

# Departures in Critical Qualitative Research

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#TONEUPORGCMM COLLECTIVE

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# Departures in Critical Qualitative Research

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## An Extra-Ordinary Critical Intervention Forum

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In summer 2019, the field of communication studies imploded, owing largely to a controversy surrounding the yearly Distinguished Scholar Award presented by the National Communication Association (NCA). Of the 80 awardees from the past three decades, only one was an academic of color. My field was a few decades delayed in its rage over this obvious display of structural racism and bigotry, but the rage was overwhelmingly welcomed. As a card-carrying member, I offered to open one issue of *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* (*DCQR*) for a special issue on “Merit, Whiteness, and Privilege” in communication studies and related disciplines. Thanks to the concerted efforts of three guest editors and the editorial team, we showcased a thought-provoking, radical, and rigorous special issue (*DCQR* 8.4). We received so many thoughtful contributions that we decided to run a partial issue on the same subject in the subsequent issue (*DCQR* 9.1).

As expected, the NCA annual convention, which takes place in mid-November each year, was much anticipated. After an intensely conflict-ridden summer, with much of the rage playing out on the NCA listserv (CRTNET) and on social media, professors on both sides of the controversy were going to be present, in person, in Baltimore, MD. For many, the 2019 NCA convention was business as usual, for others it was exclusionary as usual, but there were moments of solidarity and episodes of resistance and transformation. One such moment occurred during the Organizational Communication Division’s Top Paper Panel. In response to what was described as a shockingly insensitive panel respondent, most panelists and many audience members chose to perform a walkout. Given that organizational communication is an important subfield in communication studies, the matter was once again publicized and debated across various social media platforms.

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Immediately after the conference, Jenna N. Hanchey, one of the Top Paper Panel's authors, wrote to ask if she could propose a Critical Intervention forum wherein she and her co-panelists, as well as members of the audience, could engage their experiences of that particular conference moment. They were eager to write "a response to the response" as a form of performative resistance, in this/their ethnographic present. I requested a proposal, which we reviewed, and which I accepted in December 2019. So, in this issue (*DCQR* 9.2), we present to you, as a continuation of last summer's conversations, an "extra-ordinary" Critical Intervention forum: "No Time for Intersectionality Like the Present: A Response to the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel." We showcase it in a spirit of solidarity with our academic comrades across disciplines who are engaged in the arduous task of courageously resisting to transform and decolonize their fields. ■

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## Beyond Race Scholarship as Groundbreaking/Irrelevant

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**ABSTRACT** This introduction situates the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel walkout within a larger subdisciplinary history of erasing scholarship on racism, colonialism, as well as queer and trans\* studies. I describe how such scholarship is labeled either groundbreaking or irrelevant—thereby relegating it to outside of the typical or expected domain of organizational communication. **KEYWORDS** Organizational communication; Disciplinarity; Racism; Coloniality

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I entered the 2019 National Communication Association (NCA) annual convention in the midst of an identity crisis. I consider myself primarily a rhetoric scholar, or a critical/cultural scholar if one reads “rhetoric” as principally the territory of dead Western white fellows. But I had also tiptoed for years on the treacherous intradisciplinary line that allowed me to claim both rhetoric and organizational communication as areas of expertise. Finding myself on the Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel at a time in my career when I craved recognition as a “real” rhetoric scholar left me feeling disoriented. As with many identity crises, the problem was not truly with my work—my trajectory of intersectional decolonial research on aid to Africa is clear—but with how other people chose to label and understand it. Intradisciplinary boundaries and their attendant anxieties catch many in their normalizing traps.

Part of the reason I claim rhetoric as my primary affiliation is that it is home to a strong and undeniable coalition of scholars centering racialization, coloniality, intersectional feminisms, queer theory, and trans\* approaches in their work. Part of the reason I still publish in organizational communication is that it is not. As my coauthor, Peter R. Jensen, will tell you, I guessed we would be on the Top Paper Panel when we submitted our essay. Or, more precisely, I claimed that we would *either* be on the Top Paper Panel or be rejected outright. I knew that organizational communication had not yet substantively dealt

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with the decades of anti-racist and decolonial theory used in our essay. I guessed the essay would be seen as either groundbreaking or irrelevant.

Groundbreaking or irrelevant—this false dichotomy is one of the intradisciplinary traps often laid within the fractures between communication studies subdisciplines. At NCA, I spoke with a colleague of color who had begun in organizational communication as an MA student only to move toward critical/cultural studies after recognizing that his work on race was unintelligible to many organizational communication scholars *as* organizational communication work. Irrelevant. That's not organizational communication; it's something different. And yet, on the Top Paper Panel, my coauthor and I received an award as white scholars taking decades of work by people of color and applying it to an organizational problem. Groundbreaking.

But our work isn't groundbreaking. Not truly. Groundbreaking is another trap; it's another way that scholars of color, scholars from the Global South, as well as queer and trans\* scholars, are relegated to the boundaries of communication studies subdisciplines. Irrelevant and groundbreaking are two sides of the same coin. Both claiming that race work is irrelevant to organizational communication and claiming that it is new to organizational communication are ways of denying that scholars within the subdiscipline should have been attending to it all along.

The calls for anti-racist work run deep, as does the recognition that these calls are not being heeded. As Brenda J. Allen explained in 1995, talking about “workplace diversity” in scholarship does not mean diversity is being addressed.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it is one of the ways that organizational communication research uses diversity in a “nonperformative” manner, whereby talking about race is meant to be a failure of engaging with race substantively: “It ‘works’ *because* it fails to bring about what it names.”<sup>2</sup> Organizational communication scholars have all seen—or performed ourselves—the citation of “Parker (2001),” “Ashcraft & Allen (2003),” or “Broadfoot & Munshi (2007)” as if these essays were indicative of a broad swath of anti-racist and postcolonial work in the field.<sup>3</sup> As if our citation of them in an offhand way was a meaningful engagement with difference.<sup>4</sup> As if calls for change are themselves the change for which they call. Groundbreaking.

There are of course scholars of color who have managed to beat back these powerful tides and have notable careers in the discipline. But for every Brenda J. Allen, Shiv Ganesh, and Patricia Parker, there are dozens who the subfield pushed to the margins. Irrelevant.

