished my routine. My floor music ended, and it was instantly replaced with a round of applause from everybody in the gym. The gym owner never said anything directly to me, but she did refer to my three discouraged teammates and told them that they should strive to be more like me. Although I happened to meet the gym owner's unbelievably high expectations, I was still upset for my teammates because they didn't deserve the harsh criticism that they had received. From that day forward, my teammates and I took our practices more seriously, trying to one up the other in friendly competition. Unfortunately, our days were numbered and sooner rather than later, our home gym shut down and our gym family split up.

I began practicing at a new gym where the floor was bouncier, and the trampolines led into a pool of foam waiting to cushion any flip you managed to flop. My eyes widened at the limitless possibilities; however, I could not shake off the feelings of anxiety that accompanied being the new kid. My new coach insisted that I perform my floor routine, so I nervously shifted into my beginning pose, as I had so similarly done only a month prior at my old gym. I drew in a deep breath to settle my overpowering nerves, but I could feel the eyes of all of my new teammates burning into me as the music began. My body started to move as if the choreography was second nature, and before I knew it, the nervousness that I had once felt was replaced with confidence. The instruments within the music grew louder and I found my movements becoming bolder and more

passionate. I flew into my tumbling passes and exceeded what I even thought myself to be capable of. This was the best routine that I had ever done; it was even better than the same routine that earned me a round of applause at my old gym. When the music ended, I was filled with a surge of pride. I looked over to my coach whose face was gleaming just as mine, but that mirror like image didn't last for long as she said, "I hate it". She chuckled. "We need to change everything," We needed to change everything? Little did I know at the time, she literally meant change everything.

After only a few months of transitioning into this gym, I had become increasingly familiar with a path that none of my teammates seemed to have to travel. I glanced back at my team members as I was being pulled away, wishing I could just fit in. My coach and I were once again walking this path together and our steps had fallen in sync as we had walked this path many times before. I glued my mouth shut knowing that anything I said would just add fuel to the already blazing fire. The warmth of the bouncy spring floor ended, and I stepped down onto the wood flooring. I knew I was nearing the end of the path because, to me, the wood floor symbolized the bridge that led from practicing with my teammates to the cold tile floor located in the coach's office. A chill traveled up my spine as my feet once again met with the tile. I was in trouble again. After closing the door behind us my coach didn't hesitate before telling me that I was too crazy, and too loud, and ultimately too much. I was still silent as she spoke, trying to really understand the reason I was standing back on the cold tile. I imagined that all of these complaints were the reason why I couldn't fit in, but at the end of my long list of flaws, she gave me a solution. "You just need to change." My heart dropped as her words about my routine rang in my mind. We need to change everything. I came to realize that it wasn't just my routine she wanted to

change; it was me.

We exited the office and crossed over the bridge, but as soon as my foot connected with the warm spring floor, I knew I had to be someone completely different from who I thought myself to be. I resisted my urges to bounce and to dance and to laugh in order to better accommodate the environment. I couldn't help but wonder why my identity was completely unacceptable here but encouraged at my old gym. Instead of my coach seeing me as passionate, energetic, and creative, she saw me as loud, crazy, and distracting. It began to dawn on me; I was a black woman gymnast transitioning into a predominantly white environment. I found myself really missing my old gym where my coaches and teammates looked like me. This gym did not know how to embrace my identity, so I was forced to change it. My old gym didn't have the newest gymnastics equipment, but this gym helped me realize that just because the floor is bouncier doesn't mean I can jump higher.



Aja Stills

Aja Stills graduated Summa Cum Laude from Texas State University in 2021 with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Exercise and Sports Science. She has participated in gymnastics for fourteen years. She states gymnastics is unquestionably one of the most important elements in her life because she has spent more time in a gym than anywhere else. Being a Black woman in competitive gymnastics has also created its own, unique dynamic in her life and has largely influenced who she is today. As she reflects on her background as a Black competitive women's gymnast, she learns more about the ways in which racial identity influences athletic experiences. Aja Stills completed her senior honors thesis, which is an autoethnography of her experiences as a Black woman gymnast.

II. Chapter 3

Cautionary Tale

by Anastasia Vastakis

“Keep your wits about you.”

When I was fourteen, I'd spend my Sunday's window shopping in malls with my girlfriends. With empty wallets, our fingers would graze shirt sleeves and pant legs. We'd have fashion shows in the dressing room, sucking in our cheeks and sticking out our chests as we did our best model impressions. One day, we wandered into a store and giggled at the adult entertainment tucked away in the furthest corner. A middle-aged man watched us as we huddled and wondered what everything was. As we left the store, his footsteps were the faintest echo behind—one store, two. We ducked beneath clothing racks and snuck out the doors before slipping into a bathroom. We looked at each other, and my friend rolled her eyes. “Don't worry, this has happened to me before. It's scary, but as long as you're smart about it, you'll be fine.

When I first started college, it was with mixed feelings. On one hand, I was excited. I've always had a love for school, and as I've gotten older, I've developed a deep appreciation for the social scene. Growing up, I had these elaborate dreams of attending parties by a bonfire or the river. I imagined myself surrounded by my books as I sat in a park, and I longed to get lost in an auditorium of 300 plus students. Upon visiting Texas State University, I could visualize the dreams perfectly. Students lounged on the hill



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at Sewell park and literal bubbles floated around me thanks to the notorious Bubble Blower. But with this freedom also came responsibilities. Not wanting to get caught up too much in this dream, I did some research. I found out that Texas State University has around 39,000 undergraduate and graduate students. According to rainn.org, approximately "11.2% of all students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation (among all graduate and undergraduate students)." While girls are raised with a certain degree of awareness about sexual harassment and assault (either from their parents or through media), the topic of sexual assault is often considered taboo.

As a way to address the sexual violence on college campuses, colleges that accept Federal funds in the U.S. must teach their students about Title IX. This program teaches students about alcohol and drug abuse, as well as sexual assault. To put it plainly, "sexual abuse refers to any action that pressures or coerces someone to do something sexually they don't want to do. It can also refer to behavior that impacts a person's ability to control their sexual activity or the circumstances in which sexual activity occurs" (Hope Alliance). The term is broad because the actions it covers are broad.

"Don't go out alone."

The first week that students move into their dorms in college — the week before classes start — is almost seen as magical. There are no expectations in the morning, no classes, nor homework due. We are only required to attend the Welcome Week activities during the day, so we would stay out all throughout the night. One of those nights, I went to one of the clubs with my roommates. Everyone always showed up around midnight. Girls' arms linked around each

other as they danced to the music. Guys either sipped their drinks along the wall or huddled on the dance floor trying to dance with the girls. The night was an endless rotation of dancing with one person to the next, to going to the bathroom with the girls, then going back to the dance floor only to repeat the whole process for the hours left in the night. My roommate was rushing, and her sisters were dancing alongside us for most of the night. I had slipped away from them for a breather when a hand skated the length of my arm. Fingers slipped between mine, and I looked up as the boy began to pull me towards him. Before I could take a step, my roommate and her sisters pulled me back into the fold, sandwiching my body between theirs to ward off wandering hands. As the guy was swallowed into the throng of people, one of the girls yells in my ear. "Sweetie, have whoever you want. But not him. He has roofied so many girls. It's honestly a wonder how he hasn't been arrested yet."

Although it is mandated that students take the Title IX course when they first go to college, that doesn't mean all of the information sticks. While I was doing research in preparation for this article, I stumbled upon one of the acts in Title IX: The Clery Act. The act itself forces schools to disclose crimes, along with statistics for said crimes, as well as give timely warnings for crimes that have taken place on campuses. This seems like it should be standard protocol, and an act shouldn't force a school to release information that would make its students feel safe. While this act itself is important, the story behind it is one that gets lost within the Title IX course. In 1986, Jeanne Clery was a student at Lehigh University. She was raped and murdered in her dorm room. Her violent death is what caused the formation of the Clery Act in 1990. Jeanne Clery didn't know that when she

left for college, it would end without a graduation cap, but with a reform for crime awareness on college campuses. What makes her different from me or the 11.2% of students who experience sexual assault on college campuses? Simply because policies are in place to make us feel safer does not necessarily mean that we are. That is the thought that crossed my mind as a fourteen-year-old running through the mall or when I walked into my professor's office without knowing why I was asked to be there.

"It's better to be safe than sorry."

I was twenty when my professor emailed me to meet him in his office after class. Our class always had a great repertoire. The pains of waking up for a 9 am were alleviated through jokes with my professor and laughing with my classmates. In this class we would often share aspects from our personal lives, so it was easy for everyone to feel a connection with each other. But, when I saw that email, my mind went back to wandering hands at the river and the Square; to the five sexual assaults that happened on campus in the previous three months; to the men who would have conversations with me only in hopes of satisfying certain expectations. I wondered if perhaps we had gotten too comfortable. I wondered if the healthy camaraderie had crossed the boundary of what was acceptable. The lack of explanation for the meeting was enough to make my chest feel tight. That evening, I called my mom to tell her about the meeting. My mom asked, "He didn't say why he wanted to meet with you?" No. He just said to come see him. "Mm. Well, be careful when you go to meet with him. As long as you're smart, you'll be fine. I'm sure it's nothing, but I'd rather you be safe than have something happen to you. You can never be too cautious, ya know?" The next morning when I went to the office, I sat in the chair across from his desk as

he closed the door. I remember the door clicked shut, and I looked out the window to see if anyone could see me here. I wondered if anyone else thought perhaps this just looked a little bit strange. He pulled his chair out and sits down. The back of the chair leaned back as he stretched out. All I could think about was a bull in a china shop, and I wasn't sure who the bull was in this scenario. "So, I called you here because you're in trouble." I looked at him. His body relaxed in his chair as my legs were crossed and my fingers were tightly laced together. "Not really! I actually was wondering if you could write an article for the book I am working on. It would just be about something you feel strongly about, or experiences you've had that you want to speak on."

Personally, the hardest part about being a young woman is deciding if my reactions to situations are valid. In each of these stories, nothing bad happened. However, in each situation, there was this undercurrent of anticipation...is this going to be *the* time—the time things go too far? Is this going to be the time that a situation goes from anticipation to harassment to assault? Perhaps, even going beyond assault. I am always reminded of this threat, especially in the recent case of Vanessa Guillén. Vanessa Guillén was from Houston, Texas and was a soldier in the US Army. She told her family that she was experiencing sexual harassment by one of her superiors. Shortly after, she went missing for two months and then her remains were found (Horton, 2020). As a young woman, hearing stories like this on the news taught me a few things: coming forward about sexual harassment or assault could backfire and hurt us, and further, we can be killed for doing so. There is a movement founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke called the #MeToo movement that served to raise awareness for sexual abuse. However, this movement didn't pick up steam until 2017 when Hollywood A-listers

came forward to take down powerful men such as Harvey Weinstein and Jefferey Epstein for sexual assault. This movement swept the world, and people everywhere were using the hashtag #MeToo to bring awareness to their stories of sexual harassment and assault. (Chicago Tribune). This movement created validation for the emotions of victims and established a sense of justification for all women to be cautious without feeling as if we are being overdramatic. Women should not be afraid to feel afraid.

Sexual assault has become this boogeyman that whispers in our ears, sits in on our conversations, and sleeps with us in our dreams. Because women are taught to protect themselves, rather than men being taught to not be predatory, men often feel villainized while women are aware of how easily they can become victims. We should be able to have a meeting with professors without having to consider our safety. We need to work on the safety of women, so men can remain men and not monsters, and women can remain women and not cautionary tales.

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Anastasia Vastakis

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II. Chapter 4

Reclaiming Agency

by Olivia Hinojosa

Last year, I was hired as a graduate writing tutor, a job I was eager to excel in and learn from. Though I enjoyed my work as a writing tutor, I was troubled by the discrepancy between what I was learning in my composition courses and my experiences as one of the few Latinx employees serving as a writing tutor. In my classes, I was learning from authors like Gloria Anzaldúa, that the language I chose to use in my writing is academic even if it doesn't meet the standards of Edited American English (EAE). Still, at my new job I felt constantly policed on my punctuation, grammar, even my tone was too "feisty" or "aggressive" for some of my superiors and colleagues. As I look back on my initial analysis of this experience, I realize that I did not fully understand the magnitude of the situation. Without arming myself with knowledge and a firm grip on my identity, I was powerless in the face of oppression. As a queer Xicana from a Texas border town, I am destined to be underrepresented within any field of academia. When I applied for graduate school, I signed up for two years in a system built largely around the oppression of people who look like me, talk like me, and think like me. Research within the field of composition continues to prove the importance of protecting the language of students of all backgrounds. Yet, students, like myself, are consistently told we must adjust our writing to sound more "academic." Whether it's through policing language or under-representation, BIPOC continue to enter



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academia only to be greeted with less than welcoming and generally unequal circumstances. As we wait for appropriate changes to be made to this unbalanced system, it is up to us, the underrepresented, to find our voices through agency and free ourselves from the cycle of oppression. To further analyze the discrepancy between theory and practice within the field of composition, I will reexamine my experience as a writing tutor and the way it affected my sense of agency.

I sat in my seat, palms completely soaked, my voice trembling as I tried to conceal the fact that my stomach was turning itself into a knot. My potential co-workers sat before me watching me fidget but did not seem fazed by my nerves. I answered a few scenario-based questions without much of a struggle, and then I was directed into a small cubical to take a punctuation usage and grammar test. Once my test was graded, I was directed back in the hot seat for the feedback portion of my interview. I cringed as they proceeded to list the grammatical and conventional mistakes in my submitted essay, resume, and cover letter. After discussing each problem, they asked me why I thought I might be having so many issues. The knot in my stomach turned into a hot piece of coal searing my insides; I couldn't possibly say that I am a fraud, and I applied to graduate school on a whim with the expectation of being denied. Before I could answer, I was told that some of the errors in my writing were "ELL markers." I nodded my head in agreement, even though I was unfamiliar with the term. I was offered a position as a writing tutor under the condition that I schedule time to work on my grammar. At the time, I felt genuinely grateful that they decided to take a chance on me; I felt lucky.

