

The Curriculum of the Jester

An Examination of *Hamilton, An American Musical*

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HAMILTON, AN AMERICAN MUSICAL (Miranda, 2015) continues to be a critical and economic success (Passy, 2019). Along with a profitable Broadway run, the musical's reach includes a residency in Chicago (Jones, 2019), a highly successful national tour (Pressley, 2019), a performance in Puerto Rico to bring awareness and raise funds to aid the island's struggles in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria (Schulman, 2019), and most recently, streaming a recorded performance of the original cast on the streaming service Disney+. The musical has been the topic of scholars as well, debating its historical accuracy and cultural impact (Craft, 2018; Mineo, 2016; Monteiro, 2016; Nathans, 2017; R. C. Romano & Potter, 2018; Schocket, 2017). This paper is another such academic consideration, but it takes a slightly different tack. Relying on a curriculum theory framework and the work of Sylvia Wynter, this paper asks the questions, "What curricular value does *Hamilton* have?" and "What does the musical teach?"

Lin Manuel Miranda was inspired to write *Hamilton* after reading a biography of the United States' first Secretary of Treasury that was written by Ron Chernow (2004). Miranda saw similarities between himself and Alexander Hamilton. He also envisioned that the broader story of the U.S. founding fathers lent itself to hip-hop and rap (Binelli, 2017). From a curriculum theory point of view, the musical is interesting for its counter-race casting (actors of color are mostly used to portray white historical figures), its overall hip-hop aesthetic (songs from the musical are decidedly in the hip-hop genre, with R&B grooves, the inclusion of rap lyrics, and actors who, while portraying historical figures, often engage in slang and mannerisms that allude to hip-hop culture), and the seeming desire of the show's creators for it to be pedagogical. This pedagogical desire (whether it is realized requires further analysis and is up for debate) is demonstrated in the lyrics to the show's closing song, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story":

I hate to admit it
 But he doesn't get enough credit for all the credit he gave us
 Who lives, who dies, who tells your story
 Every other founding father's story gets told

This paper is not an examination of *Hamilton* as a piece of theatre or a work of art but as a curriculum, and as such, it does not rely on scholarship that analyzes film and theatre along their aesthetic merits. Rather, given the intrinsic pedagogical premise and that the musical is not a straight retelling of history, it seems pertinent to ask, “What history is it teaching?” On face value, the story Miranda offers could be seen as counterhegemonic, working against dominant narratives that glorify the founding of the United States and that reinforce it as mostly white and mostly male. However, as will be discussed, the musical itself contains many historical inaccuracies that may solidify the founding fathers’ places on pedestals rather than knocking them off. Instead, by using a curricular lens combined with the work of Sylvia Wynter and Anne Tsing, the analysis shifts away from only looking at the musical’s historical accuracy and toward a consideration of it as something more complex, as something between domination and resistance. Furthermore, this paper argues that whether the piece was written as an intentional act of resistance becomes less interesting and important when it is seen as a site of friction between the hegemonic and counterhegemonic. In other words, by viewing *Hamilton* curricularly, in terms of what Pinar (2004) calls “the complicated conversation,” this paper moves away from judging the play in terms of its inherent counterhegemony and instead examines it as a site where the hegemonic and counterhegemonic intersect.

Hamilton has had its share of critiques, and as Manuel-Miranda admits, they are all valid (Bate, 2020). The historical accuracy of the musical is shaky at best, taking this historical figure of Alexander Hamilton, an elitist who was hardly a friend of the masses, and portraying him as a lover of freedom for all is deeply problematic. Hamilton owned slaves and played a large role in the genocide of Native Americans. Furthermore, Manuel-Miranda inserts an abolitionist thread in the overall plot of the story that is questionably present in the actual historical context of the founding the United States. These critiques and others are consolidated by the historian Ishmael Reed, first in his numerous written critiques of the musical and then in a play, “The Haunting of Lin Manuel-Miranda,” done as both a staged reading and full off-Broadway performance (Arjini, 2019). This paper does not seek to erase these criticisms. Instead, it offers that *Hamilton*’s existence creates a friction with both hegemonic and counterhegemonic effects that should be explored. More specifically, what characteristics of *Hamilton* make it a friction-causing cultural artifact?

Further complicating *Hamilton* and the ways it reverberates in society, is Manuel-Miranda’s own identity. Born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents, Manuel-Miranda’s first musical, *In the Heights*, placed his upbringing in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City front and center. This connection between his identity and his work continues to be implicit, due to both his status as a celebrity creator and the way that connection is discussed in the media. *Hamilton* is no different, especially since Manuel-Miranda was cast in the title role. This complicated connection can perhaps best be seen in his advocacy for Puerto Rico and the staging of *Hamilton* there to raise awareness and to bring aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Manuel-Miranda’s prior support of certain policies aimed at supporting Puerto Rico was seen by many Puerto Ricans as aiding continued oppression of the island on the part of the United States (Jackson, 2019).

As much as a curriculum theory frame sharpens the analysis to be more attentive to educative concerns, to fully understand the musical’s potential as a site of hegemonic/counterhegemonic friction, Sylvia Wynter’s (1979, 1984, 2003, 2015) work is also used. Wynter’s (2015) scholarship is relevant here because it is largely concerned with dominant conceptions of the human and possible revolutionary resistance to these conceptions. Most

importantly, Wynter's work demonstrates forcefully how these conceptions of the human are solely socially constructed, and as such, interventions into these constructions are not only possible, but necessary. Wynter seeks to identify the process by which the dominant conception of the human, through a socially constructed process, has become what she terms *homo economicus*. For Wynter (2015), this conception of the human is one that reifies dominant and oppressive structures and identities including patriarchy, white supremacy, and global capitalism. Wynter seeks an intervention by including the stories of those who are marginalized by the dominant narrative and, therefore, not considered fully human. Wynter has posited such an intervention as the work of the jester in a king's court because of how he can be included in the dominant narrative while simultaneously subverting it. By invoking the concept of jestering, Wynter imbues interventions with elements of strategy, luck, and happenstance. Using Wynter's work allows an analysis that gauges the success with which *Hamilton* intervenes with(in) the socially constructed telling of the founding of the United States by using the jester as a metric.

To view *Hamilton* along these lines of dominance and resistance is to risk reinforcing a dichotomy of hegemonic and counterhegemonic with an eventual determination as to where the musical itself rests. Wynter's concept of the jester is ideally suited to interrupt this dichotomous line of thought. The jester could not engage in pure rebellion, or the king would have him executed. Wynter uses the jester as a metaphor for potential change because they can never fully be categorized as part of either the dominant or resistant. In other words, pay less attention to the jester and more to mischief he creates and its aftereffects. In this sense, Wynter's jester is akin to Tsing's (2005) ethnographic research on global capitalism's effect on the environments of Indonesia, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Tsing resists what she sees as the common move in similar work to focus on the seeming conflict between two cultures—the dominant global versus the local/native resistance. Instead, Tsing sees real change happening in the friction within this dichotomy not in the sides themselves. Indeed, Tsing posits that the potential to create friction is deeply connected to the ability to operate both within the hegemonic and the counterhegemonic. This ability is perhaps best seen in Tsing's (2015) book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, in which she examines how the matsutake mushroom can be both a product of the destruction caused by global capitalism and still offer avenues of resistance away from such devastation. With this view, the focus of this paper moves away from seeing *Hamilton* as a piece of resistance and toward looking at the type of friction it generates.

While other scholarship examines *Hamilton*'s success or failure as a historical work in terms of its accuracy (Craft, 2018; Mineo, 2016; Monteiro, 2016; Nathans, 2017), this paper attempts to move beyond those questions with using curriculum theory, Wynter, and Tsing (2005) and positing *Hamilton* as a friction-causing curriculum of the jester. In this sense, the friction can be seen along pedagogical lines—such as the Deweyian discomfort of not knowing that pushes an individual to learn more (De Waal, 2005) or Woodson's (Grant et al., 2016) insistence upon teaching counternarratives to the White epistemological legacies we have come to accept as singular truth. The musical pushes against the many myths upon which the United States is built even while simultaneously reinforcing them, and the friction created has ramifications beyond each staging of the show or viewing on a television.

In order to fully investigate *Hamilton* as a possible curriculum of the jester, this paper starts with an outline of what Wynter identifies as the major shifts in the social construction of the human. It then presents her discussion of the jester as a move within and against such a narrative. It will briefly discuss how curriculum theory enhances the ability to identify jester work as

curriculum work and will, finally, use this combined framework to analyze four songs from the musical (and one inspired by the musical) as examples of a jester curriculum.

Man1 to Man2 to Hybrid Human

A major theme throughout Sylvia Wynter's (1979, 1984, 2003, 2015) work is examining historical and theoretical shifts in the social construction of the "human." For Wynter, tracing such shifts is key to understanding how oppression works. In other words, by examining dominant conceptions of the human and how they came to be, we can identify ones that are marginalized. Furthermore, the dominant conceptions are not everlasting; they shift, they move, and there is slippage to be seen, and as such, interventions can be made. Wynter (2003) works to not only identify the "human," but also to find places where others have offered alternatives to dominant conceptions. By putting dominant versions of the human in conversation with non-dominant ones, she underscores the slippage and advocates for a better overall conception, one that strives to include all people. The focus here is to use Wynter's work as a method for identifying cultural objects that could be seen as interventions and create possible alternatives to dominant conceptions of man—namely, male, white, heterosexual, cisgender, and capitalistic. Combined with Tsing, these interventions became identifiable by the friction they create rather than a template for resistance. As will be discussed later, Wynter's (1984) court jester is an example of how friction can be created in moving between, even playing with, dominance and resistance.

Before examining why the jester is a useful model of intervention, one must first understand Wynter's (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) discussion of the socially constructed transitions from Man1 to Man2. Wynter deftly points out that the choices made in terms of how the human was posited dictated how it related to other elements of the perceived universe. The first conception (Man1) is prior to Copernicus, when Christian theology dominated epistemology and ontology. In this conception, the Earth and its inhabitants were seen as the dregs of creation, the bottom of the barrel in the hierarchical structure that put heaven and god on top with Earth and man on the bottom. As such, man was seen as a lesser being living on a lesser plane. This conception is symbolized by the prevailing notion of the time that placed the Earth at the center of the universe. At first blush, one might think this runs counter to the idea that man is at the bottom, placing him, rather, at the center. Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), however, argues that, pre-Copernican conceptions of the universe did not place Earth at its center to exalt man, but rather to reinforce that other heavenly bodies were above him, with moving up towards heaven as the ultimate goal. Moreover, Earth's position as the non-moving center further devalued its worth in comparison to heavenly bodies that moved across the universe. In other words, we start at Earth, but we don't want to stay there. This theocratic vision the universe is important when considering the shift to Man2 as represented by Copernicus. Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) writes:

Now, many bourgeois scholars keep saying: Oh, Copernicus took man away from the center, thereby devalorizing the human. But they are liberal scholars, right? They see the world biocentrically. And they do not understand that, seen theocentrically—as would have been the case then—to be at the center was to be at the dregs of the universe. The center was then the most degraded place to be! (p. 14)

Wynter notes that Copernicus changed the conception of man by arguing that the Earth was not the center of the universe, but rather a moving body that rotated around the sun. The Earth was no longer a static, non-moving rock, but an equal heavenly body along with the other stars and planets. With Earth's status elevated, the status of man changed as well. Man became a biological being equipped with reason as a means to move within a larger system. Man was no longer subject to all that was above him, but an organism with agency that could move beyond his means. If Earth could move and be equal with other stars, so could man.

Wynter makes an important note that, while the transition from Man1 to Man2 resulted in a more exalted status, it did not result in a more enlightened one. She (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) writes, "Humans are, then, a biomutationally evolved, hybrid species—storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological" (p. 11). In other words, within the epoch of Man2, the stories used to conceive man as biological were stories disguised as scientific fact. Wynter sees a better version of the human as a hybrid in which stories are laid bare, stripped of any "scientific" origins to reveal a human who is both biological AND made from stories:

So, if the biocentrists are right, then everything I'm saying is wrong; but, if I am right, I cannot expect them to accept it easily. For our entire order of secular knowledge/truth, as it has to do with ourselves, is devastated if we are hybrid beings! If humans are conceptualized as hybrid beings, you can no longer classify human individuals, as well as human groups, as naturally selected (i.e., eugenic) and naturally dysselected (i.e., dysgenic) beings. This goes away. It is no longer meaningful. (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 16)

The key here is that Wynter's "new" human isn't really new, but one in which our already existing hybridity is exposed and acknowledged. She goes on to say that the acceptance of this new hybridity will then create new possibilities of exploration for all fields of research concerned with conceptions of what "human" means. In other words, placing the hybrid human in conversation with previous conceptions creates friction, and this friction generates change. Dominant epistemological and ontological frames become exposed as limiting and exclusionary, allowing new conceptions to not only be possible, but accepted. This is more complex than simply counterhegemonic resistance, as there are no guarantees with the friction Wynter hopes to create, but she is sure that, if the human is seen as hybrid and not solely biological, it will be different than what came before.

According to Wynter, in the first two iterations of man, society was unaware that the conceptions of human were part logos/myth. In both cases, the stories we used to create ourselves, what Wynter calls the "poesis" side of the human, were obscured or hidden. She clarifies this by discussing Fanon's and DuBois' work around double consciousness. Fanon and DuBois demonstrate that the personal experience of marginalized people of color is to know that they are both biological and discursive. In other words, the construction of a "black man" is the biology of the person inscribed with how difference is socially constructed through language. Perhaps this is no better demonstrated than when Fanon (1967) describes his experience of riding a bus and having a little white girl point at him and say, "Look mother, a black man." Fanon describes this moment as a crystallization of the experience of being marked biologically as "black" and simultaneously feeling the corresponding social construction that is connected to such a marking.