The 2019 NCA Organizational Communication Division's (OCD) Top Paper Panel response—and the walkout it elicited—emerged from this milieu. On 16 November 2019, four top papers were presented by assistant professors, including Kate Lockwood Harris, Peter, and me. Kate's paper, in particular, called for disciplinary transformation in regard to racism and colonialism. At the conclusion of the presentations, Marya L. Doerfel, the 2019 OCD chair, came up to present her prepared response. Peter gave up his seat, moving to the audience so that she could sit at the front table.

The respondent began her remarks by referencing an earlier “tongue in cheek” commitment she had made, as the OCD chair, to “make org comm great again.” She then described how the four papers added diverse contributions to the OCD, noting that of the more than 200 citations among the four papers, only five references overlapped.<sup>5</sup> She minimized the centrality of the five anti-racist and decolonial essays used by Kate, Peter, and me. Irrelevant. She then specifically addressed Kate and her paper, stating that Kate should “tone down” her “fiery language” and framing other aspects of her presentation as aggressive. This was after Kate had carefully and calmly argued in her presentation that tone policing was one method through which whiteness is maintained in the discipline. Specifically, the respondent took issue with Kate's use of the term “white supremacy,” and cautioned Kate that the language in her paper was divisive. She joked about sexual harassment.

The respondent spent little time on the papers before turning to what she referred to as “me-search,” reflecting on the state of organizational communication. She mentioned that she, as a white woman, used to be the “face of diversity” in the field. She decided to focus her disciplinary history on Harvard University and its record of tenuring white women as compared to academia more broadly. At this point, my notes on the response started to read:

this is fascinating.

OMG OMG OMG OMG OMG

white woman feelings white woman feelings

“I'm not doing intersectionality here because we don't have time for that.”

Dolly Parton????

Audience members started to get up and walk out when the respondent noted that she did not “have time” for intersectionality. I heard her begin to talk about Dolly Parton, before seeing Kate get up to leave and realizing that I could do so as well.

The contributions to this Critical Intervention forum respond to the specific context of the walkout, as well as to the larger disciplinary structures that enabled the racist tenor of the response. The participants in this forum entered the room that day in different roles—Peter R. Jensen, Kate Lockwood Harris, and I as authors; Joëlle M. Cruz, Kathryn Joan Leslie, and Sean Charles Kenney as audience members; Angela N. Gist-Mackey as a representative of the OCD leadership—but we left it bound together by a desire to transform the discipline such that scholarship on racism and colonialism could no longer be ignored or dismissed. No longer groundbreaking or irrelevant: Scholarship on racism and colonialism is fundamentally necessary to the future of organizational communication. ■

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#### NOTES

1. Brenda J. Allen, "'Diversity' and Organizational Communication," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 23, no. 2 (1995): 143–55.
2. Sara Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity of Antiracism," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no. 1 (2006): 105.
3. Patricia S. Parker, "African American Women Executives within Dominant Culture Organizations: (Re)conceptualizing Notions of Instrumentality and Collaboration," *Management Communication Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (2001): 42–82; Karen Lee Ashcraft and Brenda J. Allen, "The Racial Foundation of Organizational Communication," *Communication Theory* 13, no. 1 (2003): 5–38; Kirsten J. Broadfoot and Debashish Munshi, "Diverse Voices and Alternative Rationalities: Imagining Forms of Postcolonial Organizational Communication," *Management Communication Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2007): 249–67.
4. Instead, these offhand citations are examples of what María Lugones calls noninteractive engagements with difference, ones that pay lip service without working toward transformative change. See María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 68.
5. The overlapping references were Broadfoot and Munshi, "Diverse Voices and Alternative Rationalities"; Paula Chakravarty, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain, "#CommunicationSoWhite," *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 2 (2018): 254–66; Jenna N. Hanchey, "All of Us Phantasmic Saviors," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2018): 144–60; Kate Lockwood Harris, "Re-situating Organizational Knowledge: Violence, Intersectionality and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Human Relations* 70, no. 3 (2016): 263–85; Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

## Object

### *Letter of Disapplication*

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**ABSTRACT** Drawing on autoethnography as a genre, this letter of disapplication to the discipline of organizational communication is organized around short poems. Speaking from my positionality as a brown foreign woman of Ivorian and French heritage, I walk the reader through my experience of the walkout at the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel. Weaving in recent and distant pasts, I claim that this particular encounter is interconnected to other daily embodied experiences of racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism that constitute the normal for many people of color in communication studies. **KEYWORDS** Autoethnography; Racism; Whiteness; Ethnocentrism; Microaggressions

---

Dear Professor Organizational Communication,

I am writing to disapply from the position of brown foreign woman who has been a ~~part~~ part apart from the discipline for the past ten years. The position is now open for another interchangeable brown body to fill the space as long as it fulfills the conditions: be civil, be quiet, and smile. You should be grateful to be here. For ten years, I have fulfilled the conditions. That is, until November. We, the black and brown bodies,<sup>1</sup> had ironed our suits for the Top Paper Panel. ~~We had continued to hope that perhaps you may see us one day.~~ Scratch that sentence: I no longer wish to be seen by you.

\*\*\*

### **WE HAVE HISTORY**

~~Be civil~~

Sitting in the audience

Of the Top Paper Panel

I hear

“No time for intersectionality”

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And it rips open  
My sutures

THE VIOLENCE  
THE PAIN

Ten years of microaggressions  
Escape

From

Their flesh prison (Meaning my body, Professor Organizational  
Communication)

Graduate school,  
The cheerful white Californian  
“A feminist”  
Beloved by faculty  
Is ridiculing my accent at every turn  
And  
Mocking other women of color

Professor Org Comm (You will allow the familiarity?)  
I can already hear you say  
“It can happen to everyone”  
“Maybe she meant well”  
“It’s been ten years already”  
“Why are you and they so sensitive?”

Professor Org Comm  
Ten years forward  
A professor  
In a top program  
And I am still mistaken  
For the eternal graduate student  
By other faculty  
While advertising  
Our program  
(Three times in the span of 30 minutes)

Professor Org Comm  
I hear you say,  
“What does your history have to do with you walking out?”



