Participants:
Trevor Parry-Giles
Devika Chawla
Mary Stuckey
Denise M. Bostdorff
Rebecca de Souza

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Introduction:
This is *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Hello, I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Thanks for joining us for today's episode.

As our academic listeners will know, journal editing and reviewing are integral components in the publication of high-quality peer-reviewed research. As a bit of background for those who are new or unfamiliar with the academic publishing process, academic journal articles such as those published in NCA's eleven academic journals are anonymously reviewed by expert reviewers in the area of study to ensure that articles meet the highest standards before being published. Now articles may be accepted. They can be revised, sometimes multiple times. They can be rejected depending on reviewer's responses. Today's episode of *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast* addresses journal reviewing as mentorship and some related issues in journal editing. And our guests are Devika Chawla, the incoming Chair of NCA's Publications Council; Mary Stuckey, a past editor of NCA's *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, and two veteran reviewers, Denise M. Bostdorff and Rebecca de Souza. Let me tell you a little bit more about our guests today.

Denise M. Bostdorff is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the College of Wooster. Dr. Bostdorff researches presidential rhetoric and has served on the editorial board of NCA's *Quarterly Journal of Speech* since 2013 in addition to serving on the editorial boards of other rhetoric and communication journals. Bostdorff is the author of two books and they're good books. *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis* and *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms.* Hi, Denise and welcome to the podcast.

Denise M. Bostdorff:
Hi, Trevor. Thanks for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Devika Chawla is a Professor of Communication Studies and Director of Studies of the Honors Tutorial College at Ohio University. Dr. Chawla's research uses performative and narrative approaches to study family life, home, and identity. Chawla is the Chair-elect of NCA's Publications Council. And among other works, Chawla is the author of *Home, Uprooted: Oral Histories of India's Partition* and was an editor of *Stories of Home: Place, Identity, Exile.* Hi, Devika and welcome to the podcast.

Devika Chawla:
Happy to be here. Thank you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Rebecca de Souza is a Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Dr. de Souza's research addresses questions of how communication research can answer practical problems related to injustice and inequity particularly in the areas of health, medicine, and food. De Souza has served as a reviewer for numerous journals and is the author of *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries*, a book I'm really now interested in reading. Hi, Rebecca and thanks for joining us on *Communication Matters.*

Rebecca de Souza:
Thank you for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
And Mary Stuckey is a Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Stuckey researches political and presidential rhetoric, political communication, and American Indian politics. Stuckey is a former editor of NCA's *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and is the author of numerous articles and books, including *Political Vocabularies: FDR, the Clergy Letters, and the Elements of Political Argument*. Hey, Mary.

Mary Stuckey:
Hey, Trevor. Nice to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
So let's start with some general questions about best practices in journal reviewing. Mary, you can start us off. If you had to ask reviewers to pay attention to three things as they read a manuscript, only three things, what would those three things be?

Mary Stuckey:
That's a really good question, Trevor. I think the first one would be to look for the manuscript's potential contribution. Sometimes authors don't see what they're doing as clearly as we'd like them to. So often they're doing something important that they may or may not recognize up front and if reviewers look for what's important, what's valuable, what's significant in an article instead of looking for what's weak or less perhaps helpful in an essay, then I think that sets the whole tone of the review in a direction that's good for the work, for the author, and also for the reviewer and the journal. The second thing I would suggest is to ask what literatures might be missing. Especially recently authors have been seeking to do post-colonial or decolonial work. They've been trying to reorient their work in ways that are responsive to exigencies they may not have recognized before. But those people sometimes do that in ways that are contributing to the problem rather than contributing to a solution. So reviewers might want to ask are these people studying only white men? Are they citing only white people? Are you working in an interdisciplinary area but only citing one of those spaces? How can the work be deepened? How can the analysis be extended to larger audiences? Is the author trying to join the right conversation? Are they doing so in an appropriate way? I think that's a super helpful question for people to address. And then finally I think there's the question of how can the reviewer help the author get better at the craft of writing? This goes to organization, sometimes style and grammar. Some reviewers, some of them sitting around with us today have gone so far as to occasionally line edit an essay which I think is above and beyond the call. I as editor always did line editing myself. But big picture questions that can help the author learn their craft.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's great. Those sort of lead into another question which is particularly pressing at the moment and that's the question of mentorship. Rebecca, how do you envision that going off of perhaps some of the points that Mary made but more generally, how does a reviewer serve as a mentor instead of a critic? Is it a matter of positionality? Is it a matter of tone? Or how does a reviewer capture that sense of reviewing as a mentor in a teachable moment in the reviewing process rather than being just this article's lousy?

