

SOLIDARITY, SAFETY, AND ONLINE SOVEREIGNTY:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING PRACTICES OF INDIGENOUS
AND CHICANA WOMEN

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing—Doctor of Philosophy

2019

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation contains a cultural, digital rhetorics inquiry into the social media sharing practices of Indigenous and Chicana women. Working alongside three women from her local community, I investigated how these women navigate concerns about online safety, intellectual property, and surveillance. To conduct my study, I integrated cultural rhetorics research methods into my research design, which informed how I collected data through hosting a talking circle and conducting follow-up interviews. Then, using grounded theory to analyze my data, I found that: 1) though these women experience various social oppressions within social media spaces, they find and create community to collectively act in resistance; and 2) the acts of resistance in which these women engage expand scholarly understandings of how social media platforms are designed to asymmetrically oppress users from marginalized backgrounds. Together, these findings dispel the myth that women—and particularly women of color—have had no stake in the development of online platforms. I argue, rather, that despite how these platforms are designed, women of color critically enact cultural sovereignty in online spaces through asserting their identities, fighting for political rights, and creating community in acts of not only resistance, but survivance.

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I dedicate this dissertation manuscript to the Indigenous and Chicana women who have
walked on and those who continue to survive.
Your stories are life.
Miigwech.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my children, Dan and Zia, for your presence throughout my PhD and the writing of this dissertation. I know I was not as present as you would have liked me to be, and, even when I was present, not as in the moment as I should have. Thank you for all your patience and for loving me always. I love you. And to my daughter's father, Clint, for helping out on the days I needed to do nothing but write.

Next, I would like offer my deepest thanks to the folks in my community who made us feel welcome and made this dissertation possible. Eve, for being my best friend and source of strength—and for listening to me as I read so many sentences from this aloud to you. I am forever in gratitude for your insight and teachings. To Nerli for crying, laughing, loving, and parenting with me. I love you, hermana. And to Wil for your constant support as a friend and for helping me with formatting my job market docs. Thank you Tomas, Alba, Santos, Angelica, Marcus, Taylor, Ash, David, Ses, and everyone who ever showed up to a MICCA meeting or event. You all are family to us. And to all the IGSC homies, but especially Shelbi, Jaquetta, Cat, Hannah, and Zeke. Thank you all for welcoming me and giving me room to learn and mess up. And Marie, for showing up for real this last year to give me a space for my defense and remind me that I'm a part of this community. To Mona, Emily, and all the IYEP crew and kids. I loved every single minute spent with you and am so glad for all I learned—especially all the Anishinaabe language, food, and ceremony. Y'all real ones. Thanks to SACNAS for always being there to support our events and let us help at yours. You know who you are ☺ And so many thanks to Estrella and Dylan for making our community what it is.

My life knows art, education, community, and love like I never have before because of you two.

I also want to thank all my friends in the Internets and IRI. There's so many of you and y'all have showed up for me so many times throughout these years. I especially want to give a shoutout to Laet Oliveria who passed away a couple years ago. I wish we had time to meet in person. I miss you always. Thanks especially to everyone who sent me money and GrubHub gift cards when I was stalked by a white supremacist online this year and for the gifts while I was on the market.

Thanks to my long distance best friends: Maria, Christina, and Gavin. You three have been my main support, my family, when I needed someone. You're always there for me and I promise to always reciprocate. I'm so glad we're in this discipline and this world together.

Next, I want to thank both Estee N. Beck and Stephanie Vie for believing in me since you first met me. I wouldn't be half the scholar I am without you making space for me in the discipline and in your own work, but your biggest gift has been your friendship. I'll be thanking you every day for the rest of my career.

I offer thanks, too, to my new colleagues at Boise State University. Thank you all for seeing value in my work and recognizing me as a good fit. I am so excited to start working with you, especially you, Dora Ramirez and Jenn Mallette. Thank you for your mentorship.

And, very importantly, I want to thank all the folks in WRAC at MSU: the faculty, grad students, and students. Y'all have taught me so much. But, especially, I want to thank Danielle DeVoss, Julie Lindquist, Stuart Blythe, and Alexandra Hidalgo. Alex,

thank you for seeing my place at MSU from reading my application cover letter, but also for helping me so much throughout my first few years in the program. You brought me in as gente in the Latinx Caucus and guided me to this project with your sound judgment. Gracias. Stuart, you taught me how to ask the right kind of questions and to carry with me a calm in the classroom that is unmatched. Julie, you taught me how to write about research in a way that makes sense for me and the true kind of inquiry I seek to do. Danielle, for taking me on in my second year when I really needed a committee chair who would keep me on task. You made it possible for me to finish my coursework, exams, and this dissertation by being flexible and supportive—no easy tightrope to walk.

Most importantly, I want to thank Malea Powell. For everything. You taught me things beyond myself that I needed before I had words to name them. You not only made space for me in this program, but in the whole discipline. You always gave your time, energy, and position to support me when I needed it—many times without my having to ask. You were the one who made sure I stayed in this program when I found out I was pregnant and so many times after that. You truly are an academic aunty and I respect and love you more than I can write.

Lastly, thank you to the Indigneous and Chicana women who worked with me in this project. You three are brilliant, kind, and everything I hope to be as a woman. Thank you for sharing your stories with me. I promise to do my absolute best to honor them. In respect and reciprocity, miigwetch.

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INTRODUCTION

Children, language, lands: almost everything was stripped away, stolen when you weren't looking because you were trying to stay alive. In the face of such loss, one thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of land. In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold. These are the meanings people took with them when they were forced from their ancient homelands to new places. Whether it was their homeland or the new land forced upon them, land held in common gave people strength; it gave them something to fight for. (Kimmerer, p. 17)

Positionality: A Coming From

My mother is full of land-based knowledge, though she would never refer to it as such. Living with the land, on the land, she would often drop whispers of things she knows about a tree, an animal, a turn of weather in passing, or when the right time to collect sage was because of the infrequent desert rains. I would, in an indulgence of my suburbanized youth, shrug off these things if I was focused more intently on something else. The way she engages with the world is just her way of being (and thus our way of being); there was never an explicit declaration that whatever seemingly strange activity she had us do with her was a cultural practice taught to her through tradition. For example, the woman knows how to milk a rattlesnake—a feat I learned she could do when, upon an everyday walk through the mountains of Big Bear, California, the need for such a thing arose. Why, how, when, and from whom did she learn this? She never said.

It wasn't until mid-way through graduate school that I realized why there was a communicative lack: colonization stripped my family of our stories and our connections

to our ancestors. My family is a family that has been “successfully” removed from who we are. Mom would just tell us that we were Mexican, which made us different from most of the people around us—especially the family on my father’s side. When I was older and would press her with questions about where in Mexico we were from and where our family was now, all she would say is that all her family is dead. On holidays, she would hide in her room and wail for the people she had lost. We weren’t allowed to bother her during these moments. My brother and I would sit downstairs and hold each other, waiting out the storm.

She visited the kids and me October of 2017, partially with the purpose of watching my son while I went to the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference. One night, as I was preparing my talk on actions of protest solidarity for white and white-passing folks like myself, I asked her why we never spoke Spanish.

“Did your mom never teach you, so you could fit in better?” I questioned. She had grown up in San Pedro during the 1950s, a time post-Zoot Suit Riots when it wasn’t quite safe to be Mexican (or brown and Black for that matter) in Los Angeles.

“No. We never knew Spanish. Our family grew up speaking the Native language,” she responded blankly, staring ahead at the TV.

“What?!” I asked, surprised. “Which Native language?”

“I don’t know. Our family was from somewhere in Texas.” And that was all she said before walking into another room, leaving me with new pieces of my story that I never had before.

* * *

I begin this dissertation with a story about my identity so as to position myself as an active participant in this project, and in a conscious effort to establish a relationship with you, my readers. Sharing this story about my mother helps me show that my family's history is critical source-knowledge that guided and continues to guide the design of this project. My role as a participant establishes my positionality as a core research practice that determines how I will write about the stories I collected *with* my dissertation participant collaborators. I draw on Anishinaabe researcher and scholar Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogiizhigokwe)'s words from her book *Kaandossiwin* where she argued that “[t]o remember who we are and where we come from as Anishinaabe is an act of resistance against being dismembered” (p. 16). I am not Anishinaabekwe; and I am still learning all the places where my family has come from—and places from which they have been removed. As of today, I have very little physical connection to my ancestral homes. I only have pieces of our stories and a set of practices with little linguistic evidence to their source. And, like Absolon, though I feel dismemberment, I live very much aware that I carry my familial practices with me wherever I go. Because, like my mother, I am a healer. I use this gift in the practice of making food, medicines, and spiritual acts. I brought these practices with me to Nkwejong (the land where the rivers meet) where I have met with many Anishinaabekwe and have been welcomed into the community here in central Michigan.

Re-search: A Coming to Know in Nkewjong

After all, that's the whole point of nuts: to provide the embryo with all that is needed to start a new life. (Kimmerer, p. 13).

Walking the Ledges Trail in Grand Ledge, Michigan one spring morning, I was struck by the realization that such a seemingly everyday experience was actually a truly complex facet to my forming the ethical, relational research methodology that I embody for this dissertation. I have been walking this same trail the entirety of my time living in central Michigan while earning my PhD. The Ledges Trail gives me a sense of comfort and respite from the challenges of graduate school; it also provides me with a deep understanding of the land. My ability to walk this trail is thanks to the centuries of Indigenous epistemological practices that used a trail, which follows the Grand River, as a source of knowledge-making.

Absolon recalled (2011) that “Indigenous re-search is often guided by the knowledge found within. Aboriginal epistemology (the ways of knowing our reality) honours our inner being as the place where Spirit lives, our dreams reside and our heart beats” (p. 12). Absolon’s perspective on Indigenous epistemology informs methodological practices that support the subjective, personal ways we come to know both in respect to who we work with, but also *with* the places *where* we learn. She showed me that Indigenous methodologies call on us, as researchers, to recognize the land as an integral source of knowledge that serves as a guide for living, learning, and being.

Like Absolon, prolific Ojibwe novelist and non-fiction author Louise Erdrich (2003) saw no separation between epistemology and land. She reminded us that “Books are nothing all that new. People have probably been writing books in North America since at least 2000 B.C. Or painting islands. You could think of the lake as libraries” (p. 3). Erdrich wrote of how the land continues to teach her how to live and how composing

books has taken many forms since humans' earthwalk. She described how the Ojibwe have written with the land, on the land, and from the land. Books, rock paintings, and even the shifting language of the lakes all are stories meant to educate us and inform our place in the world. This place that we occupy, when following Indigenous epistemologies, sustains itself through practices that sustain life—practices recognizing that we exist in relation with the land.

I walk the Ledges Trail, reflecting slowly on the things I have come to learn about Nkwejong, and how what I have learned is shaped by the land here and the land back home. On one of the first days of Malea Powell's 805 History of Rhetoric course, she took the class outside to walk along the Red Cedar River. She asked if we knew the names of the trees, if we could tell which one was a maple. There are over a hundred different types of maples in the world, a handful of them line the Red Cedar. When we shivered from the incoming fall breezes that snuck past the buttons of our coats, she asked us if we knew how people Native to the area survived the harsh winters here. She advised us to get better jackets.

I held these questions and suggestions close since the beginning of my stay in Nkwejong. I sought out to learn about the land in Michigan, its history, and the stories of the people who live here—those who carry the stories of their ancestors. I came to know how to tap maple trees for their sap and how to make syrup. I became familiar with native plant life like black raspberries and sweetgrass. I can tenderly gather both from hidden places I have found on my walks. I learned how to read the quiet or abrupt changes of the seasons, and to prepare myself for when winter was really coming (not

the playful hints it gives in October and November). I bought myself not just a good winter coat, but snow boots, scarves, gloves, and hats.

Learning to live in Michigan goes beyond being ready for the seasons and surviving winter. Learning to live here has been an ethical act of honoring what it means to come to know in Nkwejong as an outsider, a Chicana from California, a rhetorics scholar who grew up primarily in training of settler research practices. I acknowledge that to come to know in Nkwejong means that I must learn the language of *this* land. As Erdrich explained,

Ojibwemowin is one of the few surviving languages that evolved to the present here in North America. For an American writer, it seems crucial to at least have a passing familiarity with the language, which is adapted to the land as no other language can possibly be. Its philosophy is bound up in northern earth, lakes, rivers, forests, and plains. Its origins pertain to the animals and their particular habits, to the shades of meaning in the very placement of stones. Many of the names and songs associated with these places were revealed to people in dreams or songs—it is a language that most directly reflects a human involvement with the spirit of the land itself. It is the language of the paintings that seem to glow from within the rocks. (Erdrich, p. 71)

Erdrich's words about the linguistic function of Ojibwemowin teaches me about the meaning of Nkwejong, the depth of history and connection *the land where the rivers meet* has for those who have walked on this part of the earth and for those who do now. I walk the Ledges Trail, following one of these sacred rivers, and I am responsible for becoming familiar with the language used to describe it. I acknowledge Anishinaabe philosophy—the epistemology of this living area. Becoming familiar is an act of ethical relationality—the cultural rhetorics research methodology focused on building relationships across different ways of knowing.

My initial understanding of relationality comes from The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (2015) who drew on Shawn Wilson's definitions of relationality in *Research*

is Ceremony. Though I go into relationality more in the next chapter, I want to first reference relationality as a cultural rhetorics practice that guided the positioning of myself in this introduction. Together, the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab recalled that “For Wilson, to enact relationality means to understand one’s relationship: to land, people, space, ideas, and the universe as interconnected and fluid. Relational accountability is how one is respectful and accountable to those relationships (i.e.: practices)” (Act II). Practices of relationality call on me to consider place—*where* I come to know—as an essential, given source of data and knowledge. The land where the rivers meet has not only taught me *what* I needed to know to survive here, but has shaped *how* I came to this knowing and my responsibility to acknowledge the epistemologies gifted to me by Nkwejong.

I return to my walk on the Ledges Trail, writing these thoughts about the land and methodology on the Notes application in my iPhone. Embodied and connected to the device responsive to my fingertips, my mind is thinking about the land, but not with the land. Angela Haas (2018) bid me to remember that my body is never in isolation from the networked spaces I inhabit, but that I live relationally to them as well. My mind places my body inside my technological extension. At that exact moment where fingers type while feet step, my foot catches a corner of ground that shifts downward. My ankle bends wrongly, and I fall. I sprain my ankle because my body was partially elsewhere. I laugh, then, at myself and the lesson learned. Relational accountability, to go back a little, urges me to question how respectful I was to the story being so kindly shared with me.

According to the sign posted at its ends, the Ledges Trail is approximately 300 million years old. I can only imagine the stories it has told over this time. I reckon I have a few more to learn before I leave. For the entirety of my writing this dissertation, the pinching ache in my ankle will be present—Nkwejong nudging me with months of pain to remind me not to forget what I know as I write.

Community Organizing: A Coming Together

In my second year here, I became a member of two organizations: the Michigan Indígena Chicanx Community Alliance (MICCA) and the Indigenous Youth Empowerment Program (IYEP). MICCA was created in 2015 as a graduate student organization with a focus on organizing events for the East Lansing and Lansing Chicanx communities. We hold two large annual events every year. For Día de Muertos, we organize a weekend workshop in mid-October for making sugar skulls, papel picado, and ofrendas. Following this workshop, we throw an evening-long celebration honoring our loved ones on November 2nd. Attendees join us in viewing the many ofrendas made by members of the community, listening to mariachi, watching folklorico dancers, painting our faces to look like our dead ancestors, eating traditional foods, and other different practices depending on the theme of that year. In the spring, we also organize a coming out event for queer people of color that we refer to as Queerceañera. This is an event where we make space to celebrate our community's many genders, sexualities, and positionalities in a way that normative Latino culture does not. Both events are wildly well-attended and offer the larger Lansing community the opportunity to celebrate in our unique experiences as queer Latinx peoples. We have also rallied around one-time events like a tamale fundraiser for a family member who is fighting

cancer. Recently, we held a two-part workshop series to support undergraduates applying for graduate school, particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds.

Throughout the academic year, MICCA meets weekly or bi-weekly, depending on the intensity of organizing. We usually provide attendees with Mexican foods like tacos, beans, rice, and more. Sometimes we bring food from home; other times, we buy things in bulk from a local mercado. For the duration of our meetings, we not only plan for our events, but we also spend time reflecting on our experiences with racism and culture at the university. These conversations offer us a safe space to think through how to navigate academia as Chicanx folks, and they also inspire us to reflect that support back to our community.

Along with MICCA, IYEP is another organization that constitutes my community in Nkwejong. Started and managed by Dr. Estrella Torrez and Emily Sorroche, IYEP is a youth-centered program collaboratively organized between American Indian and Indigenous Studies and the Lansing School District. Two days a week, children attend the program after-school. There is also an annual summer camp in June that can last a week or two. My elder child has been attending since 2016. The families that attend IYEP also attend monthly community dinners, holiday parties, cultural activities focusing on the land, and a good many other local events.

These two organizations, over time, have meshed and blended together. Many MICCA members serve as tutors and camp counselors in IYEP, and most also are members of the Indigenous Graduate Student Collective (IGSC), another graduate student organization that creates space for Indigenous students seeking solidarity, friendship, and scholarly support. We routinely attend—if not co-organize—each

organization's events, as well as gather together outside of our respective institutional affiliations. We are comrades, friends, allies, and, in a sense, family.

Many of our annual social events come together over various blendings of Chicana and Indigenous—mainly Anishinaabe—practices. Día de Muertos and Queerceañera are only two of the big happenings throughout the academic year. IGSC holds monthly Fry-Bread Forums, regular talks with guest speakers, and a graduation celebration. The larger Native community hosts the Powwow of Life every spring that most, if not all, members from all these organizations attend. And there are also the seasonal events directly tied to the land such as sugar bush—a few weeks in late winter/early spring where syrup is tapped and made from maple trees. Collectively, our community stretches across organizations and beyond, actively being inclusive to all who identify as Indigenous and welcoming allies as well.

Culture Makes Community

Though our community affirms being open to all people who identify as Indigenous, those of us in the MICCA organization take great care and caution to identify with that term ourselves. Rodriguez and Cuevas (2017), two MICCA members, wrote in “Problematizing *Mestizaje*,”

Surrounded by intersectional feminism and academic pushes for decolonality, in a (more) diverse (than most) rhetoric and composition program in a predominantly white institution, we listen to those who have come before us as we unpack our own identities and how they relate to academia. (p. 230)

As a part of the same academic institution and community as Rodriguez and Cuevas describe here, I, too, seek to unpack my own identity and how it relates to academia, but also in how I relate to my community.

They help me find the words to discuss the hesitancy I feel in calling myself Indigenous or Native when how I was raised was referred to as a Mexican cultural practices. Instead, I align myself with what they propose in their conclusion to this short article. They offered,

Rather than trying to compose the mestizx through blood quantum, for instance, we should begin by examining our stories as they exist, our traditions, our words, our names, our foods—our rhetorical practices—and beyond simply acknowledging their Indigenous origins, re-memembering and relearning how to honor them. (p. 232)

Offered as a way to delink from the colonial erasure that Mexicanismo and Chicanismo enact through Mestizaje as an identity orientation, Rodriguez and Cuevas asked Chicane folks to return to our practices and account for our cultural histories that help us reestablish our connections to Indigeneity and work toward honoring our Indigenous practices without simply claiming them as identity markers. It is that work that I begin with in this dissertation.

Working toward honoring our rhetorical practices requires acknowledging what makes them cultural therein. Andrea Riley-Mukavetz (2014) established a foundational approach for doing cultural rhetorics research in her article “Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology: Making research matter with multi-generational women from the Little Traverse Bay Band.” Riley-Mukavetz theorized a cultural rhetorics methodology derived from her dissertation research that she conducted near where I conducted mine. She explained that “Culture is not defined so much by any combination of race, ethnicity, gender, or class, but by the spaces/places people share, and *how* people organize themselves and *how* they practice shared beliefs” (Riley-Mukavetz, p. 109-110; emphasis in original). Riley-Mukavetz’s definition of culture clarifies and situates a

complex term that often eludes definition into a description for how a people come together to engage in practices, rhetorical practices, to create and maintain meaning. In this sense, culture is absolutely connected to community and the ways a community shares time together. Space and place—the land—is the *where* and the *what* that together constitutes a community. And for Indigenous communities, the land is irrevocably part of the *what* that gets done or happens.

Riley-Mukavetz continued in her definition, expanding culture to encompass the rhetorical-making that comes from community action. She emphasized that her definition of culture rhetorics produces a particular kind of scholarly community practice:

To do cultural rhetorics scholarship under this idea of ‘culture’ allows scholars to move away from telling recuperation stories or justifying that a particular community is, in fact, intellectual. Instead it focuses on *how* a specific community makes meaning and negotiates systems of communication to disseminate knowledge. (p. 110; emphasis hers).

In the way Riley-Mukavetz outlined here, analyzing culture through a community’s language and practices enables a researcher to better assess the meanings a community creates together and what those meanings mean both within the community and the world. Or, in other words, rhetoric.

It is precisely a *how* of cultural meaning-making that this dissertation identifies. Situating my research study within my community and listening to Anishinaabe, Chicanx, and other Indigenous scholarship in the design of my methodological framework with participant-collaborators in my community, I root the conclusions I draw from this digital rhetorics study in cultural rhetorics. As Riley-Mukavetz summarized, “To do cultural rhetorics work is to value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological

framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with” (p. 110). So while my dissertation takes up questions about social media practices among Chicana and Indigenous women¹—a study that moves in digital rhetorics and technical communication conversations—, the design of this study derives from cultural rhetorics methodologies.

I purposefully chose to begin this dissertation with a story about my life and then I connected that story to another story about the land of Nkwejong. The scholars that I cite in this introduction are my scholarly relations, some have studied here at MSU and others have detailed the Anishinaabe/Ojibwe epistemologies that have shaped my ways of knowing and being here in Nkwejong for the whole of my doctoral work. I constellate them together, acknowledge how they inform me, and move forward to position them in conversation with the scholarship in the next chapter—my literature review. This chapter begins with a story about how I came to acquire what I will define as critical digital literacies. Next, I will provide a historical account of the rhetoric and writing discipline’s development of critical digital literacies as an aim of social justice research as I encountered this scholarship during my graduate study. Then, I will complicate that history, ever so slightly, by discussing the role of representation for marginalized scholars doing critical digital literacies research. Lastly, I bring in theoretical approaches regarding story within cultural rhetorics as a means for repositioning—and thus decolonizing—the emphasis on Western epistemological understandings of critical digital literacies.

¹ I use the term women here because the three people I worked alongside for this dissertation identify as cis women.

My literature review enables me to present the [somewhat] unique methodological approach I took to design my dissertation study in Chapter 2. Both the literature review and the methodology chapter work together in determining the way I present my data and findings in the three data chapters that follow. This entire dissertation is written with a blending of story, an integration of the work of other scholars and the data I collected, and reflections of my coming to know the scholarship I cite and the data I share. I choose a personal voice for the writing of this project so as to model the relationship-building practices I engaged in as I have done this work. This voice is as close to my own as I can write. I hope it translates the complex and beautiful ethical stance I have attempted to embody as a cultural rhetorics researcher who has truly enjoyed every part of this dissertation project. Welcome and miigwetch.

CHAPTER 1

CONSTELLATING SCHOLARLY TRADITIONS: MAKING SPACE FOR INDIGENOUS AND CHICANX CRITICAL DIGITAL LITERACIES

“Want a different ethic? Tell a different story.” - Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories*

It was finals week of one of my last quarters as an English major earning my BA degree, and I had several essays due for my classes. As I sat at my desk typing an essay final for Literary Theory and Criticism on my brand new Dell laptop, my dear cat Wylie, who was wearing a cone because of an injury sustained from a fight with a neighborhood cat, jumped up on my desk looking for affection. The cone smacked right into the green iced tea I was drinking, sending the liquid flying across my keyboard. I immediately backed up my essay on a USB drive, saved it on the hard drive, turned the computer off, and then turned it upside down over a towel to drain the fluid out. But the damage was already done. The sugar in the tea stuck all the keys. I worried what would happen if I tried to turn it on again. With no other options, I finished my finals on my many-years-old laptop and boxed the other one up indefinitely. I was a single mother, working multiple part-time jobs who had no resources to my knowledge that would enable me to hire someone to fix my computer—let alone buy the parts needed to fix my laptop. And, with summer approaching, the additional poverty of living three months without the financial bump of student loans or writing center work meant it would be a long time before I had enough money to get a new keyboard.

By the next summer a year later, I had saved up enough money to buy a new keyboard from Dell and ordered one from their customer service line. Unfortunately, there was a problem: I did not know how to replace the keyboard myself and I still did

not have enough money pay someone else to do it for me. In a panic, I texted my friend Ryan who had earned a degree in computer science the year before and asked for his help. He responded immediately—excitedly—with ideas for exactly what I could do. Since he was leaving out of town for work, he couldn't help me himself, but he suggested I search for *YouTube* videos that would explain how to install my computer's specific keyboard. I was stunned by his suggestion; it had never occurred to me that videos about installing computer parts existed online. With this new access to knowledge, I raced over to my best friend's house to use her computer to watch the videos while I installed the keyboard on mine. Within one hour, I had easily replaced the sticky keyboard with relative ease—surprising myself with my sudden technological prowess.