A month after I was hired, I was instructed to write about a formative writing experience as an assignment for my

composition class. By that time, I had finally come to understand that being labeled “ELL” meant I was being perceived as a Spanish speaking student. I was not. I dreaded the idea of my writing being read by the same people who made assumptions about my language based on my accent or maybe my last name. When I sat down to write my essay, it was an agonizing and embarrassing experience. In a lengthy introduction, I bashed the education I received at the university in my hometown, because of the “low privilege” status of the Rio Grande Valley. However, these are not my words; I was using the same language used by my superiors to describe my writing in my interview. Although I tried to turn the situation into a positive learning experience, writing about it made me realize that my experiences as a graduate tutor damaged my sense of agency and fueled my imposter syndrome. I felt as though I have not only been mislabeled as an ELL student but as a bad writer, too, and I let someone convince me to devalue my own language as non-academic.

My survival depended entirely on my ability to apply what I was learning in my classes, to my own life experiences. Authors such as Camren Kynard, Nancy Sommers, Andrea Lunsford, and countless others created a space in composition where I felt comfortable enough to write without the fear of sounding too Tex-Mex. Though I was introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa as an undergraduate, her words took a new form when I applied them to my experiences as writing tutor. In her iconic autobiographic text, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa, links her identity to the blend of dialects she speaks in various languages. In her fifth chapter titled, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” she states, “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity- I

am my language.” (81). Those mislabeling me as an ELL student served no other purpose other than to separate my language from what was considered, to them, scholarly and otherwise valuable. Anzaldúa’s use of violent imagery to illustrate the effect of policing one’s language captures the threatening nature of imposing standard American language practices on less than “standard” Americans. Anzaldúa defends my specific dialect, Tex-Mex, which we acquired growing up in the Rio Grande Valley (79). Our language consists of parts and pieces of other languages, the best combination of various Spanish and English dialects. It is a language recognized as simple Valley lingo but serves a larger purpose, to connect natives from small towns all along the Texas/Mexico border in any space we may find each other. Anzaldúa acknowledges the power and potential of the borderlands, and her legacy is proof our hometown is anything but low privileged (79). Anzaldúa worked to create a space for Latinxs, especially those from the RGV, in academia, a space that is still threatened by linguistic terrorism, so I read her to remind myself to “overcome the tradition of silence” (81).

In his book, *Literacy Practices, and Perceptions of Agency*, Bronwyn Williams explains how the rhetorical context in which one writes affects one’s perception of agency. As the rhetorical context changes, students are expected to “negotiate unfamiliar genres, audiences, and authorial positions” (118). He focuses this portion of his research on graduate students and their awkward experiences with writing at the graduate level. Williams explains that the idea of imposter syndrome, the fear of being exposed as a fraud, fortunately, is not unique to my experience. Students of color feel this fear at a higher degree because we come from groups that are not typically perceived as academic. Williams (2018) states that on top of feelings like they do not

belong in academia, students of color also fear the possibility of our performances contributing to negative stereotypes (107). When I initially examined my time as a writing tutor, I found it easier to agree with the stereotypes about the Rio Grande Valley, even though they do not apply to me. My primary language is English; I do not consider my upbringing to be “low privileged,” and my undergraduate program was full of transformative writing experiences that exposed me to the field of rhetoric and composition. My perception of agency emerged when I rejected impossible standards and embraced the spaces created by women of color before me, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks, who punched holes through the glass ceilings women were never supposed to breakthrough. It is my job to flourish in the spaces they created.

In retrospect, I characterize my first semester of graduate school as a painfully necessary experience that forced me into a search for answers and, eventually, a full identity transformation. I have learned to love and appreciate the foul-mouthed, Valley Xicana within me, who I once rejected out of fear and ignorance. The issue with mainstreaming American Standard English as the language of American academia is that it marginalizes students like me in spaces where we exist by the thousands. It’s time that we are allowed to exist and succeed using our own language and on our terms. My short experience as a writing tutor gave me a glimpse of how normalized policing language has become a practice for teaching and grading student’s writing on our campus. In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) released a resolution that protects a student’s right to their own language and condemns any attempt to validate one dialect as more or less valuable than another. There is a massive gap between

what was written by the CCCCs and the writing expectations at Texas State University, and I find it essential to understand why it exists and how to change it. Despite the adverse nature of my first semester of graduate school, I have been able to turn this experience into a positive and, above all, informative one. Without a full awareness of the unbalanced system I was entering, I was defenseless and easily manipulated into rejecting the parts of my identity that couldn't be changed. Though I appreciate that my writing will always be in a state of development, I will not whiten my tone to please the standards of anyone; I will not be silenced.

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Gee, James Paul. "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction." *Journal of Education*, Vol. 171, No. 1, 1989, pp. 5-17.

"Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without." - William Sloane Coffin Jr.



Olivia Hinojosa

Olivia Hinojosa is an Instructional Assistant, and a graduate student at Texas State University where she is completing an M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition. In 2017 she graduated with a B.A. in English and a minor in communication studies from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. From 2017 to 2019 she worked as a tutor in secondary schools across the upper Rio Grande Valley area, which gave her the opportunity to work with ESL students. Her research interests include language and literacy, Border Studies and Xicana Feminist theory. Her goal is to teach composition in her community and instill a linguistically and culturally diverse teaching ethic in order to support the literacy needs of students from different walks of life.

II. Chapter 5

My Experience as a Black Man in the IT Industry

by Rozelle Monroe

As a black man, what has my experience as a working professional in the field of technology taught me? You know, some questions come and go with time, never to be asked again. But this particular question has been like a set of luggage that seemed to have stuck around, indefinitely. Personally, it has been a question that has produced answers that are both dramatic and didactic, for various reasons. But no matter how many times I am reminded of my past relationships with technology, that thing which I truly love, if I am honest, there are at-least three take-aways from those experiences that always seem to come to mind when thinking about former companies, managers, and colleagues: a woeful lack of respect, an abject expectation of full transparency that borders trespass, and frequently being the target of blame. Now, this is not to imply that I did not learn new things, adequately perform the duties of my job, further my experience, or make new friends. Because I definitely did all of those. But it does speak volumes about past and current systems that presently exist in many professional work environments that sustain a culture that brandishes and even encourages unequal and unfair treatment towards persons of color. Many would argue that this type of behavior does not exist anymore, particularly in corporate environments among professionals, and more particularly in fields of technology. But I beg to differ. In fact, I



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would draw a comparison to a particular phenomenon that seems to be replete among individuals who are subjects of this global pandemic known as COVID19. Just as there have been many people who tested positive for this ubiquitous virus, yet are asymptomatic (show no symptoms), there are many more people who have been and are currently asymptomatic bigots but are infected with a racist outlook and prejudicial social perception. But because their speech does not squelch tones of xenophobia or roar with rhythms of racially charged epithets, they believe that they carry a clean bill of health. My rebuttal to such a belief is that the intentions are the same, only the exhibition is diverse. It is much more difficult to flatly identify bigotry, yet you know it is there, alive, and well because of the consistent negative experiences encountered; it is much more effective, because it more subversive, embedded, and sinister. Another important fact I would like to establish now is that 85% of the time during my tenure in the technology field, I was, at most, one of two black males in the department in which I was assigned. Let us take a closer look at some of these experiences.

I can better explain my experience with regards to disrespect in the following illustration: Just recently, I had to ask myself: "Why is someone else's sprinkler watering my grass and wetting my garage and driveway?" This question danced on the ledge of my thoughts for some time, threatening to jump into a fertile sea of emotions if ever the question was answered by either excuse or presence of the sprinkler's owner. But an excuse or a presence never came. And only the circumstantial evidence of an entitled, inconsiderate, and far too privileged next-door neighbor remained: a water sprinkler, purposely set way too high, way too far, for way too long! The sprinkler had not only rained on my home and car,

but also on the conscious identity of my manhood. I tried to appease these concerns away by rationalizing that maybe my neighbor was just trying to be helpful in some way by watering my grass, garage, and car for the umpteenth time since I had moved in next door. But my ability to suppress vacillating emotions and dismiss the obvious had run out, and I could no longer continue to fool myself or be a fool for someone else. So, I resolved to have a much-needed conversation with my neighbor. Brimming with anger and angst, my feet supported a determined, beat-your-door-down posture as I embarked on the journey between mine and my neighbor's front door. Keenly and fearfully aware of the tension that had begun growing inside and having traveled half the distance towards my neighbor's front door, I reluctantly opted to abandon my scheduled trip when I encountered the dreaded sprinkler that had caused this whole mess in the first place, or so I told myself at the time. I proceeded to manhandle the sprinkler by snatching it up and slamming it into another part of the earth, where the focus of the water would fall anywhere else besides my home, grass, and car, while at the same time hoping that my neighbor was watching me from behind the window of their home. And while that was my way of taking the high road and preventing a potential impasse, turbulence persisted to rule the raceways of my heart. I imagine that, even though I had seemed to change the circumstances that caused me much distress, only the symptoms of the problem had been resolved. And sooner or later, sooner than later, I would be faced with a similar situation because the root cause of the problem had not been addressed. And so, both anger and angst continued to keep me company. A bit of the backstory is that my immediate neighbors are not people who see a semblance of who I am and where I come from (my origins).

And for that reason, it seems they partake in a collaborative effort to remind me that I am an outsider through public display of salutations, front yard visits, and intimate interactions between one another, with careful attention not to direct any of this affection, or infection, towards me. They would have me to believe that my blackness, dark and warm as it is, is invisible.

Interestingly enough, I am reminded of a time during a particular tenure in the technology field where I experienced what seems like identical behavior of the aforementioned from some supervisors and colleagues. If compared, my work assignment would be my grass, home, and car. A former colleague's work would be the water sprinkler. And though we had our individual assignments, this colleague positioned their work to overshadow, or rain down if you will, on the work I was doing. In fact, their work embodied elements of my work and the work assigned to them. Supervisors and other colleagues were aware of this. But they all acted as if this person had completed their work assignment and mine. And subsequently, they were commended, and it was suggested to me that I use what they completed going forward. So, in essence, the work I had done was invisible. And by indirect representation, they were saying I was invisible. I became so angry that I could barely see, hear, or talk (use any of my senses). As I reflect on these things now, it is all the sadder, but my experience is replete with this type of disrespect, as well as many others.

It is said that "if you're honest, you have nothing to hide, and therefore nothing to fear." Yet, my experience in many work environments in the field of technology takes this adage to the third power when dealing with persons of color. For example, when employed with several companies I was

always baffled and bugged that my supervisor(s) would expect me to share how I solved certain problems with colleagues, make public, certain, resolutions that I had completed, or even expect me to share intimate details of my life by joining the office chatter. Yet, this was not expected from many others (non-persons of color) with whom I worked. It seems that I would always get asked: "what's wrong with you?" "Are you okay?" "Do you like your job?" I mean, this was one of the most consistent things that got under my skin while working in the technology field. They feigned concern, all while issuing a threat. Please understand; this is just a snapshot. I could give example after example of this type of patronizing behavior toward persons of color through direct or vicarious experience. I can better illustrate this point with another example: Years ago, while employed with a government entity, I had worked overtime, and packed up some personal equipment that I had taken to work to use for an assignment. As I began to leave the building, I noticed one of the top brass, who was walking well ahead of me, turn and began to ogle in my direction. This seemed strange because here is a person that would never speak to me and certainly would not turn around to extend a salutation. However, after the distance between he and I began to close, by him shortening and delaying his gait, I realized he had eyes fixed on the bag I was carrying. Would you believe that this ... person had the audacity to ask me what was in the bag! I wanted to retort with some expletives that would cause sailors to blush. However, I was always taught to maintain dignity, integrity, and professionalism at work and outside of work, particularly when you are a professional. So, almost biting through my tongue, I responded with: "this is just some personal equipment from home I used to help me with a project." He

came back with: "Can I have a look?" Saying that I was livid is an understatement! Can you imagine going into a store to shop, and while inside you see someone watching you, feel them watching you? And you know it is only because you are of a certain hue. And once you leave that store, someone comes outside, confronts you, and asks: "What's in your pants, or down your shirt? And then they ask: "Can I look inside?" Grudgingly, I did not say a word. I merely opened the bag that I carried, so he could see that I was not stealing.

And, then I proceeded to my car where I sat for 15-20 minutes re-playing the scenario over in my head, chastising myself for not responding more defiantly, or aggressively. And I wondered if I should confront him the next day. Needless to say, as a person of color, I learned that when you expect to be seen and heard, you are invisible. When you are transparent, you are never transparent enough!

