Journal of Humanistic Mathematics

Volume 9 | Issue 1 January 2019

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## Cover Page Footnote

Lynette Guzmán, PhD, is a mathematics education researcher and teacher educator at the University of Arizona. Motivated by experiences as a Latinx woman navigating academic spaces, her scholarship centers on addressing inequities in education for historically marginalized students with attention to identity and power. She examines discourses and practices in mathematics education to interrogate narrow epistemological and ontological perspectives on teaching and learning that often exclude students of color. Lynette enjoys working with prospective and practicing K-8 teachers to transform classrooms with equity-oriented and humanizing practices that value young people as knowers and creators.

# Academia Will Not Save You: Stories of Being Continually "Underrepresented"

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## Synopsis

My entire life I have had to navigate educational structures labeled (by other people) as "underrepresented" in my fields — mathematics and mathematics education. As many people who are similarly labeled in this way know, this meant I had to navigate oppressive structures that positioned me as lesser (e.g., white supremacy, patriarchy). Making sense of these repeated interactions, I wrote my dissertation as a series of three articles, each prefaced with an essay that situated a broader social, cultural, and political context and also connected to my lived experiences navigating academia. These essays were some of my most personal academic writing, and I took time to process why it was important for me to write down these stories of my life — both for the purposes of my dissertation and for my own healing as a human trying to live in this academic world. My conclusion is the title of this piece: Academia will not save you. I initially did not think academia deserved these stories. However, upon further reflection I realized that I did want to share my experiences for those who might have similar experiences navigating the academy. What follows is a revised and expanded collection of those essays.

As a 28-year-old Latinx woman scholar,[1] I have spent much time deconstructing my experiences navigating academic spaces as a former doctoral

[1]Lynette Guzmán, PhD, is a mathematics education researcher and teacher educator at the University of Arizona. Motivated by experiences as a Latinx woman navigating academic spaces, her scholarship centers on addressing inequities in education for historically marginalized students with attention to identity and power. She examines discourses and

student at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest and as a newly hired non-tenure track faculty member in a mathematics department in the Southwest. Through this process, I know that what I know is something to be known, something real, because other people's stories resonate with my stories. For example, *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa [4] was published two years before I was born, but the resonance I felt when reading it was powerful and nearly indescribable. It was incredible to read text that told pieces of my life — my racialized experiences, my relationship with Spanish and English (and Spanglish) languages — even before I existed in this world. How was that possible? Inspired by many brilliant women of color and their creative endeavors (including Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's edited book, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* [14] and Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade* [5]), I offer my stories and hope my vulnerability attracts resonance.

## 1. A Brown Girl Who Was "Good at Math"

When I was five years old, I wanted to be a teacher, however, over the years in school I was constantly encouraged to pursue STEM[2]-based careers instead because I was a brown girl who other people saw as "good at math." I participated in numerous outreach programs designed for "underrepresented minority" students (i.e., women and people of color) in STEM fields. No one encouraged me to go into education; they needed me in STEM. Many are included in this "they" for different reasons. Companies "need" us to portray images of progressiveness and fairness. People of color "need" us to have role model representation and to transform oppressive spaces. Outreach programs that receive grants "need" us to justify funding (salaries) for their work. Researchers "need" us for similar reasons. Our parents "need" us to have better opportunities than they ever did. *But what do we want and need?*

This problem of being continually underrepresented did not go away when I entered mathematics education spaces for graduate school. One difference

practices in mathematics education to interrogate narrow epistemological and ontological perspectives on teaching and learning that often exclude students of color. Lynette enjoys working with prospective and practicing K-8 teachers to transform classrooms with equity-oriented and humanizing practices that value young people as knowers and creators.

[2]Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

was that I did not hear many people talking about it at my predominantly white institution until I read the following in a book chapter by Dr. Julia Aguirre in my second year proseminar course.

