

LiCS

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LiCS MISSION STATEMENT

Literacy in Composition Studies is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors scholarly activity at the nexus of Literacy and Composition Studies. We foreground *literacy* and *composition* as our keywords, because they do particular kinds of work. Composition points to the range of writing courses at the college level, including FYC, WAC/WID, writing studies, and professional writing, even as it signals the institutional, disciplinary, and historically problematic nature of the field. Through literacy, we denote practices that are both deeply context-bound and always ideological. Literacy and Composition are therefore contested terms that often mark where the struggles to define literate subjects and confer literacy's value are enacted.

Given its ideological nature, literacy is a particularly fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. At its heart, literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. Orienting a Composition Studies journal around literacy prompts us to investigate the ways that writing is interpretive as well as persuasive; to analyze the connections and disconnections between writing and reading; and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on or constitutes the writer even as the writer seeks to act on or with others.

At this time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation, *LiCS* seeks submissions that theorize literacy at its intersection with composition and will prioritize work that bridges scholarship and concerns in both fields. We are especially interested in work that:

- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities
- analyzes the processes and power relations whereby literacies are valued or circulated
- adds new or challenges existing knowledge to literacy's history
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies, especially those drawing on transnational, multilingual, and cross-cultural literacy research.

Editors' Introduction To Issue 11.1

Issue 11.1 of LiCS offers two articles and two book reviews of current monographs, all of which help us rethink or update our prior understandings or practices. The two authors published in this issue both think critically about digital technologies—how self-sponsored writing participates in economies (Luther) and how to interrogate algorithms (Shultz Colby)—while the two book reviewers explore Latinx linguistic practices (Burke Reiffman reviewing Rosa) and ungrading as both theory and practice (Schwarz reviewing Stommel).

In “DIY Delivery Systems: Rethinking Self-Sponsorship Through Extracurricular Literacy Narratives,” Jason Luther challenges composition studies’ frequent conflation of “self-sponsored” DIY writers and their writing with agentful countercultural or punk praxis. By placing these “self-published” projects into the “extracurricular public sphere” that exists today, Luther reminds us that contemporary DIY writers are as likely to be “using proprietary, cloud-based software such as Canva or Adobe InDesign, promoted on Instagram or TikTok, crowdfunded by Kickstarter, and sold using Venmo, PayPal, or mobile credit-capturing, card-swiping devices such as Square” as they are to be assembling paper with staples and rubber bands. Luther argues that the tools many DIY writers use today to mediate and circulate their work are importing “neoliberal sensibilities”— particularly “an entrepreneurial subjectivity”— into self-sponsored writing. Luther invites us to not only consider this landscape in future research but also in our “public-oriented composition classrooms.”

In “Theorycrafting Algorithms: Teaching Algorithmic Literacy,” Rebekah Shultz Colby proposes theorycrafting as a method for interrogating algorithms and algorithmic circulation. A literacy practice used in online gaming communities, theorycrafting is a system that tests the impact of variables on gameplay, thereby learning more about “the algorithms running the outcomes of their play” (26). Shultz Colby demonstrates how she adapts theorycrafting to a first-year writing class in which students produced research examining how algorithms structure their engagement with content on TikTok and Google search. Such a pedagogy, Shultz Colby argues, “not only teaches valuable algorithmic literacy tactics but also teaches [students] how to use these same logics to effectively circulate their own rhetoric online” (34).

This issue features two book reviews. The first is Jennifer Burke Reifman’s consideration of the recent monograph, *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad* by Jonathan Rosa. Burke Reifman’s review explores this in-depth ethnographic study on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and language, highlighting how Latinx linguistic practices are intertwined with racioethnic identities, thus challenging the traditional assimilationist language instruction rooted in white hegemony. Ultimately, Burke Reifman argues that Rosa’s work contributes significantly to writing studies, highlighting the complexities of race, language, and identity in educational settings.

In Virginia Schwarz’s review of *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop* by Jesse Stommel, we are invited to consider how to challenge traditional grading systems. Stommel, known for his expertise in digital humanities and critical pedagogy, advocates for “ungrading”—a critical examination of grading practices rather than just an elimination of grades. The book, combining

new and previously published work, delves into the harmful effects of ranking and standardization in education and the implicit biases in educational technology. Schwarz considers how Stommel emphasizes the need for humane, compassionate education and discusses practical ungrading strategies while acknowledging their varied applicability across different contexts. The book encourages educators to rethink grading and its impact on students, making it a valuable resource for teachers across disciplines seeking to foster a more equitable and understanding educational environment.

As we embark upon a new year, we hope the above pieces provide renewed food for thought. As always, thanks for reading!

—*Brenda Glascott, Justin Lewis, Tara Lockhart, Juli Parrish, and Chris Warnick*

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DIY Delivery Systems: Rethinking Self-Sponsorship through Extracurricular Literacy Narratives

Jason Luther Rowan University

KEYWORDS

literacy sponsors; literacy narratives; self-sponsorship; circulation; affect; delivery; public writing; DIY; zines; self-publishing; queer; extracurriculum; desire

Each year, tens of thousands of self-publishers from all over North America and Europe convene in various gyms, auditoriums, churches, and community centers to promote, exchange, sell, and otherwise share their writing with friends and strangers alike.

These publishing festivals—held in cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Toronto, London, and Berlin—emphasize different genres of do-it-yourself (DIY) publishing, from zines to letterpressed postcards to handmade books. Often, these publications are also assembled by hand, with writers scamming copies from work; collating them on kitchen tables; and using staplers, thread, rubber bands, or even the fold itself to bind them. Some are painstakingly hand- or typewritten, some include traditional comic panels; others are collaged using a hodgepodge of found or vintage materials; many are scrappy.

Such choices are about more than aesthetics, however, as participants seek to enact an embodied commitment to the longstanding ideals of alternative culture, including creativity, equality, accessibility, diversity, and self-authorization. They are also more than a throwback or homage to the activist print networks of abolitionists, feminists, punks, and queers throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. From personal narratives about sex work to comix to self-care manifestos to lists of resources for activists, the content *and* materiality of DIY publications continue to resist mainstream media while asserting a right to self-definition, solidarity, and radical independence.

In this way, contemporary DIY publishers constitute a significant and underexplored extracurriculum, an alternative site to the formal classroom where self-sponsored writers voluntarily meet in groups at “kitchen tables and rented rooms,” as Anne Ruggles Gere famously noted in the title of her 1993 CCCC address. Such writers use various forms of public writing to address the material realities of class and identity politics; whether they reproach homelessness, racism, or corporate farming, extracurricular writers view their

work as “constructed by *desire*, by the aspiration and imaginations of its participants” who are motivated by the ways in which writing has “social and economic consequences, including transformations in personal relationships” (80; emphasis added). In her study of third-space zines from roughly this same period, Adela Licona argues that many queer and of-color zine makers also used these social and economic consequences to build textual spaces for “community education” (143n9); for Licona, the making of zines could lead to a coalitional consciousness, an awareness of the ways in which their publications could “re(en)vision and represent multiply situated, nondominant subjectivities in pursuit of coalition building to address local inequities” (3).

And yet today’s extracurricular public sphere is radically different than it once was. Drawing from tools and media that have emerged during the rise of the popular web in the mid-1990s, these publications circulate amongst the hyperabundant “fluff” of the attention economy, as Richard Lanham called it. And while most are handmade and tactile, many are also arranged using proprietary, cloud-based software such as Canva or Adobe InDesign, promoted on Instagram or TikTok, crowdfunded by Kickstarter, and sold using Venmo, PayPal, or mobile credit-capturing, card-swiping devices such as Square, raising questions about the tactics of mediation employed by many contemporary extracurricular writers. Unlike the writers studied by Gere and Licona, the neoliberal sensibilities expressed with these tools and sites produces a version of self-sponsorship that is difficult to separate from an entrepreneurial subjectivity—one that naturalizes competition so much that it has the potential to seep into even the most progressive public-facing writing projects and communities.

I thus begin by reviewing the ways in which the term self-sponsorship has been evoked in our field as a euphemism for agentic literacies. I then suggest we consider its adjacent term—sponsorship—as we consider how literacy narratives function for extracurricular writers, examining the ways some DIY composers articulate their attitudes toward the materials, intermediaries, and circuits they use as they reach the public sphere. To better track this, I apply John Trimbur’s

“ . . . approaching extracurricular writers in terms of delivery systems calls attention to public circuitry, the specific-but-diffuse material structures of writing that play an instrumental role when writers imagine (or “sponsor”) themselves as authors, when they inhabit the desire to write for a public.”

understanding of circulation, which turns toward the affective and material dimensions of writing, to publishing in a sharing economy, an environment that draws writers into its workings and subsequently produces, shapes, and spreads desire as an ongoing “lamination” (Roozen) in existing circuitry. To explicate this process, I rewind the field’s conversation on circulation to Trimbur’s original use of

another term, *delivery system*, which can account for the larger “circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption through which writing circulates” while attending to ways in which such circuits build toward affective energies, or the “worldly force” of circulation (194).

While composition scholars have written about various formats and media related to DIY

publishing, from zines (Buchanan; Comstock; Farmer) to comics (Jacobs, Helms, Howes) to art or craft objects (Arellano; Gruwell; Hanzalik and Virgintino; Prins; Shipka), approaching extracurricular writers in terms of delivery systems calls attention to public circuitry, the specific-but-diffuse material structures of writing that play an instrumental role when writers imagine (or “sponsor”) themselves as authors, when they inhabit the desire to write for a public. Applying this theory of delivery systems to contemporary DIY publishers, I aim to demonstrate how consequence *and* entrepreneurship can be productively accounted for in literacy narratives of self-publishers. And it is within this framework, I want to suggest, that we examine the work of writing that occurs inside and outside our writing classrooms, as our students enter and exit them, carrying and amending these desires as they become more attuned to different audiences and strive to reach wider publics.

What is “Self-Sponsored” Writing?

Composition scholars have relied on “self-sponsored” as disciplinary shorthand for self-initiated writing, often using the term to contrast differences between authentic, self-generated exigencies and the more traditional, compulsory academic tasks assigned in composition classrooms. Its origins can be traced back to Janet Emig’s *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*, one of the earliest studies of self- and school-sponsored writing. Emig found the latter to be a “limited, and limiting, experience” for students (97) as teachers would all too commonly assign rote five-paragraph themes that “truncate the process of composing” (98). By comparison, contemplative self-sponsored practices such as journaling, led to a more innovative, time-intensive, and ultimately accurate portrait of the writing process. And while most self-sponsored writing was private, Emig found that creative work made it more likely that students would share it with peers, which in turn made it more readily revised, a finding that has held up in subsequent research on self-sponsorship throughout the last 50 years.

Six years after Emig, for instance, Sharon Crowley argued that self-sponsorship led to “real, original, unconventional writing” (168). In 1989, Marilyn Sternglass suggested that it led to sustained—and therefore more meaningful—tasks (173). More recently, scholars involved with the Stanford Study of Writing found that self-sponsorship led to “emotional, immediate, and unconstrained” public and performative writing (Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye 230), while Paula Rosinski noted that such composing provided “real writing contexts” and “real audiences” (262). Often these views uphold self-sponsorship as liberatory, as a means for redressing the long-standing absence of the extracurriculum in writing studies. When compared to in-school assignments many have argued that self-sponsored writing is “more individually agentive” (Davis, Brock, and McElroy 9) as it is often generated from independent encounters that highlight one’s individualism, their desire for self-expression, and a capacity for choice (Yi and Hirvela 97). When self-sponsored writing is public rather than private, it often originates from a specific community or affinity group, where authorship in turn leads to an empowering sense of identity, one that is emergent through writing that is shared at different stages of one’s process. This is especially the case for young, cross-cultural, bi-literate, or transnational subjects, where identity formation is linked to language acquisition. Xiqiao Wang, for instance, has suggested that social media platforms such as

WeCat can enhance self-sponsored reading strategies of multilingual international students.

At the same time, while self-sponsorship is often treated as a separate sphere of activity, researchers have been consistently focused on the *fluidity* of these spheres—that is, the extent to which writers can use an impressive array of writing tools, spaces, and intermediaries to bridge the division between worlds (Yi and Hirvela), laminate literacies through transmediation (Roozen), reflect on rhetorical strategies for transfer (Rosinski), or experience disconnects (Wang) as students move between self- and school-sponsored contexts. These studies often conclude by beckoning teachers of writing to better understand students' extracurricular contexts while encouraging more research on how self-sponsored literacies travel across time and space.