When you need to bring  
Diversity  
To your table

Otherwise,  
My knowledge claims are too “contextual”  
The eminent white male faculty  
 (“Why does it always have to be about race?”)  
Scolded me for my use of “African feminisms”  
 “The solution is not separatism  
 And branching out from Western feminisms”

I had forgotten something  
Western knowledge claims are universal  
And easily transfer to all contexts  
Including all 54 countries  
Of the African continent

“No time for intersectionality”  
Your boldness  
In proclaiming  
It overtly  
Broke  
Something  
In  
Me  
That very day

It reminds me of  
the International Conference  
Invitation  
To a private dinner  
With the Org Comm experts

The day before,  
Faculty of color were harassed  
By a racist protagonist  
On the streets

The white male scholars  
At the table,

Say  
“Are you sure the attacker was from this city?”  
As if to say, “this” never happens in this city  
A way to minimize  
A way to deny  
“No time for intersectionality” indeed

The last  
Walls  
Of  
Deference  
Collapse

ANGER

I forget all provisions  
About being  
Read as  
The angry black woman

\*\*\*

#### **WALKING OUT**

Anger and sadness  
Both seize my throat  
And hold it tight  
In a chokehold

The whitest of all white talks  
Entails  
Avoiding the herd of elephants  
In the room

At this point, we are  
Rolling eyes  
At this point, we are  
Shifting uncomfortably  
In our seats  
At this point, we are  
Chuckling

At this point,  
I cannot  
Contain  
Myself  
Lest I say something  
Uncivil

“I will walk out with you if you choose to”  
Is all I need to hear  
From  
The person  
Sitting  
    Right  
        By  
            Me

Together  
We  
WALK  
OUT  
OF  
THIS  
VIOLENT  
ENCOUNTER  
THAT  
HAS  
SENT  
MY  
BODY  
REELING

\*\*\*

#### NOT OVER YET

**Self:** Professor Org Comm, I wonder why you sought more explanations from me after I walked out of a room in which I was suffocating. It is almost as if you said, “Why didn’t you stay in there while I hurt you even more softly?”

**Professor Org Comm:** I know that I hurt you, but I do it very softly and incrementally in a myriad of ways that are impossible to name at times for they are invisible. See how I handle your knowledge? I pretend that all you need is

more publications to belong to the club when I will \*never cite you in the first place. When I am under a bit of pressure, I will incorporate two people of color on the syllabus without ever changing or challenging the underlying knowledge structure. Finally, I will use you and your frameworks as \*intellectual currency to make myself more attractive for jobs and endeavors that ask for diversity.

**Self:** I see through all your ways, Professor Org Comm. Yet, you continue to ask that I see you as a good and well-intentioned white person. You even shed tears. I suppose we have both been playing into this illusion.

**Professor Org Comm:** In the past, the others have always been ~~civil, quiet, and smiling~~. I do not understand your need to cause ripples in this otherwise perfectly oiled machine. You have been good for ten years and I rewarded you with the promise of acceptance. Let's face it: It will not happen. But I will continue to dispense crumbs.

**I am over.**

\*\*\* ■

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#### NOTE

1. For more brown body tales, see Joëlle M. Cruz, "Brown Body of Knowledge: A Tale of Erasure," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 5 (2018): 363–65; Joëlle Cruz et al., "'Aliens' in the United States: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Foreign-Born Faculty," *Journal of Management Inquiry* (2018): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492618796561>.

## Scenes from the Margins

*One Queer's Response to Navigating Professionalism at NCA*

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**ABSTRACT** The scenes in this reflection explore the ways my white, queer, nonbinary body navigates a professional association from the margins under the influence of white supremacy. I confess to shadow feelings of self-importance that continuously creep up as I engage in anti-racist work and consider how this presence of *white righteousness* must be relentlessly undermined and destabilized as we work to consider new and alternative futures for (organizational) communication studies. **KEYWORDS** Queer identity; Professionalism; Difference; White supremacy; White righteousness

---

### SCENE 1

Three days prior to my departure for the National Communication Association (NCA) annual conference, I'm anxiously getting ready with the same fastidious attention to dress and appearance I always seem to fight this time of year. I scoff at the irony of the situation: In my own scholarship I critique norms of professionalism like "dress for success," but in everyday practice, I panic over appearing too queer, too fat, too much. Professionalism calls us all into alignment,<sup>1</sup> but the weight of it falls most heavily on bodies deemed by race, size, gender, and gender expression to be Other. The pressure to "fit"—in the discipline, in the division, in academia—s q u e e z e s some bodies more than others.<sup>2</sup> In fall 2019, I make a particular effort, upping my traditional queer business casual to a more ironed and pressed look. I am a doctoral student on the job market over the next year and am told to dress for the job I want.<sup>3</sup> But do I want it if I don't fit? And at what cost?

### SCENE 2

I have arrived at the conference in Baltimore, MD, and am seated at a panel called "Building Critical Coalitions for Survival: Non-normative Approaches to Organizing Come Together." We gathered scholars from transnational

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feminist, queer, and postcolonial traditions as a way to break down silos and come together to decenter organizational communication. There are as many panelists as there are attendees in the room and I admit to feeling crestfallen. In the wake of the recent #CommunicationSoWhite movement,<sup>4</sup> and the summer 2019 Distinguished Scholar tensions, I cannot understand why more folks have not attended. With whom do we build coalitions?

### SCENE 3

The walk to the Organizational Communication Top Paper Panel takes me through a long, empty corridor that finally leads into a windowless conference room. I hesitate walking in—it would be all too easy to head back to my room and avoid the awkwardness that always happens when (this) queer meets org comm. I require my body to continue, reminding myself that this year the Top Paper Panel is comprised of critical, feminist, and postcolonial scholarship that should be witnessed and supported. I spot a dear friend from graduate school, spread the sardine-packed chairs apart enough to create room for my body, and quickly sit down next to him. Before the panel begins, a professor and mentor of mine sits down to my left and I exhale in gratitude that I am flanked by these two people.