The Jester

Wynter (1984) expresses hope in our ability to move beyond the concept of Man2, the human as solely biological, to something more inclusive due to the fact that change happened in the move from Man1 to Man2. She argues that the transition from Man1 to Man2 should be examined as a means to locate markers and/or aides that may make another transition possible. Additionally, as mentioned above, she highlights the work of DuBois and Fanon, as well as the works found in popular culture, for possibilities to start such a shift. Wynter points to another possible intervention to expose the human's inherent hybridity, the jester. In "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," Wynter (1984) discusses the role of the jester in the court of rulers as powerful for their ability to expose the fallacies of the prevailing thought of the day and, therefore, expose the social construction of current conceptions of the human. Somewhat equivalent to modern-day stand-up comedians who blur the line between humor and offense, jesters walked a fine line demonstrated by their overall mission—to make fun of nobility to their faces. Jestering allowed cover for a person to say what in other circumstances might get them killed. While the explicit role of the jester was for entertainment, the implicit one was to take what was considered to be heretical and make it expressible in the presence of the king. Wynter (1984) explained,

The term "heresy" is used here in the context in which it is used by the Polish philosopher, Kolakowski. He argues that all realms of culture, philosophy, as much as art and customs, exemplify a fundamental antagonism, whereby everything that is new grows out of a permanent need to question all existing absolutes. This movement can therefore be defined as a dynamic one in which the Jester's role in the pursuit of human knowledge alternates with the Priest's role—transforming heresies into new orthodoxies, the contingent into modes of the Absolute. (p. 21)

The jester, because of his ability to move between the dominant and what she describes here as the heretical, represents the ceremony of change for which Wynter encourages us to seek modern day examples. In other words, we shouldn't be looking for jesters as markers of resistance, but rather for their ability to move between the dominant and the heretical, to utter the profane in the halls of conformity and get away with it. In this sense, control over the discourse that shapes conceptions of human move from those in power to the powerless.

Two examples of jesters in the mold of what Wynter outlines come to mind. The first is Feste from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Feste, the court fool, in his first scene with the lady of the house (Olivia), openly makes fun of her mourning over her brother's death, trivializing it. The lady plays along, all the while knowing that Feste is playing a dangerous game in which she could be seriously offended at any time. This danger creates a friction that opens up the possibility of Olivia ending her mourning. A more modern-day example is Margaret George's (2013) historical fiction, *The Autobiography of Henry the VIII, with Notes by his Fool, Will Somers*. The premise of the book is that Henry wrote a memoir decidedly from the king's point of view justifying even his most cruel of actions. The fool's notes and intervening chapters are there to present a more honest look at the king's life, one that does not hold back and takes the king down a few notches. The reader experiences the friction created between these two different accounts and must contend with both of them, ultimately settling on some new combination thereof.

The Curriculum of the Jester

While Wynter's work offers a helpful lens through which we can examine something like a musical as a possible modern-day jester-as-ceremony, it is enhanced by curriculum theory. In shifting from jester-as-ceremony to jester-as-curriculum, *Hamilton* can be seen as a musical designed to teach rather than as a ritual meant for others to experience. In other words, we should not be seeking ceremonies, but curricula that cause friction by teaching juxtapositions between Man2 and the hybrid human. As a curriculum, the jester and their performance of speaking the profane in normative spaces become knowledge that is meant to be shared and gained. Like the fool found in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, who tries to teach the stubborn king how he must correct his course towards ruin and death, jesters like *Hamilton* could be doing something similar with the audience (and potentially society at large) by speaking truth to power in the form of the friction it creates.

Schubert (2006) (re)emphasized the need to posit things outside of schools *as curriculum* in order to understand "all aspects of society that shape our outlooks, identities and actions" (p. 100). In this way, the intersection of curriculum theory (Pinar, 2004, 2012; Pinar et al., 2008) and Wynter's work (McKittrick, 2015; Wynter, 1979, 2003) seems like a natural fit given that both value an examination of popular culture (Huddleston, 2017b). Whereas Schubert sees curriculum as a lens of critique of societal elements that reinforce oppression, when combined with Wynter's call to search for ceremonies similar to the jester's and Tsing's discussion of friction, such a lens becomes the search for curricula that present the dominant and the counterhegemonic in a way that has the potential to cause friction because of the movement between the two.

As both Weaver and Daspit (2003) and Weaver and Mashburn (2006) point out, popular culture is fertile ground for curriculum in the classroom due to its ability to both connect with students and present knowledge in creative ways. Moreover, by acknowledging the importance of popular culture, instructors could unlock the potential of a truly egalitarian society in which the desires of all people across culture and class are acknowledged as important. This type of teaching is best demonstrated by the work of Love (2019) who emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the genius of black culture while simultaneously recognizing and battling the racism that works against students of color. To that end, Ali and Barden (2015) write of how the popular aspects of a specific culture, when seen as curriculum, state and impart cultural awareness and understanding. Dimitriadis (2015) contends that popular culture, when examined curricularly, can demonstrate how something can both instruct and be instructed by society, show that the intrinsic lesson of a pop culture curriculum can travel across mediums and contexts, and highlight the importance of audience interpretation. This calls to mind the work of Stuart Hall who saw popular culture as a place where the dominant could be read differently and such readings could prove instructive (Dimitriadis & Kamberlis, 2006). It is with this in mind that Wynter's jester becomes a more powerful lens of examination when thought of as a curriculum of the jester.

The question could be asked, how then do we gauge the effectiveness of a curriculum in terms of its ability to be a jester? Clearly, traditional means of evaluation would fall short for many of the same reasons discussed by Doll (2004), Eisner (2009), and Flinders (2004). It is here that revisiting Tsing's conception of friction is useful. Instead of judging a curriculum in terms of its inherent jestering or jester-like qualities, Tsing forces us to consider the friction it can create by inhabiting a space in between the hegemonic and the counter, the global and the local. This would shift our focus to include things to the periphery of the curriculum itself to gauge and judge the cultural reverberations emanating out from the source material. In the case of *Hamilton*, it means

focusing on key aspects of the musical while simultaneously considering the friction it creates, has created, or could potentially create.

The confluence of a Wynter/Tsing/curriculum theory lens used to examine *Hamilton* calls to mind other work that considers movements between and representations of the hegemonic and counterhegemonic. *Hamilton*'s juxtaposition of a color-conscious cast against a story of white men (which had become more concrete through the subsequent retelling by more white men) calls to mind Puar's (2007) expansion of the concept of assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Puar notes how bodies, discursive social constructs, and other contextual elements of society simultaneously are contaminated by and contaminate each other. In this sense, assemblages become much more viral in nature and also contingent on shifting social patterns and structures. Puar (2019) states:

Because Deleuzian-inspired assemblages prioritize encounter and movement over positioning and location, one can never know in advance 'how' to organize. A main component of assemblage is that it resists the call to announce a complicity-versus-resistance binary, recognizing that complicities are multifarious and just as unstable as resistances, and our efforts (including my own) to redress the fetish of resistance by emphasizing complicity have indeed led to a reification of the polarity of the two terms.

Pushing beyond a binary of complicity and resistance by removing intentionality, Puar offers a more complex view of *Hamilton*. Whether Miranda intended the musical to be a form of resistance is irrelevant given how its theatrical and aesthetic elements come together with traditional telling of the U.S.'s founding, the political climate of our times, and the friction the musical creates in its relation to those competing narratives. *Hamilton*, as an assemblage, can be read as a curriculum of a jester that resides within hegemony while offering lines of flight out of it.

Puar (2007) does not discount intentional acts of resistance, but they, by themselves, cannot necessarily result in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) saw as lines of flight escaping hegemony. When combined with other elements, they create lines of flight in oftentimes unplanned ways. Conceiving of hegemony and counterhegemony in a non-dichotomous way is not to discount outright acts of resistance, but it allows an examination of *Hamilton* that doesn't try to make of it something it isn't. Positioning Lin-Manuel Miranda's work as an assemblage of points of friction instead of some example of the dominant and/or resistant (or combination thereof) could further clarify the intentions of this paper. To do this, Muñoz's (1999) concept of disidentification is helpful. As Muñoz writes:

Disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy. (p. 25)

He goes on to say:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (p. 31)

Disidentification can serve as a guidepost for when a curriculum stops being a jester and starts to veer into outright resistance or defiance of the king. In looking at *Hamilton*, it fails to be an example of disidentification because it doesn't implicitly teach the audience how the original story of America's founding is deeply flawed due to the stories it excluded (and continues to exclude) and how those excluded stories are equally, if not more, important. Disidentification could be seen as explicitly counterhegemonic because it indicates an intentionality to decode cultural messages in ways other than how they are intended to be interpreted. In other words, while disidentification might be another way to jester, it is not the type in which *Hamilton* engages.

With the framework outline above in mind, the following sections present points or aspects of the musical from which friction could emanate. In some examples, the connected lines are incomplete and the possibilities for friction are envisioned. In others, connected lines or parts of a possible assemblage of friction are discussed. In both cases, the examples are not an exhaustive list and the connections made are not endpoints. In all cases, the examples are possible sites of friction because of their inherent ability to jester or their jester-like characteristics.

***Hamilton*—An American Musical**

Hamilton (Miranda, 2015) is an American stage musical about the life and times of Alexander Hamilton. Written by Lin Manuel Miranda, the music is mostly in the style of hip hop with rapping as well as singing (there are few other musical styles including British pop and R&B). Miranda first rose to prominence with his musical, *In the Heights* (2008), which followed the lives of characters in the mostly Latinx community of Washington Heights in New York City. While on vacation after the closing of *In the Heights*, Miranda read Ron Chernow's (2004) biography of Alexander Hamilton (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). Inspired by the story and seeing similarities to his own life, Miranda wrote the music, lyrics, and book that eventually became the staged musical. Additionally, Miranda designed the show to have color-conscious casting in which people of color would be used to play the "founding fathers" and other major white historical figures. Miranda made such a choice because he saw that his idols, many of whom were modern day rappers, and Hamilton shared a defining characteristic, an ability to write themselves out of dire circumstances (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). Considering *Hamilton* as a curriculum of the jester, below, I examine four songs for their ability to teach the heretical.

"Alexander Hamilton"

While he wasn't originally slated to play the title role, Miranda was cast as Hamilton (Binelli, 2017; Mead, 2017). He has often been quoted as saying that he was fascinated by Chernow's biography because Miranda himself shared so many similarities with Hamilton—i.e., they were both immigrants who rose from dire circumstances to great heights of achievement. The very first song of the musical gives a brief overview of Hamilton's life before he arrived in New York City (and foreshadows things to come). Aaron Burr, Hamilton's rival and eventual murderer, opens the song by rapping the lyrics:

How does a bastard, son of whore
 And a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by
 providence impoverished,
 In squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?

As I have stated elsewhere, origins stories are key in cementing hegemonic structures (Huddleston, 2017a). Their validity becomes irrelevant when compared to their ability to create a mythology that pushes a specific ideology. For Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), all stories humans tell about themselves and others operate in this same manner, but in the cases of Man1 and Man2, they are obscured because they are presented as irrefutable fact. She argues that to expose the story element of the human is to reveal its hybrid self, that some parts of our stories are open to interpretation, artistic license, and subjectivity. Returning to *Hamilton*, by focusing on a “founding father” of the United States, Miranda worked with two bedrock origin stories—the creation of the U.S. and the notion of the American Dream.

The mythology of the founding of the United States connects American ideals to democracy, often focusing on origin stories of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. While these stories have been dramatized and retold in various ways, both fictionalized and “historical,” Miranda flipped the script, so to speak, by equating Hamilton’s story to his own story (a person of color with a family legacy of immigrating to the United States) and his various rapper role models who used their ability to write to overcome systemic oppression. Indeed, while there is even another musical about the founding of the United States, *1776*, no other example has gained quite as much attention as Miranda’s casting the founding fathers as people of color. As Zinn (2017) demonstrated, the stories of the U.S. that are most often told are done from a white male point of view. Miranda challenges the notion that the American story is inherently one of white men and boldly claims it for people of color. Similar, but not as literal as the process for which Chakrabarty (2006) advocates, Miranda has (re)inscribed American stories with those from people of color. To solely criticize *Hamilton* in terms its historical accuracy misses an overriding lesson—history is malleable and can be subverted, upended, and amended. Using a framework that focuses more on the musical’s ability to jester and cause friction, the accuracy of *Hamilton* is less important than teaching us that the American histories we have come to know as objective fact are open to interpretation.

The second mythology Miranda upends is the American Dream. The story of the American Dream is one in which anyone can “pull himself up from his bootstraps” to make a better life in America. Indeed, *Hamilton* is one such story. As the opening song describes, his life was one of tragedy and hardship. While he worked hard to achieve (epitomized by a reoccurring line throughout the musical that he “wrote his way out”), he also benefitted from privilege that allowed for his mobility. The lines of privilege were clearly drawn during his time through the oppressive, decades-long institution of slavery, colonization, and the mass genocide of indigenous people. Miranda, however, does not directly push against Hamilton’s privilege, but rather calls attention to the lack of voices of people of color in this American Dream story by intentionally casting against race. In the lyrics towards the end of the song, the chorus sings:

Alexander Hamilton
 We are waiting in the wings for you
 You could never back down
 You never learned to take your time

Oh, Alexander Hamilton
 When America sings for you
 Will they know what you overcame?
 Will they know you rewrote your game?
 The world will never be the same, oh

Miranda seems to be literally talking about Hamilton while figuratively talking about this musical itself and its positioning of a color conscious class imposed on a story of white men. Will America know and appreciate what people of color overcame? The line, “Will they know you rewrote your game?” is striking. Here, Miranda is referring to Hamilton’s writing ability as his main strength and reason for his success. At the same time, could Miranda be referring to how stories of history are not a retelling, but a rewriting? Is he being self-referential to how he, his musical, and his cast mates are rewriting history? There are no definitive answers here, but this is how Miranda is able to act as jester, to make the heretofore heretical stories of communities of color equally worthy to be taught alongside those of the white founding fathers. He accomplishes this by telling the historical “facts” of America’s founding through a cast of color and using a style of music most often associated with underrepresented cultures.