Recognizing that writing is learned “horizontally” (that is, across domains), and “vertically” as writers carry certain skills and literacies with them in and out of said domains, Jonathan Alexander, Karen Lunsford, and Carl Whithaus have recently contributed the spatial metaphor of *wayfinding* to literacy learning. Wayfinding is helpful for pivoting away from the dichotomous inside/outside discourse through which self-sponsorship often gets framed. It suggests writers make do through a stitching together of practices learned through formal training and informally in situ. As such, the approaches by which we come to understand these pathways matter. For instance, the authors note how studies of self-sponsorship—“literacy in the wild”—are often guided by ethnographic methodologies whereby writers are navigating and negotiating extracurricular and co-curricular contexts.

Scholars, in other words, have critically explored the varied contexts, economies, and cultures in which these extracurricular literacies exist and the tools or technologies that facilitate the agency of these writers outside of the classroom. Within these conversations it is implied that a constellation of sponsors is afoot, raising the question of who (or what) is rewarded by these literate acts in addition to the writer. This was Deborah Brandt's primary concern when she developed a theory of literacy sponsors for her 1998 CCC article, “Sponsors of Literacy,” and again in her 2001 award-winning book *Literacy in American Lives*. Because literacy sponsors are “agents . . . who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (“Sponsors” 166), Brandt's *systemic* understanding of literacy acknowledges agency as it is situated within a sponsoring network. Brandt rejects the possibility that any writing could truly originate within the self since “[t]he concept of the literacy sponsor recognizes the historical fact that access to literacy has *always* required assistance, permission, sanction, or coercion by more powerful others or, at least, contact with existing ‘grooves’ of communication” (Brandt and Clinton 349; emphasis added). This understanding is important methodologically since “tracing sponsorship through things helps to clarify the multiple interests or agents that are most usually active when reading and writing are taken up” (350). Seen through Brandt's theory, the “self” in self-sponsorship therefore acts as an interpellation of agency through the subjectivity of the writer, an internalization of the feelings of independence and liberation we sometimes expect from literacy learning. Recently Brandt made this point more explicit, speculating that the term self-sponsorship provides an understandably humanitarian response to the harsher economic functions of literacy:

Our favorite form of sponsorship is self-sponsorship and our favorite sponsors are those

selfless teachers and other helpers who have no ostensible ulterior motives except a belief in and love for the goodness of literacy. In this atmosphere, sponsors become conceptualized as heroes and benefactors, plowing open opportunity for grateful learners. Literacy learning is euphemized. And so is literacy teaching. (“Commentary” 331)

Yet, as Ann Lawrence has argued, when literacy and writing scholars draw from Brandt’s concept of sponsorship, they tend to bracket the nonhuman intermediaries and institutional systems that were essential to her study. That is, while Brandt made use of both personal testimony *and* social history to delineate a complex argument about the economics of literacy in twentieth century America, Lawrence highlights how typical studies on sponsorship foreground autobiography at the expense of accounting for the broader contexts, historical forces, and material conditions that are always in play. Part of the reason is that such studies draw from the genre of literacy narratives, a genre that “typically concentrates power of influence in human actors to whom intention is ascribed” (308). As a result, literacy sponsors, as they have been approached in writing studies at least, tend to focus on people.

In response, Lawrence proposes scholars consider the *rhetoricity* of literacy narratives; specifically, how a writer’s use of the narrative genre participates in a process that “reinvents what matters, rearranges social bonds, and renews experiences and their meanings.” Put another way, Lawrence wants us to see how the literacy narrative itself works as another kind of sponsor. Humans function in these narratives, Lawrence notes, as *rhetorical figures* and character types—including as “self-sponsors”—and narratives as episodes or *scenes* as authors (re)invent contexts and editorialize experiences of literacy at particular sites (i.e., their church) or are prompted to present a narrative in a particular context for a specific audience (i.e., for a teacher in a classroom assignment).

As I see it, the methodological directions suggested by Lawrence can provoke literacy scholars to consider the processes and contexts through which such narratives are taken up, including those in the extracurriculum. While others have pointed to the constructed-ness of literacy narratives (including Kara Poe Alexander; Bryson; Kuzawa; and Lindquist and Halbritter) or have constructed their own stories of sponsorship from their home communities (Davis; García; Hunter; and Patterson), here I aim to extend Lawrence’s suggestion that future research on literacy narratives consider the “affective force of narrative rhetoric” (306) by suggesting that the tools, materials, and intermediaries writers account for their stories or reflections reveal an essential element in the production of desire, especially within the extracurriculum. Attending to these tools, materials, and intermediaries—what I collectively call the circuitry of delivery systems—productively complicate the term self-sponsorship.

“Zine Philosophy” as Literacy Narrative

Zine makers have defended their choice to self-publish since the invention of the spirit duplicator in the 1920s, often through correspondence, the paratexts of distribution systems (such as APAs), or within the columns of network zines such as *Factsheet Five* (1982–1998), *Zine World* (1996–2012), and *Broken Pencil* (1995–). In its heyday before the web, network zines like these reviewed hundreds

of zines per issue, printing addresses that would put authors in touch with each other. Of these, only the Canadian magazine *Broken Pencil* is still in print, publishing nearly a hundred issues since initially launching in 1995. However, as the web became increasingly popularized and zine makers could more easily establish digital networks, *Factsheet Five* folded and *Broken Pencil* started printing fewer reviews, replacing them with more traditional magazine content such as feature stories and regularized columns.

One of these ongoing columns, “Zine Philosophy,” has been reserved for the final page of nearly each issue since 2004, spotlighting nearly 70 different authors who have shared their attitudes about DIY culture, activism, radical politics, and, of course, zine making. And although these philosophies come in a variety of forms—as manifestos, critiques, origin stories, project descriptions—they accumulate to paint a rich portrait of an extracurricular scene of writing. To put this in Lawrence’s terms, the Zine Philosophy column functions as a regularized and visible “context of narrative production”—a material situation (i.e., a column in a magazine) that influences how authors memorialize, define, or invent the “narrated contexts” that continue to reflect, solidify, or possibly redirect the zine *scene* (322). Such narrativizing, Lawrence suggests, doesn’t merely reflect individualized accounts of literacy learning but *creates scenes of literacy sponsorship*—and what I want to model here is how we might interrogate self-sponsorship when looking closely at the contexts of narrative production in extracurricular spaces like *Broken Pencil*.

Many of the narratives of the columnists in the Zine Philosophy are not that different from our students’ own literacy narratives, as they highlight the essential role that human sponsors play in inspiring their own desires to publish in extracurricular writing spaces. For instance, in a 2015 contribution titled “Queer Scribe Worldwide: An International Zine Odyssey,” Miyuki Baker begins their narrative citing a primary rhetorical figure: their mother. “In order to explain to you why I’m a zinester and a mixed media artist, I need to tell you about my Japanese immigrant mom (*okasan*). More than anyone else in my life, *okasan* is the artist and maker I am most inspired by.” Baker goes on to describe how their *okasan* dressed them in clothing made from scrap materials, made them home-cooked Japanese bentos for school, and used “DIY skills” to transform their modest home into something beautiful, making vegetable gardens as well as drafting tables from “hand-me-downs and discarded items on the street.” More than anyone, seeing *okasan*’s resourcefulness and creativity primed Baker to draw from and value reusable materials.

And yet, this narrative only begins with their *okasan*. Once Baker travelled to Japan, they began to use various scenes to show how they practiced the art of collage at home; at a summer program for gifted art students, Baker was introduced to zines; and at college they began to use zines as part of their activism for queer and trans people of color (QTPOC). Halfway through this essay, Baker then tells us about the culmination of these experiences: a prestigious Thomas J. Watson Foundation grant—offered to seniors of small liberal arts colleges—to travel around the world for over a year “exploring the implications of being ‘visibly’ queer in different contexts.” Throughout their travels to Turkey, South Korea, Singapore, Netherlands, and eleven other countries, Baker argues that making eight different zines in these places allowed them to look at the “collective experience” of being visibly queer and ultimately argues for the affordances of a mediated mutuality:

As I look back at my art and activism, my passion for queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) communities is obviously personal, but I've realized that making zines allows me to extend the equation beyond myself, and to tell stories of the collective experience. Acknowledging cultural legibility and specificity is one reason why combating homophobia, transphobia, and other phobias universally is such difficult work. However I believe that by being our own documenters, scribes and media makers, we can empower each other. (36)

The link Baker makes here between publishing and the material conditions of QTPOC might recall Gere's arguments about the role of desire in the extracurriculum, especially how the women of the Tenderloin and the Iowa farmers were motivated, in part, by the social and economic consequences of writing (80)—namely, their own poverty. While Baker does not say they are motivated by poverty per se, there is no denying that their identity politics are linked to a DIY ethos communicated by anti-profit, lo-fi, handmade zines. That is, the zine itself—as an embodied act of labor—plays an important role in Baker's cultivation of solidarity.

Sponsorship is useful for analyzing the rhetorical figures and scenes from Baker's narrative that explain their origins and development as an author. It is also useful, as Lawrence suggests,

“... understanding the unwieldy forces and networks like the zine fests within the extracurriculum of DIY publishing requires an interrogation into the affective energies that also draw authors to certain tools, systems, and spaces, giving them a sense of purpose and agency that writing so often promises.”

for considering how the narrative itself potentially sponsors other zine makers, who subscribe or read *Broken Pencil* and bear witness to the narratives of the Zine Philosophy column for continued inspiration and justification for their DIY ethos. Yet I want to argue that there is more happening here as well. That is, understanding the unwieldy forces and networks like the zine fests within the extracurriculum of DIY

publishing requires an interrogation into the affective energies that also draw authors to certain tools, systems, and spaces, giving them a sense of purpose and agency that writing so often promises.

These changes, I argue, require a re-theorization of the extracurriculum that moves away from self-sponsorship and toward a more complicated understanding of desire and agency, one that is conceptualized as more than love, and comes to terms with sociotechnical and economic systems through which extracurricular or avocational authorship emerges. To better account for the material and affective forces that shape the environments of the extracurriculum, then, we must draw from the more recent conversations and resources that have accumulated in the field; more specifically, and for reasons I outline below, I suggest we revisit the beginning of the turn in the field dubbed *circulation studies*.

Delivering Desire Through Circuitry

In 2000, CCC published John Trimbur's "Composition and the Circulation of Writing," an essay that suggests we rethink the scale from which we view writing by considering the larger "circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption through which writing circulates as it takes on cultural value and worldly force" (194). While this definition of the delivery system is closely aligned to another key concept (re)introduced in the essay—circulation—by focusing on *systems* of circulation, Trimbur addresses the tendency in cultural studies and composition at the turn of the century to *isolate or bracket* "privileged moments" in cultural analysis—"the acts of encoding and decoding, writing and reading, production and consumption" that ignore "the systems through which cultural products and media messages circulate or the transformations they thereby undergo" (203). In the extracurriculum, this might mean turning our attention away from analyzing a sponsor or textual artifact and instead considering the available materials and networks that work together with technologies and scenes to put writing in motion. How writers arrange their writing (using a laptop, Google Image search, printer, or found materials with paper/scissors/glue/photocopier), for example, is dependent upon the distribution, exchange, and consumption of the things being circulated—not only who will read it, but how it might get there (as a pdf, an art book on Etsy, or an anonymous copy left on a city bus). More importantly, how and to what effect these circuits—the materials, sites, intermediaries, networks, sponsors, and channels—*coordinate* to create a force become the key goal for conceiving of a delivery system.

We can understand this more clearly by looking again at Baker's essay. Their "obviously personal" desire to make and distribute zines comes partially from a rhetorical figure, *okasan*, who showed them the political and economic importance of thrift; however, it is also fed by the more complex, lasting circuits of the delivery system.

Circuits of production, for example, are afforded by the materiality and historicity of the collage format, which Baker started engaging after an annual family visit to rural Japan. Their drafting table is "piled high with magazines, newspaper, yarn, beads, Japanese stationary and more"—scrap materials that they collected from a surrounding network of material. From these scraps, Baker often made collages of images, quotations, and words and "had amassed half a dozen of these collage/text notebooks" by the time they were introduced to their first zine. The melding of these circuits, in turn, produce new opportunities, as Baker became more involved in the public work of composition once enrolled in a university.

