WAYWARD STORIES:

A RHETORIC OF COMMUNITY IN WRITING CENTER ADMINISTRATION

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DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my writing center community. These stories highlight some moments in our community that may have felt uncomfortable or even terrible. It may seem strange, then, to dedicate this project to all of you. Yet, as this project hopefully will both show and tell, these stories are the work of community. They explicate a group of people fighting to stay together within the constraints of something they all care about. These stories would not be possible without you all.

I am grateful that I get to be a leader in this community. May these stories help me understand my work so that I can lead in meaningful ways.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I'd like to thank my husband and children for continually being patient and loving and supportive in so many ways throughout this journey. I want to thank my husband, especially, for letting me make him a part of this journey.

To my thesis director, Marilee, I can't express in words what our relationship has come to mean to me. You are my friend and partner in this crazy writing center life, and I look forward to more years of learning and growing with you.

Kelin Hull

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Six weeks in to my position as assistant director of the writing center and suddenly I was confronted by a cluster bombing of issues and concerns – microaggressions, depression, confusion, suspicion – each one separate but related, and threatening to tear a new hole in the already fragile foundation of community in my writing center. How do we feel, what do we do, how does a community survive when the story we're experiencing isn't the story we want or expected - when it is, in a word, terrible? After McKinney's *Peripheral Visions,* we know our labor and our centers do not look, act, and feel cozy, iconoclastic, or focused on one-on-one tutoring all of the time. And yet, if we are going to continue to move beyond the grand narrative, a deep and meaningful understanding of community is essential. When we put our story in relation to our communities, then our story becomes just one thread in a much more complex tapestry. We cannot separate one person's story from the story of the writing center. Each person, each story, is a stitch in the rhetorical fabric of community. Using critically reflexive stories to change and shape practice, this thesis highlights the grand narrative of community and shows how that narrative serves to stymie community growth. These stories resist boundaries. They are wayward. They are counter to the narratives around which we construct our lives. When we share stories and write together, we begin to understand the threads we're all weaving into the tapestry – our community, stitched together through shared practice; a process that will never end, as each person comes and goes. The community will never be resolved, and in the ambiguity of boundlessness,

comes a new way of seeing the world - through constellations and the dwelling in

inbetween.

Marilee Brooks-Gillies, PhD, Chair

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP – advanced placement

DROC – Digital Resources and Online Consulting (Committee)

GSA – graduate student administrator

IUPUI – Indiana-University Purdue-University Indianapolis

LCD – Language and Cultural Diversity (Committee)

LT – Leadership Team

RA – research assistantship

R&A – Research and Assessment (Committee)

TA – teaching assistantship

TT – tenure-track

UWC – University Writing Center

WAC – Writing Across the Curriculum (Committee)

WACKO – pseudo-acronym for WCOnline

WCA – writing center administrator

WPA – writing program administrator

Introduction

On Coming to Cultural Rhetorics

Many years ago, so many that I can say it was just before the dawn of the new century, I was in a high school AP English class my senior year, tasked with the assignment to discover and perform a year-long inquiry into any topic I desired. The summer before, I had spent two weeks at the Pine Ridge Reservation for the Oglala and Lakota Sioux in South Dakota learning about their history and their present. In the years leading up to that visit (what was then titled a "mission trip" but I now find that term to be problematic and will refrain from using it), I had read and devoured countless American Indian authored or inspired texts. I could not understand why my white mainstream culture had not valued American Indian culture and I wanted to know as much as I could. So, for my AP English class, I embarked on a year-long inquiry about the Sioux and Pine Ridge Reservation.

I examined their socioeconomic status and the public policies and political mechanisms that governed that status. I talked about voting rights, mining rights, rights to land ownership and hunting and fishing, and lack of access to basic items like grocery stores. Alongside that scholarship in the final portfolio, I included multimodal aspects, such as photos I had taken or captured from movies, and non-traditional scholarship, such as poems I had written or found, quotes from American Indian songs and personal narratives, and my own personal narratives. I viewed my final portfolio not just as a simple examination of the oppression and continued marginalization experienced by American Indians, but my relationship to that subject. I storied my journey from a land of privilege and white people to a land of poverty where no one looked like me but welcomed me nonetheless, as they educated me on their culture and their history, telling

me stories about the things I wouldn't find in my textbooks. I didn't realize it then, but in the doing and the making of this inquiry, I was practicing cultural rhetorics.

Cultural rhetorics is defined by the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL) as "an orientation to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks" that "engages with the material, embodied, and relational aspects of research and scholarly production" (Riley Mukavetz 109). Or, as Malea Powell and Phil Bratta describe in "Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversation:"

> Scholars in the field of cultural rhetorics are generally concerned with re-orienting rhetoric studies to be more attuned to the cultural circumstances of rhetorical production/practice. This includes an understanding of the material bodies engaged in rhetorical practices, and an attunement to what Raymie McKerrow calls "corporeal rhetorics" as "not a method of doing or seeing rhetoric, but rather an attitude that one takes toward the rhetorical act" (320). If we proceed from the already-voiced assumption that all rhetoric is a product of cultural systems and that all cultures are rhetorical (i.e., they have meaning-making systems that are meaningful and that can be traced synchronically, diachronically, and a-chronically), understanding the specificity of the bodies and subjectivities engaged in those practices must be central. (Powell & Bratta, 2016)

In other words, one *does* cultural rhetorics by attending to relationships to and between a wide range of interdisciplinary and individual contexts and frameworks.

In writing my inquiry, I positioned myself both as an outsider to a cultural community about which I knew very little, but also as an insider to a privileged community, one who had historically oppressed the former. This notion of privilege exists both in cultural practice and is embedded in language, creating grand narratives, a story we tell that attempts to account for the whole of something (McKinney 11). This embedding can be framed using Derrida's "conceptual operations," the structure of binary oppositions western culture has created - insider/outsider, civilized/uncivilized - wherein one only has meaning because the other has been privileged over time (Bressler

110-111). Like Derrida, DeCerteau also looks to language as containing common tropes that erase more nuanced language as a method of constituting "proper meanings" (24). However, it is not simply language or communication that inscribes grand narratives, because "both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system – that of language or that of an established order" (DeCerteau 23-24). In other words, our language and our practices are cultural, and can sustain and/or change culture.

These binaries all too often help us create the narratives around which we organize our realities. These narrative binaries manifest into grand narratives. Shawn Wilson describes this process as the cultural embedding of language privilege in *Research is Ceremony,* writing

> there is always a comparison made between the culture of the 'studied'
> and that of the 'studier.' The language, tone and focus of research reflects
> this comparison, with the inevitable consequence of rating of one over the
> other (13).

In other words, when we rely on grand narratives, something gets left out, privileging the things that are in the narratives. Stories, by contrast, help us build bridges that "liberate" (DeCerteau 128). Rhetoric, therefore, asks *how*: How do bridges get built? How could I, as an outsider, tell the story of Pine Ridge Reservation within my insider community without falling in to the same cultural traps of my ancestors? The answer was that I could not.

And therefore, I wrote myself – and all of my emotions, identities, and accompanying tensions – into the project. I was not a distant researcher hiding behind a perceived objectivity, but an embodied reality – a product of a system of culture/s – that has shaped my very being, including the language I use, the sources I read and have access to and cite, the modes I use to communicate, and my audience because "all

research practices, methods, and theories are culturally located and specific (Riley Mukavetz 121). By writing myself into my research, I reshaped the familiar narratives of white/Indian.

When I am centered within my research, not distant from it, I embody it, carrying it with me across contexts and cultures, both an embracing and a shedding of my egocentrism, a way to understand who I am in relation to and how that relationship works to build, sustain, and even break a culture, a community: "of course, much work in cultural rhetorics doesn't have comparison as its goal and is, instead, rooted in a desire to change…traditional narratives…" (Powell & Bratta, 2016). In reading this, I invite you, reader, to experience alongside me the stories I share here; stories that take place in the writing center, most of them within a single semester – one of them that took place months before, a thread woven throughout that continues to stitch and unravel in an uncertain dance across these stories and those yet to come.

The Introduction begins with a moment of painful clarity that became the catalyst for this project as it is now. Within that Introduction, I review the literature that I have carried with me through airports, mountains, deserts, forests, and lakes for two years. I have four sections: On Stories and Story-telling, On Community and Communities of Practice, On Connection, and Identity, Emotion, and Power, and lastly On the Things That Get in The Way. It's organization is somewhat like an hourglass in that it asks you to start and end large, with a lot of constellating frameworks such as ecocriticism, cultural poetics, postmodernism/deconstruction, feminism, queer theory, and decolonialism, but asks that you force a lot of this large-scale information through a very finite funnel – the writing center. It's organized in this way - between the specific context of writing centers

and more general contexts of disciplinary communities of practice – in the hopes that, while these stories should be read in the spirit of institutional critique summarized by Porter et al. (and are therefore specific to my writing center and my experiences within my writing center) that some pieces can resonate without, moving across disciplines and communities of different shapes.

This funnel is made-up of all the threads of a tapestry I've struggled to weave – the stories of my experiences over the course of two years in the writing center. Each of the three stories in the chapters – "Chapter 1: The LT Revolution" "Chapter 2: The Sexism Staff Meeting," and "Chapter 3: Weaving in Arizona," are more than stories, however, they are, "data for analysis" (Riley Mukavetz 110). The intention is for each chapter to be able to stand both as its own moment in time as a story, but a story that cannot be properly analyzed without being put in relation to the others. Each chapter shows a story, but also tells a story, pausing long enough to provide discussion at crucial moments, with the exception perhaps being Chapter 3. The emotional impacts of that chapter are still quite close to me, and I found I had a hard time interrupting the story to discuss its larger implications, and so I've included comments only after the story concludes. As with any reflective work, time and distance are critical elements to analysis, and these events are still quite fresh.

After Chapter 3, I conclude with final thoughts, pulling threads from the beginning of this project back through in hopes that the final picture is more clear, even if incomplete, a critique I discuss in the Afterword. That's the thing about cultural rhetorics – the constellation of stitches and thread is never quite complete. It can quickly become, as Clifford Geertz recalls hearing in a British-Indian Colonial story in "Thick

Description," "turtles all the way down[1]" (20). There's always something more to be

understood, which is why cultural rhetorics is an orientation – a way of seeing and doing

the world around us.

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[1] Side note: I love the quote. I don't love that it's coming second-hand via an off-hand anecdote included in white male scholarship without properly attributing it to the original indigenous culture of origin or placing it within a larger cultural context to understand what its original intention was.

On the Writing Center

The writing center at IUPUI exists as a semi-independent unit and is understood to be a part of the English department within the School of Liberal Arts, and indeed, prior to the founding of the tenure-track director line, it was understood to be part of the Writing Program, which oversees 100- and 200-level general education writing courses. We have three locations – two physical locations and one online – and operate with an average staff of 30-40 consultants per semester each working up to 20 hours per week. These consultants must complete the English W397/W597 Writing Center Theory and Practice course prior to being hired, which is taught by our director.

In addition to working one-on-one with a variety of undergraduate, graduate, and faculty writers, consultants serve on one of four committees: Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Digital Resources and Online Consulting (DROC), Research and Assessment (R&A), and Language and Cultural Diversity (LCD) (Appendix A). Committee work is multi-directional – the audience can be consultants in our writing center all the way up to university stakeholders, and everything in between. Each committee has ongoing and short-term projects that recognize writing centers are a field of study and a site of scholarship. Through committee work, consultants engage in everything from updating our handbook, to presenting at conferences (Appendix A). While each committee has a core mission, consultants often propose additional projects. Project Time accounts for roughly 10-15% of a consultant's hours, or 20% for committee coordinators. Each committee has a focus and area of expertise, however, cross-committee collaboration is encouraged and often required to complete projects.

Four years ago, my director, Marilee, was hired as the first tenure-line faculty director of the writing center, which was, at that time, 33 years old. As a TT faculty director, Marilee is provide one course reallocation per semester, which understood to be about 8-10 hours per week, to direct the Center. The TT faculty line came about as a result of the recommendation of an external review and a self-study, which was undertaken by the long-time director, a full-time faculty member who had two course reallocations per semester to direct the center, and one lecturer and two associate faculty[2] assistant directors who each had two teaching assignments in the Center per semester, with duties split across administration and consulting. As lecturers and associate faculty in the university, the framing of their labor to stakeholders relied solely on quantifying teaching hours and so the hours spent consulting were valued because they counted as teaching.

At the time of the external review, the staff of the center was comprised of 15+ faculty tutors, with 10-15 undergraduate tutors each working 10 hours per week. Undergraduates were not allowed to work with graduate students or faculty writers. Based on the recommendations of the external review board, student consultants were immediately allowed to work up to 20 hours per week. When the new TT director started, she worked hard in her first year to re-emphasize peer consulting in the writing center by forming the committee structure and to highlight scholarly and professional identities through the genesis of bi-weekly staff meetings focused on professional development and community practice. This re-orientation of the praxis of the center caused a rift between

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[2] Associate faculty is the title IUPUI applies to individuals with adjunct, part-time, contingent teaching assignments.

Marilee and many faculty members[3], a fact that is beyond the purview of this project but informs it due to the instability it caused.

This tumultuous first year saw one assistant director leave the center. The remaining assistant director had always planned to leave the center to move to a different role in the English department after the coming year. That was a year, however, that nothing new could be built or decided upon, because Marilee knew the assistant director would be leaving. The total amount of administrative hours dedicated to the center had dropped from 80 to 30, with 10 of those hours being used to consult, forcing Marilee to go well above her 8-10 hours of time per week to attend to the administrative labor of the center. The 10 hours of consulting labor for the assistant director, while focused on attending to writers, also enabled the assistant director to perform on-site administrative labor such as handling issues with facilities, writer complaints, or concerning sessions. This labor was not named as administrative labor but was nonetheless highly effective at maintaining a sense of leadership in the center. I started back in the center during the spring semester of that year. I had been trained under the old director a decade prior as an undergraduate and elected to a graduate version of the writing center education course. However, because I had prior writing center experience, I started consulting immediately.

Marilee's third year, and my first year, is where these stories pick-up, with a new assistant director and the foundation of the Leadership Team (LT) structure, which will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. Because praxis had shifted towards a student-led center, necessarily, a larger administrative apparatus would be needed to support the work of the center. Between the new assistant director and the LT (which had

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[3] This tension of institutional status and organization impacting the workings of the writing center is an important thread in this project, but is not included because these experiences took place prior to my arrival. This story belongs to Marilee.

two Teaching Assistant (TA) lines, one Research Assistant (RA) line, and two undergraduate administrators), the administrative labor in the center was up to potentially 120 hours weekly with half that time dedicated to consulting; though, as this project highlights, the line between administrative labor, scholarly labor, and emotional labor are often portrayed as rigid – tasks we can move in and out of, rather than betwixt and between. This misunderstanding of the way administrative labor looks and acts is the starting point for the stories that follow. That spring semester is when this misunderstanding began an unraveling, with emotions, identities, and power playing starring roles in a slew of competing narratives.

During that semester, Marilee was out on maternity leave, while at the same time, one of the undergraduate administrators on LT needed to leave the center for a full-time job. In addition, the new assistant director received an opportunity to convert her line to tenure-track, which wouldn't allow her to retain an administrative appointment with the center as she would be expected as TT to focus on her discipline of creative writing. Upon approval of the line in the summer, I became the new assistant director, though I am still in graduate school and therefore on my TA line[4], with a 20-hour commitment to the administration of the center and no consulting hours. This means that, between Marilee and myself we have 30 hours of time with which to direct the writing center. The lack of available administrative time has proven to be taxing for us both this academic

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[4] This means that I was "promoted" but do not receive any additional compensation for these labors. I am paid the same as another graduate student in the center who has far fewer responsibilities. I began working in the summer without pay and consistently dedicate more than 20-hours per week to my job because that is the amount of work it requires and I intend to stay in my position beyond graduation. If I was less invested, however, this arrangement would spell disaster for Marilee. This, again, points to institutional status and structures and how those rigid understandings of labor negatively impact a space as complex and nuanced as the writing center. Because I am "a student," my labor is seen as something other than what it is.

year. We not only feel overwhelmed and vulnerable, but consider this vulnerability to translate to the Center, as well.

They Need to Deal with Their Own Damn Problems

Barely six weeks in to my new position as graduate student assistant director of the writing center and suddenly I was confronted by a cluster bombing of issues and concerns – microaggressions, depression, fear, confusion, suspicion, hostility, and suicide – each one separate but related, and threatening to tear a new hole in the already fragile foundation of community in my writing center. I cleared everything off my calendar that looked and acted like the writing center labor I thought I had been hired to do; the labor that had words like "train" or actions like "order" and "answer" – the labor that was clearly marked on the three-column spreadsheet shared between Marilee and myself (Appendix B). This spreadsheet told me a story of my job that was quantifiable, easy to understand and therefore easy to represent to university administration. Six weeks in, and while supplies – Kleenex, hand sanitizer, highlighters, printer ink, and more – were still ordered and payroll still run and meetings still planned and attended, those tasks were not my highest priority, despite their presence in the spreadsheet. Rather, for the next four weeks, I spent practically all of my time and energy attending to one line on the spreadsheet that reads "consultant oversight."

Hidden in that line is a part of the story of my job that is abstract – the invisible, misunderstood, and misrepresented emotional labor of writing centers. As these triggering events circled in and around and through our community, some of it a culmination of years of emotional residues, some of it new, I spent hours each day in one-to-one and small group meetings trying to build, re-build, and sustain community one interaction at a time. I did this, and the doing of it caused me to experience anxiety and depression. While leading a staff meeting that was supposed to set a new tone, one where

we understood and accepted that relating to one another was complicated, messy, and even uncomfortable – and that was okay – I suddenly realized I could not go on. I could not make my body say and do the things I'd planned. I began to cry in front of the staff, apologizing, breaking open in front of them in a way I'd never wanted them to see – the very real price of this labor. In that moment of despair, I retreated to my office, where I closed the door, lay down on my rug, and wept.

In the weeks leading up to this moment, I had taken all of this labor home with me, the residues of so many emotions sticking to me like fly paper. I came home irritable and exhausted, unable to process what was happening within me in my quest to resolve the tensions without. My identities conflated and combusted in explosions of energy, emotion, and labor that had me spinning like the arrow in the center of a board game wheel, one hand sending a work email while the other soothes a sick child while one eye pays the bills and the other reads homework. In the days following this moment, I sat on my therapist's sofa, worn from so many years of sadness and anger, and knotted my hands together as I explained the tangled beautiful mess of writing centers and writing center administration. Being not just a psychologist, but a manager of other psychologists, he readily understood. Yes, this labor makes sense. It's necessary. It's valuable. It matters. My husband, however, quiet through most of the session and weary from parrying and dodging with these residues, turned towards me and, in a serious tone said, "They need to deal with their own damn problems."

How do we feel, what do we do, how does a community survive when the story we're experiencing isn't the story we want or expected – when it is, in a word, terrible? This is a story; one among a series of stories, each one a place within me, locatable

because I can map it within my body and without, placed in a framework of other storytellers and academics. These are stories that take place outside of the grand narratives, the constructed frameworks, we use to orient and reorient our lives – the identities, emotions, and labor that construct and deconstruct ourselves and our communities. These stories, then, are wayward. They resist order. They do not distill down neatly into a grand narrative that can be repeated easily. They are disruptive to the very notion of control. And yet, I am a writing center administrator; these stories require my management.

On Story and Story-telling

In my office, on the wall facing me so that I must read and re-read it every day, is a quote by Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh that reads: "the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves organize our sense of who we are, who others are, and how we are to be related" (10). This quote resonates deeply with me, even beyond the purview of this writing project. It's chewy and yet completely obvious, echoing Malea Powell in *Stories Take Place* when she reminds us that "we are the stories we tell" (389). We tell stories about who we are and who others are. Sometimes we even share our stories with others. And, often, our stories change depending on who the *other* is. The very reality we think is real is a tapestry woven together with ours and other people's stories.

Brockmeijer and Carbaugh write how "narratives [are] the means through which social and cultural life comes into being," and contend that most knowledge includes a "narrative and rhetorical fabric" (9). This imagery of fabric is especially useful to me and is one I return to again and again: our stories – the doing, the telling, and the understanding of them – are threads we are all weaving independently and collaboratively

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in a tapestry of community and connection. Michelle Gibson et al. describe this fabric in less abstract terms, writing "storytelling is the way we compose our lives; all identity, all social construction, begins with narratives" (71). If we compose through stories, weaving our metaphorical tapestries, then, as Bruner reminds us, that also means that things get left out – the things that don't seem to fit the pattern of what we're already doing (Bruner qtd in McKinney 82).

When things get left out, the remainder "accrues," creating a history, a culture, and often a grand narrative (McKinney 23). Jackie Grutsch McKinney uses James Berlin's definition of grand narrative, "the stories we tell about our experiences that attempt to account for all features of it," and his accompanying postmodern critique (what is left out?) to theorize a grand narrative and its inevitable consequences for writing centers (11). According to McKinney, this narrative identifies writing centers as "cozy homes" – iconoclastic, comfortable places that help writers in one-to-one tutoring sessions (3). A writing center should be a safe, easy space where people do not experience "bad" things.

All stories, not just grand narratives, are motivated by what the teller wants to "highlight" and "not" (McKinney 11). Stories take place and accrue in culturally specific contexts. The way we might explain our professions at a dinner party will be different than the way we relate with colleagues at a conference. Yet, because the dinner party explanation is more likely to be uncomplicated, it is more likely to get repeated. This is how grand narratives begin: with good intentions to simplify our stories to others. McKinney explains this by citing renown writing center scholar Muriel Harris, who in 2007 wrote, "The types of work accomplished in writing center tutorials are so complex

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and varied – and individualized – that we have not yet been able to come up with sound bytes that illuminate what we do" (qtd. in McKinney 4). The fact that Harris only mentions writing center tutorials, or sessions as we call them in my writing center, highlights the journey of writing centers and the genesis of the present grand narrative – from "fix-it-shop" to peer-consulting for all writers. It pricks at a key flaw in the grand narrative, however: that the only work we do that matters takes place in sessions. In this way, the grand narrative is not just for lack of a digestible dinner party explanation but becomes a way to mark ourselves as writing center professionals.

Put plainly, when we repeat the grand narrative, we belong to the writing center community (McKinney 16). Marilee Brooks-Gillies shares this concern in her article, "Constellations Across Cultural Rhetorics and Writing Centers," "As a writing center director….I'm… concerned that – as McKinney indicates – we are not particularly good at telling the stories that get at the rich and complicated work that we do" (3). The writing center is more than a site of one-on-one learning, yet that one-on-one learning is the work that is most valued – by ourselves as writing center administrators, by our departments and university stakeholders, and by our student populations. Yet, not unlike an iceberg, the majority of writing center labor takes place beneath the surface of that labor; invisible and overlooked, yet monumental in scale to what is visible. Time and again in the history of writing centers, of the history and stories I write of the IUPUI Writing Center, there is a pronounced, acute tension between the narrative that writing center professionals consult and writing center professionals do research, administrative and emotional labor, and institutional and professional labor in addition to (and/or often in service to) the work of consulting.

Therefore, I write this to intentionally and gleefully subvert the grand narrative, breaking open the writing center as a complex space where identities, emotions, and power circulate and collide, belying a community of tension and conflict. I do this through story-telling, because, as Gibson et al. assert, "the narratives told about social institutions are embedded in or with the narratives of individuals whose lives…have been involved with the building, manipulating, and re-building the cultural context(s) in which they form their social identities" (72). My stories and my positionality, therefore, also tell a story about the writing center itself. By writing these stories, I "pay attention to the lived moments…and what they are telling us" (Gellar et al. 10). By writing myself into the narrative of my writing center, I position myself alongside the ethnographic inquiry of Michelle Miley, who writes, "through the reflective/reflexive inquiry…we can position ourselves to actively shape our work rather than to react to the… pressures surrounding us" (125). As a new writing center administrator, the only way I see how to manage these stories is to put myself inside of them as a method of understanding so that I can better shape my labor in the future.