“My Shot”

The third song of the musical, “My Shot,” builds on the themes presented in the opening number while introducing in the main point of contention between Hamilton and his rival Aaron Burr. “My Shot” is written as a rap battle in which Hamilton presents his skill to spit rhymes to his new compatriots (Marquis de Lafayette, Hercules Mulligan, and John Laurens). In this song, Miranda’s interpretation of Alexander Hamilton’s story as a modern rap is crystalized. Take an excerpt from his first “monologue”:

I prob’ly shouldn’t brag, but dang, I amaze and astonish
 The problem is I got a lot of brains but no polish
 I gotta holler just to be heard
 With every word, I drop knowledge
 I’m a diamond in the rough, a shiny piece of coal
 Tryin’ to reach my goal my power of speech, unimpeachable
 Only nineteen but my mind is older
 These New York City streets get colder, I shoulder
 Every burden, every disadvantage
 I have learned to manage, I don’t have a gun to brandish
 I walk these streets famished
 The plan is to fan this spark into a flame

Such lines are even more striking given that a Latino is delivering them as a white founding father. Wynter’s hybrid human is brought to life on stage as the story of the protagonist is inscribed into the skin of Miranda and vice versa. Miranda exposes the process obscured by the overarching conception of Man2 during the time of Alexander Hamilton, the white body being inscribed with American traits (rugged individualism, Western reason, and capitalism). Within the context of a

curriculum of the jester, this song teaches the audience that the founding fathers contained no inherent biological qualities that made them special, but rather demonstrates that they were partly constructed with stories of racial privilege that made it only seem so.

As mentioned earlier, “My Shot” and the song it immediately follows, “Aaron Burr, Sir,” introduce a main point of conflict between the musical’s protagonist and antagonist. On one side, Hamilton is cocky, arrogant, and willing to take chances. He speaks his mind and sometimes is reckless. On the other, Aaron Burr is cool, calculating, and patient. Moreover, Burr can be overcautious and condescending towards his fellow revolutionaries. If this story were to be told in a traditional manner with casting along racial lines, Hamilton and Burr’s differences might be framed purely in the political sense as two men jockeying for power. However, for the aforementioned reasons, an additional framing comes into play. Echoing the discussion of mimesis found in Bhabba (1984) and Chakrabarty (2006), Hamilton and Burr represent two paths of the subaltern, to either emulate the culture of the oppressor or to strike out against it. In the middle section of “My Shot,” Burr admonishes the other characters, and Hamilton responds:

Burr: Geniuses, lower your voices
 You keep out of trouble and you double your choices
 I’m with you, but the situation is fraught
 You’ve got to be carefully taught
 If you talk, you’re gonna get shot
Hamilton: Burr, check what we got
 Mister Lafayette, hard rock like Lancelot
 I think your pants look hot
 Laurens, I like you a lot
 Let’s hatch a plot blacker than the kettle callin’ the pot
 What are the odds the gods would put us all in one spot
 Poppin’ a squat on conventional wisdom, like it or not
 A bunch of revolutionary manumission abolitionists?
 Give me a position, show me where the ammunition is

Wynter (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) herself points to such a struggle in Fanon’s work where he often discusses his limitation to express himself as a black man in a mostly white world. Again, Miranda has laid upon the American story what it had heretofore obscured, that its founding is built on a legacy of violent “othering” that subjugates people of color into either roles of mimesis or rebellion. Miranda has created an intertwined curriculum of the jester in which the American story and the story of violent oppression interact on stage in order to allow the audience to contend with both simultaneously. All in all, it is not just that Miranda lays a cast of color on top of a story that has been historically told as white, but he intertwines the myth of the American Dream with the experiences of those bodies oppressed by its original and subsequent tellings. This is exemplified in the introductory raps by the other characters in this song:

Lafayette: I dream of life without a monarchy
 The unrest in France will lead to ‘onarchy?
 ‘Onarchy? How you say, how you say, oh, ‘Anarchy’!
 When I fight, I make the other side panicky
 With my

Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!
Mulligan: Yo, I'm a tailor's apprentice
 And I got y'all knuckleheads in loco parentis
 I'm joining the rebellion 'cause I know it's my chance
 To socially advance, instead of sewin' some pants!
 I'm gonna take a
Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!
Laurens:
 But we'll never be truly free
 Until those in bondage have the same rights as you and me
 You and I. Do or die. Wait till I sally in
 On a stallion with the first black battalion
 Have another
Hamilton/Laurens/Lafayette/Mulligan: Shot!

In these introductions, we see the issues of overthrowing monarchical rule (Lafayette), social mobility as a class concern (Mulligan), and the abolition of slavery and advancement of African American rights (Laurens). In this curriculum of a jester, these stories gain the same level of importance as the one previously thought to be central to America's founding, overthrowing colonial rule.

Miranda is not blind to the level of oppression and violence that historically follows the story of American independence, as evidenced by the closing lines rapped by Hamilton:

Scratch that
 This is not a moment, it's the movement
 Where all the hungriest brothers with
 Something to prove went.
 Foes oppose us, we take an honest stand
 We roll like Moses, claimin' our promised land
 And? If we win our independence?
 Is that a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?
 Or will the blood we shed begin an endless
 Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?

To continually question what is established as foundational is a defining characteristic of a curriculum of the jester. In the case of *Hamilton*, Miranda does not wish to wash away the sins of the original story, but rather acknowledge them, openly question them, and *then* present an alternative. *Hamilton* presents a universe in which, from the very beginning, the struggle for American independence is inclusive of all people, not just the white colonials who had the ability to fight for their freedoms. As others (A. Romano, 2016) have pointed out, *Hamilton* is a form of fan fiction that presents an alternative to the original story. However, as seen in the lyrics above, while it might be an alternative universe, the world of the musical never loses sight of what actually happened. To be clear, while representation matters¹, we cannot assume that just because bodies of color are prevalent in the cast itself that their stories are considered alongside the founding fathers'. This is the start of friction, not a full blown bonfire of resistance.

“The Schuyler Sisters”

It is not only men of color that Miranda (re)inscribes into the stories of America’s founding. More specifically, as evidenced by the song “The Schuyler Sisters,” it is women of color. Miranda makes sure to move the women in the life of Alexander Hamilton from the periphery of the story to the center. While it does take until the fifth song for the major women characters to be introduced (and they are still small in number compared to their male counterparts), the song that introduces the Schuyler sisters is an interesting example of a curriculum of the jester for a few reasons. First, the song opens with Aaron Burr, who serves as the musical’s narrator as well as the antagonist, introducing the sisters as “slumming” in the streets of New York to watch the various minds discuss the issues of the day. The sisters enter, and their first lines contextualize the times in which they live—they are not supposed to be there and certainly are not seen as equals to the men who are discussing “important” ideas. However, they assert their right to engage and, more importantly, point out the missing element in the conversations. Angelica Schuyler begins:

I’ve been reading *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine
 So men say that I’m intense or I’m insane. You want a revolution? I want a revelation.
 So listen to my Declaration:
 (Joined by Eliza and Peggy): “We hold these truths to be self-evident
 That all men are created equal”
 Angelica: And when I meet Thomas Jefferson
 Company: Unh!
 Angelica: I’mma compel him to include women in the sequel.
 Women: Work!

Concurrently, two levels of critique are working within the song. The first is a familiar strain sometimes seen in period pieces, the women of that particular time advocating for rights and struggling against sexism. The Schuyler sisters are very much in this vein. They sing of wanting a man not for his money but for his mind, they have opinions about the events of the day, and they push against the expectations for women of their time period. At the same time, by casting against race, a new dimension is added to this trope, and we see the potential of Wynter’s hybrid human fully realized. By recognizing the poesis side of the concept of human, Miranda has enhanced the original, “historical” story of the Schuyler Sisters beyond a first wave feminist retelling. Women of color being cast as the Schuyler sisters pushes the issues of women’s rights beyond a traditional portrayal and into a more complex one. In other words, by being of color, the Schuyler sisters embody a shift from second wave to third wave feminism before it actually happened historically. Second wave and third wave feminism are put in direct conversation with a time period that was stuck within a moment that predates first wave feminism. This is best demonstrated by the choreography in this song in which traditional dances of the period are joined with hip hop dance moves (Cast of *Hamilton*, 2015). This is some next level jestering on the part of *Hamilton* to acknowledge previously tried forms of resistance to patriarchy while simultaneously offering more recent ones.

In terms of bodies and where they find themselves both spatially and temporally, one of the repeated stanzas in “The Schuyler Sisters” is:

Eliza: Look around, look around at how

Lucky we are to be alive right now!

Eliza/Peggy: Look around, look around at how

Lucky we are to be alive right now!

Eliza/Angelica/Peggy: History is happening in Manhattan, and we just happen to be
In the greatest city in the world!

Schuyler Sisters and Company: In the greatest city in the world!

A literal interpretation of this line is the sisters counting themselves lucky to be present at the beginning of a revolution—the founding of a country. However, the casting of this show, again, adds another layer of interpretation. Miranda could be calling attention to the fact that, yes, for those with the means to benefit from the coming revolution (and their decedents), it is a fortunate time to be alive. For people of color, this was mostly not the case. Indeed, the lack of bodies of color that “just happen to be in the greatest city in the world” will have an historical legacy that plays out in where slavery was legal and where it was not. All this being said, the conflux of historical figures that are the Schuyler sisters and the actors who portray them make for double awareness of the violent historic legacy of America’s founding versus the possibility of what an inclusive start of that founding might have portended. However, Miranda’s jestering prevents him from directly dealing with the real history of the Schuyler sisters, whose family profited immensely from the slave trade.

“Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down)”

The last song to be examined is perhaps the clearest example as to why *Hamilton* is not only a jester, but a curriculum of the jester. The song itself is a crucial one in which Hamilton finds himself finally on the battlefield after serving most of the war as the aide of George Washington. Hamilton has long desired such a move, but Washington insisted he was more valuable in the role of aide than that of general. When Hamilton at last finds himself on the battlefield, he helps to execute the decisive battle of the war, Yorktown. The song describes the various maneuvers Hamilton and his colleagues take to win the battle, but there is one line of the song that has taken on a life of its own. Towards the beginning of the song, Hamilton and the Marquis de Lafayette meet in the middle of the stage and have this exchange:

Lafayette: Monsieur Hamilton

Hamilton: Monsieur Lafayette

Lafayette: In command where you belong

Hamilton: How you say, no sweat

We’re finally on the field

We’ve had quite a run

Lafayette: Immigrants

Hamilton/Lafayette: We get the job done.

Here the contrast of color conscious casting juxtaposed with the question of immigration is striking. The musical acknowledges that there were immigrants who played major roles in the most pivotal battle of the American Revolution, and the point is driven home when Miranda, a

descendent of immigrants himself, utters these lines. While the lines themselves are significant, given the political climate of the time in which *Hamilton* opened and rose to popularity, it is little surprise that it was launched into an orbit beyond the musical itself. The beginning of that launch was when then Vice-President Elect Mike Pence attended a performance of the musical in November of 2016 (Mele & Healy, 2016). As the vice-presidential candidate of Donald Trump's xenophobic, racist, and sexist campaign that exemplified and relied on institutional white privilege, Pence's presence in the audience that night made for a markedly different performance. While the musical is certainly political in nature, the interpretation of its inherent ideology was always left open, mainly due to Miranda's equivocation when pressed on his own political views (Binelli, 2017). As such, the musical had been a hit on both sides of the political spectrum (Schuessler, 2015), which in and of itself demonstrates how the profane can be uttered in multiple normative contexts. However, that night was different, as the performance and audience reaction was in direct response to Pence's attendance.

Reports vary, but the consensus is that the biggest audience reaction of the night came when the line, "Immigrants, we get the job done" was met with huge applause, some of it directed at Pence (Mele & Healy, 2016). Clearly, the audience was linking this line to the Trump campaign's more xenophobic promises, including the building of a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico and Trump's call for an immigration ban of all Muslims coming into the country. At the curtain call of the show, Brandon Dixon, who had only recently taken over the role of Aaron Burr from the original cast member, delivered a speech that was directed at Pence (Marans, 2016). What follows is an excerpt from that speech:

Vice President-elect Pence, we welcome you, and we truly thank you for joining us here at *Hamilton: An American Musical*, we really do. We, sir, we are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us—our planet, our children, our parents—or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. *All of us.*

Reports are mixed as to how Pence received the message or if he heard it at all (Marans, 2016; Mele & Healy, 2016). However, the ramifications were widespread with those in the media seeing this as a major political statement and then President-elect Trump reacting negatively to it on Twitter. In other words, the friction inherent in the juxtaposition of modern immigrants' stories with those of the founding fathers' was amplified when the cast delivered a message to a representative of an administration that promoted and enacted racist policies against immigrants and their families, thereby, making the musical's implicit message about immigration explicit—and more people felt the heat.

The following month, an album featuring new interpretations of *Hamilton* songs and original music inspired by the musical was released. One of the tracks was called, "Immigrants, (We Get the Job Done)" (Miranda et al., 2016). This new song, taking its cue from the immigrants line, is overtly political. In the following excerpt, the rapper, Residente, explicitly names the struggle of those who come to a country for a better opportunity even though it is built on the violent oppression of people and the seizing of lands from Mexico:

Residente: Por tierra o por agua
Identidad falsa

Brincamos muros o flotamos en balsas
 La peleamos como Sandino en Nicaragua
 Somos como las plantas que crecen sin agua
 Sin pasaporte americano
 Porque La mitad de gringolandia Es terreno mexicano
 Hay que ser bien hijo e puta
 Nosotros Les Sembramos el árbol y ellos se comen la fruta
 Somos los que cruzaron
 Aquí vinimos a buscar el oro que nos robaron
 Tenemos mas trucos que la policia secreta
 Metimos la casa completa en una maleta
 Con un pico, una pala
 Y un rastrillo
 Te construimos un castillo
 Como es que dice el coro cabrón?

The lyricists of the song (K’naan, Snow Tha Product, Riz Ahmed, and Residente) have a history of putting their ethnic identities at the forefront of their work, so this song is a continuation of that work. The repeating chorus of the song, “Look how far I’ve come,” along with an interlude that repeats the line, “It’s America’s Ghost Writer’s, the credits only borrowed,” can be seen as a postscript to the tone set by *Hamilton*, rewriting history with the stories it has long erased. *Hamilton* as a curriculum of the jester demonstrates its portability from one medium to another and shows its adaptability in the face of a Trump administration. In other words, the musical teaches others how to be jesters.

