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## Narrating MeToo

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By Pamela Runestad

Bill Cosby is in prison, and Harvey Weinstein and Matt Lauer have been fired. Donald Trump is in office despite his own admission that he has grabbed women “by the pussy”. Roy Moore lost his race, but Brett Kavanaugh sits on the SCOTUS despite accusations of sexual assault. Academics have been in the news, too: Avital Ronell, Marcus Anthony, Ric Curtis, Barry Spunt, and Leonardo Dominguez have all been publicly accused.

Regardless of how the Ronell or CUNY cases play out, we are now firmly in the age of MeToo with no end in sight. After all, 1 in 6 American women has been the victim of rape or attempted rape (rainn.org 2018). Let’s consider this statistic from the perspective of a professional academic organization. I’ll use the American Anthropological Association (AAA) because I’m a medical anthropologist. If AAA has 10,000 members and we assume that half are women, then according to the math about 850 of female members alone have been victimized. The ballroom of the San Jose Marriott where we’ll have our annual meeting in November only holds 700, so that ballroom would be overflowing.

Are we academics, particularly those of us who study people, listening? I’d like to think so. But more importantly: are we going to accept stories of abuse as valid, recognize injustice, and vow to hold ourselves responsible for preventing future injustice – over and over again? In other words, are we going to commit to change by confronting the power and privilege that perpetuates this kind of violence? I hope that organizations like AAA are listening to victims and willing to face the fact that sexual assault has been a part of our world, and that “our world” includes disciplines like anthropology. I hope that professional organizations can agree that to do nothing about abuse in our disciplines is to be complicit in the abuse of our students and colleagues. I hope that as individual members of such organizations, each of us is willing to think about when and how we can support victims. Confronting anthropology’s racist, sexist, and heteronormative history is an ongoing battle and we still don’t have equity in our own discipline despite the research we carry out on power and privilege. I’d wager that other disciplines have similar problems. Maybe the MeToo moment can be used to fuel more substantive changes in the landscape of academia in particular and U.S. society in general.

To that end, I consider the narratives of sexual assault (the MeToo stories) and counter-narratives (responses to MeToo stories) as cultural anthropologists have done for other narratives (Garro and Mattingly 2000). I frame common criticisms or rejections of MeToo narratives in terms of structural, symbolic, and everyday violence in response to intimate violence (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009). In this essay, I have couched the counter-narratives as denials because, once someone comes forward, the American “innocent until proven guilty” strategy requires that we *don’t* believe the victim at the outset. I write about narratives as making sense out of nonsense, about the burdens placed on victims to tell their stories, and the rationale for disbelief over acceptance while also exploring the factors that underpin the counter-narratives. I close with a discussion of why taking concrete, organization-level steps keeps our democracy healthy even when we are faced with injustice.

### **About the text that follows**

I use they/them because not all victims are women, and not all perpetrators are men. Moreover, non-binary individuals are at higher risk of being assaulted than cis-gendered individuals.

I use “you” to encourage readers to walk in the shoes of victims and to consider their own positionality.

I describe common instances of sexual assault because too often we gloss over the raw details that are the root of victims’ trauma and pain in “polite company.” But this is not time for polite talk. Americans engaged in such polite talk in the 1980s when talking about how HIV spreads – “bodily fluids” as the gloss for blood, breastmilk, vaginal fluid, and seminal fluid – which only served to fan the flames of fear that led to stigma, blame, and increased human suffering. I will not repeat that mistake by eliding the horrors of sexual assault.

If you yourself are a victim, please consider this a trigger warning.

### **Denial, Part 1: What is happening?!**

You’re walking home or to your car, talking to someone at a party, riding public transport, at a family event, out for a run, or out on a date. Things are normal. Until suddenly, they’re not.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Whether you're grabbed by the breast, the butt, or the vagina; whether your mouth, your anus, or your vagina is penetrated with a penis, fingers, or an object; whether you're held down, beaten, woken from sleep, or incapacitated in some way – none of this makes sense to you. None of it.

How are you supposed to make sense of going from sitting on a chair at a party to having a penis thrust in your face?

Or from walking to having your pants ripped down and someone's penis thrust into your vagina?

Or from being at a fun family gathering to having a supposedly safe person shove your hands down their pants when you're taken to the bathroom to pee?

None of it makes sense.

The only thing that makes sense is that this is nonsense. So much so that maybe you have no words.