I had never thought of myself as a technology “nerd” or someone who was even remotely capable of working on computers. But the fact that something that initially seemed so difficult and beyond me was actually quite easy inspired an immediate interest to learn more. From that moment forward, I devoted time toward learning as much about computers as I could: how to code with multiple programming languages, what made computer and Internet infrastructure work, and how to use complex privacy and encryption software. Thanks to access to stable Internet WiFi and a working computer, my interests kept expanding into the relatively vast technological knowledge I have and use now. I repeated the practice I had used when learning how to fix my keyboard by reaching out to more technologically-experienced friends whenever a new skill initially seemed too complex for me. I often searched out answers or processes on *YouTube*, *Reddit*, the dark web, *glitch*, or *GitHub*. Since most of my friends at the time

were computer hacktivists that I had gotten to know during my Master's thesis research, my knowledge grew exponentially.

This particular moment in my life was pivotal for me in acquiring what I will come to explain as critical digital literacies: a working knowledge of not only computers, but an ever-evolving methodological grasp of how to use digital technologies in ways that support efforts of social justice, privacy, accessibility, and more. The story I start with here describes my initiation into a vast, constantly adapting and growing journey toward learning information security from the perspective of a digital, cultural rhetorician. As I became more competent in my skills, the more people welcomed me into the hacktivist community. I connected with folks who build private Internet relay systems through the Tor Onion browser and the dark web to provide Internet to activists in other countries who lose service at the whim of a dictator's tyrannical defense. I learned about how people "hack for the common good" and researched these practices for scholarship. Building connections—relations—with these hacktivists enabled me to enhance my critical digital literacies through practice speaking and engaging in the discourses around information security and activism as well as seeing first-hand why such practices are necessary in fighting for social justice.

The Rhetoric and Composition discipline, particularly in the field of computers and writing, has been researching and inquiring into the role of literacy in people's computer use for decades. At the heart of the conversation I trace in this chapter has been the goal of supporting social change and uplift for people from marginalized backgrounds and communities toward acquiring multifaceted technological literacies. In this chapter, I cite very specific scholarship focusing on critical digital literacies

throughout the discipline's history that I have come across in my studies. Though the scholarship on technology use and literacy has been extensive, I trace a conversation on this topic where rhetoric and composition scholars seek to understand critical digital literacies as a way to promote equality and social justice. This conversation leads into the second section where I add scholarship from digital rhetorics written by Indigenous women who challenge Western assumptions about technology use. Then, in the third section, I bring in scholarship from cultural rhetoricians to incorporate storytelling, testimonio, and relationality to further expand conceptions of critical digital literacies. Tracing a specific historical conversation within computers and writing scholarship from my own academic experience allows me to show how I constellated these different scholarly traditions together in thinking about critical digital literacies with a focus on culture and social justice for this dissertation project.

While the scholarship I cite in the next section on critical digital literacies called attention to the need for folks from marginalized backgrounds and experiences to join the conversations about critical computer use, there exists a gap of representation on this topic written by BIPOC² scholars. Putting the more well-known conversations about critical digital literacies side-by-side with work from Indigenous and Latinx scholars supports a more inclusive and broadened understanding of what critical digital literacies mean for Indigenous and Chicanx peoples. The knowledge we gain from bridging positionalities and experiences—through the practices of storytelling, testimonio, and relationality—expands our disciplinary understanding of the ways in which literacy is always already rooted in our identities and cultures. This scholarly expansion

² BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, people of color which serves to expand social understanding that colorism impacts our communities in ways that erases the variety of skin tones people who identify as persons of color have.

decolonizes our emphasis on Western perspectives about literacy and computer use, and provides unique opportunities for emerging Indigenous and Chicanx scholars to work within their own communities to better support culturally-accessible critical digital literacies.

A Discipline Making Its Way to Critical Digital Literacies

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have been asking questions about literacy and computers for decades and, perhaps, no scholar is more associated with conversations around these questions than Cynthia L. Selfe. Over the span of her academic career, Selfe has concentrated her scholarship on the connection between literacy and computers. I first read Selfe in 2013 during Jacqueline Rhodes's English 658, Computers & Writing: Literacy and Technology course at California State University San Bernardino during my Master's program. In that class, we read "The humanization of computers: Forget technology, remember literacy." That article supports critical conversations about technologies because Selfe offers three suggestions for how we teach "literacy to people in a way that celebrates the diverse and exciting nature of the human spirit:"

1. Use computers to tie people together, not to separate them.
2. Remember that computers complicate the business of literacy.
3. Don't forget about literacy. Humans and human communication, not computers, should be at the center of English classrooms. (p. 69-70)

Selfe proclaimed that adopting these suggestions could ensure that we humanize our use of technology while empowering our students and ourselves. She suggested a hopeful, yet critical centering of literacy as a practice that establishes an ethical consideration of computers' role in the writing classroom without superseding the necessary interactions students need with one another.

In many ways, Selfe's three suggestions have continued to influence her ethos and ideological pursuit of understanding the role of computer literacy with the teaching of writing. Selfe soon began collaborating with Gail E. Hawisher to produce scholarship that enacted a shared belief in the ethical responsibility of teaching with computer technologies in the classroom. Together, they (2002) showed how the field of technical communication was lacking an awareness of students' lived realities by expecting them to graduate having acquired "electronic-literacy skills" because scholars and educators failed to see how "the social, economic, political, and educational factors" inhibit people from acquiring useful digital practices (p. 231). Selfe and Hawisher incorporated these factors into their definition of *electronic literacy*³, arguing that people engaging "the practices involved in reading, writing, and exchanging information in online environments" needed to also know "the values associated with such practices"—those being the social, cultural, political, and educational factors they named prior (p. 232). They believed that their definition of electronic literacy differed from computer literacy by adopting those humanizing and ethical factors as fundamental values rather than focusing solely on technical communicators learning "how to use a computer."

Selfe and Hawisher saw that the concept of electronic literacy in the early 2000s needed a firm definition because, as the use of computer technologies became more widespread, access to that use correlated directly with the structural makeup of society. They noted that the distribution of access to computer technologies during President

³ Electronic literacy was the first iteration of the term that I see becoming critical digital literacies. As this chapter will explain, the term changes depending on the scholar using it. Stuart Selber (2004) will set out to define different terms depending on technology ideology. So, while the acquisition of critical digital literacies may be called "electronic literacy" here by Hawisher and Selfe or "critical technoliteracy" by Vie (2008), the commonality between them all is a focus on learning to use technologies in critical ways that promote social justice efforts and limit oppression and marginalization.

Clinton's Technology Literacy Challenge reflected socio-economic disparity in which racism and classism kept many school-aged children from learning to use computers in their classrooms. They argued that, "Without documenting such large-scale social movements, the profession of technical communication will be hard put to trace and understand the context within which electronic literacies developed in the last century and to anticipate the context within which they will develop in the next century" (p. 235). Selfe and Hawisher remarked that this *digital divide* impacted the technical communication profession, and used the qualitative study they conducted via the Techwr-I to determine how and why access to computer technologies affects electronic literacy (p. 233).

During Rhodes's class, we discussed how Selfe and Hawisher established that the digital divide that exists between race, class, gender, and age differences all affect the acquisition of electronic literacy, but that none—both together or in isolation—absolutely keep folks from gaining access to computer technologies. It was useful to learn that to enable electronic literacy to expand, society would need to provide equitable access to computers in primary, secondary, and college schooling for all people and communities in order for students to acquire in-depth electronic literacies over time. They felt that expansion could amend the digital divide because "different sets of communication practices and values—may have *life spans*, half-lives determined by their fitness with, and influence on, the cultural ecology within which they exist" (p. 262). An equitable access to computer technologies, then, would require a multitude of curricular and social infrastructures to ensure everyone had the opportunity to acquire

evolving electronic literacies, and that those literacy practices would evolve and adapt depending upon cultural need/situation.

To continue the pursuit of understanding the role our perceptions regarding literacy plays in how we research technologies, Rhodes also had us read Stuart Selber's (2005) *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Selber offered several terms to refine the different kinds of literacies we were, as a discipline, analyzing. He presented three different theoretical concepts of computer literacy: functional, critical, and rhetorical. Each type of literacy Selber defined emphasized how users interact with computers in specific ideological ways. Whereas *functional literacy* purported computers as tools that required mastering skill-based practices, Selber argued this ideological understanding of computer literacy as merely functional limited itself to a kind of technological determinism⁴. To address the limitations of functional literacy, Selber proposed a *critical literacy* that focused on teaching students to ask questions about technology development and use. He suggested that students ask,

What is lost as well as gained? Who profits? Who is left behind and for what reasons? What is privileged in terms of literacy and learning and cultural capital? What political and cultural values and assumptions are embedded in hardware and software? (p. 81)

Selber's emphasis on questioning the rhetorical composition of technologies—the ideologies behind what *and who* created them—shifts literacy from functional and performative to a kind of critical practice that necessitates engagement from users as critics.

⁴ Internet studies scholar Nancy K. Baym (2010) defined technological determinism as a belief that humans are passive users of technologies in which our technologies have the power to influence and change us without any agency on our part. Often, the ideology of technological determinism is seen as negative (i.e. "The Internet is ruining our ability to be present with others and have conversations"), but can also take a positive tone (i.e. "The dawn of the Computer Age forever altered the ways humans communicate").

Selber's proposed critical literacy as a term with a strategic purpose: to push our collective understanding of technologies beyond the limitations of functionality into a move toward social justice. He positioned that,

As such an uncomfortable line of questions implies, a critical approach to literacy first recognizes and then challenges the values of the status quo. Instead of reproducing the existing social and political order, which functional modes tend to do, it strives to both expose biases and provide an assemblage of cultural practices that, in a democratic spirit, might lead to the production of positive social change. (p. 81)

Citing Freire and Macedo, Selber named “solidarity, social responsibility, creativity, discipline in the service of the common good, vigilance, and critical spirit” as replacements for the values of the status quo when engaging in critical literacy with technologies. He hoped students could come to understand computers as cultural artifacts rather than as tools, which would help “limit the negative effects from any unintended consequences of their designs” (p. 86).

Similar in Selber's belief in the purpose of questioning as an enactment of critical literacies with technologies, Laura Gurak (2001), too, argued for a *cyberliteracy* that went beyond simply using a computer. In *Cyberliteracy: Navigating the Internet with Awareness*, Gurak pushed heavily for a critical awareness that we understand how our “communication technologies shape our social and cultural spaces” (p. 27). She professed that “Cyberliteracy means voicing an opinion about what these technologies should become and being an active, not a passive participant” in their making, use, and implications for shaping the future (p. 27). Gurak called here for technology users to realize the power they have to actively participate in conversations surrounding technology. Her study (1997) of online protests during the 1990s detailed a kind of democratic engagement that fulfills this call. Gurak looked closely at the online protests

surrounding the implementation of the Clipper Chip during Clinton's presidency as well as the protests of Lotus Marketplace. Her study showed how early Internet technologies were seriously critiqued by the privacy literate for the issues these technologies posed regarding non-consensual data collection and circumvention of encryption. Combined with Selber's arguments, rhetoric and writing scholars can realize that adopting critical cyberliteracy practices means being able to ask questions about the ideologies and purposes behind our technologies, but also understand methods to act as informed, engaged citizens to collectively shape how technologies and their uses exist in the world.

Tracing the evolving conversations within rhetoric and composition regarding literacy, whether it was called electronic literacy, critical literacy, or cyberliteracy, one noteworthy facet has emerged: scholars have believed in the power and potential for technology use to shape society and expressed concern about the ideologies that informed both the design and use of technologies. Because of these concerns, they called for critical approaches toward studying, using, and designing computer technologies that would consider cultural implications in an effort to promote social justice efforts for equality.

A Disciplinary Shift in the Conversation

In an effort to further the conversation about literacy and technologies within the discipline, Stephanie Vie (2008) presented her findings regarding access and literacy in "Digital divide 2.0: 'Generation M' and online social networking sites in the composition classroom." Vie found that, while "the digital divide has been largely theorized as a problem of access" to digital technologies, students "tend to possess technological

know-how...but lack critical technological literacy skills” (p. 10). She learned that more and more students had a better grasp on using computer and digital technologies due to the ubiquity of mobile phones and computers at home and in classrooms, but lacked the many critical approaches to understanding the social impact of these technologies.

Though her findings proved that the digital divide was no longer as much a matter of access, Vie didn’t seek to discount the importance of scholarship like that of Selfe and Hawisher, Selber, or Gurak. Instead, she sought to move this important conversation forward to fit the changing use of technologies. Vie encouraged rhetoric and writing scholars to expand their scope regarding this particular focus of inquiry: “While much attention has been paid to students at risk of growing up without access to, and experience with, computers, attention also needs to be paid to students’ critical digital literacies” (p. 10). Like the scholars before her, Vie believed that critical digital literacy means having the capacity to “understand and critique technology’s societal effects” (p. 12). She referenced how social media can be better understood through questioning how these platforms complicate our understanding of intellectual property issues such as copyright and authorship, how they help us understand the “economy of attention that advertisers exploit” (p. 16), and how their design impacts matters relating to privacy and surveillance.

Vie’s work reaffirms a very important lesson that Selfe, Hawisher, Selber, and Gurak all proved about technology use: though access does affect people’s abilities to know how to use technologies, access does not mean that people will obtain a critical awareness of technology’s societal effects. Vie contributed to this ongoing historical conversation by opening space to for considering critical digital literacies of Web 2.0

technologies like social media platforms in writing classrooms. Vie felt this shift was needed at the time because she identified a secondary digital divide among students and instructors regarding a difference among their social media use—mainly a generational difference of preference and purpose. She found that most instructors resisted using social media platforms in the classroom and with their own personal use due to concerns about privacy (p. 19). And for those who did use social media, instructors preferred Facebook while students tended toward Myspace (p. 19).

The secondary divide of social media use, according to Vie, created interesting tensions within rhetoric and writing classrooms when instructors integrated social media into their pedagogy. She explained that “Online social networking sites showcase an intriguing turn of events wherein students’ scrutiny of their instructors inverts traditional notions of classroom surveillance” (p. 19). Vie found that students would often take up their knowledge of social media use to surveil their instructors, which made many instructors feel hesitant to include such technologies in their classrooms.

However, Vie encouraged instructors to reorient their concerns about privacy because students have the most opportunity to acquire critical digital literacies through participation. She argued that instructors first needed to gain a critical understanding of these platforms for themselves:

Concerns regarding surveillance, authority, and boundaries in online social networking sites are significant barriers to encouraging participation in these sites among many academics. But to assist students in strengthening their technological literacy, particularly in online social networking sites, we must first be able to understand and critique these sites ourselves. (p. 20)

By improving their own critical digital literacies, Vie noted that instructors were then most likely—and best able—to find creative and useful ways for integrating social media

platforms into their classroom curriculum and assignments. Doing so enabled these instructors to better support students acquiring more in-depth critical digital literacies by meeting them where they were.

Some time went on with the critical digital literacy conversation in the discipline until Estee Beck (2015) detailed several creative ways for instructors to support students' acquisition of critical digital literacies in the classroom through the analysis of digital surveillance within advertising tracking technologies like cookies and data collection. By showing students web applications and add-ons that expose the functions of surveillance technologies, Beck highlighted how instructors can incorporate web 2.0 platforms and applications in the classroom to help students become more critical of surveillance and more aware of the importance of privacy. She positioned that "The implications concern how everyone can continue to interact in online spaces in safe ways and understand how our invisible digital identities are constructed through surfing habits. Those implications include responsibilities to act and teach students about how to protect their identities online" (p. 138-9). Beck's position here builds off of Vie's argument that integrating technologies in the classroom will support students acquiring critical digital literacies. Also, her pedagogical examples provide instructors with the means to be proactive in curricular design that supports critical digital literacy acquisition in ways that promote democratic engagement—fulfilling the hopes that Selfe and Hawisher, Selber, and Gurak have as well.

A Need for Representation

On November 11th, 2015 during my second year in the PhD program, the graduate students of Alexandra Hidalgo's WRA 891: Academic Memoirs Across Media⁵ led the class in a series of group presentations for an "I Wish We Were Reading/Watching/Listening to/Experiencing *This*" memoir assignment. We were a class of all women, many of us women of color, and excited to share with our classmates the memoirs we had found that we wish were assigned as class texts. Shewonda Leger and Suban Nur Cooley presented on Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously*. They started their presentation by asking us all to reflect in writing on the first text we came across in our education where we saw ourselves in the text we were reading. We sat there for several minutes thinking amongst ourselves and writing down our thoughts. I personally struggled with this question because no text immediately came to mind. I found it difficult because I could not immediately recall ever reading a text about a mixed-race Chicana. Eventually, I realized the first text I read that I personally identified with was Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

I had read *Borderlands* during my MA at California State University San Bernardino, not in my own classes, but when visiting Rhodes's Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric course as a guest through invitation from a friend. Rhodes had led the class on a discussion of the meaning behind Anzaldúa's moving linguistically through a blending of English, Spanish, and Nahuatl to make her point. I listened as the class analyzed the rhetorical choices on this: Anzaldúa's normalizing theoretical discourse as Mestiza epistemological practice. I remember staying silent throughout the entire class,

⁵ Alexandra Hidalgo's syllabus for this class, including the assignment mentioned below can all be accessed on her website: <https://msuwra891fall2015.weebly.com/>

mesmerized by the fact that I finally felt seen, but also frozen with the fact that my peers around me were discussing an identity that fit my own without knowing that was close to an identity I held.

This experience was both validating and isolating, and remains a significant transitional moment in my academic career. After learning that Anzaldúa existed and that her kind of theorizing was possible, I went in search of more texts by women of color who theorized the world from their/our intersecting perspectives. With much gratitude to my PhD coursework, I have read many books and articles that serve as representative either of my identity or innate methodological and theoretical beliefs. Many of those texts will be cited throughout this dissertation. However, as I began thinking about scholarly conversations where my work has a place, I struggled once again. Up until this year, I have found little-to-no scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition that specifically discusses Chicanx and Indigenous critical digital literacies.

The lack of scholarship on Chicanx and Indigenous critical digital literacies in our discipline has not been a purposeful move to erase the experiences people of color have with technology. Instead, such a lack reflects the technological experiences embodied by the people in our discipline. Still largely white and traditional, Rhetoric and Composition has only recently—say in the last few decades—addressed the way people of color, and more specifically Indigenous and Chicanx peoples, use technology because we now exist as scholars in the discipline. The historical trajectory of critical digital literacies conversation I have traced throughout our discipline has discussed, if not emphasized, the need for more attention to how those marginalized by power structures within society both access technologies and acquire digital practices.

However, these scholarly conversations have been primarily written by white scholars who research these communities; scholarship on critical digital literacies of Chicanx and Indigenous people has rarely been written from our perspectives in our own voices. But times, they needed changing.

Perspectives from the Gap

Over the last few years, both Latinx and Indigenous scholars have conducted and published research within the discipline that presents technological experiences of people *from within* their own communities. Unfortunately, the scholarship they have done and are doing is, largely, scarce in comparison to the scholarship by folks who research *on* and *with* these communities. In this section, I will discuss contributions by Indigenous and Latinx scholars that helps to broaden our understanding of critical digital literacies to include perspectives from the identities these scholars represent and embody.

When I set out to do this dissertation, I found myself desiring academic literature and research on how other Chicanx peoples learned to use computer technologies and acquire literacies when accessing digital systems. I yearned for representation and struggled with the lack thereof. Knowing my own unique story about how I came to gain a critical engagement and awareness of digital technologies told me that a vast amount of stories were out there that would expand what we know about how Indigenous and Chicanx folks use the Internet. I remember being assigned Haas's (2007) "Wampum as hypertext: An American Indian intellectual tradition of multimedia theory and practice" in Malea Powell's History of Rhetoric course during my PhD. As I read through Haas's

article, I began to see a discussion of technological literacy that challenged Western beliefs that technology meant computers and industrial evolution.

By tracing “a counterstory to Western claims to the origins of hypertext and multimedia,” Haas explained that American Indian peoples have composed wampum belts⁶ in a way that helps us “re-vision the intellectual history of technology, hypertext, and multimedia studies” (p. 77-78). Haas determined that wampum enacts a form of digital rhetoric because they rely on our fingers—digits—to make meaning of and in the world (p. 84). Using digital rhetoric practices, wampum creates a system of knowledge that operates similarly to hypertext through communicating multiple stories within the bead design on the belt. The communication of stories in wampum belts, Haas explained, works as a form of interactiveness “between ‘designers’ and ‘presenters’ of wampum, the audience for the wampum hypertext, and the material rhetoric itself” (p. 90).

Recognizing the interactiveness of wampum belts shows there are literacy practices needed to both compose the belts and read the stories communicated within them. As Haas illuminated, “Wampum belts signify a surviving intellectual tradition that communicates living stories of a living culture. The treaties (and other messages woven into the wampum) are renewed by regularly revisiting and re-‘reading’ wampum vis-à-vis community memory and performance” (p. 92). She further elaborated that as readers return to the wampum belt through memory and performance, the meaning of the belt—the communication of a commitment—enacts a continuous act of hypertextuality where links to past content and information is always present. The hypertextuality of wampum

⁶ Wampum belts are belts composed of white and purple beads made from clam shells that serve as visual living records of a historical moment, signal a person’s title, and/or detail a meeting among peoples (“Wampum”).

makes it rhetorical: “Thus while all affected parties tend to the links to ensure alliances survive, tribal memory keeps the wampum rhetoric alive while individuals need to continuously update hypertexts and their content to keep them relevant” (p. 92). The unique rhetorical facet of wampum belts is that memory and story are sustained within the construction of the belt in a way that online hypertexts are not. Therefore, wampum belts present texts that support longstanding, traditional literacy practices that can be acquired lifetimes upon lifetimes.

It wasn’t until two years later, in reading for my concentration exam that I came across Kristin L. Arola’s (2012) “It’s my revolution: Learning to See the Mixedblood” and found a text that closely represented my identity as a mixed blood Chicana who found significance in studying identity representation in online spaces. My colleague Lucy Johnson recommended this text to me as we met for our weekly comprehensive exams support meeting. Lucy, a graduate student of Arola’s at Washington State University and social media researcher herself, suggested I read this chapter because it would help me grapple with the role of culture in critical digital literacies scholarship. Lucy could not have been more right. This chapter was everything I did not know I needed.

Arola carefully and purposefully used the space of her chapter to not only speak from her positionality as a mixed-blood Indian, but to situate her positionality as an ontological foundation that enabled her to interrogate how mixed-blood Indians self-reflect on their identity and positionality in online spaces. She asserted that “Being seen as an Indian is messy, slippery, tricky, and political; being seen as a mixed blood Indian—that is, one whose parents are not both fullbloods—is often an even messier, if not impossible, endeavor” (p. 214). Arola emphasized the *being seen as an Indian*

through the presentation and analysis of regalia. As she argued, “regalia is an intimate expression of self” and not a costume or something someone puts on for a performance (p. 214). She found that regalia functions similarly to online identities in that mixedblood Indians will find ways to represent their mixedblood-ness in online spaces through strategic profile construction.

Arola detailed how online spaces provide useful opportunities to see how mixedblood Indians assert “their identities in ways that illustrate not only the existence and persistence of the mixed-blood, but whose visual, aural, and textual choices illustrate the complexities of this category and the embodied nature of the online self” (p. 217). She saw online identities operating within a continuum of representations for the self and that thinking of online presentation as strategic, rhetorical presentation of regalia: “To understand online identity as regalia is to understand it as an embodied visible act that evolves and changes, and that represents one’s history, one’s community, and one’s self within that particular moment” (p. 218). Through her research, Arola found that mixedblood Indians navigate all of these representations simultaneously through actions that signal their identities as mixedblood Indians such as pictures that show them engaging in cultural practices, listing their heritages on their profiles, and/or sharing stories about their families. All of these regalia representations highlight Arola’s research participants having a deft knowledge of how to carefully construct themselves in these spaces in order to fulfill their commitments to their culture, community, and themselves.

Arola noted how mixedblood Indians create their online identities, as seen through regalia as a framework, thus enacting what Malea Powell (1999) referred to as

survivance. Citing Gerald Vizenor, Powell described survivance as “a pose I interpret as survival plus resistance—and to call for the entrance of the trickster who lives in counterstories” (p. 2). The pose of survivance is rhetorical and tactical—a stance mixedblood folks embody to not just survive, but also resist that which threatens our survival. Arola gave scholars in the discipline regalia as an epistemological framework to enable us to understand how mixedblood people’s offline and online identities become “woven together more tightly” and “encourage mindful representations” that honor our families, communities, ancestors, and our selves. In this way, mindfully constructed social media profiles call forth a kind of critical digital literacy practice that requires skillful knowledge about how to present our identities online to keep ourselves alive and thriving.