In cultural rhetorics, the writing and telling of stories is theory. Malea Powell in *Stories Take Place,* writes,

> Among European scholars there is an alienated notion which maintains
> that theory is separate from story, and thus a different set of words are
> required to "prove" an idea rather than to "show" one….Doing requires
> some form of social interaction and thus, story is the most persuasive and
> sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people. .
> . . There is story in every line of theory (384).

This project, then, contains stories within stories – those turtles Geertz mentioned – and should be read as a "critical reflection" in the spirit of Goodburn and Shively Leverenz that "employ[s] story to change…practice" (Brooks-Gillies 3). These stories are

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rhetorical and understanding them is key to both shaping my practice as a writing center administrator and the culture of community in my writing center.

On Communities and Communities of Practice

These stories are personal to me and my experiences, but they are not limited to me "because the formation of any story is not fixed within some individual identity…but rather is formed among competing public and private voices" (Gibson et al. 73). A cultural rhetorics orientation, according to the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab defines "culture as always rhetorical and rhetoric as persistently cultural" (1.1). My stories therefore always already include a culture and my relationships to that culture (Gibson et al. 73). Accordingly, Emily Clare Danvers notes how there is a "theoretical shift towards post-human thinking about the world, whereby bodies are reconceptualized not as independent free agents but as emerging through the entanglement of social, discursive and material practices" (286). While these stories focus on me and my experiences, they also must recognize that these experiences take place in rhetorical situations, surrounded by other bodies who also have variable emotions, identities, and power – a community.

Ahmed and Fortier position the word *community* as itself "in question" both "a question mark, as well as a mark of questioning," rather than an exclamation point - a solution (251). The relative simplicity of this difference belies its importance to writing center theory and practice, a discipline that often looks to community as an outcome, or what Ahmed and Fortier call the "promise" of community, rather than an ongoing process (252). The grand narrative, as McKinney describes, encompasses what we *do* and how what we do looks, acts, and feels. A lot of the time, this looking, acting, and feeling gets rolled into the word *community*, itself its own grand narrative.

The grand narrative of community is one of "cohesion" – that "the community promises to deliver modes of 'being together' and 'having together' that are grounded in sameness, reciprocity, mutual responsibility and a form of mutual connectedness and attachment" (Ahmed and Fortier 252). We have, as Donna Haraway aptly phrases it, a "self-consciously constructed space…[that acts]…. on the basis of conscious coalition…" (123). It, like the writing center grand narrative, is teleological. This narrative is rooted in modern scholarship in the findings of psychologist Joseph Gusfield, who, in 1975, proposed two basic definitions of community: the "territorial" and the "relational" or, the "quality of character of the human relationship, without reference to location" (Gusfield qtd. in McMillan et al. 4). A community can be both a noun or adjective, a word describing a physical location or human relationship. However, in 1986, psychologists David McMillan and David Chavis used Gusfield's definition as the foundation for a "theory of community" that "attempts to describe the dynamics of the sense-of-community force… to describe the process by which these elements work together to produce the experience of sense of community" (6). Arguing that community operates "as a force in human life," McMillan and Chavis posit four elements of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (8-9). They explicate a hypothesized relationship between these elements as a table with arrows pointing in and around the elements and their different requirements, going so far as to propose two possible formulas for emotional connection.

McMillan and Chavis don't stop with their table and its "transactional dynamics" however, they describe the difficulty in illustrating this "force" and so revert to explaining their findings using narrative examples highly contextualized to specific

places and situations. Yes. In an effort to quantify and make visible the force of community, McMillan and Chavis discover they must utilize story to explain what tables and formulas cannot. Community is not a thing; McMillan and Chavis illuminate in their narratives that community is something we *do*. Ahmed and Fortier explain this, writing, "Community enters into the debate about how to live with others and seems to be crucial as a name for what we already do (or do not do); what we must do (or not do); or what we must retain (or give up) (251-252). Community is rhetorical.

DeCerteau writes of how "a relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact" (xi). Community rhetorics, therefore, must examine how people *do* as a practice of being together, something Etienne Wenger first termed a community of practice. A community of practice is a system of people, according to Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, who:

> become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together. This value is not merely instrumental for their work. It also accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other's perspectives and of belonging to an interesting group of people. Over time, they develop a unique perspective on their topic as well as a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches. They also develop personal relationships and established ways of interacting. They may even develop a common sense of identity. They become a community of practice (5).

As Wenger et al. define it above, a community of practice, therefore, is those same characteristics of community that Gusfield, McMillan, and Chavis all noticed. It also combines the elusive "force" that McMillan and Chavis could not identify and ultimately resulted to stories to describe. It is the *doing together* of DeCerteau and the concept of

relationality, "an understanding of how our "relationship[s] to land, space, ideas, people, and living beings…have been and will always be at play with each other" (Riley Mukavetz 112). It is connection.

If we are going to continue to move beyond the writing center grand narrative, a deep and meaningful understanding of community is essential. We need to use rhetoric to question *"how* people organize themselves….*how* a specific community makes meaning and negotiates systems of communication" (Riley Mukavetz 110). It's time to think what the word community does, doesn't do, and could do in writing centers (Ahmed and Fortier 252).

The writing center is a community, and in fact the work of community is essential to writing center labor. Writing center scholar Beth Bouquet wryly quips,

> I have been puzzled over the years by the continual reassertion of
> community in those regional and national writing center forums as I have
> learned that we can agree on virtually no characteristics that could identify
> us as a community" (Boquet 30).

As Boquet aptly contends, the writing center is not a community because of its agreed-upon characteristics, but rather because of the actions of its participants. One person *doing* alone is not a community, nor are people *doing* in a group necessarily community; the community must *do together.* It is both what we *do together* and our surrounding contexts and experiences. Community rhetorics, then, asks the questions of *how* people connect and disconnect.

On Connection and Identity, Emotion, and Power

In all of this complexity how will the archipelago grow together? How, in the words of Gellar at al, "[will] we make one another matter?" (8). We are singular bodies who inhabit a space, like islands, but we are neither deserted nor isolated. We exist as

systems in a vast network of other people and their systems. We are liminal bodies; we do not end at our skin, despite the boundary it implies (Haraway 144). This network develops an ecosystem, connecting one island to another. Each of us, with our own emotions, are always and forever linked to others through emotions. We are not isolated islands unto ourselves, but one amongst a vast archipelago. But this ecosystem of emotions also includes complex variables – the identities we claim or are assigned and the power we give and take – that informs our development. And just like a real ecosystem, the decisions we make can have far reaching impacts on someone else.

In a community of practice, people must practice doing *with* (as opposed to alongside) to produce the activity necessary to build and sustain community. Often, however, a community of practice can overemphasize the practice (the *doing*) and underemphasize the community (the *with)*. This is what Priya Parker, renown conflict resolution expert, illustrates when she writes that we "inadvertently shrink a human challenge down to a logistical one. We reduce the question of what to do with people to a question of what to do about things," without questioning what makes "a group connect and a gathering matter" (*x-xi).* While practice is an activity and not a thing, often practice gets conflated with things in our stories.

For example, Boquet writes of the potlucks and social gatherings she uses as a writing center director to create community, then contends that there is an inverse effect often overlooked: that these efforts don't create community, they *emerge from* one (emphasis original) (26). Boquet's realization here is apt: while social gatherings and potlucks can reinforce community, they as practices do not create community because people make community. Qwo-Li Driskill examines the ways in which people connect

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when they are learning and making together during experiments leading workshops with his students that enables a "process of collaborative labor that answers community needs" (63). Indeed, Driskill noticed that the act of *doing together* allowed conversations to open that were more human, apart from the "formalized structures" that often exist in higher education (75). This idea that there are human interactions and formal interactions reifies Parker's question of what to do about things. "Communities are made up of people with real lived experiences and lives at stake" (CTRL 1.3). People make and do practice, not the other way around.

Connection, therefore, is fundamental to this idea of making one another and the community matter. Brené Brown defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship" (19). Brown's definition denotes that connection is a feeling – an emotional experience, one that requires not just people to feel, but to feel a sense of strength and value from the interaction. A few years ago for a conference presentation, after researching connection, I drew-up what I called the Staircase to Agency.

Authenticity → Vulnerability → Empathy → Connection → Agency

Connection takes place between two people when both authenticity and vulnerability are present, which establishes empathy. Empathy then generates connection, and connection is necessary for agency – the idea that a person has power in their own story and within their communities of practice. Authenticity involves identities – we are in a state of being within or towards an orientation. Vulnerability is the activity, then, of being authentic. It's the way we perform authenticity so that others may read it. Empathy is the emotional

reaction created by vulnerability, an emotional reaction when vulnerability is an activity that is shared in a rhetorical situation. When all of these occur, people connect. When people connect using this process of identities and emotions, they transcend to agency – to this place where they feel as if they have power and a level of control, which means they can both receive and give power. Our identities can help us have power, but ultimately, it's our emotions that help us keep it.

Community, therefore, is not just the "question mark" of what communities look, act, and feel like, but of how the people within act and feel. The people, ideas, and places in communion work together to continually make and remake a community. As such, "the shapes of community," write Ahmed and Fortier, "may take the shape of the different bodies that inhabit them and move around within them…[therefore] communities are affected by relations of power…and identity" (255). People's emotions, identities, and relations of power between and with one another are central to connection and therefore to the building and sustaining of communities.

This exploration into the way communities connect is fundamental to writing center scholarship (Gellar et al. 7). Gellar et al. share stories of moments that take place on "the backburner" of writing center administration to understand the way "everyday exchanges…tell us something about our writing centers as representing communities of practice (6). Positive psychologist Shawn Achor found that 75% of job successes – people who are agents within their communities of practice – are predicated by a person's level of optimism, social support, and ability to "see stress as a challenge instead of as a threat" (Achor). In other words, a "successful" community of practice is one that embraces the mess and discomfort of relationality by normalizing it. Writing centers are

now in the process of tearing down one grand narrative (even as we inevitably will story another – helpless to describe the ambiguous totality of our working lives). We accept that our labor and our centers do not look, act, and feel rosy, sterile, or even good all of the time (Dixon). If, as Brockmeier and Carbaugh suggest, our narratives tell us about ourselves and others, then, in truth, the "question of community" is better phrased as a question of "how to live with difference…about disentangling 'community' from 'identity' (Ahmed and Fortier 255-56).

Our identities are our positionalities, the way we orient ourselves within and to stories. Michelle Gibson et al. understand "identities [as] a critical apparatus, one that enables us to reflect on how and why we tell stories and how we use our stories to produce culture" (72). I am a new writing center administrator. This puts me *in relation to* and in a community of practice with other writing center administrators, so much so that there are groups on Facebook for writing center administrators, one of which I am a member. This is not abnormal; there are all sorts of groups organized around a particular identity. However, I am also a graduate student, an identity I likely don't share with many of the fellow writing center directors of that Facebook group. I am therefore in tension with myself and others by being in the group[5]. This is what Melissa Nicolas calls the "betwixt and between" state of being a graduate student (1). While this is true of graduate students, most people have a foot in identities that feel dichotomous, or even "identities [that] seem contradictory, partial, and strategic" (Haraway 122).

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[5] While I have not encountered many fellow graduate student administrators in that particular Facebook group, I am aware that I am by no means an anomaly in writing center administration. Melissa Nicolas's excellent book *(E)merging Identities* addresses the topic of graduate student administration in writing centers, as does the IWCA position statement on graduate student administrators found here: http://writingcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/graduate-student-position-statement2.pdf

Like our bodies, writing centers are liminal spaces (Nicolas 2). They are a community of practice, and as such have a domain, an identity, they, and the collective we within the space, are "about" something (Wenger et al. 43). This "aboutness" requires *doing*, the rhetoric of community – it gives a writing center a "commitment to care...[that] gives it a cohesiveness and intentionality that goes beyond the interpersonal nature of informal networks" (Wenger et al. 43). An undergraduate consultant is both a student and viewed as an authority figure by outsiders, and, as is the case in our center, may be asked to take-on leadership roles between undergraduate consultants. Traditional academic identity roles "become blurred" allowing "for those who inhabit the center to experiment with different roles" (Nicolas 2). Stories of relationality within communities of practice "challenge disciplinary and professional practices that emphasize strict categorization and demarcation" (Riley Mukavetz 114). The stories I share in this project, then, are not just a critical examination of the system of relations that exist in my writing center, they both explicate how identity pushes and pulls at the strings of community relations and allow me to reflect on myself in relation to specific situations.

Yet, identity is most often understood as singular, or singularly performed: I may be a graduate student, mother, and writing center director, but in a given social or rhetorical context, I can be one of these things and not the others; I put on "my writing center hat," and take off the cloak of motherhood, like an actor performing on stage. But we are not actors. We are richly layered and complex people who all inhabit multiple identities, each one overlapping into the next, sometimes in uncomfortable and difficult ways (Gellar et al. 6). My stories, then, are like Gibson et al., when they remark that "through our 'stories,' we hope to complicate the notion that identities can be performed

in clean, organized, distinct ways by examining and theorizing our own experiences…"
(70). Or, as Gellar et al. outline with their Trickster identity, "a brand of practice that
'makes claims not to a Truth or validity, but to viability and efficacy in relation to a
particular audience and intention within a particular situation'" (26).

Yet, we are, just like stories, defined to ourselves and one another in pieces and
parts – we are "cyborgs…hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" of identities patched together
through our stories and woven in to the tapestry (Haraway 143). And just like the other
grand narratives, sometimes our own good intentions create grand narratives of our own
as we and others wrestle to communicate in words the whole that is one another. Our
identities can help us reach out and connect, but they can also mark and divide. In one of
my favorite songs, a part of the chorus laments that, "the trouble is, we don't know who
we are instead" (Jars of Clay). Each of us carries with us these multiple identities, but
often we have difficulty storying who we are without the identity categories – the pieces
and parts – we claim or have been assigned by ourselves and others.

When we think categorically we lose our ability to consider the complexity of the
whole. The boundaries of definition become rigid, forcing our brains to interpret
information into binaries. Biologist Robert Sapolsky articulates this:

> Putting facts into nice cleanly demarcated buckets of explanation has its
> advantages – for example, it can help you remember facts better. But it
> can wreak havoc on your ability to *think* about those facts… In other
> words, when you think categorically, you have trouble seeing how similar
> or different two things are. If you pay lots of attention to where boundaries
> are, you pay less attention to complete pictures (6).

And yet, binary and categorical thinking are embedded in our discourse and culture, or, in
the spirit of Derrida and Heidegger, "western metaphysics" (Bradley 20-23). Passed
down through centuries, such binary oppositions as civilized/uncivilized, God/god, and

good/evil continue to influence the way we interpret information and communicate. Derrida, in his pivotal *Différance* explains that rather than viewing binaries as oppositions, binaries exist in unison because the basis for knowledge is difference from what is already known. There is an "exhaustive and irreducibly necessary …interconnection" that takes place "between" (Derrida 285).

This "betweenness" is further expressed and utilized by Haraway, when she writes of "the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true" (117). She includes in "A Cyborg Manifesto" a table that has sometimes been construed as "regrettable binarism" (Crewe 895), but which, when understood in the spirit of Derrida, reads as transcoding tables, wherein each term in the right column transcodes and displaces its counterpart in the left column, a "two-way process in which the displacing right-hand terms at once absorb and retroactively redetermine the message of the left-hand terms they displace" (Crewe 895). In other words, the terms are in relation to one another and do not hold the same meaning without the presence of the other (Crewe 895).

When we tell stories, we create boundaries (DeCerteau 125). These boundaries inform our grand narratives, telling us what belongs and counts, what we claim and name, demanding a map, a structure that clarifies and gives direction to our stories. Yet, as we have seen, these narratives are incomplete, and can even erase and oppress in the name of cultural unity. Rather than thinking in terms of boundaries and maps, however, cultural rhetorics emphasizes constellations. According to the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab,

the idea of constellation 'allows for all of the meaning-making practices and their relationships to matter. It allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive (1.2).

Constellation, then, is a metaphor that attends to the contexts and situations – the culture, experiences, identities, and relationships that occur within and among; it is both a noun and a verb. It is a name for the betwixt and between in which we live. Without constellation identity becomes a way to perform the grand narrative of cohesion in communities of practice; a narrative that serves to create tension and boundaries, both within individuals and within communities.

This tension exists as a spatial metaphor that denotes a feeling, an emotion we experience in the constellation of relationality. When we relate to others, we do so with our bodies and our language acts, which are motivated acts – we want to learn something or persuade someone. This motivation means that relationality requires emotion. Laura R. Micciche in *Doing Emotion* contends that "disciplinary narratives and tropes, like personal and cultural ones, produce affects and feeling subjects. Narratives in general have the power to attach feeling to scripts of identity and belonging" (26). Our emotions are integral to the way we interpret information, they make things "thinkable" (Micciche 47). Yet, emotions, too, have their own grand narrative. Emotions are often described as being personally experienced with insular origin – they come and are experienced within us (Micciche 109). As such, emotions have long been understood to cloud objectivity and judgment; to be in opposition to reason and logic (Sapolsky, 56-57, Micciche 1). Yet, emotions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a

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direction or orientation towards an object…[they] are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects" (Ahmed 7).

In the grand narrative of emotion, the body is not a liminal space; the skin is impermeable, we are containers for our emotions which stay safely sealed. Which is nonsense, of course, when phrased that way. We all know we cry – a visible, legible demonstration of emotion. Micciche claims, "this is not to say that people do not feel emotions, do not experience them personally. It means that emotions are without singular origins. They are produced among people, through interaction" (109). We perform, for example, sadness in extralinguistic ways with our bodies (Micciche 51). "Emotions," writes Ahmed, "involve…affective forms of reorientation….where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation" (8). The narrative skews our attention to the fact that a person is crying, not the fact that a person might be crying in front of another person, or even a group of people.

Our grand narrative focus limits the scope of interpretation to the act or behavior, not readily perceiving the causes and effects that precede and proceed from it. This helps categorize emotions into binaries – they are either good/bad, positive/negative, and sometimes even productive/unproductive. This is what Susan David terms "rigidity" (David). When we are embodied realities beyond our skin, we are like balloons – the affects and effects that circulate in this inbetween-ness can press against, move around, bounce off of, and occasionally pop the other balloons around us. When we press and push, we are in tension within the rhetorical situation, both of us bending, moving, conforming to make the contact work, even if it's awkward or uncomfortable. When we bounce off of or pop, emotions are rigid, forcing us to move away, push away, and even

hurt. This contact means that emotions are incredibly complex. And emotional rigidity in the face of this complexity, is toxic (David).

Because emotions are circulating objects in a complex system of contact, this historic and "natural" binary view of emotion undermines and marginalizes the "quiet but demanding physical and emotional labour, without which 'communities' would cease to exist" (Ahmed and Fortier). Emotional labor is a term first coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her groundbreaking 1983 *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Gillam 117). Emotional labor, Hochschild contends, requires "one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild qtd. Gillam 117). This "trained management of feeling" can negatively impact our ability to listen to others' feelings and our own (Gillam 117).

Yet, Gellar et al. contend that "writing center scholarship has long positioned writing centers as potentially insulated from these tensions," in large part because it does not align with the narrative of community cohesion (7). Underneath the surface of all of these stories we tell about ourselves and our centers, the "carefully modulated language…hints towards… tensions" (Nicolas 119). When our centers experience disunity and disharmony, we often narrativize it as a problem; a problem with viable solutions to "fix" community. As if community is a thing that can be fixed and that we, as leaders, are solely responsible for it. Indeed, while people and their various identities may join a community like the writing center for a variety of reasons, they choose to stay in a community because they are emotionally connected" (Wenger et al. 45). This makes emotional labor a critical function of writing center administration, not just for our

community members, the core of our labor force, but for the itinerant movers who enter and exit – the writers and the stakeholders. All require some level of emotional connection.

This emotion work is persistent in the narratives of new writing center directors documented by authors Nicole Caswell, Jackie Grutsch McKinney and Rebecca Jackson. One administrator, Joe, discusses his emotional laboring, saying that he "…feels [he has] to be 'on' at all times – smiling, approachable, eager to help. Joe manages his own emotions in order to manage others' impressions of him" (113). Joe doesn't just manage the emotions of the consultants he manages, but he, as a leader, manages his own emotions, as well. By controlling his emotions, Joe thinks he can project the professional identity he needs as a leader on campus, whether to consultants needing to feel secure in their position or to a university-level stakeholder who needs to feel confident in his skills. Indeed, Caswell et al. explain how, "…the labor we engage in is never restricted to a list of job responsibilities…labor is shaped/motivated by complex and unique combinations of requirements, expectations, values, perceived strengths, interests and desires, identities, and knowledge" (10). All of this labor is intertwined with emotional labor because, as we have established, relationships demand emotions and emotions are motivated.

Yet, just like the IUPUI Writing Center administrative spreadsheet that attempts to describe and quantify my job description, so, too, did Caswell et al. try to categorize writing center administration into three distinct columns: disciplinary, emotional, and everyday. Disciplinary labor includes labor such as independent research and networking with other writing center directors and will become more important when we discuss

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power. Everyday labor includes things like making the staff schedule, attending department meetings, and overseeing the budget. Emotional labor, however, includes things like working with consultants on consulting, working with consultants to prepare for conferences, conducting research with consultants, and mediating client complaints about consultants or experiences in the writing center. Because these functions of administration deal with relationships and people, they are inevitably emotional. The emotional bleeds hopelessly in between both disciplinary and everyday labor.

Any boundary we place around emotional labor is false. Joe continues to explain his labor, using the metaphor of a game of Tetris. In this game, "unfortunately, the work has not really 'stopped' to give me time to do the work" (118). Joe feels pressed to be competent and efficient in his disciplinary and everyday labor, but the emotional labor keeps creating new problems and issues that prevent him from doing the work he envisions for the center. Indeed, Joe indicates that out of all of his vast job responsibilities, it's the "emotional labor that feels heavier" (Caswell et al. 73). This need to delineate what is emotional labor and what is other labor is tense. Ann Ellen Gellar and Henry Denny articulate this in their article "Of Ladybugs and Low Status," writing,

> the very aspects of [writing center administrator's] positions that turn out
> to be the most important to their success and satisfaction are at tension
> with the academic cultural actions that feed disciplinary growth and could
> position [writing center administrator's] as central agents in the discipline
> of English (97).

In other words, while the emotional labor is the heaviest and bleeds seamlessly into our other job functions, this is labor the academy does not quantify.

What Geller and Denny contend, then, is that the work that writing center administrators (WCA) have to engage in, and indeed need to engage in to sustain the

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work of community, is in opposition to the kind of labor the academy expects and values. The academy is itself a community, a cultural institution of practice. DeCerteau writes that "power relationships define the networks in which they are inscribed" (34). The university is a network, with a complicated constellation of departments, units, and resources. What DeCerteau indicates, is that the power of the larger institutional setting plays a key role in determining our grand narratives and continued practices of it. Harry Denny contends that writing centers do not "exist as vacuums free from the influence of history and the physics of economic, social, cultural, and political dynamics" (66). Indeed, he continues on to say that "markers of identity and their politics do not disappear or recede into the background in a supposedly neutral zone" (66). While writing centers are narrativized as egalitarian, student-led sites, they are nonetheless departments or units housed within other departments contained within an institutional structure – the academy. These departments have an identity, as do the people contained within. There are layers upon layers of power in the network.

WCA labor not only does not often fit into the conception of what we, as writing center professionals, thought it would be like, but it also does not fit into the "disciplinary conceptions of intellectual labor in English or composition studies" (Geller and Denny 104). Indeed, Caswell summarizes WCA labor as "…multifaceted and vacillat[ing] from the everyday to the emotional and the disciplinary, sometimes within the course of an hour" (33). As a WCA, I am being pushed and pulled, making sure the everyday administration of "accounting, budgeting, human resources performance appraisals, the logistics of hiring and payroll, and the mechanics of prepping, educating, and monitoring staff" gets accomplished in a work pace that Geller and Denny call "frenetic" (Geller and

Denny 110). But, like all of us, I am also more than a WCA, which means I am pushed

and pulled in potentially limitless directions, like the spinner on a board game.