### SCENE 4

As the presentations of the top papers come to an end, I silently mull over one paper in particular. Kate Lockwood Haris has so beautifully and vulnerably called us into conversation about the practices of white supremacy that pervade academia generally and organizational communication specifically: We must decouple organizational communication from whiteness *even if that means organizational communication itself must dissolve.*

### SCENE 5

I *feel* what is happening before I intellectually grasp it. The Organizational Communication Division chair is responding to the Top Paper Panel and the energy in the room activates. The respondent has turned her focus on Kate, calling her into alignment by asking her to “tone down.” My body begins to react—I am familiar with this disciplining tactic as are so many who live on what are deemed the margins. I begin to look around—am I the only one *feeling* this way? I exchange knowing glances with my seatmates, watch heads turning to survey the scene as they play out their own distress and disbelief, feel my heart pounding in my chest, and I become acutely aware of the affect animating

the scene. As the energy in the room continues to rise, I whisper under my breath to my seatmate, “I’m about to get performative.” I don’t really even know what I mean by that, but I know I mean it. The feeling was getting too big, the anger too much, the silence too loud. *What do we do?* All rules of academic decorum point to a “generous” listening, one that looks for the value in whatever is said. I am also acutely aware that I am seated among a venerable who’s who in organizational communication and frankly unsure what an outburst would do to my reputation—a reputation, I might add, that really has yet to begin. As I contemplate what actions to take or not, I hear the respondent apologize for (re)centering white academic women, noting that she “doesn’t have time for intersectionality.” “HAH!” Before I can control it, I’ve chortled in disgust so loudly that others are reacting. *Why are we still listening to this?* I lean to my left and ask, “Can’t we just walk out? I’ll go with you if you want.” Each of my seatmates stands and we walk out as a trio in protest. It is not until we reach that long, empty corridor that we exhale. As others join us in the hallway there are tears, anger, bewilderment.

#### SCENE 6

The 20 minutes between the Top Paper Panel and the business meeting are blurry and frantic. It is decided at some point that to protest, we will enter the business meeting already in session and seat ourselves on the floor. As we walk in silently, I feel a sense of indignation that I can only describe as *white righteousness*, a feeling that has been present with me in the months that have passed since the national conference.

#### BEHIND THE SCENES

If white fragility is characterized by the anger and defensiveness white people feel when challenged to confront our complicity with racism,<sup>5</sup> then white righteousness is the *absolute certainty that we are not that type of white person*. White fragility and white righteousness are both born of the same superiority furthered in and by white supremacy.<sup>6</sup> It is the feeling that creeps up when I am engaged in anti-racist work that strokes my ego when it says, *Great job. YOU understand this. YOU are on the right side of history. YOU are a good ally. YOU are doing this RIGHT*. It is the quiet, self-congratulation for being a “platinum-level”<sup>7</sup> social justice warrior. It is the desire to be recognized for my anti-racist efforts and the feeling of self-importance that washes over me when I am. It is the fleeting moment when another white person enacts whiteness and I feel an ugly sense of

superiority because *I know what they did wrong*. It makes me speak more than I listen, to critique more than I self-reflect.

*White righteousness*. I have largely ignored it, often been ashamed of it, but ultimately need to face it in order to (constantly) destabilize it. For as my queer, fat, nonbinary body navigates through a world not made for it, it does so with white skin privilege and all the trappings that affords. As we envision new and alternative ways of doing and being in (organizational) communication, let us also remember the ways the sensorial practices of white supremacy that we seek to disrupt are always pulling us in. As we unapologetically continue to illustrate how and why *Difference Matters*,<sup>8</sup> we must also relentlessly labor to decouple our division, our discipline, and our very bodies from its normative grasp. ■

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## Reflections on Complacency and Inadequacy in the Face of Violence

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**ABSTRACT** In this essay, I reflect on the events leading up to and immediately following the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel. In my reflection, I examine not only the events that happened, but also the role that my complacency played in my (lacking) preparation for pushback. In particular, I discuss how, in spite of my desire to be an ally for scholars of color, I had treated the problems facing marginalized scholars as an intellectual problem that was stripped of the emotional consequences. I conclude with a call to action to recognize complacency among white scholars as its own kind of violence. **KEYWORDS** Complacency; Advocacy; Allyship; Whiteness

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Jenna N. Hanchey and I had been talking about writing a paper on organizational rhetoric for roughly five years, but it wasn't until she raised the problems of whiteness in the subfield that the paper came together. I must admit to some hesitancy when she suggested the new direction. I was fine with the change, in theory, but was concerned about my ability to make the shift. Jenna sent me a packet of articles and chapters to help me get my bearings. So, I struggled through Sylvia Wynter, fell in love with Aimee Carrillo Rowe, was intrigued by Walter D. Mignolo and Achille Mbembe, and then tried to read Wynter again.<sup>1</sup> However, even as I dove into a body of literature that sought to decenter my thinking (and even as I enjoyed the idea of that decentering), I failed to realize the importance of the arguments. My complacency shielded me from uncomfortable realities.

Flash forward: Two weeks before the conference Kate Lockwood Harris, Jenna, and I strategized. We knew our papers; Kate's in particular, would prompt pushback during the panel. We planned how to provide support for one another when difficult questions were asked. We shared our concerns about being recognized as white scholars for citing the work of nonwhite, non-Western thinkers.

Flash forward: I wasn't sitting with the other panelists because I had offered my seat when the respondent came up to the already overcrowded table. Thus, when Kate got up and moved toward the door, I was simply confused. With my

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back to the crowd, the limits of my own sensemaking were such that the idea of walking out did not occur to me until I saw Jenna stand and stride toward the door. Even given my own shock and discomfort at the response, my instinct was to stay (though to what end I did/do not know). Turning my head, I realized that many other people were walking out, and, after a moment of hesitation, I stood and moved with my friends toward the door, laptop, now slippery from nervous sweat, clasped in hand.

Out in the hallway, most of what I remember are the faces, shell-shocked and slack with disbelief, piled upon faces twisted in anger and hurt. My discomfort and shock shifted to grief and anger as I saw the results of the violence experienced by those around me. As the panel ended, I ran inside to gather the abandoned items of a friend who did not want to go back to the front of the room and tried to avoid walking by the respondent, not knowing what I would do if we made eye contact.

As I returned to the hallway, Rebecca Meisenbach switched from her role as chair of the panel to that of friend and mentor; she came and asked me if I was “doing okay.” I found I couldn’t look at her, much less answer, lest my wavering hold on my emotions break. When I failed to respond, Rebecca correctly interpreted, “No, you’re not okay.”

Someone informed me that the collective planned to go into the business meeting and sit on the floor along the wall. Shortly before we filed inside, Rebecca texted, now in her role as vice chair of the Organizational Communication Division, asking if we wanted to speak. I believed that a response was needed, though I didn’t know what could be said. I responded that we would like a chance to speak, hoping someone better suited to address what had happened would stand. She inquired whether we wanted to be invited or transgress. I replied that I would be more comfortable with us being invited.