Powell’s own mixedblood story questioned what it means to study Indians in the context of the academy. Powell’s chapter I cite wasn’t one that was assigned in any of my coursework, nor was it one anyone ever asked me to read. However, it tends to be this text so many of us BIPOC find our way toward reading. Sometimes we pass it to one another quietly or loudly, as a means for hearing a voice speak so much like our own. This voice, the one we share, gives us space to reflect on the power of our stories in academia when we have so often been those who were studied rather than studying. Calling forth her own imbrication, Powell asked us, as a discipline, to reimagine our disciplinary space by listening to “those bloody, invisible bodies,” so that we can more consciously—and conscionably—position the stories academia has erased, silenced, or ignored relationally alongside those who have dominated for so long.

Listening to Latinx Voices about Technology Use

For me, the doing of this dissertation project presented a unique challenge: I wanted to cite voices that represented my and my dissertation participant-collaborators' experiences, but could not find them. I spent months thinking about survivance and what it means to have access to stories from people like us about our engagement with technologies. If we are to survive, we not only need to think about literacy beyond access, but we also have to consider what literacy means when we cannot hear the voices of our comunidad. The Indigenous stories about technology that I had come across during my graduate coursework and exams expanded my understanding of critical digital literacy and helped me feel represented, but a silence remained. That is, until this year.

As I started compiling texts to write this literature review, I sought out the scholarship from researchers with whom I could more fully identify. I recalled reading Gabriela Raquel Rios's (2015) "Cultivating Land-based literacies and rhetorics" for my concentration exam and wondered how her research spoke to my own project. Rios reminded me that, like Native American peoples, Latinx folks hold different approaches and understandings about literacy than white-identifying, Anglo folks. Because I am a Chicana, I know that Indigenous and Latinx perspectives regarding literacy are similar: we must acquire literacy practices that enable us to fit in within settler society, while also remaining fluent in our own cultural knowledges as best we can. Our survivance requires both. Drawing from the work of Kendall Leon (another Chicana scholar), Rios identified that the farm workers she worked with in Orlando, Florida "similarly deployed rhetorics in response to ideologies of literacy that construct them as a-rhetorical" (p. 60).

Her research taught me that Indigenous and Latinx peoples know what it means to live as a-rhetorical bodies in dominant, white settler society—exposing how we must navigate the world through at least two conflicting rhetorical poses simultaneously.

Through her own literature review, Rios traced a related, but different conversation regarding literacy throughout the discipline. She found that the historical trajectory within Rhetoric and Composition tends to focus on locating “a link between *citizenship* and literacy,” whereas “scholars in Indigenous studies locate that same link as one between *settler-colonialism* and literacy” (p. 63; emphasis in original). Rios cited Walter Mignolo to argue that literacy has been “an enduring product and producer of ongoing colonialism” (p. 63). To counter literacy’s function of colonialism, Rios introduced a land-based approach to literacy rooted very much in cultural rhetorics and Indigenous epistemologies of relationality. She established that “land-based literacies are literal *acts* of interpretation and communication that grow out of active participation with land” (p. 64). By reminding scholars that the land—our planet—produces relations, Rios explained how Indigenous peoples see literacies as practices that connect us to all our relations: land, animals, our other humans. This Indigenous approach to land-based literacy helped her explain how farm workers “reframe” literacy in order to work with the land and sustain it (p. 68). Rios’s article challenged the ways Western views of literacy make other, non-Western literacies a-rhetorical through devaluing their legitimacy and erasing their usefulness.

In a conscious effort to further amend the silence of Latinx voices regarding technology within the discipline, Cruz Medina and Octavio Pimentel (2018) published a digital collection, *Racial Shorthand: Coded Discrimination Contested in Social Media* in

2018. I excitedly read this collection over the summer when it was released, finally feeling like there was scholarship even more representative of my experiences and research needs than before. They detailed the need for this collection in their introduction:

Using social media as their platform, many people of color are writing their lives and documenting the senseless deaths of community members. This collection is a part of the cloud filling with digitally archived images, voices, and experiences that continue the process of washing away the shorthand misrepresentations of communities of color. (Medina & Pimentel, Introduction, para. 2)

The cloud Medina and Pimentel mentioned here represents the undeniable amount of people of color voicing their realities and presence in online spaces. Cruz and Pimentel envisioned their collection as a specific, strategic piece of this cloud—and it is one that I identified with as representative immediately.

Cruz Medina (2018) furthered the mission of the collection in his digital chapter by presenting “how personal stories in culturally relevant multimodal storytelling contribute to scholarship that has been excluded from the landscape of academic print literacy” (Decolonizing Digital Storytelling section, para. 2). The storytelling he brought into this conversation expands what Latinx peoples know as *testimonio*: first-person narrations that present a form of witnessing communal experiences. Medina extended this term to encompass the multimodal compositions he saw his family and comunidad creating digitally: “Digital testimonios as multimodal compositions have the potential to promote literacy by broadening audiences’ perspectives and engaging with the public in a mode that resists dominant narratives while providing a platform for making the personal into the collective” (Digital testimonios, para. 1). In the chapter, Medina presented two digital testimonios that highlight how Latinx multimodal

composers use video to speak truth to power and collectively represent the stories central to their lives. The kind of resistance to dominant narratives that digital testimonios promote, Medina positioned, enacts the social justice efforts of literacy that Selfe called for in her scholarship, but do so in service of social justice on *their* terms.

Medina's argument and two digital testimonio cases elucidated the fact that Latinx peoples have always-already used computer technologies to enact survivance as well as highlight our acquisition of critical digital literacy practices in culturally-relevant and meaningful ways. As I read his chapter and watched these digital testimonios, I felt chills roll up my arms. This was representation. It was space. It was written and visual text that finally talked about what having access to technologies has meant for me and my communities. Not just theory about us, Medina's chapter was—and is—us made seen. Finally.

Grateful, I set out to write this literature review knowing that I could cite scholarship within a conversation where my research belonged without the worry and the labor that I would need to make representative space for myself. The space now existed. And, then, with somewhat surprise, I learned that Christina V. Cedillo was going to continue making space in this conversation with her featured talk for the 2018 Watson Conference. In "Towards a Composition that Matters: Bridging the Material-Digital Divide," Cedillo reminded attendees that "minoritized people find themselves in the tech all the time, just uncredited and de-mattered. It's crucial that we highlight ways to use technologies to re-matter ourselves and others" (Technology as tactics section, para. 12). Cedillo reaffirmed Medina's and Rios's arguments by detailing to scholars that though Latinx people have been accessing and using technologies all this time, our

experiences often remain invisible within dominant conversations. She nudged us to take a deeper (if not first) look at Latinx technology practices.

Cedillo referenced Powell and Vizenor's definition of survivance and included technology in that definition to explain that Latinx peoples use technologies strategically and tactically in order to survive and resist. I cite her talk at length here to capture the full complexity and detail of her description. She said,

This crucial technology is enacted via tactics that allow colonized people to survive and resist, survive to resist—a technology far more vital to me as a member of a colonized people than any computer or even the Internet. Sometimes we forget that “technology” comes from *techne*, meaning “art” or “skill,” or maybe we just have to refocus. What is important to remember is that technologies are saturated with intent and ideology, the teleology of any technology inextricable from its axiology, its standards of value circulated as technologies reify, originate, or communicate them. In the resourceful hands of marginalized folks (see Dolmage on *mêtis*), technologies are also suffused with tactical value. Tactical technologies that bespeak our [sic] takes on transformative access, or access to “spaces where technologies are created, designed, planned and where policies and regulations are written” (Banks 42). Transformative access lets technologies work for and matter to us. But it also includes how they make us matter. (Technology as tactics section, para. 11)

Cedillo's words here connect survivance and technology through rhetoric, or in this case, tactics that enable transformative access. Cedillo referenced Adam Banks's (2008) critical work in *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground* to shift this discussion about colonized peoples not only tactically and strategically using technologies, but our engagement with the creation of computer technologies and technology policy. Cedillo critiqued the conversations around the digital divide that focused solely on material access to explain that, for us marginalized people, access means so much more for us.

Putting it All Together: A Constellation of Relations and Testimonios

Technologies mean more for Indigenous and Latinx peoples because we learn to use them and continue to navigate our use of them while experiencing the same oppressions that find us in the physical world. We come to digital technologies knowing that they tend not to be designed by us or for us. Therefore, we approach them critically from the beginning. Nevertheless, we understand the necessary place they have in our lives. We need computers and the Internet to do our work and make a living. I think about my mother, a woman hell-bent on never having an email address or Facebook account. She reached out to me recently, asking if I could help her get a “smart phone” because her primary physician requires her to check-in through an app in order to be seen in their office. Life has made the need for digital technologies inescapable.

Suffice it to say, Selfe remains correct. Literacy should be taught in a way that celebrates and supports “the diverse and exciting nature of the human spirit” (p. 69). Her project to assure that electronic literacy worked to support social justice efforts has been continued throughout the history of the discipline, as I hope my literature review shows. I find it telling that nearly all of the scholarship I cite has cited her work in some way. Selfe has established a scholarly conversation that sees critical digital literacies as inciting teaching and research with very political motives. A legacy. So while there has been a gap in representation, scholars in our discipline have fought successfully for the space that supports the research I present in this dissertation.

Cultural rhetorics methodologies of story, testimonio, and relationality bring in important perspectives to this scholarly conversation about critical digital literacies. Relationality, in particular, presents a methodological and ontological practice of

coexistence that respects Indigenous epistemologies. As Arola acknowledged, “Everything is related, and our place within these relations is constantly shifting. Issues of identity and truth are terms best understood through how we conceive our relations” (Arola, 2017, p. 217). And, like Powell expressed, “I don’t believe that any scholarly work can be fully enabled until we see the entire web of narratives in which it exists and works to create meaning” (Powell, p. 4). My goal for this literature review—and this dissertation—is to constellate new narrative webs and relations into the scholarship we have.

In the methodology chapter that follows, I supply a more detailed discussion of cultural rhetorics in the construction of an ethical, relational research methodology. I contextualize this methodology in an overview of my dissertation study and how I worked with my participant-collaborators, three Indigenous and Chicana women in my community, to create the methodological approach we took together in the design of this project. This methodology sets up the three data chapters that follow, which present a look into the social media sharing practices of Indigenous and Chicana women. Together we put our experiences in relation with one another to build solidarity within our online communities while asserting very culturally-specific and culturally-sustaining critical digital literacies.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CARRYING AND SHARING OUR STORIES: ETHICAL, RELATIONAL DATA-MAKING WITH INDIGENOUS AND CHICANA WOMEN

My grandfather taught me that every good storyteller always acknowledges the place from which her story came—a friend, a gathering, an experience. – Malea Powell

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. – Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Initially, this dissertation was not going to be an inquiry into the social media sharing practices of Indigenous and Chicana women. I had intended to study how women created community within Instagram around their identities as mothers. As a woman who became a mother for the second time during my PhD program, I found comfort, solace, and information by following accounts that posted images with the hashtags #motherhood, #motherhoodrising, and #childhoodunplugged. These women provided me a visual reminder of what it meant to be pregnant and prepare for a baby, having a ten-year gap between the two. I had found connection with the stories these women shared about their everyday lives in the caption of their photos. Until, one woman shared a post that made me realize this was not a community to which I could belong.

One night before Halloween, I came across a post from a woman I had been following for quite some time who shared an image of a Pinterest-like collage of four pictures: one each of a man and a woman with their faces painted in celebration of Día de Muertos and another two of a man and a woman wearing formal period clothing. She

happily declared choosing these images as inspiration for her and her husband's Halloween costumes because "it would be fun to be a dia de los muertos couple." I saw that another woman had already commented on this post, urging the woman who had posted it to consider the disrespectful nature of what she was sharing. I felt immediate repulsion. As a Chicana woman who celebrates Día de Muertos annually, I followed through on my urge to add a comment as well. I explained my identity and how this post made me feel. I detailed how her post was an act of cultural appropriation and why using these images for a Halloween party is disrespectful and even racist.

At first, the woman who posted seemed to listen. We engaged in a few exchanges where she was open to hearing my perspective and suggestions. But then, emboldened by some of her followers commenting that it was I who was being racist and disrespectful, she recanted and posted a slew of vengeful comments my way. She called me a Nazi who was acting like the cultural police when all she was doing was honoring my culture by putting it on as a costume. I responded by blocking her.

This incident made me realize that I could not research with the women in this community. I worried about the ethics of researching *alongside* and *with* these women when I knew we held different beliefs and positionalities that would ultimately lead to my writing about them truthfully, yet negatively. Considering that my approach to ethical research calls for sharing writing and methodological theorizing *with* and *alongside* a project's participant-collaborators (which I describe later in this chapter), I knew that I needed to change my project.

I went to one of my mentors, Dr. Alexandra Hidalgo, and explained my problem. We talked together about the issues I faced and my feelings.

She asked me: “What goals do you want your project to accomplish?”

“I want my work to support the people in my communities,” I responded. With this answer, she encouraged me to think about what communities I am in and what research I could do with them. I thought about the water protectors at Standing Rock. I thought about how, at that moment, Indigenous folks and allies were on their way to the Dakotas to support the water protectors in their resistance to the violation of their land and rights. While this was happening far away, my local community had been collecting donations to take to the water protectors. During IYEP, we were guiding the children in processing the situation. We had brought Anishinaabe musician Sacramento Knox out to share his music videos about Standing Rock with the kids, engaging in ceremony together.

As I sat there talking with Dr. Hidalgo, I thought about these things and realized that I was already very much engaged in a community. I had been trained to do community-oriented, cultural rhetorics research throughout much of my PhD program. In cultural rhetorics research, we do not enact colonial research practices that *other* people by drawing data from them like they are subjects. Rather, we research alongside and with our own communities to generate information and knowledge together, collectively. We lift up. We support. For us, research is ceremony.

So I changed the focus of my project. As I shared in the previous chapter, I have invested myself in helping others protect themselves online. But, for this dissertation, I wanted to learn how the women in my community were already doing that for themselves. I had an intuitive calling that I had a lot to learn about their social media sharing practices if I listened to stories about how and why they used the Internet. Instead of treating them like research subjects, I engaged in a decolonial, feminist

cultural rhetorics research methodology that supported a collaborative inquiry where I learned alongside and with three Indigenous and Chicana women in my community.

This chapter details how I designed this inquiry and research in relation with these women, which is separated into two sections to show my research process: the first section describes the methodological approach I designed, and the second details the methods I enacted. I conclude with a summary of how both, together, inform the data I present in the three data chapters that follow. The next chapter will directly build from the methodological framework and practices I describe in this chapter to present the stories these women and I shared together, offering a complicated discussion of what it means to carry and share their stories.

Methodology: In “Theory”

This dissertation began with an introduction, which mirrors the kind of methodological approach of my project that I lay out in this chapter. In those first pages, I tell a series of stories to make a few key moves; these moves inform the rest of the chapters that follow. Land, positionality, relationality, embodiment, community, and culture are all decolonial nodes of knowing that shaped my coming to this project. Together, these nodes operate as foundations of a cultural rhetorics research methodology that supported my work with three Indigenous and Chicana women in my local community here in central Michigan.

The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL) established (2014) in their foundational article on cultural rhetorics that “the project of cultural rhetorics is, generally, to emphasize rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical. In practice, cultural rhetorics scholars investigate and understand meaning-

making as it is situated in specific cultural communities” (Act I, Scene 1; para. 2). The cultural rhetorics project places research—investigation—as the process in which researchers inquire how a community makes culture through its own set of rhetorical practices.

Academic research, for Indigenous peoples, has a fraught history of extraction and exploitation. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has argued, “From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). The fact that research comes across as a dirty word should worry researchers who work with Indigenous peoples (and everyone for that matter), putting them on alert as to how they can enact more supportive and ethical research practices. I felt this worry deeply as I sought to design this project. Because I also write and research from the vantage point of the colonized, I understand, personally and viscerally, how fraught this history has been—as do the women who collaborated with me as participant-collaborators.

I approached my research design with caution and concern, leading me to consider ethical approaches that, like Smith, privilege Indigenous ways of knowing. I could not, in good faith, continue in research practices that have colonial histories guiding them. As Smith continued,

It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous people’s claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our communities. (p. 1)

I know this anger well. Indigenous people live aware of colonialism's history of erasing and invalidating our epistemologies and ontologies. Therefore, I began this project from a place of practicing what not to do and looked closely at those who engaged in similar ethical work for their own research with Indigenous communities.

Several scholars in Rhetoric and Composition have oriented themselves to research in way that support—as well as validate—Indigenous epistemologies through cultural rhetorics. In “Towards a cultural rhetorics methodology,” Riley Mukavetz called cultural rhetorics a form of research that prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing. She explained that “A cultural rhetorics orientation is to enact a set of respectful and responsible practices to form and sustain relationships with cultural communities and their shared beliefs and practices including texts, materials, and ideas” (p. 109). Riley Mukavetz added that a cultural rhetorics orientation focuses on the “material, embodied, and relational aspects of research” (p. 109) in order to support a project taking place within Indigenous communities and elsewhere. The purpose of this focus, she furthered, is to form and sustain relationships with people, which is a methodological practice of relationality that I will explain in more detail soon. By focusing on the material, embodied, and relational facets of any and all research, a cultural rhetorics orientation makes clear how the lives of the researcher and the community with which they research are implicated in the given project. Riley Mukavetz showed how cultural rhetorics research methodologies can “provide a reorientation to talking and writing about culture” in a way that shifts the gaze from a Western othering to an internal, communal, and participatory presence (p. 110).

As the disciplinary conversation in Rhetoric and Composition on cultural rhetorics continued to develop, scholars further defined, in connected terms, what doing cultural rhetorics research means. Phil Bratta and Malea Powell (2016) elaborated on the definition of cultural rhetorics from their perspective as they presented a special issue on cultural rhetorics for *Enculturation*. Their definition does not separate from Riley Mukavetz's:

More than anything, cultural rhetorics is a practice, and more specifically an embodied practice, that demands much from the scholars who engage in it. First, scholars must be willing to build meaningful theoretical frames from inside the particular culture in which they are situating their work. To do so means understanding a specific culture's systems, beliefs, relationships to the past, practices of meaning-making, and practices of carrying culture forward to future generations. In this way, it requires that scholars move beyond simply applying frames derived from one culture/tradition to another culture's rhetorical practices. (What is Cultural Rhetorics; para. 1)

In true cultural rhetorics practice, Bratta and Powell build off of Riley Mukavetz's definition to further delineate the project of cultural rhetorics research. They highlighted how cultural rhetorics supports scholars adapting theoretical frames that source from the communities with which they are researching. Again, this definition shows that building a theoretical frame from within a community enacts a kind of resistance to the objectification and othering that has occurred within traditional, colonizing academic research for centuries.

Bratta and Powell sought to make clear that cultural rhetorics research directly interrogates "issues of power" that evolve when one conducts comparative analysis—power that exists invisibly within traditional scholarship. To do that kind of interrogation, they recalled the four tenants of cultural rhetorics laid out in the CRTL article: decolonization, relations, constellation, and story (What is; para 2). When acting in

concert, these four tenants are how cultural rhetorics researchers put together a cultural rhetorics practice that challenges the traditional model of research by acknowledging the validity and importance of epistemologies practiced by folks within marginalized communities.

As I will explain next, I applied story, constellation, relationality, and decolonization into the design of this dissertation. I draw from the cultural rhetorics scholars who have engaged in these four tenants before to explain how I adapted them to my specific project. Then, in the second half section in of this chapter, I outline how I conducted my study alongside three Indigneous and Chicana women from my community. For the most part, this is a direct adaption of the cultural rhetorics methodology I just presented. However, I chose to first honor positionality as an addition to the cultural rhetorics orientation I detailed here. Because I take earnestly the call of cultural rhetorics to make clear our own subjectivities, the epistemologies that I have brought with me from home (my ancestors, family, the lands from which we come, and my experiences) as well as what I've learned in Nkewjong determined my approach to this project. I will further make clear how focusing on my positionality stays true to the ethical, relational approach to research that I developed in this inquiry.

Positionality

This dissertation begins with one of my own origin stories: a story about home and my ancestral knowledge that shapes how I approached my learning here in Nkwejong. Telling this story enabled me to present and interrogate my own positionality. Feminist research methodologies have fought for women's scholarly right to not only include, but speak from our positionality in order to decenter the misogynist nature of

research history that used the myth of objectivity as a tool of objectification and othering. Centering my identity and subjectivity in this project makes visible the underlying processes in which my thinking brought this dissertation to be. Starting with my own positionality in this project also enables me to situate myself as a participant in the rhetorical meaning-making that my fellow participant-collaborators and I created. Cultural rhetorics research recognizes the collective process in which people make meaning—culture—together.

To me, a clear understanding of my identity as both a member of my community, researcher, an academic, an Indigenous Chicana woman from Southern California is the first step in undertaking an ethical methodology to gather research with women in my community. Riley Mukavetz explained that the CRTL did the same for their article (Act I, Scene 2; para. 2). That, in a practice of cultural rhetorics, our positionality exists within a constellation of relationships that work together to create meaning. Naming and storying my positionality helps me to engage in the other cultural rhetorics tenets with intention, direction, and honesty, which will become more clear as I continue.

Story

In the graduate-level literary theory and criticism course I took at CSUSB while earning my Master's, we read this book called *On the Origin of Stories*. This book was a very long historical examination of the role of story in the Western literary canon—going back, of course, to the Greeks. One thing I took from reading this book and the discussions in class is that story is central to the way humans make meaning. I was to learn several years later in WRA 805 that stories have had a central role and a longer documented history in Indigenous communities.

Due to their ability to shape reality, stories are our primary mode of enacting theory. Malea Powell taught me this. Though she didn't have to, she *had to* for me to learn that it was not only okay, but valued to approach storytelling and storying as epistemological practice in academia. Like the CRTL also affirmed, story is methodology (Act II, Scene 3; para. 8). Once I realized that my scholarship could be supported by these truths, everything about how I think and write made sense.

So what does storying mean as a methodological practice? How does one “use” story? The CRTL asserted that story incites critical, rhetorical engagement by asking us to consider “how a story is told, how a person’s experiences is honored, how a scholar sees and doesn’t see” the theorizing the storyteller presents (Act II, Scene 3; para. 24). When flipped, to the context of a researcher’s methodological context, these questions can serve both in reading, listening, and/or interpreting the stories of whom they are researching with, but to also ask those questions of themselves. Story as a methodological practice asks us to consider how meaning is relayed through telling a narrative of experience and history.

Just like the cultural rhetorics scholars cited above, Candace Zepeda (2016) found that Chicana feminists use storytelling as a rhetorical tool. By analyzing Chicana feminist narratives, she learned that Chicana feminists share their stories and experiences in the form of narratives—testimonios—in order to come together as a community and heal from “the collective historic trauma of racism, sexism, and classism” that we have experienced (p. 138). The stories that I will share throughout this dissertation show how the Indigenous and Chicana women I researched alongside and I make community online and act in solidarity with other women of color to heal together

from our experiences of trauma and oppression through the application of acquired critical digital literacies.

Relationality

Relationality is as historical of a practice as story. If story is how we relay and communicate our histories and experiences, relationality is how we put what we know in context with ourselves and everything around us. The CRTL established that relationality and constellating work in tandem to make culture (Act I, Scene 2; para. 2). When they discussed relationality, they are, emphatically and directly, calling on Shawn Wilson's (2008) presentation of relationality as an Indigenous epistemological concept and practice. In his chapter on relationality, Wilson listed four elements with which we hold relations: people, land, cosmos, and ideas. As he wrote to define relationality, he quoted his friend Peter:

It's collective, it's a group, it's a community. And I think that's the basis for relationality. That is, it's built upon the interconnections, the interrelationships, and that binds the group...but it's more than human relationships. And maybe the basis of that relationship among Indigenous people is the land. It's our relationship to the land. There's a spiritual connection to the land. So it's all of those things. (qtd. in Wilson; p. 80)

Wilson quoted his friend Peter to *show* relationality in practice. Wilson expressed value for his friend's perspective and gave Peter's definition proper credit in his book. Too, Peter's definition succinctly summarizes that relationality is the methodological understanding that we are all connected to all. Within Indigenous epistemologies concerning relationality, ontology—the state of our being—always lives *in relationship* to all other living and non-living beings. Even Indigenous languages such as Anishinaabemowin account for relationality through the use of pronouns, verb tenses,

and articles. For many Indigenous peoples, the practice of relationality as a means of affirming culture is engrained in every way we interact with the world.

Seeing relationality in practice further emphasizes how cultural rhetorics works to resist colonialism. For example, Wilson built from Peter's definition to show that relationality in practice means rooting work that we do within our communities. He said,

This is how Indigenous communities work—a key to being included is not only the work that you have done in the past but how well you have connected with others in the community during the course of your work. Thus the strength of your bonds or relationships with the community is an equally valued component of your work. (p. 81)

I love Wilson's description here because of how he explained that *good* relational research relies on time, effort, and investment in one's community. The more information one receives when working with their community directly depends on how rooted in community they are. In this way, like the CRTL believed, "Relationality, as a rhetorical framework, gives us a way to do something besides objectify" (Act II, Scene 3; para. 21). They approached relationality as a practice that "is made visible in multiple ways" (Act III, Scene 1; para. 14). Constellating, then, is what makes the practice of relationality visible.