That is, *circuits of distribution* emerge from their introduction to the zine and QTPOC communities at their college. As Baker notes, "It was easy for me to use zines to highlight local queer artists/activists to give them exposure and inspire an international conversation of the queer movement. I was sure that this self-published and low-budget medium would be the most fun and least pretentious way of sharing information."

When sharing with allies and fellow activists, *circuits of exchange* become visibly important. As Baker describes the experience of travelling abroad to 15 countries to explore how artistic expression was affected by one's culture, they made zines and "got the chance to give talks, be interviewed on

radio shows and organize workshops on using zines to connect and build movements.” Baker then goes on to bullet several specific encounters, including the time when they traded publications at a zine library in Amsterdam.

Finally, when it comes to making this work more public on the web, Baker turns to the more impersonal and codified *circuits of consumption*, plugging their work via by-line, using language that encourages readers to “check out” their publishing “cabin” online (a playful riff on the term *publishing houses*), Queer Scribe Productions, buying their international zines on Etsy, and following their illustrated blog on WordPress.

Although presented separately above, these circuits of production, exchange, consumption, and distribution are not linear; they work together to coordinate several different identities for Baker, presenting them as “a queer, multi-racial/lingual female mixed-media artist, activist, zinester and healer,” as noted in their by-line. The narrative, too, reflects Baker’s desire to assemble a complex identity that comes through a variety of circuits: as “a fierce hoarder of notes, sketches, and gum wrappers,” who “amassed notebooks,” whose “room was plastered with images,” and whose “interests in zines, creation and international QTPOC ... coalesced.”

While I draw from Baker’s origin story and journey as a self-publisher because of its fidelity to literacy narratives, it’s important to note that all Zine Philosophies invariably amplify these circuits in their writing. Recent issues of *Broken Pencil* help highlight these moments. In Issue 87 (2020), for instance, Kristin Li amplifies *circuits of distribution* in discussing the Montreal-based Prisoner Correspondence Project, which “connects LGBTQ prisoners across Canada and the United States with members of similar communities on the outside” (64) through several programs, including one that circulates a zine library via mail. As Li notes, zines are perfect for contending with the prison system because they’re light (reducing postage), cheap (easy to replace if lost or confiscated), and durable (since zines get passed around). In Issue 92 (2021), Helen Yeung amplifies *circuits of exchange* through the decolonial focus of Migrant Zine Collective; based in Aotearoa, the “settler colonial name New Zealand,” members of Yeung’s collective produce and trade collaborative zines and host conversation circles, workshops, and other events “that engages with people locally, but also reaches out to diasporic groups from around Asia and the world.”

An understanding of circulation in this way—as the coordination of circuits or pathways—exists alongside scholars like Jaqueline Preston who understand writing as an assemblage, as a phenomenon that is “in constant flux, pulled from and plugged into others, a multiplicity that converges with others to make new assemblages and morphing as it circulates across contexts” (39). Likewise, delivery systems are an attempt to name the circuits by which this flux operates, but to also grapple with the energies, forces, and regimes that attract writers to certain tools, spaces, and discourses.

However, we need to apply analytical frameworks in such a way that renders the relationship between composition, delivery, and power more explicitly, especially at a time when the labor of politics is inseparable from the update culture of the sharing economy. John Gallagher suggests, for instance, that the ability of authors to revise digital texts in real time based on audience response requires a shift in our understanding of circulation as one focused on content (i.e., a thing that

moves through time and space) to one concerned about “circulatory writing processes” (5). Delivery systems are valuable for understanding such processes—how writing, as it moves through the circuits of delivery systems, “takes on cultural value and worldly force” (Trimbur 194). While Trimbur never explicitly defines what he means by “cultural value” or “worldly force,” he suggests that circulation allows us to see how the means of production and labor power are inherent in all “cultural products and media messages” (208).

Desire is this force, and it is often both the cause *and* effect of the circuitry of public writing. For self-publishers, this process is especially complicated as their pursuit to circumvent traditional, conservative gatekeepers and favor user-driven spaces leads to more distributed circuitry. As Timothy Laquintano notes, the erasure of these traditional gatekeepers—a process dubbed *disintermediation*—is a fantasy, as this void is often filled by a host of *new* intermediaries, including sites like Amazon and Wattpad, but also other non-human agents, such as algorithms, terms of service, crowd-sourced book reviews, even the “ideological freight” of the history of the book itself (180–81). While I consider the output and motives of DIY publishers to be significantly different from that of the poker players, romance writers, memoirists, and popular indie authors studied by Laquintano, one important conclusion from his book is that the “shifting systems of mediation” (9) has transformed publishing from a professional activity to a literate practice. Such a shift changes the focus from the object of publishing (i.e., the zine or the book) to what readers and writers do with those objects and what those objects do to them, especially given the systems of mediation that make the activities of publishing accessible and meaningful (14–15).

So, although their desires are different from many of the self-publishers in Laquintano’s study, with laptops resting on kitchen tables, DIY publishers are also contending with these shifting systems of mediation that

have profoundly affected their extracurricular, literate practices. Baker, Li, and Yeung, for instance, promote their projects on Instagram and other forms of social media. Most DIY publishers engage with *circuits of consumption* by making use of on-demand, micro-capitalist tools like Square and PayPal to allow patrons to purchase their publications on credit or

“A delivery systems framework first suggests we articulate desire as a component of all communication. Far from the sort of pathos we traditionally teach as part of the classical triumvirate of rhetorical appeals, a gesture toward the affective means naming the embodied feelings that come with circulation and trans-mediation—whether that means making a publication from scraps of paper (such as the feeling of empowerment Baker articulates from making zines) or sharing a political sentiment we agree with on TikTok.”

donate to their projects. And throughout the pandemic many DIY publishers only shared their work digitally, even holding zine-making workshops using video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet, and in the case of Quaranzine Fest, held a multi-day all-remote event thanks

to corporate sponsorship from Kickstarter (Luther, “More Than Paper”). Changes such as these, I argue, necessitate a reevaluation of the very terms we use to describe public writing and pedagogies that occur outside our classrooms.

A delivery systems framework, in other words, is essential for understanding the role of commodities in circulatory processes: “the materialization of an underlying and contradictory social process” that pits use value against exchange value, where labor becomes an obvious and necessary feature of the mode of production for capitalist accumulation (207). In rethinking what gets circulated, Trimbur points out that it’s not so much where the thing goes as much as what it carries with it in terms of embedded hierarchies—“how the labor power embodied in the commodity form articulates a mode of production and its prevailing social relations” (210). Advances in delivery systems, therefore, do not erase the “materialization of an underlying and contradictory social process” or the commodity form of labor.

Digital tools and environments, however, mask it. And here it is important to note the historic parallel growth of DIY culture, the rise of information technologies, and the adaptive nature of capitalism. Neoliberalism, at its core, is a capitalist mutation that systemically camouflages processes of labor so that commodified forms can more easily “pass transparently and unproblematically through the cycle of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption,” as Trimbur suggests (208). In other words, under neoliberalism, capitalism’s core contradiction between use value and exchange value is rendered less visible as workers supposedly act out of self-interest through the economic mechanisms supported by (and in some cases created by) the delivery systems of its day. While digital tools offer certain forms of authorial agency, that is, they have done so within a necessarily aggressive entrepreneurial model for cultural production, where consumers themselves are put to work. Thus, as the exploitive conditions for production become erased or renamed as opportunity through entrepreneurship, the desire for an authorial voice becomes imbricated with neoliberal paradigms of “success,” producing a seemingly endless desire for more “success” (i.e., more followers). Trimbur’s economic sense of circulation, in other words, permits a widened scope that focuses on the historical, economic, and technological aspects of the production of “personal” desire within the extracurriculum.

To understand the importance of this focus, let us return again to Miyuki Baker. Unlike the previous model of sponsorship discussed earlier, this framework reveals a desire for agency that is individualized, competitive, and accessible through free enterprise and self-investment. And while the literate practices of writers like Baker undoubtedly buttress important causes, they also reveal the ways in which their tactics are framed within what Wendy Brown has called a certain neoliberal *rationality*—a social view that “disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities” (31). Gere reminds us that the Latin root of amateur, *amatus*, implies that members of the extracurriculum “write for love” (88); however, the spread of neoliberal rationality into everyday decision-making complicates previous descriptions of the extracurriculum as an unproblematic, celebratory space.

Consider, for example, Baker’s Etsy shop, which exists as one of many on a website that serves as a virtual bazaar for handmade crafts. As a publicly-traded company, Etsy has reached a combined sales

of nearly \$13.5 billion, with some users subcontracting labor to produce more “handmade” objects. By participating in a craft economy, shoppers experience a simulacrum of user participation—perhaps the most insidious way in which desire spreads. In her article for *Harlot*, “Buy It Yourself: How DIY Got Consumerized,” Elizabeth Chamberlain shares a mix of examples where “participating in our purchases makes us feel better about them,” examining several fashion blogs from 2013 that, on their face, rejected consumerism. In her analysis, however, Chamberlain indicates how certain “consumerizing pressures”—corporate sponsorship, entrepreneurship, and accessorizing for cultural capital—necessarily diluted the independent potential of these blogs. Applications like Pinterest, she notes, muzzle the broader political bite of grassroots fashion movements by turning them into pragmatic marketing tools, “a new DIY-themed version of consumption.” For these reasons, it is not only important to account for the ways in which intermediaries use circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption to commodify writing; we must also account for their desiring effects, which are traceable through affective signification.

In looking for this in the extracurriculum, then, we might ask how writers rehearse and repeat narratives about possibility, participation, and empowerment and under what contexts and conditions. Baker’s identity claims as a zinester, independent artist, and activist, for example, are inseparable from the narrative that links their work to independence and social justice, as well as the medium through which such narratives circulate. A key energizing feature of DIY culture is that it puts *possibility*—and its feelings of hope, happiness, liberation, etc. —at the center of its narratives. Often, DIY publishers encourage other amateurs to approach problems or creative projects with the promise that the process (the “do” part of DIY) isn’t as difficult as it might seem or that any struggles that are presented along the way will be diminished by a meaningful process and/or final product (the “it”). This perhaps serves to constrain a crisis of amateurism—the anxiety of *not knowing* what you’re doing or not being a professional—but it also taps into an empowered subjectivity (the “yourself”) created by participatory, affective labor.

In fact, much of DIY’s power and popularity is generated by the feeling that comes from making objects; whether they are baby blankets, wool mittens, craft cocktails, innovative smartphone apps, or gutsy publications, DIY can provide one with the suggestion that there is an “alternative to the processes of capitalist valorization,” as Michael Hardt has argued (89), by projecting a form of labor that only produces use value—or to borrow from Gere, that performs the cultural work of one’s community (90). But as Sara Ahmed emphasizes in her work, affect is produced not by simply making objects, but by circulating them. These narratives, inseparable from their platforms, attract authors and makers to particular circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The movement of texts through these circuits produces culture, but culture also affects the nature of the circuitry involved. The intersectional approaches of Baker, for example, are both produced and produced by their choices to make multimodal objects, host activist workshops, and sell their work using Etsy. Likewise, tablers at zine fests bring together a variety of circuits and cultures in the interest of creating and sharing independent media. Through these assemblies and assemblages, new possibilities arise, even if many of them are inherently wedded to neoliberal logics and structures.

When coupled with an understanding of delivery systems as embedded within neoliberal

paradigms, studying the narratives and language that they describe help us understand the “cultural value and worldly force” (Trimbur 194) that produces desire, reframing the meaning and nature of the work done in the extracurriculum. Indeed, although authors like Baker publish outside of mainstream culture, such a framework suggests that there is no “extra” space where they are truly free to compose outside of power, a myth that has been suggested by our field’s own desire to differentiate between the kind of compulsory writing that happens inside of schools and the liberatory modes accessible “outside” in the world.

Naming the Available Means of Circuitry: Toward the Public Use of Delivery Systems

Writers like Miyuki Baker narrate their use of a range of circuits as they seek to “empower each other,” aiming to connect through difference and identity politics; although some of these circuits are necessarily entrepreneurial, their project is not one that seeks profit, but unity, and what they build through their making is remarkable. DIY publishing festivals demonstrate the possibilities that arise from such empowerment, as they use forms of embodied activism in part to confront neoliberalism’s erasure of public space. As such, DIY strategies such as those embraced by Baker and these festivals are becoming increasingly necessary for those who aspire to use writing in their pursuit for social justice.