Rebecca de Souza:
Yeah. I think that's a really good question and what's interesting is I think my answer is very similar to what Mary just described. Maybe that's why I sometimes get asked to do so many reviews because it sort of matches what editors want as well. But I put it down to two basic things. You need to talk about the strengths of the piece and you also need to offer ways in which you can make the piece more powerful. And that's usually how I frame it when I write it in my reviews. What are the strengths? Where does this piece shine? What is this piece doing that maybe the author doesn't even know that they're doing that's interesting? As a person who has expertise in a subject area, I have sort of that line of sight where I can say, okay, what you said here, that's

really interesting. That's a novel unique argument. Nobody else is making that. You need to highlight this in the piece or that you need to push this more and make it more prominent in your piece. So I think strengths is really important and oftentimes reviewers can miss that and they miss the opportunity to showcase and highlight what this author does really well or what this piece does really well. And then the second piece is how do you make this more powerful?

And here's where I think oftentimes it gets framed as what's wrong with the piece or how is this piece flawed or feeling. But I think just you don't really need to frame it in that way. You can just sort of say that these are some recommendations to make it more powerful and make it a stronger argument. And as a reviewer in academia, I feel like there's a very finite list of things you can do to make a piece better and they typically circle around content and structure. And for me, I start typically with structures, a little bit like what Mary described. If this author or these authors were just to move around a few things and restructure and reorganize the content, reframe something a little differently, would this still stand alone as a piece and does that work? And that's sort of the least amount of work that the authors have to do to sort of have this bring this to publication which is their main goal. So I start with that. And then if I use all my creative and intellectual abilities to sort of reorganize and restructure and I still cannot see how to make it work, then I figure, okay, there's a content problem. And of course, sometimes that's more obvious and by content, I mean there's a theoretical literature review, there's a methodology problem. And again, they're framing it in terms of here's what you need to do in order to make this work better, to make this stronger. And I think that's what shifts you from being just a critic to being sort of a teacher, right? Or somebody who's instructive and providing constructive criticism and being a mentor because you're actually showing and providing suggestions and recommendations for what these authors or author might need to do to fix sort of what's missing in that piece. But I think framing it in terms of here are the strengths, here's where this piece really shines, and then the second part is here's what you can do to make it more powerful. And I think that sets a better tone than oftentimes what we might see in reviews.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
And I think that framing piece is really important. And the natural question that sort of emerges out of that for Devika is what we can do at NCA to encourage that kind of reviewing, that kind of framing of the reviewing process. And I ask you because you're the incoming chair of the Publications Council at NCA and one of your predecessors, Bonnie Dow had written an article years ago, now three years ago, about how reviewing can be seen as mentorship. So in a concrete sense, what do you think we can do to encourage that kind of framing?

Devika Chawla:
I agree with Professor Bonnie Dow and I think that their approach allows us to extend that thinking about reviewing as mentoring a little further. I'm probably going to repeat a few things that was

said by Mary and Rebecca. But I think of every review as both a mentoring and a pedagogical opportunity, right? I view a review as a space where authors, editors, and reviewers enter into an enlarged conversation about a specific subject that leads to an expansion of ideas to clear knowledge generation and all of it which ultimately enriches any field of study. So I like to position peer reviewing as peer strengthening. The review process starts with the editor reading a manuscript, seeing promise, and deciding that the work is substantial enough to be sent out for peer review. And so in short, the peer review has already begun with that choice by the editor. And after which the choices of reviewers occur, right? So once the manuscript is chosen for review, the aspiration is that the process becomes conversational and pedagogical rather than dictatorial. So does this always happen? No. Many editors and reviewers use a more draconian approach and what I call an anti-mentoring approach that is more about the process of eliminating manuscripts.