Constellating

Constellating is the cultural rhetorics practice of putting all relations together in a visual and/or figurative epistemological constellation. In "Our Story Begins Here," Riley Mukavetz referred to constellating as a visual metaphor for how all the relations that make up a rhetorical, cultural practice come together (Act I, Scene 2; para. 2). Powell, then, added that a constellation differs from an intersection because of the non-linear practice of constellating that "allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple

discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive” (Powell; Act I, Scene 2; para 4). Just as relationality and story can work together to enact decolonization, Powell’s contribution to the definition explains how constellating resists colonialism’s grip by rejecting the Western notion of linear, subjective finality.

When seen as a visual series of connections among different relations, constellating provides a material, embodied grasp of relationality. A constellation enables scholars “to visibilize a web of relations” among stories, disciplinary histories, and the practices of this dissertation’s participant-collaborators, our respective communities, the literature I cite, and the scholarly communities to which I speak (Brooks-Gillies; Act I, Scene 3; para. 14). For instance, my literature review constellates scholarly conversations within computers and writing and cultural rhetorics to create a new web of meaning that contextualizes my dissertation project. Without this constellation, my work would not quite fit in either disciplinary home. Constellating the literature together into a web of meaning makes a place for this project as well as creates space for the constellating of future projects.

Decolonization

I have spoken a lot about decolonization in a way that may make it seem like a goal of cultural rhetorics research. And, while decolonization is not described necessarily as such in “Our Story Begins Here” or Bratta and Powell’s introduction to the cultural rhetorics special issue of *Enculturation*, it certainly is the goal of this dissertation. Additionally, Riley Mukavetz stated that “Decolonization is a big project” of

cultural rhetorics scholarship (Act I, Scene 2; para. 2). The CRTL included decolonization as one of the four tenants or practices that support cultural rhetorics scholars in what Walter Mignolo coined as a delinking from colonial logics, which uphold oppressive systems like racism, capitalism, etc. They affirmed that, for them, decolonial practice is an orientation that seeks to build a world where many worlds coexist in validity.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) made very clear that “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” They clearly articulated that their goal is to remind readers that “decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (p. 1). Decolonization cannot be a metaphor when its purpose is sovereignty for colonized peoples everywhere. Part of settler colonization’s purpose, they reminded, seeks to diminish actions for decolonization, meaning supporting efforts to co-opt the call for sovereignty through normalization, so as to strip decolonization from practice. As they continued to assert, “The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation” (p. 3). Instead, Tuck and Yang urged their readers to familiarize themselves with the unsettling truth of decolonization and advocate for solidarity that goes after what decolonization really is (p. 3).

Tuck and Yang end their article by declaring that “decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (p. 35). These statements mean that the project of decolonization—or the goal (in my words)—lies in the determinations of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. Decolonization is not a metaphor; it is an embodied practice that Indigenous peoples enact through our bodies in the practice of our cultures to

support our survivance. In proclaiming this dissertation as in the service of decolonization, I name this form of academic composing as a constellated practice, working in relation with my communities, through the telling of stories with the very definitive articulation of sovereignty.

Method: In Practice

I wanted the intricate and metaphorical language of my ancestors to pass through to my language, my life. – Joy Harjo

On October 23rd, 2014, Jaquetta Shade and Ezekiel “Zeke” Choffel facilitated that day’s group discussion for Trixie Smith’s Embodied Rhetorics course. We had read (among other texts), Joy Harjo’s *Crazy Brave*. Jaquetta and Zeke started the discussion by explaining then demonstrating to the class how to participate in a talking circle. After, with some guiding questions, they sent us out in groups to engage in answering them in small talking circles. I joined several women in the class; Roni, Kris, Shewonda, Tania; and we sat on the grass near MSU’s bell tower. It was the first time I had seen this local landmark—one that tolled once while we conversed. Following the instructions Jaquetta and Zeke gave us and using the talking stick they loaned to us, we shared stories that got toward the question they assigned us.

To put this in western research terms, a talking circle works similarly to a focus group, but there are specific differences that are important to note. Participants gather in a circle or something like it. One person takes the talking stick, which can either be a stick or an object that serves to represent who “has the floor,” and speaks until they’ve said their full on the topic. Through gestures or quiet comments, they pass the talking

stick to another person who would like to speak. They can also place the talking stick in the middle of the circle, so another person can pick it up and begin sharing. While each person speaks, everyone else is to remain silent and not interject with questions, comments, negations, or affirmations. The silence imparts the act of listening and taking in what the person speaking is sharing, an act of embodied respect. Talking circles, for that reason, are ceremony made through discussion.

The topic of that day's class was "Love/Medicine" and we were prompted to consider how Harjo weaves the two into an embodied narrative of her life. Harjo's memoir took hold of me, as so many of the readings we had in that class. But, what is even more, this talking circle experience was especially memorable. Jaquetta and Zeke had us come back together as a class to talk collectively in a large talking circle about both Harjo's book and the ceremonial practice of speaking in a talking circle. Due to the fact that Trixie had us meet every class day in a different space, this particular class day took place in the conference room of the College of Arts and Letters. This room is a very formal space: carpeted, wood crown molding, dim lighting, windows around two of the walls to the outside, a giant wood conference table, and large armchairs. It was the only room where we all fit around a single table for the duration of the semester, which helped the class hold a talking circle conversation as a whole class where we could see and hear one another.

I did not realize it at the time that I would circle back to a talking circle as I set out to design the data collection portion of my dissertation. Jaquetta and I met up shortly after I had defended my prospectus at our favorite coffee spot Chapelure. We discussed both of our current methodological concerns and Jaquetta shared with me some issues

she was having with her IRB protocols. I shared with her that I was unsure what the best way I could work with people from our community. She suggested hosting a talking circle in order to encourage story-sharing as the practice would be recognizable to the women researching alongside me. Once I heard her suggestion, I knew a talking seemed perfectly suited for the kind of information I hoped to collect. Choosing this part of the research design enabled the other methods pieces to fall into place.

Finding Participant-Collaborators

I knew when I began this project that I wanted to learn *with* Indigneous and Chicana women from the MICCA/IGSC/IYEP community. I had grown quite close with many folks over the few years I had been living here, and felt comfortable asking several women if they would be willing to participate in my dissertation. I began talking with some of the women in the summer of 2017, during the IYEP summer camp, about my project and what I hoped to learn from the stories we would share—including some of my larger research questions. My thought was that, by being very specific about what my project was about and what I planned on doing with it, the women would have a clear understanding about whether or not they wanted to participate. By the end of the summer, I had seven women interested in collaborating as participants. However, by the time of my first talking circle in November, only three of them were still available.

While I sought out participant collaborators for this project, I also took time to compose my IRB. This process was not as smooth as I had expected. I struggled with articulating my methodological process in terms that this academic institution would understand, particularly regarding the talking circle. I also felt the pressure to clearly

identify the research questions I would be asking during the talking circle and individual interviews. However, this proved extremely helpful. I determined that I would ask

- What social media platforms do you use?
- How do you use these platforms?
- How often do you use them?
- For what reasons are you using them?
- Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt vulnerable in an online space?

Articulating these questions and putting them down in my IRB application helped give me a sense of my own purpose in conducting this study and in what ways story was the aim of data collection.

Talking Circle

After my IRB passed, I felt the drive to affirm the participation of the women who would be collaborating with me, and set a time for the talking circle. Based on the availability of the women who agreed to work with me, we chose a date in late November 2017 to begin this process. Two women backed out, last minute, so only three women participated in this study alongside me: Janelle, Francisca, and Elizabeth. I will discuss them and the ways they engaged with me more in the pages and chapters that follow, but, for now, this is the big overview of the study. I will also present a small story about the event of the talking circle later on.

I started the talking circle sharing my intentions for the dissertation project and what I hoped to learn from the stories these women would share with me. I opened with a story about my own social media use and offered stories throughout to encourage the women to share their own experiences too. We, for the most part, followed the protocol of a typical talking circle by taking turns to speak. We would grab the microphone

recorders, post it in front of us, and use it as the stick to symbolize whose turn it was. I had two recorders to ensure that what we shared would be captured.

The talking circle lasted roughly an hour and a half, and we went through all the questions that I had. I made sure to respect the time they gave me for this data collection moment, so I was sure not to go over. Also, since our children were also present, I was attentive to how this portion of the study took time out of their everyday lives. Afterwards, we spent a lot of time chatting and enjoying one another's company without the pressure of creating data.

Follow-Up Interviews

During the talking circle, I asked each woman her preferences for meeting up to hold individual, one-on-one interviews at a later date. Each woman declared their availability and we made plans to schedule at their preferred times. In order to be best prepared for my interview with each woman, I listened to the talking circle and wrote down several key things: 1) information I found interesting that they had said, 2) any additional questions I thought about from what they discussed, and 3) questions designed to incite them to tell me more detailed stories about their social media use. While some questions were tailored for each woman in particular, I also had some general questions. These were:

- How would you like me to describe you and your children in my data? What concerns about your identity do you have?
- What is your pseudonym preference?
- Can you tell me about anything you've been thinking about after the talking circle?
- How have you been using social media since?
- How long have you been using social media and the Internet?
- Why did you start using it?

The first two questions I asked, as I will explicate in the section on methodological representation, represented my seeking to engage in a relational research practice alongside these women. These two questions went beyond the protection requirements in my IRB application, and were something I regularly discussed with these women throughout the whole of my dissertation project—even right up until I submitted the full draft to my committee. In the data chapters, I relay stories that each woman shared with me both from the talking circle and our one-on-one interviews.

Transcribing and Coding Data

Once I had conducted the talking circle and individual interviews, I sat down and listened to the recordings several times. First, I listened and wrote down notes about interesting things they had said and thoughts that I had. Next, I began transcribing the talking circle, being sure to anonymize each woman in my transcription. At first, I used their initials, but then I changed each woman's listed name to the initial of her pseudonym. I regularly put in a time stamp in my transcriptions to save my place since I frequently had to pause my transcription and take care of my toddler among many other distractions.

I transcribed all the recorded data during the months of March – June 2018. At this time, I struggled with some personal issues that impacted how much I could work on this project. However, the time also supported me to take pause and *critically imagine*⁷ the important threads that started to emerge from the stories these women shared. I noted immediately the theme of solidarity and community that Francisca spoke about during the talking circle. I remembered knowing as she discussed this (see

⁷ Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012) define critical imagination as an inquiry tool that encourages feminist researchers to take time to contemplate that which we have yet to see and know, and to speculate “what could be there instead” (p.20).

chapter 4) that her desire to promote solidarity as a main reason for her social media use would be a hugely important facet of this study. I also started this project seeking to understand each woman's conception and use of critical digital literacies. I was particularly interested in the ways our cultures impact our technology use, so I had designed questions and shifted the conversations during the talking circle and interviews.

I had taken notes throughout the talking circle and interviews as well, and used these notes to impart comments in the transcriptions themselves that marked down visceral affects and feelings I had either noticed from the women or myself as we shared these stories with one another. The notes and comments helped to show me what personally important themes and topics were emerging as I transcribed the data. From what I recalled in my coursework during research methodologies, I knew I was conducting a kind of grounded theory approach to choosing themes from data by focusing on the content shared with me.

Once I had finished transcribing, I printed off each transcription separately and color-coded different sections with four different highlighters. Each color symbolized a different theme that I would focus on for the project: methodology, solidarity and community, critical digital literacies, and decolonization. Once I had highlighted each theme, I went through the transcriptions and wrote notes of reflection on the statements and what I wanted to say about each story. The transcriptions, reflection notes and the highlighted stories were my constant companions as I then went to write the dissertation.

Methodological Collaboration

Writing this dissertation took from June 2018 until April 2019. At no point during this time was my dissertation far from my thoughts. Throughout the planning, recording, transcribing, and writing of this project, I sought out conversations with Francisca, Elizabeth, and Janelle about how I would be writing about them. We discussed methodological concerns, both ethically and with respect to colonial notions of data, and figured out a methodological approach of relationality together. In their seminal text, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012) presented an ethos of care that connects “us as scholars and the women as rhetorical subjects to the future” (p. 73). Considering that each woman and I had had experience with academic research as some kind, we shared in a similar understanding of research terminology and research ethics. We also shared a deep grasp of colonial research practices that had exploited our ancestors and relations since first contact. Royster and Kirsch asked that feminist rhetoric researchers attend to our own levels of discomfort in collecting research with other women, ensuring that we take care to honor those with whom we work.

Because of our extensive knowledge of academic research and my prioritizing ethical, cultural rhetorics research practices, all four of us shared an equal voice in the methodology I used for this dissertation. Methodological representation means having an equal say in the research process as the person conducting the research. As we discussed together, every one of us shared certain vulnerable aspects of our identities and experiences that, if made publicly connected to our persons, would engender us

and our children to risk. Therefore, for everyone's safety, we agreed that they would adopt pseudonyms and that I would generalize as much as their information as I could. I do not connect these women to their positions in the academic institutions to which they are affiliated; I do not name their children or provide a gender; I discuss their identities in the abstract and do not disclose their physical appearances. The only identifying information that is provided is their histories of social media use and the fact that they belong to the same community as me. Our connections as women and friends remains the only *outing* information. The rest has been altered in order to honor their shared agency and safety.

Carrying and Sharing our Histories

As this dissertation will show, humans seek our understanding of the world through stories. Therefore, collecting and listening to stories is what determines this research investigation. Since stories are the primary way cultural rhetorics scholars understand the reciprocal relationship between rhetorics and culture, I tell this project's many origin stories throughout the dissertation in order to show how the epistemological nodes of how my own knowing came together alongside the women I worked alongside. They have granted me the honor of carrying and sharing them in this dissertation and I hold them close as a methodological priority.

An ethical methodology only works to lessen colonial violence when the ideological choices reflect the values of the community. As Maggie, a researcher who worked alongside Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogiizhigokwe), offers, "Methodology needs to be rooted in your worldview and its' not just about methods, it's about methods and worldview" (qtd. in Absolon, p. 62). It became obviously imperative that I learned the

worldviews of the Indigenous and Chicana women I researched with; the only way to learn their beliefs about methodology was to determine the methodological approach along with them.

Essentially, my worldview begins and ends with ethical collaboration to best support our collective protection while generating knowledge together. Michael F. Brown (2003) outlined some examples of how numerous Indigenous communities place value on their cultural objects, practices, and knowledges as a community. Brown also found that, due to the communal way Indigenous peoples live together, they value privacy as communal as well. He explained that “if we define privacy as freedom from unwanted or inappropriate attention, there is little doubt that many indigenous communities depend on collective privacy for the successful completion of important cultural activities” (p. 29-30). Brown’s understanding of Indigenous communities’ need for collective privacy reflects the values my participant-collaborators and I determined for the purposes of my dissertation.

To hold these stories close, I argue, requires a responsible, ethical understanding of the sacredness of our experiences in the context of our lives. Together, these three women and I worked together—relationally—to define the methodological approach I enacted in which to collect their stories, which, then, determined how I would approach sharing their stories. Before I share our stories, I had to collectively work together with these women to identify the safest approach when declaring our histories. I hope the process I described here gives researchers an understanding of the importance of working with Indigenous and Chicana in developing the terms in which we choose to release our stories no matter what they are about.

CHAPTER 3

TELLING OTHER HISTORIES: CHALLENGING DOMINANT WESTERN INTERNET HISTORIOGRAPHY THROUGH ASSERTING RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY

We are told that stories are living beings, they grow, they develop, they remember, they change not in their essence, but sometimes in their dress. They are shared and shaped by the land and the culture and the teller, so that one story may be told widely and differently. Sometimes only a fragment is shared, showing just one face of a many faceted story, depending on its purpose. So it is with the stories shared here. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

I first met the Internet in 1991. I was ten years old. My mother's boyfriend came upstairs to my room one afternoon with a disk in his hands. On it, a promotional logo read "Try America Online Free." He wanted to move the computer I had in my room for the last few years⁸ downstairs into the office, so that the entire family could start *going online*. I did not know what going online meant as I had only used that computer to play computer games and type in green typeface on a black screen that somewhat resembled MS DOS. I was about to learn. Having AOL in the house meant access to Internet chat rooms and the World Wide Web. I became familiar with the dial-up noise and being kicked off the rotary phone during conversations with my friends about important candy expeditions on our bikes.

Though I had occasional access to this technology, my mother's boyfriend held dominion over that access. His online gambling ran rampant—and I do not dare to speculate what else. My trusty old computer would not last long with this unintended

⁸ A Tandy 1000 my father had gifted me when I was seven that I used primarily to play a computer game called Springster, which I wrote about in [this digital literacy narrative](#) for one of the courses during my Master's degree program.

new application for its dated design. After about six months or so, our family was no longer a wired household. We went back to the station our poverty situated us within.

I did not meet the Internet again until I was in my early twenties when I began using the laptop my father had given me as a high school graduation gift. Living at my grandmother's house, I finally had access to stable dial-up. By then, AOL's instant messenger (AIM) was on its popularity decline as LiveJournal and PhotoBucket were the new things. I used all three, devotedly during this time. LiveJournal became my first "social network." All my friends and I updated there regularly: journaling our thoughts, everyday experiences, and even writing poetry and prose. We would post pictures from our events out together on PhotoBucket and then link to them from LiveJournal. Using these two platforms helped us stay connected by creating an archive of our time together as we toured with bands and promoted the popular emo, hardcore, and punk music scene in our hometown.

Then, in 2003, everything changed. Myspace was launched and quickly became my go-to social media platform. Having used Friendster sparingly before that (did anyone else even use this platform?), I joined already familiar with this kind of web interface, though Myspace set itself apart by doing things differently. Unlike other social communication platforms at the time like AIM, Myspace gave its members the ability to redesign their personal pages with different colors, fonts, backgrounds, and music. Access to the html code within the platform enabled me with the opportunity to make my space truly mine. Because of this, I had a difficult time switching over to Facebook when all my friends began using that platform. I found a preference for Twitter where I could

still alter the colors of my personal page's background and had the freedom to identify as any name I wanted.

Starting to use Twitter and adopting a myriad of identities is what has brought me to the research in this chapter for several reasons. I studied how Twitter members engaged in political resistance through their personal performance of anonymity on the platform for my Master's degree and various publications. Looking critically at my own use as a member in the platform, I questioned how my shifting identities allotted me different rhetorical performances and shaped the interactions I had with others. I gained invaluable knowledge through this blend of personal and scholarly engagement. During the years I studied Twitter, my use was constant: the first thing I did when I awoke in the morning and the last thing I checked before bed. If a protest or serious event was happening, I sometimes stayed on for its duration, marking down and screen-capping everything I saw that seemed relevant. My use extended past any conception of normal or healthy. Friends often complained that all I did was stare at my phone, not knowing or understanding the extent of devotion I had to my research.

To this day, my use of Twitter is much the same. I still regularly and routinely check my accounts—yes, plural. I check my Instagram probably more often, depending on what is going on in either space. I used to have a Snapchat, but deleted that account in 2015 when they changed their privacy policies to mirror those of Facebook. As for Facebook, I rarely use that platform at all due to its data collection policies. I recognize the inherent irony in having an Instagram account, since Instagram is owned by Facebook; however, I make this choice with critical reluctance. In order to maintain relationships with my friends and family who live thousands of miles away, an Instagram

account is nearly required. It is unfeasible to assume I could text the images I share to all 200+ of them on a regular basis. And I keep Facebook for similar professional reasons. Incidentally, that platform affords me so little enjoyment and so much stress that I can often go weeks or months without logging in. It is the only platform I access strictly on my laptop, using a privacy-centered browser that masks my IP address, so that Facebook has little data to collect on me.

I share all of this background information about my learning to use the Internet and social media because I present similar stories from the women I worked alongside for this dissertation during our talking circle and individual interviews. From these stories, I learned that our histories with social media during the 1990s and early 2000s are similar. This time period marks a historical epoch when social media platforms started becoming a major part of blending society's cultural and digital life. All the small pieces of my story helps to highlight how important the Internet has been in my own history, but also as a means of introducing the histories of these women. By placing our stories together, I seek to produce the kind of methodological representation I describe in the previous chapter with respect for what it means to tell a decolonial feminist Internet historiography.

In this chapter, I go over a definition of decolonial historiography rooted in story. As the previous chapter details the methodological value and representation of story within cultural rhetorics, I now shift that scholarly conversation toward drawing connections between decolonization as a project helpful in reshaping Internet historiography. Situating my and my participant's stories as storied data will illuminate that our use of social media informs cultural and rhetorical practices to build community,

enact solidarity, and resist experiences of racism and oppression through unique critical digital literacies practices. Together, our stories shape this chapter and the two data chapters that follow this one. Our stories throughout this dissertation, I conclude, will provide the epistemological foundation for educating other researchers about how to design safer, more culturally accessible online platforms that support women of color thriving within an oppressive world meant to erase and demean us. Our stories, in their very existence of being told, enact a de-linking from traditional Internet historiographies. That said, to share them requires a deeply responsible act of trust and community that supports our ongoing protection. I add those considerations in the conclusion of this chapter.

The Truth About Historiographies

Indigenous storyteller Thomas King (2003) wrote that “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). He repeated this phrase throughout his book, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. His purpose of restating this maxim over and over again was to emphasize the embodied, affective, and material truth that stories compose our very ontology as humans. It is true; we are the stories we tell. King also asserted shortly thereafter that “For once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (p. 10). King affirmed for us the rhetorical power that comes in speaking our stories into being. Stories, when told, have the capacity to create meaning that makes or breaks reality. King’s assertion should serve as a reminder of the great responsibility we have in speaking words into being.

Incidentally, not all stories are meant for everyone to be consumed and reappropriated for whatever value they offer in extraction. Indigenous peoples know this

history of stories well. King questioned stories' rhetorical make-up when asking whether Native stories should be written solely by Native writers for Native readers (p. 115). He posed this question and responded,

So it's lucky for me that literary analysis is not about proof, only persuasion. In our cynical world, where suspicion is a necessity, insisting that something is true is not nearly as powerful as suggesting that something might be true. (King, p. 115)

Focusing on suspicion and suggestion, King positioned that a truth about stories is that they invite critical inquiry about their purpose from their audience—whether readers are Native or not. King theorized rhetoric as a way of seeing story as a form of *truth-creating* and accountability that depends on interpretation.

The rhetoric of historiography is no different than that of stories. Indigenous studies scholars have sought to establish the validity of stories and oral histories within Indigenous Studies for years upon years. Citing Greg Sarris, Julie Cruikshank (2002) argued that traditional scholarship within American Indian Studies has often lacked interruption and risk that would support decolonization. She boosted Sarris's point by positing that "Stories, like good theories, make connections that may not at first glance seem straightforward" (p. 6). She went on to argue that oral histories, because of their being drawn from real world historical events, employ theory as a kind of didacticism. She offered, "Nor are oral traditions in any way natural products. They have social histories, and they acquire meanings in the situations in which they emerge, in situations where they are used, and in interactions between narrators and listeners" (p. 21). Again, rhetoric appears here, though not directly uttered. Cruikshank pointed to how oral histories, as stories, reflect their socio-historical situation—both from the moment they recapture and the moment of the telling. In this way, meaning layers in

complexity and requires not only a responsible listener of an audience/reader, but a dedication for critical reflection that can assess meaning over time.

“Myths have consequences,” Robert A. Williams Jr. declared in his (1999) book *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace, 1600-1800* (p. 17). Williams meant this declaration in regard to the truth that American Indian history has been woefully and egregiously told from the perspective of colonizers. In the colonizers’ version of history, American Indians were bestowed certain myths of being savages and uncultured. As Williams continued, “The narrative tradition of Indian tribalism’s cultural inferiority has been deeply impressed upon our understanding of the national experience. Tribal peoples are without civilization, without laws, and without place in the nation created by white Americans out of the frontier wilderness of North America” (p. 17). Williams contended that colonialism’s tradition imprinted upon all American Indians certain racist perceptions about lawlessness based on skin color and culture that influenced legal policy as well as justified westward expansion. In response to this erroneous mythos, Williams proposed a countermythology that reminded dominant history of the actual truth: “Indians responded as active facilitators of the many multicultural accommodations that Europeans found absolutely essential for survival on a colonial frontier” (p. 20). His countermythology exposed the truth about how Western settlers’ dominance over history not only creates a false mythos of entire groups of people, but that this mythology imposes lies that erase what should be essential truths, which can inform more accurate understandings of humanity’s life together.

Acknowledging the power that occurs when people speak histories into reality should emphasize the need to push colonialism’s hold over historiographic practices

that have dominated Western rhetoric scholarship for centuries. My purpose is to reconsider the responsibility we have as readers and listeners of stories to rethink how Western imprints of historiography specifically impacts Indigenous women's lives. Another such imprint, or mythos, derives from patriarchy. For instance, in her essay "Kochinnenako in Academe: Three Approaches to Interpreting a Keres Indian Tale," Paula Gunn Allen (1986) explained the lasting effects different Western ideological interpretations have had on Indigenous women. Gunn Allen asserted, "A feminist approach to the study and teaching of American Indian life and thought is essential because the area has been dominated by paternalistic, male-dominant modes of consciousness since the first writings about American Indians in the fifteenth century" (p. 222). Her assertion helps us understand that the male-dominated mode of Western thinking has impacted the lives of Indigenous women through reinterpretation of their cultural stories. That is, colonization has imposed its value systems and epistemologies onto women from Indigenous communities in ways that have had catastrophic effects on the cultural knowledge we carry. Traditional, Western historiography effected power over Indigenous and women's stories by being the loudest authority on our histories.

