

1                   **Writing Studies Beliefs & Values as Expressed Through Research Methods Texts:**  
2                   **The Case for an Interdisciplinary Approach to Equitable Research Practices**

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7   **Abstract**

8   This article attempts to recognize and challenge privilege and Whiteness in academia by  
9   emphasizing that intersectionality should be integral to research practices and advocating for  
10   inclusive and socially aware research methods. A review of literature unveils the underlying  
11   assumptions and values on which research methods in writing studies are often tacitly based in  
12   order to align writing studies methods with broader efforts to decolonize academia and challenge  
13   dominant narratives. Through highlighting historical examples of biases in educational materials,  
14   the article calls for the integration of critical race theory and other social justice theories into  
15   research and teaching practices in order to promote equity and inclusivity in the field.

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17   **Keywords:** writing research methods, equity and inclusion, social justice, critical race theory  
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## 27 Introduction

28 As researchers, it is important to examine the assumptions we bring into our work and the  
29 privilege on which those assumptions are often based. Complicating these efforts is the fact that  
30 privilege is often invisible unless compared to the lack of privilege that so many minorities have  
31 to deal with on a daily basis. It is for this reason that Whiteness and the privilege attached to it  
32 must be examined. It is imperative as researchers to recognize our positions of privilege and  
33 strive for our work to be socially active and critical of the culture we inhabit. “The creation of an  
34 equal and open opportunity system with effective and positive social outcomes for all groups  
35 requires the disrupting and rupturing of the dominance of Whiteness and White racism...  
36 anything short of this goal will only serve the status quo” (Dei et al. 82). Academia works very  
37 traditionally in a lot of aspects and some of the established norms which we adhere to are relics  
38 that need to be examined and changed to reflect today's society and work toward a better future.

39 When we study people, how they learn, how they work, and how they create we cannot  
40 separate race, gender, sexual orientation, and other demographics from who we are because  
41 every aspect of our lives, including writing, is affected by these aspects of our identity. Race in  
42 particular cannot be ignored as it is an innate trait that shapes our lived experiences. Walton,  
43 Moore, and Jones state that “Cultural imperialism makes invisible the perspectives of oppressed  
44 groups, even while stereotyping them and rendering them Other” (58-59). This form of  
45 oppression is often “manifested through erasure” (21). The erasure of our experiences often  
46 serves to create policies and curriculum that do not benefit us and in some cases actively harm  
47 us. Historian Dr. Donald Yacovone, in an article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*,  
48 discussed how reviewing over fifty textbooks on American History composed for Texas K-12  
49 schools gave him insight into the ideologies they promoted. Yacovone argued that the ideologies

promoted in these textbooks shaped generations of Americans and can explain some of the racial and historical misconceptions that have led to societal tensions today (“Textbook Racism”).

Consequently, in recent years several states that have moved to ban topics like Critical Race Theory (CRT) and general topics like discrimination and oppression leading to protests both for and against these topics being taught in K-12 schools and higher education institutions (Ray & Gibbons). Given the complicated, and oftentimes politically influenced, state of higher education it is important to take a critical look at how we teach research methods and the tools (textbooks, journal articles, etc.) that we use to teach methods because they powerfully shape the ways in which we approach our research. Writing Studies in higher education may not be as fraught with political division as other content areas or grade levels, but much like Yacovone argued happened with history textbooks in Texas, what we read, how we teach, and the methods through which we study the field bear importantly on how we approach and understand the field.

For this reason, this essay makes the case to review the common texts used to teach research methods courses in order to illuminate the assumptions, beliefs, and values espoused by these methods. The goal of such a project would be to be able to identify what these research methods are teaching us about race, gender, sex, etc. so that we may better integrate and work with the various identities we carry with us and conduct research that is equitable and social justice oriented.

### **Research Methods and Disciplinary Identity**

The evolution of writing studies as a discipline is closely tied to the research methods that are prominently used in the field which are, in turn, tied to the sociocultural factors that help determine what types of research are valued. For example, as a move to legitimize writing

73 studies and as a response to the emphasis on scientific research, writing studies generally and  
74 composition specifically has moved toward a more structured approach to research both in the  
75 methods that are favored, like the emphasis on quantitative data, and in the way this research is  
76 presented, like the shift toward an IMRD (introduction, methods, results, discussion) format  
77 (Bazerman; Adler-Kassner & Wardle).

78         In Bazerman's *Handbook of Research on Writing: History, Society, School, Individual,*  
79 *Text*, a collection of essays that attempts to trace the development and study of writing globally,  
80 the chapters show how the discipline's methodological approaches have shifted in reaction to  
81 broader societal changes. Bazerman's handbook discusses how quantitative methods and  
82 statistical analysis have become favored over time in order to mirror how research is conducted  
83 in scientific fields (Bazerman). The shifting approach to research methods in Writing Studies is  
84 also touched upon in the edited collection, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of*  
85 *Writing Studies*. In the second threshold concept presented "Writing speaks to situations through  
86 recognizable forms," Neal Lerner argues that disciplines shape and are shaped by the writing  
87 done by its members, but the discipline is also shaped by the histories of the genres used by and  
88 in the field. As an example, Lerner, like Bazerman, points out the move toward the IMRD format  
89 of research writing that mimics the organizational scheme of scientific research processes (40-  
90 41).