The meeting proceeded with absurd normality. After finishing her report, Rebecca stated it was important to discuss what had just happened. She turned toward us and asked if any *panelists* would like to come forward to speak. My stomach sank. I had imagined a more open invitation for comment. Now, however, there were only six of us who were invited to speak—only three of whom had walked out. Jenna and I looked to one another as we both hesitated. A colleague, seeing my hesitation, encouraged me to stand as Jenna rose first. Jenna shared the perspectives that we had hoped would come up in Q&A: that celebrating three white scholars for this work was troubling as the arguments we were discussing were not new.

After Jenna spoke, I stood, committed to saying something. I took a moment and tried (and failed) to steady my voice, I reflected on the last thing I remembered from the comments: a slide depicting the lyrics from Dolly Parton’s “9 to 5,” which had suggested that while things were bad if we stuck together, “someday” our ship would come in. I recall saying that it was insufficient to seek to just “not be racist” and that we needed to directly confront these issues. I argued that change does not happen on its own. Truthfully, I remember little of what I said, other than that it was inadequate to the moment.

Since the 2019 National Communication Association (NCA) conference, I’ve had time to reflect on my own inadequacy and complacency. I realize I have become complacent in my citational practices. After all, if it weren’t for Jenna’s prodding, our paper would have replicated the same whiteness that it now challenges. Even when anticipating pushback, I was complacent. During the pre-NCA meeting with Jenna and Kate, I was treating the expected challenges in the panel as an isolated moment as opposed to an ongoing struggle. My whiteness helped me compartmentalize the problems in the discipline. I had treated the problem in a sanitized manner, an intellectual problem to be solved that would lead to a better discipline. As I entered the hallway and saw the pain of those around me, I realized that I had become not only intellectually, but also emotionally, complacent in my capacity to recognize the violence around me.

I return now to the call I made during the business meeting with an amendment. To be anti-racist means to be anti-complacency. As a discipline, we must recognize that to read about and speak about whiteness in communication studies in sanitized tones that divorce the theoretical and epistemic from the material and emotional is its own form of violence, and the first place we must confront this as white scholars is in ourselves. ■

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## The Pain of Performative Professionalism

*Emotionally Embodying Business as Usual*

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**ABSTRACT** This essay is the personal and professional perspective of the National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's awards chair during the 2019 convention. It explores issues of emotion, work, professionalism, silence, embodiment, symbolic violence, and intersectional precarity from the vantage point of an outsider within the academy and the discipline of communication studies. **KEYWORDS** Emotion; Professionalism; Precarity; Symbolic violence; Top Paper Panel

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I work in a position of intersectional precarity. I am a black, American, woman, untenured scholar who works at a predominantly white institution in a predominantly white discipline employed in a heteronormative, patriarchal profession.

Rewind to summer 2019. The National Communication Association (NCA) Distinguished Scholars controversy (DSC) had me questioning the longevity of my formal career as a scholar in the academy. Scrolling through the pages of distinguished scholars, seeing faces that did not look like mine plainly revealed the intersecting nature of racism and sexism. This year my participation in NCA was different since I had been elected to serve the Organizational Communication Division (OCD) as awards chair. I was feeling a sense of empowerment and obligation to serve my discipline.

Our division leadership conducted a climate survey in response to the DSC. I have mixed feelings about climate surveys because, for me, completing them has often amounted to experiencing a series of microaggressions.<sup>1</sup> Also, I have witnessed institutions using climate surveys to justify maintaining the status quo. Yet, there is utility in having an anonymous way to ask about the identities, perspectives, opinions, and experiences of a collective group. The development of the survey took considerable work on behalf of the committee. As a critical interpretive scholar, and the only (at the time) executive board member inhabiting a brown body, I spoke up often as we deliberated. Our deliberations

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required emotion work, emotional labor, emotion with work, and emotion toward work on the executive committee's behalf.<sup>2</sup>

Fast-forward to November 2019. I mustered up the courage and began to pore over the 200+ responses. Many comments aligned with my experiences, yet, others were worse than anticipated. The qualitative data was heart-wrenching. As I read, my stomach turned, embodying the pain written into the responses. People had suffered, were suffering, and likely would continue to suffer as part of their experiences with the OCD and the NCA. I had a lot of emotion about my role in the larger systems and structures of our discipline, particularly as an executive board member and faculty at a predominantly white institution. I was part of this system of suffering, perpetuating it despite my desire and efforts to change it. The OCD executive board distributed a summary to the division, promising to present more details during the business meeting. All of this was anxiety provoking, but it was past time to face, name, and grapple with this ugly part of our profession.

Fast-forward to the NCA annual convention. For me, this year's conference was emotionally charged. On a high note, I received the 2019 outstanding journal article of the year award from the Ethnography Division of the NCA. I was humbled and honored by this recognition. Later that day at the conference, I attended a memorial for one of my former peers from graduate school, Dr. Emily Rauscher, who passed away unexpectedly at the age of 36. Her untimely passing caused me significant grief. The next day was the OCD Top Paper Panel and immediately following would be the business meeting, during which I would perform my role as awards chair. I disclose this to contextualize my experience. I was already emotional, stressed, and harried when I walked into the Top Paper Panel.

I was late. I had difficulty finding a working printer to print my comments honoring the award recipients. I hurried to the Top Paper Panel, especially since friends and scholars I admire were presenting. I stood in the back of the room listening. The papers were intriguing, bold, analytically compelling, and pushed my thinking about our discipline, but for me their arguments rang true with my experience in many ways. The response followed.

As I heard the response, my thoughts oscillated between the audible words I was hearing and my internal reactions. I heard the tone policing (i.e., fiery language), the implicit definition of white supremacy exclusively referred to as the presence of neo-Nazis, jokes about sexual harassment, references to the 45th US president's campaign slogan, as well as the dismissal of intersectionality. I found myself in disbelief. I gradually moved to distaste and then progressed into disappointment, which escalated to disgust.

It was happening *again*. Another incident, reminding me, I do not belong. The space felt hostile. I was in shock. The public commentary hurt, harmed, and excluded already marginalized identities, bodies, and experiences. People walked out in protest. People I admire, respect, and support. Metaphorically, it felt like the response had gut-punched me while I was anticipating an embrace. I wanted the top papers and business meeting to open up dialogue about inclusion and identity in organizational communication. But now this! I can't. I'm out. I went into the hallway and joined a community of people who took a stand offering support to one another.