Conclusion

Due to the intersections of history, performance, and bodies of color, *Hamilton* is instructive—its curriculum bona fides as a jester causing friction are not in doubt, as it makes the heretical not just expressible but also teachable. Whereas the jester pushes the boundaries of what can be spoken to the king, the curriculum of the jester pushes the boundaries of what can be taught to his subjects. In this sense, when Wynter says, “a ceremony must be found,” *Hamilton* makes the case that an effective ceremony is one that is curricular in nature—designed to teach and ultimately create friction. The effect is twofold. Teaching the heretical story is to elevate it to gospel and no longer heresy, thereby, forcing a consideration of the two together. Second, as demonstrated by “Immigrants (We Get the Job Done),” the friction created in the original juxtaposition *Hamilton* presents results in other modeled juxtapositions creating their own friction. Time will tell if this compounded friction originating with the musical will be enough to cause a fire. As the justified critiques of the musical point out, it might be that *Hamilton* is too closely aligned with both global capitalism and white supremacist (re)tellings of history to actually cause any worthwhile friction along the lines outlined in this paper. However, this danger is the price to be paid for a curriculum to be jester-like; it must operate in the marginal space between the king and his realm, the sacred and heretical, the hegemonic and the resistance and the global if it wants to create openings for others to do more than it can as a jester. We shouldn’t judge *Hamilton* as a

site of resistance; it would fail miserably, but it can be judged for its ability to create possibilities of resistance. This is a small distinction, but an important one.

Lastly, the theatrical aspect of *Hamilton* is an essential piece as to why it makes for a curriculum of the jester that causes friction—it instructs on how bodies can be in the world. Whereas Freire (1968/2000) emphasized the importance of those who are oppressed naming the word, Boal (1985) amended this discursive act with physically being in the world as well. Boal agreed with Freire that, in order to fight oppression, a meaningful dialogue between oppressor and oppressed must take place, but Boal also recognized that speech includes our physical actions as well. Therefore, while Freire used a mostly discussion-based pedagogy, Boal used theatre and acting. *Hamilton* is a staged performance in which bodies move in concert with each other, the music, and the historical legacy of the story it tells. It engages with America’s history beyond the written account of it and into a realm in which the ghosts of the past are forced to contend with the bodies of the present. Boal saw the importance of such an interplay with his conception of the joker in *Theatre of the Oppressed* exercises. The joker was a character who could move across space and time, forcing the stories of those on stage into contact with the ones from the audience, making them contend, debate, and interact with each other. By relying on the conventions of the theatre, Boal believed that we could learn not only how to speak to one another, but to “be” with one another as well. Building off of Brecht’s belief that if the audience knew more information they would act differently, Boal left nothing to chance by bringing the audience on stage to learn directly how to act differently and actively fight oppression by inhabiting the role of the joker. While *Hamilton* is no example of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (it might still be more in the mode of Brecht than Boal), it’s theatricality points to potential of artistic work to be received by the audience in a different way than if it were only read as words on a page.

Returning to the continuum between Puar and Muñoz mentioned earlier, if a playwright or theatre troupe wanted to be more explicit in its attempt to cause friction, or better yet, be an inherent act of resistance that is effective, moving from a jester to a joker model might be needed. This idea can apply equally to a work like Ishamel Reed’s that critiqued *Hamilton* and perhaps shield it from critiques of being overly didactic (Vincentelli, 2019). If theatre were conceived more along the lines of Boal, we might see plays that inspire us beyond *thinking* differently to *acting* differently. Even with audience taking a more active role in which they participate in the play rather than just witness it, to view their involvement through a dichotomy of hegemony and counterhegemony might not witness its fullest effect. Boal never saw *Theatre of the Oppressed* as prescriptive, but rather an open invitation to “play” and imagine different possibilities—perhaps, even, to try on the “fool’s hat” of the jester and operate within the liminal space between the dominant and the resistant. Boal offers a possible confluence point between *Hamilton*, an imperfect example of true resistance that is wildly popular, and Ishamel Reed’s play, which is more counterhegemonic in its intentions but fails to garner as much support or acclaim due its refusal to be part of the global capitalism machine.

Regardless of whether a play is an example of a curriculum of the jester or *Theatre of the Oppressed*, resisting the urge to label it as part of hegemony or an act of defiance can offer a different perspective on its effect. Wynter’s background includes playwriting, and maybe this is why her work on the jester and elsewhere seems to share a certain kinship with the world of the theatre, *Hamilton* included. Indeed, similar to Boal, Wynter’s notion of the human hybrid demands that the coming ontology is a communally active one, and as such, we all must learn to play new roles.

Notes

1. For a powerful example of how representation matters, see this girl's reaction to watching Phillipa Soo (<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-07-06/hamilton-phillipa-soo-little-girl-video-representation>) (Carras, 2020)

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Queer Narrative Theory and *Currere*

Thoughts toward Queering *Currere* as a Method of Queer (Curricular) Self-Study

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HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCE in the United States from the lived perspective of LGBTQ students before the Stonewall Riots, noted by some as the beginning of gay liberation in 1969 (Duberman, 1993), are rare. In 1989, twenty years after Stonewall, the *Harvard Educational Review* published one of the first articles on LGBTQ educational issues by Eric Rofes. In it, Rofes (1989) stated,

[The] across-the-board denial of the existence of gay and lesbian youth has been allowed to take place because their voices have been silenced and because adults have not effectively taken up their cause. (p. 446)

The *Harvard Educational Review* followed Rofes' article with a special issue in 1996 on "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Education." In the section, "Youth Voices," LGBTQ high school students gave first-person accounts of their own experiences in public high school.

For example, student Kathryn Zamora-Benson spoke about the disconnect between rhetoric and reality at her school's "Diversity Day" event in 1996:

Contrary to its "Commitment to Diversity" statement, the Academy does not provide an environment where people of differing gender, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation can grow fully. No healthy person can thrive in the midst of a sea of sexism, homophobia, and other types of prejudice. ... Homophobia at Albuquerque Academy may be hidden under layers of polite surface smiles and monotonous mottoes and mission statements, but it lies there nevertheless. (Zamora-Benson, 1996, p. 179)

Although her comments may sound familiar to many people a quarter of a century later, to pre-Stonewall gay men and women, they would have sounded nearly incomprehensible. At that time, when I was a closeted gay male high school student (late 1960s/early 1970s), no specific educational programs or curriculum for LGBTQ students existed (that I've been able to locate).

The first school-based program for gay and lesbian youth—Project 10—was established a few years later by Virginia Uribe in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Uribe described Project 10 in 1985 as “an attempt to relieve some of the pressures on gay kids so that they can go on to graduate instead of dropping out” (Ocamb, 2019, para. 9). At almost the same time in New York City, the Harvey Milk School began accepting LGBTQ students, becoming a formally accredited school in 2003 (Colapinto, 2005).

On the school level, the presence and experience of LGBTQ students before Stonewall was rendered invisible. Today, their experiences do not (or rarely) exist in the historical record. But this absence obviously does not mean that LGBTQ students did not have an American educational experience. They each did in a uniquely different and often painful way. Edmund White (2009), the gay novelist and biographer, gives a sense of the alienation in general of being gay around 1970 when he describes his own early adulthood: “There was no ‘gay pride’ back then—there was only gay fear and gay isolation and gay distrust and gay self-hatred” (p. 24). But the documentation of these stories is important not just for historical reasons. They also reveal the inspiration, pain, agency, and even joy of under-represented experiences of education. Amnasan (2021) discusses past-and-future losses due to cultural erasure:

What was working will be erased from history, replaced by the familiar version of social movements led by key figures. Something hard to sustain will be lost not only as a community, but as a way to imagine what’s possible when greater numbers of participants are regarded as important and unlimited participation replaces gatekeepers. (p. 1291)

To state the obvious, the lived history of people within a situation is often very different from the official story of that situation (Greene, 2021). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described dominant stories as “privilege[ing] Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these locations as natural or normative points of reference” (p. 28). Unfortunately, the official story depicting educational history is often conflated with its lived history (Gordon-Reed, 2021). Edleman (2007) states, “through a naturalization of history ... [occurs] the conflation of meaning itself with those forms of historical knowing whose authority depends on the fetishistic prestige of origin, genealogy, *telos*” (Edleman, 2007, p. 470). This naturalization of history, even a false history, can supplant untold stories of resistance, reshape the memory of those engaged in historical counter experiences (Brown & Au, 2014) and even scaffold a positive reception of a false narrative.

To the extent possible, the huge gaps in the lived history of American education must be told by the people who lived those histories. It is not easy, however, for queer people to tell their queer stories. An initial problem is surfacing queer experience, given the power of heteronormativity to erase or invalidate queer experience and/or promote its sublimation. Additional concerns are the use of biased tools to investigate and uncover similar biases and the use of storytelling forms that reinscribe heteronormativity (e.g., presenting essentialist findings about life). As de Villiers (2012) states,

biographical description becomes painfully acute, and the need to resist it becomes pressingly urgent, when the biographical subject is gay. The struggle for interpretive authority ... intrinsic as it may be to the biographical situation in general, acquires an absolutely irreducible political specificity when it is waged over a gay life. (p. 11)

The challenge is developing a performance-centered methodology situated within the lived experience of knowledgeable performers (Meyer, 2002). Such a methodology would need to replace essentialist heteronormative discourses that frame analysis and representation of queer lives with non-binary-based approaches that generate complexity and new possibilities.

In this paper, I present and explore one method of queer self-study, the use of *currere* framed by queer literary theory. A curriculum as well as a methodology, *currere* is “a critical form of autobiography and curriculum studies that examines the curriculum of everyday life [and] one’s process of engagement within [their] contingent and temporal cultural webs” (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, pp. 25-26). I explore how *currere* provides an epistemological and ontological break with Western autobiographical forms, opening queer complexities and possibilities of multiplicity within self-study and autobiographical narrative.

Specifically, I explore how *currere* facilitates an inquirer’s attempt to gain access to and/or reimagine personal history when that history was erased or rendered invisible in the past. *Currere* also scaffolds an approach to storytelling that breaks with the promotion of heteronormative meanings (that is, it queers self-study). In addition, I draw from queer narrative theory as a framework for both the investigation and telling of queer stories in ways that don’t reinscribe heteronormativity. Queer narrative strategies of resistance include “queer appropriations of forms typically linked to truth telling, the revelation of secrets, authenticity, and transparency, namely, the interview, the autobiography, the diary, and the documentary” (de Villiers, 2012, p. 27). Such strategies are also found in *how* we tell our stories. Representation is counter-productive with the use of heteronormative narratives, which reify the very structures we hope to dislodge and disrupt (Warhol & Lanser, 2015). Finally, and more in the background, I consider how queer stories (non-stable, multi-directional, non-categorical and non-binary, contingent, indeterminate, counter-intuitive) may destabilize and recenter mainstream stories (clear, definitive, unidirectional, and intuitive).

For a description of queer, I turned to Eve Sedgwick’s (1993) well-known conception as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (p. 8). She further states,

At the same time, a lot of the most exciting recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all; the ways that racism ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example. (Sedgwick, 1993, pp. 8–9).

I also draw from Judith Butler’s (1999) influential notion of gender performativity, which replaced conceptions of being gendered (gender essentialism) with practicing gender (gender performativity). Unique, abiding, and continuous views of the self were changed into performative, improvisational, and discontinuous (Meyer, 2002). Furthermore, to queer is to critique and resist: “queer is to resist or elide categorization, to disavow binaries ... and to proffer potentially productive modes of resistance against hegemonic structures of power” (Johnson, 2008, p. 166). Current work in queer theory examines queer methodologies within, for example, performance studies, critical race studies, history, lesbian feminist studies, as well as literacy and self-study (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). Given these complexities, queer history is not neatly bounded in the past, but links to the lived present. For example, Cvetkovich (2007) called for the study of queer

history to explore affective (including that of trauma) rather than causal connections between the past and the present. She suggested that the “invisibility or normalization [of private queer traumas] is another part of their oppressiveness” (p. 464).

To illustrate aspects of this method, I give examples from a *currere* I conducted of my own high school experience, that of a closeted cis-gendered student who identifies as queer and who attended high school in Seattle, Washington, in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Sawyer, 2021). On the surface, I remembered upheavals and dislocations of relationships and of structures of often taken-for-granted support such as school advocacy and even familial acceptance. But, like many queer individuals (perhaps regardless of generation), much of my experience was erased by the school personnel and structures. *Currere*, as I describe, provided me with specific ways to recreate and animate missing experiences from my null curriculum—experiences present by their absence (Pinar et al., 2008; Portelli, 1993; Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

Queer Narrative Theory and Self-Study

Queer narrative theory (also known as narratology) critiques how narrative structures, including those in autobiography and self-study, as well as their investigation, regulate and/or replicate heteronormative structures broadly conceived. Warhol and Lanser (2015) noted, “We recognize ‘queer’ as the sign for move(ment)s that challenge—and again, aim to understand, analyze, and rectify—heteronormative systems and practices and their attendant binary assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality” (p. 2). They stated (2015):

narratives are critical to constructing, maintaining, interpreting, exposing and dismantling the social systems, cultural practices, and individual lives that shape and are shaped by performative acts. Feminist and queer narrative theorists identify and demystify the workings of those norms in and through narrative, and expose the dominant stories keeping the binaries in place. (pp. 7–8)

In relation to autobiography, queer “evokes the doubt, uncertainty, and blurred vision attendant upon the articulation of queer lives and a caveat against taking ‘clarity and precision’ as methodological goals potentially inadequate to ‘messier and blurrier’ (queer) textual performances” (Warhol & Lanser, 2015, p. 12).

Self-studies of experience within schools and schooling are especially prone to essentialist storytelling, given the identity regulation of public schooling (Pinar, 1975), encouraging people to “get their story straight” (de Villiers, 2012, p. 10). Part of the normative regulation of storytelling comes from institutions and schools acting as both the process and product—the discourse and its artifact—of the movement of entrenched power from the past to the present (Baszile, 2017b; Foucault, 1972, 1990). As people consider the past, their historical memory may be coded and structured by the very discourses under investigation, which manufacture a stance of consent (Flores, 2002; Gramsci, 1971). Referring to the closely related concept of cultural memory, Brown and Au (2014) state, “cultural memory contends that implicit and explicit modes of power (discursive and material) inform the way a historical narrative is rendered” (p. 362).

In addition to these considerations about content, queer self-study is also concerned with form: *how* we tell our stories matters. Heteronormative storytelling contradicts queer content, reinscribing the very structures intended for disruption (Bradway, 2021). A conventional storyline

with a subtext of redemption, or growth in self-understanding, or even progress and success subverts the depiction of the social disorientation “that queers and other sexual dissidents experience being violently dislodged from the social world” (Bradway, 2021, p. 19). Patriarchal norms in Western storytelling are reproduced in causal plotlines, authoritative representations, bounded representations of identity including gender and sexuality, and a fixed point-of-view—even the traditional organization of words on the page—all these forms undermine the reconstruction of non-binary possibilities of identity (Warhol & Lanser, 2015).

