When Words Do Not Matter: Identifying Actions to Effect Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy

**Dawna Ballard[1] , Brenda Allen[2],
Karen Ashcraft[3], Shiv Ganesh[1],
Poppy McLeod[4], and Heather Zoller[5]**

Abstract

It is time to move past the words—the well-crafted statements circulated by groups and organizations across the academy, the scholarly writing as displacement, the formal and informal critiques—as if they had some recognizable impact. Each of these rhetorical moves can be valuable in helping to effect larger cultural and structural shifts. Yet, alone, a variety of evidence suggests that these forms of communication fail at effecting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Therefore, through our varied areas of research and lived work experiences, we focus attention toward actions as sites of power and potential: (a) in faculty emotional labor and work (McLeod), (b) at various levels of university administration and structural change (Ashcraft and Allen), (c) in the time-based practices associated with the ways we teach and mentor graduate students (Ballard), and (d) in our corpus of scholarship (Ganesh and Zoller).

[1]University of Texas, Austin, TX, USA
[2]University of Colorado, Denver, CO, USA
[3]University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, USA
[4]Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA
[5]University of Cincinnati, OH, USA

Corresponding Author:
Dawna Ballard, Department of Communication Studies, University of Texas, 2504 Whitis Avenue (A1105), Austin, TX 78712-1075, USA.
Email: dballard@austin.utexas.edu

Introduction to the Forum

Dawna Ballard

"*I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do.*"

–James Baldwin

It is time to move past the words—the well-crafted statements circulated by groups and organizations across the academy, the scholarly writing as displacement, the formal and informal critique—as if they had some recognizable impact. Indeed, Hewes (1986) offered the null hypothesis as it concerns the impact of group members' communication on resultant action. Through the socio-egocentric model, Hewes argued (and the data support) that much of what is said in groups has no influence on the decisions members make. Each member is metaphorically speaking to the room in a series of collective monologues, coordinated through appropriate turn-taking but absent reflection or reflexivity. He likened it to cocktail conversation—superficial and without practical import. While this model concerns small group settings, we argue that much of the communication throughout the academy functions in the same way when it comes to matters of power as relevant to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Universities, colleges, and departments regularly make statements and form committees about DEI to symbolically position themselves. As well, scholars theorize power and hegemony using specialized, privileged discourse that contributes to a body of scholarship on the topic. Institutions also recruit graduate students and faculty members from underrepresented groups in order to signal institutional legitimacy and relevance. Each of these rhetorical moves can be valuable in helping to effect larger cultural and structural shifts. Yet, alone, a variety of evidence suggests that these forms of communication fail to offer anything more than the equivalent of a good cocktail conversation—full of variety and interest but largely without value after one arrives home for the evening.

As group and organizational communication scholars, our research coheres around the study of organizing. As such, at least in theory, we are well equipped to design and practice organizing that makes a difference

locally (and perhaps globally). Nonetheless, we have historically also simply held "cocktail parties"—through our committees, statements, scholarship, and seminars—that support a null hypothesis on the impact of words and other symbolic forms when it comes to the lived experiences of people of color, first-generation students, and other marginalized groups in the academy. Rather than an opening for dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012), our discursive practices are more commonly what Smith (2011) described as signs or symbols used to negotiate the politics of identity. Similar to the #ToneUpOrgComm Collective (2020), Smith (2011) centered critical intersections of race, ethnicity, color, nationality, class, gender, and sexual identity. Pushing beyond fixed categories, however, Smith observed their performative qualities and challenged rigid identities of self and other.

Following Smith's lead, in this Forum we destabilize (and hopefully obliterate) the assumed identities of villain and hero in order to support movement from predictable cocktail conversation to unexpected and emancipatory outcomes. We invite the reader to remain open to surprise and mystery (Eisenberg, 2001) as we observe the fundamentally temporal nature of identities, such as ally, perpetrator, marginalized, and powerful (Desnoyers-Colas, 2019). Based on our varied areas of research and lived work experiences, we highlight the power, potential, and costs of various forms of *doing*, making suggestions and provocations for action as regards: (a) faculty emotional labor and diversity research (McLeod), (b) various levels of university administration, their statements, and structural change (Ashcraft and Allen), (c) time-based practices associated with the ways we teach and mentor graduate students (Ballard), and (d) how we can be more reflexive about and live the lessons of our own research (Ganesh and Zoller).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

#ToneUpOrgComm Collective (Cruz, J. Gist-Mackey, A. N., Hanchey, J. N., Harris, K. L., Jensen, P. R., Kenney, S. C., & Leslie, K., 2020). #ToneUpOrgComm: A manifestx. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, *9*(2), 152–154. https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2020.9.2.152

Desnoyers-Colas, E. F. (2019). Talking loud and saying nothing: Kicking faux ally-ness to the curb by battling racial battle fatigue using White accomplicement. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research, 8*(4), 100–105. https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2019.8.4.100

Eisenberg, E. M. (2001). Building a mystery: Toward a new theory of communication and identity. *Journal of Communication*, *51*(3), 534–552. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02895.x

Hewes, D. E. (1986). A socio-egocentric theory of group decision-making. In R. Y. Hirokawa & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Group decision-making and communication processes.* Sage.

Smith, C. (2011). *Enacting others: Politics of identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*. Duke University Press Books.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Disconnection

Poppy Lauretta McLeod

It's important, therefore, to know who the real enemy is, and to know the function, the very serious function of racism, which is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up.

–Toni Morrison

I was finishing up a literature review on diversity and group communication due at the end of the week in early June 2020 when the tidal wave of anguished protests began, in the wake of only the most recent in a long line of brutally racist attacks on Black people in the United States. The names George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery became the newest verse in a bitter lamentation that seemed like it would never end. These names appeared as a refrain in the countless public statements expressing sorrow and outrage over the murders of these individuals and denouncing the evils of racism represented by those acts.

I opened this essay with the oft-cited quote by the late Toni Morrison, from a 1975 speech at Portland State University, to illustrate the surreal paradox I faced in June. Most citations of Morrison's quote end with the phrase, "explaining over and over again, your reason for being." The phrases that follow, however, are instructive for this forum because they capture a struggle for many Black scholars, namely that no matter the subject of your

research there is an expectation that you will (and should) have something to say about race. Whether we study medieval history, microbiology, or financial decision-making, we are assumed to be interested in racial dynamics. Black colleagues tell me this expectation—felt by some as pressure—comes from all quarters. Whites seem more accepting of us when we focus on race, perhaps due to stereotyped expectations of what our interests are. From the Black community comes an expectation to "give back." We expect it of ourselves—at the very least because we are emotionally and spiritually engaged with these questions even if not pursuing them as scholarship. These expectations are an example of what Morrison means by distraction.