It is also still possible, of course, for extracurricular writers to refuse to engage with particular forms of public circuitry altogether. Certainly, DIY publishers and proponents of alternative media have, historically, been keenly aware of the politics of mediation. Still, other groups might choose to not go public, to limit their audiences to more immediate friends, family, or the kinds of print-bound groups that Gere originally highlighted in her work. In *Writing for Love and Money*, for instance, Kate Vieira highlights how transnational family members used literacy technologies such as laptops for cross-border communication; in her study, writing remittances—“the communication hardware, software, writing practices, and literacy knowledge that migrant family members often circulate across borders” (4) serve as loving “circuits of exchange” (52). In a way, such “closed-circuit groups” might be the *most radical* version of the extracurriculum in the era of the attention economy.

At the same time, publicity is a necessary component to social change and so the challenge is being able to maintain a critical consciousness while simultaneously accepting the contradictory assemblage of circuits necessary for participation in the 21st century extracurriculum. Baker, for example, cobbles together both grassroots and institutional circuits in the name of political struggle, including collaging found objects (old newspapers), meeting with queer communities throughout the world (via major airlines), selling publications via publicly traded commercial interfaces (Etsy), and winning elitist, corporate grants (Watson Foundation). Ultimately their narrative links the personal, individualized, accessible circuits of zines—the “most fun and least pretentious way of sharing information”—to a larger, ambitious mission of international political struggle. As Baker argues, the zine “allows me to extend the equation beyond myself, and to tell stories of the collective experience” for QTPOC. Put simply, they use the circuits available to leverage their position—as

activist, entrepreneur, grant writer, and publisher—in the name of solidarity.

It seems to me that this is one important way we might use literacy narratives to “listen to the signals that come through the walls of our classrooms from the world outside” (76) as Gere originally suggested. That is, in attending to the ways students cite certain platforms, tools, and intermediaries in pursuit of literacy outside the classroom, we can develop critical pedagogies for understanding the relationship between desire and circulation and how using a range of circuits might help us build ethical spaces of engagement. More specifically, by reimagining public writing as it occurs through delivery systems, we can begin to do two things. First, we can work with other writers to make desire more visible—noting how particular circuits produce affective and material outcomes, whether intended, incidental, or consequential. Second, we can look at how particular circuits can be politicized to direct, organize, and spread our desire in ways that reach beyond entrepreneurship for its own sake, and build the kind of publics modeled by publishers and activists like Baker and those at DIY publishing festivals—publics that value citizenship, difference, and social justice.

A delivery systems framework first suggests we articulate desire as a component of all communication. Far from the sort of *pathos* we traditionally teach as part of the classical triumvirate of rhetorical appeals, a gesture toward the affective means naming the embodied feelings that come with circulation and trans-mediation—whether that means making a publication from scraps of paper (such as the feeling of empowerment Baker articulates from making zines) or sharing a political sentiment we agree with on TikTok. At a time when public discourse is shaped more by feelings and belief over facts and inquiry, it is especially important to help writers slow down to understand and identify the emotions that contribute to virality. Likewise, we must also recognize the material consequences of different approaches to public advocacy: how multinational corporate circuits might be used to organize the Women’s March on Washington, but also feed polluting cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin. Or how the circuits of hashtag activism can confront sexual violence and police brutality, while also opening new spaces for white supremacy, spreading fake news, and bringing us to unprecedented rates of anxiety and depression. Decisions that dictate when we log on or off, disconnect or update, silence or amplify are often affective ones, but they have material consequences.

However, we should do more than expect writers to critique examples or case studies; we should develop opportunities for them to experiment with and experience a variety of circuits and their affordances and limitations, materially, politically, and culturally. By asking writers to build, write, and launch crowdfunding pages for self-initiated texts or to coordinate print festivals and poster sessions provide them with opportunities for such work. These require them to imagine—and in some cases design—both virtual and embodied delivery systems that anticipate encounters with strangers who might respond to their work in unexpected ways. While such a pedagogy is admittedly intense (and thus not for everyone and certainly not every context), these experiences foster a sense of ethos, care, and creativity that is hard to replicate when grades are the only thing at stake. In the classroom, where grades inevitably become an issue, these projects can be assessed through a version of Jody Shipka’s “Statement of Goals and Choices” (113), a process-based approach to assessment that asks students to define and track their rhetorical goals through reflective writing tasks. Although

responding to projects in this way is labor intensive, I have found that it makes for engaging work (Luther, “Structuring Reflection”).

As compositionists work with writers to research and experience delivery systems in these ways, they inevitably learn that their motivations, imaginations, and desires are often affected by the variety of circuits that give them shape and life, and not something deep within writers themselves. This lesson is especially important in a public sphere whose circuits seem democratic and accessible, but are increasingly based upon logics of competition, self-investment, and entrepreneurship. Rendering that relationship more visible means attending to both the material and affective aspects of rhetoric, the direct and paradoxical aspects of our politics, and the public and private notions of authorship. The larger strategy that DIY culture offers us—whether we study the extracurriculum, literacy, delivery, or rhetoric—is how certain compromises do not necessarily absolve writers from the larger struggle for public voice.

NOTES

¹ While social distancing forced many of these festivals online during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person and hybrid events have started to return in 2023. For more about the pandemic's effects on zine culture specifically, see Luther ("More").

² In an early footnote from her book *Zines in Third Space*, Licona tells readers that the zines discussed in her book came primarily from two archival collections spanning the years 1984–1999 (2).

³ A similar problem exists with the term "do-it-yourself," which serves as an emancipatory declarative for activists, content-creators, and entrepreneurs alike. For more on this see Luther, Prins, and Farmer.

⁴ Interestingly, as Ann Lawrence has pointed out, Brandt initially used the term "self-sponsored" in her 1994 CCC article, "Remembering Writing, Remembering Reading," but later replaced it with "self-initiated" when she incorporated the essay into subsequent work (327n15).

⁵ Case in point: starting with issue 15 in 1985, Factsheet Five printed a regular column titled "Why Publish?," which featured various zine makers in each issue answering that question. A significant portion of Stephen Duncombe's landmark book *Zines: Notes from Underground*, is based on some of the more notable moments from these columns.

⁶ I use the personal gender pronouns they/them/their to refer to Baker throughout this essay, as this reflects Baker's preference in their own writing.

⁷ It's worth noting that Brandt considers the role of delivery systems in capitalism in *Literacy in American Lives*, arguing that "[s]ponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners" (19). Sponsors, in other words, are circuits that deliver literacy to people.

⁸ A March 2015 New York Times article detailed how Californian Alicia Shaffer, owner of the Etsy shop "Three Bird Nest," employed 25 local seamstresses to make items of clothing, providing her with an income of over \$70,000 per month. She did not indicate how much her seamstresses were paid (Tabuchi).

⁹ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out and suggesting the term "closed circuits."

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Theorycrafting Algorithms: Teaching Algorithmic Literacy

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KEYWORDS

theorycraft; algorithm; literacy; ethics; intersectional; critical race theory

INTRODUCTION

John Trimbur argued over 20 years ago that writing teachers need to attend to the ways that writing circulates outside the classroom. With online writing, this means that today we also need algorithmic literacy: understanding how algorithms operate in circulating writing online. In this way, algorithmic literacy goes hand in hand with rhetorical awareness as we need algorithmic literacy to understand how audiences are formed and networked through algorithms online so that our writing reaches its intended audience. For this reason, John Gallagher has gone as far as to say that algorithms become our audience when we write online (“Writing”). Furthermore, by allowing certain actions while foreclosing others, these algorithms construct ethically embodied arguments when we interact with them (Brown, *Ethical Programs*) as they also actively co-construct our actions and habits, our ethos, online (Holmes, *Rhetoric*).

To teach algorithmic literacy, this article explores how first-year students can theorycraft, or systematically test a specific aspect of how an online algorithm circulates writing. More precisely, this article examines student IMRD research papers from a first-year writing research class I taught where students tested algorithms on social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram or looked at search algorithms such as Google to analyze a particular aspect of how their algorithms circulate. In this way, students also gained a greater rhetorical awareness of how the algorithm they tested forms online publics and the ethics involved in forming such a public. While this class originally only asked students to research and write about algorithms, in this article, I propose assignments I plan to teach in the future for how students can create multimodal intersectional counternarratives in response to the ethos their theorycrafted algorithm constructs.

ONLINE PUBLICS AND THE SOCIAL SPHERE

When we read and write online, there is no doubt that the algorithms, or sets of processes or procedures run by a computer, within social media and search engines play a central role in shaping not only public discourse but how that public sphere is algorithmically formed as well as culturally

conceptualized. To see the powerful force algorithms play in constructing political publics, I could point to the increased circulation of misinformation online contributing to mistaken theories of election fraud and mistrust of the Covid vaccine or the fanning of hate speech leading to the genocide of minority Muslims in Myanmar (Asher). I could also point to the positive activism constructing political publics, from the Arab Spring (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, and Maziad) to Black Lives Matter (Mundt, Ross, and Burnett).

As a result, the public sphere is a notion both complicated and fraught and seems to become only more complicated online. However, this complication is to be expected when scholars show how the idea of the public sphere has been culturally formed. For instance, Michael Warner writes that the idea of a public, especially one that can be mobilized through rhetorical discourse for political action, is “a practical fiction” that has sedimented through use into “a cultural form” (8), as most socially useful forms such as genres do. After all, as a practical, cultural fiction, the notion of the public sphere historically can be traced back to the property and slave-owning ancient Greek men of the *polis* and then, as Habermas also traces, to when it became an important part of economic and political life for the bourgeois during the Enlightenment, a notion of the public sphere that continues to culturally develop today.

Nancy Fraser further defines the public sphere as encompassing three distinct entities: “the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse” (57). Habermas details how the public sphere developed so that the bourgeois could have some political control over the economic sphere, especially as their control varied depending on economic state controls; as a result, because the public can influence the state through voting in democratic societies, the public sphere is not only essential but meant to be a deliberative political space where opinions about politics can be formed and discussed.

Fraser, however, critiques Habermas for portraying this deliberative public sphere as fairly unified, arguing that all public spheres are made up of many competing groups, some of which are considered subaltern because they exist beyond the boundaries of the normative culture of the official public sphere and tend to be excluded. She further argues that the more stratified a society is, the more normative the public sphere will be, and the less freedom citizens will have to discuss their political views. Instead, media will feed the public their beliefs often offered up as editorial opinion as if the opinion was that of the public. And it could be argued that before the Internet became widely part of household use, the US broadcast mass media operated in this vein: citizens were told what to believe and usually only had local outlets to deliberate or influence others as influencing the larger broadcast mass media as a fully contributing part of the public sphere was almost impossible.

In contrast to the more normatively controlled and nonparticipatory aspects of broadcast mass media, C. Wright Mills constructs a more fully democratically participatory public, defining a public thus:

- (1) Virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against—if necessary—the prevailing system of authority. (303–04)

In other words, citizens in Mills's public sphere have access to a forum where they can deliberatively discuss their views and can take rhetorically effective political action. Specifically, Mills argues that in such a public sphere, authoritarian institutions that would attempt to take away this participatory freedom cannot penetrate. In constructing this definition of a public, Mills was writing in the 1950s when, as Matt Barton and Dan Ehrenfeld put it, "mass media broadcasting's unidirectional flow of opinion and information appeared to be the greatest obstacle to democratic deliberation" (3).

The internet seems to hold out the promise of creating spaces for Mills's conception of a public where citizens can more widely circulate their views and even attempt political action. As a result, Warner offers a helpful lens for how the public sphere is constructed that can be applied online, writing that a public can be constructed by "conditions that range from the very general—such as the organization of media, ideologies of reading, institutions of circulation, text genres—to the particular rhetorics of texts" (14). Within this definition, Warner includes "organization of media" and "institutions of circulation," which, while including traditional institutions of broadcast media, could also include social media and search algorithms online that facilitate larger circulation. Within this framework, Warner argues that counterpublics can form: groups that culturally run counter to the normative values of the larger broadcast public sphere such as queer and African American cultures. Because counterpublics hold a subaltern position to the larger public sphere, they may be silenced by it even though their voices are essential for a fully functioning democratic *polis*.

STUDYING HOW ALGORITHMIC CIRCULATION FORMS ONLINE PUBLICS

In defining the construction of public spheres, Warner stops short of examining how they are formed online and how "institutions of circulation" circulate online discourse to do so. This is unfortunate, as addressing how rhetorical discourse circulates online to form publics is complicated by the fact that online discourse groups are often fragmented and constantly shifting.