> The low-level production of Latino/a mathematics educators with PhDs is sobering. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF), between 1994 and 2004, 39 out of 1,086 (3.5%) mathematics education doctorates were awarded to Latinos/as (NSF, 2006). I am one of these 39. On average over this decade, the number of Latino/a doctorates produced annually can be counted on one hand. [2, page 296]

I will never forget that this chapter was the piece of scholarship that made me believe I could do work in mathematics education research. Not only was this a person who looked like me, but she was also unapologetically speaking truth to power. Unlike the previous mathematics education research work I had read in through my doctoral courses, I felt a genuinely deep connection.

As a K-12 student, I successfully navigated school mathematics without any genuine relationship to mathematics that allowed me to see it as beautiful, useful, or humanizing. I hold a Bachelor's degree in mathematics, yet do not voluntarily identify as a "math person." I have spent years trying to make sense of my complicated relationship with mathematics as a discipline. I ultimately view my experiences as navigating the borderlands of mathematics education: I reject the consuming power of a "math" label imposed onto my identity, but in doing so I feel judged on my presence in *mathematics* education spaces. I am caught in the middle of wanting mathematics (and mathematics education) to love me while I also learn to love myself as a holistic, complicated human who is shaped by other holistic, complicated human beings in the world.

From reflections on these experiences, I have come to approach my scholarship with the following guiding question: How will I work to deconstruct and reconstruct mathematics (education) in ways that treat students, teachers, and prospective teachers with dignity and love? I found this question especially vital as I grappled with our current post-election impacts.

## 2. Searching for Solidarity

I was supported by a fellowship during my last year of graduate school, so I had no formal teaching obligations. After Trump was elected president, I chose to stay at home far away from my predominantly white institution. My black and brown friends immediately organized healing spaces where we could share physical company, our tears, and love for one another. We often organized ourselves because our university was always silent when it came to our needs as students of color; the best we would get were carefully crafted (and vetted) email statements about "diversity and inclusion" and "courageous and honest dialogue" a few days later.

Since the election, I have found myself stuck. The best way I can describe my stuckness is grounded in my anxiety — not feeling psychologically safe. For example, I visited Greece for an international conference and found myself overwhelmingly nervous whenever people would ask me where I was from. I was ashamed and apprehensive to say, "United States." Other times, I recognized my anxiety during what used to be mundane daily wanderings on my way to work, getting groceries, or spending leisurely time on social media. I would drive around and see signs taunting me with "Make America Great Again!" or "#trumptrain" messages. I would scroll down my virtual feeds filled with backlash against feminism and brutal critique against college student demands to be treated as fully human. I was drowning, suffocating, overwhelmed, every day a new paper cut from an apparently unavoidable density of domination and dehumanization.

I also often found myself considering mathematics education unimportant. I still slip in and out of this thinking. It was difficult to go day after day wondering, "*Does any of this work even matter?*" I especially find mathematics education spaces suffocating when I feel pressured to talk about mathematics all the time. I know the world through *more* than a strictly mathematical lens.

I was on a timeline, though, to graduate in the spring, so I had to survive the 2016 election and immediate aftermath of President Donald Trump. Despite a few months full of numbness and not writing my dissertation, I successfully defended my work and graduated with a PhD in summer 2017. I did not expect to find resonance with the 2016 presidential election aftermath for my work in mathematics education. In reflection, I suppose part of my surprise

speaks to how normalized it can be to distance mathematics education from politics in dominant discourses about mathematics, even for someone like me who thinks a lot about identity and power. Writing the election has been part of my healing.

## 3. Surviving the 2016 Election as a PhD Candidate: #dissertationdiaries

> "It's just words, folks. It is just words. Those words I've been hearing them for many years."
>
> Donald Trump, Second U.S. Presidential Debate [17]

Unlike President Donald Trump, I take a strong stance that words matter. The ways we treat people matter. Stories matter. Most important to me as an educator, researcher, and person in the world is how we create and (re)circulate discourses to impact each other, both intentionally and unintentionally. I seek to name and disrupt interlocking systems of oppression such as colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. In doing so, I foreground power embedded within discourses that operates to plague our society at a grand scale, including our schools and classrooms. Since the campaigning activities for the 2016 U.S. presidential election, gender has become particularly salient as a lens for how I have made sense of my experiences as a Latinx woman navigating mathematics education communities in predominantly white institutions.

