

Web-Text for Social Justice: Countering Dominant Narratives

Context: This is the second major writing assignment in the semester. It comes after a personal experience essay assignment that asks students to write about their personal experiences with oppression or privilege. This second assignment that prompts students to move from their personal experiences with oppression and privileges to the larger context of social injustice. Students work on this extensive project in groups. First, they produce a proposal to suggest a particular dominant narrative that they wish to investigate and dismantle. In that proposal they include research participants that they wish to interview to arrive at a better understanding of a particular issue of social injustice and oppression. The interviewees are mostly members of minoritized groups (e.g.: in terms of race, nationality, ethnicity, cultural heritages, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and so on) who provide perspectives that critique and counter dominant narratives. Students present their proposal in class and receive feedback from their peers and teacher and revise their proposals accordingly. Students also produce an annotated bibliography that includes secondary resources summaries and also summaries of their interviews with research participants. Students produce four drafts of the web-text, the first is draft#0 which consists of the website skeleton with a focus on readability and accessibility as requirements for creating socially just texts.

In this assignment, you will work in groups of 3-4 students, conducting primary and secondary research around an issue of (in)justice in the U.S. and present your findings in a web-text to inform a targeted audience. By a web-text, I mean a combination of interactive text, visuals, audio, and video that you publish online for readers beyond our class community. While you have the freedom to decide what topic to work with, your project should tackle a dominant narrative in the U.S. that advances and keeps (in)justice unchallenged and offers the readers a counter-narrative that promotes social justice.

Definitions

Dominant cultural narratives, defined as “overlearned stories communicated through mass media or other large social and cultural institutions and social networks” (Rappaport, 2000, p. 4), are systems of representation that function as subtle mechanisms of oppression and social control that shape cultural norms and personal beliefs, while concealing the processes that produce them (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). According to social dominance theory, dominant cultural narratives operate as legitimizing myths that justify the maintenance of unequal intergroup relations (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Dominant cultural narratives exert their influence through processes of psychological internalization that shape the self-concept and social perceptions of members of both dominant and minority groups (Hasford, 2016, p. 159).

Counter-narrative “refers to the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized. The idea of ‘counter-’ itself implies a space of resistance against traditional domination. A counter-narrative goes beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. Instead, these must come from the margins, from the perspectives and voices of those individuals. A counter-narrative thus goes beyond the telling of stories that take place in the margins. The effect of a counter-narrative is to empower and give agency to those communities. By choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view, helping to create complex narratives truly presenting their realities” (Mora, 2014, p. 1).

Examples of Narratives and Counter Narratives

Narratives	Counter Narratives
Columbus Day: we celebrate the anniversary of discovering America and we honor the legacy of Columbus	Columbus’s discovery of America marked the beginning of stealing a native land and colonizing its people. We continue to occupy and live on that stolen land, and we continue to oppress Native Americans as a subordinate minority
You can be whatever you want	Circumstances around you including but not limited to race, skin color, culture, nationality, religion, sexuality, gender, class, education, privilege and so on are what decide for you what you could be and what you could not
Black men are more likely to commit crimes than white men; they make the majority of prison inmates, and they commit the most severe crimes.	Black people are segregated from white people, they have less access to education, employment, and government support, and they are discriminated against in the judicial system.
Women who get sexually assaulted contribute to their assault by not being careful, by dressing inappropriately, and by giving men mixed messages	Men are raised since childhood to hold power over women and to see women as subject to their desires.

Project Objectives

- Engage you in the U.S civic life by responding to issues of social (in)justice.
- Develop your critical thinking, research, and analysis skills
- Develop your rhetoric and digital composition skills
- Practice writing for a real audience in a particular rhetorical situation

Project Stages

- Brainstorm, research, and investigate the history of a dominant story
- Research and investigate counter-narratives that resist the dominant narrative that your group wishes to respond to

- Present a research-based web-text to inform a particular and narrowed-down audience about a counter-narrative to make them start thinking of and resisting a dominant narrative in the U.S
- Promote your web-text to your targeted audience

The Web-Text Timeline

(WA = Weekly Assignment)

Friday-Monday (10/22-25) WA10: Project Plan and topic proposal
(google document)

Friday-Monday (10/29-11/1) WA11: Revised topic and research proposal

Friday (11/5) WA12: Web-text Draft #0 (the web-text skeleton and landing page full design) and Authors' Memo

Sunday (11/7) WA13: Report on your web-text

Sunday (11/14) WA14: Annotated bibliography and interview summaries

Friday (4/2) WA15: Web-Text Draft #1 and Authors' Memo

Sunday (11/21) WA16: Peer Assessment of Web-Text Draft #1

Sunday-Tuesday (11/28-30) WA17: Web-text Draft #2 and Authors' Memo

Wednesday-Friday (12/1-3) WA18: Group meeting with Dr. Diab

Friday (12/3) WA19: Reflection on group meeting with Dr. Diab

Friday (12/10) WA20: Web-text Draft #3 and Authors' Memo

Collaborative Rubric/ Assessment Criteria¹:

A good web-text as I see it should meet all the following criteria divided under five categories

Website Components

- The website should include a combination of (interactive text, visuals, audio, and video) components.

