

## Community Positionality Statement

December 1, 2020

In this statement I plan to reflect on, detail, and convey my positionality relative to my research orientation, and relative to my community. To begin, I believe it is important to recognize that the nature of our position and orientation is fluid and constantly changing. My perspective before attending the University of Florida is considerably different from my current position, and I project that throughout the course of my life my belief systems will continue to change as my values and goals shift.

San Pedro and Kinloch argue that co-constructing knowledge, co-creating relationships, and exchanging stories are central to educational research. Rather than researching under the thin guise of objective truth, they instead seek towards centering relationships at the heart of research [1]. This is an attitude that I can identify with. From the earliest days of mankind, we have been sharing stories. These stories, dramatized encapsulations of our shared experience have guided us to communicate and form communities. While storytelling has been at the heart of our journey so far, San Pedro and Kinloch continue to emphasize the importance of such spaces today. “Within such spaces, humanizing relationships are significant to our research, and the stories we exchange serve as the medium through which knowledge is shared and relationships sustained.” [1].

When affixing one’s self towards a new research goal it is imperative to ask the intentions behind the research, as well as look towards the subsequent notions this research will provide. As a cis-gender, straight, white, male who grew up in a rural, white area of Florida the majority of my childhood was spent in a bubble surrounded by people who looked like me, talked like me, and acted like me. Learning about critical race theory, Native-American and African-American history outside of the context of my history classes in my 90% white high school was uncomfortable to say the least. However sometimes a level of discomfort is important for growth. Throughout my collegiate journey I have berated myself with questions regarding my position regarding the oppression of the marginalized communities within the United States of America. “Do I deserve this internship over someone more marginalized?”, “Should I apply to be this leader within a multicultural organization?”, “Is it hypocritical for a white man to be in charge?”, questions that keep me up at night, tossing and turning.

From my white, southern, Christian upbringing I intuitively found damage-based research pathological. I am someone who believes emphatically within the power of the individual. The powers at be in the world, the institutions and systems at play may seem overwhelming at glance, however, spending too much time hopelessly nihilistic thinking on a plane much larger than reality is a quick trip to self-paralysis in my experience. Eve Tuck defines damage-based research as “research that intends to document peoples’ pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression” [2]. While often being used to leverage resources

towards historically marginalized communities this framework pathologically describes a monolithic notion that the people of the communities are “depleted, ruined, and hopeless.” Tuck aims to replace such notions with researching under the pretense of a desire-based research framework. Such research concerns itself with “understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives.”. This is a framework that I see myself aligning with to the core. “Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities.” [2]. It is only through such a desire-based framework that the individual is highlighted for their own actions, enriched by the stories of the past and the desires of the future.

Throughout my time learning and working at the University of Florida I have had the chance to interact, research, and learn about communities within the larger Gainesville area and Florida as a whole. In my ultimate semester at the University of Florida I have had the opportunity to work with the [Rural Women’s Health Project](#) (RHWP) specifically on their [Family Separation in the Sunshine State](#) materials. In a joint effort it was decided that I would be working with RHWP to design social media slides that helped spread awareness and organized the community around the current administrations aggressive intent on separating families within Florida while driving a compelling economic and psychological argument for why it is within our communities best interest to keep these families together.

In conclusion I believe it is important to maintain relationships at the heart of our community. Allowing each member of our community to have the opportunity for their voice to be heard in research rather than picking and choosing those who align themselves to our own view is imperative to providing a future where everyone is being accounted for. I think it’s important to give these community members a platform, and while performing research to do so from a desire-based perspective, rather than that of a damage-based research framework.

## References

[1] T. San Pedro and V. Kinloch, "Toward Projects in Humanization: Research on Co-Creating and Sustaining Dialogic Relationships", *American Educational Research Journal*, April 2017, Vol. 54, No. 1S, pp. 373S–394S, DOI: 10.3102/0002831216671210

[2] E. Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities", State University of New York, New Paltz.