Finally, but unfortunately, the skullduggery does not end there or here. However, I end with, yet another experience of how many people of color, myself not being the least of them, are treated while working in the technology sector. Someone once told me that when one points their finger at someone that four fingers are pointing back at them. My experience in life has taught me that people who are quick to blame or accuse usually have something to hide or cover-up. They have something to which they do not want to draw attention, or they are intimidated by something that their intended target is, has, or does in comparison to themselves. So, they seek to spew untruths by discrediting, shaming, and creating the illusion of ill repute of the falsely accused. I would also like to illustrate this point with a story: a while back I followed the story of two news anchors: one a black man, and the other a white woman. They reported together

and seemed to have enjoyed a good work relationship based on their news delivery and interaction with one another during their timeslot. Then, all of a sudden, their relationship was confronted by a crucible with the details of a particular story. The specifics on what they had reported, more-or-less, surrounded the status of a gorilla that resided in a zoo. And as they showed the face of the innocent and playful monkey on the news broadcast that particular evening, the female reporter, very casually, told her male colleague, "Hey, he looks like you when you take a picture." And the male reporter, pausing ever so slightly, confirmed her assessment by saying "He kind of does, actually, yeah"! If someone had told me about this, I would have never believed it enough to look into it. But I saw it and heard it with my own eyes and ears. Some would say that this was just a slip of the tongue, or that what she said was in jest. Please!!! There were no slips of the tongue, and you do not play like that, particularly during a live broadcast on public television. Now, I do not know enough about the woman to say she is a racist, but what I do know is that she seemed awfully comfortable in subscribing to a long-standing racial appellation. And the male anchor seemed caught off guard, not knowing how to respond. And I imagine he felt a responsibility to maintain his professional composure by taking the high road. But I am sure it was very difficult. I can empathize with his plight all too well. But what does name calling have to do with blame? Well, they are very similar in the responses that they solicit. The ultimate goal of those that use either one is to cause a person to bear a burden of guilt that is not warranted, make them less confident, cause them to second guess themselves, and ultimately cause the person undue shame. I can recall a number of times where I experienced this very thing. Specifically, one incident where I was hired to do one job, but because of previous training

and education I was asked to temporarily do another job that required more responsibility. In turn, it also was a significant salary increase. Almost needless-to-say at this point, you know that there were some colleagues of mine that were highly offended by this. Not because of anything that would affect them, but because they did not feel that a person of color should be doing what they were doing and earning what they were earning. Someone reading this may ask how I could be sure. Look! Once you have worked with and around certain type of persons for any period of time, you learn to recognize the language, the behavior, and the interactions. If nothing else, you learn to listen and believe the persons that directly communicate with such people and others that have overheard their sentiments about you. In the end, several of these persons, while praising my work to my face, began complaining to higher-ups that I was taking too long with certain assignments. They criticized the times I came in, the time I left for lunch, the times I left work, anything they could to substantiate their blaming me for the project not finishing on time, when the project was already behind, and was the basis for upper management asking me to step in and do the job in the first place.

In conclusion, as a person of color I have enjoyed a 10-year tenure in the technology field. I certainly learned a lot, maybe more than I ever wanted to learn. Assuredly, it is an industry where my expectations never seemed to be realized. And the reason for that, I imagine, is that because technology is so progressive most people assume that those who work in the technology field are progressively thinking people, across the board. But my experience shows me that this is not the case. The pride, prejudice, racism, gender exclusion, bigotry, and a whole lot more, that exists in American culture,

our communities, and society at large, also exists very heavily in the technology field. A lack of diversity and inclusion is extremely problematic in any organization. Still, what is worse, based on experience, is a manufactured semblance of diversity and inclusion, where the lines of demarcation are so fuzzy that wrongs can appear to be right, and rights can appear to be wrong, leaving many persons of color doubting or even distrusting themselves.



Rozelle Monroe

Upon leaving his last job assignment as a civilian software test engineer for the U.S. Army, this tech enthusiast had become discontent, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with the work conditions in which he kept finding himself, and so he began searching. And in a bizarre twist of fate, longtime technophile, Rozelle Monroe, found himself transitioning into the new role of graduate student into the M.A. in Technical Communication (MATC) program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas for a career remediation. He communicates that he has thus far enjoyed the warm and considerate reception of the MATC faculty, and the camaraderie that seems almost innate in every student for which he has had to interact within the department.

He holds a B.S. in Computer Science from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina. And it is this formal education that has served as a springboard into the various technological roles in which he has held tenure the last ten years.

It is his passion for technology, love of people, and his drive to bring change to the ideas of the underrepresented regarding technology that these experiences are shared in the *Cuentos & Testimonies II* collection. His hope is that sharing his experience will give birth to motivation, courage, and change, making technology more accessible and more appealing through its ability to transform lives. He looks forward to using his aptitude, experience, zeal, and voice for technology to promote the benefits of this field. Also, he hopes to help convince leaders and governing bodies in the technology industry that diversity, inclusion, and equity are critical if the field of technology is to continue to thrive.

II. Chapter 6

Attention Deficit Disorder

by Victoria Kuykendall

Note: The fictional portion of this essay includes suicidal ideation.

Me llamo Victoria Elizabeth Kuykendall, and I have struggled with attention deficit disorder my whole life. Growing up with dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), anxiety, and depression, I was strictly reprimanded and bullied. By the time I reached adulthood, I was made to believe that the events of my life were ordinary. I remember seeing my classmates in elementary school interact with each other and our teachers and thinking, “What am I doing wrong?” But I had been told for so long that the things I had dealt with were of no consequence by people who neither saw the things I had to face nor listened to my story that I began to believe they were right.

Then I enrolled in a class during my undergraduate degree that required that we watch a documentary about people with learning disabilities, which included a lecture on ADD. Viewing this documentary, I saw the scope through which my life was being viewed by others. Throughout my life I had been fed lies that told me to be complacent about the way things were and not ask questions — if I did, I was attention-seeking. Don’t get me wrong. I knew my disabilities caused issues for me, specifically with standardized testing and how



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people perceived me. But, I always assumed those people in my classes with me didn't get in trouble because they were innately better at hiding those kinds of problems. It was not until the documentary that I realized the world I faced was so much different than that of other people, and even worse, a lot of my trauma could have been avoided by simply showing my elementary school teachers the documentary I saw in that undergraduate class.

A few years passed, and then I realized another huge problem: I never, not once, had seen one of those lectures given by someone with disabilities like me, so I've decided to change things. This essay, loosely based on my life, features two short snippets from a fiction novel I am writing about having attention deficit disorder. My goal is to show my readers instances of what it feels like to have ADD. Works like this are becoming increasingly relevant as marginalized cultures are beginning to find their voices. Very similar to students of color, English language learners, women, LGBTQIA+, people with learning disabilities have been ignored at best and have been told that they are the problem, not the institution. The following is my cuento:

* * *

November 4th, 2018

"You're stupid!" A bigger kid with freckles scattered across his face kicked the back of June's chair. June's eyes swelled up with hot tears as she tried not to look at him.

"June!" the teacher snapped. "Pay attention! This is the last time I will explain this to you!"

"Is it 3?!" June nervously spat out. Word vomit.

"Why on earth would you believe it's 3? Honestly, June, are you even paying attention?"

"I am trying," she muttered under her breathe, rolling her eyes.

"Did you just roll your eyes at me?!"

"I'm sorry, Miss, I didn't mean to, sometimes I —"

"Disgusting behavior, indeed! You will not have any time for recess today!"

June slouched in her seat. "Well, at least my punishment is not bullying." Her stomach tossed and turned. "I hate getting in trouble," she muttered to the kid next to her.

"Are you still talking?!" The teacher slammed her fist on June's desk. "Principal's office, now!"

June glanced down to see all of the words in front of her blur together. Suddenly tests sprung up around her, asking questions in different languages. Everyone was shouting, crinkling paper, listening to music. The room filled with a thousand voices as the chaos ensued. Millions of tiny faces yelled at her in every direction: "You're stupid!" "Can't you read?!" "Popcorn, June! Don't groan, everyone, she's not that slow, it's only a few hours!" "Worthless!" "Can't do it!" "Can't do it!" "Can't do it!" "Different!" "Different!" "Different!" The eyes of her father flashed through her mind across the swirl of screaming faces, then her mom's, and then she stood in front of her 6-year-old self. June reached forward as the younger girl mouthed the word "retard."

June's eyes darted open as she shot up in bed. Fuck. She rubbed her eyes, purple and swollen from lack of sleep. "Girl, come on, you're fine," June whispered. "It was just a dream. They were wrong. They ... they are wrong."

She wobbled her way across the room and into the bathroom. Staring at her reflection, she let out a heavy sigh. “You look just like Mom.” She laughed. “Look — you’re fine.” She smiled at herself in the mirror as she felt anxiety slowly build in her chest. Her heart began to palpitate. She felt as if her lungs were collapsing. Her head felt light and dizzy. What if they’re right?

“Nope!” She snapped her fingers next to her ears. “We are not doing this today, brain! Not today.”

June sat in the middle of the dirty bathroom floor, months of clothes and clutter scattered beneath her. She first stared intensely at the counter, memorizing its cream color with the little specs of glassy spots shimmering throughout the countertop. She continued to count off things she could see and intensely described each one more than the last. Next was the frayed edges of a sweater, gray and warm. This would look nice sitting next to a fireplace. Fireplace, shit, did I forget to clean the fireplace? Her anxiety spiked again. “Okay, okay, we’re good. We’re fine. I’m not thinking about what I have to do.”

She stared blankly at the shower curtain, spotted and covered in splotches where the water had dried from the night before. Lily pads. Followed by a lotion bottle — the girl on the cover looked so happy. She seemed to be at a beach. Like fiery peaches, I wonder, if we could drink sunsets, what would they taste like? I love warm colors, if I could be a color, it would be orange. Nothing orange is ever sad. She let out another breath. “Okay. Great.”

Next, she stared at the candle sitting on the counter. Its wick melted and the edges stained from smoke, the black gradient slowly faded downward. Opening the lid, June

inhaled deeply. Vanilla ghosts, I wonder if anyone ever made voodoo dolls out of this stuff. June poked at the wax with one manicured finger. The polish was already chipping off the nail.

The alarm in the other room beeped loudly as June sighed. "Okay, Okay!" she yelled. "I hear you; I hear you." June attempted to bound over the pile of clothes lying in front of her to no avail. She slipped on a pair of well-worn jeans, landing about a foot in front of her phone. Ow. June groaned and quickly pushed the red X to silence the incessant beeping. Then she turned on upbeat music and began applying makeup in the mirror while singing Disney songs, musicals, 80s rock, and so on. Another alarm went off. Thirty minutes already? Dang. She unlocked her lockbox and removed a tiny yellow capsule from the prescription bottle. Turning to the kitchen, she grabbed a glass of water and a muffin. Ugh, I hate eating in the mornings. Her stomach was still anxious.

October 18th, 2006

June felt the weight of her bags cutting into her shoulders as she fiddled with the keys to the front door. Ugh, just open already. The lock was sticking as usual, but with a swift slam of her hip, June barged in the door, her mother trailing closely behind her. Finally. She slammed down her bags off her now sore shoulders and ran toward her room. I can finally go to sleep. She slammed the door behind her. The dark room was peaceful. Exactly 109 paintings and sketches lined her walls, meticulously placed over the years. She flopped on her bed and gazed up at the one photograph hung in the middle of her wall. A photo of past Racheal, June, Shawn, and Robby starred down at her through smiling eyes. June's eyes filled with tears as she turned to

the side to fall asleep. Her very being was exhausted. She was tired. Tired of school. Tired of fake friends. Tired of trying.

June's eyes wandered to the edge of her bed, where a fake gun was positioned from a Halloween party years and years ago. She reached for it, its shape molding to her hand.

When June was a little girl, she used to close her eyes while lying on her side on her bed and pretend that she was lying on the side of a building. When she could picture it in her mind and began to feel the anxious feeling, like it could be true, she would lean back, falling back onto the bed. The sudden shock of not actually falling would always give her a rush of adrenaline. But this wasn't pretend. This was different. Here June used her imagination to wonder and test if she could actually do things. She closed her eyes as she felt the weight of the fake gun. In that moment, though, it was real to her. She imagined Racheal and all her "friends." How they laughed in front of her today and pretended to act like she wasn't there. How they ignored her when she spoke. How they told her to kill herself. She thought of all the times they acted like she was stupid. All the drama. She thought of how her entire class in the fifth grade had ignored her for a year straight because of her inability to understand what the teacher wanted. She thought about all the library books she was told she was not allowed to check out because they were above her reading level and every embarrassing interaction she had with the teachers over it. She thought of the tutors who talked down to her and assumed she was stupid. The teachers at her middle school who, every time she sought help, would tell her that she wasn't trying hard enough, and they just didn't understand why she wasn't getting this. She was alone. Always alone. The only people

in her life either seemed to want something from her or used her as a source of entertainment. I'm so tired. June pulled back on the fake gun's loaded trigger, once used only for a naïve sound effect. She placed it on her temple. Who knows, if I could convince myself that falling was real, maybe I can do the same with death. Maybe then, all of this will end. She closed her eyes and imagined the gun as if it were real. The metal. The handle. The bullets. Her finger slowly pulled back.

Suddenly an obnoxious tune came ringing through the air, assaulting her eardrums and snapping her out of her make-believe. "Oh, I'm a gummy bear. Yes, I'm a gummy bear," the song chanted through the air. She flipped open her phone. "Hello?"

"June," a voice sniffed on the other line.

"Yeah?" June's heart skipped. "Katherine, is everything okay?"

"She found my bong, and I started cutting again."

"I thought we agreed you'd lay off that stuff? And what happened to trying to draw on your arms rather than cut?"

"I relapsed," she sniffed.

"Hey, it's okay." June felt her ominous cloud shrink as she set down the fake gun. "I can help."

* * *

Conclusion

Though the actual novel follows June's life from her diagnosis into her future academic career, these two scenes are some of the most valuable to understanding hidden disabilities, as they show the harmful side effects of the

outside world's treatment of said people. When these things go unchecked for so long, you begin to question what you deserve and what is considered normal. Though many people will attempt to devalue these experiences, having a disability no one can see comes with its own struggles, and though the two scenes I have provided by no means end on a happy note, I want to assure my readers that these scenes are not the end of the story. I hope, instead, those reading will read this and consider the idea of this grossly ignored problem, and the next time a person tells someone they have ADD or a learning disability, maybe, just maybe, someone will be a little less dismissive, and a little more kind.



Victoria Kuykendall

Victoria Kuykendall is a teacher of record at USC, where she is currently attending school for her Ph.D. She received her MA and BA at Texas State University, where she also worked as a teacher of record. She is a six-time published author in the following works: CC&D Magazine: "The New World;" "Nothing Lasts;" "Negative Space; Expressions!;" AIPF, and now, *Cuentos and Testimonies II*. She has been a featured author at a multitude of different venues, where she performed not only her work but also professionally MC'd/hosted events for published fiction/nonfiction authors. Victoria's research areas include British literature, children's literature, medieval literature, renaissance literature, feminist literature, disability studies, and race/ethnicity. In her commitment to equality, she has attended international conferences to discuss essential issues involving race and gender/sex, while teaching about feminism, diversity, and rhetorical frameworks like CDA to her ENG 1310 and 1320 classrooms.