Thus my paradox: I indeed had much to say about race but was distracted from saying it by sudden demands (disguised as requests) by my non-Black colleagues to *immediately* engage in dialogue, to issue official statements, to form committees, to read books, and watch films together, in short to do something—right now. There was much I wanted to say about race but these demands distracted me from saying it on my own terms. The June 2020 maelstrom, precipitated by racism, both distracted me from my work on reviewing research on diversity and provided evidence for why this research is needed. However, my review led me to make several interrelated observations about this body of research that may limit its ability to fulfill that need. I will use this essay to elaborate briefly on these observations and to point to hopeful evidence of changes in these past trends.

First, diversity research has moved away from its social justice roots in providing opportunities and access for historically excluded groups; instead the work has become predominated by an economic motive. The research that generally falls under the label of diversity literature had its origins in the latter half of the 20th century, as organizations responded to civil rights era legislation intended to broaden the participation of ethnic minorities and women in multiple sectors of the U.S. workforce. These changes to the demographics of the U.S. workforce were amplified by naturally-occurring changes to the demographic composition of the U.S. population more broadly. Earliest research argued that increasing inclusion of ethnic minorities in the workforce should not be motivated merely by legislative necessity and the inevitability of changing workforce demographics, but rather that a diverse inclusive workforce was inherently valuable. This argument stimulated a long line of research essentially testing this "value-in-diversity" hypothesis (Cox & Blake, 1991). Research attention fairly quickly moved away from a focus on inclusion processes and toward the business case for diversity, focused on economic outcomes such as group task performance and company financial performance (Nkomo et al., 2019 for comprehensive review of this history).

My second observation, therefore, is how surprised I was to realize just how narrowly focused the diversity literature has become on extracting diversity's economic benefits while mitigating negative effects, like conflict and low interpersonal trust. This narrowness is even more surprising when the sheer volume of this literature is considered. I am aware of at least 50 reviews of this literature published since 1996; the number of studies covered by these reviews is easily over a thousand. The bulk of this vast body of research focuses on (a) identifying the positive and negative effects of diversity, (b) what circumstances influence the extent of those effects, and (c) the mechanisms through which those effects are seen in organizations and groups. Results from these studies are typically used as the basis for economically-oriented recommendations, like how to configure teams to avoid productivity losses that may be a result of diversity-related conflict.

My final observation is this research area has a narrow disciplinary representation. My review revealed that diversity research is published predominantly in organizational science outlets (I include industrial and organizational and applied psychology here). Given the economically-oriented research focus and the fact that diversity research had its early roots in workforce composition, this is not so surprising. More important, this body of literature makes almost no connection with scholarship from other disciplines such as the very relevant work on race and gender in the communication and critical studies literatures (Ahonen et al., 2014; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Even a casual perusal of citation patterns, for example, shows a clear asymmetry: articles on diversity published in organization science journals rarely cite work published in other disciplinary outlets whereas the organization science work is regularly cited in the diversity work published in other disciplinary journals. This ironic lack of diversity in the diversity research literature is not only troubling but also limits this work's impact on the world.

These few observations point to some obvious directions for diversity scholarship to reclaim its potential to have a real effect on solving the significant struggles related to diversity and inclusion facing our society. I will mention just two examples. The first would be to expand the motivating focus for such research beyond economic benefit toward social integration and inclusion, as represented in recent work by Tyler (2019) and Jansen et al. (2020). I do not argue against the importance of economic benefits of diversity; rather, I assert that the outsized attention on economic benefits is limiting because such benefits are not enough for societal health. The protests and demonstrations in June 2020 made clear how much help our institutions need to learn what inclusion means and to develop inclusive policies and practices.

The requirements for providing this help lead to the second recommendation: that we need serious efforts at cross-disciplinary fertilization, especially

in scholarship coming from the organizational sciences. Integration across disciplines is critical to keep this research from being disconnected from practice. A focus on inclusion will require, for example, incorporating the rich tradition in discourse analysis from the communication discipline, which can provide insights about how people interact with each other across social category differences, a sociological perspective on the structural factors that govern how people are integrated into their organizational units, or insights from a critical theory perspective that social identity and dimensions of diversity are fluid, evolving, and contextually-based.

I will close by returning to that week in early June when I felt embattled between the clamors to join (even lead) our department's frantic calls to action on one side, and by the exigency of my writing deadline on the other. Working on that article was the only thing that felt healthy and grounded that week, which led me to recognize that responding to the demands for activism would have been a distraction from my work. I chose to not be distracted. I completed my article. But I did not ignore nor separate myself from my colleagues. Instead, I asked them to join me in the choice to not be distracted, and for all of us to engage in individual reflection to plan for how our department would move forward. In response to their concerns about how it would look for us to be silent at that time, I asked them to consider the difference between silence and quiet. I pointed out the many quiet ways we could respond. For example, rather than issuing a statement to our students I suggested that students might instead find hearing individually from their faculty advisors to be more meaningful. That is what I did and one of the results was a delightful exchange with one of my undergraduate students who ended up giving me very helpful feedback on my article. Weeks later, my colleagues and I began proactive work together to identify goals and plans for improving our department's diversity and inclusion climate. I look forward to seeing early fruit of those plans by the time this essay appears. More recently, I had the occasion to draw on this experience to counsel some STEM graduate students of color who were struggling with feeling they were not engaged enough in activism against racism. I told them, and remind all of my Black colleagues: do not let racism distract you from your work. Our work, indeed our very presence, is our true activism.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Ahonen, P., Tienari, J., Meriläinen, S., & Pullen, A. (2014). Hidden contexts and invisible power relations: A Foucauldian reading of diversity research. *Human Relations*, *67*(3), 263–286. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713491772

Ashcraft, K. L., & Allen, B. J. (2003). The racial foundation of organizational communication. *Communication Theory*, *13*(1), 5–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2003.tb00280.x

Cox, T. H., & Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *5*(3), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.1991.4274465

Jansen, W. S., Meeussen, L., Jetten, J., & Ellemers, N. (2020). Negotiating inclusion: Revealing the dynamic interplay between individual and group inclusion goals. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *50*(3), 520–533. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2633

Nkomo, S. M., Bell, M. P., Roberts, L. M., Joshi, A., & Thatcher, S. M. (2019). Diversity at a critical juncture: New theories for a complex phenomenon. *Academy of Management Review*, *44*(3), 498–517. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2019.0103

Tyler, M. (2019). Reassembling difference? Rethinking inclusion through/as embodied ethics. *Human Relations*, *72*(1), 48–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718764264

How Words Come to Matter: A Statement on Statements

Karen Lee Ashcraft and Brenda J. Allen

When it comes to activities that stress talk over action, the practice of making statements regarding matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) would seem to take the cake. Whether such proclamations induce meaningful change is an open question. Yet, in our respective roles as DEI administrators, we were constantly asked to issue or help to craft such statements, sometimes by members and allies of affected groups seeking institutional support and sometimes by administrators seeking image maintenance or repair.