One of the best institutional examples comes from the tenure-track (TT) WCA[6]. A

TT WCA, like Marilee, is the director of her own unit with many of the same

responsibilities as a chair due to the nature of a writing center, but also a university

faculty member, expected to teach classes unrelated to writing centers and to publish

research unrelated to writing centers. Indeed, because of the rigidity of understanding

between service, teaching, and research, WCA's get hit with a "double workload."

Perdue and Driscoll explain that

> The faculty WCA was often the only writing center expert in their
> department as well as the only full-time presence in the writing center. In
> some cases, this isolation was aggravated by an inadequate course release,
> resulting in the equivalent of two full-time jobs: one teaching two or more
> courses per semester as well as participating in departmental service
> responsibilities and a second in the center (198-199).

As Caswell et al. discovered, WCA labor is hopelessly intertwined between disciplinary,

emotional, and everyday. While facilitating a staff meeting on allyship involves

independent research outside the field of writing centers as well as teaching, because it is

tied to the expected WCA labor it will count as service. Similarly, mentoring a student

may include writing a letter of recommendation, but also may include performing

research that gets published, yet that labor does not count as research but teaching[7].

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[6] While I am not a TT WCA, I included this example because I felt it provided further context of the kinds
of larger institutional constraints – the power in the network – that is so much a part of this story, though it
is hidden in the background. By attending to it here, I not only describe the ways in which identity and
power conflate, but also relate specific information about this writing center and its larger contexts. As I
allude in the brief writing center overview, the administration of this writing center was not on stable
ground when I took over as assistant director. This example should be read as both a move to clarify my
own position as assistant director to a TT WCA director and a way to provide broader writing center
context beyond a graduate assistant director (which will be the focus of the rest of the document).
[7] This is highly dependent on individual institution's promotion and tenure guidelines. I base this on
IUPUI's model.

The research aspect of TT WCA's is especially problematic. Wenger et al. are careful to point out that "power derives from the ability to contribute to the knowledge of the community, not from formal authority to control resources, give orders, or grant promotions" (43). As a part of a larger university community structure, the writing center needs to practice the making and doing of knowledge in order to exercise power; power it will need to negotiate for those scant resources Wenger et al. mention. Not to mention the fact that research is a condition of the TT WCA's position. The very thing writing center professionals need to do to justify their scholarly positions and identity is thrown aside under a heap of daily management of the center. This attention to the day-to-day management of the center comes at the price of the very disciplinarity the academy admonishes writing centers to explore, perpetuating a seemingly unending loop of marginalization (Geller and Denny 111). Even when research is conducted, "writing center research [is] not universally accepted as appropriate for tenure and promotion, calling into question the academic status of writing center studies as an academic discipline worthy of study" (Perdue and Driscoll 198). Because of this, WCA's often revert to describing their centers in "terms of their successes…in order to prove their worthiness within the university at large" (Dixon).

And yet, all of this practically spits in the face of what most people, writing center professionals included, think and speak of when they speak of writing centers: one-to-one consulting (McKinney 58). That is the labor that is easily communicated, understandable, quantifiable, and frankly enjoyable. When we narrativize our labor this way – progress, success, and the grand narrative of cozy homes and one-on-one consulting – we are storying "fantasy lives in writing centers, utopias where the drawbacks of [our] current

positions would be resolved. Those other worlds of what could be, should be, or ought to be…" (Geller and Denny 106). When Joe admitted that he "doesn't feel like the work stops," what Joe is indicating is that the ways his job is understood to function is at odds with the way it actually functions, and that fact feels overwhelming. It is overwhelming to manage because there is a consistent gap between expectations and reality, and it is also overwhelming in the sense that Joe is a TT WCA and understands that the longevity of his position is contingent upon the completion of the very labor he feels he doesn't have time to complete. When identities, emotions, and labor are so complex, is it any wonder we yearn for our predictable and tidy cohesive communities?

This thread of emotional labor is central to the stories I share. They are heavy, messy, and complicated stories because, as Elise Dixon eloquently writes,

> To adhere to, perpetuate, and publicize. . . a one-dimensional and tidy portrayal of the center without also presenting its messiness keeps us from engaging with the possibilities of such unsettling moments in the center. What kinds of meaning-making do we miss out on when we're busy trying to find and make public the tidy, easily-categorizable moments (Dixon).

These stories are central to me to defining what it means to be a WCA. These are the stories that comprise the bulk of my labor, time, and energy. And these stories are, ultimately, what can either bring our writing center community closer together by normalizing what has previously been seen as a/the "problem."

By failing to complicate the story of our labor within this constricted relationship of power of the academy, however, "we are teaching others – tutors, student-writers, colleagues, our institutions, and our profession – what we value about our work and, correspondingly, what it is that others should value about our work" (Gellar et al. 121). In other words, by skewing our narratives away from the messy, complicated reality of our

labor, we are complicit as WCA's in continuing the invisibility and marginalization of that labor. These communicated values emphasize the labor that is visible and valued – the consulting – to university stakeholders and decision makers, but also, as Gellar et al. write, to our colleagues, consultants, and writers. Consulting in and of itself is incredibly valuable and the reason we form into writing centers as communities of practice. However, consulting itself is not the practice; it is the outcome of the practice. Writing centers are sites that make and do knowledge about writing and people who write, that is our practice. When we identify consulting as our labor, we erase and diminish the other essential pieces of labor – much of the emotional labor, administrative everyday labor, and research that is necessary to inform the praxis of consulting.

As we have seen, when things are erased or diminished, it often creates a narrativized binary of privilege – consulting/not consulting. This privileging of consulting has historically been a narrative in the IUPUI Writing Center and will persist into the stories I share. Wenger et al. remind us that power is created in a community of practice by contributing knowledge, yet, if a binary exists between consulting/not consulting, then there is little way for consultants within this community to practice knowledge making that aligns with existing structures and labor. They must go outside of the community to make knowledge to bring knowledge and claim power. This creates tensions between people within the community over who gets access to what resources and labor. Who is "authorized" to create their own power and who is not. This narrative of power and knowledge-making is a persistent undercurrent in all of the chapters, but is central to Chapter 1, and will be discussed further within that chapter.

Power, identity, and emotions are the variables of connection. The stories I share narrate moments of extreme tension and dissonance, things that feel uncomfortable or even awful. Like Gellar et al., I write these stories not to "to rid ourselves of these challenges…but rather to embrace the idea that '[d]isagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation'" (7). Claiming these stories reveals the ways in which discomfort and criticism – things that seem like "problems" – can actually show participation and care to a community. As Kathleen Quinlan reminds us that "a sense of belonging is a basic human drive. In fact, it is the strong need to belong within a society that causes us to obey. . . unwritten emotional rules" (Quinlan 106). Therefore, as McKinney points out in *Peripheral Visions*, belonging often gets bundled with the grand narrative of community. When we don't feel good, we can't belong. When others are upset, they shouldn't belong. Riley Mukavetz warns "that relationships go through periods of unevenness…this type of reflection and embodiment is central to practicing relational accountability because it creates an opportunity to put relationships at the center of research" (112). When we repeat these grand narratives: writing centers as cozy homes, community as cohesive, identity as fixed, and emotion as personal and in opposition to reason, it prevents us from practicing relationality.

On the Things that Get in the Way

In the Spring of 2017, I founded an event in our writing center called Kindness Week. The labor of a writing center is incredibly nuanced and complex to the point that explaining it in words is almost always inadequate – something invariably gets left out. Kindness Week became, then, a way to foreground this constellating work of connection

in our praxis. It became a way to *do* what Emily Clare Danvers describes when she writes:

> If we conceptualize…not as the product of detached, 'reasoned' bodies competing with each other for intellectual supremacy but in terms of embodied learners entangled with the world and produces through its affects, we open up space to see the imperfection of all views of the world and create pedagogical contexts that generate questions about how we are co-entangled and co-implicated (Danvers 295).

During the inaugural event, I invited Leon Logothetis, author, explorer, and star of the Netflix series "The Kindness Diaries" to come speak, and miraculously, he showed-up. During my own presentation during that week, a reading of a creative nonfiction piece entitled "Broken Places," I ended it with this quote from him: "Sharing your story is about the scariest thing you can do…[but] it is through telling our authentic stories…that we get to connect with the world around us" (Logothetis 37-38).

I share these stories to claim them as valuable, to add them to the symphony of stories being woven in my writing center and within the discipline of writing center studies, and to highlight the writing center as a space for reflection and revision (Porter et al. 613). Like Elise Dixon, I believe that sharing these stories and others like it is the most important step to "acknowledging and embracing the messiness of the center" (Dixon). These stories are a way to rewrite the story of who and what the center is and what our role is within the center. And in this revision, we highlight the messy jumble of relations that comprise relationality. As Brené Brown writes:

> Don't get me wrong, I'd love to skip over the hard stuff, but it just doesn't work. We don't change, we don't grow, and we don't move forward without the work…we must talk about things that get in the way (35).

This is what Kindness Week does. And this is what these stories do. These stories are a way to examine, understand, and make space for the "things that get in the way."

Chapter 1: The LT Revolution[i]

I met with several undergraduate consultants concerned with the writing center's relatively new leadership structure my second semester as a graduate student administrator (GSA). We three GSA's, combined with an undergraduate office coordinator, the assistant director, and the director, comprised the leadership team, or LT, a new structure in our center. Our director, Marilee, had started her position in the center two and a half years ago, and since then, had served with three different assistant directors. She had been hired as tenure-track faculty to restructure the center to reflect modern writing center pedagogies, but the lack of consistency in the assistant director role continued to be an obstacle. The LT was a way to counteract that inconsistency by, among other things, being an on-the-ground entity that could help bridge gaps in communication. Gaps, Marilee had known, that would become more pronounced as she went on maternity leave during this spring semester.

Yet, the introduction of the LT in the fall semester had not gone smoothly. The LT was supposed to be what Etienne Wenger calls "brokers" – individuals who use translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives to make "new connections across communities of practice" (109). In other words, LT was middle management, a foot in two places – one as administrative leaders and one as consultants. What it was perceived as, however, was not that egalitarian. The persisting narrative throughout the year was messy, emotionally charged, and incredibly contentious. The LT had not been unaware of the narrative, but I did think we had done enough to engender patience and trust while we worked to resolve it.

During these meetings, I took thorough notes and listened intently while the consultants explained that they had become informal emissaries – consultants were coming to them with complaints and concerns, and so they wanted to share them with me. This was already concerning – consultants should feel as if they can come to any LT member with these kinds of concerns, but obviously they did not feel comfortable doing so. Consultants shared several specific examples, and while these narratives and the emotions attached to them were shocking to me, in those moment they were neither good nor bad; they were data. Data I needed if I was going to help find resolution between the disparate narratives of the center.

The mood of the center had shifted over the past semester. I could perceive this because I had been in the center for a year. Yet, my identity in the center had also shifted from a consultant to an administrator, and I had enough experience in management to recognize that my feelings were in part due to the increased responsibility. The other part, however, was due to changes in the center.

Last spring our former assistant director had spent a great deal of time consulting, as had a former director of the writing center who stayed on as a consultant after our new director was hired. Yet our former assistant director had moved on from the center to other opportunities, as she had always planned to do, and our old director had retired. In their departure, the center had a new assistant director that many of us hadn't worked with in a writing center capacity, and so had lost some vital sense of mentorship and presence – a stability and security – that both of these individuals embodied. Again, this sudden dearth in on-the-ground leadership was the primary motivating reason for the LT. In just three years, the faculty presence in the center had gone from fifteen plus, with a lot

of heavy management lifting (even if the faculty themselves did not name that labor as such) to now just two. This amount of experienced faculty offered stability in the day-to-day operation of the center, but also stripped students from the power and authority they should be negotiating as writing center consultants. We had two remaining faculty, both of whom were mindful of fostering student agency and leadership and therefore opted to take very minimal roles outside of consulting.

The LT was supposed to take on roles similar to the faculty consultants previously serving in this capacity (with or without leadership titles) but should have been perceived as less authoritative and less compromising of undergraduate agency. We could be there, stepping in when we needed to, but also stepping back to let undergraduates learn to navigate some of these situations[8].

Yet, throughout the semester, consultants both cited specific examples where LT didn't act as managers, and yet also shared examples where consultants chafed at the idea that LT were managers at all. The consultants working in the center this academic year seemed to both want LT to act authoritatively according to their definition and understanding of authority, but also not to be authoritative.

In the Fall of 2017, the first semester for the LT, as a new administrator, my primary focus had been to establish trust between myself and my two fellow graduate assistant directors as a way to promote effective team management (Appendix C[9]). My job duties within the LT were loosely defined as "community support." My outlined

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[8] This again points to the impossibly thin line between the center as a professional site but also a site of learning. We want undergraduate consultants to feel authorized and able to manage some on-the-ground issues and concerns, and yet, other concerns and issues are too much responsibility – things that are above their level of expertise and pay. Knowing when that line gets crossed is highly contextualized to individual consultants and their relationship to the center and others in the center.
[9] The job description for these original Graduate Student Assistant Director (GSA) lines are in Appendix C.

tasks involved facilitating coordinator meetings for the writing center's four committees, being a liaison to the writing center theory and practice course, and circulating the potluck signup sheet prior to staff meetings. One of the other LT roles was professional development. This graduate assistant director was responsible for scheduling staff meetings, finding research opportunities and funding, and supporting the work of research in the center. The other graduate assistant director role was, especially during that first semester, unclear because, unlike me or the professional development assistant director, she was new to our center. Our director wanted to understand who she was and what her interests and strengths were before fitting her in to the complicated LT structure. However, she had referred to herself so far as "the junk drawer," because her duties were so random and ill-defined, a comment that appeared to me to indicate discomfort at the lack of clarity.

All of us, however, were tasked with supporting consultants and the daily operations of the center, no matter what the fine lines were between "community support," "professional development" and "junk drawer." All of us also were graduate students, attending many of the same classes, trying for the same grants, awards, and publications, and sharing a job title – graduate student assistant director. We were students and colleagues. We were supposed to be equals with equal titles and an even job distribution, a component of the grand narrative of community that portrays collaborative labor as "democratic and equitable" (Gillam 114). Yet we weren't equal. We're all different people, with different backgrounds, different ages, different strengths and weaknesses, different preferences, different styles, different goals, and different visions for the center. In the face of such differences, trust was a requirement for us to be an

effective team. Trust that I had labored on intentionally for months after a breakthrough moment with them at a conference. Trust that I would now have to break, or at the very least bend as I suddenly found myself privy to this information. Yet, as consultants saw me as approachable because of my "community support" role and shared concerns with me, I became both an insider and outsider.

If what consultants shared was true, then I was concerned about my fellow LT members' choices. I, too, had noticed a few of these items and had even discussed some of them with the assistant director[10]. Yet, I also understood the complexity of the issue in ways I didn't feel the consultants readily understood at that time. Gillam reminds us that all collaborations are shaped by the collaborations that occur within larger institutional frameworks (114). The writing center, therefore, is a collaborative community of practice, but also constellates between larger departmental-, college-, and university-level relationships. Some of the discontent circled around issues we had little control over (such as who qualifies for a graduate assistantship).

Some of the concerns involved comments taken out of context and belied a certain level of bias – as if consultants didn't trust that these LT members had good intentions and were doing their best in a difficult situation. Trust is a two-way street, however, and I wondered if we hadn't done enough yet to earn their trust. Should trust in our community be a given?

Some of the concerns also underscored the difficult identity transition some of the LT members were making: from undergraduate consultant to now, in as little as a few months later, graduate assistant director. Or me, personally, transitioning from being a

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[10] The assistant director was new, and had started over the summer, prior to the beginning of this academic year. She had not been a part of our writing center for a few years, so most consultants did not know her well.

stay-at-home-parent for nearly a decade and suddenly thrust not only back into school but now a leadership position (something I thought I'd left behind forever when my restaurant closed). No matter the specifics, scholarship on graduate students is clear in pointing out the complexities of navigated graduate school, let alone navigating the "betwixt and between" of graduate consultant – graduate administrator identities. Learning to embody a leadership role is not an easy process, and there's a lot of external pressures that coincides with starting graduate school I didn't feel as if these consultants were considering. They didn't seem to be seeing the LT members as people – humans in a complex dance with other humans, all of us trying our best and sharing a common goal.

When consultants met with me, I chose to not say any of this to them in that moment, though, choosing instead to simply listen and understand. As a new administrator, I felt listening without immediate judgment would help loosen some of their more contentious impressions, and I also wanted time to reflect and consider before giving any feedback. Eventually, consultants decided that they wanted to open a conversation about power dynamics and diversity in our writing center, starting with the new leadership structure. A few consultants shared that they had nearly stood up at the last staff meeting, and would have hijacked it, so to speak, to initiate this conversation.

This admission concerned me deeply and I paused to consider. My initial reaction was to pay attention to the consequences behind this desire: the emotional impacts of such a discussion and the potential rhetoric that would foster, fracturing an already unstable community. While conversation is invaluable to the work of decolonization, Harry Denny warns that these conversations should "facilitate genuine cross-talk and mutual hearing…[and be] ethical spaces to explore disagreement and conflict" (62). If the

intention was to have a productive discussion, thinking administratively about this, then a dialogue would need to be planned intentionally. At the same time, however, I didn't want to discourage this kind of discussion from taking place. We are a writing center: we have difficult conversations and give and receive feedback and critique every single day. I wondered if there was an in-between measure we could take, something that would help scaffold towards a large discussion that could be productive.

In the back of my mind, though, there was a hesitancy. The timing seemed unfair. The LT was brand new with one semester under our belts, we had a new assistant director, and now Marilee was away on maternity leave. It was the first weekend in February, the new semester had started less than a month ago, and we were still finding our footing as a team. We were in the process of building something and negotiating its boundaries and mechanics, and it seemed short-sighted and unproductive to the work of the center to start critiquing it when it wasn't even done yet.

A group of consultants introduced the idea of a survey about the LT. We had completed one already, though it was somewhat informal and done early in last semester, before the LT had really done much of anything. And, most importantly, it had been written and implemented by Marilee, the opposite of the bottom-up communication tool the consultants wanted to balance their impression of the power dynamics. Perhaps another survey, then, would be useful to bridge this moment, if emotions truly are at the boiling point these consultants indicated. We do Focus Groups[11] at the end of the

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[11] Focus Groups are a consultant-facilitated discussion implemented by the Research & Assessment (R&A) Committee. Marilee and I work with the R&A Coordinator on developing questions for the discussion, but the format, flow, and other questions are left up to the committee. The committee then transcribes these discussions, which are generally around an hour and a half in length, and then synthesizes them and summarizes them into a report, which is normally no more than 15 pages. Marilee and I, therefore, receive constructive feedback from the UWC staff about our writing center that is anonymous.

semester, but the emotional contagion of groups and crowds can go either way: inflaming or silencing, depending on the overarching emotion of the group. Furthermore, if the end result was inflaming (and anger is often an intensely embodied emotion), and that narrative eclipsed other experienced during the Focus Groups, then all of the more relevant data we need to collect for our annual reports to university stakeholders could potentially be undermined.

I decided the most productive available course of action for me was to use writing center pedagogy and act alongside the concerned consultants to further this conversation, as less of an administrator and more of a peer. I had been doing a lot of research on a learning tool called Assessment for Learning and thought that using the term "assessment" might reframe the conversation in a constructive way. Assessment for Learning valued a variety of feedback forms from differing identity positions, which, I felt at the time, made it a useful metaphor for consultants who suddenly felt disenfranchised and unsure of how to vocalize their discontent. Assessment is something we do a lot of in our writing center; in fact, we had just completed a self-assessment survey a few weeks prior. I wondered if a small assessment now would both provide consultants a channel for their negative output but also relevant data for the LT – a window into this moment in our center, a moment that suddenly seemed pivotal. I knew it would be emotionally difficult data, but in spite of all the response triggers, emotions are incredibly valid and useful data sets for leaders to obtain (David).

In theory, developing an assessment survey sounded so simple; making this a completely solvable problem. In practice, however, when identities, emotions, and power

dynamics are colliding, developing a useful assessment survey that is agreed-upon by both parties (LT and consultants) was an insurmountable task.

Without even realizing it, we were divided into groups of Us vs. Them, making any productive listening and cross-talk next to impossible. Us. vs. Them rhetoric views the "thems" as "untrustworthy," "simpler and more homogeneous," which then dehumanizes "thems" down to "a monolithic, immutable, icky essence" that encourages stereotyping and essentialist thinking (Sapolsky 399). This promotes a kind of "myopia," contends Gillam, wherein "identification of problems and…construction of solutions…operate[s] within a restricted 'economy of meaning'" (119). In this myopia, "…ownership of oppression and responsibility for action become so hyper-local that productive conversations, listening, and coalition-building spontaneously combust" (Denny 63). As an LT member, I felt backed into a corner: any action or inaction I took would be weighed against the impressions about me and my fellow LT members.

Jerome Bruner writes that "defining the Self and its allies also defines those who are in the out-group…. and…there seems always to be a degradation of the out-group that has a special role, by contrast, in defining one's own qualities and qualities of those with whom one is allied, one's in-group" (Bruner qtd. in Brockmeier and Carbaugh 35). Because we were relegated to binaries of consultant/LT and us/them in this narrative, the binary communities necessarily define boundaries of meaning according to Derrida's binary oppositions, or what Bruner reasons as the "degradation of the out-group," that serves to define the in-group (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 35). The community does this as a way to draw together and define its mission to the outside world (Hunter qtd in Hogan xiv).

What's more, because emotions were seen by both LT members and consultants as obscuring reality or being in opposition to logic and reason, few in the center at this time acknowledged the emotional undercurrents of this volatile situation. Because emotions are rhetorical, they have what Ahmed calls aboutness, writing, "emotions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a direction or orientation towards an object" (7). Because emotions are about something, they also, then, make things "thinkable" – they drive our behaviors and decisions (Micciche 47). Robert Sapolsky reminds us that emotion and cognition "are intertwined in a collaborative relationship needed for normal function, and as tasks with both emotive and cognitive components become more difficult… activity in the two structures becomes more synchronized" (Sapolsky 58). Our brains process information first through the lower order of the brain, the amygdala – the "circuitry that operates beneath our awareness" (Goleman 16). In other words, information moves to the higher order brain function – logic and reason – only after we have felt it first.

As a new administrator, my instinct through all of this was to control my emotions, resting on the idea that emotional labor for leaders includes managing my own emotions as (another) way of managing the emotions of those in my charge, exactly the same as Joe, one of the new writing center directors featured by Caswell et al. in *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors.* Management is a component of emotional intelligence and is productive, but managing emotions effectively requires an acknowledgment and understanding of emotion's aboutness. When we manage emotions, we both experience emotions and determine their aboutness. When we suppress emotions, we pretend they do not exist and we are not experiencing them, and therefore

they are about nothing. As we will see in the coming stories, when under heavy stress, understanding emotions requires self-reflection – a "check in" – that often requires external processing either through discussion with someone else or through writing. When we don't take the time to process externally, or worse, don't even acknowledge that we are experiencing an emotional response, we suppress emotions, not only denying ourselves the enhanced cognition they would provide, but causing these emotions to strengthen. Susan David warns that, "research on emotional suppression shows that when emotions are pushed aside or ignored, they get stronger," in a process psychologists call "amplification" (David).

The rhetoric and accompanying feelings definitely began to amplify. In such an environment, there was little room for relationality. When we are not individuals relating to one another, constellating between differing identities, emotions, and communities, we become an institution, narrativized as "monolithic;" a "shadowy presence," "a Big Brother" (Porter et al. 617). Such narratives "background" and "demonize" the institution, making it "easy to criticize but impossible to change" (625).