II. Chapter 7

Aprende del Silencio / Learn from the Silence

by Elisa Serrano

“Mami, mi maestra dice que te quiere conocer y platicar contigo de unas cosas este lunes,” I told my mom as soon as I got home from school on Friday, to which she responded, *“¿Hiciste algo malo, Elisa?”* *“No, mami. Ella dice que eres la única mamá que ella aun no conoce. El único problema es que ella no habla español, pero yo te puedo traducir lo que ella te diga.”* I could see the anxiety start to creep on my mom’s face. This was the first time that one of my teachers did not speak Spanish, meaning that my mom would be walking into that meeting already disadvantaged, unable to ask questions or to clarify anything. I figured my mom would start the meeting by saying, “No English,” a phrase she had come to master since her arrival to the United States. Instead, my mom did the last thing I thought she would do. She remained silent and simply nodded. This is how the interaction went:

Ms. P: “Hello, Ms. Sandoval. I am Elisa’s teacher this year. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Mom: *hesitant* “Hi.”

Ms. P: “Your daughter is very bright but has a little bit of trouble staying on task. She was quiet at the beginning of the year but has opened up and loves to talk to others, and since she finishes her work early, tends to distract them while they are still working.”



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Mom: *silently nods*

Ms. P: "Elisa is a quick learner and seems to never have trouble with her homework. That must be due to you and your husband's work at home."

Mom: *silently nods*

Ms. P.: "... uh, okay. It was nice to meet you. Feel free to call or email me if you have any questions."

Mom: *nods and looks at me* Me: *"ya nos podemos ir"*

The silence on the walk home was deafening. I remember staring up at my mom, at the fierce, pensive expression on her face as we walked, wondering what she was thinking. *"Mami, ¿estas bien?" "¿Que dijo tu maestra?" "Dijo que soy una buena alumna pero que a veces distraigo a los demás estudiantes. También dijo que hago la tarea muy bien y que debe ser porque tu y papi me ayudan."* *"Ah okey. Gracias."* We walked the rest of the way home in silence. We did not talk about that parent/teacher conference again.

There have been countless moments like my fourth-grade parent/teacher conference throughout my lifetime. I have watched my mom stay silent in many school events in which the predominant language was English. I have witnessed my mom become an outcast in events like these, unable to fully understand what was going on until someone (usually me or my stepdad) could translate for her. While this reality has made itself present in my life many times, I began to lose sight of its impact and significance once I moved away from home and began my college education. That is until a recent experience brought it all back. This experience, which occurred at a local elementary school here in San Marcos, brought my mom's and my struggles to the forefront of my mind, reminding me of how debilitating language barriers

can be for the marginalized and most importantly, how there is still so much work to be done to make social spaces (from the classroom to casual outside gatherings) more welcoming to all tongues.

I signed up to teach a writing activity for their National Day of Writing event on a Friday morning, excited to share my love for writing. Walking up to the school on that chilly morning, I could not help but feel a little nervous, even though I did not have a reason. Our lesson plan was written for us, the activities laid out, and every minute was accounted for.

There was little room for error. Still, I felt this pressure to make sure that every student enjoyed the lesson. I knew that if we made it boring, they would connect that feeling to the act of writing, and that was the last thing I wanted because I love writing, and I understand its importance, and I wanted the students to feel the same way. I was also nervous about speaking in front of those students because I tend to mispronounce words, or in some instances, say them with a heavy Mexican accent. I am twenty-three years old, have a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University, which is a semblance of success where I come from, and I still battle with insecurities regarding my accent and the way I speak. I remember taking three deep breaths, shoving my insecurities and hesitations away, and walking inside, into the experience that would reaffirm the importance of my graduate studies.

My partner and I started the lesson, which covered sensory details in pieces of writing, and everything was coming along perfectly until I was hit with a curveball I didn't see coming. We were teaching this activity to fifth graders, and it was evident from the beginning that most, if not all, were excited to learn and participate. Towards the end of the activity, we started asking students to participate, and while most were

more than willing, there was one student who wouldn't answer any of our questions. At first, I thought she was shy or couldn't think of a response, so my partner and I lowered ourselves so that we were at eye-level with her and asked her what her name was in an effort to get her to open up. Instead of the quick response we expected, all that we received was a blank stare. We were confused, and I debated pushing her further because, as a fellow shy student, I knew how uncomfortable it is when a teacher keeps calling on you when you don't want to be called on. Then the girl next to her, seeing our confusion, spoke the words that stirred so many different feelings in me: "She doesn't speak English. She only knows Spanish." There it was. I was speechless.

In one second, my entire childhood came rushing towards me. I grew up only speaking Spanish and, like this student, had to learn English in school. I instantly saw myself and my parents, who don't speak English, in her. I was no longer standing in front of 50+ students and their teachers in an elementary school in San Marcos. I was instantly transported back to Eagle Pass, Texas, and I was that confused child again, desperately trying to learn English so that I could be a part of the society around me. I was no longer the seemingly poised 23-year-old teaching kids about writing; instead, I was once again that child coming home from her first-grade class and immediately copying every word from every story in her reading book onto her journals, hoping that it would help her learn how to read in English faster. I stared at that quiet, reserved student and identified with her in ways that, for some, may be impossible to comprehend. I, too, was a quiet student when I first started my education in the United States. I would always opt to stay quiet instead of taking the risk of answering incorrectly or mispronouncing a word. I

feared being ridiculed and coming across as dumb to others.

I blinked and was transported back to that classroom filled with students, and this time I saw this girl, not just as any other student, but as one who faces the same struggles my family and I did every day. I saw her feeling excluded from this lesson, and probably from many other social interactions, because of the language barrier. I saw her confusion and frustration at not being able to understand anything we were saying. All of this was missed at first glance. All we saw was a shy girl who refused to be a part of an activity in front of this big group of people. We saw a girl who was uninterested in what we had to say, not because the subject matter was boring to her, but because she was unable to understand it. We saw a girl who preferred to blend in and stay quiet, and to me, that speaks volumes. My mom did the same thing with my fourth-grade teacher when she kept nodding instead of letting her know that she doesn't speak English. People's silence can often be misconstrued as them being disinterested and disengaged, as was the case with my mom's experience with my fourth-grade teacher. My teacher ended the conference, thinking that my mom was not interested in what she was saying due to her lack of verbal response. In the case of the shy student I encountered, as is the case with many ESL students, her lack of response could have been misconstrued as her not understanding the lesson or not being on the same intellectual level as the rest of the English-speaking students. What we often do not see is that it is easier to stay quiet than to try to speak English and be judged for speaking English with an accent. This is why I really identified with this student.

Once the shock wore off, I felt guilty because the lesson was not translated for her. Had I known about this student

beforehand, I would have translated the lesson, spoke directly to her, and made sure she understood and was comfortable. After the shock, I introduced myself in Spanish, *"Hola, ¿como estas? Me llamo Elisa, ¿como te llamas tu?"* and I saw the power of that simple sentence. *"Estoy bien,"* she replied with a shy smile, and her demeanor instantly changed. She seemed a little bit more comfortable, even though the lesson continued in English. At this point of the exercise, the students were working on their own to construct a paragraph using sensory details. It was also at this point that her teacher approached her and proceeded to translate parts of the lesson for her. She instantly participated and produced her own sentences in Spanish. The lesson ended with a few students sharing the paragraphs they wrote about Halloween with the entire group.

We received many thanks, applause, and smiles from both students and teachers once the activity officially ended, and they were heading back to their classrooms. The student that caught my attention, the quiet little girl who doesn't speak English, finished her paragraph, but never shared it. She wasn't a part of the bigger conversation with the rest of the students. She wasn't able to understand the stories they produced or share in the laughter or feelings of wonder that they inspired. This is why I felt guilty. Even though it is not my fault that she doesn't speak English or that English is the "dominant" or "preferred" language in this country, I felt guilty because I didn't help create an environment in which the student felt included. So even though the teaching event was technically a success, I still felt like a failure because I wanted to touch and enlighten every student. I was unable to accomplish my goal because of the unknown language barrier.

I still think about this little girl and see that blank, confused look that she gave me. I wish I could've done more. Driving up to the school that Friday, I thought I was there for the students to learn from me, but I ended up learning a valuable lesson from that one student. I also learned a lot from her teacher. It takes a lot of work to come up with a lesson plan, to make sure that all of your students understand the material; it takes even more work to translate that lesson plan and help non-English speaking students succeed in an environment that is unfamiliar to them, in which standardized English is the dominant language. They both reminded me of why I chose Texas State for Graduate School. Had I chosen to remain at A&M for graduate school, I would not have encountered this student. I may not have encountered a student like her, and I would not have realized how important it is to be the voice for those who need it. Texas State and this opportunity to volunteer that was presented to me have given me a platform to help others who are in a similar situation as me. This experience added fuel to the burning passion I have to help and be an advocate for ESL and multilingual students. It's hard enough learning a second language without adding on feelings of exclusion and inferiority.

My goal with this piece is not to inspire pity or guilt for what people like that little girl experience every day. Rather, I want to highlight all that we can learn from her silence. There is power in what is left unsaid. Understanding social cues, uncomfortable looks, shifting eyes, or even blank stares can help us better accommodate the students who lack the words to tell us that they need help. Out of the many things I have learned during my first year in the M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition program, the one thing that has stuck with me

the most is that there is much to be learned from ESL students; their culture, experiences, and languages should be celebrated, not overlooked or “corrected.”



Elisa Serrano

Elisa Serrano is a 2021 graduate of the M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition Program in the Department of English at Texas State University. While at Texas State she worked as a graduate assistant in the McCoy College of Business as an editor for faculty and staff. Originally from Eagle Pass, Texas, she holds a B.A. in English from Texas A&M University. Her interests include raciolinguistics, multilingual rhetoric and composition, ESL rhetoric, and social justice issues in education. Elisa is currently working on her thesis, researching how paper feedback on language affects graduate students' identity and student/teacher relationships. Elisa has developed a passion for language, agency, and trust issues in the writing classroom and hopes to continue to develop her interests, research, and education at the doctorate level. Elisa Serrano has been accepted into Penn State University's PhD program in Curriculum and Instruction and awarded a research assistantship.

II. Chapter 8

My Stutter Journey at Texas State University

by Jack Rodriguez

My name is Jack Rodriguez, and I am a student at Texas State University. I am also a person who stutters. Although carrying the burden of a stutter has been physically and mentally demanding, it has played an essential role of shaping the person I am today. To put my stutter experiences in perspective, I carry anxiety during social interactions each day. I am especially anxious when meeting someone for the first time or when required to talk to strangers. This experience feels like you are locked in chains, physically and mentally. It is physical because my body tenses up severely while I stutter, and mental because the anxiety, fear, and embarrassment are overbearing in my mind. Having a stutter means are you required to face challenges every day that most people will never understand. These challenges demand a response to them. This response can either be fight or flight. I have chosen to fight every single day to face the challenges of my stutter. In this essay, I am going to share how my greatest demon became my greatest blessing.

After 19 years of consistently battling a demon I call my stutter, I finally was set free in July 2018. My dad, who also has a stutter, registered me for a two-week intensive stuttering therapy clinic at Texas State University run by Dr. Farzan Irani. I was not looking forward to attending this clinic



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at first. Little did I know, this clinic would change my life forever. The most influential thing I gained from this intensive clinic was not any fluency techniques but a drastically improved perception towards my stutter. Dr. Irani's approach to this clinic was geared towards the emotional aspects of stuttering. I admired how he did not try to solely fix us with these different fluency techniques, because there is nothing to fix. We stutter and there is nothing wrong with that. His objective was to help us reach a goal of self-acceptance towards our stutter. My perception towards my stutter drastically improved after this two-week intensive clinic. I was not scared of having a voice anymore. I was not scared to say what I wanted to say no matter how long it took me to say it. I was not afraid anymore. It was like my chains that I put on myself had finally been let go. This experience was that powerful.

Along with improving my perception towards my stutter, this intensive stuttering clinic led me to pursue a degree in Speech Language Pathology at Texas State University. Halfway through this stuttering clinic, a major lightbulb came to my head. I told myself, "Wouldn't it be cool if I made a career of empowering people with speech disorders?" As the clinic went on, those thoughts only grew stronger and stronger. I never looked back from there. I know that this is what I am meant to do with my career. I realized that I went through a lot of pain, suffering, fear, and depression for a purpose that was bigger than myself. My past negative experiences were there to show my future clients who battle the same demons that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I am very grateful for Dr. Irani and Texas State University for giving me a voice and changing my life.



Jack Rodriguez

Jack Rodriguez is Senior at Texas State University from Alvin, Texas. He is currently in the undergraduate sequence in the Communication Disorders program at Texas State University. As a persistent stutterer, he has dedicated a lot of time and energy to pursuing a degree in speech-language pathology to help other

individuals who battle a stutter. He is involved in many organizations on campus including NSSLHA, where he recently was awarded the undergraduate National NSSLHA scholarship. He is currently in the process of completing his senior honors thesis: The Stuttering Game under the supervision of Dr. Farzan Irani of Texas State University. The Stuttering Game is a theoretical framework analyzing the striking parallels between sports psychology and the field of stuttering. His passion and drive to help other individuals who stutter motivated him to write "My Stutter Journey at Texas State University." In "My Stutter Journey at Texas State University," he hoped to inspire individuals who stutter or have other communication disorders to never give up in their journey of finding their voice. After obtaining his speech-language pathologist license, he hopes to open his own private practice that offers speech therapy for individuals who stutter.

II. Chapter 9

The Origin of My Fear Trigger Warning: #thepatriarchy

by Sarah Rose

That man/man/man in the street grabs my arm/ass/breast
and tells me he loves my skin.

That other man swinging a pistol crosses the street towards
us. We jump in front of a car,
desperate.

My youth minister tells me to stop coming on Sundays
because my questions are too mature.

My principal tells me I will never amount to any good in life
because I can't respect the rules.

My undergrad professor tells me to stop thinking about
grades worry about getting a husband. Another professor
leans over and whispers I would be prettier without a bra.