Furthermore, online publics are made even more complex as algorithms control most online circulation, creating a complex collaboration between humans and machine in forming publics. Algorithms are sets of processes or procedures, as Ian Bogost defines them, and sets of tasks users complete, as Kevin Brock defines them. In fact, Bogost goes on to argue that algorithms construct procedural arguments, constructing a procedurally enacted rhetoric through their processes. An algorithm's procedural logics then co-construct circulation with writers and readers online. In coining the term "rhetorical velocity" for texts that are written and designed to optimize online circulation, Jim Ridolfo and Danielle DeVoss pave the way for further examination of how algorithms shape online circulation. For instance, they mention that Google indexes mailing archives for specific time lengths and that documents should be saved in certain formats to be posted on certain platforms. Furthermore, in addressing how algorithms construct Warner's "organization of media," Annette Vee and Timothy Laquintano add that the gatekeeper editors of traditional broadcast publishing and other media have not disappeared online; they have just changed to become algorithmic and now include "corporate giants like Amazon, algorithms that determine bestseller lists, and automated

reputation measures” (44).

In studying algorithms and algorithmic circulation, scholars within the digital humanities have constructed the subfield of code studies to study how code constructs meaningfully enacted texts or procedural arguments through algorithms. Mark Marino argues that critical code scholars should not only examine how code operates but also examine it critically to see how it signifies as a social text. Within rhetoric and writing studies, rhetorical code studies has followed Bogost’s lead in examining how code constructs, as James Brown puts it, “compositions and even arguments” (“Crossing” 29).

Because online circulation is often a complex interplay between human and machine agency, Axel Bruns, Jean Burgess, and Tracy Hayes have studied how the Twitter hashtag constructs online publics that are overlapping, participatory ad hoc publics based on shared beliefs, purposes, or affinities. The hashtag is particularly compelling to study as an interplay of human and machine agency in constructing circulation as it was developed and suggested by Twitter users (Bruns and Burgess). Furthermore, while the hashtag constructs an algorithmic sorting function that controls how tweets circulate, the hashtag is a function that is also actively co-authored by Twitter writers, giving them agency in how their tweets are sorted. As a result, Bruns and Burgess studied how Twitter’s hashtag forms ad hoc publics. They examine how the hashtag allows publics to form around political topics and argue that instead of a fragmented and isolated public forming, the hashtag constructs “a patchwork of overlapping public spheres” (6). Twitter users can then use the hashtag to find any tweet about a related topic. Thus, while users may not agree with everything said in the tweets that result from their hashtag search, they can see the full ecology of opinion that emerges in forming a rhetorical public around their topic with the hashtag. Bruns and Burgess discuss how hashtags are also temporal and can form publics around past, current, or future events as when someone is running for office. Drawing on James Paul Gee and Elisabeth Hayes’ conception of an affinity space after studying how fan groups such as gamers form online, Hayes adds to Bruns and Burgess’ definition of the ad hoc public formed by hashtags by arguing that they also form around a shared purpose or passionate affinity.

Because algorithms play such a central role in forming online publics through how they circulate writing, recent scholars have studied how writers learn algorithmic logics on social medial platforms so that they can optimize how they circulate their writing. In this way, these scholars are examining how online writers gain algorithmic literacy or an understanding of how algorithms circulate writing to certain audiences, constructing a particular public in the process, a literacy both Vee and Douglas Eyman argue effective online rhetors should possess. In fact, Angela Glotfelter coined the term algorithmic circulation to more clearly focus on how algorithms affect online writing circulation. Conducting a study of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, Glotfelter found that her participants learned the logics of the platform’s algorithms, gaining algorithmic literacy as they participated within it, often experimenting and learning by trial and error, but that they also learned by reading publisher updates and participating in forums about algorithmic updates, and adapted strategies for boosting their content that worked with the platform’s algorithmic logic. For instance, participants would “avoid genres or phrases known to be algorithmically downgraded” (6), use the meta-data available within the platform to target specific audiences, figure out how to optimally interact with others’

posts to increase engagement with them and their target audience, and use the platform's built-in metrics to gauge who their audiences were and how many were engaged with their posts.

To help students gain the algorithmic literacy these scholars have studied, many writing teachers have explored how to help students gain algorithmic literacy in their writing classes so that students can better use them for their rhetorical ends in circulating their writing online. In "Writing for Algorithmic Audiences," Gallagher has argued that students should be taught to rhetorically compose not only for an audience of people, but also should gain algorithmic literacy so that they can write for algorithms. Thus, students can "think their audience as the processes and procedures by which YouTube prioritizes their videos" (27) in its circulation algorithm. To teach students algorithmic literacy so that they learn to use algorithms to circulate writing in rhetorically effective ways, some writing teachers offer reflective heuristic questions (Edwards, "Circulation") or offer open reflective opportunities for students to analyze how algorithms work through their own experiences using them (Gallagher; Koenig).

THEORYCRAFTING ALGORITHMS

However, while getting students to reflect on their experiences using an algorithm is helpful, as students have undoubtedly spent many hours on social media platforms and search engines, algorithms are often proprietarily black boxed, or hidden so that users cannot see them, often, as Vee and Laquintano argue, to prevent users from "gaming" them. Consequently, students may need more information about how algorithms are coded and function to understand them more fully. To that end, in one assignment, Gallagher asks his students to research and read any information online about the algorithm, even asking them to find documentation about that algorithm online ("Ethics"). In another assignment adapted from useability testing, he asks them to test out an algorithm such as Google's PageRank algorithm with their own websites ("Writing").

However, Gallagher's assignment ("Writing") might be too ambitious, at least for most first-year writing students with limited coding experience. Algorithms parse an immense amount of data, giving them an almost mystical quality, but they are often doing very simple tasks, just at massive scale (Watcher-Boettcher). However, as users may not be able to read an algorithm's code because of proprietary black boxing or they do not have the literacy to understand the code, many algorithms may seem more complex than they are. Consequently, Gallagher's assignments and struggles with them ("Writing") inspired me to develop an assignment asking first-year writing students to theorycraft an aspect of an algorithm. Instead of learning about the entire algorithm, students ran focused experiments that tested one specific aspect of the algorithm to understand how it worked within online circulation.

Theorycrafting became widely used online within *World of Warcraft* (WoW) and *League of Legends* (LoL) gaming communities (Colby and Shultz Colby; Reimer). Theorycrafting, which can also be referred to as meta-gaming, also comes out of a larger tradition of using metrics to game or optimize play within sports. For instance, Michael Lewis details how Billie Beane was able to optimize his baseball team using computer-run statistical analyses (Paul, "Optimizing Play"). However, both

Brown in *Ethical Programs* and Christopher Paul in *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games* argue that theorycrafting sports meets resistance in sports culture for one main reason: players are human. They are prone to error and luck. They do not run on algorithms or machines. Videogames, however, do run on algorithms. While players are still prone to idiosyncratic behavior and mistakes, the algorithms running the outcomes of their play are not; as a result, the algorithms can be tested more systematically than human sports behavior can. Within gaming theorycrafting, players use theorycrafting to find the most optimal gear, talent tree, or spell/ability combination. When trying to find an optimal weapon such as a sword, players can theorycraft by only measuring one independent variable, the sword, to find the dependent variable, the damage per second (dps). As much as possible, players attempt to control for the outside influence of external variables by wearing the same gear (except for the sword) in the same zone fighting the same type, level, and number of creatures or mobs. They repeat this process for each sword. Then they look at their dps score for each sword, picking the sword that gives them the highest dps on average.

Testing social media algorithms, while slightly more complicated, especially as students may not have readily available metrics on hand such as dps meters, is still roughly comparable. As an illustrative example I gave my class, if students want to measure how much “liking” a specific type of content will affect the types of content that appears on their “For You” feed on TikTok, they can open two new identically created TikTok accounts that use different email addresses. On one account, the control, students do not interact at all with their feed. On the other account, students actively like

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a particular type of content, a video of a specific dance for instance, recording how many times they liked it. Then, after waiting a day, students can record how many times that particular

type of dance video appeared in their feed, averaging it with the other content that appeared, in both the control account and the test account in which the student actively liked the dances. In this way, students can measure how much interacting with their feed in a specific way will affect what type of content circulates within it. While students will not fully understand the complexity of the “For You” TikTok algorithm, they will still gain a fundamental algorithmic literacy tactic about a core aspect of it: how likes affect circulation of specific videos within their feed, which they can then better leverage rhetorically when they post on TikTok.

Theorycrafting an aspect of an algorithm works because, in an algorithm, a user interacts with the computer, inputting a value, which the algorithm processes and spits out as output. However, code itself can also be seen as a grammar. Code works by assigning a value to an object variable, the noun, and then calling a method: making the object variable “do” something, the verb. In other words, the code is performing a function, which is often running an algorithm, or a set of procedural steps that often involves some mathematical calculation to that object variable. Theorycrafting works as an experiment because it attempts to control for as many variables and functions as possible in

order to test for one specific variable and how a specific function affects it as output.

While students are not learning how to code by theorycrafting, they are still learning algorithmic literacy tactics. By learning how the code enactively functions in a systematic way, students are partially unboxing the black box of proprietary code the algorithms run from. Furthermore, theorycrafting shows students how to optimize and possibly even game the algorithm for their own rhetorical circulation purposes.

TEACHING ETHICAL ALGORITHMIC AWARENESS

However, it is not enough to understand how an algorithm functions. Brown argues that to be an ethical rhetor online means to also understand the ethics an algorithm constructs with its functions as they powerfully shape our rhetorical choices online and co-construct our ethos as rhetors as a result (*Ethical Programs*), while also constructing our publics online as well. In fact, Steve Holmes takes algorithmic ethics a step further with procedural habits, arguing that algorithms procedurally form our habits, or, drawing from Aristotle, our *hexis*, which, over time, form the ethos of our character online (*Rhetoric*).

To this end, several scholars within rhetoric and writing studies have examined the ethics of specific algorithms and interfaces. Andrew Pilsch examined Facebook's Flux algorithm and argues that its feed-forward architecture consistently asks for a response, encouraging "hot takes" or knee-jerk, emotional reactions rather than thoughtful, deliberative reflection. Jennifer Sano-Franchini examined how the algorithm works together with design features of the interface to also encourage emotional knee-jerk reactions. She found that the interface emphasized concision, speed, and limited perspectives, creating a filter bubble (Parsier). Further building this reactive filter bubble, identities were decontextualized, as Dana Boyd also found, so that nuances of political belief or complexities of identity were left out. In fact, Pilsch and Sano-Franchini's studies are confirmed by the whistle blower Frances Haugen's release of files from Facebook, as reported in the *Wall Street Journal* ("Facebook"). Dustin Edwards analyzed Content ID, a database determining copyright and video circulation on YouTube. He found that, while all YouTube creators must submit their videos to Content ID, Content ID only protects creative ownership for corporate entities; ordinary people must defend their authorship from Content ID instead or have their videos removed. This controls who is authorized to circulate online content on YouTube and sets the stage to reinstate the uniflow networks of mass broadcast media ("Circulation").

As these more fine-grained examinations of Facebook and YouTube algorithms illustrate, algorithms are often not programmed with ethics in mind in forming online ad hoc publics. In fact, these studies illustrate the dangers algorithms pose in forming filter bubbles, whether corporate, political, or both, that further alienate and polarize the perspectives of ad hoc publics as they restrain our ability to hear diverse voices. At best, algorithms reify corporate interests, as Edwards argues with YouTube's enactment of copyright in Content ID ("Circulation"), reinstating an older form of the public sphere in which corporate interests control broadcast mass media and ordinary citizens have little to no input. At worst, algorithms such as those on Facebook have the potential

to destabilize democracy, especially if misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech are left to circulate unchecked. Algorithms tend to reflect the biases of their programmers or, if algorithms are self-learning and learn from modeling user behavior, they reflect the biases of users (Kearns and Roth; Noble). For instance, Google's search algorithm models the search phrase trends of users, which can be racist and sexist, further marginalizing minority groups and inhibiting them from forming online ad hoc publics, as Safiya Noble discovered when she typed in the phrase "black girls," looking for activities for her young nieces, and found porn instead.

