

The Importance of Documenting Oft-Unspoken Narratives

Sheila Carter-Tod

Perryman-Clark, Staci M., and Collin Lamont Craig. *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: from the Margins to the Center*. NCTE, 2019. 167 pages.

Elder, Cristyn L., and Bethany Davila. *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*. Utah State UP, 2019. 212 pages.

Like millions of others, I have been working from home, adhering to Virginia's response to COVID-19. To stem the spread of the virus, Executive Order Number Fifty-Three states that "all individuals in Virginia shall remain at their place of residence . . . [and] . . . To the extent individuals use shared or outdoor spaces, whether on land or on water, they must at all times maintain social distancing of at least six feet from any other person . . ." ("Governor Northam"). While writing this review, the number of deaths in the US, as a result of the virus or complications thereof, was on a steady incline. And, in the process of on-line teaching, advising, and Zoom sessions for other professional responsibilities, I have been following the news. I, like many others, have been working hard to balance my living situation and my overall emotional state in the "new normal" of life during a pandemic.

Many researchers have published on the isolation and the social effects of this "new normal" particularly in respect to mental and emotional health. For example, Dani Fallin, a professor and chair of the Department of Mental Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, states the following:

In the past few weeks, efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as self-quarantine and the closing of public spaces have dramatically reordered our social and interpersonal experiences. . . . There are a couple of angles to consider[ing] . . . the effects that isolation and social distancing can have on individuals' mental health. There's a lot of evidence showing that social isolation can increase symptoms of mental illnesses like depression and anxiety, among others. . . .

all of this is happening at the same time that we're receiving a barrage of difficult news about the pandemic itself. The wave of anxiety from the pandemic, plus the additional consequences of social isolation, can be a difficult combination. ("Managing and Understanding Mental Health")

Reading these books, while working virtually and following the news of the pandemic created a situation in which I could not help but consider each situation in relation to the other. One key point that resonated with me as overlapping was made by Fallin when he states that the one key to navigating the unknowns surrounding the anxiety, social isolation, and mental stress associated with this pandemic is that it is "important to name any of these challenging feelings and to be aware of them." It is this same concept of naming or making visible that which has been overlooked, hidden, or oft unspoken of that is the focus of both of these texts.

Through their edited collection, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center*, Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig name how "making race visible in our intersecting administrative and curricular practices, creates opportunities to both explore and problematize writing program administration as a framework for institutional critique" (1). And, much like Fallin's conversations and subsequent publications go beyond simply naming the complex mental health and emotional complications associated with the COVID 19 pandemic, Perryman-Clark, Craig, and the ten other contributors to the collection provide a "breadth of practical takeaway strategies that could address the complexities of structural racism and enact change" (2).

Responding to a multiplicity of calls for exploring the ways in which race and writing program administration intersect (Burrows; Craig and Perryman-Clark, "Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing"; Craig and Perryman-Clark, "Troubling the Boundaries: Revisited"; Craig; García de Müeller; Inoue; Grijalva; Carter-Tod; Sanchez; Tang and Andriamalina; and others), *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center* not only names/acknowledges and addresses the "political and theoretical implications associated with Black perspectives of WPA work" but also "address[es] the pedagogical imperative" that accompanies such calls to action (101). In doing this, the text successfully "moves from sharing microaggressions toward sharing successes by black WPAs and WPAs whose work represents a strong commitment to students of color" providing "concrete and specific models for taking action to confront and resist racist microaggressions (11)."