Panic, fear, adrenaline, anger, shock, disgust, pain. That is what you have. Too many emotions, sensations, feelings, just – TOO MUCH.

You shut down or black out. Or maybe you find superhuman powers and fight back. You are rescued. Or maybe you are left alone in shock.

Breaking away, cowering away, being left... When the abuser is done, your mind swims with emotion, your body feels (or goes numb) in ways it hasn't before, and your brain works to make sense of memories in an effort to move away from the disorientation caused by the abrupt changes between before, during, after. There may be a hodgepodge of things that aren't that clear punctuated by intense memories of sounds like music or a seemingly faraway party chatter, smells like body odor or cologne or breath or wet pavement, the face or voice of the aggressor, or the way their thick fingers clenched your throat. Some everyday details, depending on the experience, may be brought into relief (and serve as triggers later) or be forgotten entirely.

In other words, you begin the work of narrative construction, which in this case is to make sense out of nonsense. You struggle to make sense of everything you feel (physically, emotionally, cognitively) to answer the questions: *what happened to me and why?*

Cultural anthropologists know that narrative construction has everything to do with past experience and positionality: Does the victim have a voice? Where? With whom? What cultural frameworks exist to give shape to this

story? These questions are fundamental to the interpretation of our data.

So, indeed: who is the first audience?

I would say that it is you, the victim. You are the first audience of your own story. When you put your memories, feelings, emotions, and physical brokenness together and realize the event that you experienced fits our society's description of sexual assault, you are the first to affirm or deny it. In vetting your own story, you deny, blame, or believe yourself. This, too, is a process, and it might be more circular than linear. Moreover, this might come quickly for some, but more slowly for others depending on differences in positionality.

You might be utterly confused because you are a child and you just don't understand what someone did or does to you, or why it has to be a secret. (According to Rainn.org, 93 percent of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows). You might live in denial forever because putting the experience in the framework of abuse might implicate a close friend or family member and is simply too painful. You might vacillate between denial, self-blame, and acknowledgement over the course of several years. You might live in self-blame because you don't have the social or cultural safety net that would place the responsibility for your pain on the person who caused it.

It is worth ruminating over the emotional and psychological work that it might take to go from being a 5 in the statistic that "1 in 6 American women experience rape" to being that 1. To become the imagined "other" – someone who at best identifies as "a fellow victim" and at worst supposedly "deserved it" — is not easy. It's traumatic to find yourself thrust into a category that you never imagined you would occupy. Getting through self-blame means grappling with questions like, am I "bad" like the people I thought occupied this category (did I do something wrong? is it my fault?); or, are the people in this category actually just like me and have been labeled "bad" as a sort of collective defense mechanism meant to rationalize why some people have been victimized while others haven't? Making your way to self-belief, then, can take time and energy.

Social scientists likely recognize the internalization of these assumptions to the point of self-blame, coupled with the normalization of victimization, as symbolic violence a la Bourdieu.

Making sense out of the nonsense starts with you, and you might seek out sympathetic audiences to help you as you "struggle along" (Desjarlais 1997). Telling someone about what happened to you requires that you are reasonably sure that the listener will believe you. You are faced with a new set of questions: Who can I tell? What will I say? How will I say it? What

will happen when I tell audience ABC about XYZ? After all, different audiences require different versions of your narrative. You might tell your best friend different things than you tell a nurse or a police officer; moreover, telling someone privately might make it easier to tell someone “officially”. In any case, the fact remains that if you want the perpetrator to be punished, you have to believe not only that someone else will believe you, but you have to be certain that they will agree that you have rights, that someone violated said rights, and that they will try to hold the abuser accountable for what they did to you.

There are several places in the narrative construction thus far where you may feel that it’s impossible to tell someone that you’ve been assaulted. Each type of narrative presents its own hazards, obstacles, and possibility of further pain. Is it really a mystery why only 43 percent of women and 10 percent of men who have been assaulted say that they have reported their assaults to authorities (rainn.org 2018)?

### **Denial, Part 2: Why did they wait until now to say anything?**

The “Why did they wait?” question suggests that you’re somehow obligated to disclose to an “official” audience according to that audience’s timeframe in order for your story to be real – that there is a “right way” and “right time” to tell. This assumption fails to consider that when and who you tell depends on your relationship with the person you’re telling and your motivations for telling them. While telling a trusted friend privately might alleviate some of your pain, relating your story in some sort of official way that may become public rarely has that effect. The second assumption is that “official” accounts told immediately to become part of a report are more credible than private accounts corroborated by friends and family when you get the courage to seek justice. But this assumption fails to consider that telling immediately might make you vulnerable to further violence, particularly if the perpetrator is someone close to you. Why tell immediately if the perpetrator can strike you again?