Because algorithms are often not procedurally ethical, scholars within writing studies have conducted studies of ethical interventions of circulation algorithms, either conducting an intervention themselves or studying how others conducted one to leverage it for future rhetorical action within online publics. Steve Holmes and Rachel Graham Lussos programmed a Twitter bot to spout rhetorical protests championing feminist game scholars and journalists and female game designers within GamerGate discussions on Twitter, creating an example of how a machine algorithm can be a rhetorically ethical actor within online discourse ("Cultivating"). Lavinia Hirsu studied how tech savvy Romanians used the folksonomic logic of popular Google search term tags to create a campaign in which their ethnic identity was changed from search terms labeling Romanians as "racist," "thieves," and "stupid," to "smart" or simply "Roma." Ryan Shepherd examined how Trump supporters during the 2016 election gamed Reddit by gaining access to the Reddit moderator sticky function so that their Trump posts circumvented the normal sorting algorithms, and then quickly up voted the posts so that they remained at the top of the Reddit feed. While the actions of the Reddit Trump supporters could be considered unethical, the patterns Shepherd's Reddit study found could still be leveraged for more ethical purposes.

However, because algorithms form enactive procedural arguments that construct our online publics and our actions and resulting character online, teachers should go one step further in teaching algorithmic literacy and should teach students how to ethically examine an algorithm's procedural logics. In other words, teachers should teach students to be ethically critical of algorithms instead of merely "functional" users of them, as Stuart Selber argues, so that they have the rhetorical power to use them for more ethical ends. Fortunately, many rhetoric and writing scholars have also taken up the challenge of asking students to be ethically aware of how algorithms operate as they learn about them. Gallagher asks his students to write algorithmic narratives that critically analyze the ethical values algorithms reproduce. Additionally, Abby Koenig asks students to reflect on their experiences using algorithms in journals, which she argues moves students from a surface-level understanding of how the algorithms function—Selber's functional literacy—to Selber's critical literacy, in which students also understand the ethics the algorithms were reinforcing. Similarly, Edwards poses a set of heuristic questions to help students better understand how an algorithm's function creates ethical effects ("Circulation" 72).

However, much like Quintilian exhorting his pupils to be "good" so that they could use rhetoric effectively, rhetoric teachers must also teach ethics if they wish to teach students how to use algorithms ethically. This also begs the question of what type of ethics to teach, a question made even more complicated by the fact that ethics is at best a set of flexible guidelines that need to be

applied with the practical wisdom of *phronesis* to the varied contingencies of specific situations. To help solve this conundrum, Shannon Vallor argues for twelve technomoral virtues, such as humility, justice, courage, care, and empathy. Using a virtue ethics framework developed from Aristotle's *Nichamachean Ethics*, she argues that because we live in a complex interdependent social network with each other, for *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, to happen, we need to live in harmony as the flourishing of one group affects the flourishing of another. We can do this by using reciprocal relational care with each other as much as possible. Using a critical race framework alongside Vallor, I argue that an ethics of relational care means not only being aware of marginalized groups online, but also being aware of how technology such as algorithms further marginalizes them. An ethics of relational care also means working to disrupt these marginalizing algorithms so that writing by minority groups becomes as much of a part of the public sphere online as writing from those in the majority.

This definition of ethics as relational care that treats marginal voices equitably within discursive spaces stems from Nedra Reynolds' definition of ethos as place. Ethos by definition is situated. It is our reputation within a community; however, ethos is also defined by our physical place and how we dwell within that space. In other words, our ethos is constructed by the affordances of our place, whether these are the affordances of a social position within a community or, as Thomas Rickert argues, the material affordances of a specific place, which further construct our actions, and over time, our *hexis*, or habits (Hawhee; Holmes, *Rhetoric*).

In invoking ethos as social reputation within a community that is also constructed within a physical place, Reynolds also reminds us that communities are seldom utopic or monolithic. After all, both women and slaves were forbidden from speaking in public within the Greek *polis*. As a result, in arguing for a definition of ethics as relational care that works to equitably treat marginal voices, I recognize that I am also echoing 50 years of linguistic struggle within rhetoric and writing studies. The Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) Students' Right to Their Own Language was published in 1974, stating: "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style." However, rhetoric and writing studies still struggles to fully affirm marginalized dialects and rhetorical forms within our own classrooms as both April Baker-Bell and Carmen Kynard lament. This struggle for linguistic justice within the writing classroom also persists despite decades of CCCC chair addresses arguing to allow equal rhetorical space for minority voices within our classrooms from scholars such as Shirley Wilson Logan, Keith Gilyard, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Vershawn Ashanti Young, Malea Powell and many others. For instance, in her 2003 CCCC chair address, Logan critiques the superficial multiculturalism often embraced by university administrators by stating, "What we are doing is substituting some version of 'diversity' for the hard work of acting affirmatively to correct the consequences of past discrimination and denial of rights, particularly of African Americans. That said, what attention are we paying to our changing linguistic demographics?" (334). In other words, within the university, the myth of a monolithic, unchanging Standard English discourse that is deemed more grammatically correct than the grammatical rules governing other dialects has always worked to displace minority dialects and rhetorical forms within

the writing classroom despite extensive work from linguists (Canagarajah; Gee; Pennycook) and the scholars noted above within rhetoric and writing studies.

Furthermore, defining ethos as place calls attention to material affordances and how they construct our ethos within a specific space by affording or limiting our actions. However, ethos as material affordance also makes us pay attention to subjectivity and positionality, and how some materials may be economically afforded by some, easily “near to hand (Loc 84),” but not for others as Sarah Ahmed argues, which is also critically important when discussing technology, access, and computer literacies such as algorithmic literacy, a reminder to pay attention consistently made by Cynthia Selfe. For instance, in his book, Adam Banks heartbreakingly retells how his high school could not afford a computer lab full of functional computers.

Unfortunately, as materially discursive spaces, online spaces are also hardly utopic and counterpublics often engage in even more pronounced struggles for linguistic justice as GamerGate illustrates. In her study of discourse in online spaces, Lisa Nakamura argues that the default subjectivity online is always male, white, middle-class, and heterosexual. In other words, the default body of

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Habermas’ dominant public sphere is still white, male, and heterosexual, a holdover from the larger constitutive forces of Enlightenment logics. Writers online are held up to this norm and judged against it, especially as this norm is often so culturally normalized that it is subconscious. Sadly, as a result of this “standardized” norm, it is not that surprising

that counterpublic groups such as women, BIPOC, and queer writers often experience harassment online (Gelms; Reyman and Sparby).

Online, furthermore, the white, male, heterosexual default does not end at discourse. It also includes the design of online spaces: from the programing of circulation algorithms to the usability designed within interfaces. As far back as 1994, Cynthia and Richard Selfe critiqued Apple and Windows for using files as the default visual interface, which privileges Western users, specifically white men who have traditionally been thought the default office worker. Similarly, Noble found that Google’s search engine was not designed with needs of young black women in mind.

Consequently, teaching an ethics of relational care means making students not only aware of these default online norms but also asking them to interrogate and disrupt them, creating discursive spaces for their own transformational counterpublics as a result. Much as Selfe and Selfe discuss with respect to interfaces, this means introducing algorithms by discussing with students who technology, including algorithms, is *not* designed for and how these non-default users could be better

included by the design. It also means having students read and discuss technological counterstories (Martinez; Solorzano and Yosso) to these design biases such as Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression*, which operates as a technological counterstory. It means asking students to theorycraft algorithms, running targeted and systematic studies of one aspect of how the algorithm functions, to partially uncover how it circulates writing online so that they can better understand the ethics of how it functions and the publics it creates. Finally, it means helping students design rhetorically ethical social media posts, which also fosters Selber's rhetorical technological multiliteracy in response, and using their algorithmic awareness gained through theorycrafting to circulate them, helping them build counterpublics so that we have more diverse and equitable ad hoc publics online. With these social media posts, students are designing critically intersectional counternarratives in response to white, male, heterosexual, middle-class biases in design.

In the rest of this article, I examine student papers from a first-year writing class I taught, which was IRB-exempt, in which students theorycrafted algorithms to illustrate how students can find out more about how circulation algorithms function, gaining algorithmic literacy tactics and further ethical understanding of how the algorithm functions. While my students did not post multimodal rhetorical intersectional counternarratives to the algorithmic logics they discovered by theorycrafting, the last section proposes a future class in which students do so.

STUDENTS ETHICALLY THEORYCRAFTING ALGORITHMS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

The purpose of my first-year writing research class is to introduce students to traditional academic textual research using peer reviewed sources and primary, field-based research using quantitative and qualitative research methods. In my class, students theorycrafted, or conducted systematic quantitative studies, on circulation algorithms on social media platforms and search engines. To do qualitative research, students also conducted interviews with users or even the algorithm's programmers if students had access to them. In conducting their theorycrafting, students looked at a range of algorithms, such as looking at what factors influence the search function on Google, how what users listen to on Spotify influences what music it recommends, what personal information dating apps privilege, and what influences circulation algorithms on more traditional social medial platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. They then wrote IMRD-style papers about their research, including brief literature reviews using academic sources.

To introduce students to theorycrafting algorithms, I not only demonstrated for students how to functionally theorycraft TikTok, but I also situated this algorithmic examination within a larger critical discussion of the ethics of algorithmic functions, drawing on critical race theory and computers and writing scholarship such as Selber and Selfe and Selfe within these discussions. Students were first shown that no technology is neutral: its design always conveys a specific set of ethical and cultural values. Students examined how technology design constructs our habits, which directly constructs a specific ethos for ourselves, especially over time (Holmes, *Rhetoric*). Finally, students discussed how design often privileges some users while marginalizing or completely excluding others. For instance,

to engage students in examining the implicit values embedded within technology's structure and use and how this may marginalize minority users, I first had students read an excerpt from *Algorithms of Oppression*, and we watched *The Social Dilemma* as a class. We then discussed problems with social media and how its design, especially its algorithms, may foster some of these problems.

To further introduce students to ethically theorycrafting algorithms, students engaged in low-stakes class activities modeling theorycrafting, which is important because, while most games are made of quantitative data such as levels and scores, unless students have previously dug into a social media platform's analytics, they do not think about social media platforms in quantitative ways. For instance, to model theorycrafting Google's search algorithm, I had students do a Google search for the phrase "global warming" and email me the top five websites Google gave them. On Excel, I then charted and graphed the class's Google results. While this charting and graphing has the added benefit of showing them how to theorycraft a well-known algorithm, the data also began a conversation about the ethics of Google's search algorithm when I asked them why they thought they received the top five websites they did and what ethical values this constructs for them as Google users. In this way, while students were tasked with discovering Selber's functional literacy within the algorithm they were studying, they often critically analyzed how the algorithms functioned ethically within their discussion findings, also demonstrating Selber's critical literacy.

Unsurprisingly, within their research projects, students were quite interested in using theorycrafting to partially unbox search engine and engagement algorithms on social media platforms, especially as engagement algorithms might be the most powerful in forming online publics. To help students consistently and reliably track engagement, a solid theorycraft project does not need to investigate more than one variable. This did not mean, however, that more ambitious students did not try to track more. In my class, April tracked five variables on TikTok: trending topics, songs, and hashtags, video length, and the length of time a video was online. She supported her hypothesis that short videos posted about trending topics, with trending songs and hashtags, had the most interactions and views within the first 12 hours of the post, showing that the TikTok algorithm privileged these variables the most. To gauge engagement, she used the engagement metrics TikTok already includes for users looking at the number of views, likes, comments, and shares. She tracked the same videos, looking at the same trending and non-trending hashtags, songs, and content, over 12, 24, and 48-hour periods.

By tracking TikTok's engagement algorithms, April was learning algorithmic literacy tactics to understand how to write for the TikTok engagement algorithm in a way similar to how Gallagher argues students should learn to write for algorithms as well as people ("Writing"). By better understanding the posting variables that influenced TikTok's engagement algorithm, April could also better employ what Edwards terms tactical rhetoric ("On Circulatory"), deliberately working with what she knew optimized engagement in her posts to optimize the rhetorical velocity of her post's circulation on TikTok. She also exhibited tactics that Glotfelter's study participants used, such as rhetorically utilizing trending hashtags and content to optimize algorithmic circulation. While April did not completely understand everything there is to know about TikTok's engagement algorithm or its underlying code, she still has gained enough algorithmic literacy to optimize the circulation of

her post in a rhetorically savvy way for her core audience, TikTok's algorithm, so that she can reach the most human viewers possible.