The imperative for statements comes from multiple and, at times, conflicting corners. To call for a statement is to ask an organization to *do* something by *saying* something, though it often remains unclear what, if anything, statements do, or *can* do, and what "we" *desire* them to do, on behalf of whom.

The statement-making frenzy that enveloped higher education in early June 2020 was especially striking in this regard. The flurry intensified a week after protests erupted across the nation in response to the brutal murder of George Floyd by a white Minneapolis police officer, which came on the heels of several other anti-Black murders and violent incidents, many in the hands of law enforcement, as well as viral videos bearing witness to the disturbing mechanics of everyday racism—all this, in the context of a global pandemic

disproportionately decimating Black lives and communities. Suddenly, most universities, and nearly each college and program within them, felt compelled to issue their own statements. For the first time, and swiftly, readiness to "take a knee"[1] and declare that Black Lives Matter became a litmus test of organizational credibility, instead of a controversial stance.

As our inboxes filled with statements, we became increasingly disturbed by what England and Purcell (2020) call "higher ed's toothless response" to anti-Black racism. We resonate with their unflinching assessment that the surge of statements exposes "an unholy alchemy of risk management, legal liability, brand management, and trustee anxiety." Righteous anger—or "whiteous indignation," as Brenda J. memorably captures it—swirls all around us, but its hollowness echoes through furious condemnations and bland commitments, expressions of horror that hint innocence and mince words, nods to under-resourced initiatives already flagging, the dearth of extensive and tangible intentions toward change, and the absence of any real accountability.

As McKenzie (2020) noted, some statements promised to confront systemic racism, yet "few explicitly mentioned black people, referenced the Black Lives Matter movement or included any concrete action items to address inequities on campus or in wider society." On a similar note, England and Purcell (2020) lamented, "These statements feign care for the community but ask us to deal with structural inequities not through collective action but by directing us to the university's buffet of self-care services." As we processed the statements flowing all around us, some within our own institutions but also from multiple others, we encountered similar patterns, observing how few even mentioned white supremacy, much less its manifestation in higher ed systems. When named at all, white supremacy and anti-Black racism consistently appeared as something "out there" to guard against, intruders lurking around the institution that must be kept out, evil forces with no place "in here"—and, therefore, unrecognizable as founding premises of U.S. higher ed that remain fundamental to its institutions and operations (Dancy et al., 2018).

If we were to distill the apparent formula guiding the majority of statements we read, it would go something like this:

Step 1: [This bad thing] just happened that goes against our [DEI] values, and we will not tolerate it. Name [this bad thing] in relatively safe, technical, bureaucratic and otherwise sanitizing terms (e.g., in response to George Floyd's death and related events, use "racism" and "killing" rather than "white supremacy" and "police murder"). To be safe, retain some display of so-called balance or even-handedness (e.g., support "peaceful" protest).

Optional enhancement: Attempt to empathize via a clueless, virtue-signaling personal statement.

Step 2: To anyone who might somehow be affected by [this bad thing], we're sorry; we support you; we want you to feel safe and welcome—in a word, included.

Optional enhancement: Look at these resources—mainly, existing campus and community offices and programs. It will go without saying that many of these are inadequate and underfunded, or that they individualize both problem and response (e.g., by treating racial trauma as personal rather than collective and inter-generational).

Step 3: Repeat that [this bad thing] does not correspond with our DEI values, and we promise to "continue" the work we are already doing to uphold those values.

Optional enhancement: Indicate, and assume ownership of (credit for), some [DEI] efforts already underway, even if these do not address, directly or even indirectly, [this bad thing]. Hyperlinks ideal.

Of course, a few caveats are in order. First, we intend this as a suggestive, not exhaustive, characterization of a dominant tacit template currently circulating in higher ed. Our intent is to stimulate readers to notice these and other common moves on their own. Second, we recognize that there are variations and exceptions to this formula (indeed, we became involved in alternative attempts).[2]

Finally, while our tone is critical, at times satirical, we do not surface the formula as some cynical or self-righteous exercise. Rather, institutional habits of statement-making are worth spelling out like a template precisely so we can see not only repetitive patterns of messaging, but also what they accomplish, and how they might do otherwise. As Ahmed (2012) explained, "We can learn from how responses to critiques of racism sound like rehearsals . . . as if a script was written in advance, *as if the very point of the script is to block the critique of racism from getting through*" (p. 149, emphasis added). This blocking, we concur with Ahmed, is what the current formula achieves. Its impact, regardless of intention, is to deflect the critique of white supremacy and anti-Black racism it purports to acknowledge.

To be clear, we are *not* faulting the current template for yielding statements that do little or nothing—that is, we are *not* indicting the formula as "all talk, no action," empty words over real deeds. Our argument is that such statements *are* deeds, albeit not the kind that activate change. Instead, they circumvent the very change of which they speak and claim to seek. In this sense, we might say that, with these statements, institutions of higher ed put

their mouths precisely where their money is: invested in the preservation of white supremacy.

In her analysis of diversity and inclusion work in higher ed, Ahmed (2012, p. 117, original emphasis) introduced the notion of "non-performatives" to capture "the 'reiterative and citational practice by which discourse' *does not produce* 'the effects that it names' (Butler, 1993, p. 2)." Unlike a performative utterance that endeavors to bring about the reality it describes, a non-performative utterance acts to stave off the state it summons. In other words, "The failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, *but is actually what the speech act is doing*. Such speech acts are taken up *as if* they are performatives . . . such that the names come to stand in for the effects. As a result, naming can be a way of not bringing something into effect" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117, original emphasis).