In Rebecca Solnit's introduction to *Men Explain Things to Me* [20], she described a vignette that spoke to her repeated interactions with men who acted as if they knew more and dismissed her expertise, regardless of whether that was true. She went on to comment, "Every woman knows what I'm talking about" [19]. During the third United States presidential debate of 2016, Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton called out Donald Trump's repeated derogatory statements and actions toward women and stated, "don't think there's a woman anywhere who doesn't know what that feels like" [18]. As a feminist woman of color, I hear this discourse often and recirculate it myself with intentions to strike resonance among women in my audience. Recently, however, I began to question my assumptions that (a) all women have a shared understanding of interactions that speak to patriarchy, and (b) all women identify these interactions as problematic signs of injustice that we must fight.

### *3.1. Intersectional Breakdowns in 2016 Presidential Election Results*

My hesitation stemmed from a range of reactions and feedback to the content of my dissertation wherein I felt, at times, that I was trying to navigate suggestions of minimizing my bias or providing "better" evidence to explain my experiences as gendered and racialized. I also paused during reflections on the 2016 Presidential Election results as I attempted to make sense of how 52% of White women[3] voters supported Donald Trump in exit poll data. This statistic stung as a jarring, unforgettable reminder of my struggle to find solidarity across intersections of gender and race: a majority of polled White women voters (52%) supported Donald Trump while a majority of polled Latinx women voters (68%) and Black women voters (93%) supported Hillary Rodham Clinton [7].

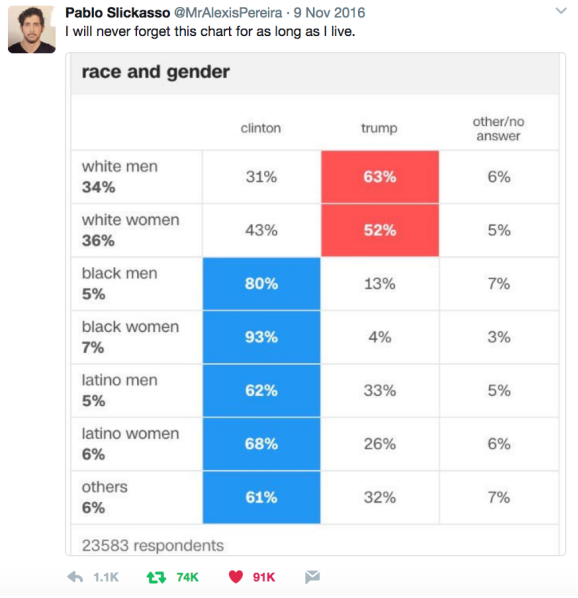


Figure 1: Alexis Pereira's tweet [16], resonating with how I feel about intersectional race and gender exit poll data for the 2016 Presidential Election.

[3]Gender and sex are used synonymously (i.e., female and women) in exit poll descriptors [7]. I am choosing to use the term *woman/women* throughout this paper to connect with my own gender identity; however, I recognize that using this term may exclude non-binary people and representations of multiple genders.

I want to explain why these values shook me by emphasizing that these percentages only provided part of the picture because each percentage point represents a different number of people. That is, one percentage point of White women voters who supported Donald Trump is many more people than one percentage point of Latinx women voters who supported Donald Trump. I feel quite confident in making this statement based on 2010 Census data that the population of the United States by race[4] is 196,817,552 White (63.7%), 50,477,594 Latinx (16.3%), and 37,685,848 Black (12.2%) [22]. There are nearly four times as many White people as Latinx people (and over five times as many as Black people) in the United States; I would assume that a large share of our electorate is White.