Therefore, this chapter challenges dominant historiography concerning the Internet by sharing stories from Indigenous and Chicana women that have yet to be heard in publication. As I have sought to show in the previous chapter, Indigenous epistemologies prioritize story as a matter of ontological sovereignty and, thus, require decolonial interpretations in which to understand them. Every reader's own positionality and relationship determines how much meaning from these stories will be available for interpretation. The purpose is not to understand what meanings can be extracted from

these stories for large-scale, disciplinary gain. Rather, the four stories in this chapter mean to incite a memory of a reader's own stories with the Internet as well as provide representation of these Indigenous and Chicana women's stories in the collective voice of Internet history. This chapter's conclusion and the next two chapters will provide some contextual argument about specific meanings I do feel are critical for the discipline to hear with regard to the stories I will share.

Meeting The Participant-Collaborators

The stories and information I present in this section have come from both the talking circle and individual interviews I held for the purposes of my dissertation as data collection moments. During the talking circle, I asked my participants to tell me which platforms they use, how often they use these platforms, and whether they use them on their computers and/or phones. In the follow-up interviews, I asked them more specific questions about how long they have been using social media and what prompted them to start using these spaces. Often, I encouraged their responses with the story I have shared in the beginning of this chapter, which incited an understanding that there is much similarity in how we participated in the same spaces. The three sub-sections here will begin with descriptions of each woman's Internet and social media history to introduce them and provide necessary background information that will transition to the next section (and throughout this dissertation's next two chapters) with my analysis of the reasons why and how they use the social media platforms they do. Each woman's story is both unique and related to the other stories the four of us have. They present individual experiences with access and how that access, like mine, determined their use of the Internet.

Janelle

I arrive to Janelle's office for our individual interview and find her sitting at her desk next to a light that helps ward off seasonal affective disorder. I immediately feel comfortable and grateful that she welcomes me into her space with light therapy since it is only a few short days before the Christmas holiday and Michigan's six months of gray has only recently begun. For the first part of the interview, we spend time talking about methodology, anonymizing the identities of her and the other participant-collaborators' identities, and what it means to research *with* Indigenous communities. Much of our interview content fits in other chapters of this dissertation, but the main points of our conversation start by understanding how she began using the Internet.

When I ask her how long she has been using social media, she exclaims with an expletive and I laugh. Both of us have been online a long time. Janelle's experiences with social media began in the 1990s as AOL situated itself as one the first forms of social infrastructure in the Internet. Like me, Janelle started on AOL around the age of ten. By twelve, she was working for the company under the guise of being her parents. The Internet company "paid" her by giving her a free account that positioned her as a message board operator of a text role-playing group within the platform. Her job as moderator was to push other members to improve their grammar and write in complete sentences. Through this position, Janelle helped shaped the text role-playing community: "I coined this term called *story-line role-playing*, which meant you have to have a story and your profile has to be a character, not just like you drop in and drop out of chatrooms and change characters." The purpose behind this emphasis, she recounted, was to help build and facilitate community both within the chatroom and

throughout the AOL message board community. Creating and maintaining an identity with a story helped members build relationships with one another, thus enlivening and enriching the experiences within the platform.

Talking with Janelle stirs an interesting conversation about what it meant to be able to alter our own profiles on social media. She explained that her involvement and investment in the AOL community kept her from fully transitioning to LiveJournal. Later, she did begin using Myspace and Geocities. Like the rest of us, she also modified her Myspace profile by pulling code from special websites, then began adjusting code she pulled. Eventually, she wrote her own. Janelle reflected on the uniqueness of the platform: “You know, music and the colors, and you could kind of create your space. It was like *my space*. You create your own space.” During this time period, she was also on Geocities—a time when web designers could get paid for designing for them. “I mean, it was horrible; it was horrendous,” she mentioned, jokingly, about how web 1.0 design created an economy relying on dynamic user-designer-owner relationships that no longer exist today.

After Myspace and Geocities, Janelle shifted into working for a university and adapting dot edu pages. She pointed out that this was “a time when it was okay for universities to have different designs, so a department could have a completely unique own thing.” She noted that this was only a brief window of time:

I got to do graphic design and choose the colors and it did not have to relate to the university whatsoever. And then I remember there was a point only a few years later where it was like ‘Okay, everything’s gotta be in *this* certain color tone. It’s gotta be in *this* template. And they just stripped the uniqueness out of everything.

Her emphasis on uniqueness and freedom in non-universal design provides a summative kind of history of the affective and visual experience of designing during the late 90s and early 2000s that also gives us insight into the depth of her Internet knowledge.

The access Janelle had through her job at a university also gave her the opportunity to join Facebook in its beta and trial period. In order to use Facebook during its early iterations, one had to have a dot edu email address, as Janelle illuminated. I asked her how she liked the space, and she responded, “It felt like there was nobody there, so it was kind of pointless for a while.” Her reflection on Facebook in its early stages contradicts her experiences with Myspace: “And Myspace felt more like you had a feeling.” Here, it seems that the affective difference between the two platforms comes from feeling a sense of belonging and having community—something very important to Janelle as her experiences show.

Currently, Janelle uses Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. She, like me, also uses Twitter. She remarked along with everyone during the talking circle about the duration of her participation, but had an almost worrisome thought:

It’s the first thing I do when I wake up in the morning usually when the alarm goes off and I don’t want to get out of bed yet, and then I’m like I’ll burn my eyes with the phone in the dark. So I do that. I think the word I would use is compulsive because it gets compulsive.

Janelle’s reliance on social media comes from a reason I can, as a single mom, also understand. She explained,

I’ve been a single mom for so long that social media became my social outlet. I’m home all the time. I don’t go out at night. I don’t get to go to the parties. I don’t get to go socialize in any kind of form. That’s my world.

Because of her isolated life as a single mom, Janelle learned to rely on social media as a means of connecting with others, but this use has had its cost.

Janelle worried about whether her reliance on platforms has become unhealthy, admitting that she often assesses the amount of reliance she has on social media platforms and adjusts the time she spends on them. She described,

and because of Snapchat, I started feeling the need to actually have my phone with me at all times...that was like a year ago. And, again, it has gotten better. But I had to kind of wean myself off of it because I realized that it felt like an unhealthy behavior.

Her consistent assessment of her own reliance on social media shows how she critically questions her participation. Though she invests her energy, labor, and time into creating and maintaining community in the platforms she uses, Janelle also tries to make sure that her involvement does not impact other aspects of her life.

Elizabeth

I met with Elizabeth for our private interview in her home a late December morning. We sat across from one another on her dark, plush couch with two tape recorders positioned between us while I followed up on my questions about her history with social media. Elizabeth has been on social media platforms since 2003-2004. Her first social media platform was Myspace, which she primarily used to post pictures and catch up with friends through status updates. Since she didn't have Internet at home, she did not learn how to navigate Myspace in all its capacities, but she did log on when she could from her local library. Like me and Janelle, she also liked altering the Myspace html to have new backgrounds and a different font on her page. On why she used Myspace, she mentioned: "It was really primarily for that—just making it pretty and seeing what your friends were up to." Making her Myspace page pretty was her favorite

memory of using the platform. Like me, she initially found Facebook's imposed blue and white design features limiting and boring, but she thought Facebook has evolved and is a little more interesting now.

Elizabeth currently goes on Facebook and Snapchat through both her computer and her phone. She describes the amount she is on these platforms as "way too much." For her, way too much means checking these two platforms every five minutes or so, in between doing her work or taking care of her child and family. "I don't know if it's an automatic thing, but you just check. You don't think about it. You just reach for your phone or go on your computer and it's like you automatically do it," she said during the talking circle. Whereas Janelle reflected on the worries she had that her social media use felt compulsive, thus she needed to sometimes restrict her use, Elizabeth did not express worries in the same way. Instead, Elizabeth's reflection came across as more of a juggle between the different obligations she has.

When I asked about the main reason why she goes online, Elizabeth described primarily logging on to share facets of her everyday life. On this, she said,

I'm a pretty open book. I tell people my life story. I like sharing about myself and I like talking about myself. I just share a lot about my child and the fact that they have a disability. They're a special needs child. I do post that they have a lot of doctor's appointments. They need accommodations. They're going to get a wheelchair, but I don't think I've talked about that. At least not on Facebook. I do more of that stuff on Snapchat because I have a smaller group of friends. So what Instagram is to you guys, I do Snapchat. And I'm a little more open just because I know more of the people that are on there.

Here, Elizabeth detailed how she approaches the different platforms she uses in response to our descriptions that we shared during the talking circle. Her use of social media includes talking about her daily life as a mother and a Chicana woman in a way that accurately presents her everyday experiences.

Elizabeth's use of social media and the Internet also heavily relies on connecting with her family through sharing their cultural practices. At one point in the talking circle conversation, Elizabeth mentioned that she posts pictures of ofrendas during Día de Muertos to connect with family when they are separated. She explained,

The reason it helps me feel more connected to my family is because my family is a lot of cousins and people my age, so the ofrendas are really something that more our parents and grandparents do, but now that we're older and a lot of us are living on our own like my cousins, because I'm the oldest, my siblings still live at home, but my cousins that are my age, they are starting to move out and so they're making their own ofrendas and post pictures of it...But it's interesting to see the same picture in my cousins' ofrendas or my husband's family's ofrendas. And it just makes you feel connected in more of a spiritual kind of way.

Her description shows how the Internet enables her and her cousins to continue a deeply spiritual cultural practice despite distance. Their connection stays strong because of their ability to share in this tradition that has gone on since much before their lives.

During our interview, the first thing Elizabeth made sure to bring up was something left out of our collective conversation during the talking circle: her investment in Facebook groups. She listed that she is a member of an academic mamas group, parents of children with special needs groups, a graduate student group for women of color, and a women of color academic group. She mentioned that she uses these as support groups in a way, "because it's an academic moms of kids with special needs group, I can relate to a lot of reading what those people go through in terms of balancing academia and mothering a kid with special needs." Elizabeth primarily accesses Facebook groups as a way of relating to women in similar professional and personal positions as her.

Since Elizabeth primarily uses Facebook to participate in these groups, a lot can be learned about the benefits of groups in Facebook. She credits these groups for helping her navigate the parenting of her special needs child and graduate school, both complex experiences on their own. She elaborated,

It's more the other one with the kids with special needs. The women of color in grad school is also quite useful just because you can relate to other people when everybody posts their stories, their struggles, their accomplishments. I like reading all of those just because a lot of the people in their groups come from similar backgrounds to me in my immediate community, so I can relate to them. And so that's also like a support group and resources too because sometimes they ask questions or post information about important things in terms of grad school or politics. It's a good group. And so I think groups are a big thing.

Elizabeth's thoughts on groups show why these spaces inside Facebook are important reasons for logging into the social media platform. These groups offer women who feel marginalized within—and from—dominant society to find commonality in their shared experiences and learn better how to navigate moments that seem more difficult given their particular identities.

Francisca

It had been snowing over twenty-four hours on the day I went to Francisca's house for our individual interview. I left my apartment to find my car buried in over a foot of snow. My son and I shoveled out the tires and a few feet in front of the car since the snowplow had yet to make an appearance in the parking lot. We got stuck several times before gaining enough momentum to push through the snow and get on our way. We arrived at Francisca's house a little late, a little wet, and with salt lines on our boots. She and her family welcomed us to their home as we took off our boots and went inside. While our children ran off to play together, I noticed that Francisca made her small

dining table amenable for our conversation, encapsulating just the kind of considerate person that she is. We sat down together and began the interview.

Like my interview with Janelle and Elizabeth, Francisca and I started by talking about methodology. We discussed what information about her I could share versus what would implicate her identity. After we settled the best way to represent her and her story, we shifted to talking about social media. Francisca's first social media platform was Myspace when she was in her early teens. Next, she began using Facebook as a junior in high school, which was the only social media platform she accessed for years to follow. She started using Instagram about six or so years ago and Snapchat only in the last few years. When I asked her what motivated her to join Myspace, she credited her joining due to school and a desire to connect with her peers: "I was really into it. I remember especially in high school, and it was mostly a way for me to make friends." Francisca's experience with social media began because of her struggle to find friends during childhood.

Crossing the border from Mexico every day, Francisca did not immediately fit in with her classmates and felt isolated from connecting because she was traveling from a long distance. This feeling of isolation shaped her experiences throughout middle school and into high school even though her family moved to the US permanently while she was still in school. However, social media helped her overcome those feelings. She shared,

In high school, I started to get all this attention, and I feel like it was, again, because of social media also helped me in getting friends. But it was also a source of a lot of drama, right? So I was really uncomfortable talking with people one-on-one. It was a lot easier for me just to talk with people online, so it was real. They would be my friends in high school and I would know them, but it was

just—especially boys. It was easier for me. It took away a lot of pressure to talk with them and in person in high school.

Francisca's use of social media enabled her to navigate and overcome her feelings of social anxiety with making friends and communicating with her peers throughout her adolescence. For her, social media served an important role in her life by creating a space where she could more freely and easily speak with others without face-to-face pressures or self-consciousness. These early experiences, in a way, set up a pattern where Francisca continues to look for similar experiences as she goes online.

At the time of the talking circle and interview, Francisca said that she uses Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat both on her phone and her laptop. She mentioned that, like the rest of us, she checks them daily, though the one she uses the most frequently is Facebook, joking that sometimes she checks both on her phone and her computer at the same time. Meanwhile, her use of Instagram and Snapchat are much less frequent. She will check Facebook first thing in the morning and it will occupy her time intermittently until she goes to bed. However, since she really likes watching the stories in Instagram, she will go into that app "frequently enough." During the talking circle, she elaborated a little on what motivates her to check these spaces:

I do enjoy being on Facebook and seeing what people are up to. I can go weeks without posting anything to Snapchat, but I'll check it at least once, or at least once every two days because I do enjoy seeing what other people are doing.

Francisca's motivation for logging into these platforms emphasizes their social purpose. Even though she may be too busy to post, she still desires to know how the people she cares about are doing. She explicitly uses social media to participate socially in her loved ones' lives.

Francisca's Internet use evolved in ways that reflect how her relationships with her loved ones has changed over the years of her adulthood. Like Elizabeth, Francisca approaches social media as a way to connect with her family and friends. At the talking circle, she shared with us a story about social media supporting her own learning of traditions. She explained that her husband's family had taught her a traditional wedding dance called *el baile de las monas* and asked her to dance it at their wedding. She described how social media influenced their participation in this tradition:

One of my husband's cousins recorded it and she posted it on Facebook and she tagged all of the family. I thought it was a way for her and us to share because the practices from Guerrero and she tagged people who were there. I felt like it was a way for us to connect through that even though not everyone was able to be at the wedding, they could still see the dance they did for us. And for me it was really special because it's not necessarily part of my culture. It was something that was shared with me and I really appreciated it. So when it was our second year anniversary on Facebook, it was like "Oh look at this memory from two years ago. Oh, I'm going to share it again with everyone so everyone can see, right?" And so for me that was a way to feel really welcomed into his family. I was already welcome to the family, right, but it was just even more special. And the fact that it's recorded there and I can see it and show it to other people.

Francisca's reflection through the process of storytelling provides a meaningful look at the way social media supports her learning and sharing in a very important cultural tradition within her family. Facebook's design of the memories function enabled Francisca to reshare this significant moment during her wedding two years later, which allowed everyone in her family to return to this memory together and connect all over again. In this way, Francisca and Elizabeth approach the Internet in similar ways and appreciate how it supports them to stay connected with their family through sharing in practice of their culture.

Conclusion

Culture is ultimately lost when we stop telling the stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived there, what we once knew, what we wish we knew; when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of our future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every single second of our lives. –Deborah Miranda

By sharing these women's stories alongside my own, we add new histories to the whole of Internet historiography. Any Internet historiography of Indigenous and Chicana women should start with a collective, shared grasp of the significance of what it means to tell our stories. Unlike those sharing colonialism's interpretation of history, our stories can be co-opted by the voice of dominance and turned against us. It's not that Indigenous and Chicana women have never shared our Internet histories; it's that our contributions have never been given a platform. History-making is no neutral matter, which Indigenous women tend to know inherently.

I place Janelle's, Elizabeth's, Francisca's, and my own stories in this chapter and those in the following chapters together in order to highlight the importance of our cultural uses of the Internet and social media platforms. In his article with the same title as the question, Turner (2017) asked, "Can we write a cultural history of the Internet? If so, how?" (p. 39). His question meant to challenge the myth that the Internet has not one culture, but all of the cultures of the people who compose within it. He argued that the Internet "consists of a complex, interlinked set of technologies and social worlds, both of which interact to produce images and stories, rituals and subjectivities, which are the foundations of culture" (p. 40). Because so many different people and communities engage in and on the Internet in ways that reinforce and reflect their cultural practices, Internet historiography must account for the myriad of stories that get

us toward a more full understanding of the Internet's history—though a universal history may always remain impossible.

Angela Haas's (2007) provided a counterstory to dominant Western Internet historiography by presenting a history of American Indian's use of multimedia and hypertext in the composition of wampum belts. Through telling an American Indian Internet origin counterstory, Haas posited "that the 'history' of hypertext is a Western frontier story, a narrative that most often begins with the exploration of the land of Xanadu and the Memex and eventually leads to the trailblazing of the World Wide Web" (p. 82). Haas's work addressed the colonial imposition of power and control over Internet historiography and shuts its validity down. Instead, she called on us to change our Internet historiography practices: "Thus we must be critical of the stories we tell ourselves about being 'technologically advanced.' Whose definition of technologically advanced are you using when evaluating your technological proficiency?" (p. 94). This dissertation is my attempt to heed Haas's call and provide another counterstory that boosts the social media and Internet practices of Indigenous and Chicana women.

While the four narratives—Indigenous and Chicana women's Internet testimonios—remain limited due to the constraints of the academic dissertation confines, I want to emphasize their significance still. I affectionately always remember that Thomas King also repeats another maxim at the ending of each chapter in *The Truth about Stories*. He says to take his stories and "Do with it what you will...Just don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now" (p. 167). He concludes each chapter by offering the stories he has shared in his book to his readers to make meaning from them as they

will. King is a giving kind of man. The truth about stories is that that's all we are, and we have the opportunity to hear so many that may not be heard otherwise if we take a moment to listen. May the stories in this dissertation do the same. You've heard them now.

CHAPTER 4

SPACE FOR SOLIDARITY: WHY INDIGENOUS AND CHICANA WOMEN CREATE COMMUNITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at your feet. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery—as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

On October 28th, 2018, Dinè Xicana artist Nanibah (Nani) Chacon unveiled a stunningly beautiful mural she painted on the wall of an aging building in Lansing, Michigan's Old Town. Dozens of local Indigenous and Chicanx folks in the community gathered together under tarps in the pouring rain to see Nani's work of art. My children and I arrived just a few minutes prior to the big moment when her mural would be shown to the crowd. We stood on the edges of the tarp, me holding my toddler and my teenager standing next to me. We weren't quite prepared for the weather and only my youngest had the appropriate rain gear on for protection. My son and I were fully soaked within a matter of minutes, but we remained dedicated to see Nani's mural.

Suddenly, some friends noticed we had arrived and motioned us closer. Zeke made space for us between the two tarps where we would be sheltered from the downpour. As the unveiling ceremony began, local elders and community partners took turns speaking. They first began with a land acknowledgement and then a series of stories about what the mural means to Anishinaabe peoples. Next, the owner of the clothing boutique Polka Dots (on whose wall the mural was painted) spoke about allowing Nani to paint on brick building's side and what this mural would give to the

people visiting Old Town. Lastly, Nani spoke. She explained how she worked with local Anishinaabe strawberry farmers and what this mural means for Indigenous and Chicanx folks. She was also the only person to name Marcus de Jesus, a friend and artist, for assisting her in painting late at night during inclement weather.

Nani's mural depicts a young woman wearing a canvas bag full of strawberries. Ensnared by vines covered in strawberries and blueberries, the woman is shown to be picking them. Some berries and flowers have rings of light circling around them. Nani gave the woman a colorful flower headband and a braid. The background is different shades of vibrant red that strike the eye when contrasted against the sky—no matter the weather. When it was unveiled, the soaked wait we all experienced became worth it. The mural is absolutely stunning and beautiful. It encapsulates all of the sacredness Anishinaabe and Chicanx place on strawberries as an absolute gift from the land. Nani had taken the time to learn the shared sacred value in strawberry's gift among both groups of colonized peoples.

After the unveiling, everyone in attendance moved next door to a pizza parlor where a buffet of traditional Anishinaabe and Mexican foods were provided. We all ate together, filling the restaurant with our cold, rain-wearing selves in the heat of a building. The laughter echoed off the walls of the main room where we all sat: eating, sharing, and warming ourselves in this beautiful moment together.

We were brought to this mural moment by the Womxn of Color Initiatives (WOCI) at Michigan State University, mainly through the organizing efforts of Doctors Dylan Miner, Estrella Torrez, Delia Fernández, Yomaira Figueroa, and Tamara Butler. WOCI made it possible to fund Nani's trip and honor her as the WOCI women of color artist in

residence for the fall 2019 semester. The organizers knew Nani's unique identity as a mixed Chicana and Dinè woman meant she held a representative positionality that would support a sense of unification for our very specific cultural community in Lansing. Drawing on that sense of unification, Nani's mural visually manifested the positionality of our community. Nani addressed this unity specifically during her talk at the unveiling when she discussed that the exploitation of migrant workers who work the fields—pick strawberries—face similar dehumanization⁹ by settlers as the Anishinaabe peoples whose sacred practices of berry picking had been commodified.

Space to come together and share in our similar experiences of oppression and celebration are essential for Indigenous peoples across the Americas to build community. The purpose of this chapter is to show that not only do our desires for connection and representation drive the way we build community in online spaces, but that we seek out online spaces for how we can enact solidarity with other women of color as well. Just because social media platforms are not designed with us in mind does not mean that we stick to the structural confines they impose upon us. Instead, as the discussion in this chapter and the next detail: Indigenous and Chicana women will manipulate our use in our online social platforms to circumvent their traditional infrastructure for our own needs.

What is Solidarity?

Introducing my, Janelle's, Elizabeth's, and Francisca's Internet histories in the previous chapter helped give a sense of our culture, identities, and how/why we use social media platforms. These stories set up the conversations I extend in this chapter

⁹ I know this dehumanization well. As a youth, my best friend's father used to make fun of me and our other friend Candace, both of us having Mexican ancestry. He would refer to us as "strawberry pickers" and joke that we should be out in the fields with our kind.

and the next in order to provide a clear sense of our investment in these spaces over time. The stories we shared explain that we initially logged on with a desire to connect with our social circles and engage in cultural practices indicative of our respective experiences. As we grew older, our social media participation evolved. Some of us moved away from home and all of us have had children; both of these life changes have impacted the way we integrate social media into our lives and shape how we use these platforms. However, the reasons we continue to log into our favorite platforms—and which platforms we choose to use—are consistently determined by the reasons we logged on in the first place. These reasons show how our desire to connect with others determines a constant motivation for sharing pieces of our lives in social media.

The enactment of solidarity is one way I learned that Francisca, Elizabeth, and Janelle, and I engage with social media similarly in order to support other people in our communities. Though we have individual experiences with our enactments of solidarity, as the data in this chapter will show, our purpose remains similar. We engage in solidarity within our social media spaces not through empty action, but in direct resistance to social oppressions that we have faced and continue to face. According to Noah de Lissovoy and Anthony L. Brown (2013), “Solidarity is in the first instance a necessity of struggle—a strategy or tool for strengthening forces on one side of a social or political antagonism” (p. 548). Lissovoy and Brown analyzed different forms of solidarity and how successfully each form supported diverse aims for social justice among all racial groups of people. They found that solidarity could often equate to unity when there is a shared single form of identification, such as race or gender, among a group of people. Nevertheless, Lissovoy and Brown realized that solidarity becomes

more difficult to actualize, embody, and enact among people who do not share common forms of identifications. They concluded that any act of solidarity requires a “multicultural imagination” in “more progressive forms” in order to mobilize solidarity as a form of alliance that succeeds for as many identifications as possible (p. 559-60).

Like the story I began this chapter highlights, certain kinds of cultural practices provide the opportunity to bring together the Indigenous and Chicanx communities. Nani’s mural presented a visual representation of a shared identification that connected people through the sacredness of berries and similar experiences of oppression. Sociologist Ann Swindler (1986) articulated that “Culture shapes action by defining what people want. What people want, however, is of little help in explaining action” (p. 274). Swindler’s statement here, on its own, mentions that, though culture may influence action, it does not explain the reasons for that action. However, when we connect Swindler’s statement to Lissovoy and Brown’s description of solidarity with respect to my conclusions from the previous chapter, the sharing of our cultural practices online enacts action in our want for solidarity and community.