We thus advocate for statements that are conscientiously performative rather than non-performative. A performative practice of statement-making could pave a real pathway toward anti-racist organizing by beginning to *enact* anti-racism. Such a practice starts by recognizing that the usual non-performative statement is caught up in, enables, and perpetrates the same systemic racism it condemns. To interrupt this complicity, performative statement-making must throw away the template that provides cover for the institution and start doing the actual work of anti-racism. Rejecting the fantasy of innocence preserved, it must unequivocally admit organizational injustice and inequity; prioritize the extension of shelter (i.e., meaningful empathy, care, justice, healing, restitution) to those who bear the brunt of constitutive white supremacy in higher ed; and work to unsettle, challenge, and educate those who benefit, including many statement authors.

Next, we describe *how* an organization might cultivate a performative practice of statement-making through a set of doings designed to yield alternate sayings that *can* do otherwise. The "you" below refers to higher ed leaders tasked with generating statements, accounting for the fact that, in the U.S., the overwhelming majority of this group are identified as white:

- Perform whatever labor is needed to name [this bad thing] in specific, unwavering terms. As racial equity experts Andrews and Harper (2020) recommend: "Use words that explicitly name racial violence. Do not soften the intensity of systemic racism with broad language about diversity, equity, and inclusion. If the statement does not include words such as 'racism,' 'racist,' 'white supremacy,' or 'anti-Blackness,' it is insufficient." Intentional, overt self- and organizational-critique are essential to this process. If you are not knowledgeable enough about racism, white supremacy, and anti-Black

racism to characterize the dynamics at stake, you will need to gain enough knowledge to address [this bad thing] *before* you issue a statement. In short, learning to describe directly how racism operates *is* anti-racist work.

- Concede that your institution cannot help but be racist, and begin active learning about how this is so, so that you can offer tangible examples in the statement. Demonstrate understanding that things akin to [this bad thing] "out there" happen "in here" as well, and commit to expanding this awareness.

- Acknowledge the inestimable negative impact on members of racially minoritized groups. To become literate about these impacts, consult the ever-increasing wealth of available resources (e.g., expert scholars on your campus and elsewhere, and social media feeds such as #BlackInTheIvory on Twitter and Instagram). However, do *not* call upon people of color you know to educate you unless that is a formal part of their role (e.g., DEI experts, critical race scholars). Even then, show empathy for how much more overburdened than usual they likely are during these times when multitudes of white people are seeking guidance for how to be anti-racist and/or to support the Black Lives Matter movement.

- Point out that systemic racism harms everyone. For example, even those who most benefit from privilege cannot help but become stunted by partial knowledge and narrow exposure, their human development hampered by the very inequities that seem to profit them. Particularly for higher ed, such harm should be a central concern for all of its stakeholders.

- State how you are increasing *your* knowledge, and indicate how you will share and apply lessons learned, so people can hold you to it. We know of one campus where leaders have charged faculty to develop an anti-racism course for undergraduates, while seeming to totally miss the hypocrisy of not committing to similar education for themselves.

- Describe how you plan to cultivate an anti-racist institution where all racially minoritized groups are valued and respected, and where everyone (not just DEI personnel, or faculty and staff of color who are unfairly expected to shoulder the burden even when it is not in their job description) is responsible for achieving that goal. Specifically, articulate professional and personal actions based on proven strategic, sustainable, and systemic mechanisms (Allen, 2020). Indicate how all stakeholders (including you and your leadership team) will receive appropriate education and professional development (PD), after which they all will be held accountable. Provide dates and deadlines. Such PD should be an ongoing commitment, *not* a one-and-done, that

covers a variety of DEI topics, with an emphasis on anti-racism. If
relevant efforts for anti-racist organizing are underway, only then cite
them with hyperlinks.

Making statements should not be easy, a scripted public relation. If you are
struggling for words instead of rehearsing a non-performative template, and
if you are learning with those around you *as* you struggle, a saying with
potential to do differently may be coming into view.

Now all this *talk* of statements puts us in mind of sorely needed *action* in
our academic "home" discipline, organizational communication studies. As
awareness of white supremacy in our own field intensifies (Harris, 2019),
what better time to put the much-touted constitutive power of communication
to work in/on our *own* practice? Together, let us circulate examples of prom-
ising statements, then compose our own performative statement that demon-
strates by doing how words come to matter. It has long been time, yet the
moment has never been more ready.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life.* Duke
University Press.
Allen, B. J. (2020). *Message to higher education leaders from a former Chief
Diversity Officer*. [Post]. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/message-
higher-education-leaders-from-former-chief-allen-phd
Andrews, D. J. C., & Harper, S. R. (2020). 6 considerations for school leaders making
a statement about George Floyd. *Education Week* https://www.edweek.org/ew/
articles/2020/06/02/6-considerations-school-leaders-statement-george-floyd-.
html
Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "Sex."* Routledge.
Dancy, T. E., II., Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically white universi-
ties and plantation politics: Anti-Blackness in higher education in the Black Lives
Matter era. *Urban Education*, *53*(2), 176–195.
England, J., & Purcell, R. (2020). Higher ed's toothless response to the killing of
George Floyd. *Chronicle of Higher Education.* https://www.chronicle.com/arti-
cle/Higher-Ed-s-Toothless/248946

Harris, K. L. (2019). *Unlearning border defensiveness, undermining white suprem-acist violence: Renewing the case for interdisciplinary inquiry in organiza-tional communication studies*. Paper presented to the National Communication Association Conference, Baltimore, MD.

McKenzie, L. (2020). Words matter for college presidents, but so will actions. *Inside Higher Education.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/08/search-ing-meaningful-response-college-leaders-killing-george-floyd

Changing Times: Necessary but Not Sufficient Temporal Conditions for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Dawna Ballard

> "My first paper for my first class with (them) was, in retrospect, pretty awful, and (their) feedback unequivocally articulated the paper's shortcomings. Imposter syndrome began to set in. Later that semester, I turned in some much improved work, earning feedback that included the phrase 'You belong here.' That still sticks with me."

> —Dr. X, Assistant Professor

The long-term relationship between faculty and graduate students begins through a process of each choosing the other. As faculty, we examine student applications and make a judgment about whether they are capable of excel-ling in our departments. In this process, sometimes capable students are not accepted because our heuristics fail us. Yet, despite our confidence in the heuristics that *we* developed, and the amount of time invested in the selection process (i.e., choosing them) and recruitment (i.e., getting them to choose us), we end up participating in the exclusion of students we deem most quali-fied. This exclusion may not be malicious, but it is routine (i.e., mundane, inherent in day-to-day interaction) and it is institutionalized (i.e., continually [re]produced at the system level).