This is not to say that internalized white supremacy (and patriarchy) does not exist among some people (and women) of color. Nonetheless, complicating these statistics provided a lens into potential barriers to solidarity. Although I can talk about how 41% of polled women voters supported Donald Trump, I found the intersectional breakdowns quite powerful for examining how white supremacy and patriarchy work together as systems of oppression.

### *3.2. Women of Color are Women*

Three weeks after the election, conservative political commentator and viral online star Tomi Lahren was interviewed by television host and comedian Trevor Noah as a guest on his late-night program, *The Daily Show* [21]. Tomi is a White woman who grew up in Rapid City, South Dakota. Trevor is a multiracial Black man who grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa. During a conversation about NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and the Black Lives Matter movement, Tomi and Trevor talked about the controversy around protesting the national anthem. When asked how Black people should protest their oppression in a "more appropriate" way that is acceptable to conservative critics, Tomi replied:

[4]These numbers exclude multiracial data and ethnicity (i.e., White alone, Black or African American alone). The 2010 Census defined Latinx (i.e., Hispanic or Latino) as an ethnicity, not a racial identity: "'Hispanic or Latino' refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" [22].

> TOMI: I, being a woman, I didn't have rights after Black people, until women got the right to vote, but because I feel like I am a woman, and I'm marginalized in some way, I don't protest my country. I don't see what he's protesting. I would like to know exactly what he is protesting.
>
> TREVOR: So, how do you protest then?
>
> TOMI: I don't protest. Because I'm not a victim. I don't — I choose not to victimize myself. I choose not to make myself the victim. That's the difference.

Through this exchange, Tomi Lahren falsely suggested that women did not have rights until after Black people, which completely disregarded intersections of race and gender by erasing Black women. Somewhere in the back of my mind I heard Sojourner Truth exclaiming, "*And ain't I a woman?*" Yes, Black women exist. Women of color exist. We are also women. While I understand refusing to feel helpless, I do not make sense of what I do as victimizing myself. I must accept, though, that these interlocking systems of oppression are indeed real, pervasive, and strong [12]. I cannot escape them.

After watching this interview, I saw Tomi Lahren as one face within the 52% of White women who supported Donald Trump, propagating messages that (some) women are weak. But I did not know how to talk to someone like her, as many of my (White) social justice and equity-oriented colleagues would encourage as part of "the work" in education. How could I engage with a person who arrogantly assumed that my actions to acknowledge and disrupt oppressive systems meant that I must victimize myself?

### *3.3. Healing through Writing*

Processing the election — and the many complicated discourses that were recirculated after the election — was a time of mourning, confusion, and rage. I was blindsided and experienced a strong, overwhelming existential crisis: the work that I pursued as a mathematics education scholar did not seem to matter. Existing in a society where domination, supremacy, hatred, and dehumanization were part of the fabric made me feel that mathematics, as a discipline, seemed completely pointless.

Writing a dissertation section about intersectional gender inequities (in mathematics education) during this time was like wandering through the darkness of my home at night without electricity: I had a familiar sense of where all the door jambs and furniture were (from my many experiences walking around with light) and could probably navigate the rooms without hitting them, but I still felt anxious and hesitant because I felt overwhelming uncertainty. What if I misjudged the distance and was about to run into something? And I could not simply turn on the light switch to alleviate those feelings because the power was still momentarily out. I felt trapped in my own home.

Writing through the election was a major part of my own healing. I must admit, I had days (and weeks) where I did not write anything about my dissertation (at least, not directly). Instead, I wrote through my feelings in the moment — how I was making sense of my experiences. I still have days when I am overwhelmed, but I had been inspired by several scholars and activists to refuse to remain silent. Staying silent does not help. Some people might think words are "just words," but words are powerful.