Furthermore, by becoming aware of what factors most influence TikTok's circulation algorithm, April also gains some critical awareness of these factors. For instance, she discovered that videos that are 45 seconds or longer do not circulate as well as shorter content does, writing in her discussion of her research paper that "[t]he shorter videos have an advantage over the longer ones in that TikTok users do not have to focus on them." She corroborated this finding with a user interview who admits "that shorter videos have a better chance at keeping her attention long enough to finish and interact with them." Consequently, April critically understands that the TikTok algorithm is catering to users with short attention spans and that longer videos that are more substantive and nuanced will not circulate as well.

Another student, Julio, wanted to know if he could uncover shadowbanning on TikTok's engagement algorithm. Many Black creators have protested TikTok for downplaying, or shadowbanning, their content on the algorithm when it is about race or when a white content creator will sing or dance the same content and receive thousands of more views. To make matters worse, the Black artist is often the creator of the song or dance, but the white content creator often does not credit the Black artist (Pruitt-Young). While shadowbanning of Black content has yet to be definitively proven,

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with TikTok's executives protesting that they support Black creators (Mitchell), executives have admitted to suppressing queer content (Botella). However, Black content such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) may get shadowbanned in a similar way as queer content because of TikTok's fear of harassment,

as content from both groups may promote offensive reactions from racist and homophobic users. However, instead of targeting those who are racist and homophobic and banning them for their racist and homophobic writing and actions, often algorithms will downgrade engagement, or moderators will take down content that is deemed "controversial," because the content deals with race or sexual identity (McCluskey). However, taking down or algorithmically downgrading content deemed "controversial" effectively silences those of difference from the ad hoc public sphere of social media and promotes a false public of universal white heteronormativity on social media instead.

Consequently, to theorycraft shadowbanning, Julio wanted to see if #BLM tags were shadowbanned on TikTok and found that, at least in his limited theorycraft project, they were not. He created two accounts: one where he actively clicked on content with #BLM and another where he did nothing but randomly scroll. After the third day of actively counting BLM content and averaging it with the other content that came across his feed, he found that 61.7% of the "For You" posts were

related to BLM on the account where he had actively clicked on content with #BLM tags. In contrast, the account where Julio had done nothing only had 8.3% of BLM content. So, while BLM content is not that popular on the TikTok algorithm normally, users can actively seek out this content by clicking on it and the algorithm will reflect their BLM interests.

In uncovering how the TikTok algorithm privileges content, Julio also gained ethically critical awareness about it. He argued that the algorithm still suppressed Black content as his study showed that the algorithm did not naturally promote it unless a hashtag like BLM was attached. In his discussion, he wrote, “This discovery I think would cause turmoil across the platform and especially with Black content creators as only a select amount of people are able to see their posts. They would feel suppressed as their information they post cannot be accessed worldwide and [can] only [be] looked at if specifically searched for.” Consequently, Julio ethically interrogates his theorycraft findings, critiquing ways that the algorithm still engages in shadowbanning.

Students were also interested in theorycrafting Google’s algorithm, specifically how searches varied between different users. August created a new Google account and compared it to his usual account, looking specifically at his search results for shoes. In his usual account, he found an entire line of pictures advertising specific shoes from the shoe store Zalando—in total nine out of 11 ads were from Zalando, his favorite shoe store. On his new account, his shoe search contained no ads and only three websites of shoe stores, of which Zalando was only one. However, this theorycrafting showed August how Google prioritizes personal advertising based on past search history and effectively monetizes the search function, which many users may erroneously think of as a neutral function.

While August’s theorycraft was limited to two accounts, the algorithmic literacy tactics he gained from it still point to the fact that Google’s ads, while clearly marked, can blur Fraser’s economic and state public sphere. As such, August critically discovered that the Google algorithm generates ad content based on previous searches, rhetorically alerting him to the fact that the Google search engine is not neutral: it prioritizes certain search results over others based on a complex formula derived from a history of a user’s previous searches and how many websites are hyperlinked to the search result using the PageRank formula (Parsier; Vaidhyanathan). Furthermore, these findings made August critically aware that the Google search engine is preying on customer demographic information derived from user search histories, which users give away for free in exchange for the convenience the search algorithm provides. August wrote in his discussion section that “This means that the data is essentially willingly given away in order to make the search experience better.”

TEACHING STUDENTS HOW TO COMPOSE MULTIMODAL COUNTERNARRATIVES

As my examination of student theorycrafting demonstrates, teaching students to partially unbox an algorithm to learn how it circulates not only teaches valuable algorithmic literacy tactics but also teaches students how to use these same logics to circulate their own rhetoric online effectively. However, because theorycrafting can hand students a great deal of rhetorical power, it

also entails teaching how algorithms construct an ethical ethos for users and how to ethically use these algorithmic literacy tactics. Finally, teaching students how to theorycraft allows them to use what algorithmic literacy they have gained to construct rhetorically effective, critically intersectional counternarratives in response to the unethical ways algorithms can operate, which is a critical step in fostering counterpublics that create a more diverse ad hoc public online.

In reflecting about what their theorycrafting research projects revealed about their algorithm's ethics, students could also be asked to construct critically intersectional counternarratives that act as counterarguments to the procedurally enacted ethics the algorithms construct. In this way, students are not just ethically critiquing the algorithms in their studies, engaging in Selber's critical literacy, but they are also engaging in Selber's rhetorical literacy in using what they have learned about specific algorithmic circulations to rhetorically effect ethical change. Unfortunately, because of the time limitations of a 10-week quarter, I did not ask students to compose multimodal counternarratives in my class. In this section, I outline a pedagogy for a future class that teaches students to construct multimodal critically intersectional counternarratives for their intended online audiences as a rhetorical intervention to the algorithm's unethical processes.

To prepare students to design rhetorically effective multimodal posts and videos, I will introduce visual design concepts such as Robin Williams's contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity, as well as Gunther Kress and Theo von Leeuwen's design salience and information value so that students understand how images, text, and layout work together for rhetorical effect and purpose. Using these principles, we will analyze social media videos and picture posts. Then we will turn class into a studio space where students design their videos and posts. While I will offer tutorial resources for common video editing applications, I will also allow students to design with whatever image and video editing software they feel comfortable using while also encouraging students to help each other. Finally, students will create social media campaign plans where they identify what social media platform they will use, who their ideal target audience will be, why this is their ideal audience, how they will use the algorithm to target this audience, what their ethical message is in their campaign, and what multimodal written and visual design elements they will use to rhetorically make their ethical message clear. However, because counterpublics (i.e., women, BIPOC, LGBTQ) tend to be targets of online harassment, as Gelm, Jessica Reyman and Erika Sparby show, students who do not feel comfortable widely circulating their message online can also explain why and how they will minimize this circulation instead within their social media campaign plan.

Students can then use their algorithmic literacy to form counternarratives to the silencing norms circulating more widely within the social media platform, creating spaces for counterpublics within the more dominant online public sphere visible on that online platform. For instance, after Julio tested shadowbanning with his theorycraft, he could create a multimodal post that shared his findings that he did not find direct evidence of shadowbanning on TikTok; however, if he worked together with April's theorycraft on TikTok's engagement metrics, he could still design video posts deliberately promoting BLM content using TikTok's engagement algorithm to ensure that more mainstream white adolescent audiences were exposed to such content, targeting them by pairing a BLM hashtag with a currently trending hashtag, using a currently trending songs in his video, and

making sure that his BLM content was integrated with currently trending content to optimize circulation. In this way, he would be leveraging the algorithmic literacy tactics he gained from theorycrafting, using Edward's tactical rhetorics, to ensure that BLM content is not being shadowbanned on the TikTok platform and that it is receiving optimal circulation instead. He could also include a shoutout to Black artists, whose songs and dances are the most popular but who have not received the credit they deserve. For instance, Julio could utilize a song created by a Black artist in his video, deliberately citing the name of the artist who created it to rhetorically counter the negative appropriation tactics of shadowbanning. In using the rhetorical knowledge gained about algorithmic circulation from his theorycrafting, Julio can also address a corrective to the false white heteronormative TikTok ad hoc public created by shadowbanning practices and promote a more realistic, healthier ad hoc public that includes minority voices. In this way, this student example illustrates how asking students to compose ethical multimodal intersectional counternarratives is critically important in constructing an equitable ad hoc online public in which counterpublic minority voices are heard.

Finally, students can reflect on what happened when they circulated their multimodal counternarrative posts, using their algorithmic circulation knowledge gained from theorycrafting by answering a series of reflective questions. Were they successful in creating online spaces for counterpublics and what did they learn in attempting to do so? For instance, were students able to reach their intended audience effectively? If not, what else should they find out about how the algorithm operates so that they will be better equipped to reach this audience in the future? If they did reach

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their intended audience, what was the rhetorical impact? How did audiences react? Why did students find these audience reactions rhetorically effective or not? If audiences did not respond in ways students wanted,

how could students rhetorically change their message with their writing and visuals in the future? Thus, students can reflect on how to be more rhetorically effective in future posts.

In conclusion, theorycrafting can be an accessibly powerful way for students to partially demystify the black box of how social media algorithms operate. As such, students gain algorithmic literacy tactics in using the algorithms to their own rhetorical ends. For instance, through theorycrafting, students can discover how algorithms circulate writing and use this knowledge to circulate their writing to their intended audiences. However, students also need to be taught to theorycraft within an ethical framework: they need to know how algorithms construct an ethos for their users and they also need to be guided to use their algorithmic literacy tactics in rhetorically ethical ways, especially ways that value the ad hoc publics of minority counterpublic voices online.

NOTES

¹ While Aristotle infamously believed that only Greek men were capable of *eudaimonia*, excluding all other groups such as women, slaves, and foreigners, Vallor argues that this is false and true flourishing can only happen if relations of care are extended to all groups.

² Because most of my students are also white and middle to upper class, I do not want to call their critical narratives counterstories, even if they examine race. They are critical responses to the biases of design, so I call them critically intersectional counternarratives instead as they still follow the critical race theory work of decentering white male privilege in design and creating larger spaces online for marginalized groups.

³ Students could also listen to the Facebook Files from the podcast *The Journal*, produced by *The Wall Street Journal*, which explores how Facebook's engagement algorithms foster online hate groups and the spread of misinformation.

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Book Review *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad*
by Jonathan Rosa

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Several decades of research in writing studies has detailed how scholars have rejected the notion that linguistic variations of English often associated with minoritized populations are somehow lesser, “bad” versions of English (Delpit; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez; Smitherman and Alim), pushed against the erasure of home languages for Standard English (Cummins; Moss), and furthered our notions of language difference in multilingual contexts (Horner and Trimbur; Matsuda). Recent research in anti-racist, Black-language pedagogies (Baker-Bell; Condon and Young) and decolonial language pedagogies (Cushman) continue to push the field’s understanding of how literacy instruction is impacted by the social constructions of race and racial identities. In the 2021 Conference on College Composition & Communication (CCCC) Statement on White Language Supremacy, scholars from the field and across decades described White Language Supremacy (WLS) as an ever-present, yet “unseen, naturalized orientation to the world,” highlighting the ways that language serves to produce both insiders and outsiders, particularly in educational setting (Richardson et al.).¹ In line with much of this research is Jonathan Rosa’s *Looking Like a Language, Sound Like a Race: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad*, an in-depth ethnographic investigation into the co-constructions of race, ethnicity, and language. While examining a K-12 context, Rosa’s monograph represents a deep contribution to the field of writing studies as he complicates the many ways that language and racial identity are entangled and provides a stark reminder of how education can act as a vehicle for language supremacy.

To construct this text, Rosa uses participant observation and interviews with faculty, students, and administrators in a newly founded Chicago Public School (CPS) called New Northwest High School (NNHS). Rosa speaks to the ways in which racialized identities and language are co-constructed and naturalized in “modern governance, such that languages are perceived as racially embodied and race is perceived as linguistically intelligible” (2). Through understanding and following the experiences of students of NNHS, who were classified as 90% Puerto Rican and Mexican, Rosa unpacks the ways in which Latinx linguistic practices are constructed through racioethnic identities.

This ethnography builds from Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa’s work on raciolinguistic ideologies, which critiques assimilationist approaches to language instruction that requires students to use “appropriate” language practices rooted in white hegemony as a means of gaining legitimacy. Rosa expands on the impact of raciolinguistic ideologies describing how students designated as learners of English, and particularly standard academic English or what Baker-Bell calls “White Mainstream English” (9), are perpetually positioned as at a deficit and requiring remediation to acquire the dominant language practices. As Rosa details, this practice is reified and consistently

systematized in institutions through the co-naturalization of race and language. Instead, Rosa seeks to denaturalize these categories and provide historical context to the creation of Latinx identities.