I wanted leave. I thought about resigning my position, leaving the profession altogether. I stopped myself. These top papers and other award recipients deserved recognition. Also, I was holding financial checks for graduate student awards. I remembered the poverty of graduate school. I convinced myself to stay. People were depending on me. But I didn't know how I would go sit at the front of the room and conduct "business as usual" sitting next to the division chair who had just communicatively gut-punched me and my people. It didn't feel safe. Yet, I had a sense of obligation to a structure (i.e., discipline, higher education) that was never designed with me in mind.

I was emotionally moved by everyone who protested the response yet walked back into the business meeting. It gave me hope. During the business meeting, the floor was opened up, inviting top paper authors to respond to the response. Peter R. Jensen and Jenna N. Hanchey stepped forward. Heewon Kim also spoke. I felt grateful for their leadership and fearful for any retaliation they might experience as untenured faculty. When they were done, I wanted to speak. I had a lot to say. I reached for the microphone, but felt the emotion welling up and tears forming in my eyes. I pulled back. In a split second, I analyzed my intersectional precarity in a flash-forward. If I spoke, I would cry. If I cried, my future career could be jeopardized. When senior scholars received a request to be an external reviewer for my tenure case next summer, these scholars might remember *this* moment—possibly thinking of me as a hysterical, irrational, black woman who spoke out at NCA, negatively coloring their interpretation of my dossier. I was not prepared to take that risk. I have worked too hard. I am standing on the shoulders of ancestors who have worked too hard to make my career a possibility. There are people counting on me to help fix this historically created mess in the academy and our discipline. I am an outsider within.<sup>3</sup> I can't help fix this mess if my tenure case is denied and I am not here in the future. So, I swallowed that emotion, that message, and those tears. I regret doing so.

I believe if I had spoken, it would have made a difference, but I also feel my tears should not have to be exploited for my profession and the academy to change. So, I sat quietly and to the best of my ability I performed “business as usual,” not communicating the message that should have been said. Periodically throughout the meeting, I made eye contact with my people. Those moments of solidarity gave me strength to keep fighting this good fight. After all the emotional labor and performative professionalism that evening, I returned to my hotel room and wept. I wept for hours. I wept for the pain I was experiencing, the prejudice that persists, the inequity that prevails, the suffering of outsiders within and those who are pushed to the margins, and for my part in this system of symbolic violence. I am committed to being part of the positive change. Maybe one day the academy and the communication studies discipline will understand, as Brenda J. Allen, Mark P. Orbe, and Margarita Refugia Olivias put it, “the complexity of our tears.”<sup>4</sup> ■

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## (Un)Disciplining the Graduate Student, and a Queer Otherwise

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**ABSTRACT** This essay reflects on the walkout during the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel. I draw upon queer theory to discuss the impacts of disciplinary norms and whiteness in organizational communication. **KEYWORDS** Queer; Discipline; Organizational communication; Whiteness

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I feel strange, uncertain being here. Yes, in these pages, but also in the academic spaces that this forum writes about: conferences, classrooms, departments. As a master's student, I am acutely aware of the academic hierarchy, of when my voice is appreciated (and not), of the currency of deference. The paranoia that attends to being both relatively unseen and yet consistently scrutinized for academic fitness means that graduate school has artfully preyed upon my insecurities and primed me for discipline. So, yes, I feel strange being here.

"Being here" in academia has often meant decoding what it means to be part of a "home" field such as organizational communication. It took me a long time to find a place where I could be curious about the things I cared about, but I did not initially consider how that "home" would discipline me: my queer body, my queer ways of relating, thinking, writing, and researching. I have discovered I do not have to do much to participate in my own disciplining; merely being here in academia communicates in so many ways how to act, what kinds of knowledge are valued, and what questions are worth asking. The more I show up, the more I realize that the guiding hand of disciplinary norms will happily shape me in its own white, cisheterosexual, able-bodied image.

The image both does and does not fit, and I cannot deny the certain comforts afforded to me by my white cismale identity in these spaces. But the things that academic whiteness asks of me, of all people—perfectionism, individualism, defensiveness, among others—are the exact things that have nearly killed me in

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the past and continue to threaten my life. The seat at the table has straps, pins, and razors.

Sitting in the 2019 National Communication Association Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel session, I felt something lift in me. Many of the papers named and addressed forces that shaped organizing, such as whiteness, colonialism, and sexism, making visible the many ways I could feel the field disciplining myself and others. Kate Lockwood Harris's paper in particular spoke so plainly about the field's complicity in perpetuating coloniality and white supremacy, and the consequences of constituting itself within these harmful logics, that I finally allowed myself to feel as though the field itself might wrestle with the questions that so many of us seemed to be struggling with, either individually or in beleaguered pockets. Envisioning what this reckoning might entail, the community that could be built from *that* starting point was a door opening into a queer otherwise that might finally undo our collective disciplining.

Sadly, this critique, and the potentialities it elicited, was dismissed by the panel respondent and chair of the Organizational Communication Division. Hearing Harris's argument discounted and minimized, not on its own terms, but in ways that reenacted precisely the practices of whiteness that Harris sought to critique, felt like that door closing, heavy and definite. Slipping away from view was the queer otherwise that I had felt, "the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality."<sup>1</sup>

I like to think that the walkout left that door ajar, as a kind of open, unresolved wound. As Harris argued in her paper that day, protest and activism are theory, and the walkout continued a long, persistent tradition of speaking to the normative disciplinary logics that shape organizational communication. And yet, in the weeks that followed, the striking feeling that lingered in my body was not that the walkout happened, but that it could have just as easily never happened. Were it not for the people sitting next to me, my disposition that afternoon, the conference sessions I had visited earlier that day, I am certain my disciplinary training would have kept me in my seat even as so much of my body protested. Disciplinary whiteness taught me to instinctively value decorum when faced with a violent dismissal of people's humanity, decorum over what the body speaks. This recognition forces me to acknowledge the countless other times that I would not allow myself to stand—when I found myself strapped to the chair in order to stay at the table.