91         Ultimately, the disciplines' struggle for legitimization means many researchers have  
92 favored methods that focus on certain values and groups of people while ignoring others  
93 (Bazerman; Phelps & Akerman). That's not to say that writing studies is the only field to do so,  
94 but it is an issue of particular concern for a field that is in constant flux, in part, because of the  
95 ever-present societal demand for more scientific approaches in the humanities. To this end,

prominent research in the field during the past decade has called for intersectionality, critical race theory, and decolonial practices to be integrated into research and teaching. For example, in *Beyond Inclusion: Rethinking rhetoric's historical narrative*, Chavez argues that rhetoric needs to be reimagined in a way that does not focus on western perspectives and ideologies. This is hard to do when the very institutions that we are a part of in our everyday lives themselves perpetuate western perspectives and ideologies. As Banks et al. suggests in *Re/Orienting Writing Studies: Queer Methods, Queer Projects*:

In the intersections of the humanities and social sciences, where we tend to locate writing studies, these well-worn paths [of research methods and methodology] provide institutional and disciplinary validity; they become recognizable paths of inquiry and methods of discovery, and in their recognizability, their visibility as systematic processes, we take refuge in having developed (or co-opted) frames of empirical inquiry that lend our work certain kinds of validity as research. (Banks et al. 4)

The identity of the discipline and the research methods used are inherently tied together because of the disciplines' (and higher educations', for that matter) history of constantly changing and adapting to meet the demands incurred through constant societal change.

In their article *Using Narratives to Foster Critical Thinking about Diversity and Social Justice*, Jones and Walton argue for using narratives in the classroom to promote critical thinking about social justice, race, inclusion, and other issues in order to widen the lens that we view the world in and challenge the status quo. They call for using historicity to help deconstruct the established narratives that are considered legitimate and acknowledge how they are subjective and often only account for the ideologies of those in power. "Focusing on historicity in narrative

is useful for two reasons: (1) it allows for a closer examination of the process of knowledge legitimization and (2) it encourages critical interrogation of dominant ideologies” (252). If, as PhD students and researchers in the field, we are to conduct research that speaks about the experiences of others then we must examine the kind of narrative we tell ourselves about those individuals and critically engage with the ideologies that help formulate our methodologies.

It is important to examine this occurrence so that it doesn’t continue to happen. So that the voices and issues of marginalized groups aren’t saved for “special projects” but are included in the studies conducted every day across the country in various universities and organizations. Walton, Moore, and Jones offer a framework for incorporating social justice work in the technical communication field. They make the argument that social justice needs to be a key component in the work of technical writing in order to address, reflect, and combat oppression that is often perpetuated or enforced through text. This is an important point because as technical communicators the results of our work can have unforeseen consequences that further marginalize or oppress already oppressed individuals because “intention doesn’t matter. Intention does not erase harm” (25).

Despite substantial growth in marginalized groups attending institutions of higher education, the tools used to assess writing have not kept up with these changes and continue to be developed and normed based on middle to upper class white males (Arellano). Further, using “theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have been normed on other groups... and fitting those models onto Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, claiming a ‘lack of fit’ for these marginalized groups or identifying an ‘achievement gap’” (2) perpetuates the narrative that white and male is the norm and the standard of ‘correct’ or ‘good’ writing to which everyone else should strive to achieve.

Alongside race there are a host of identities that are often othered or ignored both in writing studies research and society as a whole. To address the overlapping identities that affect both researcher and the research subject(s), I look to social justice theories of intersectionality for strategies to integrate critical race theory, queer theory, among others to account for our various identities where it intersects with writing and the study of writing. For example, in *Re/Orienting Writing Studies: Queer Methods, Queer projects*, Kuzawa builds off of Terese de Laurentis' work in order to argue that queer theory can provide a heuristic to understand the relationships and socio-cultural spaces not only as a theoretical lens but also as a mode of analysis (Banks et al.). Because, as Faber argues in the *Handbook of Research on Writing: History, Society, School, Individual, Text*, writing "constitutes and reflects social practices" (329). Therefore, how we study and teach writing can influence the customs of a society. As an example, Faber presents the history of the university education system of the United States and the UK and how they were both transformed by discourses of business and capitalism, thus forming a new capitalist structure of education in which educational processes are turned into a transaction in which knowledge is not valued as much as skills that would aid in the further exchange of goods and services (332). This commodification of education is a part of why the question of what kinds of research are valued and who are worthy subjects of attention is so important.

