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Session 22: How to get Published

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[Slide 1] The Author as Editor as Author: From Writerly Experience to Publishing Praxis

This presentation was written and recorded in Houston Texas, which sits on traditional Karankawa, Sana, and Atakapa land. That matters not just because it is important for all of us to acknowledge where we are and whose land we reside on, but because for me, as someone of Indigenous descent, acknowledging my own relationality with the keepers of the land reminds me always of the responsibilities I bear in all of my professional and familial roles. I'll return to this theme momentarily.

[Slide 2] First, I want to begin by explaining the overall purpose of my presentation. Here, I wish to talk to you about my own experiences and how they have influenced me as an author and as an editor, hoping that information may be of use to folks seeking to publish their research, especially as graduate students and early career scholars. Then, I want to touch a bit on research that ponders ethics and/of hospitality and how it may invite us to change how we look at publishing, though I'd like to complicate the notion of hospitality itself from a decolonial perspective as well. And finally, I'd like to close by discussing how bringing affect and experience into the process of publishing can help us to humanize what it is we do.

[Slide 3] The first half of the title of this presentation—"author as editor as author"—refers to the way that I see publishing as a cyclical endeavor. I don't mean all of the tasks that must be done to publish each issue of our journal, the *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*. I mean how, as authors we must learn to think as editors and then allow that to influence our writing or revision, but also how editors should remember how they themselves started out as authors, allowing that to guide their practices, and seeing themselves as authors in their position who help shape the work for publication. Sometimes as authors, we are so accustomed to reading our own work and knowing how the ideas connect that we don't always think from the perspective of the editor, who must ensure that the argument is clear, that the purpose for making it is understood, that the influences on our work are credited, and that the writing is accessible. Conversely, editors don't always remember that not everyone has been mentored in writing for publication. We may think all students should be, but that doesn't mean that they are, and thus, when people submit their work, we need to ensure that we are enacting mentorship rather than denigration even when we don't accept a piece for publication.

This matters because while we act like publication is a straightforward thing, that somehow academic research stands apart from the rest of everyday life, the reality is that that is just not true. This is where I got started with publishing: while in graduate school, I lost my parents within six months of each other, I moved with a partner and dissertated from out of state the semester my program offered its one seminar on writing for publication, and then that relationship ended right after I started my first job. Publishing was the last thing on my mind.

Surviving from day to day, getting through the semester as a student and then a brand-new prof, that was what mattered. But I'm not the only one, nor does this always happen during grad school. Real life has a bad habit of intruding at any time in our careers, or maybe I should say, we might not think about its influence on our research until something really bad happens. For example, the COVID pandemic affected our lives, our teaching and research and writing, but it claimed many of our loved ones and so, it will continue to affect us for a long time to come, if not for the rest of our lives. Our health, too. But even in the best of times, depending on your relative privilege and security, not everyone has a blissfully uneventful time as they go through school and start academic positions. As authors we need to remember this so that we give ourselves space to recover and enough time to work slowly even if that means you publish fewer things; this is not a competition, no matter what anyone tells you—it doesn't matter who writes the most or what have you. As long as you meet whatever criteria you need to for your job, no one deserves more of your energy than you have or want to give. This also allows you to make more strategic decisions about the venues you choose: even when the yearly evals call for journals with a certain percentage of acceptances, which is actually really gross and inaccurate as a gauge for what's "good" anyway, see who's publishing the work that you consider important and try to ask people who've published there what their experience was. Allow that information to guide your selection because sometimes you might prefer to have a better experience than publish in a "top" journal where the submission process can be traumatizing.

Yes, I mean traumatizing. That's why we started our journal in the first place. I submitted to one of the top journals in my field that I have since published in. When I first submitted, I had no experience with publishing and had received no mentorship, though I was told to start at the "top" and then work "down" if I got a rejection. I now hate those distinctions. No one had ever taught me how to break down an article and make sure I'd written all its necessary parts and done everything I was supposed to do. Well, I received a desk rejection wasn't just a rejection but a form of telling me off. The then-editor pointed out that my work didn't fit our discipline but offered no suggestions of any kind, only a pointing out of flaws. For the record, after revision, that article won an award at another journal. Sometimes it just takes some constructive feedback. A few years later, I submitted there again. This time, even after a friend who published there gave me feedback, the same editor obliterated my work, assuming my "opaque" writing was on account of being an "international scholar" (whatever that means) and again pointing out every flaw (yeah, you know what that means). He seemed determined to let me know I should never submit again because he said his journal only published the best and my work was not it. In those words. At first, I was sure I didn't belong in my discipline. Then I got angry and said if I were an editor, I would never treat anyone that way. And so, a friend and I asked, why not? So we started our own venue and we networked with editors who mentored us, people who always see the potential in submissions, who practice transparency and act with respect for authors, who want submitters to have a positive experience even when their work doesn't fit the journal's scope. Journals like *Kairos* and *constellations* in my discipline who have reviewers who work closely with authors. Not every journal has the resources to do

this. I share this to let you know that not everyone you encounter will be receptive but that is not about you. Find your crew who will help you revise so that the work is what you want it to be and who you want it to be for, and find the venues who want that work and you. Because that will determine everything from your statement of argument to your literature review to your methodology to the examples you give to the style of writing that you use throughout. Maybe you want to experiment with form; some venues prefer formal essays, but some enjoy a mix of creative and expository writing. In addition, you will have to decide how much you're willing to change your work to make it fit the journal. Editors shape the work too as they advise you and if you are told you must make so many changes that your work is no longer your own, you should know where else to take it if you choose to take it somewhere else.