Beginning the book with Vershawn Ashanti Young's informative, instructional, and performative piece "A Forenote from an Angry Black

Man: Blackness Should Always be Center,” Perryman-Clark and Craig provide a personal, professional, and national foundation for, as they state, “venturing into the weeds” bringing “experiences and narratives that are less familiar to readers[;] narratives that position black experiences more directly in relation to WPA work” (16). One such narrative is Carmen Kynard’s powerful piece “Administering While Black: Black Women’s Labor in the Academy and the ‘Position of the Unthought’” which, as she states, “uses the black body as a critical source of sociological imagination of what WPA work has looked like, what it could become, and how we could challenge and resist a neoliberalist higher education within its terms” (28). Kynard uses “Afro-pessimism as a narrative lens and intellectual foundation . . . [to] take up a series of significant memories that have shaped [her] racialized experiences of management and organization in higher education” (28). Next, David Green Jr’s chapter “A Seat at the Table: Reflections on Writing Studies and the HBCU Writing Program” continues this narrative venturing, adding “to the body of WPA scholarship by considering how black rhetorical practices aid formal composition instruction and theories of WPA work” (51).

Considering the majority of WPAs are not minorities, the text then takes an action-based turn in Scott Wible’s chapter “Forfeiting Privilege for the Cause of Social Justice: Listening to Black WPAs and WPAs of Color Define the Work of White Allyship.” As Wible states, his chapter explores white allyship by “analyzing specific contexts in which white WPAs can work alongside black WPAs and WPAs of color to support their research and administrative work to promote a new vision of the field grounded in antiracists principles” (75). This concept of allyship, which is also explored later by Perryman-Clark in the context of bullying in *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*, provides practical guidance on how White program administrators can more “critically examine and personally acknowledge” their own positions of privilege and be willing to put those positions of privilege on the line in supporting Black program administrators at both the institutional and national level (79).

As mentioned earlier, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* “address[s] the pedagogical imperative” in the concluding chapter “Reflective Moments: Showcasing University Writing Program Models for Black Student Success” by Alexandria Lockett, Shawanda Stewart, Brian J. Stone, Adrienne Redding, Jonathan Bush, Jeanne LaHaie, Staci M. Perryman-Clark, and Collin Lamont Craig, by critically showcasing faculty reflections and African-American student work from Spellman College, Houston–Tillotson University, and Western Michigan University. In addition to focusing on common themes, such as black labor and black bod-

ies, curriculum development, antiracist assessment practices, institutional power dynamics and decision making, this chapter highlights the wealth of supporting documents: “sample syllabi, and assignments [that] appear in the online resources associated with this book, found at black-perspectives-in-WPA-resources.ncte.org” (116). These resources and this entire text provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of writing program administration by giving voice to a range of oft unspoken experiences and providing models for considering African-American perspectives in programmatic structures and curriculum.

Navigating the social isolation of living and working online is challenging. My personality and the culture in which I was raised is steeped in human interaction—personal, physical, contact. As my mind kept merging my current situation with the narratives in the texts, the concept of isolation emerged as a salient approach for beginning the review of *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*. Shirley Rose’s foreword confirms this connection when she states “This is a difficult subject to discuss because people are often unwilling or afraid to discuss their own experiences . . . Silence about these incidents can also have the result of isolating those who have experienced bullying” (x). This concept of exclusion and isolation is also later addressed by Davila and Elder as a common theme from their survey research. However, in much the same way that *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* provided narratives to better understand the ways in which race and program administration intersect, the chapters in this text go about naming, explaining, analyzing, and theorizing what bullying is and does in the WPA workplace, and in so doing “empowering all . . . readers to take an active role in . . . addressing bullying in their own workplace” (5).

In both the introduction and “‘Shocked by the Incivility’: A Survey of Bullying in the WPA Workplace,” Davila and Elder define bullying, and based on “survey data collected from stakeholders in WPA workplaces across the United States . . . use these data to establish the scope and patterns of bullying in the WPA workplace” (13–14). These data establish the theoretical foundation of their work and that of the eleven chapters that follow. And, similar to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, the narratives in *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace* move beyond merely documenting the oft unspoken aspects of WPA work to “the theoretical grounding of the experiences, the naming of patterns of behaviors, . . . the resistance against ideologies of normalcy, and, most of all, the agentive responses . . . that readers can apply to their own contexts” (Elder and Davila 13).

