

SELF-REFLEXIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE AUTHORS: CURATING THIS PIECE (Transcript)

Jenna: So, we write in this piece that participatory curation demands active restraint on the part of participants with more power and then active affirmation of those with less, so that the storytellers get to decide when, if and how to disseminate or make public their collaborative, creative rhetorical works and yet Urmi here we are making the unilateral decision to showcase youth storytellers work in the Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics, an open access but nonetheless pretty academic oriented outlet. How do we feel about this or maybe I'll just toss it to you first Urmi, how do you feel about this?

Urmitapa: This is a really critical question that I think we have to grapple with. I would start off by saying that I feel a sense of discomfort like there is an uneasiness about it, but not necessarily in a negative way that we have to "resolve." In fact, I feel as a decolonial feminist scholar, this kind of discomfort is actually productive and generative. In fact, for me, it reminds us of the really ubiquitous and insidious ways in which neoliberal universities act through us even as we are trying to resist it. If we were to imagine a place where the process of writing this piece for the Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics was in itself a moment of participatory curation, what does that actually entail and what are the kinds of demands that we then place on our community partners? I think those are important questions for us to grapple with.

Jenna: Yes. I really like how you're speaking to the discomfort. As a feminist rhetorician, I feel like if I'm not uncomfortable, I'm probably not doing it right or I'm not really thinking self reflexively, which is part of, for me and I think you, a good practice is to be uncomfortable with this process of creating knowledge with others and then kind of taking what we see as important and showcasing it to other academics that weren't part of that process. It's just uncomfortable. I like this like sitting in the discomfort, but at the same time, we're doing it.

I think one of the things for me is that we're doing it, but we're doing it by modeling the self-reflexive process where we're critiquing some of the moves we made like in vignette one, when we say we were going to leave it at just the brainstorming and let all these very raw emotions just sit. We had to defer to the youth coordinator who seemed to make them more rhetorically effective move to circle us up. So, I think the way that we're going about putting this thing together makes me feel a little bit more right about it, I guess.

I'd also say I do like that the Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics is open access. It allows us to link to something that the youth storytellers already made public, and therein allows readers to critique us, to think about how we're putting this together. Something about that open access outlet makes me feel a little bit better about it as well.

Urmitapa: Right. I would add to that, that the multimodal format is really critical as well. It has allowed us to bring together aspects of the project in ways that would be really difficult to do if we were just doing a linear narrative.

Jenna: I agree. The fact that we can include perspectives from the youth participants, the highlighted call out quotes that we include from them, of them reflecting and theorizing what we did seems very generative and an outlet like this. I also think we both jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the special issue because it's drawing attention to what we argue in this piece is a very power imbued process. It's drawing attention to curation, which we resist this kind of hierarchal understanding of a curator as a manipulator of the arts. The way that the special issue is framed and the way that we're collecting pieces for the special issue or the editors are allows us to really critically interrogate that.

Urmitapa: I think for me, something that's been really important about this project is the way in which we are troubling the way we generate our work and the kinds of claims that we're making. That also seems a very critical part of doing a feminist scholarship, that sort of continually troubling our representations even as we recognize the profoundly political act of representing our findings. So, that sort of troubling feels very important.

To me, it also feels like there is something about holding ourselves accountable and to try to cultivate and exercise a certain kind of honesty. It's hard sometimes not to give into the demand characteristics of social research, producing feel-good narratives about social change. It's so easy to be seduced into replicating those narratives even though we realize how difficult social change is. I think a way in which we have sort of taken on this challenge of writing about participatory curation, but at the same time not being able to quite model it in the piece itself is to sort of, is by the ways in which we are troubling what we are doing.

Jenna: Right. I really like what you're saying here about holding ourselves accountable because it makes me feel as though had we not published anything like to the academic community about what we've done, we're not opening ourselves up to being held accountable for how we did it. Even though we are admittedly framing it in certain ways and mediating people's perceptions of what we did and how we're arranging this piece, we are, I love this, holding ourselves accountable by publishing it to our peers that can now readily critique or contribute or draw upon what we've done.

I also want to jump in on this idea that we can't really model participatory curation through the web text, because I think the web text that we're creating for the Journal of Multimodal Rhetoric is collaborative. You and I come from different disciplines. I think it's collaborative in that you authored some of it. I authored some of it. Then we edited each other's and rewrote each other's, and we're drawing upon and featuring the youth coordinators perspectives and the youth. So, I think it's a collaborative piece that's ethically done. I mean we went through IRB. We make sure we use pseudonyms when appropriate or link to things when appropriate.