As Bruce Horner writes, "negotiation is not a matter of one party persuading a second to adopt the position of the first, nor a process of exchange (barter) between two parties, but a process of joint change and learning in which power operates dialectically" (175). In this story, power was not something people both have and do not have situationally - in contact zones, where asymmetrical relations of power create tensions (Pratt 34). Asymmetrical can mean that power relations occur in dominant/nondominant binaries, and indeed, this is the most widely understood definition. However, it can also mean that power looks, acts, and feels differently in different contexts within each group.

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In other words, power is not a constant but a variable: those with more power in a given situation must continually adjust and control that situation to retain their power (Sapolsky 475).

The consultants in the writing center seemed to focus most on a critique that imagined the LT entirely as an oppressive force for powerless consultants, not as an entity with limited power and marginalized status within an administrative structure contained within a greater institution, or as themselves with power in creating it (Porter et al. 611). In truth, studies have shown that middle management has a high level of work demand and stress but little autonomy – it is "responsibility without control" (Sapolsky 436). The consultants did not see how little power the LT actually had, instead viewing themselves as having very little power, thus they were being oppressed by a more powerful entity. By failing to frame the multidirectional nature of power and relations, they could not correct what appeared to me to be their foredrawn conclusion: the myopic view of the institutional structures at play and their one-directional relationship to it (Porter et al. 626). This lack of recognition of power promoted a kind of surveillance that became stifling for everyone regardless of their group of alignment. When this occurs, open dialogue becomes next to impossible.

Furthermore, because I was a part of the LT, and therefore part of a structure that appeared to undermine the power of consultants, I felt limited in what constructive feedback I could give them. Indeed, the emotions circulating were so volatile I intentionally did not communicate my emotions in conversations with consultants. If I outright opposed any action taken to critique the LT, then I proved the narrative as they've rhetorized it. If I tried to redirect our interactions to attend to individual emotions,

then I proved myself aligned with colonial practices, demanding they hedge their language for the sake of my fragility (a subject we discuss frequently in our writing center). Put plainly, I wanted to be a good ally, but I also wanted to be a good manager. Those two are not incompatible, and yet, in this context, the tension I felt between the two was exhausting.

As I continued working with consultants on creating a survey about the LT, the more my emotions amplified, and the more my stress increased, reducing what little capacity I had to manage the situation. The semester ended with no assessment survey and a 34-page Focus Groups Report that had very few positive things to say.

This story highlights the complex interrelationship between identity, emotion, and power within a community. It shows the ways our identities can conflict and become partial through our own performances of positions and others' understandings of acceptable performances for these positions. One GSA, for example, had a different understanding of her role as a leader in the center than I did, and therefore we performed our GSA identities accordingly. These different performances came into contact with consultants' individual and collective understandings of what those roles were and how a leader and manager should perform that role; and because we have an internal bias for binaries, one performance became the "right" performance, privileging it over the other. This fractured the small community of GSA's, effectively ending any effective team leadership that the position required. The LT survey, in the midst of all of this contact, then set an emotional bonfire in the center that became a struggle for power between groups of people who felt powerless. This bonfire began much smaller, growing as

emotions heightened and amplified in the face of emotional suppression. While we should address concerning situations such as the feedback consultants had about the LT structure systemically as a community, we also must address the reality that feelings are attached. As such, any systemic action must also take into account the individuals within the system. Individuals shape and make the system, not the other way around; and individuals inherently feel and use those feelings to perform actions and make decisions. Suppressing emotions prevents connection between individuals and, in this case, the two disparate groups – the Us and Thems. Failure to attend to the circulating emotions stymied the ability for all of us to make and shape the community in the ways we envisioned.

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[i] This chapter was heavily revised in the late stages of my thesis submission, removing about 20 pages. My original chapter involved more direct details because, almost more than any of the proceeding chapters, it highlights a complex range of emotions, identities, and power dynamics that shows the messiness of relationality and writing center labor because it centered on conversational interactions. I felt it important to an analysis of the rhetoric of community to include interactions, however the focus should have been on my feelings and responses since (as the Afterword will make clear) this is only my part of the story. The intent of that chapter was to analyze the relationship between two disparate groups of people - the Us vs. Thems I frame in the current chapter - who both wanted what was best for the writing center but disagreed on what "best" looked like and mistrusted how to go about getting what was best. The chapter foregrounded much of the discussion that takes place throughout the remainder of the thesis, becoming an important touch-point building up to the conclusion: that community is shaped through practice, that practice doesn't always feel good, and therefore "best" may not look exactly like "best," in the moment. I elected to revise this chapter because it was being misread and misinterpreted, distracting from the overarching theme that seeks to value these kinds of interactions and bring them forward in our narratives. It is my hope that the heart of the revised chapter remains the same as the original, and that interpretations of this chapter now align with the important through-line of relationality in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2: The Sexism Staff Meeting

Every other Friday, academic calendar permitting, we have professional development meetings for the writing center. The meeting topics are usually mapped out weeks, or even months in advance, and this Friday in the Fall 2018 semester was no different. With the success and increasing popularity for our newly revived online consulting initiative[12], we opted to finish training people *en masse* at a staff meeting, led by the student consultant who had spearheaded its revival.

Let me repeat: the topic of this staff meeting was Online Consulting Training, and the official facilitator of this staff meeting was a consultant. Yet, almost as soon as this meeting began, it became known and referred to in hushed or even angry tones as "The Sexism Staff Meeting"- you know, the one where Marilee and I ostracized all the men in the room and delivered a heavy-handed lecture about sexism.

The day before had been a blur of meetings, workshops, and thinking about the operations of the writing center. Why isn't this committee running smoothly? Is the work of this committee too large for an undergraduate to manage? Are we being fair in our expectations? Is this new coordinator simply experiencing impostor syndrome and having a hard time with authority, or does she not want to be coordinator?

In between each meeting and set of questions, answers, and more questions, I received news updates on my phone about the world outside of my writing center,

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[12] Our center had done online consulting previously but it was accomplished by one assistant director alone. When she left the center, we stopped online consulting until an undergraduate consultant expressed interest in reviving it. He performed extensive secondary research on the subject and then proposed a new system, one that every consultant in our center could be trained to use.

namely that particular Thursday, the minute-by-minute tracking of the Kavanaugh Hearings[13].

I am a woman. I am a rape survivor. I am a survivor of emotional abuse and physical violence.

I am also a woman in a position of authority, in a historically marginalized discipline, in an even more marginalized unit of that discipline, and to top it all off, I'm still a graduate student. I have the authority but not the degree to back it up.

As I met with one female committee coordinator, new to this position and somewhat new to our center, I listened as she explained how she felt like she didn't have the authority to lead, that other people would be upset with her if she became too directive, and so had lacked in any direction for the committee. I looked her in the eye and in a dead-serious tone said, "You're going to have to embrace being a bitch."

She left my office feeling better. I, however, realized for the first time that day how triggered I was by what was happening on the periphery of my awareness; the incessant connectedness of me to the goings-on of the Kavanaugh hearings every time I needed to look at my phone to check my calendar or answer an email.

I went to bed that night exhausted. I woke up enraged.

Wearing my "Nevertheless She Persisted" t-shirt as a nod to Thursday's political events, I walked into the computer lab, reserved especially for this meeting so we could work on online consulting training, and immediately set about pulling up the role-playing scenarios we had very briefly gone over at our leadership team meeting on Monday. This

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[13] Congressional hearings that took place prior to the swearing-in of Justice Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court under the presidency of Donald Trump. The specific event of note was the testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, wherein she recounted the alleged sexual assault she endured at the hands of Kavanaugh.

year's leadership team is a group comprising of myself, Marilee, the office coordinator, and our four committee coordinators[14]. We typically have these meetings the Monday before scheduled staff meetings to field on-the-ground concerns and finalize plans for the coming Friday meeting. This meeting had been shorter than normal due to demands on Marilee's time, and had covered a lot of administrative ground all at once.

Ground that covered items that had been on the LT agenda for some time, such as file-naming conventions and a pedagogical debate over handouts, and the sudden pressing concern raised by a female undergraduate consultant via an email to Marilee and me over the weekend regarding a moment in our center when she hadn't felt supported by a male co-worker in a difficult situation with a male writer. This was not the only complaint of that nature we'd received lately (though it was the first regarding a fellow consultant), and so, in our forty-five-minute leadership team meeting, sandwiched between a discussion on file-naming conventions and handout formatting, we had a brief discussion about these email complaints and how to address them as a community. Because our last staff meeting had asked consultants to roleplay problematic sessions with one another and had been deemed fun and successful, we opted to address this and a few other concerns through role-play during the announcements portion of the Friday meeting.

Only, last time I had spent a good hour formulating and revising the scenario prompts. This time I had taken hasty notes during Monday's meeting and not taken time

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[14] The revised LT this semester included all the undergraduate committee coordinators and none of the TA or RA graduate students. This structure was intentional to appeal to the Focus Group Report; however, by the second semester, two of the TA/RA lines in the center were sitting on the LT once again out of necessity after two undergraduate committee coordinators quit and their experience was required.

to circle back to revise them because the coordinator issue was the most pressing writing center concern of the week and I had limited time to give to the center.

In the computer lab with thirty-seven pairs of eyes staring at me and an already late start to the meeting, I copied and pasted these hastily worded notes into a Word document and threw them up onto the large screens located around the room, then told the staff to break into pairs and work through them before a large-group discussion. And only after I had done so did I read them. And then I turned my director around to face the wall and said in a quiet, worried tone, "The wording on these is super problematic."

The first prompt read: "I have an idea for a project and my coordinator said No, but I didn't listen to why because I was insulted. How should I react?"

The second prompt read: "The student who comes in and just wants their paper checked. "My writing's good, so validate me, and then I leave."

The third prompt read: Writer said, "Educating women is totally wrong. They need to stay at home and take care of me." Consultant finds it funny, laughs out loud, and nods enthusiastically.

The fourth prompt read: Consultant is sick and moves an appointment to another consultant. Writer comes in and, in the middle of the session, loudly asks for the consultant they had scheduled with.

Ignoring the fact that the first prompt is like pouring gasoline on the still-hot-coals of last year, let's first focus on the fact that a prompt that is about sexism in the workplace is sandwiched nonchalantly between a prompt about the writer we all are familiar with and a writer who is mad that their consultant is sick. One of these things is not like the others. Yet, much like the discussion that took place between file-naming and

handouts in our Monday meeting, there simply wasn't time to feel our way through these prompts and discern that difference. It was just another item we needed to check-off a packed agenda in a short amount of time.

Let's also focus on the fact that not only was the Kavanaugh hearing and Dr. Ford's testimony yesterday, but our center had faced a few cases of sexual harassment this semester alone with consultants feeling unsafe with writers or students on campus. This fact is part of why we felt it necessary to address internal complaints of sexist behavior – consultants want and should be able to feel supported by their writing center community. We should all want to be allies for one another. And lastly, let's also focus on the fact that Marilee and I, for the sake of addressing systemic policy and professional concerns, emphasized that these were all issues and situations that had occurred in our center; they were fictitious accounts of real concerns.

The intention for that emphasis was to make this a learning moment. We are in a professional work environment, legally bound and morally obligated not just by law but by strongly held beliefs about equality, to treat sexism seriously, but we are also a learning environment, a unit housed within an institution of higher education where a lot of our staff are in their earlier twenties, may never have experienced a serious or long-term relationship, and may also never have worked in an environment as professional as the writing center. This is what McKinney refers to as the "'ever-beginner culture' in writing center studies" where not only are we training young professionals, but we are constantly training new young professionals as consultants continue to graduate out of our writing centers (84-85). Training someone to become a writing center consultant is simply not the same training someone to assemble fast-food sandwiches or stock shelves

at a store. The work of consulting is ambiguous, nebulous, and autonomous (McKinney 3). There is no prescribed formula or recipe to follow. It expects and takes a lot.

Similarly, Marilee and I had to be both administrators, adhering to legal and pedagogical concerns, but also mentors, there to guide and instruct when mistakes get made; a knife-edge line we walk daily. We must provide a safe professional space for our staff, while at the same time mentor our staff to learn to inhabit "real" professional spaces once they graduate. This line is why we require professional development meetings.

In spite of all of this, our consultants gamely attempted a reasonable discussion. I'd like to think this indicated a reinvigorated sense of community trust after the events of last semester, but I also cannot ignore the power relations present - two authority figures had asked a group of people they lead to discuss this, so the group felt they had no choice. Marilee and I are not unaware of these dynamics, which is why most of the time staff meetings are led by consultants or outside resources, including difficult conversations such as these. In any given semester, students, committees, or campus resources are asked to present on topics ranging from working with ELL writers, deconstructing the myth of "Standard English," handling difficult disclosures in sessions, and working with neurodiverse writers. Because this conversation was supposed to both take place during the announcements portion of the meeting and be constituted by role-play and discussion, we did not consider the power dynamics in play as carefully as we would have in other situations until it was too late.

Nevertheless, we all awkwardly got through the first prompt because, I suspect, nobody felt like opening that can of worms, and then sailed through the second. And then came the third prompt.

Out of the gate, the first consultant to answer was a male. In fact, the second consultant to respond was also a male. While both had good intentions, their answers were a little problematic, forcing the discussion in a direction neither Marilee nor I had foreseen. We hadn't foreseen a lot, honestly, because we had, perhaps naively, assumed that the prompt was obvious: the consultant may have been uncomfortable with the comment, sure, but more than likely, given the enthusiasm they displayed, the male consultant agreed with the writer. Consultants who agree that women should not be educated have problematic views that need addressing for both professional and educational reasons. We didn't think anyone on our staff would disagree.

Yet, here we were. I honestly can't remember what was said, exactly, but I do remember suddenly feeling triggered – horribly, unavoidably triggered.

I looked down, tears pooling in my eyes, causing the room to swim around me. I breathed, an intentional grasp at mindfulness, then I looked up and noticed that a consultant was staring intently at me. I didn't want my emotions to stimulate negative ripples around the room, so I quickly looked away. I was focused on being an effective leader, a writing center assistant director in charge of a meeting that had suddenly gone very awry. I needed to manage my own emotions so that I could manage others (Caswell et al. 113).

These negative ripples, however, were already everywhere. This is what Ahmed refers to as the "social body" wherein emotions "do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousnesses but from without" (9). In other words, emotions are not a binary of either "inside out" or "outside in," because they are not a "cause" – emotions are an "effect" (Ahmed 10). I was triggered as an effect, which meant that other

people were also feeling triggered. One person cannot be the trigger. One person, therefore, cannot be The Problem.

And then two consultants got up and left the room. One of these consultants were presently under threat of sexual violence. The other was a close friend. A few other consultants followed.

Marilee and I looked at one another for an intense moment, before she said, "I should go check on them."

As Marilee stepped outside, I took another deep breath and listened to the consultant speaking, this time a female, who was still earnestly engaged in trying to puzzle through the prompt in spite of the emotional currents sizzling around the air.

I tried to concentrate on what she was saying, thinking of how to get this back on track. How can this discussion be productive and meaningful but also safer for everyone? Why is this happening? What triggered it? Was it any specific comment? Do people in the room condone the reaction of the consultant in the prompt? I don't think so. But if they didn't agree, then why was there so much tension in the room?

Tension and discomfort are emotional signifiers of a deeper signified. For example, when studying her students in a community writing center, director Julie Prebel noticed that the discomfort they expressed in their reflective writings were about the fact that they were experiencing an emotional response when confronted with social justice experiences. Ultimately, this recognition helped the students see that their discomfort was about the sudden need to "question their own beliefs, values, and views" (Prebel 8). In other words, discomfort is an emotion that is about a deeper emotion. Experiencing discomfort, then, when left unexamined is painful because it often pre-signifies a pain -

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watching the needle move towards your skin prior to the prick of a blood draw is not painful in and of itself, but it is uncomfortable because it precedes the pain of the prick. Questioning one's own actions and beliefs in a rhetorical situation, as this thesis does, is not painful, either, but it is uncomfortable because it precedes the inevitable conclusion that I am not always "right" and do not always act in ways that are beneficial to the building and shaping of community.

Marilee came back into the room. The consultants who left were still outside. The female consultant was still speaking, focusing, as so many around the room had been doing, not on the consultant, but on the writer who brought the problematic sentence to the center. I tried to redirect her, emphasizing - again - that this example is meant to focus on the consultant more than the writer.

We have so much language and practice around working with writers who make us uncomfortable or who write uncomfortable things. We are a center on a very diverse campus, and consultants are accustomed to navigating cultural differences. This is part of our job, our identity, and again, part of that grand narrative that tells us our jobs are to consult with writers – it doesn't say anything about relating to other consultants. Everyone kept directing back to that comfortable safe space we already have language for rather than leaning in to the sudden discomfort and cognitive dissonance that one of our own could somehow think women should not be educated.

And then there was the whole idea that it was "one" of our own. Who was it? Who were we targeting? Who was the sexist among us? Who is The Problem?

The Problem, some people decide, is one male consultant. He had drawn attention to himself in his role play group by stating he thought the prompt was about him, but then

had tried to meaningfully contribute to the large group discussion. Yet, his contributions, as others had done in the room, focused on the writer, not the consultant, a fact that had drawn some pointed gazes from the female consultants in his role play group.

When discomfort becomes a very real kind of pain, this pain, Sapolsky warns us, is "written into our biology at a young age…to find attribution for…'*why* is this person in pain, and whose *fault* is it?'" (Sapolsky 531). Rather than embarking on a critical reflection to determine discomfort's *aboutness,* it is a far lighter cognitive load to simply find the source – The Problem. There were two places this blame could go – towards whomever this prompt must be about – this male consultant - or to both Marilee and I. While I didn't take a formal poll in the moment or even after the fact, my impression after talking with people is that the fault lines fairly distinctly followed gender alignment: those who identified as female or aligned themselves with feminist power dynamics blamed the male consultant and those who identified as male or aligned themselves with male power dynamics blamed Marilee and I.

The male consultant likely had been uncomfortable and therefore had cracked a joke – "this one must be about me" - a very common emotional move to deflect attention and lessen the threat of vulnerability. Sapolsky warns us however that "most of us typically require moments of piercing, frothing shared pain to even notice those around us in need" (551). This is why vulnerability is the first step in the Staircase to Agency. We've been biologically hardwired to categorize and construct social groups. This male consultant was not only a male in a predominantly female group but is also a person of color – two ways in which he is an Other in the community. With people's blame reflexes activating and identities aligning towards social groups, Sapolsky warns that

observations of in-group versus out-group pain indicates that empathy is a much harder emotion to activate for someone in our out-group (Sapolsky 533). He writes, "The more the purity of empathy is clouded with the anger, disgust, and indignation of blame, the harder it is to actually help" (Sapolsky 531). While we all should empathize with the female consultant who experienced this microaggression, the practice-professional-learning space of the writing center enables us to also foster an attitude of empathy for the male consultant[15]. Empathy doesn't authorize his behavior; it authorizes continued connection around this issue in spite of his behavior. It recognizes that people make mistakes and learn from them after receiving feedback.

We had told everyone that these were real concerns that had taken place, synthesized from numerous complaints into these examples. It's why we were addressing it systemically as a community rather than in individual meetings. No one person was The Problem. Yet, just as with the events from the previous chapter, when people divide into binaries of Us vs. Them, meaningful, productive discourse becomes impossible. And so the triggering emotions circled and stuck.

Marilee caught my eye and gave me an earnest look, touching her fingertips lightly to my shoulder, asking me if I was okay. I hastily nodded. I had put a firm clamp on my tears, but the emotional strain of the room showed on my face and in my body language.

Like Ahmed, Micciche, explains that emotion is not something that is contained within a text or body, a liminal space, but gets "produced during collisions of contact" (50). It's the contact that is most telling. Unlike Pratt's contact zones, which are restricted

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[15] In the aftermath of these events, Marilee and I met with him and he was deeply troubled at his behavior and apologetic. This is why microaggressions are important to discuss – very rarely are they intentional.

to classroom spaces, Micciche's collisions occur within any spaces and attend to the emotional aspects of contact and to the extralinguistic ways emotions are experienced and circulated within the collision, something Ahmed calls "stickiness." An example of stickiness occurred when neuropsychologist Justin Feinstein showed movie clips with strong emotions to patients with Alzheimer's. While the patients immediately forgot they had even watched a movie, let alone what the movie was about, the emotion associated with the movie – whether very happy or very sad – stayed with them (Franklin). In other words, as the saying goes, people don't remember what you said, but will remember how you make them feel.

It was obvious emotions were colliding and sticking, and yet, we persisted in keeping our attention focused on the prompt. We ignored the emotions circulating as if they were individual, private, none of our business, and perhaps, even, a hindrance to the necessary discussion taking place, exactly as the two consultants had done in Chapter 1. If discomfort is painful, then our biological instinct is to push it easily aside by blame or suppression. In this contact zone, some of the consultants appeared to cope with the discomfort by trying to blame, while I was focused on suppression. No matter the motive, the result is the same: the more all of us worked to move the sticking and circulating emotions aside, the stronger the emotions became.

I wanted very much to direct this discussion in a human way, one that was nuanced, one that acknowledged the complexity of what we were all feeling and initiated a discussion about that, rather than focusing on the scenario and its rather blatant sexism - one that understood and made explicit the tensions. This is us, our trusted community,

this is who we are: a practice-professional space where people make mistakes, learn from them, and support one another through that process. And it's messy.

But I couldn't. Because I was focused on suppression, on not feeling or displaying what I felt to the group over which I had become intuitively aware I had power, I could not allow my discomfort to have *aboutness*. And so instead of saying or doing any of this, I folded in on myself and retreated.

My director wanted what I wanted. She talked and separated people from behaviors. She spoke about Not All Men.

And yet the emotional presence in the room persisted.

We are all speaking with our bodies, and our bodies are saying we are uncomfortable and threatened and angry.

The experience of this meeting was not limited to this interaction. There were constellations of other experiences present in the room – the swirl of identities and emotions we all carry individually into the center, as well as the identities and emotions we all have already in prior contact – the residues of last semester that continue to echo in our community. Micciche writes that rhetoric needs to be

> accountable to wider sensory and experiential realms…beyond effects we
> have on one another to the larger context of how the resources we use to
> 'effect' get constituted as effectual, come to have particular meanings and
> associations, and through this…persuade or fall flat (19).

In other words, if emotions are circulated among and through bodies and "stick" beyond the words (which is why I cannot remember who said what), then this moment is less about addressing sexism in the workplace, and more about how we as a community address difficult conversations. Invariably, for the next few weeks, consultants would begin a discussion about this meeting with the words, "I

feel…" Like the Alzheimer's patients in Feinstein's study, few could recall the specific words, but all could remember how they felt.

We wrapped our discussion on sexism and sexual harassment thirty minutes after we had thought it would end and well before any meaningful resolution could be established, then signaled our intention to awkwardly transition to online consulting training, informing people they didn't have to stay if they needed space. The male consultant we had asked to lead the online consulting training during the meeting was unfortunately also the male consultant some people had decided was The Problem. Some people left, many stayed. No one was participating. I had completely shut down and sat there, hollow in my skin, going through the motions for appearances; trying to convey calm.

The male consultant wrapped-up quickly and no one asked questions. As soon as he finished, I checked-in with another consultant, one of the consultants I had been working with on the survey from last semester and who was now trying to get a research project off the ground about those events. She had scheduled a meeting with Marilee and I immediately after the meeting. The proposed project had a lot of potential but needed some direct mentoring to help guide it, so we wanted to talk with her about it. I assured her that, yes, we were still meeting and that I'd be in my office in fifteen minutes. I'll put tea on. We need tea. I hastily retreated to my office. I put lavender oil in my diffuser and switched it to constant mist. I put the kettle on. I fussed over the tea cups and my cat-shaped tea bag holders. And I tried to ground myself by sniffing all the teas in my special tea box I'd splurged on to sit prettily on my office shelf. I still felt hollow.