Also similar to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, the volume *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace* responds to the need for WPA scholarship to including perspectives from underrepresented social groups and analyzing how identity politics play a role in who is bullied and how. In “Of Sticks and Stones, Words That Wound, and Actions Speaking Louder: When Academic Bullying Becomes Everyday Oppression,” Harry Denny reflects on a previously published piece where he explores his experiences as a gay man, a writing center director, and a pre-tenure faculty member and his immersion “in a local culture of harassment whose roots were in homophobia and heteronormativity and also dovetailed with a repertoire of institutional and workplace bullying” (36). Staci Perryman-Clark’s chapter “Race, Teaching Assistants, and Workplace Bullying: Confessions from an African American Pre-Tenured WPA” builds on her previous work on the intersection of race and writing program administration, by discussing “the role of racialized and gendered bodies as [a] WPA practitioner who must confront racism from tenured faculty advisers and graduate teaching assistants” (Perryman-Clark 126). Perryman-Clark again “identifies the possibility of white ally-ship to address the bullying of WPAs of color . . .” (15).

Andrea Dardello’s chapter “Breaking the Silence of Racism and Bullying in Academia: Leaning in to a Hard Truth,” as she states, “demonstrates how bullying—another form of oppression—operates alongside racism and classism to disempower”(103). Through her story and analysis, Dardello’s “hope [is] that her story might clarify . . . the ways racism is endemic to academic culture and the subtle forms oppression might take . . .” moving readers “not only to acknowledge its existence but to do something about it” (103–04).

Erec Smith’s chapter “A Barbarian within the Gate: The Detriments of Insularity at a Small Liberal Arts College” provides yet another voice of the underrepresented WPA by analyzing the “crisis of insularity” he experienced “based on his embodiment of otherness” analyzing bullying as “mobbing” (144). Smith notes that “this kind of bullying, unlike the general definitions, often involves a group of bullies attacking a single target” (Smith 139). Amy Heckathorn’s chapter “The Professional Is Personal: Institutional Bullying and the WPA” further explores mobbing at the disciplinary and institutional level citing “three underlying reasons . . . (1) ignorance of the field, (2) unwillingness to accept disciplinary expertise, (3) fear of growing disciplinary prominence as resulting in the diminish of other fields” (155).

Further situating bullying in the WPA workplace as systematic, institutionalized, and gendered, Aurora Matzke, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Bre Garrett’s essay “‘Nevertheless, She Persisted’: Strategies to Counteract

the Time, Place, and Structure for Academic Bullying of WPAs” locates bullying in “their experiences as three female WPAs at different institutions and at various stages of tenure, complicating traditional notions of power that center on top-down bullying between tenured faculty or administrators and pre-tenure WPAs” (14). Their chapter along with Dawn Fels’s “Quiet as It’s Kept: Bullying and the Contingent Writing Center Director” illustrate the complexities of how environment and academic status are often a foundational factor of accepted systematic cultures of bullying. And much like Denny, Perryman-Clark, Smith and Dardello, and others, Fels’s data from her study of contingent writing center directors further theorizes how “being bullied [is] often related to other systems of oppression” (Davila and Elder 15).

Moving from systemic to cyclical, Sarah Allen’s essay “The Making of a Bully Culture (and How One Might Transform It)” complicates the discussion by analyzing the ways in which those who are bullied may in turn bully. Allen moves beyond simple analysis to offering recommendations on breaking the cycle and working towards better civility in the WPA workplace. Examining yet another dimension of bullying, Academic Systemic Incivility (ASI), W. Gary Griswold’s chapter “Remediation via Mandate: The California State University’s Early Start Initiative as Manifestation of Systematized Bullying” explores ASI as “a multi-level, top-down administrative behavior that uses low intensity bullying tactics to achieve a specific end or ends without regard to academic employee (faculty or professional staff) expertise or resistance”(174). These chapters provide both a personal and an institutional view of the systemic nature of bullying. In providing this perspective, readers can not only avoid perpetuating the cycles of bullying but also be able to identify cases of bullying in larger cross-university and state-based initiatives.