My aunt tells her son to have patience with girls; we can't
help being weak.

My second aunt's husband puts her in the driveway and
backs over her with his car.

She takes him back after the surgeries.

My second cousin can't speak because her father wouldn't
stop hitting her when she was little.

My grandpa tells me I will be an ugly fat woman every time



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he buys me ice cream.

My father has photos of naked women in his desk that he
tapes pennies to for luck.

His porn magazine under the couch has a dead woman on
the cover.

My Nana scoffs at the clothes in the store - no wonder
women get raped.

My father tells me no one will ever love me. I am nine.

I love them. I love them. I love them.

One Day When I Am Stronger Yet I Will Forgive Them.

And Maybe Even Stronger

Stop Pretending It's All Okay

Sarah Rose

Sarah Rose (she/her/hers) obtained a B.A. in environmental studies with an ecology focus from Baylor University in 2014. She thereafter became a Peace Corps Volunteer in Central America, and afterwards worked independently as an English teacher in Bangkok. During her travels she began to question her role as an American teaching English internationally, and developed a driving interest in the deep ecology of literacy. She also became interested in the relationship between language and power dynamics. Sarah Rose has returned to Texas for an M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition. Her academic interests are postcolonial and ecofeminist rhetorics, heavily informed by her past work experiences. Her love of academia stems from her hope that it has the potential to one day honor and value the full spectrum of human experience and knowledge.

II. Chapter 10

Diversity Amidst Disaster

by Elizabeth Esparza

“We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat.”

Damian Barr

A surge of torrential rain and high winds pummeled the area, causing widespread devastation to people across the city and nearby towns, and creating one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. The city was New Orleans, the year was 2005, and the natural disaster was Hurricane Katrina. Over 1,200 people died and over a million became homeless as nearly 80% of the city and nearby parishes were under water (Zimmerman, n.d.). While other nearby states (Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi) were impacted by Katrina, New Orleans shouldered a heavier burden due to its faulty levee system that failed and consequently resulted in massive damages, seen in the number of human lives lost and infrastructure destroyed.

Readers may already be wondering: *What does Hurricane Katrina have to do with diversity and inclusion?* Well, let's talk about it.

This disaster, and other natural disasters and man-made crises reveal quite a bit about how people are impacted differently during times of crisis. And these differences can be seen vividly when viewed through the lens of diversity.



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Many individuals and families in New Orleans lived on less than half of the federal poverty level around the time of Katrina. With New Orleans being a predominantly African-American community, and African Americans experiencing some of the worst poverty, the storm disproportionately impacted this racial group. And setbacks such as this often wreak havoc on families' stability for a prolonged period of time, further exacerbating their challenged trajectories.

The media often seems incredulous at the people who stubbornly refuse to adhere to evacuation orders—those who willfully stand their ground to protect their homesteads. *How dare they put emergency workers at risk just to save their stuff?* An important note—as matter of history in the case of Katrina, mandatory evacuation orders were delayed by government officials (Brinkley, 2007).

There were also political realities that impacted the decisions of many in poverty in the New Orleans community as to whether they should stay or go, including an understandable distrust of local officials based on a longstanding history of intentional efforts by those in power to systematically displace the poor away from their homes in the more profitable areas of town, such as the French Quarter (Brinkley, 2007).

But how many people seek to understand why some individuals and families do not comply with such orders? How many consider other perspectives rather than jumping to judge? Who ponders perspectives beyond those that are spoon-fed to the public by the various media outlets or passed down through mean-spirited individual opinions?

Disparity creates different realities for people, even those

who are enduring the same disaster. As was powerfully and simply stated recently by author and columnist Damian Barr, *"We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat."*

Disparity comes in many forms, income disparity, power disparity, health disparity, etc. As an example, one can be wealthy but still lack the political power to impact desired changes. It is said that health is the great equalizer—people of all economic levels, races, genders, as examples, get and die from cancer and other chronic conditions, and any privilege the wealthy may have cannot prevent cancer from happening to them, and this is true. But I argue with this maxim because those in poverty, in many cases, have to choose between whether they get to eat or pay for their cancer medications, whereas those with financial means are not faced with such a dilemma.

In the case of Katrina, many couldn't afford the gasoline to leave town, if they even had a car. In a good number of cases, these individuals and families were residents of public housing and could not just go wherever they wanted and obtain public housing in a new place. For those unfamiliar with how public housing works, it is usually managed by local governmental entities, such as cities or counties, that create their own rules, eligibility criteria, and waitlists. It is not a program that can easily transfer from one community or state to another.

When Katrina forced many to flee their homes, San Antonio was one of the first to open its arms to welcome and care for the weary evacuees. A military base was utilized to receive the displaced New Orleans residents and offer them shelter, food, medical care, and other services. I was employed by

one of the local governmental entities that played a large part in the relief efforts. The front-line staff of our department met with families to assess their needs when they arrived at the shelter and connect them to services provided through other agencies. The department I worked for also coordinated with local housing authorities, who were diligently attempting to provide public housing to the displaced who had housing vouchers from the New Orleans area, even though there was no mandate for them to do so. The case management staff of the department I worked with met with individuals and families at the shelter and after the evacuees were transferred out to their temporary housing units in San Antonio in order to assist them in their medium-term plans for stability. It was a tough time and we worked long days for weeks on end.

But after the storm passed and New Orleans was deemed safe to return to, many people who were low-income stayed in the cities and towns they were evacuated to for the some of the same reasons they didn't leave New Orleans when the storm was approaching—because they couldn't afford to go anywhere else. When those with the financial means had to evacuate, however, they had many more options when leaving and in choosing whether to return. Their lives during and after evacuation were more bearable, comfortable.

Flash forward to today, as we are stifled by the hardships and uncertainty that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic for people around the globe and for the world's economic and political systems. It's true that almost everyone is being impacted, but the degrees to which people are impacted, the severity of their situations, are significantly influenced by factors such as their income levels and the nature of the work that individuals do to make a living. Some

industries are thriving while many more are being crippled.

As has been widely reported, people in the service industry are taking a big hit with the isolation measures being put into place. This includes workers in restaurants and bars, hair and nail salons, spas, and the tourism industry as a whole. I am fortunate enough to be able to travel once a year to a charming and beautiful island off the coast of Mexico. The island's economy is driven by tourism, so they are really hurting. And many low- to medium- wage workers in Mexico do not have continuous air conditioning in their homes even though they reside in hot climates. I have learned that not only are the workers not being provided sufficient incomes while the hotels they work for are shut down, but they are also spending all their days in their hot homes, unable to escape to their workplaces that provided them air conditioning for a significant part of the day. Their employers, in many cases, also provided their workers meals while on their shifts—now this is gone, too. So, the impact is greater for many people than is initially realized. This is just one example of the consequences being experienced by those who face food and housing insecurity. There are many other stories to tell and hear.

When I first became engaged in learning about the topic of diversity, beginning in my undergraduate and graduate years in social work programs at Texas Woman's University and Texas State University, we discussed a wide field of diversity that included many factors that contribute to differences in people, such as economic levels, education levels, religion, geo-political regions, access to health care, and more. But when I completed my master's degree and was early in my social services career, discussions around diversity were

predominantly focused on issues of race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Why these specific areas? Well, workplaces tend to only focus on areas of diversity where federal or other regulations require compliance with certain practices. This is the responsibility of human resources departments in many organizations.

But our knowledge and exposure to issues around diversity should not be limited to those aspects we may have become familiar with only through employment. But how can we increase our awareness around issues of diversity and subsequently speak and act in ways that are more sensitive and respectful, more culturally competent, to promote a more inclusive climate in our workplaces, university settings, communities, and the world, especially during times of crisis when people are exhausted and prone to highly charged emotional reactions?

Well, there is not just one path, but many. I'll share with you a few things that I learned along the way from mentors and through experience.

First, learn more about issues of diversity. This can be done by listening to people who are different from us. Seek to understand their values and experiences and how these inform the choices they make. One way I love to learn about different cultural groups is to read literature, especially non-fiction and the historic novel genre. Both provide a plethora of information about certain cultural groups and their journeys through time.

Next, reflect upon learnings and then challenge erroneous or ill-informed ways of thinking and biases. Biases are

sometimes deeply ingrained in us and operate at the subconscious level, so this can be tricky work. The ability to really reflect honestly on one's belief system is necessary in order to be successful.

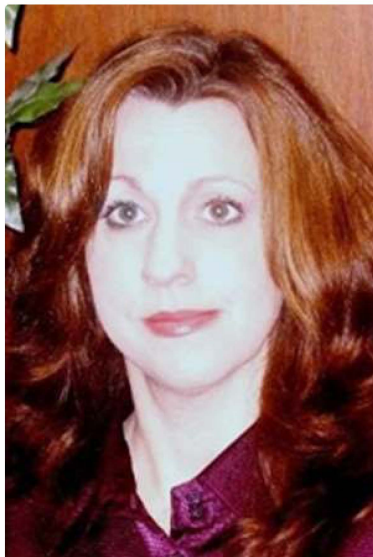
Finally, speak and act in more culturally competent ways. Learn about proper etiquette in referring to specific groups and avoid blunders. Also, it's not enough to be well-intentioned; we need to be well-informed before speaking and acting. My professional mentor of many years taught me early on in our working relationship about Intent vs. Impact. I'll admit it, I have often been well-intentioned, but did not always reach the desired result because I acted without the appropriate knowledge. One example—I offered to drive some colleagues all the way to the airport, many years ago, to help them jump the battery on their stalled car. I had the jumper cables and good intentions, but I connected the cables to the wrong clamps, and it resulted in worse damage to the vehicle.

Now, back to the island I love. There have been many very well-intentioned tourists who also adore the island and who wanted to take care of the staff that always take care of them when they travel there. So, many fundraisers were initiated to raise the funds to purchase food and supplies for staff that were out of work for an unforeseeable future. I read a number of blogs where these well-meaning people proclaimed, "We're all in this together—We're in the same boat!" But we really aren't. It's a much more pleasant position to be able to give than it is to have to depend on others to survive.

So, as Barr's appeal encourages, let's not villanize the wealthy, let's not villainize the poor, let's just not villainize. Let's try to better understand others who are different from us. And let us become more culturally competent in the ways we act and speak. Let's not make the mistake, however unintentionally, of downplaying the experiences of those who face more struggles than do we by suggesting that *We are all in the Same Boat*.

Brinkley, D. (2007). The great deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf

Zimmerman, K. A. (n.d.). Hurricane Katrina: Facts, Damage & Aftermath | Live Science. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from <https://www.livescience.com/22522-hurricane-katrina-facts.html>



Elizabeth Esparza

Elizabeth Esparza first graduated from Texas State University (then Southwest Texas State University) in 2000 with a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. The internship she completed while in the MSW program led to a 20-year career with the City of San Antonio in their social services department. Elizabeth served in many roles while there, providing administrative support to executive staff; coordinating development and training opportunities for the department's staff; and leading programs designed to serve populations in need, including the elderly, those who are differently-abled, those in poverty seeking to meet basic needs and find a career path, and disadvantaged families

with young children in an early education program.

Several days before retiring from a rich and rewarding career with local government, Elizabeth returned to Texas State University to embark on a second master's degree. She completed the Master of Arts in Technical Communication (MATC) in December of 2020.

Elizabeth's planned future path is to employ both her experience as a social work manager, and the knowledge and skills she gained in the MATC program, to pursue her passion for social justice. Her energies will be focused in both local communities and the larger arena of the global community. A passion for social justice and serving those in need is the common thread that ties the two educational journeys together. She envisions writing about social justice issues, supporting the work of nonprofit organizations, and mentoring the young to assist them in finding and pursuing their paths.

She adores traveling and learning about different cultures and is currently on an extended stay in Mérida (Yucatán), Mexico where she is learning about the Mexican and Mayan cultures.

II. Chapter 11

Soy Panameño y Afro-Americano Viviendo en Tejas: Ethnic Complexity of a Texas State University Student

by Jhmar Dixon

People have always had certain expectations of me because I have a brown skin tone and curly hair. Their expectations are simplistic and racist. By looking at me, people often assume I am African American (Black), and with that, they assume I should be an elite athlete, listen to rap music, and use African American vernacular. Although most people do not view these expectations as racist, they clearly are because they construct all Black people as monolithic. It is important to consider each person's unique identity, including mine as someone who is Panamanian (Hispanic) and African American (Black).

Being Panamanian and African American is complicated, confusing, and frustrating at times because of the expectations that both the Hispanic and African American communities place on me. For example, some in the Hispanic community expects me to speak Spanish, dress a certain way, understand Hispanic cultural practices, etc. On the other hand, some in the African American community have the similar expectations and uphold these expectations as demonstrative of African American cultural heritage.

Before I analyze the complexity of being a biracial Texas State University student, I will provide a brief history of my parents to contextualize my complex identity. My mother was



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born in Oakland, California, and stayed there throughout her teenage years, eventually graduating from Oakland High School in the 1980s. Through our conversations, I learned from her that the African American population in Oakland was truly diverse. She told me that as a child and teenager, she knew many African Americans who were athletes, rappers, straight-A students, as well as those with no extracurricular interests. Even with their vast differences, they also had similarities in their Black experiences that can be described as Blackness that connected all Black people.

Much different from my mom, my dad was born in Panama and moved to the United States (California) when he was four years old and has lived in the U.S. ever since. Being raised in Panama, my dad learned Spanish as his first language. Many years later, when I was a child, I often heard my grandmother and father conversing in Spanish. I remember hearing them and admiring the language, wishing I could communicate with them, but I couldn't because I was not fluent in the language. Since I was unable to communicate in Spanish and because I did not learn Panamanian cultural practices, I have often been treated as a "guest" within Panamanian cultural communities.