At the knock on my door, I prepared myself to discuss leadership roles and power relations in the center, the exhausting but necessary carryover from last year. Only, the consultant I was due to meet was not alone; she had brought another consultant, the same female consultant who had emailed us the concern over the weekend that had sparked the discussion to review sexism at the staff meeting. I was enormously relieved to see her because I had belatedly realized I should have checked-in with her before I fled to my office for aromatherapy and tea.

Two hours later, when everyone left my office, I looked at the time and grabbed my keys and my bag. It was past time to get the kids. I should pick them up, make dinner, and help do homework. I was scheduled to be somewhere and so my body obeyed while my mind went elsewhere. In my car, my fingers clasped the keys but would not turn the ignition. Instead, I laid my head down on the steering wheel and wept.

I waited until Monday to formulate a formal response, an email I wanted to write because I could think of no other way to communicate to the entire staff at once without convening another meeting (which felt too soon) or waiting until the next staff meeting (which felt too little too late). I felt that people needed to understand the way their leaders felt about this meeting to help them frame their own responses, and they also needed some disciplinary guidance on how to frame this response within the larger context of writing center studies. I wanted my response to do both, but I also wanted to talk to Marilee first and meet with a few key voices in the center, as well, before writing it.

And yet, by Monday – two full days after The Sexism Staff Meeting – I was at near panic-level anxiety about not having written my response. I couldn't arrange all the

meetings I wanted to have early in the day, so by the time I was on my way to family

therapy that evening I was desperate, typing in sentences while at red lights in my laptop,

which was open on the passenger seat next to me. I continued writing in the waiting room

and could not stop talking about it so much in the session that my therapist dismissed me

after fifteen minutes. I finished writing it in a Starbucks parking lot on the way home.

> I wrote:

> What happened on Friday was a terrible, beautiful mess. It was
> uncomfortable, hard, emotional, and contentious. It was, in my estimation,
> what makes a writing center a special place. This is what I love - leaning
> in to the mess, having the hard conversations, and loving one another
> through it.

I then shared a quote from Elise Dixon's "Uncomfortably Queer: Everyday

Moments in the Writing Center:"

> In offering up a breaking open of the messy everyday moments of the
> writing center, I hope to offer up the opportunity for writing center
> professionals, consultants, and clients to go off-script of the grand
> narrative of the writing center as a tidy, uncomplicated, straight,
> comfortable space.

I wanted the mess. I wanted the discomfort. But I also needed them to want the

mess and discomfort with me, to normalize things that are difficult or complicated

as the work of our center. To buck that damn grand narrative (McKinney). But I

understood their feelings, and I validated their responses, even if their response

was anger or resentment.

And because I know of no better way to communicate empathy to people than in

one-on-one interactions, I told everyone I would be clearing my schedule and would be

seeking out interactions with some people, but also welcomed anyone who needed to

speak to me. Just send me an email and we'll schedule it. In prioritizing the "relational

work of emotional labor" I knew I could "build trust" with my consultants" (Caswell et al. 119). Trust that, I knew from last year on into this year, was shaky at best.

While I was convinced this was the right course of action to attend to the emotional needs of the center, I was also aware of the very real toll this would take on me personally. A large component of last semester had been emotional labor, and it had, at one point, caused me to escape to a bathroom where I could cry for a few hours without anyone in the center knowing. But, that labor last year had also been unacknowledged – everyone had wanted to be seen as unemotional and detached so as to identify as objective and reasonable. This time I was foregrounding this as emotion work and deliberately claiming this work as necessary labor in writing centers. I wasn't practicing emotional suppression, but emotional management. So what could go wrong?

It was the week after The Sexism Staff Meeting. I wore jeans and a t-shirt with a flannel shirt over it to work because I was all out of fucks by that point. In addition to one-on-one meetings where I had fielded responses ranging from "this was amazing and necessary and powerful" to "I feel betrayed by you and Marilee," I had also been managing other, seemingly unrelated (in as much as anything can be unrelated in a community of practice) items.

One of those items was the re-scheduled meeting with the consultant I was supposed to meet with after The Sexism Staff Meeting. While we both continued to be invested in scholarship around the events of last Spring, it was understandably uncomfortable and messy. Another item I'd handled circled around a privacy concern for a consultant yet was also one that other consultants continued to email and text me about

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at all hours of the day and night. They needed someone they saw as a leader to handle the situation, and so, despite persistent and careful warnings about what I legally could not do or say or know, I suddenly found myself front and center in a situation that was emotionally charged and potentially earth-shattering for the center. Unlike last semester, where as an LT member my management performance was restricted to binaries of all/none and viewed as ineffective/too authoritative, these consultants wanted and needed a leader to handle this; someone that could carry the emotional labor to that they trusted would do something with it. Dancing this fine line between empathy for them, empathy for the consultant going through this event, and awareness of the boundary constraints of my position as a university employee was exhausting and emotional.

And lastly, I had been managing the daily administrative tasks that are important, necessary, and time-consuming – things like re-writing the schedule to shift consultants around as requested after The Sexism Staff Meeting – as well as the daily tasks of my other identities – student, wife, mother, intern, woman, person. In the middle of the privacy concern situation, my son had gotten his braces put on. So, while I sat in an orthodontist's waiting room, I fielded phone calls to several on-campus resources and answered emails and texts from worried consultants. On another day, both of my children had an "E-Day[16]" at their school, which meant I could either pay money to put them in the Boys and Girls Club all day, or bring them to work with me and let them complete their work quietly in the conference room next door while I shuttled between helping

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[16] An "E-Day" is a day that the children in our school do not attend at the physical location, but instead have assignments on Canvas, the virtual classroom software our district uses. Students have a week to complete and turn-in these assignments, and can be given time at the school library to do so, but if it is possible for students to have internet and computer access during the E-Day, they should be completed on the actual day.

them multiply two-digit numbers and meeting with the line of angry, confused, hopeful, or devastated consultants outside my office door.

I do not share all of this to explicate in any way that I am unique and you, as a reader, should marvel at my ability to be "Super Mom" and juggle it all. I share this precisely for the reason that I am not unique. While others' identities and experienced emotions may be different, they are nonetheless present in any interaction. We all are embodied realities, carrying with us a myriad of identities, emotions, and power constructions. These embodiments are hard to divide and construct boundaries around, but clear boundaries within the spaces we perform help. In some spaces expectations of identity performances are more distinct: classroom = student or job = assemble sandwiches efficiently and safely. The writing center does not have clear boundaries or expectations – everyone within the space is, in a way, a kind of manager because of the autonomous nature of the work of consulting and of researching writing center scholarship. This compounds the amount of emotional laboring we all have to do every day so that we can even get at the so-called other work.

I carried all of these events and the sticking emotions with me into a meeting with a professor where I was suddenly supposed to perform "student" after, not five minutes before, I was both "concerned writing center administrator" and "concerned mentor/friend" in a phone conversation surrounding the privacy concern. I walked woodenly to his office at the appointed time, because that was what my calendar told me I should be doing even while my brain circled and looped in an anxious dance. He asked me how I was doing in that formal way that everybody asks everyone how you're doing, never once expecting it'll be anything other than a sentence of acknowledgement: "fine,"

"good," or "hanging in there." Never terrible. Never falling to pieces. Never the truth, really.

I burst into tears. They weren't loud or dramatic. They were the leaky-faucet kind; the ones that just pour out of your eyes because you've tried to hold them in for too long. It was the first time someone had asked me how I was doing recently. I had been so careful to manage my own emotions, projecting an outward face of calm and confidence while all of this had been going on, that I hadn't checked-in with myself; I hadn't thought about how *I* was doing. This is what is known as "empathy fatigue," which Sapolsky describes as "the cognitive load of repeated exposure to the pain [of others]" (Sapolsky 534-535). Empathy is a component of the concept of *emotional intelligence* that cites "social memory, emotional perspective taking, impulse control, ability to work with others, and self-regulation" as better predictors of adult success and happiness than IQ or SAT scores (Sapolsky 523).

Yet, empathy also has a grand narrative attached to it, one that says we must feel what the other person is feeling in order to make it count. Sapolsky warns us, however, that trying to actually experience someone else's pain can prevent us from actively trying to help that person. We tend to do one of three things: become empathy fatigued (as I did), feel so much pain that we become focused on alleviating our own pain, rather than the pain of the other person, or feel that somehow feeling their pain is a solution in and of itself (Sapolsky 542-543). Empathy, rather than a *feeling alongside* should be seen as *imagining alongside* – it's about perspective taking rather than attempting to make yourself experience the exact same emotions (Sapolsky 523, 551). I was still finding my footing with perspective taking, having practiced the grand narrative of empathy my

entire life. I viewed my ability to perceive and feel others' emotions as a gift, one that allowed me to relate and care and love. And yet, when this is how we empathize for one person, let alone thirty-seven, the experience of fatigue can be tremendous.

I retreated back to my office, breathing with intention – deep belly breaths to ward off the knot of anxiety I had just realized was present. I picked-up my iPhone and debated texting Marilee. She needed an update on the privacy concern and I didn't want it in an email. But, she was also likely either at the airport or nearly there, getting ready to board a plane heading into a hurricane to go to a conference. Just as I wondered whether it would be better to text her later, a text from her came through to me. My professor had alerted her to the interaction we'd just had.

There, in a car on the way to the airport, flying away from her family and all of this and into a hurricane, upon hearing everything, she cried, too.

At the airport as she waited for her flight, we live-texted updates to one another, she starting (Picture 1):

Picture 1: Hurricane Text Message Exchange

While we waited for more information, neither of us seemed to want to break the

link of contact between us. So much had happened in the past two weeks and it felt as if

we could only now talk about some of it. We began to text about The Sexism Staff

Meeting fallout and the preparations for the meeting about allyship coming up in one

week that I was due to facilitate based upon my preliminary thesis research. In our one-

on-one meetings, we had fielded some consultant complaints that the center was "too

political" and that the Dixon article (on the importance of recognizing discomfort as a

reality in writing centers) we were asking them to read was offensive. We both went back

and forth dissecting those comments, she from her perspective as a decolonial scholar,

me from my perspective on emotion studies; neither perspective wrong, and both of us

acknowledging the desire to foster an attitude of trust, where we could all lean in to the

hard conversations. I wrote that the consultants were experiencing "disconnect" between

the center as a site of learning and a professional space: "They want it to be either/or

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selectively and situationally. It is always inextricably both…" Then emphasized that it is our job to push them to grapple with these issues. However, "the fact that they don't like it is no surprise, but what is, is how they frame that pushing to themselves and to each other. The pushing tells a story about who we are, who they are, and what our center is."

"Yes," Marilee texted back, "This is a constant way of life in the UWC."

This chapter reinforces the border war between the delineation of identities in the writing center, not only for the people within, but the space itself- what is a writing center? The writing center gets constituted differently by different people in different positions: from university partners who often narrate the "fix-it-shop" mentality to university stakeholders who discuss "all the drama" of working with so many undergrads, to even ourselves as members of the community – are we consultants, are managers, are we researchers?

Not only are the professional identities malleable in a writing center, but so are the personal identities. We're all carrying with us multiple identities that can often compete directly with one another in a rhetorical situation. This chapter, then, necessarily complicates the idea that connection feels good. Vulnerability, empathy, connection, and agency all go to work in this chapter in various ways, and yet, this chapter did not ever feel "good." Emotions are a part of all of our identities because emotion is *sticky* – it gets attached to people, events, things, places, ideas, and experiences. Managing emotions is an integral component of connection, but empathy is itself a complicated activity that can be carried out in ways that are less productive. When this happens, emotional management becomes overwhelming, making emotional labor less effective. In the end,

we come to accept that communities will not ever be experienced evenly by all of its

members, and so narrating it as a warm, safe, cozy space is not only false, but divisive

and counter-productive to the growth and sustainability of a community.

Chapter 3: Weaving in Arizona

It was nearly 9pm at night when my husband's phone rang. We were in bed talking, trying to unpack and move beyond some of the difficult feelings that had surfaced in therapy a few hours earlier. It had been a trying semester after The Sexism Staff Meeting and now it was The Holidays; intense emotions were inevitable.

"Yes, this is his son," he said into the phone as he got up and walked out of the bedroom.

His sudden departure stirred me. I remembered that walk. I had done that instinctive movement, too, when my mother had called to tell me my dad was having a heart attack; as if, somehow, you could escape the news you knew you were about to get if you moved your body away from where you had just been.

Somewhere, a voice inside me said, "You know his dad is dead."

The night before I had made meatloaf. I hadn't made meatloaf in almost a year. I didn't know why, but I had a sudden urgent need to make it. And now I knew: it was his dad's favorite, and the last meal I'd cooked for him before we had to kick him out of our home for the last time two years ago.

I didn't want to intrude on his flight away from me. We had just been arguing. He may want privacy. But what if the voice was right? There was no way I would let my husband receive this news by himself with no support.

I tip-toed to the kitchen table, following the sound of his voice.

"Could you tell me your name again?"

I gently traced a fingertip along his shoulder blade.

"And you're an officer?"

I circled around the table.

"With the coroner's office?"

The word floated into me like a balloon, then popped. I sat down on the step-stool we keep next to the fridge, the seat I could get that would be closest to him without making any noise to pull-out a chair, as if by not making noise I could suspend time and keep him from having to face what was already here.

He hung up with a habitually professional farewell and then paused, noticing me for the first time.

"My dad is dead." He said with little feeling.

I nodded because I already knew.

"Tomorrow I'll need to go down there… he had things on him… they found him…he was frozen… people will need me to tell them…"

He was focused on being the leader of his family, not the fact that he was now fatherless. I knew, because I had been doing the same thing to myself all semester in the writing center. So I did what I wish someone had done for me much earlier. "Shhhh. That will all keep. Right now I want you to tell me how you feel, because I imagine it really sucks."
And with that he embraced me and began sobbing.

I wrote this in an empty word document in the aftermath of that evening. I wrote it here because it haunted me, but I couldn't yet share the grisly, agonizing details with anyone. On Monday of that week, two weeks before the end of the semester, Marilee and I had to have an emergency meeting. It was a meeting time we had previously scheduled

to discuss other concerns and issues, but wound up having to rush through those items so we could hastily strategize how to replace a coordinator who quit unexpectedly. This conversation necessitated a discussion about another coordinator, one who I had been working with all semester, but had been unresponsive to emails and had missed meetings and events. We decided it was time to replace her, and both of these replacements necessitated that we meet with four other consultants prior to making any formal or finalized announcements. We had scheduled our end-of-semester LT planning meeting for Friday, and, given how this semester had gone, felt it imperative that we had a good team in place and everyone ready to move forward, so time was of the essence. We parted, both making hasty meeting arrangements with the other consultants.

On Monday evening, Marilee learned her grandfather had passed away. Earlier in the semester, her husband's grandfather had also passed, and she had traveled to Michigan for the funeral and taken the time to visit her grandfather, who's health she knew was starting to fail. Still, this was her second loss in two months.

Tuesday morning my son was due to have two teeth extracted, the same two teeth they hadn't pulled when we got his teeth pulled before his braces went on earlier in the semester because they decided he would need to be put to sleep. In between shuffling meetings and making contingency plans for Marilee's imminent departure from the center at this critical time, I forgot not to feed him breakfast, and so showed up to the dentist office utterly clueless until the hygienist asked me if I'd remembered not to feed him anything this morning. We rescheduled, I set my calendar to notify me the day before a reminder not to feed him, and then dropped him off at school with explanations and humor (Look at the overly busy working mom who forgot how anesthesia works!

Aren't I silly?!), and then opted to work from home so I could do laundry and chores in preparation for our flight to Arizona on Friday for an early Christmas with my husband's mother and half-brother. During the day, Marilee called me to tell me that word of the sudden departure of the coordinator is out and certain LT members are upset at our lack of transparency in not telling them. We had known less than 24 hours and had to talk to four other people or risk offending privacy concerns. This causes us both to feel anxiety because it's too familiar to the complaints from last spring.

Wednesday I met with the coordinator we needed to replace, and, as it turns out, she didn't want to be coordinator, anyway, and had even considered telling us that weeks before. I wish you had, I replied, because it would have made the transition much cleaner. I ran from that meeting with her to another emergency meeting with Marilee, who was in her office finishing up items that could not wait for bereavement; she had to do them before she could leave for the funeral. It's the end of the semester and we're in the middle of hiring all of the new consultants that just completed the training course, planning our spring orientation, and she had two courses she's behind on grading.

She had successfully connected with the other three consultants, so we had, in less than one day met with the people we had to meet with before we could finalized the new coordinator and committee membership list and discussed the dissolution of an entire half of a committee, based upon the feedback we'd received from the departing coordinator and planned a new structure for that to work. I left her to her grading with assurances that I would complete the LT email and start a Doodle Poll to find a new meeting time. Back in my office, I composed the email explaining the past few days to our LT members, detailing the urgency of the situation and time constraints that restricted our

communication for a few days, and then introduced our two new coordinators to the team and asked them all to fill-out the Doodle Poll. While we weren't meeting on Friday, per our plan, I assured them I would be in my office to discuss concerns or questions about any of these last-minute changes during the meeting time. I hit send and dashed out of my office, late to pick-up the kids and make it to family therapy across town.

And then after therapy and before bed on Wednesday evening, we found out my husband's father had died. He was homeless by choice. It had been his birthday on Sunday. My husband had tried to find him to take him out to dinner but couldn't. He had spent time with his brother, his only brother who shares that father, instead.

His brother lives a block away from the park where they found his father's body. When they found him, he'd been dead for days.

No foul play was suspected. Toxicology will not be finished for months.

The coroner's office is not what you expect after watching TV. It was decorated with a pink Christmas tree and staffed by a woman in a flowing dress who asked us gently to be seated while we waited on the officer. They did not ask us to ID the body. They had fingerprinted him.

"And so there's no chance?" my husband had asked, "You're sure it's him?"

"It's 100% accurate."

We left with a plastic bag filled with a soggy wallet, a watch, and an unusable cell phone.

"He had a phone. Why hadn't he called?"

"I don't know…." I said vaguely, holding his hand, not mentioning the iPhone we'd bought him and put on our plan so that we'd always have a lifeline to him; the iPhone that he'd sold or given away, which one he never said.

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I sent out two emails: one to Marilee and one to our listserv. I did not tell anyone my father-in-law's body had been found frozen in a park. I did not tell anyone that we'd always expected this phone call, had reconciled to it years ago, and yet now, when faced with the reality, it was wrenching and tortuous in ways I still can't comprehend.

Instead I said that we had "found out" my father-in-law had "passed away unexpectedly."

I canceled all meetings with students and fellow faculty members I had scheduled and apologized. I reminded the LT of our upcoming meeting and that'd I'd be emailing them a meeting day/time shortly.

And then I asked my husband if he still wanted to fly to Arizona tomorrow.

His answer did not surprise me. "Now more than ever."

We flew to Arizona on Friday.

We hadn't packed. Hadn't done anything. And we still had to return to the funeral home to pay them in full to secure the discount they were so kind to grant us and to sign the paperwork before they could move my father-in-law's body into their custody.

Family was still calling. Still needing assurances.

And we had to find the social security card, hidden in the soggy wallet that smelled of death and mildew, each piece of crumpled paper that now had to be carefully taken out and laid to dry.

With one hour until our plane started boarding, we stopped at campus. I had to get my computer cord, print our boarding passes because our home printer was out of ink, and grab some books I hadn't thought to grab when I left my office last because I thought I'd be coming back the next day; you know, before our world turned upside down.

It had been a full business day since I'd sent the email to the listserv and a few hasty others to faculty members. I hadn't checked my email at all after sending it, so I desperately hoped things were not falling to pieces. Marilee was on her way to Michigan to be with her family. I was on my way to Arizona to be with mine. Neither of us would be present at this critical end-of-semester time.

Nevertheless, I needed to get in and get out. We were still a twenty-minute drive to the airport, plus the time it takes to park and take the shuttle to the main terminal and get through security. And none of us had remembered to eat. We were going to be close; never had I been thankful to be in the last boarding group for Southwest before.

Up the elevator of my building to the fifth floor, I fast-walked down the hall only to be spotted by one of our financial liaisons as soon as I turned a corner. We're hiring new consultants, it's almost winter break, and things must be signed now. I nod and smile and say that yes, I'd be happy to sign. I unlock my office door and, inexplicably, my bulletin board chose that exact moment to fall, strewing papers everywhere. I ignore it. I'll pick it up next week. I go for the big boxy PC first and slap in my university passcode so I can print the boarding passes. I snatch up the computer cord and pivot to my books

and articles, weighing what I absolutely had to have, knowing I'd be lugging it across three airports. I had to wait for the papers I needed to sign, so I checked my email.

In response to my listserv email, I had seven condolence emails from consultants.

In response to one of my faculty emails, I had a "condolence but." You know the type, where someone says they're sorry for your loss but not really because they need you to do something for them right now.

I sighed audibly and grumbled. The papers were ready to be signed with my thanks. I swiveled around, gazing at the mess of papers on my floor, shook my head, and turned off the light.

We had just completed a breathtaking hike up Bell Rock in Sedona. It was our third day in Arizona. We'd hiked through a sacred American Indian pool in Phoenix, toured two American Indian city ruins, and checked-in to a resort in Sedona, provided - miraculously – free-of-charge to us by one of my husband's relatives. It had two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living room with a pull-out sofa; big enough to fit our family of four, Brian's brother and our niece, and their mother. The trip had been bittersweet, as expected, but good. My husband thinks and feels best when he's on his feet in nature, and the time spent with his other family had been healing.

We were going for Mexican food, because it's my favorite and I said I'd be disappointed if we came this close to Mexico and didn't eat some. The plan was to get food for all of us, then leave the kids with their grandmother to go back to the resort while the three of us - me, my husband, and my brother-in-law - went back for more hiking. We'd rented a small SUV and had all the children with us, including our five-

year-old niece. The GPS was on, telling us how to get to the Mexican restaurant we'd selected, when my husband's phone rang. We both immediately recognized it as the number of the funeral home.

Before we left, we had finalized arrangements with a small, family-run business near the neighborhood where my husband had grown up. They had learned of the circumstances surrounding my father-in-law's death and had offered to waive the fees to prepare the body for viewing, essentially giving us a two-thousand-dollar discount. But, they hadn't been certain that the body could be viewed because of the length of time he had been left outside in the elements. Friday, when we had paid, the mortician had said he would try his hardest. He knew how important this was for my husband. Friday evening he'd called to say they had secured my father-in-law's body and he could definitely be prepared for viewing. It had been with that sliver of "good" news that we'd hiked on Saturday and Sunday.

My husband answered. And immediately I regretted not disconnecting his phone from Bluetooth. The mortician's voice boomed out of the speakers and began talking about deterioration and how the body had been exposed to elements that interacted with the chemicals they use to preserve bodies….

I chanced a glance at the back seat, not wanting to overreact and make the words any harder to hear for three young children. All three looked at me with great big owl-eyes. I frantically thought about how to disconnect the phone from the speakers without disconnecting or disturbing the call, my eyes desperately roving over the dashboard for some clue. But it's a new car. I drive a broken-down 2005 car without, even, a working

radio. I have no idea how to make this go away in the precious few moments I have to figure it out.

"….and so I'm very sorry to tell you, but your father's body will not be in a condition that we would recommend a viewing. It would not be a positive experience for anyone," the voice reverberated through the speakers.

I gave up and reached for my husband's hand. Again he had the habitually professional tone as he said his goodbyes and hung up. I was devastated for him.

He'd never get to see his father again, even in death. It would always be as if he vanished into thin air.
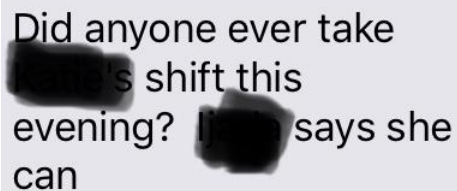
The GPS came back on and informed us we had reached our destination, and once again, I found myself woodenly walking somewhere because that was where I was scheduled to be, feeling hollow and like I had no idea what I was doing there. I pulled my brother-in-law aside and told him the news in a hushed tone, knowing that my husband was not alright and also wanting him to keep an eye on his daughter. And then I did a check-in with my children. My daughter was seemingly unaffected. My son was very quiet.