Rhetoric and Composition scholar Katherine DeLuca’s research (2015) on how women engage communally within Pinterest provides additional rhetorical context for our different approaches to enacting solidarity. DeLuca positioned that gendered norms for a space are established through users’ interactions on a specific site (“Gendered Rhetorical Spaces,” n.p.). She considered social media platforms sites as where social justice action and solidarity become practiced gendered social norms:

Although non-traditional sites of civic activity, social media sites (like Pinterest and others) demonstrate the ways that everyday rhetorical, composing activities—like posting links to recipes and discussing them—can be situated as forms of civic engagement. These composing activities can be understood as

engaging with issues that matter to the community (or communities) that one inhabits and interacts within.” (DeLuca, “Digital Civic Engagement & Digital Citizenship”)

DeLuca’s knowledge of civic engagement on social media sites showed that seemingly mundane, everyday activities like sharing recipes on Pinterest could serve as ways women build community through supporting one another. Later, DeLuca provided two big takeaways from her research on how women’s everyday social media practices on Pinterest enact civic engagement: 1) their rhetorical practices dispel the myth that women’s work is idle and apolitical, and 2) proves that women’s online spaces enact politics onto our bodies through sharing in social media engagement. DeLuca’s understanding of gendered civic engagement in Pinterest allows for looking deeply at simple, everyday forms of communication that Indigenous and Chicana women conduct as acts of civic engagement that comes in the form of solidarity. While the stories I share in this chapter may appear superfluous at first glance, I will explain the significance of these descriptions for how each one support feelings of community and solidarity.

Gabriela Raquel Ríos (2015) drew on the concept of spatial praxis from Indigenous epistemologies that speaks to how people of color practice civic engagement. She explained,

If we take indigenous scholarship seriously in a discussion of spatial praxis, however, it will question that very foundation, and it will make visible the blood and bodies that constitute what we mean by ‘civic’ engagement, what theories we use to enact it, and how we define space. (Ríos, p. 84)

Ríos challenged the discipline to address its novelty for incorporating Indigenous scholarship into our research without acknowledging that the fight for land and sovereignty are acts of civic engagement. For her, civic engagement includes

sovereignty as well as redressing the conception of solidarity to account for Indigenous livelihood. In this way, Ríos contributed to rhetorical scholarship by honoring Indigenous, Chicanx ways of knowing as ways of being.

Thanks to Ríos, the Rhetoric and Composition discipline has the means to go even further by considering a more inclusive articulation of solidarity as a form of civic engagement. She was not alone in her making of space and redressing inclusion. Kendall Leon (2013) read Cherrie Moraga's short essays from *A Bridge Called My Back* in order to apply Moraga's theoretical concept of theory in the flesh to rhetoric scholarship. Like my own work in this dissertation, theory in the flesh recognizes that "the physical realities of our lives...all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (qtd. in Leon, p. 6). Leon adopted Moraga's theory in the flesh as an empirical methodology to study how women of color. She detailed,

Despite what might be the painful experiences we encounter as women of color, Moraga asks us to consider our rhetorical ability to read our experiences alongside others and to connect as a strategy for survival. Theory in the flesh involves recognizing our lived experiences and coming to a critical consciousness about this, coupled with our responses, or actions to alter the worlds that produce such conditions. (Leon, p. 6)

Leon used Moraga's theory in the flesh to provide a needed and necessary understanding that being women of color enables us to act relationally and rhetorically with one another within a community. Leon helped me see that solidarity can be enacted with others inside and outside our communities through the process of theorizing our lived experiences. Together, we keep each other alive by sharing about our lives.

Mehreen Kasana (2014), too, recognized how women—and particularly women of color—enact solidarity within social media spaces. In "Feminisms and the social

media sphere,” she noted that “For marginalized voices in social media spaces, solidarity becomes essential” (p. 237). Kasana established that when women of color come together within a social media platform to form a network, they engage in the creation of *transnational solidarity*. This concept of transnational solidarity is crucial for any kind of lasting activism and gets at Lissovoy and Brown’s description of a multicultural imagination. Kasana extended this scholarly conversation by calling for Indigenous people to lead in acts of solidarity: “Only through more indigenous voices on social media can we envisage and execute a network of activism and solidarity” (p. 242). Her argument that transnational solidarity should source from Indigenous voices promotes a more global, inclusive, and sustainable form of activism.

The brief outline of scholarship I have brought together makes a case for how community does not necessarily represent a group of people so much as it represents people acting as a collective through a shared practice of solidarity among one another. In this way, inclusive solidarity supports difference while seeking resistance. Acts of solidarity can be big productions of protest in the streets all the way down to sharing a recipe for a small group of women on Pinterest. What determines solidarity is *how* people come together through engaging in cultural practices and traditions. The storied data I offer in this chapter will depict scenes in which these women and I have done this kind of solidarity work.

Speaking Solidarity into Being

I first understood the concept of solidarity from my involvement with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in 2011. Taking a Master’s course on Marxist theory that fall when the movement began positioned me well to assess class-based revolution as both a

researcher and an activist. I watched from afar in California as folks created a physical encampment of protest in Zuccotti Park, then all over the country and world. As the short months that fall unfolded, I befriended many people online who were based at the New York City camp as well as in Boston, Tulsa, Dallas, London, Sydney, Portland, Riverside, and Los Angeles. These camps were disbanded traumatically throughout winter of 2011, but the protests went on for the whole of next year. In May 2012, I went to my first protest for May Day in Los Angeles, solidifying many of the friendships I had online now in person. Across the globe, these protestors and I posted pictures on social media and shared in our experience of solidarity together.

The rise of OWS encampments and protests stirred from the resistance and discord that simultaneously erupted in the Middle East during the Arab Spring movement. In many ways, all these protests were connected, but the only way to truly understand and see that was from the inside. Communications across the Internet that coordinated specific revolutionary actions also supported friendships, camaraderie through acts of solidarity in our similar experiences of struggle and oppressions. While watching these protests online, I watched livestreams and livetweets of friends and acquaintances beaten violently by police, incarcerated, or disappeared forever. Many of us carry active or remnant post-traumatic stress disorder from the violence that occurred at these resistance sites—either by being present or watching things unfold online. Though OWS and the Arab Spring are technically over, the life lessons remain ever-internalized in our minds and bodies.

The *affect* of protest, in my experience, comes through in the moments where I felt solidarity with the other people sharing these moments alongside me. For instance,

during the May Day protest, I found myself in the middle of a drum circle during our march through the streets of downtown Los Angeles. There I stood, feeling the drums beat around me, dancing with hundreds of others in a brief experience of joy. In this moment, I deeply understood what solidarity *felt like*. Amid the very real and oppressive feelings of constant oppression, protest provides opportunity for people to come together for similar (but not always identical) reasons. This shared similarity can spark an indescribable sense of affiliation—of solidarity in the affective form. This feeling of solidarity in protest is absolutely contagious and resonates throughout the body in the form of excitement, chills, goose bumps, and even euphoria.

Thanks to feeling my way through this moment on May Day and all the other moments online where similar collective experiences occurred, I know what solidarity is. I recognized it when hearing the stories Francisca, Elizabeth, and Janelle shared with me. I could feel it when they talked about a memory manifesting physically and viscerally. The impossibility of capturing that affect in writing faced me as I wrote this chapter, but I hope the storied descriptions I retell here show how solidarity builds through communities coming together in resistance to oppression in order to impart the definition of solidarity I delineate in this chapter. This first story, Francisca's, will explain beautifully our desire for solidarity's affect as we go online.

Francisca

For Francisca, everything she does on the Internet begins with her considering the world as translated through her particular cultural and racial positionality. Her experiences of racism as a Chicana woman blend across her life within online and physical spaces. When I asked her if she had been thinking about anything after the

talking circle, she informed me that she realized she had been trying to think of specific, notable events when smaller moments in her life have imparted cultural meaning. Some of these moments, she said, concerned her embodiment as a Chicana in online spaces. She explained,

Thinking also how social media influences how I mother because there's a lot of memes or little funny videos of typical Latina mom things that we do, right? And then I feel like sometimes I see my mom in those videos and then I see myself in those videos. And it's interesting because, for example, the chancla. That's really popular, right?

Francisca recalled the chancla (translated "sandal" from Spanish to English) as a cultural symbol of parental punishment. For example, in the film *Coco*, Miguel's grandmother wields her chancla as a threat for him to fall in line and do as he is told. So it is within many Mexican families.

The chancla serves as a helpful representation of how the material experience of racism and violence permeates our everyday lives as Chicanas, and becomes viralized within our culture with the help of social media. I will quote Francisca at length here because what she said is vitally important to our understanding of what such a symbol means:

And at the same time, it's a huge problem within how people of color, we feel that we have to...how do I say this? We have to keep an eye on our children more. We have to be more strict on our children. Like our children cannot be fully free because we know that they are perceived a different way than if they were white kids. So I feel like it's interesting; it's really funny to think of the chancla, but what's the story behind it? Why are we so strict on our children? And so I feel like it's interesting on how that plays on social media because it's kind of not normalized, but it brings attention to something and it brings attention to it in a really funny way. But when you think about it in more depth, it's kind of sad at the same time. Like yeah, it's funny, but we have to be really tough on our children because we'd rather be the ones tough on our children rather than have the police kill them.

Francisca contextualizes the chancla meme beyond its humor to understand the power and weight it carries within Chicanx culture. She described the realization of the problems with how the chancla as a concept can promote child abuse. She feels this deeply as a Chicana mother who worries about raising her child to be healthy and loved amidst the conflicting issues that come with our culture. That conflict between culture and hope interacts with the reality that no matter how we raise our children, they still grow up in a world that would rather see them—and us—dead or imprisoned. Every time she comes across the memeification of the chancla and other digital icons from our culture, she must face that they represent a duplicitous reality for Chicanx peoples.

Francisca looks for spaces within social media platforms that offer her solace and affirmation when dealing with hurtful representations and racist experiences, and where she can offer the same in return. During the talking circle, she mentioned something right along these lines in such a way that caused all of us women to catch our breath, nodding and murmuring in agreement. She said,

And, for example, with people of color, I don't mind sharing different stories about what I'm going through just in case. Because, for me, it's how we can relate, how can I support you? You know what I'm going through. I can know what you're going through. So it's a space of solidarity.

Francisca's thought resonated with all of us because we, too, look for spaces where we have this experience of "being seen" by others. She touched on an important and necessary value that we all share as women of color: that sometimes we just need to be places where we don't have to explain why certain micro- and macro-aggressions are so hurtful.

Francisca articulated a desire so critical for this project that I asked her a follow-up question about her use of the phrase “space of solidarity” during our interview. I wanted to know how she would define solidarity and what that definition means for her in regard to online spaces. She responded,

In this context...So for me, it's we are all being oppressed in some way or another, and most of us being oppressed in similar ways can come together and more than anything show understanding. Like a listening space where you can talk and people listen and support, any type of support more than anything, right, like moral or emotional support.

When she said this, she started a conversation amongst the two of us about what this kind of social media sharing in solidarity looks like. I followed up her statement by relaying, “Even just seeing other people facing similar struggles,” which was something Elizabeth had said to me earlier during our one-on-one interview. Francisca confirmed and then said, “Yeah. So when you see someone who is, you know, having a hard time parenting and being a professional, then be like, ‘Oh, I’m not alone. There’s someone out there making it work, right?’” Exactly. She went on to talk about how important it is to see another woman of color who appears to be successfully juggling motherhood and her career, but also talks about surviving the numerous struggles we uniquely face—one of those women being the other women in our community and who participated in this dissertation.

Our conversation shifted a little bit to how the Facebook groups, like Elizabeth’s story will elaborate on, provide much needed opportunities for articulations of solidarity among one another. I asked her what her ideal social media space would look like, given the identification of solidarity as a requirement, and she offered this interesting bit:

Myself as a person, and any person, you have different parts of who you are, right? And so they don’t always coexist at the same time, so I wish there was

some way I could share different things. I would like a space where I could freely share my thoughts and have no backlash. And I feel like right now in my life, I'm at a point where I'm still trying to find myself. I became a mom so young that I wasn't ever able to live life in a different way. Right away, I was a mom; I was a wife; I was a student. And many times, I feel like where's me? And I guess it's not necessarily like a social media space, but maybe it would be because it's like I cannot be myself just me in the real world, so is there a space where I could just be? Me, me...I guess more than anything, I would like a space where I could freely share my thoughts and have no backlash...and I don't know if it would be through a group or through a way that you're completely anonymous and just create an identity for yourself—especially thinking about how we have to constrict ourselves so much. It would also be nice to have a space where you can truly be free.

I chose to keep her long reflection on what such a space would look like so as to show her whole line of thinking. Francisca gave so much vulnerability and honesty in this reflection. I saw how critical it is for us, as women of color, to have spaces where we can play around with the constraints and affordances of our many personal and professional obligations that require not just different hats, but whole different identities. The stress all these identities place upon us can sometimes be so imposing that social media may be the only way we can temporarily escape from them and investigate ourselves.

Elizabeth

As her story from the previous chapter intimated, Elizabeth primarily uses Facebook groups in order to obtain support and find commonality across her multiple embodied experiences. Like Francisca, Elizabeth has several roles: an academic researcher, a Chicana, and a mother of a disabled child. For her, her identity as a mother cannot be separated from her other identities, and is one that shapes the other aspects of her life. Elizabeth's use of social media revolves around actively working to receive and offer support for other mothers in similar positions as her. However, the

most important part of Elizabeth's social media sharing practices is how she uses her positionality in these Facebook groups to build community and enact solidarity. As she told me during our interview, "You're a mom in academia. However that defines you. So like you guys share a part of your identity or a part of how you live your life is similar to everybody else in your group." Like Francisca, Elizabeth knows how necessary it is for her to have the ability to choose when to separate parts of her whole person into pieces and share them within Facebook groups that serve as spaces of solidarity. The main groups she belongs to offer representation for her different identities—though enable the possibility of some being combined depending on different roles such as women of color in academia and mothers of disabled children. The other women in these spaces understand much of the unique challenges Elizabeth experiences, and, therefore, offer her a sense of connection, representation, and affiliation.

In general, Elizabeth tends to post updates on social media about her professional career as an academic researcher like undergoing grant or award application processes, completing a publication, or meeting up with a colleague. She also posts or reposts/reshares links to articles and videos. The primary account she reblogs is from *undocumedia*. Elizabeth feels they are the most trustworthy. She elucidated,

I trust *undocumedia* because of my own family and my friends and stuff. I see a lot of what they post is the reality for a lot of people. I'm pretty sure that some of the political is probably biased towards the more left or more liberal stuff.

Here, Elizabeth reflected on why she looks toward media accounts that post political information relevant to her identity and her closest relations. *undocumedia* often creates video content that addresses systemic issues pertaining to undocumented ("illegal

immigrants”) people such as Donald Trump’s attacks on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the DREAM Act. Because these issues affected Elizabeth’s most immediate personal social circles (and mine and Francisca’s), much of her focus on social media revolves around them.

Though she invests much of her online sharing practices around immigration issues and politics regarding people of color and primarily Latinx folks, Elizabeth also emphasized her investment in making sure what she shares does not isolate the white people who follow her. She knows that the academic mom group that she belongs to has nearly 12,000 members who have many different racial identities. For that reason, she considers what she adds to that space and how it might impact her relationships with others on there. This consideration also moves onto her Facebook profile page where she also thinks about how what she posts and reblogs might make others feel. She shared with me a story about an instance of this:

So I think last week, a few weeks ago, I saw a video where it was an African American guy rapping. And his rap was basically about the racial inequalities in the United States and how bad people of color have it and how white people do. He said something about “You get mad for us asking for more, but all you really give us are scraps. And like we’re asking for more. The white people find that offensive.” I was going to post that, but then I don’t know. It seems kind of offensive to *all* white people. So I was like, “No, nevermind. I’ll just like it or something. Or save it.”

This short story gets at how Elizabeth stops to question how a simple reblog of a video will make her Facebook friends feel. She went on to explain that she finds most of her white Facebook friends to be supportive and understanding, so she tries to make sure she does not isolate them by things she shares. Elizabeth said that there are other times where she has made similar choices in posting content.

One reason Elizabeth takes the time to consider her white friends' feelings is because Elizabeth's investment in her social media platforms only starts with her concerns with racial issues. For her, disability justice lies at the heart of her fight for social justice. Elizabeth does not see race and justice as separate oppressions—especially since her child experiences the intersection of both—but understands that many interactions in online spaces are shaped by these identities individually. She offered,

I find that interesting because even within the people that are advocating for racial justice, there's no talk about disability justice and, for me, I don't know, I just find that it bothers me. And that's why, although I am aware of racial injustice and I feel that as a person of color and it is important to me, I feel that there's enough people doing racial justice work and then there's not a lot of people doing disability justice work and even less so at the intersection of race and disability.

Because she sees the lack of people advocating for disability justice, Elizabeth uses her spaces to share her experiences as an academic, a Chicana, and a mother of a child with disabilities to fight for more awareness of and justice for disability issues.

Throughout our conversations, I listened to her vocalize a clear understanding of why she asserts herself in the platforms she uses. She recognized that the audience of her posts shape what she says in each space, emphasizing that her views on solidarity ask her to move through and communicate in her spaces with care.

Janelle

Toward the beginning of the talking circle, Janelle shared that the primary cultural practice she shares on social media tends to be her beadwork. She finds chronicling her beading process rewarding, which drives her to share her feeling of accomplishment. She detailed,

I post a lot of beadwork. And I think that's because I like the feeling of satisfaction of like 'I did it.' And it's done and now people can see it. And it's somehow other people seeing makes it feel more done than finishing it.

Janelle also approaches the sharing of her beading purposefully. She elaborated,

I'll usually post photos of beadwork; I'll stagger it. Like I'll do it instantaneously on Instagram. It doesn't matter what time it is. It's just like "I have just done this and now I'm going to post it." Kind of like marking the time it was done. But then I'll go back some time later, maybe, and kind of pick out what I decide is the best of the beadwork to share on Facebook and have a story with it. You know, so I kind of filter it like that.

Janelle's elaboration provides an example of how her sharing practices differ across platforms. Similar to the Elizabeth, she maintains a conscious awareness of her audience and considers that when deciding what aspects of her beading process she posts to each social media space in ways that support feelings of affiliation through sharing cultural practices.

Another way that Janelle described connecting with others in online space is through the use of humor along with mundane content. She delighted me with some details of what she does:

I've been posting a lot more jokes lately. Not to be facetious, but to kind of just to lighten up. Because I need it. I need it. And, you know, maybe that's a position of privilege for me. You know what I mean? It's like you don't see me and my emotional moments *laughs* Like, you don't know. And that's okay for other people not to need to. And totally irrelevant stuff like posting jokes about how I need coffee or whatever. Just things that everyone could potentially identify with.

Janelle's reflection here illuminates why it can be helpful to post things that seem irrelevant or irreverent. Often, people like us from marginalized communities feel the burnout of endless political struggle and find ourselves needing temporary escape or even a moment of laughter. Just as DeLuca showed from her research on Pinterest,

these seemingly mundane posts do create experiences of solidarity among people in online spaces by promoting similar affects of representation and affiliation.

However, not all interactions on social media provide these moments to connect with others who share similar experiences of oppression. Janelle described how she can, at times, choose to interact with others in ways that challenge their beliefs—if those beliefs represent a kind of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of history. She explained,

And sometimes people aren't ready to hear things that they're ready to hear now. I posted something about how we're already living in a post-apocalypse, that I grew up that way. And it got 300-something fucking likes. I've been saying this for years...I don't know why it's being circulated now, and I didn't necessarily want that to happen because the moment it got that big, I started getting weird people from New Zealand and the UK and whatever being like, "Oh millenials just think it's an apocalypse" or "A real apocalypse was Rome" or "What a true post-apocalypse is that you have to have your complete civilization drop, your technology is eradicated and people are camping on your space." And I was like, "Yea, that's exactly what happened." You know?

Janelle's reflection summarizes the difficulty Indigenous peoples have with regard to posting content about our struggles. Sometimes folks are not ready to hear what we are saying or they have a Westernized grasp of history. Her example highlights how our everyday experiences are not necessarily perceived within dominant society as historical fact—or even contemporary reality. But, as Francisca made clear: our children are being taken from us and locked in cages inside detention centers. Native women are being murdered and disappeared at alarming rates. Black folks cannot exist in everyday life without the police being called on them. Muslim people are not free to practice their religion or travel across the world, especially Western countries. Our genocide is ongoing. Apocalypse is now and has been for a really long time.

And with the ever-present apocalypse that is colonialism, Janelle considered one of her roles online to be an ally and advocate who assists in protecting others from systems of oppression when she can. In her role as a message board operator in the days of AOL, she encountered a situation that called on her to engage in what came out to be the most descriptive act of solidarity that occurred during the talking circle and individual interviews. I share this whole story of hers:

People started moving from that to LiveJournal and I missed the boat because I was so emotionally invested in this AOL stuff, but what happened was really weird. AOL brought in this, it was way too convenient. AOL brought in a “publish your own fiction” kind of company who would publish people’s fiction for them. But the writers would pay them, up front, for the printing, and the idea was you would make money off of it if you sold all the books. So it put all the labor on the writers. So AOL brought in all these people around all these message boards and everything. And then they tried to pull off this really sneaky thing where they said, “The copyright. We have to move servers, and so we have to move all the content and oh, by the way, while we’re moving the content, AOL owns first copyright over everything on the boards.” And I knew that it was weird because they had just created this partnership with this fiction publishing company at the same time. So, it’s like this is too convenient. And so I went in and I deleted years worth. I saved it all. I emailed it all to each individual person because I cared that much. Like I knew everyone’s user names. Like maybe they hid them, but I was the one person that knew each person, who they were and everything. So I took everyone’s stories. I put them in docs. I sent them all to them, and then I went through and hand-deleted years’ worth of stories. And killed my own community in the name of sovereignty and protecting their intellectual property. And then everyone at the same time, they were already starting to lean towards LiveJournal anyway and I just couldn’t take that journey with them because it’s like setting your own village on fire. You know, like okay, “We can’t let anyone else have this and we have to move.” And I was the one who did the burning and everyone else moved. And I just sort of was like, “I’m just going to stay here and make sure the fire burns.” Yeah.

Janelle’s story is just plain incredible. The words she used to describe this event, though absolutely off-the-cuff in the moment, come across as completely indicative of the kind of solidarity that occurs within decolonial activism. Janelle’s identity as an Indigeneous woman informed her understanding of AOL’s colonial actions of allowing a

private company to assert copyright control over their user's intellectual property. She likens her resistance to this act as setting her own village on fire because that was the only way to protect the people she was on that space to support. If anything shows what solidarity in an online space truly is, it is this act of sacrifice that Janelle conducted.

Conclusion

If one tree fruits, they all fruit—there are no soloists. Not one tree in a grove, but the whole grove; not one grove in the forest, but every grove; all across the country and all across the state. The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don't yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together. All flourishing is mutual. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

As I wrap up this chapter and move on to discussing how my participants and I enact critical digital literacies within our social media spaces, I want to connect all of our stories together by going back to what Francisca said about having spaces of solidarity. When we share what goes on in our lives as socially-marginalized bodies—Chicana and Indigenous women and mothers trying to give our children healthy, full lives considering their own marginalities—we help create and maintain networks of support within our communities by enacting solidarity with women and others who also face similar oppressions.

Sometimes our sharing goes beyond our own lives, necessitating our taking action in these spaces in ways that support the other people in our communities. Spaces of solidarity, for us, mean that we position our bodies, lives, and truths in order to support the full representation of our experiences as women of color, mothers, and professionals in order to identify with others who can identify with us and us them. Santos Ramos (2016) aptly summarized acts of solidarity for people of color as an

enactment of relationality: “Our active solidarity, as ethnically and culturally diverse people, requires ongoing consideration of how we exist in relation to one another and how our rhetoric impacts the comrades we have in adjacent communities” (para. 10). In his article for *enculturation*, Ramos, like Ríos, sought to push our concept of solidarity further. He suggested that “In order to adopt a more nuanced approach to solidarity, we must be able to simultaneously acknowledge our similarities and our differences, our oppressions and our privileges” (“Discontents”; para. 6). The stories I shared in this chapter add a more nuanced understanding of solidarity by showing how four women participated in social media spaces to support connection and community.

Ramos presented the concept of “relational organizing” that saw relationality and solidarity as “building relationships both inside and outside of academia, both within and beyond Xicano communities” (para. 11). He also determined that relational organizing requires constructing “relationships across the hierarchical and dichotomous racial divisions imposed by ongoing colonialism” and to “try to maintain a willingness to be transformed by the knowledge that those relationships produce” (para. 11). The goal, or crux, as Ramos argued, means that we “avoid engaging in isolated acts of solidarity” and, instead, focus on “one which allows us to subvert the status quo while simultaneously building love and respect for one another across cultural difference” (para. 12). Ramos explained how relational organizing demands anti-racist approaches that create relationships that source from affirming affects such as love, which imparts a necessity upon the possibilities of solidarity for achieving more genuine and decolonial social justice.

Ramos is not the only scholar to see how important anti-racism is for solidarity. Lissovoy and Brown concluded their article with an explanation of how this kind of solidarity through relational organizing (though they do not use this term) imparts the possibility of decolonization. They proclaim that

Forms of solidarity more deeply attentive to and respectful of differences in experience and understanding can allow for coordinated work on a range of fronts against an ultimately integrated global economy of racism. Without falling prey to fantasies of fusion, this approach to solidarity refuses the colonial partitions that deny the co-participation of people of color and Whites in the open space of the human and in the reconstruction of social reality. (Lissovoy & Brown, p. 557)

Lissovoy and Brown, too, called for anti-racist solidarity, noticing how such action manifests decolonial resistance. As they understand it, anti-racist solidarity leaves a place for white folks to act in concert through their support, allyship, and advocacy.