Being a mix of two different cultures has made my self-discovery difficult. In fact, it would be fair to say that this process has been one of the most difficult things I have faced. On a daily basis I wonder if certain stereotypes of Panamanians or African Americans really pertain to me or if they are simply racist stereotypes that are applied to all people who look like me. I understand that I do not look like the average Hispanic or African American person. In fact, I am often confused as someone who is Black and white, which also adds complexity to my experience because

although this is often my assumed identity, I know nothing about the cultural and racial experiences of being Black and white. Although it does bother me that people cannot really identify my cultural heritage, I also do not feel compelled to discuss my cultural heritage with every individual I meet.

I have dealt with these cultural and racial complexities my entire life. In high school I remember an incident in which I had a difference of opinion with a Black friend named "Dee" over which Lemonade song I liked better (either by the rapper Gucci Mane or Beyoncé). Since I had never heard Gucci Mane's song, I replied "Beyoncé," after which Dee told me that I wasn't "actually Black." While I was able to laugh off incidents like these, they actually had a huge impact on me. What did it mean to not fulfill this unstated notion of Blackness? Over time, these expectations have bothered me less. I basically began to talk, dress, and participate in activities that I enjoyed and by no way was trying to culturally associate with any heritage. It became clear to me that there is great diversity among Hispanics and African Americans (and in fact all cultures), so the way people dress, talk, or physically look does not always map onto socially constructed ideas of culture and race.

Now as a Texas State University student, I am gaining a better sense of who I am. As I reflect on my development, I am sure I have gained a better sense of my identity by being surrounded by smart, open-minded, educated people. I also have no doubt that the conversations and teaching moments I have experienced in my classes have aided me in this process. My life up to this point had made me wonder if stereotypes about Hispanics and African Americans applied to me. After deeply thinking about this, I realize that none of these stereotypes describe me. I am a light-skinned

Panamanian/African American, who really does not speak Spanish. My speaking and body postures mimic cultural practices of Panamanian, African American, and “American” culture, and I am OK with that.



Jhamar Dixon

Jhamar Dixon (a former Texas State Football player 2016-2018) is a Senior at Texas State University, majoring in Exercise Sports Science (Class of 2021). Along with working hard on his academics, Jhamar works at Str8 Training as an individual and group personal trainer where he offers both physical and mental training to his diverse clients.

II. Chapter 12

Constant Mispronunciations and Corrections

by Lindsey Villalpando

“Actually, it’s pronounced...” “Your accent is so cute! Where are you from?” “I’m sorry, I didn’t understand you. Can you repeat yourself?” “You’re saying it wrong, it’s...”

I did not acknowledge the presence of my accent until I moved to San Marcos, Texas from Brownsville, Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. I never recognized that I had a Mexican accent and, what I have heard people call it since my time in San Marcos, a “Valley” accent. Immediately upon arriving here, the first thing some people noticed about me was the pronunciation of my words and grammatical errors I made while speaking. It did not bother me at first; however, after constantly being corrected every time I attempted to speak my mind, I had drawn the line.

In the first week of one of my graduate courses, I was already being corrected for the way I pronounced the specific words, one being “pedagogy.” With my undergraduate background in Rhetoric and Composition, I had a full understanding of what it meant, but because of my pronunciation, it was apparently hard to tell. It happened during a classroom icebreaker when students were prompted to introduce themselves with a short description and asked to explain why we chose to take this course. Right after I introduced myself, I went on to describe my rationale for enrolling in the course. My sentence began with, “the reason I chose composition peda- pedo- pedagogy,” and



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while I stuttered on my words, my classmates and professor saw this as an opportunity to interject, correct, and explain how to say this specific word. Right away, I felt segregated from my classmates, since they could eloquently and efficiently verbalize their icebreakers, whereas I needed help pronouncing the simple name of the course. I felt belittled and embarrassed; instead of defending myself and vocalizing my extensive knowledge of composition, I felt reduced to a tiny, unthreatening, unintelligible individual. Afterwards, I was very cautious and particular of my words, as to not bring attention to the way I spoke or my grammatical errors. My continuous fixation on the “errors” of my own dialect incited anxieties of speaking in classroom settings and, with time, I stopped talking and participating.

This went on until the day I had to give a lesson on in-text citations during a 25-minute teaching collaboration with my classmate for the course. We had to teach the classroom like a first-year writing class, engaging with the students with a specific chosen activity. Before I even began, I felt my blood rush to my head as I thought about how long I would be talking and lecturing in front of my classmates and professor. For the first half, my partner led the teaching for the most part and everyone listened with open ears. When it was finally my turn to speak, I guided the class with examples of specific MLA in-text citations, and I had to read out a quote off the PowerPoint from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. “Flames glided in on the river, small green flames, red flames, white flames, pursuing, overtaking, joining, crossing each other—then separating slowly or hastily.” My tongue let out the incorrect pronunciation of the word “hastily,” but I had not noticed until a majority of the class, including my professor, interrupted my teaching to save me from my own verbal poisoning. My identity went from a teacher, an academic, a first-year graduate student, to a child drowning

in her own words begging for help from her surrounding certified lifeguards. The flow of my confidence during my presentation was cut short because of the tears that were welling up in my eyes and the sheer panic I felt while accepting my defeat and correcting my pronunciation.

I often encounter incidents like these since I have moved to the diverse community of Texas State University. Back at home in the Valley, mispronunciation was common between us; it was what tied us together. We would rarely correct each other because most of us were English as a Second Language students who attempted to articulate every long, complicated word with a simplified Spanish pronunciation. For the most part, professors would not correct me, and my classmates would profess to me that my vocabulary was extensive and I could enunciate well. In graduate school at Texas State University, my pronunciation was seen as something that needs correcting, something that had no place in higher education. This was a sudden shift from praise to constant critique. Of course, my professors and classmates did not mean any harm by correcting me; they see it as “helping me” by bringing me closer to a correct version of English mechanics and conventions. However, in doing so, it damages my agency; it damages my confidence. and adds to the constant feeling of being an imposter in graduate school.

I would spend endless hours in the university restroom crying because I felt as if I did not belong in graduate school. I was too stupid, too young, and I lacked the confidence that my classmates would bring every day to class. My dialect was not as sophisticated as everyone else; I believed it was extremely simplified and lacked depth and sophistication. I had to stop myself from thinking this way—it was only causing me pain and anxiety every time I would think about

going to school and participating.

After a while of repeatedly tearing myself down every day before and after school, I had an epiphany when talking with my Latinx classmates. After each class, my Latinx classmates in the cohort would regularly meet in the entryway of Flowers Hall to discuss and debrief the heavy load of information from class. Much of the conversation described feeling like an imposter in graduate school and not feeling good enough. Although they had never indicated these emotions in class, they experienced situations similar to mine but would similarly internalize any microaggressions that they faced. This internalization was rooted in shame and embarrassment—shame of talking differently, shame of not knowing certain words, shame of being seen differently, and shame of speaking up after their injustices. One of my Latinx classmates was seen to have “ESL markers” at her job on campus, even though English was her first language and she spoke minimal Spanish. My other Latinx classmate had experienced injustices at her old university, and her learned self-doubt from it spilled over to her graduate studies.

Nonetheless, these individuals did not let their accents, their doubts in graduate school, or their “ESL markers” determine their confidence or worth after all. Every day, they had something important to contribute to the conversation, and their confidence, even if forced, would shine bright in classrooms every time they would participate. Even though they had certain individuals attempt to bring them down because of their “accent,” the way they acted, or the way they looked, they did not let this stop them from contributing their voice to the classroom. Speaking differently does not mean that the conversation is any less meaningful or important. Being different does not equate to being wrong.

Because of these important conversations with my fellow

Latinx sisters, I quickly realized that my pronunciation is not a determining factor of my worth in graduate school. The imperative social problems I attempt to tackle and the people I could influence in my writing are what really matters. My writing has always been and will always be focused on diversity issues and injustices that should be addressed and corrected, because we cannot afford to ignore and dismiss them.

The injustices and microaggressions, and certainly blatant racism, that Latinx students are facing should not go unnoticed because it is directly affecting us, our self-confidence, and our performance in classroom settings. The biases that have affected me will continue to affect other students, whether they are aware of it or not. This experience turned from something that caused me to shut down and hold my tongue during class discussions to something that empowers and strengthens my writing, because I do not want this to continue happening to my people. It took a little time to understand that my agency should come from within and from within the students I want to influence, not just by the way we pronounce specific words. I am not my accent, and neither are you.

With time, I learned to brush off these comments and reassure myself that the people in the Texas State University environment are not here to hurt me but are simply attempting to uplift me and bring out the best version of myself. I continue to get corrected daily because of my accent, the way I talk, and the way I pronounce certain words, but ultimately, I know that many of the individuals that are correcting me are not taking into consideration the fact that I am an ESL student. They just want me to be able to pronounce words correctly in order to better myself and my speech for either my own or their own benefit. Whatever the

case may be, I know that my accent is not a demonstration of the lack of knowledge. It is a demonstration of where I came from and because of this, I now wear my accent proudly.

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Lindsey Villalpando

Lindsey Villalpando is a 2021 graduate of the M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition Program at Texas State. She is from the Rio Grande Valley, or more specifically, Brownsville, Texas. She is currently a teacher assistant for first-year composition and is in the Masters of Rhetoric and Composition program. She has a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in rhetoric and composition from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Her pedagogical and research interests are informed by her identity as a queer Chicana student from a border city.

II. Chapter 13

A Critical Reflection on College Choice and Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Status

by Quetzin Pimentel and Charise Pimentel

For most elementary and secondary students, school choice is not an option. Students, for the most part, attend public schools that are located within their home school district and students are assigned to specific schools based on how district lines are drawn. Educational scholars (Howard, 2010; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2018; Noguera, 2003) have long pointed out that the way in which district lines are drawn often reinforce educational and social inequities, whereby low-income students and students of color are more likely to attend schools that lack resources, qualified and experienced teachers, and engaging, relevant curriculum. More than that, K-12 schools across district lines continue to flatten our world as well as student opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). That is, curriculum and pedagogical practices remain anchored to standardized, benchmark assessments and are guided by an overwhelmingly monocultural and monolingual, Eurocentric perspective. For many students, college presents their first opportunity to participate in school choice, providing students options as they weigh factors such as cultural competence and campus environment as part of their decision-making process. In this essay, the authors (Quetzin Pimentel—a sophomore at Texas State University and Charise Pimentel—Mother of Quetzin and Professor at



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Texas State University) examine college choice and consider Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status as part of that decision-making process. In what follows are *cuentos* from both Quetzin and Charise as they reflect upon Quetzin's college choice experience.

Quetzin: Over the course of my senior year of high school, I must have been asked the same question a thousand times: "What college do you plan on attending?" Sometimes the tone of this question was light-hearted and filled with excitement as many people were simply excited to share in this milestone decision. Other times, the tone of this question was intense, as people took the time to emphasize that college choice is a major life decision that will impact my career, and in extension, my foreseeable future. Taking the advice of many, including my parents, teachers, counselors, and other mentors, I wanted to have options when it came to college choice. With this goal in mind, I applied to 10 universities, including UTSA, UTRGV, Arizona State, UNLV, University of Utah, among others, of which I was accepted to all of them. Throughout this process, my mentors advised me that I should consider the pros and cons of each college, so that I can make a well-informed decision. For my mentors, college choice presents a complex, major life decision. For me, the decision was easy and straight-forward—a decision I honestly made long before applying to any colleges: My heart has always been set on attending Texas State University.

Since I was young, I have always seen myself attending Texas State University. Texas State University became my top choice because I have many fond memories of different cultural events I attended over the years. The event that stands out most to me is Luis Rodriguez's presentation and

reading at the Katherine Anne Porter house in Kyle. The Katherine Anne Porter house is in my hometown and only a short 2 miles from my home. Luis Rodriguez's event was relatively small in comparison to other events I have attended on the Texas State campus, yet it had a significant impact on me. Right away, I felt at home at the event when I was greeted at the door and offered hors d'oeuvres and a beverage. Even though I was not in college yet, everyone treated me as if I was.

Luis Rodriguez started off his talk by simply discussing his life as a Mexican American who grew up in poverty, continually faced racism, participated in gangs, and was a drug addict. He talked about the several times he almost died due to drug overdoses and gang violence. As he talked, I sat there wondering—How can a man who has experienced so much adversity in life, be so successful? His life story was truly inspirational. Luis Rodriguez then read from his books: *Always Running* and *It Calls You Back*. His words magically took me to California where he grew up and where I visited frequently throughout my childhood when I visited my extended family who live in California. As a Mexican-American myself, I could identify with many of the experiences he described. Overall, I was amazed at the successful writing career Luis Rodriguez has had and was delighted when he wrote personal messages in and signed my copies of his books. As a result of this event, I became even more convinced that I would be successful in college, and specifically at Texas State University. When I think of Texas State University, I think of home—a place that embraces who I am and emphasizes the importance of expanding my knowledge.

Luis Rodriguez's event was only one of many events I have attended at Texas State University. My parents, Dr. Charise

Pimentel and Dr. Octavio Pimentel, have been professors at Texas State University since 2005, which has provided me many opportunities to visit the university. From a young age, I remember my parents taking me to different university events. As I reflect back now, most of these events featured Hispanic scholars and were hosted by Hispanic Texas State professors. In addition to meeting Luis Rodriguez, I also met Edward James Olmos (actor/activist), Sandra Cisneros (world famous Chicana author), Dr. Enrique Alemán (director and producer of the film *Stolen Education*), and Yuyi Morales, among countless other Latinx children book authors and illustrators who have presented at the Tomás Rivera book award celebration each year. These events gave me insight into my culture and made me feel proud that I am Mexican American. As a result of attending these events, I now know many Hispanic professors at Texas State University. I feel very lucky to have met these professors, as these personal connections have helped me establish an array of mentors at Texas State. As a Pre-Med Biology major, I feel confident that I can reach out to professors across the campus.