We sat down at the table at the empty restaurant; it was early for lunch, but we'd been hiking all morning. Everything we did echoed in the tiled and concrete room, and our table was smack in the middle of the restaurant. Nowhere to hide. Nowhere to break quietly together. It was maximum exposure, a grotesque stage at the theater of the absurd. My husband excused himself to go to the restroom. My son came around the table and whispered if we could go talk in private. I took him just outside the restaurant to a bench that was by a little pond with a fountain. We sat down, I touched his shoulders and
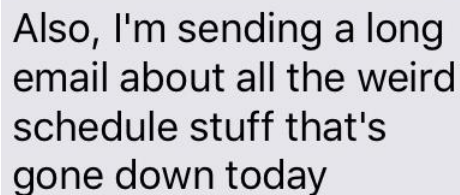
brushed his hair away from his forehead, a habit from the many years his hair was long, but utterly useless now that he'd gotten a "Thor: Ragnarok" buzz cut.

And he burst into tears. Inconsolable, wrenching, primal tears that could not be squelched with any of my kisses, hugs, rocks, soothes, or murmurs.

I held him for ten or so minutes, anchoring him through the storm. And then I decided that he didn't need to stop crying, but he did need someone to cry with, and so I returned to the restaurant and asked my husband if he and my son would like to take a walk together. They left. I ordered for everyone, because what else does one do in an empty restaurant, and at that exact moment I received a text message from work (Picture 2):

Did anyone ever take ████'s shift this evening? ████ says she can

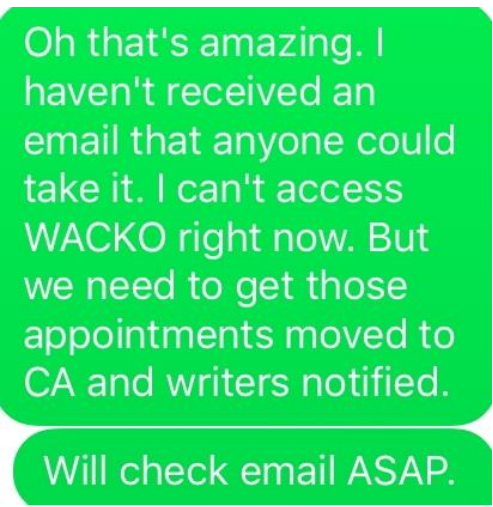Also, I'm sending a long email about all the weird schedule stuff that's gone down today

Picture 2: Weird Stuff Text Message to Me

I had gone into my email the night before to send the revised LT meeting day and time

and to also submit my thesis proposal[17], which I'd been able finish between working on

the plane and while driving to Sedona. While I was in my email, I had seen where a

consultant had been scheduled to work today, the last day of classes, and now could not.

She already had sessions scheduled, however. To make matters more complicated, the

other consultant that would have been on shift with her had quit. Which means that I now

had three appointments scheduled for this evening during a time block when I'd have to

close that location, anyway, and no available consultant to take the shift. I had sent out an

email titled "URGENT" to the listserv last night asking if anyone could take the

appointments and move them to our other location, which means our office coordinator

would need to open a shift for the consultant in the schedule in WCOnline[18]. All of this

would normally fall under the office coordinator's purview, anyway, but for some reason,

he was AWOL.

All semester, I'd been having to text him to chase down a reason, then schedule a

check-in with him and try to sort it out, toeing that impossible knife-edge between the

center as a personal-social-learning-professional environment. I responded to the text,

happy at least that there would be a consultant for those three appointments (Picture 3):

[17] Yes, the proposal for this – the thing you're reading. Bereavement is odd in that it causes you to stop
while the world continues without you. If I intended to enroll in thesis credits and graduate on time – which
I had to in order to retain my position as assistant director – then I needed to finish that damn proposal,
grief or not. I wrote on the plane (both Indianapolis to Denver and Denver to Phoenix), in my brother-in-
law's apartment, on the two-hour card ride up to Sedona from Phoenix, and finally again in the master
bedroom of the completely and unbelievably free and amazing resort in Sedona. I hadn't written this
chapter into the thesis, it came much later, but I did understand that I wanted to write my way through my
experiences in a way that would help me understand who I was in relation to the writing center, and who I
would need to be as a leader of the writing center.
[18] WCOnline is our scheduling software. The pseudo-acronym "WACKO" was ascribed to it prior to our
director's arrival and stuck, and so I refer to it thusly in the text message.

I shuffled to my email, there was nothing new in my inbox that was relevant to whatever

was happening right now in the center. Nor, I noted absently, was there any email about

our Finals Week schedule tomorrow. But I couldn't see what was happening right now; I

was in Sedona, Arizona, thousands of miles away, two hours earlier in the day than

anything happening at home, at a Mexican restaurant, and my husband's carefully

constructed grief was shattering once more in a new wave of reality. My brother-in-law

gave me a meaningful glance, pointed to his phone, and left the restaurant in search of my

husband and son. My husband had texted for back-up.

The food arrived. Half the table was missing. And no one could eat. My body felt

split in half: one part was hovering over my husband and son, the other had gone back to

Indiana to investigate whatever was going wrong in the center. In that moment, I knew I

was the only leader available. Marilee was in a place with spotty WiFi, and the office

coordinator was obviously dealing with something not good, but all I knew right now was

that he was unreliable. I was it; all the answers or decisions anyone needed right now

rested with me, except I didn't even know what was going wrong. I checked the time on my phone. The consultant who texted me must be in a session.

My husband returned with my son and his brother in tow. My son tried to sit and eat, then ventured over to snuggle with me. He looked hopelessly sad and I decided I'd had enough of sitting in this empty restaurant stewing about things happening in two different places. I told my husband I was going to sit with my son in the car, he needed a quiet place to reset, and suggested he ask the wait staff to box up our food to take back to our hotel.

"When you're ready, I'll take your mother and the kids back to the hotel. Why don't you and your brother go on the hike."

"You're sure? But you wanted to go."

"Positive. You need this time, and there's some things I need to handle, anyway."

You should know that my mother-in-law is mentally impaired. She is mostly independent and can handle quite a lot, but it can be overwhelming for her and sometimes mistakes get made, and so I was frankly relieved to be in charge of the kids for her. My niece had been through hell and back this past year, manifesting in some concerning and troublesome behaviors. She was a handful, and she required an enormous amount of patience and a healthy dose of reason to manage. If you get emotional with her, she will use emotions to manipulate the situation to her favor, something my mother-in-law was incapable of doing; they would just argue, escalating until, my mother-in-law informed me, one day a neighbor threatened to call the police. In the car ride on the way back to the hotel, my niece bullied my son for crying about his grandfather, claiming she knew

him more than my son (which isn't accurate) and that she didn't cry. I was stunned at her cruelty, and yet also aware of the circumstances behind it. I felt an ache for both my son and for her.
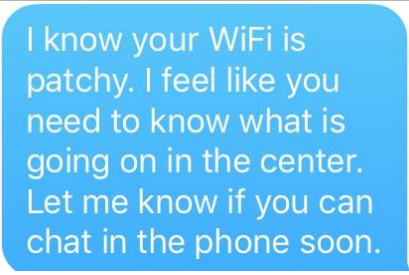
Back at the hotel, I set-up an emergency office at the kitchen peninsula and laid-out the mostly uneaten lunches up for the kids at the dining table. I had finally gotten the email. Two consultants no-showed because they didn't realize today was not Finals Week, but the last day of classes. Something we normally would have made clear in an email about the Finals Week schedule, which should have been finalized days ago and sent to consultants and advertised to faculty. Again, this is a job the office coordinator should handle, but for whatever reason(s), he wasn't. The consultants who did manage to show up for work today were shuffling appointments as best as they could, taking care of writers and one another and pulling more than their share of weight. But there was still the three appointments for this evening that needed to be notified of their consultant and location change, and then there was the issue of needing WCOnline to reflect those changes.

It is my job to supervise the office coordinator and to make sure the schedule gets maintained and handled appropriately. So ultimately, this is my job, too, and definitely my problem. Just as it is also my problem that I didn't know how to add a shift in WCOnline. All semester I'd wanted to learn, had recognized that I needed to learn as my panic increased with each new AWOL episode by the office coordinator, but all of the other issues occurring in the center had thus far prevented me from spending meaningful time trying to learn to administer the program. Now was not the time; nevertheless, I did attempt to watch a tutorial to see if I could make the necessary changes.

The kids started fighting. They wanted to go to the pool. Arizona or not, it was 47 degrees outside. The resort did have, however, an infinity hot tub almost as large as a pool that overlooked Thunder Mountain. And there was no way I could learn what I needed to learn in the five minutes I could negotiate peace. It would be what it would be.

"Alright, kids, everyone get swimsuits on. We're going to the hot tub in fifteen minutes!"

I emailed the consultant back, thanking them for notifying me and handling it all so well, and apologizing for the lack of professionalism and communication. I sent thank you emails to each consultant who had covered shifts, and then emailed the writers whose appointments were moving to the other location and copied in their new consultant. In the absence of an existent time slot in WCOnline, they could at least communicate with one another. I texted Marilee (Picture 4):

> I know your WiFi is patchy. I feel like you need to know what is going on in the center. Let me know if you can chat in the phone soon.

Picture 4: Weird Stuff Text Message to Marilee

I packed up my makeshift office and went to the master bathroom to change. Marilee texted me back (Picture 5):

Ugh.

Feel free to call

Just saw emails.

Thank you for handling that!!

(There's more to follow up on of course but it seems like you've done the best you could from afar)
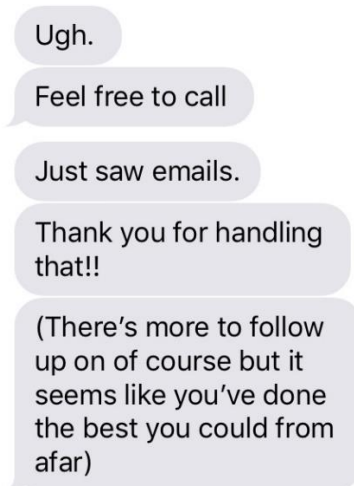
Picture 5: Weird Stuff Text Message Marilee Response

As we prepared to leave for the short walk to the hot tub, my niece opened the front door, slammed it as hard as she could, and screamed at me. My mother-in-law snapped at her. Inwardly, I felt like screaming, too. I envisioned in a flash what that would feel like, the satisfaction that would come from letting loose the torment of colliding emotions boiling beneath the surface of my skin. Instead, I took a breath, told myself that my emotions were not about my niece or my mother-in-law – this was not the context to bring them into - and calmly explained to her that she and I could sit in the hotel room and do nothing, or she could listen to me so we could all go to the hot tub together. Unsurprisingly, she selected Option B.

I led a straight-line march school-hallway-style to the hot tub, anxious to relocate us all to somewhere we might be happier. Only, the emotional upheaval persisted once we arrived at the hot tub. My niece's bad attitude is spreading and my son, overwrought and in need of R&R, begins to complain. My mother-in-law begins to lament. My daughter observes these proceedings from an aloof distance. And I continue to clamp down any emotional expression whatsoever because I'm keenly aware that my perceived

neutrality is the only thing any of us can lean-on right now. We're in the most amazing hot tub I've ever seen with an incredible view, and no one is around; we have it all to ourselves. I analyze the feelings raging around, knowing this conflation is about so much more than hot tubs and walks and lunches. Each of us have our own stories that are colliding right now.

I look around, knowing I needed to find solid ground, a rooting to the present that would help me sort and analyze the emotions circulating around; knowing that was what the children needed, too.

"Kids, where are you right now?"

A hot tub. Arizona. With you.

"Have you ever been here before?"

No.

"Are you likely to return to this exact spot?"

Silence. No…….

"What do you see?"

Red. Orange. Mountains. Desert. You.

The sun was just starting to set, inflaming the red soil of the mountain. It was breathtaking.

I spent the next hour and a half playing Eye Spy and intermittently getting out of the hot tub into the cold mountain air to check my phone and make sure all was well at the writing center.

Hours later my husband and brother-in-law returned with an incredible story.

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They had gone back to Bell Rock. Only, instead of stopping at the panoramic plateau halfway up, as we had this morning, they continued the hike, freeclimbing towards the end to reach the summit.

When they summited, clear, high, and haunting on the wind, they heard a woman's voice, singing what sounded like an ancient song. They listened for a while, and then instinctively moved to another side of the summit where, tucked between two rocks to protect it from the wind and the elements, they found a plastic box.

Inside were letters, photos, torn pieces of clothing, and other tangible remnants people had left; stories of triumph over illness, of realization of dreams, of the loss of loved ones. And beneath these stories, my husband – alone now because he'd left his brother with the singer – found an empty journal and a pen, inviting him to write his story.

There, on the summit of a mountain, a few hours after learning he'd never see his dad again, less than a week after learning he'd died, and nearly six months from the last time he'd seen him – not knowing it would be the last – he wrote. As the song on the wind swirled around him, he wrote about his father, about the time they drove his tractor trailer through this place and how much his father had loved it, and then he cried.

He was able to say goodbye.

Late that night, the Finals Week Schedule finally got posted, and an email sent to students and faculty. The office coordinator had finally come through.

I didn't tell my husband any of this or what had transpired while his world fell apart and got put back together again. Instead we shared a bottle of wine and a pizza and

wished we had one more day in this beautiful place. We had to leave Sedona at five-thirty

the next morning to make the drive back to Phoenix to catch our flight.

There was so much waiting for us to do when we got home.

The act of making, doing, and being is all that stitches us together in this miasmic

diaspora – we are all weavers of the tapestry of community. In a recent *New York Times*

article, David Brooks describes systemic concerns through a localized, individual lens in

a project called "Weave: The Social Fabric Project." Weavers, Brooks writes, put

relationships over self, and are not motivated by power, status or other more self-

absorbed "we before me" iconography. Weavers show that we create a moral ecology –

like the island ecosystem I mentioned in my introduction – through our actions: "When

we love across boundaries, listen patiently, see deeply, and make someone feel known,

we've woven" (Brooks). This is not to say that power is something that is bad (again,

binary categorizations between good/bad or even productive/unproductive are slippery

slopes of cognitive simplicity. When we recognize power is a variable that can be given

and received, we also view power not as a motivation – a thing to strive towards – but

rather, like so much else in this thesis, an activity. Weaving – activities - is what creates

community and shapes it for the better.

In this chapter I intentionally wove. I wove feelings and experiences together for

my grieving family. I wove vulnerability and gratitude into the writing center as a person,

and wove time, attention, and care into it as an assistant director. I also wove together in

writing: I wrote my thesis proposal during this chapter and planted the seeds for this – the

thing you're reading right now, where I wove the last year and a half of my life – all of

the threads of identities and emotions and experiences together. My husband wove in his writing. And the writing of so many others I've read, reflected on, and used throughout this thesis. With each sentence I stitch and weave, adding myself and all of these necessary questions to the rhetorical fabric of the writing center. In doing this, I want to be a weaver. I want others to want to weave with me. I want to make weaving the practice of this community.

Conclusion: The Problem is Not the Problem. The Problem is Your Attitude About the Problem.[19]

Melissa Nicolas, in *(E)merging Identities* describes how, "…we play out scenarios about possible ways to move from in-between to actually arriving at a decision, a destination, a resolution" (1). At this arrival, we envision ourselves in a place that has boundaries, no longer in a seemingly limitless void of between – a limbo or purgatory between finite destinations. There is clarity in boundaries, in who and what fits where. This is why, for centuries, Western thought has most often defined itself by what it is not, with so many cultures, people, places, and things becoming nothing more than a yardstick by which dominant and privileged groups of "civilized" could measure themselves. For example, In *Communities of Practice,* Etienne Wenger describes the process by which communities negotiate boundaries through practices of reification – of what it means to be a member in that community. For many this is as clear as a specific title, degree, or clothing (103-104). In boundaries we see what is inside and what is out and what the rules are for in/out.

In this clarity, however, we marginalize, other, erase, and oppress what is not contained within our borders. Ahmed and Fortier summarize this potently, writing

> Rather than seeing the refusal of narratives of unity and togetherness as a symptom of the failure to achieve community – a failure that is taken up as a signal to call for the urgency of community – we can consider it a cogent critique of the violent modes of ascription, conscription and erasure perpetrated in the name of community" (256).

This clarity however, is comfortable. We can locate ourselves within a defined space, clearly marked and labeled and easy to navigate. And yet, as the stories I've shared highlight, our lives and our labor take place exactly in the "betwixt-and-between," the

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[19] Yes, this is a quote from Captain Jack Sparrow in Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean franchise.

discomfort of boundlessness (Gellar et al. 9). Boundaries, while narrativized as impermeable and fixed, are in fact "transportable" (DeCerteau 129). Maps and their corresponding boundaries are human constructs, and therefore "it is only ambivalently that the limit circumscribes in this space" (DeCerteau 129). In other words, maps place artificial boundaries on a "properly unrepresentable totality" (Jameson).

Deconstructing the binary of "in/out" on the map enables us to "[follow] the variations of encounters between,"- what DeCerteau describes as "bridges of ambiguity" (128-129). Wenger, too, aptly points out that communities of practice do not occur in isolation but are a part of a much more complex system, an "articulation with the rest of the world" (103). It is these "encounters between" that correlates what once was called a map to the constellation. According to Jameson, distance has been "abolished" in postmodernism. "We are submerged… suffused volumes…our postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and…incapable of distantiation" (Jameson). This is what Donna Haraway meant when she wrote, "the cyborg [is] a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality," a metaphor against the notion of "abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency" (118). A constellation does not care for distance; it cares about the relationship between.

DeCerteau eloquently wrote, "what the map cuts up, stories cut across" (DeCerteau 129). Unlike maps with their arbitrary but impermeable boundaries, stories create a constellation. However, some stories can still draw boundaries. Because grand narratives are stories that attempt to account for all the features of a thing, they must create boundaries – what either is or is not contained within the totality (Berlin qtd in McKinney 11). In a postmodern world where we understand the "unrepresentable

totality," grand narratives are an impossibility. And yet, the belief, attempt, and adherence to them persists, often – and most dangerously – beneath our level of awareness.

Becoming aware is a function of rhetoric. Cultural rhetorics scholar Madhu Narayan describes this as asking "what is this story doing?" (qtd. in Powell 390, 2012). In asking this question, Madhu writes, we can step back and gain distance. We are no longer mapping our bodies but, bereft of meaningful boundaries between body and space, we story them ourselves, simultaneously acknowledging the constellation and providing us distance to see it all at once. "This stepping back is hard," continues Madhu, "it takes a great deal of courage to stand outside our own narratives for a moment and ask, 'What is this story about? What is it doing to those who may read it?' Stories have an effect. They are real. They matter" (qtd. in Powell 390, 2012). Through story, we can be bodies beyond our skin, standing both inside and outside of our stories. However, a constellation is not one body's relationship, but countless other relationships.

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen
> in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding
> your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home.
> Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up
> and listen (Tafoya qtd. in Wilson 2).

There are stories inside and between – turtles all the way down. The stories I have told here, while constructed in good faith to be accurate and complete, are nevertheless incomplete – the side-effect of boundlessness. There are no maps. It takes getting lost and being uncomfortable. Stories, writes Powell and Bratta, "operate in multi-dimensional ways…[they are] theories and practices of communities."

When we rely on boundaries, we miss these dimensions – the constellations of an erratic orbit we all dance in and around. Yet, we also miss the multi-dimensions within ourselves, the boundaries that tell us that identities can be tucked away or separated, that emotions can be suppressed; or even that our labor can be delineated and clearly marked and quantified. What these stories I have told here highlight is that emotions, identities, and labor are constellated together in so many overlapping Venn diagrams, stitched together a thread at a time through our actions. They have permeable, transportable, fluid boundaries. The UWC administrative spreadsheet from the introduction cannot adequately describe the day-to-day labor of my job, and no chapter in this project can devote itself only to emotion or identity or labor or power - they are all hopelessly entwined. Each chapter underscores the nuanced, context specific ways in which connection manifests and interacts across time, people, circumstances, and experiences to build a community.

These stories resist boundaries. They are wayward. They are counter to the narratives around which we construct our lives. They are difficult to predict and consistently changeable. And in this waywardness, these stories are uncomfortable and complex, and are therefore narrativized as problematic. Indeed, problems have their own grand narrative, along with so much else of our constructed reality, a binary operation between problem/solution. Solutions are good. Problems are bad. Problems need to be fixed, eradicated, and resolved.

Bruner writes that "narrative solves no problems. It simply locates them in such a way as to make them comprehensible" (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 30-31). Stories shape our culture. This is why Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg is so poignant. Cyborgs are

not human, they are not Western, they "would not recognize the Garden of Eden; [are] not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not remember the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection…" (119). In other words, cyborgs are free from the Western ideology of "original unity out of which difference must get produced" (118-119). For Haraway's cyborg politics, just as in Ahmed and Fortier, Powell, Riley Mukavetz, and all the others, unity is not natural, it is a possibility rooted in social relations and based on activity within those relations (Haraway 125). Those activities and social relations, as we have seen in these stories, can build, sustain, and even destroy unity. Difference does not get produced; difference exists as a constant. We all carry with us individual experiences (in the form of identities, emotions, labor, and power) regardless of the present episteme.

In a staff meeting for the writing center, during a workshop on decolonial practices, I was part of a small group discussion about discomfort. The first part of our discussion prompt read: "How is the WC a site of a discomfort?" Because the writing center is a site of relationality, a tangled web of contact zones, discomfort in our center and in our labor is inevitable. When people come together with their varying identities, emotions, labor, and power positions, expecting harmony, safety, and comfort seems foolish and even utopian to consider. And yet, that is exactly what we expect, what we desire, and what we narrativize over and over again when we look to community as the solution to all of our writing center problems.

The second part of our discussion prompt read: "How can discomfort be productive?" One member of my small group, with good intentions, wished for no one to be uncomfortable, equating it to injury. We cannot injure one another in a space designed

to promote agency, deep learning, and individualization. Dixon supports this, writing that "many writing center professionals would argue this uneasiness is unnecessary because writing centers are supposedly safe, conversational, nonhierarchical places" (Dixon). Equating discomfort to injury, however, belies a misconception we often have when we narrativize "safe spaces." The term "safe," however, "fails to acknowledge the impossibility of removing risk from difficult encounters that may arise around controversial issues" (Arao and Clemens qtd. in Hermann). Safe does not allow space for discomfort, and therefore, not only privileges comfort, but erases and marginalizes discomfort. Or, as Dixon writes, "the grand narrative of the writing center as a safe space puts writing center consultants and clients who do not feel safe at fault for feeling as such; for how could someone ever feel uncomfortable in such a decidedly comfy place?" (Dixon).

Rather, Julie Prebel contends, that we must view discomfort as a mode of inquiry. Audre Lorde writes of redefining difference, stating that, "it is not our differences which separate…but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences" (859). When we embrace the grand narrative of community, difference is an interloper. We name it as a threat, a problem, an outsider because our lived reality of community is distorted into a binary. The way out of this distortion is not in domination or incorporation, but through embracing both our "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves," and to submitting ourselves to "disassembly and reassembly," or as Lorde phrases it, we must "scrutinize" and "alter" ourselves and our lives to bring about change (Haraway 124, Lorde 859).

This process of disassembly and reassembly - as I have done writing this thesis - is uncomfortable - it demands a loss of our egocentric selves and a loss of the narratives around which we organize our realities – but it is not an injury. It isn't something to be avoided at all costs. Nor is it always intentional – something someone does to us out of malice or wrong-headed thinking. The way out, is to look in, as I have done in writing these stories. Rather than viewing discomfort as a "problem that must be solved," highlighting these stories "[open] up spaces of discomfort [as] a key part of the meaning-making process…[because] feeling bad often acts as a catalyst for… change" (Dixon). Sometimes discomfort is the necessary byproduct of relationality, and it's something we all need to become accustomed to feeling.