There are plenty more of reasons why someone would choose not to tell their story right away.

It takes time for you to put together what happened to you because time itself is warped and twisted by the trauma you experienced. It takes time to come to the conclusion that your experience fits the description of assault. And it takes time to decide to come forward because you have to think about who you are going to tell. Moreover, these timeframes are variable for individuals. It is also possible that the assaults are ongoing and

haven't stopped.

There's also the fact that the trauma you experience when you're assaulted is not limited to that singular event. The horror often replays in your mind, over and over, like a bad song that you can't get rid of. In addition, the fashioning and re-fashioning of the narrative(s), which is required when telling the story to multiple, different audiences, is also traumatic because re-telling it is re-living it. In other words, in order to hold someone accountable for the horrible thing(s) they have done to you, you have to re-experience the trauma through narrative. In fact, some people do not report assaults right after they happen because of this factor alone. And then there's the possibility that you've been assaulted multiple times, either by the same person or by multiple people. There is also the trauma that comes from hearing the stories of others because it reminds you of your own.

In some cases, you might have told someone close to you only to have your experience denied (see "They would never do that" below). Perhaps you want to spare others the pain of knowing what has happened to you. Or you might "read the writing on the wall" and keep the narrative to yourself because your local police department, school, church, workplace, or other environment has a history of protecting the futures of the perpetrators of violence and the public image of an institution they belong to (say, a university) at the expense of victims like you. Maybe you have seen the credibility of other victims destroyed as they sought justice, and instead of closure they suffered new injustices. Trauma on top of trauma on top of trauma. So the question for you isn't why did you wait, it is why would you tell at all? Part of your narrative becomes, "I clearly have more to lose than gain by coming forward when the likelihood of being treated as a liar at best and a whore at worst is far greater than the perpetrator being disciplined." After all, out of 1,000 sexual assaults in the United States, only 310 will be reported, and of those only SIX perpetrators will serve time (rainn.org 2018).

With these odds stacked against you, what often happens is that you tell when you just can't take it anymore. You tell when that person is being nominated as a Supreme Court justice, is becoming a bishop, is going on the ballot for president, is up for an award, or is taking on a new graduate student. You tell not to get justice for yourself (because you've already been through hell and maybe the statute of limitations has run out), but to save others. In the case of Professor Blasey Ford, you go public because you cannot bear the thought of allowing the person who sexually assaulted you to set legal precedence for our nation's most pressing issues. You persist, and you resist.

### Denial, Part 3: There's no way they could have done this.

This is a particularly nasty version of denial that circulates when people who are known and liked are accused of something that their friends and associates (or even family members) find unimaginable. It's a classic knee-jerk reaction: it's not possible! Surely my friend, my advisor, my priest, my neighbor couldn't have done THAT. I know them to be of impeccable character.

But what *you the denier* really know is that they have demonstrated "impeccable character" towards YOU. They could have done this to someone else and still have been perfectly nice to YOU. It is flawed logic to assume that because someone did not assault you, that they didn't assault someone else. Abuse is about using coercion, force, or a combination of the two. Victims are usually in a subordinate role of some sort, and while they may be able to muster some power by choosing who to tell what and when, it's important to consider that abuse is about power. How power is wielded depends not just on who the abuser is, but also who the victim is. In other words, what can be done to another person is relational, too: your advisor does not necessarily use coercion (for example) with both you and "Tom" because you and Tom are different people who have different relationships with them. Moreover, perpetuation of abuse is supported by systems of privilege, whereby the rules are made by a certain group for everyone else, and members of the dominant group feel that they do not have to abide by them. They might be accused, but they won't be found guilty because "boys will be boys" who just engage in "locker room talk." In this case, this defense works only for wealthy, white boys/men, because sexual assault without penalty is only normalized for them – not for the rest of society. Out of the list I opened with, only Cosby is in prison.