From an organizational communication standpoint, this exclusion is an unusual routine (Rice & Cooper, 2010). Rice and Cooper (2010) define an unusual routine as a "recurrent interaction pattern in which a system allows or requires a process which creates and reinforces, through dysfunctional (non-existent, obstructive, or deviation-reinforcing) feedback, unintended and undesirable outcomes, either within or across system levels (or both)" (p. 17). Accordingly, a boundary condition of this essay, highlighted in this definition, is that organizational members view exclusion and inequity as an

unintended and undesirable consequence. It is far outside the bounds of this essay to convince others that, collectively, we fall short of the ideals of inclusion, equity, and diversity that our numerous formal statements proclaim. It is even further outside of these bounds, as well as my desire, to persuade those for whom exclusion is a desirable process that their stance hurts the intellectual vibrancy and impact of our field. Rather, this essay is in conversation with colleagues—faculty, graduate students, and staff—who have considered *how*, despite good intentions and anti-racism aims, *we continually (re)produce exclusion and inequity*.

Time offers a useful lens to consider how these unusual routines arise and are sustained in daily interaction, and it points to long-term structural changes needed to support students with membership in traditionally marginalized groups, as well as graduate communities as a whole. There are at least three necessary preconditions, each building on the next, in order to effect diversity, equity, and inclusion for graduate students. First, enlarge your time scale. Next, pay careful attention to your daily, mundane practices. Finally, institutional structures must reward effectiveness (at least) as much as efficiency. Below, I describe how these preconditions enable and constrain our ability to move past words and into actions.

Enlarge Your Time Scale

Attention to time scale is the first step in moving beyond formal statements to enable actual shifts in the lived worlds of graduate students with membership in traditionally marginalized groups. Ballard and Aguilar (2020) described the time scale of exclusion. They argued that the time scale of any outcome functions to include or exclude certain organizational processes, especially those that arise in and through their work. In the case of the academy, there are key socialization processes that simply take time. Some students may be socialized more quickly because their parents hold doctoral degrees, or because of the close mentoring relationship they benefitted from in their previous institutions. Other students—including, but not limited to, first-generation college students, international students, and non-native speakers—will naturally find some aspects of the experience easier to adapt to than others. For instance, a gregarious international student might find relating to their peers easier than learning how to participate in graduate seminars. Another student whose parent holds an advanced degree may feel confident in seminar, but isolated because they hold political or religious views not widely held among their peers. In both of these circumstances, students need time. They need time to adjust to a new setting, new norms, and new relationships.

For many communication scholars, despite our explicit knowledge of the phases of socialization, faculty routinely make judgments about students' abilities in their first semester of study. More commonly, we make judgments from the first day. How can one separate out students' promise for scholarship from their stage of socialization into a new community? The socialization literature is clear that we cannot (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018). However, the organizing logic of elitism in the academy demands exclusion (Dorling, 2015; Woodson, 1933/2006), and so we look for ways to sort students into (exclusive) categories. There may be formal structures—such as choosing an advisor at the start of the second semester—that seem to require these judgments. Yet, only months earlier, we *chose* those same students, so the need to quickly judge their readiness is invented. Instead of measuring their potential as a great ethnographer or theoretician or statistician during this early and atypical time in their professional development, the literature suggests that noticing where they excel and offering regular and specific feedback about these strengths is more likely to help them adapt to their new scholarly community and life in their new city (if not country) (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018).

Pay Attention to Practices

Next, from this expanded time scale, practice theory points to how our everyday, repeated, and taken-for-granted interactions with graduate students—as opposed to one-off DEI statements—can be remarkably effective at producing and reproducing structures over time. Everyday, mundane communication practices can help shift the experience of graduate students with whom we work. These practices are not sexy or provocative and do not involve the performance of "wokeness," but their repetitive, consistent nature is tied to their impact. I want to highlight the Buddhist sense of practice here—as both a noun and a verb. We call it a practice because it is developed over time and it looks and feels qualitatively different (as a noun, i.e., an ongoing accomplishment) at different stages. It is also a verb because we know we will fail along the way: The commitment to practice is a commitment to continually get better at building something that supports ourselves and those around us.

The cumulative impact and context of our day-to-day practices is highlighted through communication research on stereotype threat, a type of social identity threat experienced as fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's identity group (McGlone & Pfiester, 2015). Anyone can experience social identity threat; however, not all threats are tied to systemic inequity. Similarly, while imposter syndrome is common among graduate students of all backgrounds, research shows it is particularly pronounced among members of underrepresented groups (Cokley et al, 2013). Therefore, when

members of a graduate community—constituted by faculty, students, and staff–collectively (re)produce elitist sink-or-swim cultures, it necessarily undermines purported goals of inclusion writ large. This is because some students will understand that advanced study is a challenge for everyone (i.e., the reality). Others will see themselves as personally inadequate (i.e., an imposter syndrome). And a few will be so distracted by what it means about them *and others like them* (i.e., a stereotype threat) that they struggle for years—or give up entirely. Below, I share everyday communication practices that faculty and graduate students have shared with me over the years as well as the much longer-term impact these practices have had on their ability to thrive in the academy. To mask the identities of individuals and institutions, I combined several different examples to create a composite character.

I recall the day I spoke with a doctoral candidate whom I had met years earlier during their recruitment visit to campus as an interdisciplinary master's student. I was reminiscing about how full of enthusiasm and excitement they were during that early meeting. The student then proceeded to tell me of the crippling insecurity they developed in their first semester after having asked their course instructor for advice about how to manage the large number of readings assigned. The faculty member responded by chiding the student for asking something "they should have already known" and even warned them to avoid referring to faculty by their first names (although this was the norm in that department). This retort, in addition to several other stereotype threats that this first-generation, non-traditional Latinx student experienced around campus—from faculty, graduate students, and staff— during their initial semester exemplified the exclusion and inequity that our formal statements rebuke. Yet, this interaction took only seconds to unfold and was not public so it went unnoticed. Equally devastating is the fact that the student believed the professor, and thought they should have already known these things. It confirmed the stereotype that certain bodies belong and others do not. Fortunately, the student in this story began intensive therapy and, over time, recovered and was able to thrive in their program. Their successes, however, were *in spite of* key members of their community, not because of them.