### **Current Research Conversations**

Our research practices create realities that can either contribute to social and economic inequality or seek to create a more inclusive and socially aware field and discipline. In a series of letters responding to each other, Green and Condon discuss their experiences with racism as well as their thoughts on how to promote students' use of their own language and fight for racial

equality. In a response to Green sharing a moment in which a White educator stated that students needed her permission in order to use their own English and code mesh in her classroom, Condon states that White academics “center themselves and what they see as their interests, needs, and “expertise” because their privilege allows it—demands it—instead of making it personal to those of us whose lives are at stake” (283). This is happening in the classroom and in research; White academics center their own needs, interests, and “expertise” first and this leaves marginalized groups excluded from the work. Condon and Green also make it clear that these moves are made by White researchers unconsciously, at best, but regardless of the intention the outcome is the same: Black, Latinx, Native, Asian and other students of marginalized groups pay the consequences of being left out of the conversation. Studies then don’t account for their specific struggles, needs, or interests. Green and Condon make a call to action and urge us all to become accomplices, not allies, making sure it is known that the difference is in the action and risk we must take in order to enact moves that position marginalized groups out of the darkness and into positions of power.

To this end, in 2019, Asao Inoue gave the keynote address at CCCC’s and consequently made many white academics very uncomfortable. That was exactly the point. Inoue states that in order to combat White language supremacy, we have to acknowledge the fact that it is inextricably tied to White supremacy and the disenfranchisement of black and brown bodies. As educators we teach our students to conform to Standard Academic English, but this is also actively harming our students. Furthermore, he makes sure to be clear that there’s a need to specifically callout White educators because “most in the room, in our disciplines, are White, I have to speak to them too, many of whom sit on their hands, with love in their hearts, but stillness in their bodies” (355). We need to critically reflect on the way we conduct research;



from forming a research question, developing survey questions, interview questions, deployment, and analysis, we need to ask ourselves if how we are engaging with the field and our research is inclusive. Inoue calls for us to be responsible researchers and educators as well as people.

In *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods* the goal is to evaluate how humanities scholars practice antiracism today. There are several key chapters in this edited collection that discuss how antiracism in the humanities has been mostly performative and lacks the support to garner true change. Locket et al. specifically reflect on the National Council of Teachers of English and their efforts toward antiracist practices stating that there are recent reports which express how “despite the inclusivity efforts of various groups who have offered suggestions for procedural changes via policy statements, protest letters, etc.... It is apparent from a review of the history that this making and providing recommendations has become cyclical, resulting in occasional and limited change” (10). This argument is one that has been made many times about composition studies. We need to only look back at Victor Villanueva’s “Maybe A Colony: And Still Another Critique of the Comp Community” from the seminal text *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, in which he offers a critique of the field by arguing that it is not as progressive as it claims to be, and in fact adheres to colonial and traditionalist values. Similarly, Douglas Hesse’s piece “Who owns Writing” asks who is in control of how writing is taught and to whom. As well as, Wallace Douglas’ “Rhetoric for the Meritocracy: The Creation of Composition at Harvard” discusses how composition was established in the post-Civil War America in order to create barriers for lower class students. To ignore the very reason for the founding of composition studies would be to ignore the classist, racist, and sexist underpinnings that exist, to this day, in writing research and writing instruction.

210           Additionally, in *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods* Ruiz's chapter, "Critiquing the  
211   Critical: The Politics of Race and Coloniality in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies  
212   (RCWS) Research Traditions," looks specifically at research methods in rhetoric and  
213   composition in order to make the point that "although certain rhetoric, composition, and writing  
214   studies (RCWS) methods claim to be "critical," when filtered through an epistemic act of  
215   decoloniality—epistemic disobedience—it becomes clear that current critical methods are  
216   embedded in traditions of Whiteness and Western oriented epistemologies" (39). If our methods  
217   and methodology are embedded with Whiteness and Western epistemologies then we must be  
218   able to recognize them in order to extract them from our practice and move toward more  
219   equitable frameworks. We must examine the texts that we use to teach research methods in order  
220   to help the field move toward antiracist, anti-white supremacist, epistemologies.

221           Because writing studies embraced methods and ideas from other fields, the capacity for  
222   research and learning is also expanding. The inclusion of historicity and hermeneutics allows for  
223   another look at historical texts and shifting the focus from a white, male, dominated narrative to  
224   one that includes voices that were once silenced or ignored. Counternarratives (Solorzano &  
225   Yosso) complement these approaches by promoting typically marginalized voices to the  
226   forefront and allowing the experiences of marginalized peoples to inform the history and  
227   development of the field. Alongside counternarratives, the inclusion of Critical Race Theory,  
228   Decolonial theory, and Social Justice theory allows for the examination of established texts and  
229   for a shift in how we talk about and view traditionally marginalized groups. The field's ability to  
230   grow and learn from other fields in this way is one of its biggest advantages when it comes to  
231   adaptability and development. This adaptability should allow for research that is innovative,  
232   equitable, and ultimately oriented toward social justice.

Future research in this regard should seek to review the methods found in commonly used writing research textbooks. A review of writing research methods texts would not only provide a history of the development of research methods within writing studies but also offer suggestions on ways we can integrate best practices from other fields in order to create more equitable research practices. A review of the texts used in research studies courses would also serve as a starting point from which we can determine the values and beliefs the field promotes through its research practices (and the teaching thereof). From there, social justice texts can serve to help develop ways in which to incorporate critical race theory, queer theory, and social justice methods into writing studies research and in doing so create a more equitable field and discipline for all.

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