Perpetrators choose their victims, and victimizers with power are especially scary when they are intelligent – or at least intelligent enough to know that the system is set up to afford them privilege when they abuse their power. They know how to emplot *you the victim* (Mattingly 1994), to lure you in: "Here, I'll help you with your paper, I'll buy you a drink (or 4), I'll take you home/to your car." They know how to get you to revise your story so that you're wrong about what happened once it has happened: "You don't remember it right, that wasn't my intent, you imbibed all that substance, don't you remember that you said yes?" They know how to tell their version to people in similar positions of power so that even scholars who should know better will defend them before any evidence is heard: "I'll ruin your career, no one will believe you. It's my word against yours. Oh, they would NEVER..."

And so you consider what evidence you have to make your case. But what

counts as evidence? A rape kit, written communication, the testimony of witnesses. Even if you had the presence of mind not to shower after an assault, processing evidence from a rape kit costs time and money that a police department may be loath to spend. Maybe your assaulter was smart enough to be vague in their written communication. At the end of the day, you, like many other sexual assault victims, are not “lucky” enough to have these pieces of evidence, so your evidence is your story. The onus is on you to tell your assault story, in the way that you feel you are most likely to be believed. You have to prove the defendant guilty. So never mind the fractured way you feel or remember. Never mind that you may suffer from PTSD from being raped. You have to be able to tell your story in a sensible way and without emotion to be believed.

But who is the official audience for this official narrative? The audience is most often made up of people who are statistically more likely to commit a similar offense than to have experienced one: 90 percent of all rape victims, for example, are women (rainn.org 2018). Fifty-seven percent of perpetrators of sexual assault are white (rainn.org 2018). So in telling a white, male-dominated court, team of investigators, or say, the US Senate, the audience that hears a story of sexual assault is much more likely to argue that your carefully crafted, heart-wrenching, heartbreaking, narrative of sexual assault is “just a story” that “lacks evidence” to support it. You have to be unemotional, but they can cry and shout and scream and taunt. Because they have built the system, men, often privileged white men and the women who support them, are in a comfortable position to vent their outrage when someone like you dares to put words to their actions and identify them as perpetrators of violence. They are in a comfortable position to reject such a story as “just a political move” meant to block someone from a judgeship. Or political office. Or tenure.

#### **Denial, Part 4: This just seems like a political move.**

Social scientists have been saying the personal is political for decades now. When people rail against “fake” victims coming forward like in the Kavanaugh/Blasey Ford example, you have to stop and think about what someone might gain from making such an accusation, as well as what can be gained from delegitimizing an accusation.

Again: power and privilege.

As outlined above, the accuser stands to lose far more than gain when they tell their narratives publicly. So what do people in power gain by couching accusations as “just a political move”?

Everything. They stand to preserve the status quo. In this case, it is a right to rape, grope, grab, and engage in any other manner of sexual offense.

And what would they lose by giving credence to an accusation of sexual assault?

Everything. They stand to lose everything. By admitting that that perhaps someone like them committed sexual assault, they become vulnerable to similar accusations for similar behavior. They could be denied the things they aspire to, or lose control completely.

And there are so many who fit this bill. Just listen to the white men in the senate who say that they wouldn't want to be asked what they did 30 years ago, and then dismiss the testimony of Dr. Blasey Ford. And she had therapy records while Kavanaugh had a calendar and some sniffles.

So, yes. Accusation this Fall by Blasey Ford was a political move. Her motive in telling about how Kavanaugh victimized her was to prevent him from victimizing other Americans through legislation. It's personal AND political: she has made herself personally vulnerable in an effort to exercise her civic duty to protect the rest of us from violence. While Blasey Ford self-sacrifices, Kavanaugh supporters are in self-preservation mode.

To suggest that Blasey Ford's motives are political while those of Kavanaugh supporters are not is a farce. Denial of her narrative and the creation of the counter-narrative of Blasey Ford as a false accuser are also political moves by predominantly rich, white men and the women who benefit from their relationships with those men. After all, only 2 percent of sexual assault claims are unfounded (the same as for other felonies) while only one third of sexual assaults are reported at all (rainn.org 2018). So, let's be clear that claims that "it's a scary time to be a man in America," are articulated by white men similarly accused, who are afraid of being punished for actual behaviors that before went unpunished because of their privilege. If they were really talking about all men in America, they would be talking about black men being murdered in their own yards or cars because someone thought they were dangerous. If they were really afraid of facing false accusations, they would talk about black men accused of rape by white women. But these aren't part of the conversation because they don't want to validate those very real problems. It doesn't fit their aspirations to preserve the status quo. The reality is, people who support Kavanaugh are working to keep the privileges of assaulting women, not being punished for it, and remaining in power over women and other minorities. One way to do that is to enshrine someone who will support them as a member of the SCOTUS. It's personal AND political for them, too. This is why when asked why he made fun of Blasey Ford, the president responded, "It doesn't matter. We won"

(NPR 2018).