In contrast to these complications, however, queer narrative theorists have recently begun to examine ways in which writers have constructed texts whose content and form promote queer perspectives (Warhol & Lanser, 2015). Strategies include allowing for “nonlinear plurality, the open sense of temporality” (Matz, 2015, p. 242), “revers[ing the] positions of speaking authority—subject and object” (de Villiers, 2012, p. 11), and contesting the authority of signification (Meyer, 2002, p. 258). Matz (2015) has critiqued storylines that produce false hopes for the future as contrasting with typical gay outcomes. Queering is spinning positionality in different directions (Sedgwick, 1993), finding multiple variations in position and strategy without adopting any one definitively” (de Villiers, 2012, p. 15), breaking with causal, deterministic, natural, and pre-ordained plot lines (Roof, 2015), combining memoir with critical essay (Cvetkovich, 2007), and engaging in queer parody, such as camp, “an intertextual manipulation of multiple conventions” (Meyer, 2002, p. 257).

In short, queer narrative theory frames *currere*'s critical analysis around gender and sexuality, while at the same time foregrounding the political nature of embodied experience. It acknowledges “linkages between sexual politics and other issues such as war, migration, and racism” (Cvetkovich, 2007, p. 462). And, it also provides a range of queer narrative strategies for synthesizing and telling queer stories in non-heteronormative ways.

***Currere* Informed by Queer Narrative Theory**

Currere's roots in the first wave of the curriculum reconstruction movement of the 1970s and 1980s reveal its critical stance toward deconstructing normative discourses. As a reaction against the structuralism, positivism, and technicism undergirding American curricular thought and design and a reaction toward self-critique in relation to issues of equity (e.g., schools' contribution to mechanisms that sort students into producers and consumers) (Pinar et al., 2008), curriculum scholars called for a reconceptualization of the curriculum field, shifting “from a primary and practical interest in the *development* of curriculum to a theoretical and practical interest in *understanding* curriculum” as critical text (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 187).

In this process of understanding, *currere*'s creator, William Pinar (2017), emphasized the intersections between lived experience and educational experience (Pinar, 2012). Central concepts to curriculum reconceptualization include historical/cultural deconstruction, a juxtaposition of stories, and a promotion of textual multiplicity (Pinar et al., 2008). Within *currere*, these concepts, grounded in education, become pedagogical. As a methodology, *currere* has four moments (also known as steps or stages): the analytical, the synthetic, the regressive, and the progressive (Pinar, 2012). These four moments are generally recursive and nonlinear, with a shifting foreground/background emphasis in their use. In the following brief description of them, I first describe the transconceptual moments (i.e., analysis and synthesis) followed by the transtemporal ones (i.e., regression and progression), framing the discussion around queer narrative theory and

self-study. I illustrate key considerations with examples from my high school *currere* as a skinny, introverted, white male gay (but “closeted”) student in Seattle long ago.

The Analytical Moment

In the analytical moment, we decontextualize and juxtapose memories of actors, places, and experiences into a temporal and conceptual third space:

The analysis of *currere* is akin to phenomenological bracketing; one’s distantiating from the past and extrication from the future functions to create a subjective—third (Wang, 2004)—space of freedom in the present. This occurs in the analytic moment, wherein we attempt to discern how the past inheres in the present and in our fantasies of the future. (Pinar, 2012, p. 46)

With my *currere*, my initial goals were to generate memories and to simultaneously dislodge them from their taken-for-granted story lines. I facilitated this goal by using bracketing, as suggested by Pinar and followed by Joe Norris and me in duoethnography (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer, 2017; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Pinar (1975) states,

We require a strategy that will allow us to “bracket” the educational aspects of our taken-for-granted world. That is, we must attend to the contents of consciousness as they appear. One loosens one’s usual holds on thinking that reflect cultural conditioning and result in vaguely instrumental and sharply other-directed thinking. (Pinar, 1975, p. 406)

This strategy is akin to the framing technique that queer artist Francis Bacon used in his paintings of embodied twentieth century horror. He framed distorted human figures in the center of his paintings in order to break their associations with a fixed contextual meaning, exposing the figures with a naked physicality (Deleuze, 2003).

To begin my *currere*, I found my old high school yearbook and selected the candid shots—not the formal individual student poses but the spontaneous pictures of students. I arranged them on my physical desktop in a random way, scanned a few onto my computer, and then began to rearrange them in my *currere*. To bracket them I placed them in boxes and formally exhibited them in my study. It’s interesting to note that the yearbook editors placed Shakespearian captions under some of the candid photos to provide a witty narration. I highlighted the quotes in italics.

Exhibit One. A Few Yearbook Candid Photos

Cut along the dotted line, rearrange images; write new captions.



The image: A white male student with a long, crooked smile and gleaming eyes dangles a rope noose. He looks straight at the camera.

No caption.

The image: In the library, four standing male students crowd around a sitting female student who appears to say something defensively.

The caption: The lady doth protest too much, me thinks. –Hamlet

<p>The title: “The Men’s Club Officers”</p> <p>The image: In the lower photo four male teenage officers, all smiling, are dressed in evening attire (black slacks and jackets, white shirts, black bowties) and stand in front of an expensive, LA style restaurant. In the top photo the same four students, lean against a cocktail bar; drinks and straws litter the counter.</p> <p><i>No caption.</i></p>	<p>The title: “The Girls [sic] Club Officers.”</p> <p>The images: Three photos show a faculty advisor with five female officers engaged in public duties in an auditorium. In one photo, they pose in front of a sculpture with the Space Needle behind them. They all wear matching sleeveless argyle sweaters, white knee-high socks, black skirts, and white shirts.</p> <p><i>No caption</i></p>
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The image: A male student, puckering his lips, is camping it up, holding out a limp hand [trying to look disabled? Gay?] and opening his long trench coat to the waist.

No caption.

I let the photos and captions speak to me, to engage me in an evocative dialogue (Leavy, 2020; Sameshima & Irwin, 2008; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012). I jotted down relational associations and thoughts to use later as I synthesized these artifacts from my life.


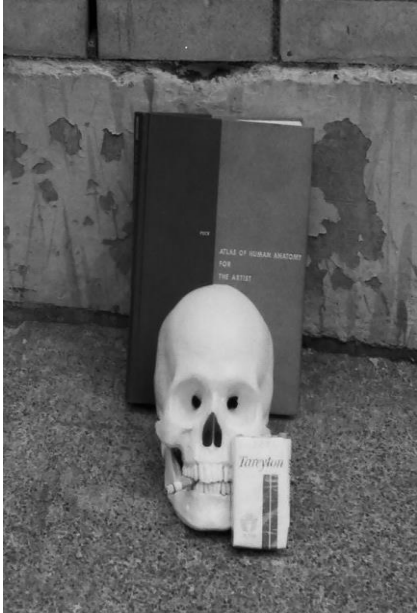

Next, I interrogated the photographs I took myself at the school, documenting the unofficial spaces around the school. Here I wanted to play with the performativity of the text. I turned to Kathy Acker’s (1978) novel, *Blood and Guts in High School*, for inspiration. Acker queered her storylines by inserting a hand-drawn dream map—a pictogram—into her novel, as part of its movement. Merport Quiñones (2021) describes this queer strategy:

The achievement of Acker’s drawings is that they encourage their viewer’s desire to find, to come into contact with this sort of embodied performance without encouraging her attachment to the oppressive hierarchies of cultural production associated with traditional Anglo-European ideas about creative subjectivity. Look for me, they seem to say, but also—leave behind your usual ways of seeing. (p. 1349)

To promote polyvocality within my layout, I was also guided by Francyne Huckaby and Molly Weinburgh’s (2015) *Spark Like a Dialectic*. In their duoethnographic self-study, they examined their connections to the familiar and racist “Ice Cream Truck Song,” the jingle playing from trucks selling ice cream on city streets. To disrupt norms that mask the song as inviting and wholesome, they constructed their text as a polyvocal performance, with Huckaby writing in white type against a black backdrop and Weinburgh in black type against a white backdrop.

I built on their polyvocality to create a dialogue between my photographs and my vignettes. I opened the storyline by presenting two versions of the same experience.

Exhibit 2: Sex Education Class: Everyone Thought about Sex

	<p>We crowded into our sex education class in a basement classroom. Bodies were omnipresent. The flat-topped teacher spoke of the joy of sex within marriage. Then he said something rude about homosexuals. Everyone had sex in mind.</p>	
<p>Male students gathered in the choir and the drama class. On stage, they were dressed in loose fitting costumes and sang and danced in “The Miracle Worker” and “Lil Abner.” One group at school was called “The Queen’s Men.” The Queen’s Men looked wholesome and fresh—poster boys for queering a restricted space.</p>		<p>Male students gather in the choir and the drama class. On stage, they are dressed in loose fitting costumes and sing and dance in “The Miracle Worker” and “Lil Abner.” One group at school is called “The Queen’s Men.” The Queen’s Men look wholesome and fresh—poster boys for queering a restricted space.</p>

The goal is create a third space that resonates with intertextual practices and multiplicity (Bhabha, 1994). According to Aoki (1993), curricular multiplicity is engendered in the spaces that lie between students, teachers, and others—in the dialogues we create. He cites Deleuze: “In a multiplicity what counts are not . . . the elements, but what there is between, the between, a site of relations which are not separate from each other. Every multiplicity grows in the middle” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, as cited by Aoki, 1993, p. 260).

To create dialogue, I juxtaposed items representing both the official and unofficial school curriculum: my senior yearbook, an old report card, old contact sheets of photos I took, and a journal. In dialogic spaces, meanings are generated in the present, broken from their discursive regulation. Central to this process for me was the creation of a polyvocal text. By this I mean the creation of a text (my *currere*) where I examined relational meaning within the dialogic spaces between texts, photos, situated memories, views of curriculum, and meanings over time. This multiplicity of voice promotes an intertextual heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 1981) supplanting causality with relationality within the storyline. The polyvoices gave “shape to an internal dialogue” (Baszile, 2017b, p. vi), as a personal catalyst for insight and transformation.

The Synthetical Moment

In the synthetical moment, participants consider how to pull their analysis together, but in an emergent and ongoing way: “unlike traditional Eurocentric autobiography—where the point is to tell one’s life story in heroic terms, the point of *currere* is to intervene in one’s educational experiences and to consider how they have manifested and how they will manifest as one’s private and public self” (Baszile, 2017b, p. vii). Pinar (2012) describes the moment of synthesis as heteroglossic and multilayered, involving both analysis and synthesis:



Conscious of one’s embodied otherness, one confronts one’s own alterity in public. Listening carefully to one’s own inner voice in the historical and natural world, one asks: “what is the meaning of the present?” This [is] a moment of synthesis—one of intensified interiority expressed to others. (pp. 46–47)

This replication of oppressive historical ideology is avoided by a process that is performative, subjective, transactional, and dialogic. Although here Pinar is discussing curriculum, I think this quote also applies to *currere*:

Understanding curriculum as deconstructed text acknowledges knowledge as preeminently historical. Here, however, history is not understood as only ideologically constructed, rather as a series of narratives superimposed upon each other, interlaced among each other, layers of story merged and separated like colors in a Jackson Pollock painting. The stories we tell in schools, formalized as disciplines, are always others’ stories, always conveying motives and countermotives, dreams, and nightmares. To understand curriculum as deconstructed (and deconstructing) text is to tell stories that never end, stories in which the listener, the “narratee,” may become a character or indeed the narrator, in which all structure is provisional, momentary, a collection of twinkling stars in a firmament of flux. (Pinar et al., 2008, pp. 448–449)

Aside from its beauty, the above passage is almost a “queer” narrative manifesto in its critique of narrative authority, suggestion of character morphing, statement of provisional structure, inclusion of dreams and nightmares, and suggestion of open, changing stories.

Exhibit 3. Photography Class

	<p>Two students fight with sticks in the road. Another student makes an anti-smoking message. I go to photography class. The flat-topped teacher talks to a jock. I stay in the darkroom. I love the wet alchemy of chemicals becoming images in the white light.</p>	
<p>Two students fight with sticks in the road.</p>		<p>A student makes an anti-smoking message.</p>

Queer textuality promotes an intertextuality where meaning is derived from the performativity on the page and not their underling denotative meaning (de Villiers, 2012). Thinking of Bertolt Brecht’s (1957) alienation effect, I attempted to distance myself from the denotative meanings in the textual material. Decontextualized photos, bracketed details, disjointed plotting, unexpected graphics, shifting points-of-view, announcements to the readers/audience, and jarring juxtapositions, for example—all contributed to an alienation effect and a queer disorientation. Double-coding these images with intertextual, relational, and connotative meanings, I examined them outside their routinized and normative meanings.

Exhibit 4. Language

The contrast between the specific discourses within the yearbook and the mainstream story of American education progressing toward equity is stark. I can’t help but think about my indoctrination into the meanings of the yearbook just from these few images: my high school cultural conditioning endorsed white supremacy, male sexual dominance, female subservience, and gay invisibility.

90% of my LGBTQ friends who work in higher education have not received tenure or promotion. They were erased psychically during their employment and then physically after six years of work. Their bodies display political scars.

The language of allegory further opens possibilities in the representation of one’s story. Pinar quotes Angelika Rauch: “Allegory is an alternative way of reading that assembles fragmentary pieces in a collage that consists of various, if only once meaningful, representational elements” (Rauch, 2000, as quoted in Pinar, 2012, p. 51). In other words, the assembled pieces intertextually contribute to the multiplicity within *currere*, overlaying detachment and intimacy

and elevating a story as it grounds it: “Allegory keeps open the question of the present, however conclusive the evidence, precisely because it declines to coincide with it” (Pinar, 2012, p. 61)

The Regressive and Progressive Moments

Participants interweave—with occasionally a more dedicated focus on a specific moment—regression and progression—onto the analysis and synthesis (although again, in a non-linear way). In the progressive moment,

the student of *currere* imagines possible futures, including fears as well as fantasies of fulfillment. ... As in the past, the future is infiltrated with cultural content, but even aspirations for happiness are not only specific to the individual and his or her family, but incorporates elements of national history and culture. (Pinar, 2012, p. 46)

The above quote suggests the regulatory role of “national history and culture” to one’s achieving happiness in the future. I think it’s important to note that with *currere*, “aspirations for happiness” are lived in the present and are ongoing. To me this consideration echoes the observation about the hollow promise of future-oriented plotlines for queer individuals (and especially youth): critiques of temporality “cast doubt upon any hopeful sense that time naturally unfolds toward queer outcomes” (Matz, 2015, p. 230). Instead, hope for the future is produced by resistance in the present.