## 4. Speaking Back To Move Forward

> *"We need to be careful with 'I don't care' [about 'Where's the math?'],"* cautioned the older White woman. *My mind went racing. My listening started to fade out as I heard foggy sounds coming at me. I have seen this before — words of caution by older (White) people telling me how I should feel and express emotions. This time, though, I was not intimidated by my status on the hierarchy as a student and hers as a tenured professor.*
>
> *After she finished speaking, I replied, "As a woman of color navigating predominantly white institutions, there are only so many things I can care about." I went on to clarify my meaning in not caring about entertaining questions of "Where's the math?" because that kind of question — and intended dividing practice*[5] *— was entirely irrelevant to the humanity I am fighting for in mathematics education spaces.*

[5] A *dividing practice* is a process of objectification by which a human being is "divided inside himself or divided from others" [9, page 326], constructing divisions between normal and abnormal.

Throughout the film *Hidden Figures* (2016), there was a buildup of anticipation as Katherine continued to encounter racial aggressions from her colleagues. She navigated these normalized daily assaults with grace and obedient silence. One day, however, Katherine's boss publicly confronted her about where she had been spending her time while not at her desk, and she boldly responded that she had been forced to use the "colored" restroom in a building over half a mile away from her work space. She continued to voice her experiences as the only Black woman working in a unit of White men: abiding by a dress code for women but not being able to afford a white pearl necklace, seeing her co-workers put out a separate (and non-functional) coffee maker labeled "colored" just for her, and not having a bathroom to use in the building. Speaking is important. My role as a mathematics education researcher is to tell stories that speak back to acts of violence (e.g., psychological, emotional, physical) within mathematics spaces. Through this storytelling, one act of resistance is to choose not to engage clean myths by offering messy (and perhaps more human) stories about people.

### *4.1. No Tolerance for Mediocrity; No Pressure, Right?*

I have begun this work through how I share stories about my own experiences navigating an academic life. First and foremost, I am indebted to women of color, both within academia and at home, who sustain me with their labor and love. A couple years ago, I mentioned to a professor that I aspired to be like Julia Aguirre and Rochelle Gutiérrez, two notable Latina scholars in my field of mathematics education. The professor responded, "Well, that's a pretty tall order," referring to their high esteem in mathematics education research communities. Yes, absolutely. My role models will be exceptional. To be a brown woman in academic spaces, you must be amazing to exist. That also meant I had to be amazing to exist; there is no tolerance for mediocrity for people who look like me. No pressure, right?

I was recently reminded of this truth when one of my mentors announced to a room full of faculty, PhD recipients, and our families that I was the first Latina to graduate with a PhD in mathematics education at Michigan State University. *The first.* Wasn't that title reserved for important people who accomplished great things in the past? In that moment, my existence made

perfect sense. *En la lucha.*[6] I always thought I was following the paths paved by trailblazers, but I never considered myself as a trailblazer, also. I suppose some paths were already paved and my job was to make sure they did not fade away for those who follow us. I never asked to carry this weight. At the same time, though, it really is a shared burden — a little lighter to carry among all of us fighting for our liberation.

> and when we speak we are afraid
> our words will not be heard
> nor welcomed
> but when we are silent
> we are still afraid
>
> So it is better to speak
> remembering
> we were never meant to survive.
>
> Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival" [13]

When I walk into spaces with brown children, they stare at me — eyes lighting up the room because someone who looks like them is doing "great" things. *Epitome of success*, according to my family and others who show me off, like a trophy. (If only they knew their National Hispanic Scholar was labeled "at-risk" in her undergraduate Honors college program.) Anything I said, these children seemed to hang on to every single word. I recognized that feeling, though. Sometimes I am the brown child who does that too, listening to brown women professors: I hang on to each word. They are exceedingly brilliant. We are brilliant. But our stories of resilience and success are simultaneously stories of pain. Single stories erase this messiness. I refuse to be defined as "marginalized" in totality; I am strong. I also refuse being "exceptional" as a rarity; I do not believe human beings are as different as we might think. I am everything — my complex and contradictory self — all at the same time. And so is everybody else.

[6] In the struggle.