I am interested in an *undisciplined* queer otherwise, one that attends to the horizon, but also the immediacy of "the dirt and concrete where people live,

work, and play.”<sup>2</sup> An otherwise that creates new ways of being in community that are not underpinned by disciplinary whiteness. Such a queer approach values inquiry into the disciplinary norms that shape the field, rather than inclusion into the field as it stands today. It attends to the crisis that is this open wound, acknowledging and sitting with the wound instead of hurriedly covering it up or moving past it.

In gesturing toward this undisciplining queer otherwise, I hope the walkout prompts organizational communication scholars to question: What are the limits of thought for organizational communication, “where thought stops, what it cannot bear to know, what it must shut out to think as it does”?<sup>3</sup> What would change if organizational communication saw the seat at its table as a kind of torture device, not as a way forward? Would it continue to focus its efforts on inviting people on “the outside” to have a seat, or would it direct its inquiry inward, to what causes so many of us with and without privilege pain? How can we walk with each other as we encounter this crisis, this understanding that whiteness defines our relationships with ourselves and others inside and outside of academia?

These are not questions to engage at an intellectual distance. Ultimately, queerness “implies what is possible for making lives livable.”<sup>4</sup> For me, the messiness of undisciplining organizational communication, and building life-giving communities of thought, heart, and spirit, has just begun. ■

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## Time to #ToneUpOrgComm

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**ABSTRACT** Organizational communication should tone up, that is, refuse white fragility's demands to slow the pace of change. **KEYWORDS** Organizational change; Time; Trauma; White fragility; White supremacy

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I heard the comments directed at me. The call to tone down. An objection to my “fiery language.” The suggestion that it was inappropriate to use the term “white supremacy.”

I remember grinning, not in pleasure, but in wry recognition of discourse that shuts down transformation and organizes whiteness. I felt calm and clear in that moment. This part of the response was directed *at* me, but it was not *about* me or my paper or the 2019 National Communication Association (NCA) Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel. It was about what happens when people violate the hushing expectations of whiteness.

As the response escalated, I turned my attention to the audience. I heard dissenting murmurs, and I saw objections on some people's faces. A co-panelist passed me a note: “wtf?!” I heard an eruptive chortle. Its timing was an act of resistance, different from the audience laughter that accompanied the respondent's “joke” about sexually harassing the panelists. Then, I saw three people I care about walk out.

Still calm and clear, I thought, “What are my points of influence in this moment? What actions can I take?” Our panel consisted entirely of untenured assistant professors. I was most senior among us, and I also knew I would receive the Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Award. My leaving would be impactful for both those reasons.

Time stretched during those brief, deliberative seconds. In that clam slowness, I decided to follow the three people out. I made eye contact with a few friends in the audience to ask if they would join me. And then I walked off the panel as some nonsense about Dolly Parton rang out in the background.

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Other panelists walked out. Many audience members did too. Some allies stayed in the room, witnessing the session's remainder.

I wish that sense of calm had stayed with me in the days that followed. It didn't. I couldn't sleep or keep down food. I couldn't find the stillness I'd accessed in the moment. The events activated my nervous system such that pasts, presents, and futures blurred.<sup>1</sup> It was hard to stay grounded, and I wanted to flee my body and the discipline and the profession altogether. Encounters with systemic violence can do this.

But as a scholar and a white person, engaging that system is part of my work. Composing this essay now, a few months removed from the NCA annual convention, my heart rate still speeds up and my hands shake. I haven't found a way to write that elicits the messiness of this labor. I'm still figuring out how to participate in the disorganization of systemic violence—how to care for the traumas written in my body while witnessing<sup>2</sup> and struggling<sup>3</sup> against the violent, white supremacist systems communication studies has constituted.

In the weeks following the Top Paper Panel, I spent almost all my time responding to it. I spoke with colleagues across the country and replied to hundreds of text messages. My professional social media was abuzz, my inbox flooding. In the midst of these intensities, each of us Critical Intervention forum authors along with trusted mentors, students, and colleagues were laboring hard to organize something different. That work continues.

During this time, I noticed many calls for me, this group of Critical Intervention forum authors, or Communication Scholars for Transformation (CSFT) to “slow down,” “calm down,” and “tone down.” The calls came initially from the respondent, but other colleagues echoed them, and some came from scholars I respect and admire.

Sometimes “Slow down!” can mean “I need to rest” or “I cannot remain in this grueling, trauma-filled space while maintaining myself and/or the relations that support my survival.” Rest can be radical.<sup>4</sup> It is crucial for transformation, and stillness matters for continued action.<sup>5</sup> Slowing can challenge the acceleration of violence.<sup>6</sup> Even the supposed “center” of organizational communication—though reticent about race—understands “systematic soldiering,” a form of resistance wherein workers refuse to speed up their labor. Organized slowness can be anti-racist, feminist, trauma-informed action.

But slowness can also be a technique of violence, oppression's enabling buddy. Calls to slow down can reinforce what so many coalitions want to dismantle. “Slow down” and “calm down” and “tone down” are gaslighting

phrases.<sup>7</sup> They invoke the “stability” part of the stability–change dialectic that organizational communication scholars so often discuss. But stability for whom? To some people, what looks like “stability” is the force that produces insecurity, precarity, and violence. What can feel “too fast,” what can seem like too much change is, for many people, actually an emerging stability and security.

Although both of these iterations of “slow”—activist and abusive—were operating during and after the Top Paper Panel, I want to pause on the second one. When people said to me, or this group, or CSFT, “*You* should slow down,” “*You* should calm down,” and “*You* should tone down,” the people speaking these phrases likely meant “*I* am at the point where I am no longer able to sit with my anxiety and despair and rage and all the other emotions white supremacy produces.” In these “suggestions,” I heard fear because I have felt it before and will likely feel it again. I also bristle because, when these statements emerge from the mouth of whiteness, they are appeals to accommodate white fragility.

For scholars of color, accommodating white fragility can be a survival strategy, a way to stay in the room. The risks of refusing this labor and the work of responding—the relentless decisions about what to say, when and how, or whether to go—fall unevenly on different bodies. White people expect black and brown people “to live in a state of being turned down, unobtrusive, inconspicuous, ornamental. [Black and nonwhite people] are to both turn down and tone down.”<sup>8</sup> Organizational communication has normalized this turning down and toning down, this “politeness” that maintains whiteness.