I share the stories in this chapter in order to present four different examples of relational organizing that operates through anti-racist, decolonial solidarity. That said, our unique positions as women of color provide a useful model for others to reflect upon and adjust for themselves. Leon's interpretation of *la hermandad* as a rhetorical praxis supports such representative methods. She specified,

This makes sense given that Chicana identity is one that specifically emerges as a response to conditions in which one is marked as *not* productive. As a result then of being compelled into a position of non-action. Chicana identity emerges as a position of action; more specifically, a particular type of action that not only builds on experience, but is instantiated each time that *la hermandad* is invoked. (Leon, p. 15)

Leon understood *la hermandad* as a form of embodied Chicana sisterhood in action. She reminded readers of the inherently politic embedded in taking on Chicana as an identity—one three of us women do. Those everyday mundane interactions are, as we have described through our stories, us enacting *la hermandad* in our online spaces.

And while this might appear to leave out Janelle, an Indigneous woman, she is not on her own. Sisterhood extends beyond the Chicana identity, especially in our local community. Janelle mentioned as much during the talking circle:

I'll change my cover photo, I don't know how often, according to my mood. So that reflects how I'm feeling or kind of the tones of what's going on, if it's like I'm feeling like 'women are banding together' and we're talking about that.

Since we all share similar oppressions as women of color, we know how we are compelled into non-action by colonial forces as Leon revealed. Janelle expressed the moment when we can commit to a simple act like changing a profile picture to symbolize solidarity and speak sisterhood into being. No tree fruits alone, as the Kimmerer epigraph to this conclusion said. Strawberries are always a gift from the land that asks for nothing of us, but to be open-eyed to their sacred mystery that beckons our humility.

CHAPTER 5

ALREADY CRITICALLY DIGITALLY LITERATE: HOW INDIGENOUS AND CHICANA WOMEN ASSERT SOVERIGNTY OVER THEIR ONLINE IDENTITIES

That is the fundamental nature of gifts: they move, and their value increases with their passage. The fields made a gift of berries to us and we made a gift of them to our father. The more something is shared, the greater its value becomes. This is hard to grasp for societies steeped in notions of private property, where others are, by definition, excluded from sharing. Practices such as posting land against trespass, for example, are expected and accepted in a property economy but are unacceptable in an economy where land is seen as a gift to all. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

I started Chapter 3 with a story about how I came to use the Internet, but that was not the full story. During the time I was studying the social movement Anonymous for my Master's thesis, I experienced a scary instance of being doxed¹⁰ by hackers. I had adopted an anonymous Twitter account in order to conduct participatory research as a member of the Twitter Anonymous community, which presented a perfect storm of a occasion. Through my engagement in this community, I befriended what turned out to be a person who held a lot of status, but whose true identity remained elusive to mostly everyone. To be in Anonymous at this specific moment time, one's identity was the most prized item of value. Hackers constantly sought to dox one another and out their real name and location to the general public in a spectacle of hacking superiority. And, in June of 2012, I learned this first-hand.

Because of my research relationship with this hacker of high status, other hackers in a rival group doxed my young son and me, then threatened to kidnap my

¹⁰ As I have defined in a previous publication, doxing is a neologism for the practice of obtaining documents on person, a group, or an organization. Usually, when doxing concerns individuals, it means that that person's personal information such as full name, date of birth, address, social security number, financial information, and more, and then using that information as collateral in a bribe to incite them to do something.

child from their school if I did not give up the identity of this person. Scared, I reached out to my contact in direct message and informed them of the doxing plot on me being used to entrap them. They relayed their regret for my being put in the middle of this situation and told me, “Don’t worry, it’ll be taken care of.” And, miraculously, I never heard from the people within this rival group again.

I learned from this horrifically terrifying situation that I had not been properly prepared in any respect to conduct the research I did for a mere Master’s degree. Not only was I threatened with the kidnapping of my son, but I had also experienced physical surveillance by the government. Throughout this one year, a white van parked across the street for months, my phone was tapped, and I experienced consistent invasive body searches every time I flew (and continue to fly) on an airplane. Reflecting on all of these things, that summer, I became both infuriated and worried about why such things could happen to me in the name of academic research. I turned to my university and academic department, but no one there had any idea what I should do to improve my situation, let alone what I could have done to better protect myself. This situation remained beyond everyone’s wheelhouse.

So I set out to learn how to better protect myself on my own. While I was starting to use new programming languages, I also dedicated myself to acquiring knowledge about encrypting my email, anonymizing my location and IP address, as well as many other digital safety practices. By the end of the summer, almost all links to my personal information in my online identities had been wiped or locked away privately. I had acquired what I was coming to learn as absolutely necessary critical digital literacies of surveillance and privacy. With this new knowledge, I decided it best to stop researching

in the Anonymous community and focus on both investing my time in improving my knowledge of privacy and online safety so I could help others protect themselves from the scary experiences I had.

In this final data chapter of my dissertation, I pull the discussions from the previous chapters together, connecting those threads to the stories in this chapter, in order to present a cumulative discussion about why knowledge of how Indigenous and Chicana women use social media in the ways we do. My purpose in this chapter is to show that we 1) use the Internet already in possession of critical digital literacies, and 2) continue to acquire critical digital literacies as needed based on online experiences we have. Though my inexperience and lack of knowledge about privacy prevented me from being adequately prepared for research in a highly technologically savvy community of hackers, I learned that it took just one instance of threat to spark a knowledge quest that would lead to a whole career trajectory. And, in this current stage of my trajectory, I had the heart-warming, inspiring opportunity to learn from the women I researched alongside that it is precisely these moments of vulnerability that teach us where we are in our acquiring of critical digital literacies. The truth in these stories is that we already have many.

Women Can Internet Too

The literature review in this dissertation mapped the scholarly conversation regarding the evolution of critical digital literacies, tracing the shift from considering digital literacies in the context of training for jobs in technical communication toward self and communal empowerment through cultural rhetorics and testimonios. I noticed a gap in some of the vastly beneficial literature because of a lack in scholarly perspectives on

the critical digital literacies people of color have written by people of color. I called for more representation in critical digital literacy scholarship through investing and supporting scholars of color doing that research themselves with their own communities. This chapter, and this dissertation, presents one such study from the perspectives of Indigenous and Chicana women.

A Woman of Color's Place In the Internet

When we think of a person embodying brilliance with technology, dominant and normative conceptions of white male genius often come to mind: Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Tim Berners-Lee. *Wikipedia's* list of "Internet Pioneers" offers ten men's names before the inclusion of a woman's ("List of Internet pioneers," n.d.). Of the thirty-seven people listed, thirty-one are men. All of these women appear to be white; most of them are/were American. Even Janet Abbate's (2000) foundational research on the Internet's beginnings fails to credit a single woman as contributing to *Inventing the Internet*.

Feminist Internet historians and researchers such as Laura Gurak, Lisa Nakamura, and Mar Hicks have sought to reposition women's stories as central to computing history and early experiences of the Internet. In *Persuasion and Privacy in Cyberspace: The Online Protests over Lotus Marketplace and the Clipper Chip*, Gurak (1997) dedicated a whole chapter to considering gender and the Internet. Though representative of the 1990s' understandings of gender as a binary, Gurak asserted that "being online" offered very different experiences for people who presented and experienced the world as men than as women. She concluded that

Once women are connected on the Internet, the highly technical nature of many online discussions continues to make cyberspace even more exclusive. Because the Internet was originally set up by men in science and technology, it has

retained the technical discussions that have traditionally excluded women. (p. 106)

Gurak highlighted the inherent sexism embedded within Internet discourse and infrastructure that shaped—and continues to shape—experiences online. This sexism supports the rampant pornography online that predominantly preferences the heterosexual, cis male gaze. She even found that discursive interactions can be shaped by gender, such as women tending to use emoticons and emoji to “attenuate” emotion online and soften their communicative presentation (p. 110).

Such tendency of white, cis men dominating technology goes back to the early days of computing history. Mar Hicks (2018), a feminist Internet historian of British computing, connected that “once computing started to become a more desirable field for young men, women were largely left out, regardless of what they might have been capable of or what they might have preferred” (p. 3). Hicks looked closely at this history within England, but found gendered discrimination to occur both there and in the United States. From their study, Hicks learned that such discrimination based on gender “rendered invisible” the contributions women provided to the labor of early and contemporary informational technologies (p. 238). They called for scholars and researchers to find the histories that were made hidden as Internet technologies advanced and men sought to make their domination a matter of historical record.

Internet and critical race researcher Lisa Nakamura (2002) developed the concept of *cybertypes* to explain the embodied reality for racialized, marginalized people in online spaces. She defined, “Cybertypes are the images of race that arise when the fears, anxieties, and desires of privileged Western users (the majority of Internet users and content producers are still from the Western nations) are scripted into

a textual/graphical environment that is in constant flux and revision” (p. 6). Nakamura’s definition of cybertypes provides a dated, yet useful phrase for continuing to understand how white fragility seeks to sustain itself within online spaces. She pointed to the fluidity of cybertypes in maneuvering throughout the Internet whenever their online identity comes up against normative expectations of whiteness, and more often white maleness.

Nakamura showed that communication is what formulates and performs the awareness of race in online spaces: “Rather than being left behind, bracketed, or ‘radically questioned’ the body—the raced, gendered, classed body—gets ‘outed’ in cyberspace just as soon as commerce and discourse come into play” (p. 11). As Nakamura explicated here, verbal and visual communication in the Internet determines the situations in which discrimination becomes exerted onto marginalized people. And, going back to Gurak’s point about gender being part of the very infrastructure of the Internet, racism has been coded the very same.

Nakamura took her investigation of race and the Internet further as her career progressed. In 2014, she published an article titled “Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture” that critically reflected on the recruitment strategy of Fairchild Semiconductor, an “influential and pioneering electronics company” during Silicon Valley’s “formative years” (p. 920). Nakamura critiqued the lack of voice Navajo women had in receiving acknowledgement for their contributions in producing circuits for this technology factory, thus contributing to the “PC revolution” (p. 921). In looking at “Fairchild’s internal documents, such as company newsletters, and its public ones, such as brochures, along with Bureau of Indian Affairs press releases and journalistic coverage by magazines such as *Business Week*,”

Nakamura found that the Navajo women were recruited based on their “temperament, culture, and gender” (p. 920-21).

Nakamura’s research analyzed numerous technical documents that described these Navajo women—as well as Latino women—as having what many companies referred to as “nimble fingers” (p. 920). Additional publications detailed that Native Americans had centuries of practice using their hands from rug and basket weaving and for visualizing “complex patterns” that enabled them to “memorize complex integrated circuit designs” and make successful, “subjective decisions in sorting and quality control” when putting together circuit boards (p. 926). While these documents depicted positive celebrations of Native peoples and corporate settlers in an entrepreneurial relationship that benefited both groups, Nakamura noted, unsurprisingly, unilateral evidence of exploitation and pollution from this working collaboration. She declared,

Navajo women did not make circuits because their brains naturally “though” in patters of right-angle colors and shapes. They did not make them well because they had inherent Indian virtues such as stoicism, pride in craftswomanship, or an inherent and inborn manual dexterity. And Fairchild did not employ Navajo women *because* of these traits. These traits were identified after the company learned about the tax incentives available to subsidize the project, the lack of unions and other employment options in the area, and the generous donation of heavy equipment given by the US government gratis as part of an incentive to develop “light industry” as an “occupational education” for Indians. (p. 935)

Nakamura’s uncovering of the true reason why Fairchild hired Navajo women shows that the depiction of these women on technical documents supported that romantic, idealized mythos of the Indian, which the company purported to further support their exploitation of a cheap labor workforce on land that never was theirs. Nakamura determined that the disjunction between Fairchild’s promotional materials and the truth

about the labor conditions for the Navajo women created a purposeful misrepresentation of computing history that erased the Navajo women's contributions.

When there is erasure of women of color's contributions to history (as I highlighted in chapter 3), further acts of oppression certainly follow. Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) learned, through her research, that racial and gender oppression exist as a current Internet infrastructural issue as well. In *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble analyzed the racial and gendered bias encoded in algorithms of search engines, particularly Google. Noble used what she called "a black feminist technology studies (BFTS) approach to Internet research" (p. 171). Her goal was to understand how algorithms create impact intersectionally, specifically for Black women, and continue to impose racist, sexist assumptions upon their bodies. She revealed, via her findings, that Black women and girls remain primarily represented within Google through pornography and other subjugating images. Noble rightfully critiqued Google's adoption of algorithms that uphold such a virtual, yet material and racist reality. She declared that "What we need now, more than ever, is public policy that advocates protections from the effects of unregulated and unethical artificial intelligence" (p. 181). Noble believed that public policy and government intervention can challenge oppressive Internet infrastructures. And, while her call here is one solution, it may not be the one that will be enacted to support the agency for women of color and other marginalized peoples. Our desire, as Indigenous and Chicana women, to promote connection and solidarity amongst our communities intimates that our social media use draws from the materiality of communicating as marginalized bodies within digital spaces.

We Know What We're Doing

By studying how and why we use social media platforms critically as Indigneous and Chicana women, I address the limitations of dominant scholarly conversations within the discipline on the topic of critical digital literacies. Beck, Blair, and Grohowski (2015) asserted that, Rhetoric and Composition scholars must consider that “it is our responsibility to bridge gaps between these circulating rhetorics of computing culture, including technological labor, as male, and the material conditions of women that impact their relationships to technology, even within our own digital writing environments” (Home page, para. 3). I accept this responsibility by drawing together the stories with technology that my participants and I have for this dissertation. Beck, Blair, and Grohowski called for more attention to how our technologies implicate women’s bodies in real, material ways, and explicitly because of our gender. To that, I add the focus on the implications on race and ethnicity as well. Indigneous and Chicana embody these implications and exhibit them through social media sharing practices that unearth complex power structures that marginalize our cultural practices.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth’s description of engaging critically in her social media spaces builds off of much of the information shared in the previous chapters. While listening to the things she said during the talking circle and our separate interview, I was able to learn so much about her unique perspectives on privacy, online safety, and social justice. As she told me about how she normally tends to be an open book in social media platforms, she does consider the costs of that:

But then I worry, I’m like, “Huh, am I invading my child’s privacy?” I’m worried about that. But I don’t say what [disability] they have. I just say they’re a special

needs child, but I don't go into specifics in terms of they have this problem and they have this problem. I think it's more general and I do post a lot of videos and things to make people aware of kids with special needs or people with disabilities. So, yea, it's not a thing that makes me uncomfortable; it's not an uncomfortable experiences. I just worry about it for my child's future, but I also want to make people aware. And I think people become more aware when they know somebody that is going through something like that. Like they know this person: "I know her child has these problems." So you can connect to those issues a little more. So yea, that's the only time I'll post pictures of my child.

Elizabeth outlined the critical thinking processes she undergoes every time she considers sharing about her child with special needs. She questions how much information is just enough to build community and enact solidarity without putting her child at risk through exposure and her own platforming.

However, Elizabeth wasn't always so cautious about sharing information about her child. She continued, "I posted more when I was younger. I had my child when I was young. *laughs* So I did post more when I was younger. I think now I've become a little more aware of all these things." The things Elizabeth became more aware of are the frequency in which she shares pictures of her child and how much information about them she posts publicly and privately. She tends to share more during events like birthdays and parties. Her husband, though, does not have an equal tendency:

My husband will post a little more, but I made sure that I changed his privacy settings. *laughs* So that it's just friends only. Like we're married. I know a little about that part of things, so I made sure I went in and changed all the settings for the old pictures and stuff. Luckily, he doesn't post a lot of those things, so it was easy to go through everything and change those settings. And I just make sure that we don't post where our child goes to school, maybe people that know me know they're in the school district they're in cause where I live and it's a small town. There's only so many elementary schools. So, yea, I'm just careful about stuff like that.

Elizabeth conveyed here an important facet of critical digital literacies with regard to Chicana and Indigneous women: that we, as women, are often charged with the

responsibilities of online safety when it comes to our families and children. Our roles as caretakers and the cultural dynamics within our family systems both can place the responsibility of critical digital literacy acquisition on us. And, because we are further marginalized in society by being women, that marginalization puts us at greater risk when we become visible (something Janelle's stories will discuss).

Since Indigenous and Chicana women serve as the critical digital literacy "specialists" of our families, we attend to all moments when we may learn from one another. We also incorporate considerations for other women and the privacy preferences they may have for their family. In our one-on-one interview, Elizabeth mentioned that she had realized something based on what I had shared about my scary social media experiences. I had asked her if any of her social media practices had changed since the talking circle, and she responded,

It was just interesting to hear other moms' perspective on the use of social media. Like you talked a lot about your kids and how you don't want any pictures of them. So then yesterday, I was like normally, I'd be like, "Party!" but I didn't post anything yesterday because I know that Les doesn't post anything of her kids up there on social media, so I'm just not going to do it. And so that's normally something that normally I would do without thinking and this time I didn't because I remembered our conversation.

This reflection that Elizabeth shared with me informed me tremendously about how much we can teach one another about critical digital literacies through just sharing our experiences of one another. She talks about taking time to consider posting on social media after a party we were at together with our families because she remembered me mentioning during the talking circle that I do not post pictures of my kids on Facebook and Twitter. Though I had never asked her to make these considerations or to change her behaviors, her sense of solidarity and community accommodated for my own

preferences when engaging in her social media sharing practices. Not only do we apply this act of critical imagination to our own partners and children, but our cultural notions of community extend to our hermandad as well.

I say *our* hermandad, but as Elizabeth intimated throughout the conversations I had with her, she extends her form of critical imagination to everyone in all of her communities. She takes care to reflect on how others might interpret what she says based on their own positionalities and experiences before she prepares to share anything online. Following the story she had told me about watching the video of the Black man rapping about racial inequality and deciding not to repost that video due to her white friends' feelings, Elizabeth explained a little more about her thinking. She first reflected on how she comes across people acting out in the world from a place of white privilege and racism, then she said,

And so those are the types of people I find really annoying. But I was like, "A lot of people are like that, but not everybody is like that." And so that's why I monitor, I guess, what I use because the people that I do talk to, I personally don't feel that they are like that. And so that's why I was like, "Oh, I don't want to offend them if I posted."

Elizabeth described recognizing a difference between white people who express forms of racism as more than a part of personality and those, in her inner circle, who work hard to address their white privilege and fragility.

She carefully considers all her online actions in ways that will be sure to support her friends' acquisition of racial literacies as a sign of her own critical digital literacies. For instance, she followed up later that, "Like I said, I just post things to make people become more aware. I don't, especially for disability stuff, I don't think I'm in a position to go out and do active stuff yet because I'm still learning." In other words, Elizabeth

sees her social media use as sites of activism since she's not able to go out and protest due to the consuming obligations she has as a mother and academic.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth did ruminate on the specific people who would be most impacted by things she chooses to share. She described seeing interactions online regarding taking time to educate white people about racism issues that caused her concern. She qualified

But I do notice that with other people of color they put down white people for trying to do that, and that bothers me because I'm like, "People are really putting in effort." And I do know. My advisor, she's white and she's very dedicated to social justice and she's good if people tell her. One of her best friends is an African American professor at another institution and my advisor is pretty open if people tell her like, "Oh no, you can't do that." If you ever meet her, she's a really cool person. She's one of the people that I interact with and she's open to criticism and she's the type of person I admire. But she's also different than most other people. I saw other professors or other people that do try to become more aware and be more considerate about race and how to talk to people and I don't know if censor would be the right...maybe censor, but how to use the appropriate terms to use when talking about race or gender or sexual orientation and all those things. I think if people are genuinely trying to put in an effort, then we shouldn't hate them for it.

Elizabeth's reflection highlights the way she looks to her mentor and other more senior scholars around her as models for how to interact and educate other folks about racism, as well as what it means to respond with self-reflection when someone is kind enough to call one out on hurtful language or behaviors. Junior scholars do not just learn how to do academic scholarship from other scholars in online spaces, we are also learning how *to be* academics—colleagues. Elizabeth's story teaches us that acquiring critical digital literacies mean acquiring critical life skills.

Janelle

Much of Janelle's acquiring of critical digital literacies began with her understanding of the sacredness of certain cultural practices within her Indigenous

communities where it's not appropriate to share specific facets of ceremony outside of the space in which it is being practiced. Some of these sacred ceremonies include dancing at powwows in regalia, participating in lodge, and other practices like singing and drumming. I share in a lot of Janelle's views in this regard, and we talked briefly about these things during the talking circle. She started explaining that she'll take pictures of her children in their regalia near the parking lot before going into the powwow as one instance. But then she shared another instance:

I don't ever post photos of myself singing because, to me, that's a ceremonial moment. But it will happen to me when I'm a part of Anishinaabe women and other Indigneous women here. That's happened here too and people just think it's like a performance, so they're treating it like a performance, and they're taking photos and they're posting them up, and I've even had other singers want photos of themselves all singing and posting it up online. And I'm not comfortable with it, but I have come to accept that. And I will tend to untag myself. Just because I think that, protocol-wise, that's ceremony, so you wouldn't necessarily share it in that way.

This instance highlights a moment in which people in attendance of a sacred ceremony did not hold the same views about capturing that moment and what happens during such dissonance. For Janelle, she has had to learn quickly how to navigate situations such as this based on her comfort and privacy preferences.

In order to learn how to change how these situations impact her sense of comfort, Janelle learned to articulate clearly her own boundaries. She shared with us a little more of this story:

So I went from having a circle of women where we'd meet very quietly in my house and nobody knew what we were doing to "We're going to throw you up on stage and there's going to be video and photos and who all knows what else." And I was like, "Okay, this is really intense." And that was a really interesting experience. And here I noticed since I've been in Michigan, people have wanted to do that, and then, if I have any control over the situation, I will tell someone to tell other people during the event: no photos, no video. So I have some kind of sense that I'll be protected. But you have no idea because you're in front of a

whole group of people. You have no idea what they're going to tag or how the photos going to look or any of that. It's just a mess.

Janelle retells how she has come to learn how to communicate her own privacy preferences when she came to Michigan and became involved in social events where her identity and participation was made more public. Having to acquire critical digital literacies, in this case, means learning how to navigate physical spaces where others' sharing practices remain dissimilar from her own.

Her own privacy preferences, though, have tended to stay the same with regard to her children. Due to her identity as a mother, she assesses the safety of each space and determines what she shares to each platform based on who follows or is her friend on there. She clarified.

I don't post a lot of the kids, but that's mostly because of safety concerns primarily. I never post my children's names on Twitter. There's a huge separation for me between what I'm willing to share on Twitter where I know that anyone can see it potentially and then what I can post on Facebook set to friends only. I'll be way more open there. And then on Instagram. My Instagram is private. And then only people I know. And I don't have as many people on there like at all. Most of the people I have on Instagram I know more closely. I am trying to watch that because I feel like it does start to get out of hand. And then I lose "how do I use this particular space?" because I do want to share photos of the kids with family.

By negotiating and assessing each space for the vulnerable position they put her and her family in, Janelle is best able to ensure online safety for all of them. She had shared with us some information about having to be extra cautious due to previous experiences of relationship violence that I will not share in detail here. What she learned is that she and the kids can be tagged in photos that also provide location information publicly. It is for these reasons that she has to be careful about which space she shares what. She added that "A lot of people aren't necessarily going to be aware of other people's needs

and there's such an openness to posting that has been a huge concern." Janelle has *had* to learn how to communicate her privacy boundaries and assert strict regulations on certain social media platforms because of the risks that come in not doing so.

Like me, Janelle has also learned about what we both have come to call "the swarm" of bots and harassment on Twitter. The swarm has a tendency to come after a person when they post something particularly political, usually something very challenging to dominant ideologies. While I won't go into the specifics of what happened to her for her own safety, I will recount part of what she shared with us during the talking circle. She said,

And so then I realized that Twitter is not a safe space to just be saying whatever. And especially if I was to say something, like, I'm not comfortable with this situation or whatever. Anyone could screenshot that and use that in an article. And that's eventually the kind of situation that started happening after that...That was a weird situation where it got misused. And then anyone can do that with anything you got. And that was when privacy actually hit me.

Janelle's reflection on experiencing the swarm on Twitter shows how any simple utterance, if deemed controversial or offensive by those who embody dominant power, will employ tactics in which to exploit what we say for their own gain. Such actions can lead to doxing, death threats, or more physical violence, and are absolutely terrifying to experience. Janelle showed us that we have to learn how to leverage our identities when we get thrown in the swarm. She summed up her reflection by recognizing the importance of the kind of work that I do, which is to provide folks with strategies to combat online oppression.

Janelle felt compelled to share her experiences not necessarily because it would help boost my project, but because, at the very core of this project, was to encourage one another to gain better critical digital literacies skills through the sharing of our

stories. During our individual interview, she mentioned to me that she thought our talking circle was “an important bonding experience for us, but not necessarily important outside of the circle.” She continued by questioning how we could use this dissertation to help others learn to be more cautious and protective. She asked,

And so how do you prevent people who are just learning from having to have a crisis or a traumatic experience that would then position them in a way that they would understand and “Oh, oh, this is really how it is, you know?”