### *4.2. Embrace the Messiness, Resist Single Stories*

> "All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."
>
> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of A Single Story" [1]

I understand the allure of mitigating messiness in favor of a consistency that lacks contradictions. Consistency is controllable, possibly predictive. But messiness is realness, resonance that beautifully connect us in powerful ways. A density of messy stories make it difficult to uphold clean myths that often flatten and diminish our humanity. During one experience in graduate school at a forum on education research, I shared my interests in identity and mathematics education in a small group. An older White woman replied, "Girls and math? I thought we were past this!" Granted, I was in a room full of people who did work outside of mathematics education, but it made me confront the pervasiveness of a storyline that we are past inequities, especially because we could point to all these wonderful STEM outreach programs and quantities that suggest we are improved.

But are we really past this? Given numerous studies in STEM contexts, gender inequities are not "solved" for mathematics and STEM spaces; they are subtle, intersectional, and often hidden from the spotlight [3, 11]. This is a primary reason why I feel strongly compelled to challenge the intense emphasis on STEM outreach for women and people of color; not because I think we should not try to pursue STEM but because there is much more work to be done for STEM spaces to be conducive for women and people of color to thrive. I feel the same way about academia: there is much more work to be done for academic spaces to be conducive for us to thrive. I call for messy stories so that it becomes more difficult to tell clean myths with credibility and so that our stories of simultaneous success and struggle can legitimately exist without dissonance.

## 5. Guests Who Don't Belong: Making Sense of Exclusion in Academic Spaces

> Me: "Hi, I'm Lynette."
>
> Colleague: "Dr. So-and-so."
>
> Another Colleague: "Oh, you haven't met before? Lynette completed her PhD at Michigan State."

As one of the first interactions I had as a newly minted PhD, I replayed this conversation in my head for the rest of that day. In the moment, I could not react fast enough. But given at least 8 hours thinking about a single moment, I can certainly say I was caught off guard. Thankfully, another colleague reacted, without hesitation, to address the unspoken in that brief moment: *No, Lynette is not a student; she is a professional colleague.* Academics do not introduce themselves to colleagues as "Dr. So-and-so."

On the one hand, I suppose I should have expected Dr. So-and-so's assumption that I was a student; I have had plenty of aged, racialized, and gendered interactions my entire life, greeted with surprise that I was old (and competent) enough to be where I was in my career. But a bigger dynamic at play involves a variety of exclusionary interactions in academic spaces that are normalized. Scholars who are "conditionally accepted" in academia might feel like guests who do not belong.

### *5.1. We Are Enough*

I found solace in humanizing approaches to research from negotiating my feelings of not being "enough" in multiple intersecting ways — my mathiness, Latinxness, toughness (emotionality), youth, teaching experiences. I have spent the last five years of my life constantly feeling out of place, like I do not truly belong anywhere. My only validation at times is when people share stories like mine. I always find comfort in these moments: we are not alone.

Navigating my feelings has become central to my research work. My entire life I have been chastised for being too emotional. I frequently tried and failed at advice to tame my emotions; I like to wear my heart on my sleeve. In graduate school, this was often referred to as minimizing my own bias. I always read these admonishments as gendered — intensified because of my existence as a woman — and consequently, I have spent much of my intellectual labor masking my emotions to not be viewed as a stereotypical

emotional, overreactive, irrational Latinx woman who has clouded her judgement with feminist ideas. I have been socialized to act in ways that do not draw attention to my womanhood and my brownness.

### *5.2. "I'm not crazy!": Knowing Through Feeling*

I do not remember exactly when I heard and took up the phrase "I'm not crazy!", but I do know it was early in my doctoral program in a space with graduate students of color where we discussed our daily encounters with racism and dehumanization in our doctoral education. Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez called this social narrative "Am I going crazy?!" in order "to represent the tentativeness, insecurity, and doubt that can be projected onto doctoral students of color" [10, page 100].