I think it's collaborative. I think it's ethical, but it's not participatory in the ways that we are defining participatory curation, because that's about a process. That's about kind of invested collective process where we consciously make sure everybody who's differently positioned has a say in how or whether we're going to disseminate it. That's not what we went through to create this piece. You and I made decisions and collaborated on how to show this process, how to tell the story of this process. Yeah. I just wanted to jump in on that.

Urmitapa: Yeah, I think that's really true. It also makes me sort of think about the ways in which we were altering what we did was also dictated by the institutional review board. Some of the values that you talked about that we are committed to and that participatory action research espouses. Now IRBs are still not responsive to that kind of sharing of power and democratizing of the research process.

Jenna: Uh-hmm (affirmative). So, it would have been an added challenge if we wanted the youth to author this with us kind of a thing? I don't know that they'd be open to it.

Urmitapa: Right. In a way though, what the IRB defines as "research contact" was limited to those 11 sessions. Unfortunately, our IRBs are not in a place where they are more open to thinking about ways in which that collaboration can continue beyond the specifics of the project itself. That it doesn't just have to be about data collection but that we can continue to work together in ways that are not always amenable to these post positivist frameworks or biomedical frameworks.

Jenna: Absolutely, the multi-modality of it, every mode that you engage with a "research participant" is a different level of skepticism. What you're saying makes me think of like, "Okay, and where are you using images and we're using ..." Right now, you and I are talking. If we had done that with participant, that would have been a whole other level of permission to seek and engage in. Unfortunately, the project has ended.

Urmitapa: I know we've talked about it too. I've been reflecting on the ways in which the tensions that we are talking about. They're so integral to this process.

Jenna: Uh-hmm (affirmative).

Urmitapa: I think part of our move really has been to argue that we need to normalize these tensions in some sense, so that our orientation is not to figure out how to resolve those tensions but to recognize and remain with them and really also use those tensions as a way to think about our own affiliations and the alliances that we have, institutional and disciplinary. That despite our progressive politics, we are still anchored in these institutions and there are particular implications. So, part of what I feel that we have done and what we want to push ourselves to do is to engage in a sort of honest and very critical reflexive process about what that means and that there will be tensions and there will be contradictions sometimes.

Jenna: Right. Absolutely. So, we could do the same process with what we're doing here. What is being curated, the story and the process of this digital storytelling project. Who is the curator? Just really honestly self reflexively looking at, well, in an academic outlet authored by you and I, once the project has terminated and the IRB approval has desisted, it's us and this is an institutional practice that we both have to do for as tenure track faculty or tenured faculty. I like the idea that we have to sit with these tensions, be transparent about these tensions, but not necessarily not do the work of putting ourselves accountable and putting these things out there in public outlets.

Recommended Readings

This list contains an interdisciplinary set of readings for anyone interested in learning more about feminist research praxis and critical reflexivity.

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators* (pp. 135–150). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Dutta, U., Shroll, T., Engelsen, J., Prickett, S., Hajjar, L., & Green, J. (2016). The “messiness” of teaching/learning social (in) justice: Performing a pedagogy of discomfort. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(5), 345-352.
- Fine, M. (1992). Passions, politics, and power: Feminist research possibilities. *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research*, 205–231.
- Lykes, M. B., & Crosby, A. (2014). Creativity as intervention strategy in feminist and psychosocial accompaniment processes with Mayan women in Guatemala. *INTERVENTION International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*, 12(1), 30–42.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. New Delhi, India: Zubaan.
- Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 16(2), 175-196.
- Russel y Rodríguez, M. (1998). Confronting anthropology's silencing praxis: Speaking of/from a Chicana consciousness. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(1), 15-40.
- Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.) New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd.
- Sudbury, J., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (2009). *Activist scholarship: Antiracism, feminism, and social change*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409–428.
- Villenas, S. (1996). The colonizer/colonized Chicana ethnographer: Identity, marginalization, and co-optation in the field. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(4), 711–732.
- Watkins, M. (2015). Psychosocial accompaniment. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 3(1), 324-341.
- Zembylas, M. (2015). ‘Pedagogy of discomfort’ and its ethical implications: the tensions of ethical violence in social justice education. *Ethics and Education*, 10(2), 163-174.