[Slide 4] So now I want to talk a little about the issue of hospitality and how it can influence our view of publishing. Derrida writes about hospitality being conditional, how it asks the visitor "so who are you?" and how the answer determines whether the host will be hospitable or not. Writing about the risks involved, Gerasimos Kakoliris writes that "'pure' hospitality is a risk, because we cannot determine who will be our guest or how he or she [they] will behave as a guest" (147). I find this resonates with publishing because as authors, we have to be as receptive as possible for our readers, stating things as plainly and accessibly as possible; after all, we academics often write to one another as though in a vacuum but we are curators of knowledge for *all* people. Accessibility can make clear all the different places where your work fits, even if it's not technically within your discipline. At the same time, I want to address editors here. I often think of a performance piece by Karma Chávez, Sara L. McKinnon, Lucas Messer and Marjorie Hazeltine. While they reference examples based on im/immigration, their point that "people's desire to 'have a say' in what is happening in their home, leads to a lot of saying, or talk, opinions, beliefs about the people (who are not 'us')" bears consideration in any situation where belonging is deliberated (1-2). That includes publishing because when we decide that something doesn't fit the journal, we have to be honest and ask whether we mean this individual piece or the author's work as a whole, even the people themselves? If so, are we helping them find a more receptive space? Editorship is more than a yes/no; it's about knowing where people can find space, and if not, having a reason why. We certainly don't want to promote harmful work. Maurice Hamington goes on to say that hospitality is often "defensive, and rooted in mistrust of strangers" (24), gendered (25), and market-driven (26-27). We should add racialized and ableist, since we use all of these dimensions of identity to determine who is worthy of inclusion and care, often failing to see that hospitality is a reciprocal relationship and one based on forgiveness (dimensions also mentioned by Hamington). Without a guest there is no host. Without authors, there is no editorship, and we have to think about that issue of risk. When we give new authors a chance instead of publishing only the already-renown, we influence the field beyond its present boundaries. We also have to remember that guests don't always know the rules, and we cannot fault them for that. We can teach them though, and help guests become hosts like us.

[Slide 5] I don't think I'm far from mentioning work in hospitality having to do with national and social issues when we consider that post-Enlightenment academia has defined people's humanity and social utility in some dangerous ways, justifying racial and gender hierarchies that sustained evils like Manifest Destiny, chattel slavery, and conversion therapy. Lest anyone think that I'm reaching, I will remind us all that only five years ago a certain article argued that colonization proved a moral good. The colonial matrix of power has also sealed off academic pursuits to most people who aren't white, cis, male, and wealthy for a very long time. Many of the populations maligned by prejudiced work have struggled to enter the academy, but we aren't always the ones with access to the most resources. Hospitality takes on an additional dimension when you are from a community being offered hospitality grudgingly on what is your ancestral home. The truth is that even when we think that our research doesn't matter to anyone outside academia, the conversations we contribute to are building our reality. People read our work and it informs their praxes; our work matters. So as authors, again, we have to make sure that our work reflects who we are and what we find important and we must find venues where there is space for that; and editors, we have to become more knowledgeable about the modes and forms that particular communities may prefer without imposing our views about what rings authentic or scholarly. And together, we must all be pushing to make publishing more inclusive.

This is where some people (editors) will say, "So we just publish anyone without any kind of rigor?" The answer is no, indeed, there is no room here for that kind of thinking. Rigor is a word that disguises academic hazing, as though making people struggle is somehow teaching or ensures writing is good or useful. Instead, we must opt to foreground our responsibilities as good relatives: find out how to help people write the best research they can from their respective orientations and if we don't know, learn to ask. Likewise, authors, listen when editors ask you to be more attentive to *all* of your audiences.

[Slide 6] Ultimately, we must all think about what "good" writing is—what does it actually do in the world? As an author, this is the question that often makes the difference in your argument. Tell us why it matters and who/what is helped by knowing this. Our journal is now in its seventh year and going strong. When we started, we created a set of questions designed to help authors write for diverse audiences in terms of discipline, culture, and academic (or not) background. Editors, think about the process of the writing and not just the result. We told reviewers that they should focus on authors' ideas and what would it take to make them publishable rather than on telling authors they weren't good enough. We asked reviewers if they were willing to work with authors to revise their writing, and I Skyped with many of them myself to shape the work to fit the journal's mission of making research accessible and readable, even enjoyable! And finally, we should all think about publishing as making space where people can enter and make more space for more ideas, ideas that build the world and must therefore be honed in ways that are inclusive, invitational, and accessible. Thank you for your time.

[Slide 7] Works Cited

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