Charise: Quetzin is an outstanding student who has always had plans on attending college. Having taken many AP classes and graduating high school with a 3.9 GPA, Quetzin definitely had options when it came to college choice. While Quetzin may consider the task of college choice as “easy,” I believe his decision to attend Texas State University, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), has been long in the making. Throughout Quetzin’s elementary school grades, he was enrolled in a dual language bilingual program (Spanish and English), which taught him the school curriculum in both languages. During this time, Quetzin became accustomed to

reading and writing in Spanish and English as well as seeing a strong representation of Latinx authors, characters, and subjects across the curriculum at his school. In middle school and high school, Quetzin became critical of the notable absence of language and cultural representation in the curriculum. In high school, Quetzin's critical consciousness became even more acute. In one incident as a freshman in high school, Quetzin wrote an essay on why Shakespeare should not be required reading in high school, citing that students cannot relate to the linguistic code (Old English) or the distant, Eurocentric themes in the writing. In another case, as a senior, his social justice perspective became a bit more zealous. At one point during his senior year, his teacher took his cell phone away and sent him to the Assistant Principal's office to pay \$20 to get his phone back, because he simply refused to read the required text in class. The assigned reading in question—*Beowulf*. In his own defense, Quetzin explained, "This was another old-English text and the ninth white male author we had read this year for this class." Apparently, Quetzin was keeping count and growing increasingly critical of the Eurocentric perspective. It is important to note that there is nothing inherently wrong with a Eurocentric perspective; however, when that is all that is offered, and when that perspective does not represent the linguistic and cultural practices of the student body attending a school, there is certainly an injustice to offering such a limited perspective.

What does HSI mean at Texas State University?

Texas State University gained its HSI designation in 2010, when its undergraduate student population represented more than 25 percent of the total undergraduate student

population. Currently, 38 percent of the student body at Texas State University is Hispanic, which impressively represents the Hispanic population in the State of Texas, currently standing at 39 percent (Blaschke, 2018). The appeal of an HSI, however, goes beyond numbers. More important than numbers are the ways in which a university supports and serves its student population. While not perfect, Texas State University, through the leadership of its faculty and students, has established a Hispanic-friendly campus with numerous Hispanic-centered programs, projects, events, and organizations.

Notably, the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award is housed in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Texas State University. Established in 1995, this national book award honors authors and illustrators who effectively represent the Mexican American experience in children's books. Every year in October, the book award organizers host a celebration and author/illustrator presentation, at which more than a thousand elementary, secondary, and university students attend. Texas State also offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs that center on Latinx experiences. The School of Music, for example, offers Latin Music Studies degrees, in which students can receive a concentration in Latin Music Performance and a specialization in Mariachi. To the San Marcos community's delight, Texas State's Latin Music Studies program sponsors the annual *Feria del Mariachi* (a Mariachi festival). Most recently, Texas State approved a Latino/a Studies minor, offering Latinx-focused curriculum from various departments across the campus. On a broader level, Texas State faculty are encouraged to include multicultural content and perspectives in the classes they teach. Specifically, The Center for Diversity and Gender

Studies offers a week-long Multicultural Curriculum Transformation & Research Institute to faculty from all colleges and departments who seek to teach from a multicultural perspective.

Texas State also offers students countless opportunities to participate in student organizations, university events, conferences, and common theme experiences that represent or address Hispanic issues, as well as other social justice, diversity and inclusion issues. The Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion, for example, offers events throughout the year and hosts Equality University, an annual Texas State Student Diversity and Inclusion Conference that features renowned keynote speakers and engaging break-out sessions. In all reality, the university offers many diversity-focused events that students attend throughout the year, too many to list. Because Texas State University hosts many different multicultural events, as well as encourages faculty members to participate and implement multicultural perspectives into their curriculum and pedagogy, diverse students will continue to see Texas State University as an attractive college choice.

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See also *Cuentos and Testimonies I: Diversity and Inclusion
at Texas State*, Chapter 4

[I Stress Less and Sleep More at a Hispanic Serving
Institution](#)

by Charise Pimentel



Quetzin Pimentel

Quetzin Pimentel is a sophomore at Texas State University majoring in Pre-Med Biology. After completing his B.S. degree, Quetzin will be attending medical school while specializing in orthopedics. Quetzin is dedicated to social justice issues and looks forward to addressing equity issues in the field of medicine.

Charise Pimentel

Charise Pimentel, Ph.D., is a Professor at Texas State University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction within the College of Education, where her areas of specialty are in race and education, bilingual education, multicultural education, critical media literacy, and critical whiteness studies. The courses she teaches include such titles as, Multicultural Teaching and Learning, The Politics of Language, Bilingual Education Principles and Practices, and Literacy Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children. She has published widely in top, peer-reviewed journals and has contributed several book chapters to edited books. She is an editor on the book, *From Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Help: Critical Perspectives on White Authored Narratives of Black Life* (2014). Most recently, she published the book, *The (Im)possible Multicultural Teacher: A Critical Approach to Understanding White Teachers' Multicultural Work* (2017) and is currently working on an edited book, titled: *Teaching Racism: A Critical Media Literacy Project on Deconstructing Cultural Racism in Hollywood Films*. Dr. Pimentel has been recognized for excellence in the areas of teaching and scholarship, receiving the Presidential Distinction Award for Excellence in Teaching and in Scholarly, Creative Activities, and the Exemplary Faculty Practice Award from the Center for Research, Evaluation, & Advancement of Teacher Education. She has also been recognized with publication honors such as "Most Cited," "Most Read," "Top Article," and "Featured Article" designations as well as a nomination for the NCTE award for Best Article Reporting Historical Research or Textual Studies in Technical and Scientific Communication.



II. Chapter 14

Hispanic Serving Institutions: Chipping Away at Systemic Racism

by Jesus A. Jimenez-Lopez and Octavio Pimentel

In 1964 Brown vs Board of Education declared that segregation in the United States was illegal; therefore, in theory, promising an equitable education experience to all. Unfortunately, this ruling was greatly opposed because many people felt that Brown and Black people should not have access to the education White European Americans (WEAs) were receiving. Unfortunately, many people still oppose an equitable education to all, and as a result, often support legislation that continues segregation. Perhaps the most common way to ensure inequitable education is through school funding. Since property taxes are used to fund schools, the more affluent neighborhoods will always have more resources than the working class neighborhoods. These inequitable schools are often separated by a highway, train tracks, or another symbolic structure.

School environments often bring a vast number of people with different cultures, practices, beliefs, and sociopolitical orientations together, all with the same goal in mind: to learn and to gain new perspectives. Unfortunately, even though they share similar aspirations, the sad truth is that schools are often embedded in institutional racism that gives traditional students (often rich WEAs) the upper-hand and often marginalizes all other students (including students of



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color and the poor). In reality, people of color are subjugated and discriminated against on a consistent basis, which often leads to them becoming discouraged to continue in school.

As a high school student and Valedictorian at Jack C. Hays High School Buda, Texas, I saw this inequity often.

Throughout my high school years, many of my peers have expressed that they have grown weary of continued acts of hate and resentment towards them. Growing increasingly frustrated, some of them professed that they now only see a college education as a right for only the privileged. Although that may not be entirely true, a substantial number of students indeed feel like they attend a school where they do not belong. This, in turn, obstructs them from their potential, as their confidence diminishes in a seemingly hostile environment. Hearing these conversations, I often wonder if these same students attended a school that was much more culturally friendly (a school that embraced cultural differences, perspectives, and knowledge) would their schooling experience be much more positive?

Texas State University is a Hispanic Serving Institution (an HSI), which is a title given to universities that have at least a 25% Hispanic undergraduate student population. In Texas State's case, their undergraduate Hispanic population is nearly 40%. Having this Hispanic student population, Texas State University participates in different activities such as the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, *Día de los Muertos* Celebrations, among other activities. It is vital to understand that many students often leave an environment that reinforces their cultural identity and experiences, so it is comforting to know that students can find a similar home that supports their cultural identity at Texas State University.

Unfortunately, most other universities do not do this. Within these other settings, universities commonly claim that they have thousands of students, thus making it hard to prioritize the needs of one student (or one group of students) over the needs of others. What these universities do not realize is that not providing a supportive environment to students often creates a hostile environment for them. This can be shown when a student explores a university and notices that there are not many people who look like them, speak their language, have similar cultural practices, eat what they do, among other things. Regrettably, it is common for students of color to notice a lack of receptiveness and an off-putting dismissiveness from their teachers/professors. Facing this, a student of color might question, "Am I just another "checkbox" to them, another obligation which they must meet?" As the student continues their freshman year, they may fall into despair because they miss the warm, welcoming hands of their papás, who despite not having a good understanding of what their child is experiencing, are always happy to help. Facing these different obstacles, students of color often ask themselves: Am I getting the same treatment as other more privileged students? What can I do in this monocultural environment, where all I am is an outcast? Schools that promote these environments are guilty of forcing diverse students to assimilate to White European American cultural practices, instead of acculturating to the rich, invigorating culture these students may bring to campuses. Thus, it is important for schools to be accepting of people of all cultures, guiding them through this difficult pathway that they may not fully understand themselves. In a Hispanic Serving Institution, such as Texas State University, students feel welcomed by their peers and professors, people with whom they share similar backgrounds. In many cases their peers

have undergone similar difficulties, so they can often guide new students through the difficulty of adjusting to a college campus.

Researchers have discovered the various benefits of being in an environment surrounded by people who have the similar cultural aspects/practices. Fundamentally, believing in yourself as well as being accepted are some of the most psychologically important aspects of being human.

Renowned psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers have professed the importance of accepting and loving who you are, and in turn, being accepted and loved by others. Having others supporting you while experiencing difficulty can foster greater confidence, allowing the individual to expand their boundaries, and ultimately, giving them a greater chance of succeeding.

Unfortunately, if students of color underperform in comparison to WEAs, some critics attribute their lackluster academic performance to their culture and not the individual. However, in reality, a decline in performance may be a result of being in an environment where these students feel like an outsider, and rightfully so. Students of color are often made to feel that way by hateful remarks and widespread prejudice that plagues American campuses. What is even worse is that these students often experience cases of systematic racism where the environment itself causes these racists to act against them, therefore, building even more obstacles that students of color will have to overcome. Unfortunately, these incidents continue to rise. Instead of accentuating the fact that minority students underperform when compared to white students, it is important to analyze the complex cultural situation and the large impact it has on a student's academic performance.

Luckily in 2021, there are many different options when it comes to colleges and universities. Students nowadays have the option to attend a Hispanic Serving University, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and of course a traditional university. A Hispanic Serving Institution, such as Texas State University, often provides a “haven” for Hispanic students seeking to strengthen their academic talents in an environment where they are nurtured. In HSIs the university should recognize the importance of the Hispanic culture and then center it around many of their activities. It is also important to note that although HSIs do prioritize the needs of Hispanics, they are dedicated to providing *all* students opportunities to exercise an equal opportunity to academic success.

Institutional practices like these are important to recognize because they are fostering change across America. As a result, Hispanic enrollment in some Hispanic Serving Institutions (like Texas State) has increased. Seeing an environment where their needs can be met, Hispanics are attending these schools in record numbers, and this enrollment continues to increase. Given the hostile environment often imposed on Hispanics, it is important to see students from diverse backgrounds reach high levels of schooling in America.

With racial tensions high, the Hispanic community must continue to fight the racism that some people have against them. It is no secret that Hispanics are sometimes professed by our political leaders to be “rapists” and “drug dealers,” and undereducated. Thanks to the mere “GANAS” of Hispanic people and with Hispanic Serving Institutions that help support Hispanic culture in higher education, social

equality will hopefully continue to rise. Although this will not be easy, this fight must continue, and hopefully as a result, help erase some of the racism against people of color.

Response: Dr. Octavio Pimentel

As it has been eloquently discussed, Texas State University is supporting and advocating for Hispanic students (and other marginalized students) and as a result it is becoming extremely popular among top-tier Brown and Black high school seniors. Granted, it is not perfect, but Texas State University is taking major steps in addressing issues of racism that Hispanics, African Americans, and other marginalized students think is important. Although there are various examples of events that Texas State participates in, perhaps a prime example is the university's recent adaptation of America Ferrera's edited book *American Like Me: Reflections on Life Between Cultures* for their 2020-2021 Common Experience Book. The university adopting this book was a smart decision because this book addresses multiculturalism, which increases their desirability. More specifically this book, "...is a collection of first-person accounts from prominent figures about the experience of growing up between cultures"

<https://www.txstate.edu/commonexperience/book.html>.

That said, this book provided the opportunity for the 2020-2021 freshman class to explore the complexity of being multicultural, which to many of them will be their first exposure to talking about issues of multiculturalism. This opportunity will be provided to the students by making them read the book, as well as making it mandatory for them to attend various multicultural events.

Other major events that Texas State University supports that makes it attractive to Brown and Black students are events

like the Tomás Rivera Mexican Book award, which has been in existence since 1995. This award recognizes authors and illustrators who effectively represent the Mexican American experience in children's books. Their annual celebration is well-liked by many marginalized students because it rewards individuals who work with Mexican Americans. Again, by the university supporting events like this, it continues to make themselves very attractive to highly sought out high school seniors.

Texas State University is taking the right steps in addressing issues of racism that as a result is making themselves attractive to many Brown and Black students. Although there are still many things that the university has to work on to make it more attractive, such as increasing the number of faculty of color, building more programs that increase the graduation rate for marginalized students, among many other things, Texas State University is on the right path of increasing its attractiveness to marginalized groups. By continuing to support programs such as the ones mentioned above, it is highly likely that Texas State University will increase its popularity among students of color.

See also *Cuentos and Testimonies I: Diversity and Inclusion at Texas State*, Chapter 5

[¡No escondan el nopal! Sus raíces son obvias! \(Don't Attempt to hide your Latinx Ethnicity! Your Ethnicity is Obvious"\)](#)

by Octavio Pimentel



Jesus A. Jimenez-Lopez

Jesus A. Jimenez-Lopez (Class of 2021) was the Valedictorian at Jack C. Hays High School located in Buda, Texas. His research interests include: medical research, machine learning, and race relations. During his years at Hays High School, he took numerous college-level AP courses, ranging from calculus to physics. More than anything, Jimenez-Lopez aspires to help others. In high school, he founded a free tutoring website called Hays Tutoring—a platform where he helps others meet their academic goals. Jimenez is planning on majoring in neuroscience and then attending medical school. In his free time, Jimenez-Lopez is an avid soccer player and loves “Las Chivas de Guadalajara.”