Reward Effectiveness (at Least) as Much as Efficiency

Both the practice of inclusion in our mundane, everyday interactions as well as enlarging the time scale for graduate student success relies upon a third precondition: Institutions must reward effectiveness at least as much as (if not more than) they reward efficiency. Bluedorn and Waller (2006) argued that this relative weighting is key to proper stewardship of the temporal

commons, or "the shared conceptualization of time and the set of resultant values, beliefs, and behaviors regarding time, as created and applied by members of a culture carrying collectivity" (p. 367). If we value diversity, equity, and inclusion, our temporal commons must reward the effectiveness of exploration and not simply the efficiency of exploitation (March, 1991). Efficiency has its place in our work, but it does not belong in the training of graduate students.

For instance, in the example shared earlier, rather than lecturing a student for not having already mastered the skill of reading scholarly articles (prior to entering graduate school), or rushing to judge students as soon as they arrive, faculty can openly acknowledge the hidden curriculum, the implicit norms required to succeed, and work at making it explicit (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). We can consider challenges students face and reflect on tacit knowledge that might be missing. Then we can share this information with all students—not just those in our labs or research groups—during weekly brown bags or other synchronous meetings. We can hold ourselves accountable not to mix up the names of the three South Asian women or the two Black men in our department. We can examine whether we are cultivating relationships with students that make them feel included in our professional worlds, or simply subjugated to our critiques. This may sound like additional work in our already accelerated lives. It is: exploration takes time.

My co-contributors and I wrote this Forum in the summer of 2020 when nearly every department, college, and university was issuing DEI statements. The efficiencies of publishing meant that we had only weeks to complete our essays if the forum was to be published in the same year (one measure of how effective it might be in contributing to an urgent conversation)—certainly not enough time to complete an empirical study on the topic. So I reached out to my former advisees (23 to date, 13 of them doctoral advisees) as well as several other students with whom I have worked over the course of my career and asked, "*What is something specific that a faculty member did/said that made you feel valued, capable, and like you belonged?*" Each of the examples involved faculty, staff, and other students taking time—expanding their time scale, paying attention to mundane practices, and valuing exploration over exploitation. Decades later, students still vividly recalled instances of faculty offering verbal support as simple as asking how they are doing (and actually caring about the answer), nonverbal support as basic as a smile, material support in the form of unexpected funding, feedback on papers (described in the opening example), supportive conversations about navigating seminar participation as non-native speakers, and inclusion by other graduate students in their research and shared hobbies. That these stories were at the top of mind for former graduate students suggests the potency and effectiveness of faculty interaction at making students feel included. This

suggests that to have the kind of impact to which we aspire, our relationships with graduate students must be measured by their effectiveness, not their efficiency.

Effecting Inclusion and Equity in Graduate Student Training

In closing, Rice and Cooper (2010) showed how even highly visible unusual routines persist when they benefit one or more parties. They also warn about how glossing over contradictions in organizational values, including beliefs about what inclusion means, can make these routines more deeply entrenched. This theorizing predicts the norm of bringing visibility to our failings in graduate education through writing public DEI statements about greater inclusion while simultaneously continuing with exclusionary practices. Without fundamentally shifting how faculty are rewarded relative to their work with graduate students, these statements can actually make things worse. And without these changes, the same faculty who have always operated within larger time scales and paid attention to the mundane, everyday practices will continue to be the ones who carry out this labor, creating additional inequities (Gewin, 2020; Reddick & Young, 2012). As Sharma (2014) argues: "It is time to cast aside the individualistic and privileged weight of busyness, sacred space, and generalized precarity found in the laments over speed. If we want to grasp the complex intersections of social differences under global capital, we need to take the temporal seriously on its own terms" (p. 19).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Aviles, G. (2020). *Black women create #BlackInTheIvory and #PublishingPaidMe to reveal inequity in academia and publishing*. NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/pop-culture-news/black-women-create-blackintheivory-publishingpaidme-reveal-inequity-academia-publishing-n1227626

Ballard, D. I., & Aguilar, A. (2020). When pacing is a privilege: The time scale of exclusion. In M. L. Doerfyl & J. L. Gibbs (Eds.), *Building inclusiveness in*

organizations, institutions, and communities: Communication theory perspectives.* Routledge.

Bluedorn, A. C., & Waller, M. J. (2006). The stewardship of the temporal commons. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *27*, 355–306. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(06)27009-6

Cokley, K., McClain, S., Enciso, A., & Martinez, M. (2013). An examination of the impact of minority status stress and impostor feelings on the mental health of diverse ethnic minority college students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *41*(2), 82–95. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2013.00029.x

Dorling, D. (2015). *Injustice (revised edition): Why social inequality still persists*. Policy Press

Ganesh, S. & Zoller H.M. (2012). Dialogue, activism and democratic social change. *Communication Theory*, 22(2), 66–91.

Gewin, V. (2020). *The time tax put on scientists of colour*. Nature. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01920-6

Gist-Mackey, A. N., Wiley, M. L., & Erba, J. (2018). "You're doing great. Keep doing what you're doing": Socially supportive communication during first-generation college students' socialization. *Communication Education*, *67*(1), 52–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2017.1390590

March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, *2*(1), 71-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2634940

McGlone, M. S., & Pfiester, R. A. (2015). Stereotype threat and the evaluative context of communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *34*(2), 111–137. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X14562609

Orón Semper, J. V., & Blasco, M. (2018). Revealing the hidden curriculum in higher education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *37*(5), 481–498. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-018-9608-5

Reddick, R. J., & Young, M. D. (2012). Mentoring graduate students of color. In S. Fletcher & C. Mullen (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of mentoring and coaching in education* (pp. 412–429). Sage.

Rice, R. E., & Cooper, S. D. (2010). *Organizations and unusual routines: A systems analysis of dysfunctional feedback processes*. Cambridge University Press.

Sharma, S. (2014). *In the meantime: Temporality and cultural politics*. Duke University Press.

Woodson, C. G. (1933/2006). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Book Tree.

Putting Our Own House in Order: Research, Race, and Reflexivity

Shiv Ganesh and Heather Zoller

As communication scholars, we believe in the truism that words are just about the most important kinds of organizing actions we can take—but as

always, what those words are, where we utter them, and to whom, are of the utmost consequence. So, we join with this forum in taking on the question of what organizational communication scholars might do to change how we talk and act about race in the academy by paying particular attention to the place of scholarship. Our objective is to examine what are broadly considered to be "talk-action" disconnects between the performance of organizational communication scholarship on intersectional justice, particularly as regards racism, and actions to remedy those injustices both inside and outside the academy. Thinking through these applications encourages us to reconfigure the place of race and justice in our scholarship to avoid perpetuating the very problems that have occasioned the need for this forum. So, we begin with five suggestions for how we might reposition the place of race and justice in how we "do" scholarship, before turning our attention to five suggestions for how we might act differently in the academy and beyond it.