By concluding with “I Can’t Afford to Lose My Job,” Elder and Davila make a poignant acknowledgment that, while the chapters in their book have significantly added to the conversation concerning bullying in the WPA workplace, there are indeed so many more who weren’t able to speak. This chapter, consisting solely of the title and a blank page, illustrates the perfidious nature of bullying in the WPA workplace.

As I was reading both of these texts, I was reminded of how as co-coordinators of WPA workshops at CWPA, we would revise the curriculum to address current emerging WPA concerns. At the time, we added a session on emotional labor and writing program administration because of the growing body of research in the field and the nature of program administration. While not labeling it as such, both of these books are extremely useful to any program administrator or anyone considering program administration

because they provide the reader with analyzed, and theorized perspectives through multiple forms of data with a cacophony of voices expanding WPA scholarship on emotional labor—specifically as it relates to race and bullying—in immeasurable ways.

WORKS CITED

- Burrows, Cedric D. “The Yardstick of Whiteness in Composition Textbooks.” “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing,” edited by Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 42–46.
- Carter-Tod, Sheila. “Stories, Struggles, and Strategies: The Emotional Labor of Female WPAs of Color.” *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration*, edited by Courtney Adams Wooten, Jacob Babb, Kristi Murray Costello, and Kate Navickas, Utah State UP, pp. 252–71.
- . “Reflecting, Expanding, and Challenging: A Bibliographic Exploration of Race, Gender, Ability, Language Diversity, and Sexual Orientation and Writing Program Administration.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 97–105.
- Craig, Collin Lamont, and Staci M. Perryman-Clark. “Troubling the Boundaries Revisited: Moving Towards Change as Things Stay the Same.” “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing,” edited by Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 20–26.
- Craig, Collin Lamont, and Staci Maree Perryman-Clark. “Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2011, pp. 37–57.
- Craig, Sherri. “A Story-less Generation: Emergent WPAs of Color and the Loss of Identity through Absent Narratives.” “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing,” edited by Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 15–20.
- García de Müller, Genevieve. “WPA and the New Civil Rights Movement.” “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing,” edited by Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 36–41.
- García de Müller, Genevieve, and Iris Ruiz. “Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: A Qualitative Study of US College Writing Programs,” edited by Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 19–39.
- “Governor Northam Issues Statewide Stay at Home Order.” Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam, 30 Mar. 2020, governor.

virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/march/headline-855702-en.html.
Press release.

- Grijalva, Regina McManigell. "Sustaining Balance: Writing Program Administration and the Mentorship of Minority College Students." "Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing," edited by Barbara L'Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 31–36.
- Inoue, Asao B. "Friday Plenary Address: Racism in Writing Programs and the CWPA." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, pp. 134–54.
- . "Engaging with Assessment Technologies: Responding to Valuing Diversity as a WPA." "WPAs Respond to 'A Symposium on Diversity and the Intellectual Work of WPAs,'" edited by Greg Giberson, Lori Ostergaard, and Jim Nugent, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 134–38.
- "Managing and Understanding Mental Health Concerns during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *The Hub*, 6 Apr. 2020, Johns Hopkins U, hub.jhu.edu/2020/04/06/dani-fallin-mental-health-challenges-coronavirus.
- Sanchez, James Chase, and Tyler S. Branson. "The Role of Composition Programs in De-Normalizing Whiteness in the University: Programmatic Approaches to Anti-Racist Pedagogies." "Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing," edited by Barbara L'Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 47–52.
- Tang, Jasmine Kar, and Nora Andriamanalina. "Rhonda Left Early to Go to Black Lives Matter: Programmatic Support for Graduate Writers of Color." "Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing," edited by Barbara L'Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 10–15.