It struck me that she understood that it can take experiencing something horrific to realize that critical digital literacies are an essential need when existing as a woman of color online. She rallied,

It’s not fair that we should have to make that choice. It’s not fair that we should have to be like, “Oh, no, we’re not going to step out because everyone should be able to step out. And why is it that speaking our truth, then, automatically is contextualized as risk?”

Janelle relayed her frustration that we have to choose whether we speak up on a topic or stay silent in order to ensure that we are safe. But with silence and safety comes no change.

In response to her frustrations, Janelle then offered some strategies for me to pass along in the name of this project. She suggested that folks worried about their online safety can consider the following things as suggestions and behaviors to adopt when choosing to speak up or not. Here’s her first one:

Not to use hashtags. Because hashtags are an invite to people finding you, and drawing the attention. And so I can just say a thing, and I’m not going to get very many likes on it. But the people who are in the battle can see that I support them. Like I did a tweet with no hashtags. There’s another woman I know—another woman of color—she’s a Native actress and she’s in a heated battle with Kaya Jones because she’s also of her league. So these people who are equivalencies to her. It’s almost like we can start to figure out whose battle this is? And this is not my battle, but I can tweet something without hashtags in it, and then, the actress is retweeting me, but it’s only going to her audience. And what I say is

only going to go to my audience and people who are supportive of this Jones person are not going to find it.

Janelle understands that hashtags help bring on the swarm through their ability to place us in higher visibility and optics of the dominant gaze. To resist the swarm and increase our safety, she suggests limiting hashtag use. We can best understand when to limit such use by assessing to whom the battle belongs. If the combatants are of high profile, it is helpful to let other high profile folks interject and fight on our behalf.

We can still enact solidarity within our communities by speaking up in less visible ways, but also maintain our safety when the battle becomes too much. She went on,

So this is me being like, “I support you.” And I said my thing. You know? And I’ve also noticed another diversion tactic if you don’t care about the likes, but if you feel the need to express yourself, you do it early in the morning, especially if you’re in East Coast time. Because if you don’t do it when less people are in those blocks of time where they’re looking, you know, and you follow the waves of activity.

Expressions of solidarity, when it concerns rupturing dominant politics, can still be enacted by carefully considering *when* to post. Some times gain more visibility as others, like Janelle detailed. These two tactics that she offered encourage us to question what garners the most attention because attention stirs the swarm. Once we frame tactics through the lens of attention, multiple opportunities exist where we can still engage in community and solidarity actions while continuing to retain our safety.

Francisca

Francisca did not share as much on this topic of privacy as Janelle, but what she did share conveyed some very crucial information that contextualizes the risks she faces as a woman of color and a professional in academia. While her perceptions and feelings might not be universal, she captured an essential experience that many of us

do think about when we post online, especially in moments when our roles in our professional lives shift or change in ways that open up our online communities. I will be quoting her at length for the whole of this sub-section. First, Francisca described the process of her own professional life shifting and how that impacted her awareness of what she shares in her online spaces:

While I was still in undergrad, I was still very unaware of privacy issues...but then, I think, it started this academic year when white undergraduate students started adding me on social media that I started to think a little bit more like, "Wait, am I comfortable with these people, this specific group of people, knowing about this specific challenge that I'm going through? How are they going to perceive me? So because previously to that I didn't have to worry about that. The people that were in my social media, they knew me, they were close people to me that knew what I was going through...But when [my friends] became these other people who I don't necessarily want them to see my vulnerabilities or certain things that I'm going through because I want them to see me in a specific way, right? I don't want them to see other things I'm going through. And so I feel like now, I am, to a certain extent, more careful about what I decide to share. But I noticed it was because specifically white undergrads that added me and I could have just blocked them, but because I work with them, it would be really awkward. Because if it was just students I would never see again, I'd be like whatever, but because it's students that I work with, that makes it why I don't post that much anymore. I'll post every once in a while.

Francisca explained how the pressure to be perceived a certain way, as a woman of color in a position of relative power could greatly influence the presentation of ourselves within social media platforms. In her case, she even goes so far as to self-censor in order to control how the white undergrads she works with sees her. Francisca's view differs from Elizabeth's in very crucial respects because her relationship with the white folks who have access to her online spaces are more top-down than peer level. She's not worrying about building solidarity with other mothers, but must upkeep appearances that only a woman of color in a professional capacity can understand.

She then articulated her understanding of the need to control one's social media spaces:

I understand why people might have multiple Facebooks. Like a more public one where you're more professional and then another one where you might have super close friends. But I feel like, also, that's a lot more labor that you don't necessarily want to put into your social media. Then trying to remember, right, who is the audience of this Facebook; who's the audience of this other Facebook?

Francisca discussed a whole complex experience that so many of us can sympathize with. Though one can create separate social media accounts to accommodate for our myriad identities and box them off, she recognized the additional labor that such an effort would require. We all talked, together after the recorded portion of the talking circle, that a tactic like this offloads labor onto already over-worked women of color who have to accommodate extra service just to provide representation and support for women of color coming up through the ranks. Ain't nobody got time for that.

So, instead of creating multiple accounts, Francisca talked about some things she does to better present herself. Much of what she shared has to do with self-censorship, yet she also takes another rhetorical approach. Francisca continued,

But I do feel like now I'm a little more thoughtful of what I am deciding to post and making sure that I'm not just talking about race all the time or discrimination all the time cause, again, I don't want others to perceive me as "She's vulnerable through all these other things.

Francisca might not always choose to stay silent or censor what she says. Instead, she will, like Elizabeth and Janelle, take time to think carefully and critically about how much she shares about racism and oppression in order to pad the times that she does speak up about these issues.

Lastly, when we met for our one-on-one interview, I asked Francisca the same question I asked the other two women about what, if anything, did they change or think about post talking circle. Francisca responded that she did change a significant approach to her social media after we all shared our stories together. She offered,

I made my Instagram private because before it was public. And I started to think more about it like, “Huh, maybe...” Because at first I was like, “Well, I’m just sharing about me and my family. There’s nothing wrong, right?” And it’s not that there’s anything wrong, but I became more critical: “Well, who do I want to share this with?” And specifically talking about now that I’m in this different position. And I do really want undergrads, certain types of seeing what I’m posting. Seeing that personal. And I think before I had never really thought about it just because I wasn’t in that position. You know, so in undergrad I feel like, who cares, they’d just be my peers, but now I feel the need at least some level of respect from certain people. I feel like I might not receive it or if people get to know really personal things about me. And with that said, I haven’t posted on Instagram since then. And I think it’s because I don’t have time or I’m really particular about what I want to share on my Instagram story.

Francisca admitted that the stories we shared during the talking circle encouraged her to reconsider making her Instagram public-facing. She also confirmed that hearing our stories about being doxed and harassed showed her why being critical of what she shares is a necessary tactic—not because she’s facing immediate danger by how she uses social media, but *because* using social media means consistent rhetorical negotiation and audience awareness. No longer is she, like the rest of us, able to blithely post with freedom. We are all accountable to the things we say online, and women of color have our own unique, marginalized expectations placed upon us.

Conclusion

A good mother grows into a richly eutrophic old woman, knowing that her work doesn’t end until she creates a home where all of life’s beings can flourish. There are grandchildren to nurture, and frog children, nestlings, goslings, seedlings, and spores, and I still want to be a good mother. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

Listening to stories about how Indigenous and Chicana women use the Internet and understanding them through the lens of critical digital literacies helps all of us realize how our online identities directly reflect our experiences. We have a lot to gain in learning from the stories shared in this chapter about why it's important to be more critical and active with our online identities. The reasons why we need to take up strategies for critically engaging online depend on how at risk we are and who has access to our online profiles. Nevertheless, the responsibility and need for safety are an ever-present concern. As I conclude this chapter, I want to quickly go over what the challenges Indigenous and Chicana face in social media platforms mean for our livelihood and why.

Indigenous and Chicana women, like I showed earlier in this chapter, cannot remove their culture and racial identity from who they are even in online spaces. While some may “pass” as white people (myself included), we are still very much *who* we are when we are online. Kristin Arola (2012) has spent much of her career studying just this and explicated in her chapter “It’s My Revolution: Learning to See the Mixedblood” that mixedblood, Indigenous people will adopt regalia throughout their online presentations of themselves. She argued that

Regalia is not something one simply dons atop the self for the sake of play or trivial performance; instead, regalia is an intimate expression of an ongoing process. Seeing online identities not as bracketed costume but instead as material expression encourages an examination of online identities as part of the complex ecology of meaning and not merely an isolated snapshot of performance. (p. 214)

Arola’s connection to online embodiment of regalia and mixedblood identity justifies the truth that our culture comes across in every choice we make in presenting ourselves

within social media. She summarized, “To understand online identity as regalia is to understand it as an embodied visible act that evolves and changes, and that represents one’s history, one’s community, and one’s self within that particular moment” (p. 218). Arola’s argument of regalia as an irrevocable, integral part of Indigenous identity accounts for the cultural approach Indigenous women undertake as they adjust their online identities according to space and kairos.

In addition to Arola’s argument about regalia, I want to turn to another essential perspective from Indigenous Rhetoric and Composition scholar Angela Haas. I cited Haas’s “Wampum as Hypertext” in a previous chapter, but there’s more to her research that applies. I should also note that in her research on Navajo women contributing to United States computing history, Lisa Nakamura referenced Haas’s article briefly. Nakamura missed an opportunity to look more closely at the meaning within Haas’s work. To amend that lost opportunity, I want to bring together Haas’s understanding of wampum being representative of Indigenous hypertextual use with Arola’s view that Indigenous people don regalia when they compose online. Haas evaluated that

To begin, both Western and wampum hypertexts employ digital rhetoric to communicate their nonlinear information. To explain, “digital” refers to our fingers, our digits, one of the primary ways (along with our ears and eyes) through which we make sense of the world and with which we write into the world. All writing is digital—*digitalis* in Latin, which typically denotes “of or relating to the fingers or toes” or a “coding of information.” (p. 84)

Similar to regalia, wampum operates as digital rhetoric. Wampum, according to Haas, is a digital rhetoric text that is created *literally* by hand.

Haas focused on the hand-crafting of wampum as a vital component of its rhetorical composition. She declared that it is interactiveness that makes wampum a digital hypertext: “With wampum hypertexts interactiveness is achieved both between

and across the content and media types and between the ‘designers’ and ‘presenters’ of wampum, the audience for the wampum hypertext and the material rhetoric itself” (p. 90). Wampum serves as a location for communication via the content that is created within it. As a rhetoric, wampum enables the translation of meaning from one people to another. “Thus the act of speaking into the wampum presents meaning to the material object itself and impresses the experience into the individual’s mind, not to mention for any onlookers as well” (Haas, p. 91). In this way, the interactiveness of wampum’s hypertextuality demands the enlistment of a participatory engagement with it in order to facilitate communication between communities or persons.

In the conclusion of her article, Haas recommended that we “be critical of the stories we tell ourselves about being ‘technologically advanced’” and whose definition we use when defining such things. She ended her article with a

call that we resist the dominant notions of what it means to be technologically “literate” or “advanced” (with roots in manifest destiny) and that we critically reflect on struggles for and engage with discussions about digital and visual rhetorical sovereignty, or the inherent right for indigenous communities to claim and shape their own communication needs (as well as the rhetoric of their identities) in digital and visual spaces. (p. 95-6)

Haas’s “we” in this conclusion stands for rhetoric scholars who speak into the conversation on digital literacies. Her call asks of us to be *critical* of the definition of digital literacies that we hold. She pushes us past our colonial history of considering technological advancement as connected solely to Western engineering and computers. Rather, she brilliantly illustrated that, should we go beyond our limitations of digital literacy conception, we can make space for Indigenous communities to define what digital literacy means. The women and I not only assert our rhetorical sovereignty every time we compose ourselves in our online spaces as technologically advanced women of

color, we retain the right to define in what ways our identities should be read. It's time to listen to us and consider what of us lies beyond the scattered pieces of what we show publicly. We are so much more than what is seen.

CONCLUSION

The moral covenant of reciprocity calls us to honor our responsibilities for all we have been given, for all that we have taken. It's our turn now, long overdue. Let us hold a giveaway for Mother Earth, spread our blankets out for her and pile them high with gifts of our own making. Imagine the books, the paintings, the poems, the clever machines, the compassionate acts, the transcendent ideas, the perfect tools. The fierce defense of all that has been given. Gifts of mind, hands, heart, voice, and vision all offered up on behalf of the earth. Whatever our gift, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world. In return for the privilege of breath. – Robin Wall Kimmerer

There's a story that I know that I cannot tell. This story is an origin story of the maple sap that lives in maple trees—the magical blood below the bark. This story can only be told during sugarbush when we gather to toil for the liquid. While I cannot share this story because it is not mine to tell, I will share a story about how I learned this story.

We tell the origin of maple syrup in late March/early April when the sap flows through maple trees after freezing through the winter. The sap runs like a life-force into tin buckets connected to the trees through hammered punctures. There everyone will sit, 'round the fire that boils the sap into syrup. We gather together near the fire and tell stories, laugh, cry, complain about racism and oppression. This year, there were many of us gathered in the shack to boil syrup. One friend is studying for her bar exam. Another has this friend's textbook on her lap and is calling out random questions from the text for the other to answer on the spot. We all try to guess answers and fail miserably. My closest friend sits quietly in the corner. He's composing an email he'll never send. In this email, he writes pages about an institutional lack of response to our continued erasure and racial oppression. I sit next to him and carefully go over every word to make sure it's as soft and as kind as possible. We need the white folks to *hear* us. Every so often, we all will take turns to stir the boiling liquid and check to see if that

current batch is finished. The air in the room sits heavy, damp, and with a tinge of an earthen musk.

One friend asks us if we want to hear the origin story about how Ojibwe and Anishinaabe peoples learned the truth about sap. We all agree enthusiastically, welcoming the break from the things we were doing. She stands up and we circle our chairs around her. She clears her voice and tells what was told to her, passed down from a friend who learned this story from their ancestors over centuries and centuries. The story, like most Indigenous stories, has a layer of comedy—a welcome respite to temporarily put down the pain and poverty we all carry every single day.

The origin story of maple sap is the story I cannot share with you. Like I said, it's not mine to tell; it's not sugarbush time and you have not been in that shack with us to hear this story with your whole being and understand its purpose. Maybe you know this story already and I don't need to tell you. If so, you know the laughter we all shared for a good long time in that dank room in the middle of the forest. You have an *in* in this Indigenous inside joke. In all likelihood, you probably don't know this story. So so many Indigenous stories exist in the realm of what we don't know—many because those who knew them were murdered and silenced before they could pass them on. Others exist in our Native tongues that settlers English'd out of our speakable memory. And a good many others are simply not for everyone. That's the thing with stories—we cannot know them all. And, yet, every single story we tell is a sacred act of rhetorical meaning-making of our world.

In Summary

Throughout my time in WRAC's PhD program, faculty and colleagues reminded me to always be sure to explain how my work fits in the discipline and why. Such an explanation, of course, is disciplinary standard. And, like many graduate students, I struggled with coming up with this explanation—such can be the reality for many of us folks who do work outside clearly marked scholarly fields. I found the best way to find a place for me was through story. Storytelling, for me, comes natural. Whenever I think of stories, I think about my mother. Though our relationship remains tumultuous, her memory is home; stories are our blood. This PhD program helped me find my way to write scholarship as story—this dissertation culminating all I have learned.

Rhetoric and Composition scholars can draw from the stories in this dissertation that Indigenous and Chicana women go online, sharing some of the most vulnerable and sacred parts of their lives, in order to enact solidarity and build community among one another. Unfortunately, through our experiences in these online spaces, we must acquire critical digital literacies in order to protect ourselves and our children. Our online spaces often fail to acknowledge the harms their infrastructure and designs enable. We—women of color—operate in these spaces gaining an ever-evolving knowledge that requires us to alter how we engage in these spaces to increase our safety as new threats emerge. If the spaces were more protective of their most marginalized users, we would not need to acquire these critical digital literacies in the first place.

The two sub-sections that follow will detail two big takeaways from this dissertation. I connect some of the arguments I make to scholarly literature as a form of summary and noting of place, but the larger intellectual work on these two topics will be

inquiry I develop further. As I conclude this dissertation, I have realized how crucial these stories are for everyone's understanding of the Internet and of Indigenous and Chicanx culture. My community has been nothing but supportive of this work, and I am happy to report that so has the discipline. Right now, I am fielding two requests from book publishers. I also see each chapter as befitting journal articles for *Constellations*, *College Composition & Communication*, *Computers & Composition*, and *Kairos*. With five new course preps finding me this first year on the tenure track, I will take some time to consider how I will approach publishing this work. Regardless of what I choose, I know this scholarship matters and I honor the importance of our voices here.

Online Sovereignty

Indigenous epistemologies see story as ontological sovereignty and agency. Too, Indigenous peoples tend to place value on our epistemologies communally. We make meaning together; our rhetorics are never in isolation. Our rhetorics are always already cultural and relational. Lisa King (2015) constellated the definitions of sovereignty as having “an inheritance from European, Euro-American, and Native nations” with the purpose of reversing the ongoing imposition of colonialism (p. 20). With this history, King noted that any new articulation of sovereignty would both nod to these inheritances while also creating new meaning upon the use of the word. As it is here.

Leaning on Lyons's definition of *rhetorical sovereignty*, King went on to define that

Rhetorical sovereignty directly addresses the language, rhetoric, and representations concerning Native peoples and wishes to place more of the control over that language and rhetoric—and therefore control over the representation and the images derived from them, and therefore the policy and action derived from those—in Native nations' hands. (p. 26)

King's definition of sovereignty supports a research practice I adopted throughout this dissertation: purposeful silence. While I share a good amount of the information and stories from this dissertation's participant-collaborators, there was a good amount of details that were not appropriate to share with others. Together, Elizabeth, Francisca, Janelle, and I discussed what would not go beyond our talking circle. The talking circle became a sacred, private space where we collectively determined what information would go beyond us.

I struggled with writing *around* these sacred secrets, but found much intrigue in contemplating the power of holding such information close. Indigenous communities often function in this way: keeping the sacred private and sharing what benefits all. The truth about stories is that they're not meant for everyone. And so, with the story I started this conclusion chapter with about sugarbush, the story can be a story told *around* another story. Turtles all the way down.

Choosing what to share and what to keep among our talking circle actualizes rhetorical sovereignty, and it reflects on the behaviors Indigenous and Chicana undertake within social media platforms as well. Rhetorical sovereignty for Indigenous peoples complicates and contributes to contemporary conversations regarding intellectual property. As Michael F. Brown determined, "The hybrid nature of indigenous cultural life today argues against rigorous separation of indigenous knowledge from the public domain of global society" (p. 248). And while that remains true because so many Indigenous people carry different beliefs about what is sacred for them personally, communally, tribally and inter-tribally; rhetorical sovereignty justifies that we must have more conversations about how, what, and why we share the information we do online.

Brown also said that “It is their right, as well as their responsibility to defend the dignity of their communities in public forums” (p. 249). In this way, *online sovereignty* means collectively adapting our understanding of what information we put online remains sacred and private and what is open to the public—together.

Cultural Accessibility

I remain hopeful that this dissertation can beget many conversations about online sovereignty. However, I also want to call upon technological designers for their accountability in building Internet infrastructure that determines the scope of our online sovereignty, thus negating sovereignty as we define it. Because the needs of Indigenous and Chicana women remain very specific and rooted in our traditional cultural practices, we use our online spaces for at least four different practices: culture, representation, support, and decolonial resistance. Together, these four online practices determine our survivance. Internet architects must consider how to better account for these practices as they design online platforms.

Technical communication, as a field, has begun to shift its investment heavily toward considerations of equity and access. In their article “Bridging analysis and action” in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, Petersen and Walton (2018) traced the emerging social justice turn in the field. Looking historically at the field, they found that feminist scholarship has largely remained marginalized within the field, but, in fitting with the social justice turn, expands technical communication scholarship beyond analysis toward action. They credited the growth of scholars recognizing the myth of neutrality and emphasizing, instead, the intellectual depth in research that interrogates positionality.

Taking up positionality, Petersen and Walton argued that feminist research within technical and professional communication contributes not only important, but necessary conversations that expand our perspectives about research in the field. Additionally, they positioned that the field should focus its attention on other forms of social inequalities. They purported, “Social justice scholars must prioritize the recovery of contributions of other underrepresented groups in order to influence what is legitimized and direct our attention to new sources of knowledge” (Petersen & Walton, 2018, p. 422).

Tracing the social justice turn in the field of technical communication as well, Haas and Eble (2018) realized that the turn toward social justice correlated to globalization within technical communication industries. They presented their edited collection as a response to the consistent lack of addressing social injustice within the field and the design and use of technologies that has always determined who has access and who is seen (and why) within technological infrastructures. They established that the social justice turn in technical communication *must* make a “turn toward a collective disciplinary redressing of social injustice sponsored by rhetorics and practices that infringe upon, neglect, withhold, and/or abolish human, non-human animal, and environmental rights” (p. 5). In other words, Haas and Eble call for a redress of colonialism’s impact on technology.

I heeded Haas and Eble’s call with this dissertation project by creating an ethical, responsible, respectful, and reciprocal research relationship with my participant-collaborators. Throughout data collection, our methodological design enabled us to value one another as we shared very personal stories about our social media use. We

made this dissertation together. And, together, the four of us show the discipline that Indigenous and Chicana women are always-already critically digitally literate. We started going online to connect and build community in order to enact solidarity with other women in our shared fight against oppression. Our negotiation of critical digital literacies are *always embodied*. We experience social media use as material, affective, and real—and our interactions in these digital spaces are never separated from the lives we lead. We experience racism, sexism, and ableism online and offline—and just as we may change our behaviors in specific in-person situations, we will do the same online.

Internet architects and social media platform designers can look closely at the measures we take to create new user experiences that support the online safety of women of color. As Sun argues in *Cross-Cultural Technology Design*,

One thing that tends to be forgotten by the design community is that a usable technology does not equal a meaningful technology for local users. And when users cannot relate to a technology, they will not use it. To make a usable technology relate to individual users with diverse cultural backgrounds, designers need to help users to *consummate* their experiences into culturally localized user experiences. (p. 261)

Meaningful technologies require the integration of online sovereignty through every stage of the design process. I refer to the integration of online sovereignty not only through the lens of usability, but what I see as *cultural accessibility*.

Cultural accessibility, as I've come to define it through my dissertation research, is an implementation of multi-faceted design practices at the front end, back end, and in all platform policy documents that supports users from marginalized backgrounds and communities. Cultural accessibility must be constantly adaptive and seek to prevent users from experiencing social oppressions based on identity, culture, and life values.

Some ways cultural accessibility can be supported is through revision of Terms of Service and Privacy Policies that present more user-friendly, accessible language, platform design that has less invasive data collection (via tracking of location, platform use, storage time of data, and implementation of security features), the creation of communicative infrastructure that enables platforms to respond to harassment and online oppressions quickly and more effectively, and creating as well as maintaining private, safe spaces for users to go to build the communities where they can connect with one another on their own terms.

While much of these suggestions befit a more broad definition of accessibility, *cultural* accessibility means to include any design choices that affect the sovereignty of users from marginalized backgrounds, particularly those who live with the intersections of race and gender. In his summary of Sun's book, William Hart-Davidson (2013) remarked that the big takeaway from Sun's argument is the difference between usability and usefulness. He added that "Usability is a minimal requirement: necessary, but insufficient. Usefulness is a higher bar, and the one that users who have choices will demand" (p. 55). He went on to argue that even usefulness can become a minimal requirement when users choose an even higher bar of expecting technologies to be "compelling" (p. 55). Hart-Davidson assessed these determinations and found that users will choose technologies that recognize their expectations and value their needs. With respect to Indigenous and Chicana women, technologies will only meet our expectations and needs if they not only accommodate—but pointedly serve—our material, affective experiences in ways that keep us safe and allow us online sovereignty over the information we share. Such a technology would consistently

accommodate quick, supportive responses to threats of violence, racist attacks, doxing, government surveillance used in support of our continued genocide, and every other way we become vulnerable in social media platforms.

In Conclusion

I want to end this dissertation with a last story. After I composed this chapter, I made buttermilk blueberry pancakes for my children. We drizzled maple syrup we boiled ourselves during this spring's sugarbush on top of the pancakes. Then, I went outside in my new backyard in Boise, Idaho to sit under the shade of a sycamore maple tree. I wrote this conclusion while my black cat Shuri chased bugs in the grass. She wanted to catch the wasps that live in our shed, not knowing what pain such a thing would bring to her. I stopped typing to spend time tending to my small garden of pumpkin sprouts and wild mint. Bees danced around me; a den of mice peeped in request for a meal; birds brought small items to their nests in the eaves of my roof. My kitten continued to roam around in the grass nearby. We listened, intently, to the August earth and one another. I pulled the baby mint coming in too close to the pumpkins. I spent a few seconds in wonder that, though I'm allergic, the bees do not mess with me. Then I took my kitten inside to write this small paragraph, knowing that the meaning behind these words—the lesson learned in the experience—makes the writing of this dissertation a ceremony.

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