Finally, in the regressive moment, an inquirer tries to re-experience past lived existential experience. Again, to stimulate and transform memory, one free associates. “In doing so, one regresses, that is, re-experiences, to the extent that is possible, the past. The emphasis here, however, is the past, not (yet) its reconstruction in the present” (Pinar, 2012, p. 45).

In my experience with *currere* and duoethnography, this step or moment of re-entering the past in a critical yet concrete way with sensory detail and even contradictions of experience is central to the process. Reflexivity and self-understanding are grounded in an “honest” and maybe even harsh re-entry into the past.

The juxtaposed photos and paragraphs in my *currere* overlaid progression and regression, analysis and synthesis. The analysis did not focus on fixed meanings (in contrast to the traditional coding of the yearbook photos), but rather on their possibility of generating and constructing multiple and even conflicting meanings. They defied a simple truth or normative presence. In *currere* more generally, this synthesis generates and communicates new possibilities in the flux of the moment, in the process of engagement. Matz (2015) describes this generative pedagogy of temporality in relation to queer narrative theory:

Perhaps what is at issue here is less futurity itself than an alternative way to refuse our present circumstances ... determined by a more truly innovative temporality. Stressing its pedagogical character, I have hoped to shift attention from time schemes that shape our lives to those that are shaped by our practices and rhetorics. (p. 247)

In the progressive moment, Pinar describes the future as linked to the present (Pinar, 2012, p. 133).

Exhibit 5. Shadow Stories

<p>The Official Story My yearbook communicated an idealized image of white male strength, masculinity, beauty, and territoriality. The young men leapt, ran, tossed, carried, tackled, blocked, huddled, kicked, shot, bounced, dribbled, pitched, caught, batted, flexed, swung, putted, scored, and won. The male gaze projected onto young women who were sexualized, trivialized, cornered, and silenced in their photos or captions. Striking is the reified and closed nature of this power. The images and captions taken together showed that the avenues of power were one-way and open only to a few.</p>	<p>My Story I experienced an educational story common to many LGBTQ children: alienation from the official curriculum, personal distress and anxiety, disempowerment, and dislocation instead of a direction forward. This was not teenage angst. It was a situation in which teachers were dismissive in rare references to homosexuality, rendered gay students invisible, or recoiled from gay students presenting an appearance of homosexuality. However, for me, in a shadowed light, I also experienced a disjointed counter curriculum of joy, critique, community, art, and liberation.</p>
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I am educated by friends, past and present: those who died of AIDS, and those who currently organize and engage in civil disobedience, those who love dinner theater, and those who are daily bullied and belittled at work. Taking our history from the shadows is a form of resistance.

A Continuing Reflection

When I first considered doing this *currere*, I wondered how easy it would be to access a queer high school story that had existed partly in an interior space. Then, when I began the study and thought back on my experience, I was immediately inundated by images of the school's homophobia and my general alienation, and I couldn't remember any positive experiences or thoughts: the official story dominated my lived experience. Initially, my null curriculum was out of reach. I discovered, as Baszile (2017b) suggests, that the hidden curriculum can dominate and become hegemonic:

even more powerful than the discrete "education" we receive in schools is the curricula hidden ..., reinforced through other social and cultural institutions and practices that support pedagogies of empire—neoliberalism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and so on. These pedagogies teach us how to be raced and gendered consumers in ways that reinforce their disciplinary powers. Even more worrisome is that this learning is largely subconscious. (p. viii)

But the mutually generative moments in *currere* and the material strategies of queer narrative theory opened a space for me of political praxis (Freire, 1970).

Doing this study, I realized how the act of creating and presenting queer studies is a political act. Running these stories next to mainstream stories ideally exposes the bigotry if not the violence of more dominant stories. Stories are pedagogical, not just for the listener, but also and

perhaps more importantly for the storyteller/writer. Taylor and Helfenbein (2009) discussed how a process of conceptualization in storytelling can disrupt oppressive discourses (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Rooted in lived counter experiences, conceptualization promotes the emergence of counterspaces, which are “spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (Soja, 1996, as cited in Taylor and Helfenbein, 2009, p. 322).

My counterspace of praxis lay not just in the past (helping me to see and combat the heteronormative curriculum), but more importantly, in the present. Today, for queer individuals, heteronormativity manifests in the promotion of a “new normal,” delineated by the concept of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002). Duggan defined homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). To this day, when institutions of education (and certainly including those of higher education) are not erasing LGBTQ culture and critique, they are often co-opting and trying to mold them into neoliberal shapes.

To resist hegemony, as many scholars have noted, we need to try to understand and confront the lived past to move with a reconceptualized purpose and vision into the future (Baszile, 2017a, 2017b). *Currere* framed by queer narrative theory puts a human face on the abstract and symbolic quality of lived experience, helping to situate it historically, socially, and subjectively (Pinar, 2012), thus helping us to reconceptualize our relationship to it.

One question, though, is whether queer stories—rich with multiplicity, broken plot lines, brackets, and decontextualized frames—can compete with the traditional and predictable Anglo-European story. I have to answer in the affirmative. A few days ago, I saw a film called “In the Name of Scheherazade or the First Beergarden in Tehran,” by Iranian director and filmmaker Narges Kalhor (2019). The film (containing an inner film) presented multiply layered story lines: a queer man seeking asylum in Germany from “objective” immigration authorities, animated versions of tales from the Arabian Nights (Scheherazade telling the sultan a nightly story to prolong her life), delightful shadow-puppet sequences, friends talking and slowing rising on a “flying carpet,” Kalhor trying to protect her film from her professor who desired a traditional story with a happy ending, Kalhor strategizing about her project to friends, characters’ direct addresses to the audience, German beer-making experts describing Bavarian beer, Iranian authorities lecturing about the Western evils of alcohol. The film was a pastiche of different images and stories. To me, the film presented a powerful intertextual counterpoint to what might have been a typical Western story leading to an ending of unrealized and unrealistic dreams (a form of normative lecturing). The film showed the power of allegory and complexity to open the mind and imagination to new possibilities (in the midst of a bleak landscape).

I think that *currere* and queer narrative forms scaffold one’s imagination of new images of social justice in action. Decades ago, Freire (1970) revealed that, to promote liberation, we need to change our understanding of the structures of oppression. To sustain a larger and more enduring social justice project and to counter white supremacy, patriarchal hegemony, and heteronormativity, we need to revise the epistemological and ontological bases for our conceptions.

Clearly, my own high school *currere* is not going to dismantle structures of homophobia or reduce the physical and psychic cost of being erased from the curriculum (Pinar et al., 2008). But counter stories represented by *currere* help shift the discourses within educational and curricular entanglements that bind. Erased and silenced stories need to be reconstructed, told, and

heard to become pedagogical contexts for critique and disruption of ongoing discourses of supremacy. Telling our own stories is difficult, but the alternative is all too apparent: someone else will do it for us, and we will be present only through our absence.

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Within and Beyond Religious Boundaries

Welcoming the “Uninvited Visitor” through a Curriculum of Hospitality

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I must welcome the infinite. ...this is the first hospitality. (Derrida, 2002, p. 386)

MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD as a Curriculum Studies scholar and human being (are the two synonymous?) has unfolded in a series of accumulated insights. As I continually add thoughts and experiences to the tangled pile in my mind and body, patterns eventually and suddenly emerge. Most recently the interconnections between curriculum and religion along themes of inclusivity and relationality beckon me to follow the stream of my unconscious and put words to the ineffable. For me, this is a re-searching of the individual parts to see a larger integrated whole. The following experiences led me to the impetus for the current paper:

Experience 1

In a graduate level curriculum studies course in a program that espouses diversity, equity, and social justice at a primarily white university in a decidedly Christian state, a student emphatically proclaims, “I’m a Christian, and there is nothing that is going to change that!” I can’t recall the specific topic, but I do recall being surprised because, in my view, I nor anyone in the class had even hinted at changing anyone’s religious identity. It seemed as if they did not feel that social justice work was compatible with Christianity and that “liberal” education was trying to somehow change them. Despite growing up in a conservative Christian household myself, my “reading” of Christianity was different. Was there room for our differences?

Experience 2

Serving on the dissertation committee of a student in the Curriculum Studies program, a student kept returning to the notion of her Judeo-Christian identity and linked it to her research topic. At first, this seemed unremarkable. But later, I began to wonder about the link between Judaism and Christianity. Having lived for two years in a rural, primarily Muslim village in Cameroon, students and colleagues told me stories from the Koran that were the same as those in the Christian Bible. This came as a quite a shock. Why didn't I know about this relationship before?

Experience 3

As I pondered these two experiences, a memory suddenly popped out. Talking with one of my own professors whose spirituality lay outside of Western traditions, they remarked how strange it was that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam didn't "get along" better given that they had a shared lineage. Again, I had not considered this shared lineage and had accepted the split between a Judeo-Christian and Islamic points of view as obvious, so I tucked this away into my mental file cabinet.

Each of these experiences and comments opened a pathway for me to reflect on how curriculum and pedagogical practices (including my own) might be more inclusive of other belief systems. This seems impossible. How can I stay true to my own beliefs (religious, spiritual, and otherwise) while supporting others whose beliefs seem intolerable and exclusive and vice versa? It is in this spirit that the journey begins.

Perhaps I should state at the outset that it is not my intention to denigrate or minimize any religion. Nor do I view any religion as being better than or worse than the other. Each religion has multiple branches and can be understood and practiced in a myriad of ways. For this paper, I am more concerned with the conceptual relationships between the three Abrahamic religions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—and how shifting relationships between the three might serve as metaphor for reframing curriculum.

In this vein, I also explore Derrida's notion of "hospitality"—a welcoming of the "uninvited visitor"—as one possibility for inviting religious and other differences of gender, race, socio-economic status, etc. into curriculum. It is my hope that exploring these interrelationships can provide insight for a more inclusive curriculum for students and teachers of all faiths, those who do not claim a faith, and those who belong to multiple faiths simultaneously.

In constructing a framework of hospitality, I tease out some of the recurring themes in Derrida's writings and lectures on the subject. I also weave in some of my own pedagogical insights regarding the ways in which hospitality might be implicated in practice. I begin this paper by briefly examining the connection between education and religion followed by a rationale for why I chose Derrida's work on hospitality as the theoretical grounding for this paper. Next, I deconstruct the Judeo-Christian narrative as a way of recovering the Muslim third. While this section does not focus exclusively on Derrida's writings, it does allow for a rethinking of the relationship between the three Abrahamic religions, which sets the stage for his theory of hospitality. The remaining sections focus more strictly on Derrida's concept of hospitality. The themes I explored are: hospitality and the "uninvited visitor," difference as a human right, secularization, the welcoming experience, and forgiveness. I conclude with an exploration of what these concepts may mean for a curriculum of hospitality.

Religion and Education

Other writings address more deeply the long history of the ways in which public education has grown out of religious traditions, but that is not the focus of this paper. What I am concerned with here are the relational aspects between education and religion. While there is a gloss of a separation of education and religion, at least in the American public school system, it seems obvious that such a separation is implausible from the beginning as students, teachers, curriculum designers, and administrators bring their own religious and non-religious lenses to bear in their understandings of curriculum.

My own perspective is that any attempt to divest students and teachers of their religious beliefs in the context of public education is disingenuous. When I was a child growing up in the 1970s, there was a push to remove prayer from schools. The joke among students was that anyone who didn't believe in prayer had never been at school on test day. Our religious and spiritual beliefs, jokes notwithstanding, are already there and influence our points of view in different ways. This is not a free pass for imposing one's beliefs on another through public schooling, whether those be religious, personal, social, and/or political. It is an opportunity to acknowledge one's beliefs and to utilize those beliefs to create spaces of acceptance, even for those with whom we significantly differ.

It could be argued that the relationship between religion and education can be mutually beneficial. In noting the inseparability of education and religion, Daisaku Ikeda (2007), founder of the international peace institute known as The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC), argues that the “humanism that lies at the heart of all religions—is indispensable” in developing a more “humane” education (p. ix). He adds that education can help religion from becoming overly “self-righteous” and conversely that education derives its “true value” when supported by “spirituality and philosophy” (p. ix). In noting the need to explore issues of spirituality in society more broadly, Chérif (2008) adds that both avoiding spiritual matters and enforcing spirituality in a strict way out of a “fear of freedom,” serves to heighten “dehumanization” (p. 5). This suggests that the spiritual aspects of religion, when practiced thoughtfully and not imposed or mandated, can foster an educational system that embodies care for all students and that imbuing education with spirituality can also serve to re-humanize it.

At the same time there is a continual need to guard against the merging of religious and political power within institutions, including schools. Specifically, one must especially resist the authoritarian urge to pick and choose whom to welcome and whom to reject based on a veneer of religious belief. Research professor and best-selling author Brené Brown (2012) argues,

It doesn't matter if the group is a church or a gang or a sewing circle ... asking members to dislike, disown or distance themselves from any other group of people as a condition of “belonging” is always about control and power. (p. 108)

It may seem harsh to implicate both religion and education as sites of authority, power, and control. Yet it can be this same power both inside and outside of religious and educational systems that can be used to create spaces that are inclusive and support differences no matter how difficult. The idea is not to take on or accept those beliefs, but to defend others' right to be different.

Why Derrida?

As I began to look at the way in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were connected and disconnected, I came across the writings of Jacques Derrida. In these writings, Derrida explores a theory of hospitality, often by shifting our understanding of the relationship between the three Abrahamic religions. Some of the writings that form the basis of this exploration include Derrida's (2002) *Acts of Religion*, Derrida's (2000) *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, and Chérif's (2008) *Islam & The West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Other writings are, of course, included where noted.