To start, Rosa describes the ways in which the CPS system uses the premise of “school choice” to combat educational underachievement, despite the ways in which it serves to sort and isolate students by race and therefore perceived ability; school choice then reinforces agency as a vehicle for equity, a connection which needs to be problematized. In dialogue with NNHS’s principal, Dr. Baez, Rosa interrogates the principal’s mission to transform “gangbangers and hoers” into “Young Latino Professionals” (42), a mission “that seeks to combine upward socioeconomic mobility with the maintenance of one’s ethnoracial and cultural identity” (43) and requires students to enter a binary of identity using a strict uniform policy and an emphasis on detracking. In exchange for homogenizing their appearance and classroom experience, students were granted access to similar experiences; however, as Rosa describes, these policies worked to frame their identities as inherent barriers to success and recognize the differing needs of students.

In the following chapter, Rosa details the “multidimensional processes that demonstrate the linkages between diaspora, national (be)longing, and institutional experiences of difference” (72) associated with forming Mexican, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Latinx identities. Rosa’s investigation of these identities is best problematized in his discussion of capturing identity and simultaneously theorizing it as a social construct as he asks: “That is, if identity is socially constructed, then are we unable to locate and engage it analytically without merely reifying it?” (87). Rosa’s question lends to the trouble of documenting identity, in that it may serve to concretize it in the minds of readers, manifesting fixed characteristics of people, further socially constructing an identity. Rosa ultimately finds that the fixed nature of these identities is confusing for the students as their perceptions change from year to year and are complicated by questions about interracial relationships. Chapter 3 goes on to detail the embodiment of ethnoracial identities where emblems of subgroups are decontextualized into broad representations of Latinidad that serve to other and differentiate, emphasizing the “unmarked status” of Whiteness and the ways in which Whiteness “serves as a stand-in for Americanness” (105) in contrast to practices outside of Whiteness. In discussing the visibility and variability of Latinx identity, Rosa discusses the social process of identity creation and visibility as a process of “joint creation and erasure of difference” (107) broadly highlighted in the charts created by asking students to speak to the traits of the Puerto Rican and Mexican students.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 speak to the linguistic impacts of these constructions of identity, starting with the inverted conceptualization of bilingualism where the speaker is not proficient in either language in ways that matter to the standardized linguistic practices; in this linguistic paradigm, the student’s proficiency in unmarked and academic English is the only goal. This contradiction speaks to the ways in which school designations like bilingual and ELL can erase portions of identity and undermine ability in the service of a linguistic norm rooted in Whiteness and how cultural diversity initiatives (which stand in for race) are just vehicles for ensuring non-white students are assimilated. In Chapter 5, Rosa goes on to discuss raciolinguistic enregisterment that “creates a set of practices that allows them to manage these competing demands” (144) in school spaces that largely act as

“flagship institutions for language standardization” (150) using Inverted Spanish, a concept that moves past “Mock Spanish” (Hill).

Finally, Chapter 6 marks a turn toward textual literacies in forms of legitimate and illegitimate writing and reading practices that reflect the way that powerful institutions have defined appropriate and valued literacy practices and criminalized others and how students have internalized and complicated these beliefs. In this, students again enter a binary of identity possibilities: “gang banger” vs. “good kid,” which can extend out to several other identities positioned as mutually exclusive and opposed: “smart,” “confident,” “good” vs. “remedial” comes to mind. These are taught constructs that disadvantage students, but they continue because of broad rhetorics about schooling that reduce identity to binaries.

The paradigms presented by Rosa are vitally important in understanding how race, language, and identity can be conflated in their co-constructions. The intersection between race, language, and identity is made most apparent for writing instructors in Chapter 6 where we see classroom practices situated through the lens of raciolinguistic ideologies, demonstrating the many opposing forces and conflicting beliefs students negotiate in creating and understanding their literate (broadly defined) selves. Through this lens, students have adapted to taught schemas of what constitutes true writing and reading, reminding me of an old study about “schooling literacy” (Evans) where students segregate reading and writing tasks by what is valued by school and not. However, Rick Evans does not consider intersections of identity and race, leaving out conversations made famous by Shirley Brice Heath.

Rosa’s ethnographic work is a clear contribution to the field of writing studies in providing another framework for considering how language and racialized identity intersect. While this text allows us to extend our understanding around the ways that race and language are entangled, Rosa does not comment on the applications of this framework in the classroom or in education broadly, leaving room for practitioners and scholars to interpret how raciolinguistic ideologies can inform anti-racist classroom practices and policy.

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NOTES

¹ Editorial footnote: We wish to acknowledge the full list of authors who contributed to this statement: Elaine Richardson, Asao Inoue, Denise Troutman, Qwo-Li Driskill, Bonnie Williams, Austin Jackson, Isabel Baca, Ana Celia Zentella, Victor Villanueva, Rashidah Muhammad, Kim B. Lovejoy, David F. Green, and Geneva Smitherman. It is LiCS's editorial policy to name all authors of a text instead of using "et al." We do this because "et al." can obscure the full contributions of all authors, instead centering the efforts of a single author. We also recognize that when many authors have contributed to a text, the list of names in a citation can make it hard for readers to follow the paragraph they are reading. In such cases, we include a note like this one to name and make visible the efforts of all contributors.

Book Review *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop* by Jesse Stommel

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U*ndoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop* is a full-length monograph that Jesse Stommel composed of new material and of pieces that were previously published in journals, in edited collections, and on his academic blog, *Hybrid Pedagogy*. The first time I ever met Jesse Stommel was during his Digital Pedagogy Lab in 2015 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Going into that experience, I didn't yet know Stommel was an ungrader, like me. At the time, Stommel was known for his work in digital humanities and critical pedagogy, and he had been so vocal on social media about his pedagogy and beliefs and values about education that his assessment choices didn't initially catch my attention. In fact, even now, Stommel's views about ungrading seem like a gateway into other conversations about teaching and learning. If you've attended Stommel's conferences and workshops, themes from this book will seem familiar to you. If you're unfamiliar with his work, then this book will get you up to speed. In fact, if you are unfamiliar with ungrading and alternative assessment practices more broadly, then this could be one place to start. Because Stommel takes up big-picture questions about education, *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop* is for a range of teachers across disciplines and contexts.

For Stommel, "the word 'ungrading' means raising an eyebrow at grades as a systemic practice, distinct from simply 'not grading'" (6). This is important because Stommel's contribution is primarily philosophical and, for most of the book, he resists giving readers a "set of best practices" (6) or grading alternatives that constitute "the mechanics of ungrading" (32). Instead, in Chapters 1–3, he takes us through the logics that make grading systems possible: the ranking and standardization of students. Stommel talks about how these logics also reflect and reproduce themselves in educational technology in Chapters 4–6. Drawing from his background in digital humanities and critical pedagogy, he brings up issues of learning management systems and data sets and privacy. These may not immediately evoke questions of assessment for writing teachers because they are removed from the daily routines of what we typically view as classroom "assessment mechanisms": grading, feedback, rubrics. However, in reading this book, I was struck by how much I benefited from slowing down and thinking about education and educational routines holistically, not just through the lens of grading. Stommel continues this thread into Chapter 7 as he discusses how entrenched grades are as an everyday "technology" (63) in the US schooling system. He gives several examples of the underlying messages that institutions are sending students through these technologies: "we pit students and teachers against each other; we rank students in fiercely competitive ways; we measure output with little concern for the learning process; we demean student work by crudely quantifying it; we start from a place of deep suspicion of students; we assess in ways that reinforce bias against marginalized students" (66). I appreciate how, throughout *Undoing the Grade*, Stommel reminds us

that the burden of proof should be on grades and grading; that is, institutions should have to show how their chosen assessments, like grades, serve all students and their learning.

After arguing for a more humanizing and compassionate reimagining of education, Stommel finally begins to unpack the “how” in Chapter 8. He gives a brief overview of his own practice: a series of student self-reflections. Because all of Stommel’s institutions have required end-of-term transcript grades, he also asks students to grade themselves. While he wishes that he did not have to submit a final grade, he also claims that “asking students to give themselves a grade also makes the why and how of grades a valuable subject of the conversations we have—valuable because they will go on to be graded in other courses and thinking critically about how and why grading happens helps that become more productive for them” (74). As Asao Inoue, Wonderful Faison, and others in composition have argued, the important work around assessment happens through discussion and in collaboration with students. After briefly summarizing his own approach, Stommel moves to an overview of other potential ungrading strategies: grade free zones, self-assessment, process letters, minimal grading, authentic assessment, contract grading, portfolios, peer-assessment, and student-made rubrics (74–81). I appreciate that Stommel troubles the idea of “best practices” by acknowledging that no one practice will work the same across classrooms, institutions, teachers, and groups of students. In this chapter he also circles back to his definition of ungrading as continuously questioning our assumptions about “what assessment looks like, how we do it, and who is grading for” (75). Part of the payoff here, for me, was reading these options in light of Stommel’s continuous point that teaching is “personal and idiosyncratic” (71), and although he expresses his own reservations towards certain strategies, he presents them as honest options that all of us might explore, customize, or combine to help us—and our students—rethink grades and grading.

The next three chapters, 9–11, situate ungrading within other overlapping pedagogical imperatives: humane syllabus policies; deeper conversations with students about educational inequities; and small, human acts that help build relationships with students so that we can better understand what the people in our classes need to be successful. Stommel does not shy away from the hostile institutional and academic practices that make the work of ungrading difficult. In fact, he highlights part-time, contingent faculty and the working and living conditions of teachers more than any other advocates for ungrading I’ve encountered. Writing teachers, in particular, may also want to visit the discussion of neurodiversity, extrinsic motivation, and structure in Chapter 11. Stommel maintains that ungrading attempts to reduce the harm of grades and grading and, for those learners who benefit from structure, there are several better options like “a clear schedule, concise descriptions of the class activities, clear ways to ask for help or feedback, community architecture that makes it easy for students to connect with each other” (106). This discussion of structure and its relationship to both flexibility and care could be worth putting in conversation with other writing studies texts when thinking about due dates, “participation,” or building multiple pathways and assignments for students (e.g., Womack). Essentially, Stommel wants us to “resist the notion that the shape of teaching and learning should be fixed in advance and standardized” (107).

Up until this point in *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop*, I had been reflecting on my own practice as a first-year writing teacher. Moving into the final three chapters, I started to

think about this book in the context of professional development (writing pedagogy education, faculty workshops, working groups, etc.). Chapters 12—FAQs—and 13—an ungrading bibliography—offer specific questions and resources for teachers doing the work of ungrading. They offer places to start a dialogue with ourselves, our students, and one another. The final chapter, 14, circles back to the idea of ungrading as a frame that describes these components: “(1) an active and ongoing critique of grades as a system and (2) the decision to do what we can, depending on our labor conditions, to carefully dismantle that system” (131). Stommel clarifies that ungrading is a systemic critique, not a personal call out of individual teachers who grade. Because of this move—and because he chooses not to focus on only one -ism (like ableism), on only one discipline (like English), on only one solution (like self-assessment), and even on only one problem (like grading) —I could imagine *Undoing the Grade* finding a frequent home in many cross-disciplinary and professional development spaces. The book might bring new folks into conversations about ungrading, less grading, and alternatives to grading. Stommel finishes the book with a list of assessment-related “good-for-some-people-in-some-contexts practices” and then ends with a list of “necessary practices” that make education more equitable and the work of undoing grades more possible: pay teachers a living wage, check that students’ basic needs are met, work to minimize harm, and include students in these conversations (137–39).

For me, reading *Undoing the Grade: Why We Grade, and How to Stop* felt like attending several workshops at a conference. Stommel provides a range of information that was easy for me to read, navigate, and move through in and out of order. Even in the parts where I caught my own resistance to his ideas or wished for content that simply isn’t there, I would have found this book incredibly valuable when I was a part-time community college instructor teaching developmental reading and writing at three different campuses. In *Undoing the Grade*, Stommel gives us—educators across disciplines—starter tools for negotiating how we feel about grades and grading and how we can imagine education differently in our classrooms that function within unequal social systems. What he doesn’t give us are specific recommendations for literacy education or for writing studies. He does not apply his arguments about standardization to language. Ultimately, I appreciate Stommel’s book and would recommend it to colleagues and students and include it on my own bookshelf. However, I’d follow up with recommendations for additional readings that get more specific about anti-oppressive assessment approaches in discipline-specific contexts.

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