Resolving the tensions I feel in wanting to belong but not wanting to be labeled, I believe that we are all masterpieces continually in progress. In other words, I appreciate my current existence as an already whole human being, rather than a person who is preparing to become some future idealized self. Yet, I am also dynamic, which opens possibilities for change. "In progress" does not mean I am working toward a static end goal; it means there is no end so I must embrace all of it. Most importantly, I do not hold this view only for myself — I believe each human being is just as complex as I see myself. That is why it is so difficult for me to make sense of acts seeking to dehumanize, particularly in academic spaces where I spend so much of my time and energy.

I often get asked "*How do you know?*" when it comes to experiencing microaggressions based on race, gender, or age in my daily life. I know while it is happening from much more than just spoken words: the tone, the gaze, the posture, the silence, and the vibes and energies I feel in the space. It is quite an embodied experience, sometimes indescribable. In my retellings of stories, though, many people have stared at me in disbelief that anyone would say such a thing or questioned how people could be so blatant with their racism and sexism. Sadly, I only share the stories that I can articulate in words; I would not be able to "convincingly" share the stories where my only "evidence" is non-verbal. Feeling is an important sense that tends to be the first dismissed in my experiences as a scholar (with requests for *stronger* evidence). Hierarchies seem inevitable; power is ever-present, establishing regimes of truth [8].

### *5.3. Politics of Knowledge Production*

After Dr. Erika Bullock's keynote plenary at an international conference in mathematics education [6], one of the working groups reported out with questions from their debriefing discussion: *How is intersectionality new? What does it have to offer that we don't already know?* In that moment, I was livid and did not know why. I kept thinking about it and realized that I recognized this discursive move. You could replace *intersectionality* with anything else and still hear that question in many academic spaces. Was this another intellectual ploy[7], deployed to dismiss women of color scholars (whether intentionally or not)?

I must admit that I do not understand an obsession with "newness" in academic knowledge production because it disregards that our knowledge is intimately linked with time, space, and people. Then, can we ever dismiss knowledge with critiques of newness? New to whom? For whom? Am I only "allowed" to claim knowledge if I can cite other scholars? Do I already know and produce knowledge through my body — continually navigating and making sense of my experiences with a mind-body connection? Can I know and produce knowledge through my being, regardless of whether I can articulate it? *Knowledge is political.* Knowledge and power are inseparable [8].

I question the enterprise of academic research as a primary means for knowledge production. In my writing for academic venues, I choose to engage philosophical work. But the more dystopian novels I read, song lyrics I hear, and stand-up comedy acts I watch, the more I recognize that academia does not own philosophical and theoretical practices. Writers, artists, comics (and more) produce knowledge and are philosophers. My parents produce knowledge and are philosophers. Children produce knowledge and are philosophers. They did not need PhDs to do so. Deconstructing the politics of knowledge production in academia has helped me make sense of a larger dynamic of exclusion in academia.

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[7] Neale [15] wrote about standard intellectual ploys that are invoked to misdirect "radical" academic work to maintain hierarchical functioning within academia. For example, a discipline ploy might be a statement like, "*That is interesting, but it is not my field (or not mathematics education).*" I currently make sense of "*Where's the math?*" as a discipline ploy.

## 6. A Few Closing Remarks

Although I am choosing to leave these stories open and somewhat unresolved, I maintain that this piece produces knowledge for this particular time and space. I am not telling readers exactly what they should take away, nor am I telling them exactly how to make sense of my messy existence as a human. Instead of a tight, well-developed argument, I offer messy, complicated stories that I hope readers interact with in ways that are meaningful to them.

One major take-away from working through making sense of my stories about being continually "underrepresented" is a recognition that we, as human beings, are complex and contradictory. We might struggle because our work is difficult. But a beautiful aspect of this work is embracing human connection: among ourselves as people in the world and in solidarity as people continually working toward a more just world. I have already accepted the emotional nature of this work in making sense of my own story, but now I would like to think about what it means to fully embrace the human connections in making sense of other people's stories. Researchers are not saviors, but we still have opportunities to develop relationships with people. Through those relationships are opportunities to engage in praxis that embodies love, dignity, and humanity. Together, this work might dismantle exclusion as normal in academia. We are not guests, we belong, we are enough.

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