Derrida's early years growing up in Algeria, as a "Franco-Maghrebin, Judeo-Arab Jew" (Chérif, 2008, p. 31) seem to have cosmically positioned him at the intersections of multiple cultural, political, linguistic, and spiritual crossroads from which much (but he notes not all) of his philosophical work derives. According to Derrida (as quoted in Chérif, 2008), it was the movement between and among different cultures that created a sort of "instability" that fed the "questions" that gave rise to the "earthquake" of his life experiences (p. 31). Given the apparent "instability" of our current times as evidenced by suggestions that democracy is "devouring itself" (Rosenberg, 2018) and may be at an end, perhaps such instability can be a generative source in striving for what Derrida (as quoted in Chérif, 2008) calls a "democracy to come ... whose occurrence and promise remain before us" (p. 42). From a Derridean perspective, one might then ask—how can democracy be at an end if it has never fully been realized?

It may be interesting to note that, in thinking through the concept of this paper with a friend, she asked why I needed to link these three religions (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) together. Another asked if I should be discussing religion at all in my university Curriculum Studies courses. My response was and is that we should discuss anything that teachers discuss, anything that influences teaching, learning, and the lives of both students and teachers, that it is important in education to explore difficult issues of meaning and to deconstruct language in order to develop new understandings that offer new possibilities, and that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are already always connected through shared ancestry.

Deconstructing the Judeo-Christian Narrative

Whereas the Classical West was Judeo-Islamo-Christian and Greco-Arab, we have been led to believe that it was only Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. The sons of Abraham fall into a trap of confrontation at the moment they must live together. (Chérif, 2008, p. 3)

As I began my research regarding the term "Judeo-Christian," I came across the above quote by Algerian intellectual Mustafa Chérif who reflects on his 2003 public debate with Jacques Derrida. The section that stands out to me in the quote above is "we have been led to believe it was only Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian." I think it is possible that many Westerners (and perhaps Easterners too) do not think of Islam as a Western religion at all, let alone as connected to Judaism and Christianity and as having "participated in the emergence of the modern Western world" (Chérif, 2008, p. 21). If we have been led to believe that the ancient western world was largely Judeo-Christian, how did this term come into usage and to what end?

One of the most powerful ways this belief has taken hold is through the usage of the term "Judeo-Christian" as a symbol of

religious and ethical consensus. The phrase commonly refers to the shared religious texts (the Ten Commandments, incorporation of the Torah into the Christian Bible), shared moral principles (the “golden rule”), and millennia of shared cultural and historical values between Christianity and Judaism. Both faiths affirm one God, prize the covenant between God and his people, and value the dignity of human life. Said to be the basis of Western civilization, the Judeo-Christian tradition invokes shared values and connected fates. (Grzymala-Busse, 2019, para. 2)

Yet, article after article I read seemed to argue that any notion of a “Judeo-Christian” tradition is somewhat of an “assumed tradition,” indeed a “myth” (Commentary Bk, 1969, para. 4 & 11). In fact, the concept itself was described variously as “bizarre, imprecise, and most-importantly dangerous” (Zagoria-Moffet, 2014, para. 1), “historically shaky” and a “modern invention” (Almond 2019, para. 10 & 24), a “construct, an artificial gloss of reason over the swarm of fideist passion” (Commentary Bk, 1969, para. 5), “vague, historically flawed, and inflammatory” (Altshuler, 2016, para. 5), and “an expedient political tactic, rather than a longstanding historical consensus” (Grzymala-Busse, 2019, para. 12) among others. These perspectives throw into question the notion of a unified consensus on the meaning and accuracy of the term.

In the introduction to the book, *Is there a Judeo-Christian Tradition?*, co-editors Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski (2016) open the book by discussing “the myth” of a Judeo-Christian tradition as understood from a European perspective. They begin with the complex and disputed history of the term in Europe and its uses through theological, philosophical, philological, and political lenses. The book itself is centered on the work of Arthur Allen Cohen who was an American scholar, theologian, and author of both fiction and non-fiction works. Specifically, the book focuses on and supports three of Cohen’s claims that the term “Judeo-Christian” was first coined by the German theological scholar F. C. Bauer in the 19th century, that it had a “decidedly negative usage” unlike the usage that sprung up in the U.S. during its fight against Nazism, and that the term “Judeo-Christian” is in effect “anti-Semitic” (Nathan & Topolski, 2016, p. 8–9). The editors also point to the contention that in the 19th century when the term “Judeo-Christian” appeared in print, the term “Semite” referred to Jews, Arabs, and Muslims, suggesting that term “anti-Semitic” applied to all three. They also suggest that the linking of Judaism and Christianity in present-day Europe has led to Islamophobia presumedly because the term “Judeo-Christian” excludes Islam (Nathan & Topolski, 2016, p. 9)

In the United States, use of “Judeo-Christian” increased in popularity in the 1930s (Hartmann et al., 2005, p. 209–210). One of the recognized leading authorities in this area, Mark Silk (as quoted in Winters, 2019), offers a succinct summary of how the term has shifted since it has gained public popularity:

During the 1930s, “Judeo-Christian” came into American public discourse as a way of opposing Fascist anti-Semitism. After World War II, it became the watchword of an America standing for human freedoms against communism. With the rise of the religious right, it was transformed into a synonym for traditional sexual mores and, later, into a shibboleth for Islamophobia. (para. 15)

Reading even this admittedly reduced history—one could argue that the term has been (and is being) used at different times, in different contexts, for different purposes. It seems as if the two religions became linked in opposition against other forces at different points in time—anti-

Semitism, communism, sexual and social permissiveness, and Islam. Further, it was initially used as a term of inclusion—to encourage Christian protection of Jews in the buildup to WWII—but is increasingly used to exclude others (Almond, 2019; Altshuler, 2016).

Some have also argued that Judaism and Christianity are a strange pairing—given their very basic differences in beliefs and practices as well as the history of Christian aggression toward Jews, including blood libels, the Crusades, pogroms, expulsions, book-burnings, ghettos, restrictions on jobs and education, and the toleration of violence and prejudice directed against Jews in the name of Christian integrity (Grzymala-Busse, 2019; Zagoria-Moffet, 2014). Zagoria-Moffet (2014) goes on to argue that Judaism and Islam have more similarities than do Judaism and Christianity, especially regarding “concepts about law, behavior, faith, the nature of God, the obligations of people, the running of a society, etc.” with some exceptions, of course (para. 5). Ultimately, “The myth, then, is a projection of the will to endure of both Jews and Christians, an identification of common enemies, an abandonment of millennial antagonisms in the face of threats which do not discriminate between Judaism and Christianity” (Commentary Bk, 1969, para. 20). These readings suggest not a shared tradition, but an alliance for purposes of political power in the fight against perceived enemies. But why must religions be wielded as weapons when, through their overarching spiritual aspects, they are generally intended to show the connections among all people and provide pathways to ethical relationships with others?

My goal here is not to destroy all of the linkages between Christianity and Judaism—but to look at how the meaning of the term has been constructed, changed over time, and imbued with social and political power. I also recognize the historical connections and the generative possibilities between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, all of which trace their existence to a single ancestor in the figure of Ibrahim/Abraham. Is there space to bring together these three related religions in a dynamic tension without subsuming one into the other? This does not have to be an act of political control or political correctness. Opening up the relationship amongst the three religions could inspire mutual respect, affection, care, and hospitality.

For Derrida (as quoted in Chérif, 2008) “one of the primary duties of our intellectual and philosophical memory is to rediscover that grafting, the reciprocal fertilization of the Greek, the Arab, and the Jew” (p. 39). One example of cross-fertilization mentioned by Derrida was Spain. I believe he was referring to the Iberian Peninsula, which was at one time under Muslim rule. According to the BBC (2009), Islamic Spain (711-1492) has been “described as a ‘golden age’ of religious and ethnic tolerance and interfaith harmony between Muslims, Christian, and Jews” (n.p.), although, as the BBC also notes, Jews and Christians were still considered second class citizens and were required to follow various restrictions.

Derrida’s point is that there are historical examples in which the three Abrahamic religions thrived together, and it is our curriculum task to dig those up as a way of thinking about nonviolent possibilities for the future. For example, for two years I lived in a Cameroonian village where adherents of various forms of Islam, Christianity, and Animism worked together in openly generative ways despite their differences. This could serve as an example of interfaith cross-pollination. Of course, I am not naïve. There are many instances across Africa and the world where a breakdown of tolerance, religious and otherwise, has resulted in violence. Yet, it seemed to me (though I do not speak for everyone) that most people in the village where I lived and in the surrounding area recognized each other’s differences regarding religious beliefs and their own rules of behavior. It felt easy and natural to respect each other’s beliefs because religion seemed to be simultaneously social in observance and personal in practice. It has been difficult to return to the U.S. where freedom is so freely spoken about, but the desire to control the Other through

political means (laws, funding, judicial systems, media, religion, etc.) seems an ever-present reality.

I wonder what shift in thought and relation may be possible if the interconnections and similarities among the three religions (in addition to the differences) were studied, understood, and explored in popular mass media, government institutions, and schools. Such study would not have to devolve into a contest amongst religions but could allow us to reconsider some of our deeply held beliefs. This calls for the recognition that curriculum can, and perhaps should, be both eye-opening and challenging. My hope is that in shifting the language (the language of Judeo-Islamo-Christian) a new relationship may emerge—one in which we recognize family ties and demonstrate that it is possible to work through our differences.

Developing a Curriculum of Hospitality

...hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of impossibility (to receive another guest of whom I am incapable of welcoming, to become that which I am capable of)... (Derrida, 2002, p. 364)

If I welcome only what is welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the *hôte* as invited, there is no hospitality. (Derrida, 2002, p. 362)

Before I begin, I would like to point out, as Derrida notes, that the French word “*hôte*” as mentioned above translates to both “host” and “guest” depending on the context. It is fascinating to imagine that we are in some sense both host and guest simultaneously. What does that mean for the relationship between guest and host? When we extend hospitality to the other, are we offering it to ourselves? When we are inhospitable, does it hurt us both?

According to Derrida, there is a big difference between being an “invited” guest and an “uninvited” guest. When a person is invited and expected, it is easy to be welcoming. Yet, it is in welcoming and making a space for the uninvited guest that one may demonstrate hospitality. This calls for going beyond the limitation of the impossible to create the possibility of hospitality. And therein lies the challenge. Welcoming the uninvited guest takes considerable effort and self-reflection. There are no shortcuts nor rules to follow, only ambiguities and ongoing negotiations between the known and unknown, the shared and unshared.

In an educational sense, it is easy to welcome the students that we expect to share commonalities with. Perhaps these are students who look like “us,” share the same language and culture as “us,” and perhaps expect to be welcomed by “us.” Following Derrida, this would not be hospitality. Hospitality would require educators and educational systems to welcome the students they are not prepared to welcome. These might include students who look different, sound different, come from another culture, speak a different language, have a different sexual orientation, have experienced trauma, etc. These might also be the parts of our own selves whose presence we may painfully neglect.

To welcome these differences would require the impossible—the things we aren’t able to do—but it is precisely because they are impossible that we must recognize and go beyond our social, cultural, political, and religious boundaries to locate possibilities within the impossible. To

do that requires embracing “the infinite” (Derrida, 2002, p. 386)—what I think of as the ultimate interconnectedness of all living things.

Derrida’s (2002) main example for hospitality appears in the personage of Ibrahim/Abraham who is the shared ancestor of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and a “kind of saint of hospitality” (p. 369). Drawing on the work of the French Catholic Scholar of Islam, Louis Massignon (1883-1962), Derrida explores the story of Ibrahim/Abraham and how he was told by messianic visitors of God’s plan to destroy the “wicked” city of Sodom. Yet Ibrahim/Abraham pleads with God on behalf of the lives of those who would be lost. I should note that this story appears in a section of the both the Bible (Genesis: 22-32) and the Quran (Surah Hud 11:73-76). In a sense, Abraham/Ibrahim is negotiating with Allah/God to save the lives of those who would be lost, no matter how despicable. It seems improbable and unimaginable to preserve even the greatest of differences. Certainly, there have been other women and men who have challenged authority in some way to save the lives of others. This example draws out of my reading of Derrida and serves to support the notion that one could work within one’s own religious beliefs and still go beyond one’s religious boundaries to advocate on behalf of those who are seen as dramatically different.

In the story mentioned above, the city of Sodom was ultimately destroyed, but this should not deter us from advocating on behalf of those who may seem unworthy of our advocacy. If it is fear of the Other or how we might be perceived in our care of the Other that holds us back—let Ibrahim/Abraham’s (and others’) example help give us courage. We cannot keep only to ourselves and reject the outside world. Chérif (2008) argues,

No civilization or society can live in autarchy, in closure; and our texts not only authorize but demand the welcoming and the respect of the different other. This is why we are fundamentally attached to hospitality, to exchanges, to negotiation, to debate. (p. 78)

By opening up dialogue both for and with the Other, we learn to open up possibilities for ourselves and the differences within us.

Difference as a Human Right

The logic of war and the globalization of injustice contradict the evoked principles of the rights of peoples and of human rights, the right to be different as well as the access to an authentic universality. . . . To rethink this disturbing world, in which the right to be different is less and less a given, is a necessity that cannot be ignored. (Derrida, as quoted in Chérif, 2008, p. 24)

Implicit in a curriculum of hospitality is the notion of difference and the ability to welcome difference into our lives. I often ask graduate students in my class to define the term culture. They typically speak about cultures in terms of sameness—shared foods, music, religion, language customs, etc. But I ask them, based on Derrida’s insistence that “civilization and community are not about sameness but difference” (as quoted in Chérif, 2008, p. xvii), if it is possible to be part of a culture and perhaps both share and NOT share some of those things. In other words, is it possible to be different and still be a part of a particular culture? And then, doesn’t that broaden the possibilities of what culture may be? At least one student has asserted that cultures are about

sameness and sharedness—that is, she said, how they came about. I suggested that perhaps that might be the case—at least on the surface. If it were the case that communities and cultures were built on sameness though, we would not need vast political and judicial systems to discuss and debate different perspectives. Nor would we need so many laws to protect our individual rights to be different—to have a different religion than the majority, to think differently, to speak differently, to read, write, and view different materials, and to behave differently. To view culture in this way requires being able to both locate the differences within commonalities and likewise the commonalities within the differences without one swallowing up the other.

For Derrida, difference itself is a human right that is under attack and in urgent need of defending. Further, the ways in which we deal with difference speaks to our underlying beliefs. This suggests that without differences justice would not be possible. If we were truly the same—we would have the same needs and think the same way. But humans have the ability to think one way and behave differently. It is one thing to have a belief in freedom, democracy, and social justice; it is quite another thing to behave in accordance with those ideals. Seeing how those who are perceived as different are treated by various cultural actors (educators, politicians, judges, businesspeople etc.) can be telling regarding our beliefs on social justice.