First, we need to reposition the place of justice in our scholarship and elevate it to the same level that the terms "theory" and "practice" occupy. When we design, conduct, and write research, we should consider axiological questions and contributions to be central in the same way that we think about theoretical contributions and practical significance. A values orientation requires us to articulate the place of our research in building and imagining a more just world, including how our work is designed, the questions that are asked, and, especially, who benefits from the production of the research. Increasing our efforts to study issues of race, justice, vulnerabilization, and minoritization would mean that a broader spectrum of minoritized groups could more equitably share in the resources generated by universities.

One way to promote this repositioning is for journals to ask authors to explicitly articulate the axiological contributions of their work, and not subsume it under a "practical recommendation" or "theoretical innovation." Highlighting the values that research promotes, the values that underlie it, and their relevance to minoritized groups would help position justice as an explicitly fundamental part of the organization of research. Past editors of this journal have asked authors to feature a "contributions to practice" section. We ask what highly-cited articles in this journal might have looked like if authors had been asked to account for their axiological commitments and contributions in their manuscripts. What communities would we have invited into our field as a result, and what would the field itself look like?

Another way of centering justice in the research process is not only to ask authors to account for it, but to build it into the review process itself. Peer reviewers should be asked to pay attention to the place of justice, and we should expect reviewers to complete training or educate themselves about race and justice issues in order to evaluate the claims made. We should no

longer accept work that investigates predominantly white samples and contexts without a strong rationale for doing so, or that fails to consider how theories reflect marginalized experiences. These moves would also encourage more diversity in our academic recruiting. We cannot expect underrepresented minorities to want to be academics if they do not see themselves reflected in any scholarship.

Such changes would help with a second important move: *to ensure that extant critique is more organically connected with practice*. We are keen to promote resonant critique that both supports and leads to activism. Research can assist, challenge, and promote activist criticism of organizational practice in ways that influence how scholars understand race. The Black Lives Matter movement asserts demands for change with a sharpness, urgency, and anger our critical vocabularies do not describe well, and we need to embrace concepts, terms, and principles developed by scholars and activists who are much closer to the movement. The term "shameful publicity," for instance, was offered by Lebron (2017) to both describe the radical ethics of #blacklivesmatter as well as its strategy.

Likewise, most critiques of nonprofit communication practice published both in this journal and elsewhere do not center issues of race—and yet, it is a central part of practitioner critique. The website Nonprofit AF, for instance, regularly publishes commentary on the relationships between fundraising and tacit white supremacy, gender and ethnic dysfunctions, and imbalances in board composition and management, racist practices in volunteer management and coordination, and even latently racist undertones of values such as gratitude that underlie nonprofit practice. Generating critique that joins with such public efforts is of crucial importance if we are to make any headway in reconfiguring the place of race in our work.

Each of these approaches may in turn help with a third move: to *explicitly support minoritized scholarship*. In the wake of #Communicationsowhite, many scholars have called for increased citations of minoritized faculty to reduce existing disparities. We have both become aware of our own limitations in this area, not only in terms of the "big" theories of power our work has drawn from but also in terms of choices we have made to cite and center Northern organizational communication scholars. Clearly, inclusive citation practices contribute to more equity in the tenure and promotion process, particularly for Black scholars. However, we encourage scholars to go beyond adding citations to their work. Particularly for social science scholars who may cite scores of authors they do not know, it is not just the race or ethnicity of scholars we are citing that matters. Rather, returning to our earlier point, we need to integrate citations with the very questions and issues we are engaging. Are our citations actually helping our research questions

relate better to race, justice, and intersectional differences? Engaging these questions challenges received views of communication and improves the relevance of our scholarship, and in the process, our citation practices also would become more diverse. Here again, we can promote improved citational practices and the decentering of white and Western voices when we review for journals, and editors can make that an explicit review criterion.

Fourth, organizational scholars should *interrogate hitherto gender-, color-, and class-blind concepts and phenomena*, and, crucially, such research should not only be conceptual, but also empirical—surely the latter is something all of us can do regardless of our own theoretical sensibilities. Concepts such as innovation, transparency, partnerships, networks, materiality, agency or the communicative constitution of organization, are in dire need of interrogation from the perspective of minoritized groups. Post-humanist work on object-oriented ontology, for instance, has been subject to considerable critique from scholars who observe how perverse it is to theoretically reposition agency into the domain of the non-human at the very historical moment that minority struggles for agency are particularly urgent and acute (Lugones, 2010).

And finally, *how we teach our scholarship should itself be up for further scrutiny*. As we consider the practical ways our research might influence practice, we need to draw attention to our textbooks. We would like to see more explicit attention to not just describing extant research but translating it so students can apply our research to make organizations and institutions more equitable, and redress white supremacy and other forms of discrimination. We observe with disappointment that nearly 20 years after Ashcraft and Allen's (2003) work on the racial foundations of organizational communication, which called out five problematic ways that organizational communication textbooks treated race, most textbooks continue to reproduce those very same problems.

Repositioning how we design and write about research, organize the research publication process, and teach our research will go a long way in helping us change how we position our scholarship with (and against) our work in the academy itself. Here too, we have five suggestions to make.

First, call for explicit standards. Our research has much to say about how we could communicate better at work, and it is time to apply those insights to our own workplaces. Critical theorists have long written about the ways unspoken norms maintain elite rule, but in practice have not adequately addressed their own departments that treat membership like a country club. It is exceptionally problematic that a number of our departments continue to lack clear criteria for tenure and promotion, or even written unit standards. One cannot equitably evaluate candidates with criteria that do not exist, and

in their absence, entrenched departmental powers are given license to evaluate people based on who is "like us" and "fits in" even when other excuses are used. Our scholarship has also established that extant criteria such as metricization reflect the interests of dominant groups. We invite those readers who are full professors to examine what values and perspectives are encoded in their departmental promotion criteria—if those exist—and challenge them. Consider whether the journals your department considers to be "top" journals regularly publish work related to racial issues, or whether topics related to difference are valued as important scholarship. What are the consequences of tenure and promotion practices for where people can publish and what topics they can teach and publish? Consider how judgments about the timing of research outputs (i.e., those dreaded research "gaps" or expecting the highest rates of publishing to occur pre-tenure) are gendered. Does your document account for and value the work faculty of color often engage in related to addressing "diversity?"