Octavio Pimentel

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II. Chapter 15

Cracking the Curriculum Code: A Student-Teacher Dialogue on Crisis, Pedagogy, and Practice

by Clarice Blanco and Amanda Scott

Introduction

With the emergence of COVID-19, faculty and students have been forced to embrace the online space as many universities weather the storm of uncertainty ushered in by the pandemic. This transition has prompted faculty to consider best practices for online course delivery and the technological challenges many students face in this new learning environment, most notably unreliable internet access and hardware. Furthermore, students find themselves increasingly navigating hardship in their personal lives, from the loss of jobs to unstable home environments to ongoing health and safety concerns. Recent think pieces have begun speculating about the future. How will this situation impact enrollment? What will happen to the SAT? What does the rise of audio recordings mean for real-time instruction? Faculty are also weighing the tough question: do we sacrifice quality for ease of access, especially in times of crisis when compromise is necessary? Of course, this question is not new. In times of change, faculty must employ creative means to adapt their courses to a changing environment, whether institutional or disciplinarily. However, what we know historically and what this pandemic has revealed is that all too often our most vulnerable students—



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both socially and financially—struggle most with these broader transitions. However, these students are the very reason we should be more creative, inclusive, and equitable in our pedagogical efforts, whether in times of crisis or not.

In the wake of coronavirus, an article titled “Please Do a Bad Job of Putting Your Courses Online” by Rebecca Barrett-Fox went viral, its namesake a call to action for instructors everywhere to ease the pressure of online instruction not necessarily for themselves, but for their students. Generic curricula and instruction are antithetical to fostering innovation and inclusivity in the classroom, but Barrett-Fox and others note that we are adapting and working in crisis mode—classes are neither normal nor taking place in classrooms anymore. “Your class is NOT the highest priority of their OR your life right now,” she writes. “Release yourself from high expectations right now, because that’s the best way to help your students learn. It is hard to predict when we will return to normal, but one thing is clear: it will be a new normal, with new important questions about what it means to teach and learn at this moment in time.

Still, prescient questions from our past and present will remain: how do we reform curricula to better reflect students’ lived experiences and take decisive action to establish expansive learning experiences for everyone in our classrooms? As Texas State University and universities across the country increasingly mirror larger demographic shifts—in fact, over 50% of Texas State students identify as part of a minority group, a figure that continues to increase—we must ensure that our learning environments also reflect those changing trends and attitudes (“Student Demographics”). Accordingly, we hope to continue this dialogue by exploring strategies faculty can integrate into

their teaching to enhance course content and classroom experiences, and also provide a space for amplifying our most important voice: students'. Together, we hope to highlight the underlying issues facing instruction and present ideas for bridging the gap—in essence to model the same kind of student-teacher dialogue we believe can lead to intrinsic change.

The Predicament of Higher Education: A Student's Perspective

Like many students, I have found myself struggling to maintain focus and motivation amid the COVID-19 pandemic and new online class format. While many of my peers are faced with new professional and familial responsibilities, I was still surprised by the overwhelming relief many others expressed because they were getting an “easy out” from studying, writing essays, taking final exams, and many other assignments. Undoubtedly, the pandemic warrants concern and we should all be prioritizing our loved ones, economic well-being, and safety. But I could not help but wonder why so many students were eager to cut corners and willfully embrace a subpar experience. Why were there no protests against these executive orders? But if students have always felt this way? What if it is not just a current generational problem or a COVID-19 issue? What if it is a problem with the education system itself?

Paulo Freire, the great advocate of critical pedagogy, wrote, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). Right now, it seems we are all practicing this process of inquiry, speculating about what will

happen next for our businesses, homes, and schools.

However, as a student, it can feel like we are largely left out of this process, especially in the classroom. The banking method of education, as coined by Freire, in which teachers, the keepers of knowledge, deposit information into students' bank of growing knowledge, feels apropos for this moment.

Under this method, discussion is minimized in favor of memorization and other rote instructional methods, and therefore does not stimulate thoughtful inquiry, problem-solving, or creativity. In the words of Pavan Kumar Chandrappa, "the knowledge gained by a learner in the morning will become obsolete at night" without a means to further operationalize that knowledge (37). As a result, students do not think twice about the information they are given; they simply exercise their short term memory to complete assignments and classes, which effectively diminishes the quality of learning and the value of education. Instead, a satisfactory education should evoke emotions, thoughts, and discussions of ideas that make us uncomfortable because they are controversial topics. As Ronald Barnett asserts, a satisfactory education should foster "a change in understanding and a change in one's relationship to the world," not incite celebration over cancelled classes or "easy" online exams (65).

Yet, despite known challenges, the rise of the online space has redefined education and created new prospects for students through remote learning. Many students prefer online classes because, for the most part, they can learn at their own pace. However, they also yield far less interaction among students and professors. So I have to ask: is it any better than the current banking method of education?

Unfortunately, it appears that online classes still perpetuate,

if not encourage, this method. In Zoom and other online platforms, instructors suddenly possess new controls over the classroom such as the ability to assign students to specific break-out sessions, mute and un-mute students, and more. While these tools may stimulate participation, it is a forced participation that inevitably creates an imbalance in the traditional student-teacher dynamic. Likewise, online classes also provide a more dramatic snapshot of other important disparities, namely for students who already feel excluded or disengaged from course content. Without face-to-face interaction or methods that optimally simulate that experience, these are the students that may take a backseat in a course if they don't feel supported, inspired, or included.

Before the rise of coronavirus, researchers like Susan Dynarski were concerned about the impact online classes have on traditionally marginalized students. She finds that “[less academically proficient] students are hurt most by the online format,” because they lack structured and meaningful support from teachers, whereas “for those with strong academic skills, by contrast, online learning can open up amazing opportunities” (“Online Courses Are Harming...”). Furthermore, as Beth McMurtrie notes, “life intervenes in random and unusual ways,” which students and faculty alike have witnessed firsthand: younger siblings talking in the background, cats walking across laptops, and other unexpected antics (“What One College President Learned...”). When attempting to focus on my online classes, I sometimes found myself wanting to comb my hair, vacuum my room, or do anything else to distract me from my laptop screen. It is true that the online space feels too familiar to us, so we often lose track surfing its many channels or ignore it completely as a defense mechanism. In

a time of social distancing, it seems isolation and remote learning are vital to preserving our health, but detrimental to our education.

So what is one to do? How can we help students “develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire 73). To stimulate these skills, faculty should strive to continue engaging with students in meaningful ways and think critically about how they are exercising inclusion in the classroom, whether in person or online. While these settings certainly share their differences, flexibility, creativity, and relevancy remain essential tenets to carry forward. Thus, fully engaging with students means incorporating more unconventional and creative materials such as real-world scientific studies instead of textbooks, memoirs and narratives that detail specific historical moments or showcase psychological issues, literary texts that showcase critical theory, and so many others. The key is to connect students’ real-world experiences with classroom concepts.

However, there are those rare gems that are attempting to implement a change in their pedagogical approach. The Honors College at Texas State offers an eclectic array of courses designed to engage students differently from the traditional classroom setting. Unlike traditional lecture-based courses, honors courses often promote student-directed discussion, with professors facilitating and dialoguing alongside their students. Also, these courses often provide more avenues for professional development, including conferences, service projects, and internships. However, not everyone has access to these courses, as students must satisfy specific GPA and other requirements when applying, whether as a high school student or currently enrolled at

Texas State. Though it may seem like a simple application process, maintaining a high GPA can be difficult for some students and many simply have not heard of the Honors College, therefore missing out on an enriching educational experience. Still, despite these barriers, there are lessons to be learned. Rather than rely solely on a model that is, while effective, largely exclusive, Texas State and instructors across campus should strive to incorporate these strategies wholesale in all courses.

Aside from in-class instruction, there are other ways in which students can activate their learning. Throughout the year, various colleges and departments host campus events to expand student engagement. For example, in the Department of World Languages and Literatures, specifically the Spanish discipline, the professors host events such as the Intercambio Mixers for students learning Spanish to practice their speaking skills and for native Spanish speakers to practice their English. Additionally, they host a Cine Contemporáneo: Must See Movies en español event to assist students in practicing their listening skills, while other events like Shakespeare en Argentina explain how Shakespeare's plays are translated into Spanish and performed throughout Spanish-speaking countries. Consequently, these examples demonstrate how investment in diverse, engaging events can increase participation and ultimately, comprehension in and out of the classroom.

Bridging the Gap: An Educator's Perspective

So what happens when we return to the traditional classroom setting after COVID-19? How can faculty think more critically and meaningfully about the classroom

experience, whether in an online or more traditional face-to-face setting? Most importantly, how can we listen to and integrate students' concerns into broader curriculum outcomes? How can we truly be present with our students, in times of crisis and beyond? I believe this process starts with transparent dialogue, which must include students.

Each semester as I'm planning my courses, whose topics range from composition to technical writing to professional editing, I try to remember that no class is a fixed entity. No syllabus or lesson is a guaranteed success. Even when I think I've mastered my template for the semester, I leave room for flexibility, creativity, and dialogue. I plan with intention and ensure my students know that they, too, play a role in shaping a course's mission statement. For instance, in my undergraduate-level Computers and Writing course, most students embrace the opportunity to explore cyborg theory with enthusiasm, while some students puzzle over my inclusion of sometimes challenging intersectional frameworks like queer feminist theory to explore course concepts. In my attempt to broaden students' horizons, I often challenge them to question the so-called democratized online space, and consider the ways that it may actually perpetuate inequities for certain groups. This produces some discomfort, but these conversations are most often productive and enriching, and in my experience, the students that speak up the least—students of color, LGBTQ+ students, students suffering from increased mental, emotional, and financial stress—often appreciate these discussions the most. Hence, faculty should not shy away from, but rather embrace these uncomfortable conversations, for they have proven to be some of the most illuminating moments of my semester. In challenging

students in these ways, we are creating a space for them to be vulnerable and present.

Of course, as with many universities, Texas State does invest in initiatives and programs that encourage more progressive approaches to teaching. Currently, the university offers faculty the opportunity to overhaul individual courses through the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute (MCTRI), hosted annually by the Center for Diversity and Gender Studies. The weeklong event invites faculty members to engage in group discussion around issues of inclusion and equity in the classroom for the purpose of redesigning a course of their choice. The event also features guest speakers on a variety of topics with an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching. The institute offers stipends to participating faculty for their time and effort, and can therefore only accommodate a limited number of participants. I participated in the institute last year and found the weeklong gathering to be a wonderful setting for candid discussions with faculty from across campus, many of whom I'd never met. The institute also allowed me the space to think critically through the syllabus and lessons I use in my Technical Writing course, endeavors that require devoted planning time. While surely a valuable resource, the institute is only a partial solution for broader transformation.

Accordingly, colleges and departments need to be willing to reassess and reform current curricula, discipline-wide. This means gauging the needs of administrators, staff, and especially students through deliberate measures and outcomes to ensure degree plans and course offerings are meaningful and relevant. Some departments have already or are in the process of taking such steps. For instance, the Department of English has recently moved to conduct a

comprehensive review of its curriculum to meet the needs of all these stakeholders. To begin, the chair and other faculty members developed three different committees, each separately devoted to assessing faculty, student, and curriculum benchmarking needs. While the faculty and student-oriented committees' gathered feedback about the curriculum from these groups through survey data, the curriculum committee reviewed peer institutions to better understand their approach to program development and promotion, a key tool in the ever-competitive academic market. The findings of this department-wide effort are still in progress, but this initiative has stimulated generative and productive conversation among faculty, from which students are likely to benefit. Apart from these formal audits, more informal strategies like dialogues and fora with faculty and students also show promise as a bridge toward coalition building around inclusive pedagogical experiences. Most importantly, these long-term efforts should involve, and ideally, emerge from students themselves, who are often positioned on the periphery of many curriculum overhaul efforts.

To that end, students should be part of our institutional conversations, both in person and online. In the age of Gen Z, many students are looking to social media and other digital tools to learn more about academic programs and professional development opportunities, while institutions have found the online space to be an effective marketing tool. With the help of student interns, schools like the University of Florida and Louisiana State University have formed robust social media profiles and embraced popular apps like TikTok ("To Reach Gen-Z Students, Colleges Meet Them Where They Are—on TikTok"). But rather than utilize

these tools for informational and promotional means exclusively, we should also consider their potential in the classroom. As instinctive content consumers and creators, students are naturally equipped to investigate meaningful issues and problem-solve in these cyber-mediated contexts, and faculty are poised to invoke this space for transformative, real-time learning through multimodal methods. Still, as many instructors can attest, it seems inequities will always persist. In this moment, the pandemic has made it all too clear that individuals facing financial hardship or who lack physical access to resources and support will struggle most to participate in online learning. Zoom and robust learning management systems are helpful solutions in a time of social distancing, but they are imperfect solutions nonetheless.

Conclusion

In Freire's words, "to speak a true word is to transform the world." Therefore, for true transformation to take hold, faculty and students alike should focus on advocating for pedagogical change that moves beyond the status quo of top-down reform measures. Instead, the trend should shift toward a more bottom-up approach, wherein student voices, desires, and needs drive the curriculum transformation and instruction process. Ultimately, there's more than one way to teach and learn, and the current coronavirus pandemic has further underscored a need for flexibility and empathy—for dialogue. This situation offers us an opportunity to consider how we might innovate teaching practices in both face-to-face and online settings to meet students where they are, culturally and contemporarily, especially the most vulnerable among us. Indeed, as Kimberlé Crenshaw states, "When they enter, we all enter (167). In a time of great uncertainty,

these are the lessons we need, and the ones that will ultimately carry us forward.

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See also *Cuentos and Testimonies I: Diversity and Inclusion at Texas State*, Chapter 8
[Cultivating Activist-Based Pedagogy in the Age of Generation Z](#)
by Amanda Scott



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