The real fear then, is losing. Change that results in loss of power. Being held accountable for sexual assault. The possibility that the people you subordinated may come to dominate you. If they were not so afraid to lose, Kavanaugh and his supporters probably would not have been engaged in such a fervent battle to discredit MeToo stories – to split them apart, attempt to make them look internally inconsistent, or prevent them from being seen together as a large-scale snapshot of sexual assault in the United States. In other words, they would probably not be trying so hard to delegitimize story after story of sexual assault committed by wealthy white men. Victims who are coming forward in solidarity with Blasey Ford are scary to privileged white men because there is a chance that meeting systemic abuse with sustained evidence and energy could change the game.

### **Denial, Part 5: She wanted it, OR it's her fault because of what she wore/where she was/what she drank.**

While many denials are couched in the vagaries of maybe it happened and maybe it didn't, this type of denial is different because no one is contesting that the *action* you describe happened. What they question is your consent. Maybe you have a rape kit result that unequivocally demonstrates that the defendant penetrated you. Because this is difficult to refute, the defense will argue that you in fact consented, you led the perpetrator on, you said no but meant yes. And again, if the people deciding your fate (and your perpetrator's) are more like them than you, this is what your audience will believe. Some will believe it because believing makes them feel that they themselves and those they love are safe from sexual assault. Some will believe it because they don't want to be in the position of reflecting on their own past behaviors, and/or they want to continue to feel free to act as they always have. And so again, your evidence doesn't count. It's in this moment that you realize no evidence will ever be enough when the person who assaulted you is a beneficiary of privilege.

The sad state of affairs you realize is that even though we have codified ideals about consent as unambiguous, as something that cannot be given when one is incapacitated, and something that isn't legitimate if given under duress, they only serve as actual rules for people who the privileged feel should be punished. This is what you realize when you see the student athlete be allowed to stay and play, the faculty member put on leave but allowed back, the priest transferred to another church, the president not just elected but on stage screaming "Imagine if your son

were accused!” or a room of white, male senators defending Kavanaugh’s “right” to be on the Supreme Court.

### **Denial, Part 6: What boy hasn’t done this in high school?**

Failed GOP candidate Gina Sosa made this comment in a group interview with Republican women who were asked about their thoughts on the possibility that 17-year old Kavanaugh assaulted a 15-year-old girl by holding her down and covering her mouth (Time 2018).

In one sentence, Sosa unwittingly showed us the extent of normalization of assault in the United States, not just by men, but by women of privilege as well. In this statement, she effectively implies two things: first, that every American male 17 years committed sexual assault as a high schooler, and second, *that that is acceptable*. We know that not all men have done this, and that not all people think it is acceptable. But make no mistake: for her to say this, she has to believe on some level that everyone in her peer group has done it and/or thinks it’s normal. It also follows that a number of her peers themselves have been victimized. We are back to normalization and symbolic violence. So what would the implications be if Sosa and her peers were to admit that this is neither normal nor acceptable? All her male friends and family members (because who of them hasn’t done this?) could be accused. If we decided this wasn’t acceptable, they’d potentially lose everything. We are back to the reality that by admitting that assault happens and it’s wrong, it would upend the power and privilege structure – and maybe uncover some more victims.

You shake your head as you realize the whole system is set up to keep you silent, passive, traumatized, victimized, alone.

But MeToo has helped you realize that you are not alone.

### **Refusing their denials**

These are the denials that you face. You hear affirmations, too, but not from people like our senators. With every story on social media, the newspaper, or the news you think: there are so many. So many more than I thought. Faces, stories, numbers: the CDC reports 19 percent of American women experience rape, while another 44 percent experience another form of sexual assault (CDC 2018). You watch Trump ask conservatives to “Think of your son” or Gina Sosa ask “What boy hasn’t

done this?” and you think: No. Not anymore. I can't take anymore.