Likewise, current curriculum materials often promote the idea that sameness is preferable over difference, especially through a curriculum that focuses on standardized exams and the pursuit of the one right answer. How can we as educators invoke what Derrida calls the “right to be different” in working with students to develop their and our own differences—even though students sometimes reject this right in order to receive a socially approved “good” grade? Can curriculum also be about the pursuit of differences as well as what Derrida refers to as “access to an authentic universality” (as quoted in Chérif, 2008, p. 24), which I interpret as the right to belong to the human community AND to be different?

Becoming an advocate for curriculum difference can be a challenge. In my view, it would have to begin with educators getting in touch with and advocating for the differences within themselves. As teachers, we are good at learning systems. And, when the social/educational system says something is bad, wrong, taboo, different, many (but not all) of us learn how to suppress those parts of ourselves that are deemed socially/institutionally incongruent. Recognizing and reconnecting with those parts of ourselves takes a gentle kind of strength and intentional work that holds the power to help students make these re/connections as well.

Certainly, we should want students to have the basic skills to communicate, earn a living, and be able to participate in society. But beyond these basics, a whole universe of differences and possibilities within these “basics” also exists. Let us not teach the fear of these differences that we carry within us. Let us make peace with our differences and live more creative and connected lives. Let us internalize inclusivity for the benefit of ourselves and our students, for the ability to care for others begins with the ability to care for ourselves.

Derrida calls this learning about the Other (which I propose to be another person or another side to the self) as learning the “poetry of the other” (as quoted in Chérif, 2008, p. 81). What a lovely thought—to think of difference in terms of the poetry of the other. Not to think in terms of fear or desire to control but to find the beauty within. In this way, curriculum can be a space in which we teach for developing our differences in generative and thought-provoking ways.

Secularization

I do not believe that secularization of the political presupposes a denial of religion. On the contrary, I believe authentic believers, if that word has meaning, are the first or should be the first, to demand separation of the political and the religious, because this is also the condition for the freedom of religion. (Derrida, 2002, pp. 72–73)

Secularization—“or the separation of the political and the religious”—appears to be another important step toward creating a more hospitable culture. Interestingly, Derrida insists that this demand for secularization should be made first and foremost by “authentic believers” whom he describes as “those who are truly living their religious beliefs and not simply endorsing the dogma of those religions” because he believes they “are more ready to understand the religion of the other and to accede to that faith” as a kind of “universal faith” (as quoted in Chérif, 2008, p. 58). The idea is that authentic believers recognize religion as a type of universal human connection. They also see the need to protect everyone’s religious freedoms, not simply their own politically bounded interests. Failing to protect each other’s freedoms turns religions into rivals bent on power and control. It is in this vein that Smith-Christopher (2007) also argues for “radical faith *and* political atheism” (emphasis in original), which he describes as a “faith that embraces ... nonviolence” and “to proclaim oneself an atheist in relation to the preferred gods of nationalism and patriotism” (p. 174). In short, he suggests that citizens not put their faith in political systems that turn religion into a tool for social and cultural division. Pitting religious beliefs against each other in the political arena has the potential to lead to ongoing social and cultural upheaval.

Through my travels in various cultures, I have experienced secularized religious cultures that allowed everyday citizens to flourish. This did not mean that people did not share, discuss, challenge, and question each other’s different beliefs, but beneath it all was an underlying respect and sense of inclusion. I have also lived and worked in cultures in which democratic ideals were promoted, yet the control of the different Other was employed with religious fervor and morality both within and outside of religious institutions. According to Chérif’s (2008) reading of Derrida,

even nonreligious institutions tend to impose their norms and standards from the top down, according to a model of absolute authority shared by the three religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. If this is true, which Derrida believes it is, the liberating duty of deconstruction entails a commitment to secularization ... assumed as the interminable effort to dismantle the theocratic model of institutional authority, which coincides with the demand for unconditional submission. (p. xii)

This is my concern for American public education. That while it is considered a nonreligious institution, it can and sometimes does impose a “theocratic model of institutional authority” that demands the “unconditional submission” of students and teachers. Once such a theocratic model of authority is instilled both within people and within institutions, challenging the system to make space for differences can seem like an abandonment of religious duty. And yet, perhaps paradoxically, a careful deconstructive reading of religious texts can provide openings for challenging the same authority that religions themselves seem to engender. In essence, the religious texts referenced in this paper simultaneously provide guidelines and wisdom for living non-violently in relation to others, but they also push us to think and act beyond what we are able to do.

The Welcoming Experience

It is hard to imagine a scene of hospitality during which one welcomes [accueille] without smiling at the other, without giving a sign of joy or pleasure, without smiling at the other as at the welcoming of a promise ... even if the smile is interior and discreet, and even if it is mixed with tears which cry of joy. (Derrida, 2002, p. 359)

Here Derrida asks us to welcome the Other with a smile, with joy, with pleasure. While it is one thing to tolerate differences, welcoming the Other—the uninvited visitor—with a smile whether physically and/or metaphorically, with pleasure, and with cries of joy is another. How might we convey to the uninvited Other that, You are welcome here! We see your humanity! We celebrate you! We hope you are happy here! We will be sad to see you go! This seems a lot to ask of someone when they are confronted with a person or idea they may or may not want to know.

What is also interesting is Derrida's concept of smiling "as at the welcoming of a promise." In the context of the quote, I think it means a kind of relishing, a wanting, an obligation, an invitation to the joy of caring for another. Taking responsibility for another can be understandably burdensome, painful even, but there is a kind of beauty in making an ethical commitment to give safe passage to another. It can also be a healing of oneself for in recognizing the humanness of the other, we make room for ourselves.

Reflecting further, I began to think about the welcoming smile—and the lack thereof—when encountering the uninvited guest. When I was younger, I served as an International Student Advisor at a local community college. A few students over the years asked me why Americans made "that face" when they tried to talk to them. In a shock of recognition, I knew what they meant by "that face" because I had made "that face" early in my career. I was so intent on trying to figure out what the student needed, what they were trying to say, and which regulation applied to their circumstance that I had forgotten to notice the humanity within. Their presence was often met with my furrowed brow. I had to teach myself to soften, to slow down, to project my sincere excitement at receiving them, and to put our humanness before any work that needed doing. One might call this practicing mindfulness on the way toward inner and outer hospitality.

More recently, I witnessed some examples of "that face" as I introduced an international visiting scholar in various offices around our campus. While some people radiated warmth and welcome through their tone and posture, others barely noted the scholar's existence. They seemed so focused on the scholar's paperwork, they barely looked up from their desks and computer screens. Certainly, this was not the case in every instance—but when it did occur, my heart sank. I felt sad that the "community" I was a part of and represented did not live up the promise of a smile. I even apologized at one point, and the scholar graciously acknowledged that they knew everyone was busy. This is not a rebuke but an awareness to ponder.

Certainly, these experiences speak of asymmetrical relationships of power. Power can both be used to welcome and to protect the "uninvited visitor" as much as it can also be used to segregate and punish differences. As a former Middle School teacher, I tried to use the twinge that I felt when an unwanted visitor showed up unannounced as a signal to embrace the Other in some way. I tried to quiet the urge to subtly and/or overtly separate myself from the Other out of anger and resentment. This does not mean taking an "anything goes" approach to classes and/or failing to engage students in critical dialogue. Nor is it a call to relinquish all power. It is a questioning if it is possible to smile, even under the most the most trying circumstances—to say, "I'm glad you're here" and to mean it.

Forgiveness

Whoever asks for hospitality, asks, in a way, for forgiveness and whoever offers hospitality, grants forgiveness—and forgiveness must be infinite or it is nothing: it is excuse or exchange. (Derrida, 2002, p. 380)

I must admit that when I think of hospitality I do not immediately think of forgiveness. But here I believe Derrida recognizes that hospitality—as extended to the “uninvited visitor”—is not easy and can be a great imposition. Derrida (2002) even describes hospitality as “*to be ready to not be ready* ... to be surprised in a fashion almost violent ... to let oneself be swept by the coming of the wholly other” (p. 361, emphasis in original). In these terms, it makes sense that one must forgive the surprising arrival on the doorstep. At the same time, Derrida (2002) also argues that the host must ask the visitor for forgiveness as well because “one is always failing, lacking hospitality ... one never gives enough” and is “always inadequate” (p. 380). For anyone who has ever hosted others or who has been hosted themselves, the desire to give as much as possible for each other’s comfort while attempting not to be a bother can be all-consuming.

While I did not initially realize it as such, asking for and granting forgiveness, are healing elements within an apparatus of hospitality. As with hospitality itself, Derrida argues that forgiveness must involve forgiving not that which is easy to forgive, but the unforgivable. This can ultimately prove unfulfilling. Yet, without forgiveness, it is difficult to imagine a way forward. So, while it is difficult to embrace the needs and the disruptions of the uninvited visitor, working through those disruptions can lead to greater understanding and acceptance.

An excellent example of this concept is explored in the book, *No Future without Forgiveness*, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) who was tasked to lead South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee. The goal of the committee was to acknowledge and address the long history of unimaginable violence inflicted on its black and brown citizenry perpetrated by whites through a national system of segregation and discrimination known as apartheid. Part of this work involved listening to the innumerable horrors that victims and their families endured. It also involved allowing perpetrators, after meeting certain criteria, to confess their crimes and, in return, they were granted immunity from prosecution. The focus was on healing rather than retribution and embracing the past to make a path forward in the spirit of forgiveness no matter how painful that may be.

I felt that the book was so compelling in its message of acknowledging the damage done, and likewise finding some measure of forgiveness held the potential for healing, that the students in my class would be equally inspired. A student in the class burst into tears at the mention of the word “forgiveness.” She explained that she was a survivor of abuse who was continually asked to forgive the perpetrator. I was not prepared for this response. For me forgiveness suggested releasing anger for one’s own health and welfare. My assumption was not necessarily right or wrong, but I was not ready to not be ready. How could I respond to the student without making things worse? Could I forgive myself for not being ready? How could I prepare myself to be ready to not be ready next time?

This also reminded me of a time when I critiqued the creative work of a 6th grade student. I commented on practically every part of their work. When the student, out of frustration, snapped at me that my remarks were too much, too cutting, I instantly recognized that he was right! I had focused on the work and had forgotten the child. I apologized for my words. I asked for

forgiveness. The student mentioned that it was “so weird” because “teachers never apologize.” This had the ring of “truth.”

Notes on a Hospitable Curriculum

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 77, Emphasis in original)

Maintaining boundaries is not necessarily a bad thing. Yes, boundaries can be used to exclude, but they can also lead to openness and an acceptance of others who differ significantly. I think of the quote above as a sort of Hippocratic Oath for educators although I would replace each “or” with an “and” for greater inclusivity. In saying “yes to who [and] what turns up, before any determination,” we might set boundaries that unconditionally welcome and protect differences in curriculum, even those differences that we perceive as discomforting, limiting, and exclusionary. This is not a call to accept physical or emotional violence. Nor is it a call to avoid addressing the intentional and unintentional marginalization that occurs in schools and society. It is a request for educators to think about the relationships with and among students, how we might perpetuate our own forms of marginalization, and to consider how a curriculum of hospitality might shift those relationships for the better.

For instance, as a student, I recall teachers/faculty who demonstrated a welcoming and celebration of differences, no matter how painful or how much they disagreed with students’ perspectives. Differences, even religious viewpoints that seemed exclusionary, were necessary for a wholistic understanding of the world around us. I left those classes feeling that neither I nor my classmates had been judged for our differing views—even though I internally professed my own desire to dismiss others’ perspectives as wrong and uninformed.

I have also attended classes in which I noted that the teacher was displeased with viewpoints that differed from his or her own viewpoint. In looking back, I can recognize times in which teachers had subtly and overtly distanced themselves from those students with diverging viewpoints. I learned what to say to get a good grade and to feel somehow morally superior. I don’t think I was alone in this. I asked my 7th grade students if it were better to say/do what the teacher expected in order to get a good grade or do things in the ways that were meaningful to them. All but one or two students argued that it was better to please the teacher because it was more important to get good grades. The point being that students learn what we want by observing our behavior and then often play to our desires. They learn which of their classmates are “good” and “bad.” The grades and awards they are given provide them a sense of who is better than whom.

I have been the teacher who has been in/hospitable when “uninvited visitors” (differences) have shown up in my classrooms. Recognizing this, I try to develop my own embodiment of the smile that welcomes unconditionally, conveys they will be given safe harbor, that I will ask forgiveness for not doing enough, and that I will miss them when they are not there. We are both host and uninvited guest at the same time, and in welcoming the other, I am welcoming myself. Such a perspective can be healing for us both.

In Conclusion

When hospitality takes place, the impossible becomes possible but *as impossible*.
(Derrida, 2002, p. 387)

The premise for this paper has been that students' and teachers' religious identities are implicated within curriculum. These religious identities can make their appearance in the classroom in sometimes surprising ways. Further these identities, based on religion, can create boundaries that exclude others. It is my contention though that many if not all religions offer mandates for holding fast to one's religious boundaries while providing a means for crossing those boundaries to ethically engage others. Additionally, preserving and crossing religious and other boundaries can be an impossibly possible task.

I also suggest that Derrida's conceptualization of hospitality offers opportunities for rethinking our relationships with the "uninvited visitor," which I define as other people and the othered parts of the self. As such, I have offered a theoretical framework of hospitality based on Derrida's work that may be useful in shaping our relationships within curriculum in mutually satisfying ways. This framework includes concepts of difference as a human right, secularization, the welcoming experience, and forgiveness. Further, I have shifted the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as an example of how religions can maintain their differences and yet be open to each other through the lens of hospitality.

Lastly, I have woven in my own experiences of hospitality and inhospitality within and outside the classroom. I was surprised and often dismayed by students' claiming of religious beliefs that I perceived as opposed to notions of equity, justice, and the teachings of their own religions. I now recognize my own inhospitality in failing to happily welcome these and other differences—even those I find shocking—despite my own hopes of teaching in a more inclusive way. It is my hope that the concepts and experiences explored here might resonate with other educators so that curriculum might be conceived in a spirit of hospitality. You are, of course, free to disagree. I will be happy if you do.

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