The feelings I describe throughout this thesis were not often feelings I enjoyed experiencing. Yet, without these experiences, I would not be writing this thesis and I would not be reflecting meaningfully about these events. I would not, therefore, arrive at these conclusions. Brene Brown describes this perfectly, writing that

> the most powerful emotions that we experience have very sharp points, like the tip of a thorn. When they prick us, they cause discomfort and even pain. Just the anticipation or fear of these feelings can trigger intolerable vulnerability in us. We know it's coming. For many of us, our first response to vulnerability and pain of these sharp points is not to lean into the discomfort and feel our way through but rather to make it go away (70).

Leaning in and seeing discomfort as productive, as an individual takes a willingness to be vulnerable – I may be wrong. I may, even, need to apologize. It's hard. And I'm an individual in control of this project. Imagine, then, how hard it is for people to follow their leaders into vulnerability.

This kind of leaning in a community of practice takes trust. Business researcher Frances Frei contends that trust can be defined as a triangle, an equitable relationship

between empathy, authenticity, and logic. If any one of these points of the triangle "wobbles" trust is broken – it requires all three. This triangle is remarkably similar to the staircase to agency I highlighted in the introduction: authenticity, vulnerability, and empathy, with vulnerability being replaced by logic. In truth, though, the two are not entirely dissimilar, as I will explain in a moment. This notion of trust and what it allows within our stories is critically important to the work of connection and subsequently community.

In all three chapters of this project, part of the narrative highlights the tension between expressed and suppressed emotion, an uneasy binary between authenticity and the narrative of the stoic, in-control leader, and how suppression plays a crucial role in stymying the development of community rhetoric. In each chapter, we also see a nuanced difference between suppressed emotion and managed emotion. We use emotions as cues in rhetorical situations. If we say something, and someone's body language shifts or their facial expression changes or their breathing alters, we see, without any verbal communication, that what we have said has affected the other person. In environments where we are told to create "safety," however, what we encourage is emotional suppression. Emotions are unpredictable and circulatory which makes them uncomfortable and unsafe. In contact zones, it's become standard practice to attempt to create an environment of neutral emotion – one where we can say, "that makes me angry," but dare not show it with our bodies. But Pratt's original portrayal of a contact zone was "dynamic, heterogeneous, and volatile. Bewilderment and suffering as well as revelation and exhilaration are experienced by everyone, teacher and students, at different moments. No one is excluded, no one is safe" (Pratt qtd. in Lu 456). Managing emotions

requires *aboutness,* which demands contact because emotions are circular and sticky. We cannot simply say "we are angry," we must be able to feel it and work through that feeling to make the anger productive. The anger is a story and it's *doing* something within the contact zone. When we try to stifle emotion, suppressing it to make environments safe, we fail to see how we amplify what we're feeling, circulating it around so that it sticks – to people, things, and contexts, until we routinely refer to events like "The Sexism Staff Meeting," with shudders and sighs[20].

When emotions are suppressed and so-called negative emotive emotions stick and circulate, we lose our ability to give and receive empathy. We feel bad about what we're experiencing, so if what we're experiencing is a staff meeting or a new leadership structure, then we must be feeling this way because that was the intent. Someone must have wanted us to feel this way, or at the very least, made us feel this way through their inconsideration of us. This is why, in the aftermath of The Sexism Staff Meeting, I fielded several comments ranging from "betrayal" to the belief that Marilee and I had "passive-aggressively" dealt with The Problem instead of talking to The Problem individually.

And finally, when we get hurt but can't express it and lose empathy, we lose logic. Frei differentializes between sound logic and the impression of logic. For many leaders, it isn't the rigor of our logic that is questionable (and if it is, that is well beyond the purview of this paper), rather it's our ability to communicate our logic that calls it into question. Like Spock on the original Star Trek, we often think that communicating logic requires us to suppress our emotions. However, Simon Sinek researched the

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[20] Andrea Riley Mukavetz offers an excellent article on the relationality of anger entitled "On Working from or With Anger: or How I Learned to Listen to My Relatives and Practice All Our Relations" for *Enculturation* (April 20, 2016).

communication strategies of some of the world's most successful corporate leaders. What

he found was that most communication occurs from "the outside in," moving from "the

clearest thing to the fuzziest thing" (Sinek). The most effective leaders, Sinek argues,

communicate from "the inside out." He explains:

> our limbic brains are responsible for all of our feelings, like trust and
> loyalty. It's also responsible for all human behavior, all decision-making,
> and it has no capacity for language. In other words, when we communicate
> from the outside in, yes, people can understand vast amounts of
> complicated information like features and benefits and facts and figures. It
> just doesn't drive behavior (Sinek).

Trust is an emotion, but like all other emotions, it isn't produced as a singular,

insular event. Like community, trust is an activity – it is something we do with

our bodies and our language. How we feel about something determines whether

we will reconsider it and make a substantial change.

Furthermore, Kathleen Quinlan writes that "transformative learning is something

more than just the gradual accumulation of knowledge or even assimilating new

knowledge or skills...rather, it involves changing as a person" (107). With all of the

emphasis on community and connection as activities, it can be easy to misconstrue that

activity as entirely external – it is our actions, behaviors, the things we do in and around

one another. However, because community is intrinsically tied to our emotions and

identities, this activity of *doing* also requires the internal component of *being*.

Philanthropist and explorer Leon Logothetis writes, "too often in life…we're so busy

doing that we don't have time to stop and question how we are *being* in life" (Logothetis

92, emphasis original).

This *being-ness* is a listening, an attention to the way we are as individuals in the

world; it is the practice of doing cultural rhetorics. Momaday writes, "we have no being

beyond our stories" (Momaday qtd. in Powell et al. 389). We are individuals, explained to ourselves and others through the stories we tell (Brockmeier and Carbaugh). We constitute our identities, our emotions, and our positions of power within our communities, through the stories we tell, the stories we do not, and the stories we silence or disrupt. Alice Gillam asserts that "overidentification," that is attending to one identity more than another in our stories "can lead to the kind of epistemic and ethical 'lean' that can be 'blinding'" (119). This blinding can erase differences and draw boundaries around and within the community that ultimately can create fractures, strains, and separations. And yet *being* is a risk. It's vulnerable. It requires authenticity. And as such, reflecting on how you show-up and *be* in a context, a connection, or a community, is a critical method of leadership.

Knowing when and what and how to *be* is something these stories narrate repeatedly. Authenticity is a responsibility of power and authority, but it still requires emotional management. Leaders should, according to Frei, "set the conditions that not only make it safe for us to be authentic but make it welcome, make it celebrated" (Frei). And yet, leaders are also sensitive to the circulation of their emotions; we want to project confidence, strength, and positivity. We want to inspire because, as Sinek says, "there are leaders and there are those who lead. Leaders hold a position of power or authority, but those who lead inspire us…we follow those who lead, not because we have to, but because we want to. We follow those who lead, not for them, but for ourselves" (Sinek). A leader, in this sense, is not "telling" or "policing policies" but "brings people together and enables the community to find its direction" (Wenger et al. 43). A leader leads within or in front of, not from behind.

The fact that the consultants and the consultants who confided in them in Chapter 1 did not feel inspired by the leadership of the LT and therefore lost trust in our good intentions lies at the heart of this project, with the after-effects of that breakdown in trust carrying through to the following Fall semester. As Wenger et al. underscore, in a community of practice the way to claim power is by making knowledge (43). It is this motivation that underscores the need consultants and administrators have to react to events that trouble us, even when we don't always choose to do it in productive ways. In addition to the research being conducted by these two consultants, that same spring semester, our writing center supported nineteen undergraduate consultants who got accepted and presented at the ECWCA conference. While many of these presentations were tied directly to consulting or committee-related projects, some presentations stepped outside of the purview of those practices – they were "personal projects," a phrase that got bantered back and forth in an ongoing argument between administration and consultants over how paid non-consulting hours (project time) gets assigned and authorized, and who is authorized to have it. Ultimately, the struggle over the LT survey was a struggle for power by two groups who felt powerless. People who do not feel as if they have power do not act with agency in a community – they cannot shape and sustain the community practices. Therefore, the only available option is to leave the community or negate the community and build a new one in its place. In other words, it is not malice that made these stories difficult; it was love. People who are not invested in the community would not get angry – they would simply leave. Recognizing discomfort and tension as productive contributions to community is integral to the growing and sustaining of community.

This idea of growth towards a destination is the final thing boundaries temptingly enable – they allow us to mark the steps, the stages of our journeys which are now complete. We can trace a tangible beginning, middle, and end point. We can see how far we've come, track our change. We can create for ourselves the notion of progress. Steven Pinker states, "Progress is not some mystical force or dialectic lifting us ever higher…it's the result of human efforts" (Pinker). Like community, people *doing* create progress. It isn't something we achieve. It is not an exclamation point. It's a process of activity, a way into, through, and out of. Unlike our tidy maps, however, progress is not linear it is "catastrophe and progress all together" (Jameson).

These "catastrophes" reflect the leaps of faith we all make, whether in trusting one another through discomfort, or trusting a process that is long and difficult: "just as with innovation, failure needs to be rewarded and processed; people (administrators, directors, tutors, and students), must be allowed to fall on their faces and to learn from those experiences" (Denny 67). The frustration and pressures the two consultants faced trying to implement the LT survey that spring semester is rooted in this narrative of how progress looks, acts, and feels. In a community when trust is broken and discomfort has become the norm, it seems unlikely that the notion that progress is encoded in "catastrophes," as Jameson terms it, will be accepted. Thus these consultants' need to "perform progress" for the rest of the consultants should have been a signifier to all of us that the community needed thoughtful attention to connection – to the emotions and identities and the power between. The fact, then, that I chose to restrict the conversation they wanted to have and opted to repackage it in the form of this survey was another form of emotional suppression. My own good intentions – to use the survey to foreground

emotions prior to a more thoughtful discussion – did not account for the emotional labor required to author the survey to begin with. The two consultants also had emotions, and therefore could not author an objective survey, dooming the project before it even got started.

And yet, progress has come out of this "failure." Failure is encoded in success and progress. The remaining consultant (who did not graduate) and I, along with Marilee and two others, are working on a project about the events in Chapter 1 (and the reverberating residues threaded throughout the other chapters) together. This project, similar to this thesis, is a way to reflect on our positionalities in and to writing centers and one another, and to use those reflections to shape our stories and the story of our community. Communities, therefore, will not change meaningfully without this element of risk. Our community must be an environment where risks are not only safe, but encouraged, and where they can be reflected upon (Denny 67).

Discomfort, failure, risk – all of these are necessary to meaningful change, and yet these are all narrativized as "bad" and "to be avoided." Yet, Wenger et al. understand that successful communities "acknowledge their weaknesses and leverage this awareness to spur their growth and reaffirm their long-term vitality" (Wenger et al. 150). Indeed, this authenticity and vulnerability is exactly the same as the individual authenticity and vulnerability necessary for generating connection and trust.

This emphasis on writing centers as sites of relationality, however, feels less defined and clear and bound on our university maps. As administrators we should be able to identify and solve problems, communicating comfort and security to our colleagues, our stakeholders, our writers, and our consultants. It is much more difficult to see the

complexity of the systems of relations inherent in any human interaction. Jameson

remarks that "a pedagogical . . . culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with

some new heightened sense of place in the global system…will necessarily have to

respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new

forms in order to do it justice" (Jameson). These "radical new forms" comprise the

constellations of identities, emotions, and communities we have seen pressing and

pushing throughout this project. These constellations require trust, and in that trust

discomfort, an understanding that community "is not a state to be achieved, but

a…process of making, a practice that is always intersectional, negotiated, nuanced, and

changing; a practice that can't be taken for granted" (Powell & Bratta).

     Allowing space for discomfort and disruption in our communities means that "we

must change ideas about how we learn; rather than fearing conflict, we have to find ways

to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth" (McKinney 27). And we must learn to

let go of our notions of success and progress. We need to recognize "that meaningful

change is next to impossible to see" (Gellar et al. 11). Progress does not mean that

everything gets better for everyone everywhere all of the time (Pinker).

     In this realization and acceptance, in this new story we're telling, community does

not mean everyone is safe, or happy, or even equal – though that's certainly what we'd

like. When we don't make space for difference and inequality within our stories, we

suppress the kinds of difficult inquiries and discussions that lead to community shaping

and changing. In this way, write Ahmed and Fortier, "we might think about communities

as never fully achieved…even when 'we' already inhabit them. We can therefore think of

community as a site lived through the *desire for* community rather than a site that fulfils

and 'resolves' that desire "(257). A community is knit together both from the *doing* and the *being* of its members. A community is resilient in the face of discomfort and mess when its members "hold the belief that they can do something that will help them to manage their feelings, they have social support, [and] they are connected with others" (Brown 64).

It's within our nature to label something, or someone, a problem. If it's someone or something it can be fixed, eradicated, resolved. It's much harder to see the *wholeness* of the system - this community we all inhabit, bumping, pressing, and pushing against one another in an erratic orbit. The untidiness, the lack of resolution, and sheer continuity that *wholeness* brings can be hard to bear. Wenger et al. warn that "communities of practice are not havens of peace of unbounded goodwill. They reflect all the strengths, weaknesses, and complex interrelationships of their human members" (144).

Community is not its "elements" or its location, but an activity, or as Ahmed and Fortier describe "the need to consider the 'we' as an effect of a complex set of social practices" (254). Malea Powell, contends that communities "aren't pre-built structures that one simply enters and exists. They are living organisms, are literally constructed from the participations and care (or lack thereof) of each and every member…" (Powell 2018). We are people who *do* things, and it's the *doing* that matters more than the things. Communities are rhetorically constructed by the activity of its people. People are not problems. People are who they are. We are not all planets in a solar system of the writing center. We are, each of us, solar systems unto ourselves. We are systems with a variety of cosmic forces within and without pulling and pushing us in and around. We are travelling

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through the universe, not static, not held in place, some of us faster, some of us slower, and some of us colliding with others, while others still move further and further away. And like a photograph of the universe, only a small fraction of the whole picture is ever available to us at any one time. We map the center as a space inhabited by order, by systems of people in tidy performances, distilling and diluting in sacrifice to hegemony, convinced there is no other way to embody community. But there is a way. Beyond the graveyard of so many nouns and adjectives lie the verbs; the actions, the behaviors, the emotions – the things we do in and around one another – that knit us together or tear us apart.

The second law of thermodynamics says, according to astrophysicist Sean Carroll, "that entropy increases in the universe" (Carroll). Entropy is "randomness" and "disorder" (Carroll). At the time of the Big Bang, our universe was in a state of low entropy, where things were very ordered and less random. Yet, Carroll states that we know entropy increases "because there are many more ways to be high entropy than to be low entropy" (Carroll). Astrophysicists have done the math and the universe is not only expanding, but it is accelerating – moving further and faster away from a state of order (Carroll). In other words, as we grow, we grow apart, which makes a mess. The fact that we are all constellated together as metaphorical solar systems contained within this partially mapped universe that we know now is probably one of an infinite number of universes, both illustrates the utter complexity that these stories have tried highlight, but also the complete and sheer futility of continuing to narrativize order and comfort. If the state of existence of our universe is disorder, how in the world do we think we can bring order to our writing centers?

These stories are an answer to Gellar et al.'s question posed in the introduction, "How do we make one another matter?" Shawn Achor, positive psychologist, explains that it isn't necessarily reality that shapes us, "but the lens through which your brain views the world that shapes your reality" (Achor). By complicating the writing center grand narrative, I "humanize" the space and "attend to the possibility of making peace with or being in the room with'…the mess' (Dixon). Narrating and revising our stories is central to progress – as a slow but meaningful wandering towards understanding, as "a narrative that allows for multiple interpretations, thick descriptions, and even dissonance" (McKinney 34). Every story is incomplete. There is no map we can draw. Only when we tell and listen to the stories we write together can we begin to understand; the threads we're all weaving together into the tapestry – our community, stitched together through shared practice; by *doing together.* A process that will never end, as each person comes and goes and tears out stitches and makes new ones. The community will never be resolved, and in the ambiguity of boundlessness, comes a new way of seeing the world: not measured in maps, but through constellations.

Less than a week after our return from Arizona, my husband authored a eulogy for his father. The last line reads, "But I'm okay not being okay and I hope I stay not okay and just understand." This is, as Bhabha would write, "dwelling in the beyond" (770). In a world where it is okay to be not okay, in a world where we just want to understand, we make it feel somehow better to be not okay. Being not okay is no longer an emotion to fix, but a place of dwelling that has deep and instructive meaning. And when we dwell, we reflect, and in that reflection, connect out. We stitch together the

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ways we're not okay with the ways in which we are and the ways in which others both

are and are not. We complicate the tapestry together, practicing *doing* and *being*, making

practice the meaning; its own end. This is what I have done in weaving and writing this

story.

Afterword: Limitations, Further Study, and the Pros and Cons of Transfer

In the introduction I referenced the "turtles all the way down," of cultural ethnography. Because we are postmodernists engaged in investigating what our grand narratives – our realities – leave out, this thesis could go on and on, deepening as we widen the lens of view. Like a photograph of the universe, our stories will always be incomplete because the view is incomplete: we either can't see it all at once ever, or because we are trying to photograph a thing in constant motion. This is what I mean by "always another turtle." Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to show that a writing center is a community within a larger institutional community; as I have also shown that the IUPUI Writing Center is its own localized context that is separate and distinct in meaningful ways from other writing centers. This is because 1) writing centers are communities of practice – they are systems of culture but 2) people are the engines of the community, which necessarily makes any community restricted to that particular time and place with those particular people. These stories would likely not happen the same ways twice because people and time will have altered. Because of this dual emphasis on narrowing and widening – the hourglass of the introduction – there are avenues of exploration left unaddressed or tacitly gestured to: how did university stakeholders respond to the focus group report and annual report for that year? What structural changes did we make to the writing center following that year? What changes do we plan to implement going forward now that I graduate? How do other writing centers respond to these stories? What about other communities of practice? Because this is a thesis project focused on using my personal experiences to theorize a cultural rhetorics practice for my writing center administration, I restricted the discussion and analysis to the local

contexts as much as possible, even while gesturing to broader implications in places in the introduction and, at times, throughout the project. Simply put, a longer, more in-depth discussion of some of these questions are, at the very least, another chapter. That's the thing about dismantling grand narratives, there's always a new turtle.

In the introduction, I also admitted that I am using a lot of large-scale theories and frames but am asking that you pass this information through the finite funnel of this writing center, and more specifically, my lived experience of this writing center. Some of you may ask, then, "what makes this specific to writing centers?" Because I am focused largely on administration or moves towards leadership, a common reader-response is to relate these experiences to any manager of any other professional community. I see this critique as both a positive and a negative. The hourglass structure of the literature review makes this resonance across communities possible, and so in that instance, I've achieved my goal of transfer. However, I would caution that local contexts are always highly variable; another writing center will not experience these circumstances and practices similarly, let alone another kind of community. A writing center, at its core, is distinct from other management situations: we manage a thing on constantly shifting ground. Malenczyk et al, write that "we have often gone where students have led us," with a praxis centered around students as knowledge makers (70). A writing center by necessity, then, has staff that are novices in our field yet asked to perform as autonomous experts who, in meaningful ways, make and shape the discipline and the community. In addition, because of the nature of being a student, a writing center's staff turns over at an incredibly high rate, every two or three years (which means the things we make and shape together can often have a short shelf-life). So even while we may have had that

workshop on allyship, the students two years from now will not remember it. This is why leading in a writing center cannot just be about structures but must also be about the relationships made – we show and then try to schedule time to tell.

A writing center's emphasis on student agency, both in the writers we support and within our communities, make management pathways unclear, as these stories show: is this a learning situation? A professional development problem? A "personal and private" issue that is none of my business but has somehow bled into the writing center, impacting the community? Where's the line, anyway? And that's just the relationality between community members. The itinerant members of our community – the writers who come in for support – also are highly complex variables who bring in writing of all shapes, writing a consultant cannot even begin to support until some level of relationship has been formed with the writer in the session.

Writing is personal and authentic and bringing writing to another person for "judgment" is vulnerable. Writers bring in "academic" writing that is full of disclosures of private and potentially harmful information all the time. A novice consultant must navigate a slew of variables when a writer discloses – Do I point this person to resources that could help them? Will that make them feel marginalized and othered? Do I disclose my own struggles with this issue to establish empathy? Do I ask them if they are ok? Do I ignore it – maybe this person doesn't want to talk about it with me? Am I ok? Is this bothering me? Do I feel like I can work with this writer? Or do I need help? All of these questions are difficult for trained mental health professionals, let alone a nineteen-year old undergraduate student in their first semester working at the writing center.

As I've reiterated again and again in this thesis, however, consulting is just the tip of the iceberg of the writing center. In the midsemester reflections Marilee and I ask the consultants to write, when they respond to the prompt "What is a moment in the Center from this semester that you will remember fondly?" more often than not, those responses favor times spent with co-workers while working. The social nature of the writing center extends beyond the relationship between consultant and writer, but, as I've stated previously, between all of the writing center's relationships – whether personal, professional, institutional, or systemic. The tension of a writing center as a professional but learning environment and a professional but social space will always make managing it volatile and unpredictable. The unique relationship of partial and competing identities, high emotional labor, and fostered power towards the learners make a writing center a highly context-specific space dependent upon the work of relationality.

Another common reader-response is something akin to, "Yes, but tell me *how*." How do we practice relationality? How do we foster connection across discomfort? How do we apply any of this to our communities? The answer to those questions is why I tell stories. Again, everything in this thesis is a variable except for the fact that a writing center is a variable space. We are all forces in the universe constantly in motion, moving away and towards one another in sometimes violent displays because of the laws of thermodynamics. People are complex variables, each with their own variable identities and emotions, and power dynamics shift and change as identities and emotions and people and places shift. *How* to do any of this is rather unsatisfyingly non-specific: practice cultural rhetorics. Work to constellate and build bridges, show-up and *do* and *be* and *see* in a space, place, community, or context; be a weaver.

Robert Sapolsky, in discussing empathy activation, answers the question similarly:

> Yes, you don't act because someone else's pain is so painful – that's a scenario that begs you to flee instead. But the detachment that should be aimed for doesn't represent choosing a 'cognitive' approach to doing good over an 'affective' one. Instead, it's the case of things that have long since become implicit and automatic – being potty trained; riding a bike; telling the truth; helping someone in need (552).

In other words, cultural rhetorics is a practice and an orientation; it is something that we can start doing at any time, and something that we can get better at the more we do it. It is part of my job as a writing center administrator to set systems and structures that will help the community, which is why the IUPUI Writing Center has a committee structure led by students, encourages cross-committee and collaborative research and making, hosts events such as *Difficult Conversations* and *Kindness Week,* requires professional development, offers community-building events such as *Art for the Center* and *Game Nights*, and attends conferences together. These systems and structures will likely be something I never stop tweaking and trying to get right, but at the end of it, the people make the systems and the structures. Showing up and modeling cultural rhetorics over and over and over again (because the people will change) is the *how* of all of this. Recursion is a way of life.

Because of this lack of specificity of *how* I think it is important that other people add to this practice by adding their stories to the tapestry. Because of the nature of a thesis project, the focus is limited to my stories – my lived experiences. This thesis is already being transitioned into a collaborative project with Marilee, because she is a main character and her experiences could add a lot to these stories. In addition, the project I am

trying to work through with the undergraduate consultant mentioned throughout also utilizes some of these stories within a large multi-voiced project circling around and through a group. Because cultural rhetorics is a practice and an orientation – a way to *do* and *be* - the activity of that project accomplishes both: I am both *doing* cultural rhetorics and modeling it for these consultants. This is what my primary function as an administrator is. I think, as a discipline, writing center scholarship has begun to lean more and more towards story as theory (I'm thinking especially of Elise Dixon and Neisha Anne-Greene right now, though there certainly are many more). The more voices that engage with this practice within our discipline, the more richly we will constitute the constellations – the more apparent and practiced the *practice* will become.