So maybe you fight for justice. Maybe you spiral into depression. Maybe you contemplate suicide. Maybe you self-medicate. After all, the risks for the latter three are all elevated for victims of sexual assault. Maybe you have nightmares because your brain is trying to process at night what you have avoided all day long in a bid to be a “normal” worker, parent, friend, human. Maybe you book more time with your therapist. Maybe you have to stop watching the news. Maybe you bury your story because if people won't listen and act now, when will they? After all, you don't owe anyone any part or version of your story. In case you need to hear that again: you don't.

### **Where do Anthropology and other “humanizing” disciplines go from here?**

To witness MeToo is to witness how abuse of power and privilege is shaped by gender, class, race, and status such that sexual assault is normalized in the United States. We are witnessing resistance to the systems of oppression by which victims of sexual assault are assumed to be lying in the name of fairness to the accused, are obligated to tell public versions of their stories to prove otherwise, and are summarily dismissed as opportunists despite efforts to make sense out of the violence perpetrated against them. Despite Kavanaugh's confirmation, and despite the appalling number and details of the MeToo stories, this movement reminds me of Howard Zinn's point that democracy doesn't rest solely on the functioning of our courts. It lies in protests, in voting, in showing up, and demanding change (Zinn 1976). Survivors of sexual assault and those who support them are attempting to wrest control of the conversations on sexual assault from perpetrators and oppressors.

In academic terms, intimate violence (sexual assault and the physical, emotional, psychological, and cognitive trauma that comes along with it) is happening IN our disciplines and not just “out there” in the world or where we do fieldwork. When trying to make sense of sexual assault, victims experience structural violence because there is really no “safe” option for them to take when deciding who to tell what, when. They experience symbolic violence through self-blame and normalization. And we all commit everyday violence by not taking concrete steps to address this abuse at the institution level (see the violence continuum in Bourgois and Schonberg 2009).

So, what will we do? How will we, as academics, respond?

Don't forget that jam-packed Marriott ballroom.

A few weeks ago, I received a call for papers on anthropology in the last 50 years. Honestly, all I could think of was the next 50 years. So I close with a challenge: face the systems of power and privilege that have supported sexual assault in American society head on so that they are not reflected in our professional academic organizations. In other words, say no to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination of all types. Say no to all the forms of violence discussed here.

Anthropology, for example, has a code of ethics and a statement against sexual harassment, but I have not seen language that allows us to ban someone found guilty by their institution or the court system of a violent crime (including but not limited to sexual assault) from membership, our meetings, or publications. Surely, we can have conversations about that. The bar for scholarship is high; why should the bar for professional conduct be so low as to allow offenders in our midst? I know that there are plenty of people who will say it is not possible. But this answer accepts that we are in the prison of Weber's iron cage. It accepts that we will turn a blind eye to intimate violence as institutions, thereby committing everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 1996 in Bourgois and Schonberg 2009). Moreover, medical anthropologists Paul Farmer, Jim Kim, Arthur Kleinman, and Matthew Basilico have said that global health practitioners who claim change is too hard suffer from a "failure of imagination" and that we have to "reimagine" global health to face and ameliorate inequity (2013). Surely we don't want to be guilty of this "failure of imagination" in our own disciplines.

We need continued conversation about how to make our disciplines safe places. It has been my experience at AAA annual meetings that when we have sessions on topics such as hierarchy in academia or decolonizing our work and classroom pedagogies, the people in the highest positions of power and privilege are often absent. This leaves the people with the least social capital to bear the burden of this work. This cannot continue to be the case. This is about all of us, not some of us. Assaults on individual bodies are assault on our professional bodies because we limit the potential of both to contribute meaningfully to our bodies of knowledge.

Anthropologists preach reflexivity in the field; I propose we use it to consider how we may be complicit in oppressing or abusing students and colleagues. Self-examination, if it is going to result in cultural change, needs to be honest and ongoing. I will be the first to say that I am imperfect, I want to learn and be an ally, and I will try to put the burden of learning on myself and not people with less power than me. I will do my best to ensure that professional development and mentorship includes sustained efforts to train men in particular to recognize and reject toxic

masculinity and face their privilege, and not just tell women how to “be careful.”

If we cannot have these conversations here at “home” in our disciplines, and commit to sustained reflexivity, our outrage at current politics will be revealed as empty words. We all know that culture is dynamic and that systemic change is a process. Let’s commit, again and again, to the process of making our organizations better. The health and safety of both individuals and our society depend on it.

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