Second, call out problematic behavior. Many scholars are calling for increased reflexivity, asking that we make connections between our research and academic practices. A part of the response to #metoo and #communicationsowhite has been to call out the "lefty" professors who virtue signal or publish in areas related to equity and justice, but either fail to do the work of promoting equity at the departmental and disciplinary level, or actively engage in discriminatory behavior. These calls highlight academic posers who benefit from publishing about justice issues without enacting them in practice. Scholars (primarily white/cisgender and male) who are positioned to be able to call out these behaviors should address this form of hypocrisy.

However, hypocrisy is not the only story. We should be careful to also address scholars whose research does *not* address issues of power, equality, or difference. First, returning to the point above, we should be asking why they are not engaging these questions, whatever their theoretical or methodological orientation. Second, we need to hold their personal behavior to the same standard as more critical scholars. Indeed, these folks may actually commit all the more to avoiding addressing difference and social change after seeing criticisms aimed at the critical researchers, rather than be encouraged to alter their research *or* change their behavior.

Third, think and talk through the complexity of accountability. What gets called "cancel culture" is often about calling out people who continually enact racism and/or other forms of bigotry, or even single instances of problematic behavior. Such call-outs are often necessary to sanction unacceptable practices. We want to encourage holistic attention and understanding of scholars' contributions to equity, while recognizing the difficulty in assessing what might or might not count as a "contribution." On one hand, we have

people who may need education about some aspect of their behavior but have performed much-needed departmental (and/or community) work quietly for decades. On the other, there are those who might make important contributions via their scholarship but fail to promote justice in their own departments by being "academic assholes" (Mewburn, 2013), that is, engaging in selfish or individualistic behavior by, for example, making time for their scholarly contributions in ways that shift departmental service to minoritized scholars and women. We should consider these different levels of contribution as we leverage public accountability, keeping the growth of solidarity front and center, despite the difficulties of this task.

Fourth, work toward big stakes. Recent agitations we have seen in our academic associations, especially in summer of 2019 surrounding NCA's distinguished scholars, as well as the more recent controversy over the response to the top paper panel at the organizational communication division of NCA, have highlighted to us the need to continue examining the habitus of the communication field and its latent support of white supremacy (Patton, 2004). Yet, we also believe that those moves make sense primarily when they are yoked to the much riskier and more intimate project of procuring change immediately around us. Conversational norms, civility and heightened vulnerability, particularly for women and minoritized groups, combine to make such departmental work much more difficult, awkward, threatening and sometimes impossible. In some senses, it is easier to direct one's ire to publication norms, conferencing practices, and theoretical lacunae because one's everyday employment and wellbeing are not at stake in the same way. Yet, working through one's associations and changing how we do our scholarship is not enough if we do not eventually gear it toward changing everyday department practice around hiring, promotion, student support, and voice, that is, genuine workplace democracy in the academy.

Finally, *push beyond the boundaries of the academy.* We need to make our work known and available to communities that both need our experience and expertize. Power differentials between university researchers and community participants are real, but can also be leveraged by scholars to promote spaces for and investigations *with* groups who are challenging the status quo (Gibson-Graham, 1997). Through our research, we can continue to share insights about how we can approach and support, with humility, communities who are currently experiencing trauma. We are often sealed off from those communities and that trauma because of the class privilege we exercise by virtue of being academics. Engaging in these efforts also helps to redress the many examples of people talking about race and justice in the academy who have not really engaged with those issues outside of it. Walking the talk also involves walking outside the academy.

Having enumerated these lists, we want to clarify that neither of us offer ourselves as models of how to promote equity in and through higher education. We continually recognize ways we have fallen short and continue to work to improve our scholarship and academic leadership. We hope our thinking in this piece is helpful in the conversations we are all having, or needing to have, about equity, justice, and redressing discrimination.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

ORCID iDs

Dawna Ballard ⓘD https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8648-068X

Heather Zoller ⓘD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2967-7061

Notes

1. A reference to the movement launched when, in 2016, NFL player Colin Kaepernick began to take a knee during the playing of the national anthem in order to protest police brutality and racial inequity while honoring U.S. military members.
2. https://www.colorado.edu/cmci/2020/06/05/cmci-statement-anti-black-racism-and-pursuit-racial-justice

References

Ashcraft, K. L., & Allen, B. J. (2003). The racial foundations of organizational communication. *Communication Theory*, *13*(1), 5–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2003.tb00280.x

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1997). *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Blackwell.

Lebron, C. (2017). *The making of Black Lives Matter: The brief history of an idea*. Oxford University Press.

Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, *25*(4), 742–759. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x.

Mewburn, I. (2013). *Academic assholes and the circle of niceness*. www.thesiswhisperer.com

Patton, T. O. (2004). Reflections of a Black woman professor: Racism and sexism in academia. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *15*(3), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170490483629

Author Biographies

Dawna Ballard is associate professor of communication studies at the University of Texas, Austin. An expert in chronemics—the study of time as it is bound to human communication—she researches what drives our pace of life and its impact on the communication practices and long-term vitality of organizations, communities, and individuals.

Brenda Allen (PhD, Professor Emerita) is a former Chief Diversity Officer (University of Colorado Denver and the Anschutz Medical Campus). She has developed a track record for scholarship, leadership, teaching, service, mentorship, and training related to organizational communication, diversity, inclusion, and equity. Among her numerous publications is a groundbreaking book entitled *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Waveland Press). She is working on the third edition of that book.

Karen Ashcraft is a professor in the Department of Communication. Her research examines how relations of difference—such as gender, race, and sexuality—shape various scenes of work and organization, ranging from social services to commercial aviation to academic labor. Most recently, she is studying the relationship between communication and affect and, specifically, how occupational identities arise and circulate through affective economies.

Shiv Ganesh is a professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He studies collective action and social movement organizing in the context of globalization and digital technology. He has conducted research in Aotearoa New Zealand, India, Sweden, and the USA, among other places. He is a former editor of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, and a former associate editor of *Communication Theory*.

Poppy McLeod is the Kenneth J. Bissett '89 senior professor and chair of the Department of Communication at Cornell University. Her research focuses on information exchange, communication and decision-making in virtual and face-to-face-groups, linguistic bias and social identity in intergroup interaction, and effects of social group identity on environmental sustainability behaviors.

Heather Zoller is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Cincinnati. Her research addresses organizing and the politics of public health. She has served as associate editor at *Management Communication Quarterly* and *Human Relations*. She serves on the board of Ohio Citizen Action and the worker and community owned cooperative initiative Apple Street Market.