I have learned to accommodate quite well, and I have also learned how to require others to accommodate me. These are the lessons of whiteness, ones that require organized unlearning. Each of us has a breaking point where we can no longer find internal stillness. But white people have not had to move through that point, to dwell in it and past it every day.

For me and my white body, accommodation is an exercise in complicity. It supports those who want to avoid the fire of transformation, and it stops growing a collective capacity to dismantle white supremacy.

So, tone down my “fiery language”? Stop saying that organizational communication and the academy are foundationally white supremacist?

No.

I, along with a collective, will not tone down. This group will not perform emotional labor for the comfort of white supremacy. This group will not protect people from witnessing the horrors that whiteness has organized. Instead, this group will “tone up” in a way that honors the various speeds that each

person engages as they move through trauma and vulnerabilities. To tone up is to notice the white fragility that lives in so many of us but not to befriend it. Acting in this capacity might mean staying or leaving. But it does not mean calming down, slowing down, or toning down in response to calls that reinforce already well-supported systems of oppression. Time to turn up.<sup>9</sup> Time to tone up. ■

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#### NOTES

1. Embodied experiences of trauma both queer time and disrupt organization(s). See Clementine Morrigan, "Trauma Time: The Queer Temporalities of the Traumatized Mind," *Somatechnics* 7, no. 1 (2017): 50–58.

2. Witnessing is one way to disorganize white supremacy. D. Soyini Madison describes witnessing in connection to wounding, a capacity to encounter injustice in a way that inspires action and avoids "(1) empathetic over-identification, (2) apathy, and (3) overt refusal of responsibility/answerability by secondary witnesses of individual, structural, or historical trauma." This capacity to respond requires not merely distanced noticing, but also cultivating relational modes whereby organizing happens differently. See D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 226.

3. Struggling is another way to disorganize white supremacy. As Karen Lee Ashcraft asserts, changing power requires feeling power. She notes, "The struggles to change and to feel power are entwined and ongoing. . . . By vigilantly tuning in to this production—our own enactments of power in the act of critiquing power . . . we become better equipped to recognize how flashes of other futures can arise." If organizational communication developed an embodied knowledge that white criticality and complicity are intertwined—and a capacity to feel that enmeshment—then naming white supremacy as such would not enflame such spectacular displays of white fragility. Instead, to name white supremacy as such would be simply to acknowledge routine reality, one that can be constituted otherwise. See Karen Lee Ashcraft, "Critical Complicity: The Feel of Difference at Work in Home and Field," *Management Learning* 49, no. 5 (2018): 617.

4. Tricia Hersey, *The Nap Ministry*, <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>.

5. Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017).

6. Charlie Yi Zhang, "Teaching Feminism as Slow Activism," *Feminist Formations* 30, no. 3 (2018): 198–208.

7. Angelique M. Davis and Rose Ernst, "Racial Gaslighting," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 7, no. 4 (2019): 761–74; Kate Lockwood Harris, "Mapping Gender and Violence: Describing Reality, Resisting Abuse," *Women's Studies in Communication* 14, no. 2 (2018): 113–16.
8. Crunktastic, "An Ontology of CRUNK: Theorizing (the) Turn Up," *Crunk Feminist Collective*, 29 April 2014, para. 30, <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2014/04/29/an-ontology-of-crunk-theorizing-the-turn-up/>.
9. Crunktastic, "An Ontology of CRUNK."

## #ToneUpOrgComm

*A Manifestx*

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**ABSTRACT** This manifestx refuses calls to “tone down” by instead toning up. We declare an intersectional present and future for organizational communication, one that embraces fiery language, is undisciplined, arises in relation, destabilizes white righteousness, and will not be silent. There is no time for intersectionality like the present; the time for intersectionality is now. **KEYWORDS** #ToneUp; Intersectionality; Organizational communication; 2019 NCA OCD Top Paper Panel

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#ToneUp. We only have time for intersectionality. We do not have time to waste on the narcissism of whiteness. We do not have time to cater to the anxiety of US American identity, whose false exceptionalism depends on pretending as if its interpretations of the world are universal for the world’s own good. Lady Liberty doth protest too much. Professor Org Comm doth protest too much.

#ToneUp. Our future essays will be dragons, unashamed and unafraid, breathing heat into the discipline and burning away the systems of so-called civility steeped in whiteness, patriarchy, hierarchy, and heteronormativity that enact violence day after day after day. Our fiery language is dangerous, threatening the status quo. Our fiery language is a deliberate disruption, warming the spirits and bodies of those whom organizational communication has attempted to exile out into the intradisciplinary cold. Prepare: Our dragons are on the way.

#ToneUp. We bring forth a new vision of professional. Our professional does not wear a suit, does not stifle emotions, does not buy into the idea of professionalism as white Western heteronormative upper-class masculinity’s domain. Does not *buy* into anything. Our professional embraces feeling as part of logic.

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Our professional's labor is intensely emotional and expertly academic. It does not belong to or identify with the institution.

Our intersectional professional is taking over.

#ToneUp. We transform places and presences. We reject the disciplining of our bodies, identities, dreams, and ideas as the price of admission. We dwell in the question of how to make lives livable in the here and now, no longer shrinking to fit a box of whiteness, straightness, and normativity that ultimately serves none of us.

Our queer horizons are limitless.

#ToneUp. We write in/with ancestors, in/with histories, in/with contexts, in/with Others, in/with lands. Why would we wish to break the ground? We have no need to claim fraudulent "discoveries," colonizing the knowledges of those who came before and are still with us. We are together. Our relevance is determined by the intimacy of our connections and relations to/with Others.

Take care, or you may end up as irrelevant as you would have us be.

#ToneUp. We embrace imperfection. We do not desire purity, as it is the realm of the savior, the fragile, and the righteous. Elephants are majestic creatures; we address them when they are in the room. We know that it is only by facing those parts of ourselves that participate in violence that we can change them. It is not the righteous who do right.

#ToneUp. We respond in the face of violence, to the face of violence. We do not wait for comfort, tenure, or other excuses meant to lull us into complacency. We do not care if that makes you uncomfortable. We hope it does, that it shatters your complacency and you decide to join us.

Together we are stronger than the violence.

#ToneUp. What are you waiting for? Are you ready to do the fiery work of radical inclusion and equity? Join us.

#ToneUp. The time for intersectionality is now. ■

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#ToneUpOrgComm Collective (members are listed in alphabetical order).

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