¹ Feel free to add your input before we finalize this assessment criteria

- The text component should be at least 6,000 words in length.
- Every web-text should include the results of 3-4 interviews with marginalized participants whose life experiences counter the dominant narrative.

Clarity of the Rhetorical Situation

- The title of the website relates to the rhetorical situation of the website (the problem(s) it tackles, the audience it targets, and the purpose it aims to achieve)
- The URL includes a title of the website that relates to the rhetorical situation.
- The web-text needs to target a particular narrowed-down audience
- The landing page of the website provides a cohesive story about the whole website and its rhetorical situation (the problem(s) it tackles, the audience it targets, and the purpose it aims to achieve). That should not be by telling the audience “This website is about...” In other words, show, don’t tell, the audience what the website is about. The clarity of the rhetorical situation needs to be achieved through the textual and non-textual elements of the landing page. That includes the color scheme and design of the page.
- Every inner page of the website provides a cohesive message about its content and elaborates on what was promised in the landing page.
- The titles of the pages provide a clear idea about what’s in the pages

Organization and Cohesiveness

- Every page needs to be organized around a topic rather than a research method. For instance, interviews need to be summarized and synthesized to speak to each other or to other research components such as a survey you conducted, past studies, or internet sources. The implication of that is titling any page in accordance with its topic component. For instance, instead of title the page “Interviews” you might title it as “Local narratives of homelessness”
- The organization and design of the website needs to always be suitable for the targeted audience. For instance, if your web-text targets children (the

readers are children) then the level of language complexity, color, and visuals...etc need to appeal to children throughout the website.

Readability and Accessibility

- The font type, color, and size are clearly readable and contrast well with the text background. If these are controlled by the “theme” that the website builder provides then you need to change the whole theme.
- The website is easy to navigate. Every component on the website can be accessed in several ways to guarantee that the users would have equitable chances of accessing the content.
- Navigating any page components requires the minimal amount possible of scrolling and clicking
- All the links are provided as hyperlinks and all are tested to avoid broken links
- All videos, audio, and visual components on the website or linked to from the website need to have a textual description of them.

Submission Requirements on Moodle

- Starting from draft #1 through draft #3, the web-text project must be presented on a website.
- For the peer and teacher feedback purposes, every draft assignment requires submitting a PDF of the authors’ memo to include an accessible hyperlink to the website.

References

Ewick, P., & Silbey, S. S. (1995). Subversive stories and hegemonic tales: Toward a sociology of narrative. *Law & Soc’y Rev.*, 29, 197.

Hasford, J. (2016). Dominant cultural narratives, racism, and resistance in the workplace: A study of the experiences of young Black Canadians. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 57(1-2), 158-170.

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Rappaport, J. (2000). Community narratives: Tales of terror and joy. *American journal of community psychology*, 28(1), 1-24.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (2001). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge University Press.

Dr. Kefaya Diab is an Assistant Professor at the Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies Department (WRDS) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC). She identifies as an activist-teacher-scholar. In her research, Dr. Diab currently works on her monograph “Theorizing a Sense of Agency in the Arab Spring (2010-11),” where she theorizes how a sense of capability emerged among Arab revolutionaries from rhetorical ecologies informed by religion and culture in the region. At this time, she is preparing for a documentary film about the Tunisian revolution (2010-11) "A Revolution of Emotions," which investigates the role of emotions in pushing actions of resistance forward in Tunisia. The film offers a counter-narrative to what mainstream Arab and Western media widely circulated during their coverage of the revolution. Dr. Diab’s work has appeared in the WAC Clearing House Open-Source Book: Sexual Harassment and Cultural Change, in Writing Studies, Composition Studies Journal, and Paideia-16 Textbook. Her most recent article “The Rise of the Arab Spring through a Sense of Agency” appeared in the Rhetoric Society Quarterly (RSQ) Journal, and was awarded the 2022 Charles Kneupper Award. As a teacher, Dr. Diab embodies a critical pedagogy informed by Paulo Freire (1996) where she challenges her students to analyze problems in the world around them and respond to transform reality into a socially just one. She implements community-based learning and anti-racist labor-based writing assessment approaches adapted by Asao Inoue (2019).