COMMITTEES

Consult the following coordinators or committee members for information or questions related to these areas of the UWC:

Committees

The committees are permanent fixtures of the UWC. Membership is consistent in that consultants serve on only one committee throughout their time at the UWC (but they might collaborate with other committees). The committees themselves are somewhat fluid and respond to current needs of the UWC, English Department, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, etc. Specific work of each committee might shift and grow over the years, but the committees are here to provide stability to the UWC and provide a way to extend our programming and share opportunities (and responsibilities) with the entire staff.

The UWC Leadership Team serves as a resource for all committees, though each consultant is only responsible for work in one committee. Individuals should work diligently on committee-related projects (as well as other supported projects) during open appointments and time designated as "project time." Project time should account for approximately 10-20% of your weekly hours.

The purpose of the committees is to:
- Promote a consistent, positive, and accurate image of the UWC across campus
- Create and maintain stable and sustainable UWC programming
- Expand UWC programming beyond one-to-one consulting
- Encourage research in writing, pedagogy, curriculum, culture, etc. in the UWC
- Enhance professional development opportunities for UWC staff

All committees will:
- Include at least three members and should include a fairly even mix of new and experienced consultants
- Prioritize goals and create plans for each semester and report on progress mid-semester and the end of the semester

Committee Coordinators are encouraged to delegate specific projects to particular consultants. Committee members might complete projects or portions of projects in small groups or individually and then bring that work back to the larger committee before presenting it to the Assistant Director and Director (and later the entire UWC staff).

Committee members are highly encouraged to meet with their coordinator and relevant Leadership Team members as necessary. These meetings can occur during office hours or set in advance by appointment.

Digital Resources and Online Consulting
This committee is responsible for the development and maintenance of our digital and material resources and our online consulting system.
- Consult with technology—research and promote ways we can incorporate technology into our face-to-face consulting practices in meaningful ways
- Maintain a Web presence
- Manage our electronic/digital resources
- Update handbook as needed (and review every 2 years)

- Review our current resources (handouts, etc.) and update or retire as necessary
- Develop needed resources (but don't recreate the wheel—no need to create resources that are made redundant by the Purdue OWL or other outside resources)
- Look into resources we might want to acquire
- Create protocols for managing and maintaining resources (books, technology) we already have
- Organize electronic supplies and technological space (with input of entire community)
- Develop training for online consulting for our consultants
- Research how online consulting happens at other WCs
- Develop plans for how to enable more online consultations at IUPUI (grant writing for more tech, more space, etc.)
- Research online consulting techniques and apply them to our practices

Language and Cultural Diversity

This committee is responsible for ensuring continued training for working with multilingual writers and for developing and maintaining relationships with programs that enroll large numbers of multilingual students (such as the EAP Program).

- Develop programming that supports cultural competencies and an environment of inclusion at the UWC
- Develop programming that provides consultants with additional ESL training and resources
- Conduct research that informs consultants about techniques and strategies for writing center pedagogies that support language diversity and multiple identity positions
- Learn about other units on campus that support students so that we can educate our staff about other resources to tell students about, such as Adaptive Educational Services, Program of Intensive English, English for Academic Purposes, ESL Tutoring Center, Office of International Affairs, CAPS, Student Advocacy, and the Multicultural Center.

WAC

This committee is responsible for WAC-supported outreach to the larger IUPUI community with the aim of promoting the UWC as a safe space for collaboration and writing development. In addition, this committee is responsible for developing, maintaining, and promoting UWC workshops on academic writing to be given in-Center and in classrooms for writing-intensive assignments and courses.

- Promote and Support UWC Values that accurately represent our work and campus community via social media, workshops, and events
- Develop and Promote interactive in-class and in-center workshops to offer the campus community
- Develop and Promote in-center social activities and workshop training for UWC staff members
- Promote visibility across campus via tabling, hosting, and presenting events and workshops
- Develop welcoming programming that showcases the UWC as a welcome and inviting space for the purpose of entertainment and promotion of UWC values.
- Act as an institutional memory of the UWC's practices through archive preservation

Research and Assessment

This committee works with Marilee to develop and carry out appropriate assessments of the UWC. This committee also works to promote research in the UWC.

- Develop assessment instruments that will help the UWC determine if we are providing consistent programming that embraces current UWC theory and practice (e.g. consultant self-assessment, extended writer survey, session observations, administration focus groups)
- Review and potentially revise assessment instruments we already use—CRF, client survey, etc.
- Promote research in and alongside the University Writing Center
- Support consultants presenting about WC work at conferences (ECWCA, IWCA, IWAC, Watson, CCCC)
- Encourage publication about WC work (WLN, Praxis, WCJ)
- Identify gaps in consultant training
- Identify professional development opportunities for staff

Appendix B
The University Writing Center
Assistant Director Responsibilities

Under the direction of The University Writing Center Director, the Assistant Director will have primary responsibility for managing the daily operations of the Writing Center. Primary duties include setting goals, developing and assessing programming, overseeing the schedule, providing professional development, supervising consulting, participating in campus outreach, and facilitating writing center scholarship across three locations (two physical, one online). Candidate should have an MA in English or Rhetoric & Composition and writing center experience.

This position requires an administrative commitment of 20 hours per week in the UWC, a teaching commitment of 10 hours per week in the UWC, and a 1/1 teaching load in the Writing Program. This is a 10-month position with a stipend for summer duties.

Supervise and Mentor Consultants: The Assistant Director has primary responsibility for consultant oversight during regular day-to-day operations and for following-up with consultants about ongoing projects during their regular hours.
- Give advice and support to consultants
- When consultants do not have appointments, find other projects or tasks for them to complete
- Answer questions, explain procedures, support consulting
- Generate team building ideas and implement
- Address concerns about tardiness and other policy violations with consultants
- Assist Director with evaluation of staff
- Supervise Consultant Projects:
  o Creating instructions, objectives, outcomes, expectations and descriptions for downtime tasks and projects
  o Assigning consultants to projects – following through on expectations and progress
  o Follow up with project leaders on tasks and teach them how to complete their responsibilities.

Supervise Committees: The Assistant Director works with Marilee to supervise long-term committee projects and operations. They supported by 4 (undergraduate) Committee Coordinators and 1-2 Graduate Teaching/Research Assistants in this work:
- Meet biweekly with the UWC Leadership Team—the Graduate Student Administrators, Office Coordinator, and Committee Coordinators—to share information about WC operations and prepare for biweekly professional development workshops.
- Support Digital Resources and Online Consulting Committee Coordinator with the following
  o Handbook
    ▪ Keep *The UWC Consultant Handbook* up to date and work with staff to ensure they understand policies and where to look them up

- - - Remind consultants of policies and direct to *The UWC Consultant Handbook*
  - o Online Consulting
    - - Create and update training workshops and tutorials for consulting online
    - - Create and update training workshops for consulting with technology
    - - Collaborate with units on campus that support online learning and distance learning
  - o Website
    - - Update website design and content
    - - Coordinate with appropriate dept/offices about appropriate changes/updates to website
  - o Handouts
    - - Revise existing UWC handouts
    - - Design and create handouts for the center as necessary
    - - Collect data and information for handouts
    - - Delegating resource development tasks to committee members
  - o Blog
    - - Create Blog Assignment instructions for Consultants
    - - Add all content on pages
    - - Post on a weekly basis
- Support Language and Cultural Diversity Committee Coordinator with the following
  - o Create and update training workshops on working with diverse populations
  - o Develop avenues for constructive conversation about cultural difference in the UWC and IUPUI
  - o Collaborate with units on campus that serve linguistically diverse populations (e.g. EAP Program, the Office of International Affairs, the Program in Intensive English)
- Support Outreach Committee Coordinator with the following
  - o Coordinate "tabling" events
  - o Post events on the Den, Facebook, and other relevant sites
  - o Create new promotional PowerPoint presentations, videos, etc.
  - o Post on Facebook regularly
  - o Facilitate Open House and other events
    - - Design and create promotional materials
    - - Get all promotional materials printed, distributed, and posted
    - - Plan, theme, develop activities for open house event each fall and spring
    - - Purchase refreshments and decorations
    - - Schedule tabling for promotion of open house
- Support Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator with the following
  - o Update workshop materials
  - o Train consultants to present at various orientation and welcome events

- Coordinate Visits and Visit classes for Writing Center introduction, writing tips and other workshops
- Coordinate presentations/projects with other departments and generate materials for these presentations
- Coordinate requests for and maintain records of visits the UWC consultants present or facilitate workshops in the classroom--spreadsheet with times, dates, locations, courses/audiences, instructors/requestors, consultant facilitator(s), and any pertinent notes
- Train consultants on classroom visit policies and in-class writing center presentations and workshops
- Undergraduate Workshop Series (in development)
  - Develop theme, name, dates
  - Create promotional materials, print and post
  - Send email announcements to students and faculty
  - Create interactive PowerPoint/Prezi presentations
  - Purchase refreshments

Office Maintenance and Support: The Assistant Director has primary responsibility for managing the UWC schedule, supporting payroll, and ensuring all necessary supplies are available. They are supported in this role by 1 (undergraduate) Office Coordinator:
- Create WC schedules at the beginning of each semester
- Rescheduling consultants due to illness, conflicts or external circumstances
- Answer schedule-related questions from staff and clients
- Support SLA Administrative Staff with employment paperwork for consultants
- Create folders for all training and employment paperwork for each consultant (UWC contract, etc.)
- Support SLA Administrative Staff with biweekly payroll for student consultants
- Support Marilee with general UWC questions and concerns voiced by faculty and students
- Support Marilee with accommodations for students registered with Adaptive Educational Services
- Schedule and attend appointments with facilities (lighting, keys, furniture arrangement, etc), printing services (posters, flyers), campus safety, etc. as necessary
- Keep track of WC supplies and needs, sending Director lists of supplies to purchase

Professional Development for Consultants: The Assistant Director works with Marilee and consultants in leadership roles on developing fall and spring orientation programming and biweekly professional development workshops and staff meeting programming. The Assistant Director may teach *W397: Writing Center Theory and Practice*, which is also the writing center education course. Marilee teaches it every fall; the Assistant Director may occasionally teach it in the spring.
- Teaches W397 on occasion (this will be part of Assistant Director's 2/2 teaching load and should not limit their ability to fulfill their regular UWC duties)
- Support Director and consultants with leadership roles with planning and facilitating fall and spring orientations for all consultants

- o Designate and train returning consultants to be part of the orientation
- o Prepare agendas and goals for orientation – design all activities
- o Schedule rooms and order refreshments for all orientations
- Work with consultants to create professional development workshops
- Observe returning consultants as part of their on-going training and evaluation

Writing Across the Curriculum and Faculty Support: The Assistant Director will work with Marilee and selected consultants to provide faculty support, particularly in the form of workshops. When workshops are requested for student audience, they should be under the purview of the WAC Committee and conducted by consultants.
- Collaborate with writing program faculty to develop and update workshops for faculty on writing pedagogy
- Facilitate workshops for groups of faculty on writing pedagogy
- Support Marilee in assisting faculty with writing pedagogy questions
- Support Marilee in assisting faculty with questions about UWC programming

Assessment and Writing Center Scholarship: The Assistant Director is expected to engage in the scholarship of Writing Center Studies through participating in regional and national conferences. Writing Center funds are available to support them, and the Assistant Director will work with Marilee to develop their own professional development plan.
- Promote and explain conferences to consultants
- Write proposals and support consultants writing proposals/developing projects
- Create presentations and support development of presentations by consultants
- Attend Conferences and Institutes, especially the East-Central Writing Centers Association (ECWCA) Conference
- Support Director and Research & Assessment Committee with assessment efforts
  - o Observations
  - o Client Surveys
  - o Consultant Self-Assessments
  - o Administration Focus Groups
  - o UWC usage statistics (for consultations, workshops, etc.)
  - o Annual reports

Writing Center Administration: Duties and Expectations

INTERNAL (significant overlap across Director, Assistant Director, and Leadership Team)	EXTERNAL (primarily Director)	TECH and RESOURCES (primarily Assistant Director and Leadership Team)
		Troubleshoot computer problems, software programs, network problems, printer problems, installment of technology, organization and management of technology (printer, headphones, laptop, etc.) and act as a liaison with SLA and UL technology teams
Consultant oversight--on the ground supervision and any necessary intervention, discuss issues of tardiness/absence	Meet with university stakeholders	Create semester schedules for CA and UL. Get available hours from consultants and populate schedule. Manage changing shifts, etc. of staff (particularly in first few weeks of the semester.
Policy abuse concerns--by consultants and writers (supported by Office & Schedule Coordinator and Office & Digital Resource Coordinator)	Represent Center in SLA Represent Center in ENG dept (WCC, W&L, PDC, etc.)	Reschedule consultants (or supervise consultant who does this): taking calls from sick and delayed consultants, finding replacements, telling students
Teach writing center theory and practice course	Represent Center in ENG dept (WCC, W&L, PDC, etc.)	their consultant is late or that their consultant isn't coming
Develop additional training and conduct through semester orientations and biweekly professional development staff meetings.	Represent Center in ECWCA	Manage all aspects of WCOnline: creating scheduling, maintaining schedules, trouble-shooting schedule malfunctions, answering

questions about schedule technology

Contact potential presenters for training sessions
Manage consultant questions and concerns
Evaluate consultants (create materials--expectations, contracts, evaluation forms/narrative prompt, etc.)

ESL training of consultants (supported by Language & Cultural Diversity Committee)

Conduct online consulting training for consultants (supported byDigital Resosurces & Online Consulting Committee)
WAC training for consultants (supported by WAC Committee)

Assessment training for consultants (supported by Research & Assessment Committee)

Represent Center in IWCA

Research and publish about WCs
Promote and guide research in the Center (provide access to published resources, hold research training, mentor consultants)

Collect assessment materials (supported by Research & Assessment Committee)
Write various reports about the UWC to stakeholders; write memos articulating needs for more space, better equipment, more consultants; writing reports on utilization of space, equipment, and consultants

Write and implement strategic plans
Promote visibility of UWC: represent at dept, school, and university events (supported by UWC consultants) and through service opportunities

Manage keys--who has them, getting new ones, etc.
Arrange for facilities-related concerns: cleaning, moving, etc.

Manage displayed information: signage, changing the directory, hours posted, holiday notices, etc.
Serve as webmaster for UWC website: maintenance, revisions, communications with liaisons in SLA (supported by Digital Resources Committee)

Supervise social media updates (by Outreach Committee)
Supervise blog (by Digital Resources Committee)

Inform consultants about university policies regarding space

Observe consultants: for assessment purposes (Research & Assessment Committee); for evaluation purposes (Assistant Director and Director) Oversee UWC committees: Digital Resources, Language & Cultural Diversity, Online Consulting, Outreach, WAC. Meet with committees and ensure committee (and individuals) are on task and supported in their projects.

Recruit UWC consultants

Approve payroll and manage payroll concern: training consultants to use timekeeping system, reminding consultants of timekeeping policies, managing timekeeping and payroll errors

Meet with accreditation committees to negotiate assessment plans

Manage questions from faculty and students about our policies and scheduling system (WCOnline)
Develop policies around UWC resources (Box, Canvas, Google@IU, WCOnline) and train and communicate with staff to follow policies for appropriate use of technology, data management, and basic ability with frequently used digital resources. Troubleshoot as necessary.

Meet regularly with UWC Leadership team (Director, Assistant Director, Coordinators)

Collaborate with other units on campus on writing-related research Work closely with consultants on WC-related research projects on writing proposals, articles, theses, dissertations, or job letters/resumes (representing their WC work); act as PI on research projects involving the UWC

Ensure consultants complete apporpriate university-level training (FERPA, Titile IX, sexual harrassment)

Work with appropriate staff member and consultants for reimbursement of purchases made for UWC (supplies and PD-related expenses)

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Maintain careful records of all programming (supported by appropriate committees)

Send reminders and occasional clarification to staff about staff meetings and training and WC policies

Work with consultants to design consultant t-shirts or WC pens and other promotional items (supported by Outreach Committee)

Write or proof copies of writing center advertisements (supported by UWC consultants)

Manage student employee files

Meet with student groups and faculty who want to know how the writing center can help them, meeting with student groups and faculty who want to know the "secrets" to being good writers in an hour or less

Stay engaged in WC literature (WCJ, ATD, Praxis, WLN, etc.)
Meet with students or faculty who are researching student writers in the writing center, discussing ethical research practices, methodologies, and historical approaches to writing center research
Run for or take on a position on a regional writing center association board, voting in board elections, hosting regional or national writing center conferences, packing up for travel to a city-wide, mini-regional, national, or international meeting with other writing center professionals
Conduct workshops and other programming for the campus community (usually developed

Manage requests for supplies (regular as well as those for special events) and submit orders to appropriate staff member. Track down supplies that were delivered to the wrong office or not delivered at all. Manage the return of equipment that is malfunctioning.
Oversee daily maintenance and care of the space: clean tables, chairs, keyboards; tidying up resources and desk drawers; watering plants

Manage requests from faculty and students for proofreading or ready-made curriculum

Develop outreach and promotional materails (bookmarks, handouts, videos) promoting the UWC

Attend additional tech-related training (data security training, WCMS training, WCOnline town

| | through partnerships with specific programs or departments) (supported by WAC Committee) | hall training, etc.) |
| Be available to answer general questions about WC policies and practices (both those of consultants and those of students and faculty) | Respond to posts from other writing center professionals on WCENTER | Complete travel authorizations and travel reimbursement for staff travel (especially students) pertaining to UWC scholarship (ECWCA conference) and that of the director (IWCA, CCC, CRCON, etc.) |

Appendix C

The University Writing Center
Graduate Student Assistant Director Requirements, Responsibilities, & Application
Guidelines

REQUIREMENTS
Preferred qualifications: Experience as a writing consultant at a university writing center.
Completion of or concurrent enrollment in *W600/W597: Writing Center Theory &
Practice* at time of employment.
Required qualifications: BA and acceptance into IUPUI's English MA program

RESPONSIBILITIES
Student Assistant Directors receive a 20-hour weekly appointment to the University
Writing Center as a Teaching Assistant. Student Assistant Directors are expected to
engage in significant administrative duties and professional development activities that
sustain UWC programming. Administrative duties are shared between two-to-
three Student Assistant Directors. The general breakdown of each week is roughly 5-10
hours of administration/management, 5-10 hours of research/program development, and
10 hours of consulting.

This includes the following expectations
Administration & Management (25% of time, approximately 5 hours per week)
- Oversight of UWC on-the-ground operations during shifts
- Support the work of the Office & Schedule Coordinator
- Support the work of the Office & Digital Resources Coordinator
- Support the work of Committee Coordinators
- Support the work of Consultants
  - Answer questions about policies and procedures
  - Listen to concerns and know when to relate information to the Assistant Director or Director
  - Share consulting strategies
- Support writers with question about UWC policies
  - Train consultants in general UWC policies (i.e. number of appointments allowed per day and per week) and how to respond to writers about our policies on uwc@iupui.edu, on the phone, and in person
  - Respond to writer questions about policies and know when to refer them to Director or Assistant Director
  - Create and maintain collection of template email responses to common writer inquiries
  - Answer writer inquiries on uwc@iupui.edu consistently
- Enforce UWC policies for staff and writers
- Meet with Director and/or Assistant Director in regular biweekly UWC
Leadership Meetings

Research & Program Development (25% of time, approximately 5 hours per week)

- Complete writing center projects
    - o Conduct writing center research (e.g. challenging the WC grand/master narrative, importance of play in learning, strategies for working with ELL writers, importance of vulnerability to successful WC sessions, WC needs assessment, etc.)
    - o Develop writing center curriculum/programming (e.g. online consulting program and training plan, writing group program for graduate students, community writing support, etc.)
    - o Engage in writing center administration (e.g. collect and analyze assessment
        data, work with director to develop policies for addressing tardiness, etc.)

Consulting (50% of time, approximately 10 hours per week)
- Provide one-to-one consulting with student writers of all abilities on writing across the curriculum. Writing consultants assist writers with analysis, research, organization, and development. They model writing and revising strategies and encourage writers to experiment with these strategies. Writing consultants act as sounding boards for writing ideas, and help writers overcome anxieties and build confidence in their writing.
- Support and mentor other consultants
- Answer questions about writing, documentation, resources, research, and Writing Center programming, philosophy, and pedagogy
- Introduce the Writing Center to students by visiting classrooms and taking part in University welcome and orientation events
- Facilitate small group and classroom workshops covering various writing strategies and concerns, including but not limited to peer response, writing process, and citation style
- Participate in a Writing Center Committee responsible for sustaining the quality of Writing Center services: Digital Community & Resources, Language & Cultural Diversity, Online Consulting, Outreach, Research & Assessment, or Writing Across the Curriculum
- Participate in the intellectual community of the Writing Center by furthering knowledge of Writing Center practice and theory through reading and discussion
- Cooperate with all assessment efforts
- Attend regular UWC professional development workshops and meetings

To conduct this work thoroughly, consistently, and productively, Student Assistant Directors should be sure that they have sufficient project time for administrative and research tasks. Each coordinator is expected to utilize 50% of their weekly hours to these duties.

The extra responsibilities and pay associated with this role enable the UWC to function smoothly and are essential to the day-to-day running of the space. Along with contributing to the sustainability of UWC culture and community, your leadership as a Graduate Student Assistant Director should be personally meaningful to you and can

lead to conference presentations, publications, and other professional, scholarly, and personal accomplishments. This position is a particularly good fit for graduate students interested in Rhetoric & Writing, Linguistics, and TESOL and will provide the students in the roles with meaningful experience pertaining to research, teaching, leadership, and management.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

To apply for this role, please submit the following materials to Dr. Marilee Brooks-Gillies at ███████████████

- Cover letter describing the ways you see yourself contributing to the UWC: Discuss committee involvement, programming development ideas, research ideas, and consulting experience. In addition, please indicate the ways taking on this role would support your professional, scholarly, and/or personal goals.
- Consulting or teaching philosophy (1-2 single-spaced pages) indicating the primary value(s) you see as most relevant to writing center work
- Resume/CV with references

Additional information about employment at the IUPUI UWC can be found at http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/uwc/pages/employment/index.php. Please contact Dr. Brooks-Gillies with any questions: ███████████████

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Education

- M.A. in English, Indiana University, earned at IUPUI

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Academic Appointments

- Assistant Director, University Writing Center at IUPUI

Publications

- Hull, Kelin and Marilee Brooks-Gillies "Messy, Uncomfortable, and Essential Emotion Work: Stories of Collaboration and Equity in Writing Center Administration." *Affect and Emotion in the Writing Center* edited by Janine Morris & Kelly Concannon. *Conditionally Accepted for Review.*

Conference Presentations

- Hull, Kelin. "Weaving Waywardness: A Rhetoric of Community for Writing Centers." International Writing Central Association Conference, Columbus, OH, 2019. *Accepted.*

- Hull, Kelin. "Embracing Waywardness: Counter-Narratives of Progress and Community." East Central Writing Center Association Conference. Dayton, OH, 2019.

- Hull, Kelin. "Monsters in the Mirror." with Jason Auckerman, Mike Hughes, and Jennifer Price Mahoney. English Week, Indianapolis, IN, 2018.

- Hull, Kelin. "Stories of Kindness Week: Why Connection Matters." International Writing Center Association Annual Conference." Chicago, IL, 2017.

Awards and Honors

- Travel Fellowship Grant Recipient, IUPUI for East Central Writing Center Association Conference, 2019

- Travel Fellowship Grant Recipient, IUPUI, for International Writing Center Association Conference, 2017

- Internship at the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies, 2018-2019

- Teaching Assistantship for IUPUI University Writing Center 2017-2019

Professional Experience

- Graduate Student Assistant Director, University Writing Center at IUPUI 2017-2018

- Graduate Writing Center Consultant, University Writing Center at IUPUI 2017

- Intern at the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies, 2018-2019

- Undergraduate Writing Center Consultant, University Writing Center at IUPUI 2007-2008

- Teaching Literature Practicum, Science Fiction, 2018.