And the problem with such a process is that fundamentally reviewers and editors tend to view papers as either publishable or non-publishable. And instead, I believe editors should be committed to publishing important work, not just publishable work. And we know that reviewing to make something publishable can be formulaic. However, reviewing can also guide an author to say something important and that's a fundamentally different exercise. So as incoming chair of Publication Council, when I think of reviewing as mentoring, I'm thinking of a few things. Editors and reviewers must give an essay its due before attempting to rework it. That is they must enter the work with respect and with an ethic of care, knowing that the editor has chosen to send this to peer review, right? Reviewers must be willing to step back and step aside from a review if they fundamentally disagree with the central tenets of an essay. And if you begin on a disagreement, you're more likely to tear down ideas rather than help to build them up, right? So reviewers must think with the manuscript and not think to rework it in their own image. And their goal must be to expand the work, make it bigger than what it is, right?

So when editors encounter reviewers who bully and we know that happens, right? Or make ad hominem attacks and disparage the author or the paper, editors have to step in as mentors for the author and for the reviewers and to set aside reviews, right? I also believe these infractions should be noted and shared across platforms, right? So double anonymized reviews are desired on the one hand but on the other hand, they cannot be used to allow the breakdown on what is a precarious and time-bound mentoring relationship, right? So how do we do this? I have just three more points that I'll make. How do we do this? We need support and encourage editors to be more explicit in their editorial vision for what reviewing means to them. When we request vision statements for journal editorships, we need to ask editors to outline their philosophy for reviewing and how they will mentor reviewers who will in turn mentor authors. I believe that members of editorial boards do receive this information but we know that journals rely on a range of ad hoc reviewers, right? So we need to provide support to editors to run review workshops a few times a

year. Consider running NCA-wide workshops on reviewing for early career and even graduate student applicants, right? We give awards and we acknowledge scholarship. We must consider acknowledging and rewarding thoughtful reviewers who make a difference across our journals. And review is not merely a service to the field, right? It's a form of scholarship, collaborative scholarship that contributes to knowledge building.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's fantastic. Sets a pretty good agenda for the next few years for us to pursue and that'll be both challenging and rewarding I suspect for the discipline. Now I don't know about the rest of you but I remember the first time I was asked to review a manuscript. And it was probably ad hoc. It wasn't when I was asked to be on a board. And Denise, we're probably looking at a cohort of folks listening to the podcast who are early career scholars and who are thinking, yeah, this mentorship thing sounds cool and I'd really like to do that. What advice would you give to those young scholars about entering into the reviewing process? How do you get to be a peer reviewer of manuscripts for a journal?

Denise M. Bostdorff:
Yeah. Well, I think that in terms of young scholars trying to get entrance into the reviewing process, I would suggest several things. I mean one would be volunteering to be a reviewer for conferences. I might start with an undergraduate conference or regional conference and then build up to NCA, right? So that's one. You get experience in in doing that. And I think mid-level and senior faculty can also be really helpful by recommending people to be reviewers, right? Here's a young scholar who's doing this exciting area. They might be a good reviewer for you. So letting editors know about folks who are out there. And I would say young scholars too should express their interest to their mentors, right? I'm really interested in reviewing and try to see what kinds of ways in which they might help. And the other thing I think is just simply presenting and publishing your own work, right? Because the more that you do that, then the more people come to know you as an expert on a particular topic. And so that makes it easier then for people to identify you as someone who would be a good reviewer.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I also like Devika's point about rewarding reviewing. I mean we're really asking people to do a lot of labor that is uncompensated, that is for the good of the discipline, and presumably for the good of their professional career. But I think we all know that in a lot of promotion and tenure dossiers, the reviewing is not a highly prized activity. It doesn't get you promotion and tenure in a lot of cases, right? Do you think there's some room here for, I don't know. I'm not suggesting we pay people but at least recognizing the importance of reviewing in some kind of tangible way?

Denise M. Bostdorff:
Right. I mean I think maybe one of the ways to think about this is research is what you need to produce, right? And scholarship is the way in which you engage with the discipline in other kinds of ways that helps the research and the knowledge of the discipline go forward and that that's one of the things that departments and schools can start to think about. I also just want to back up a little bit just to talk about support for young scholars as they go out to become reviewers to begin with. I really like Devika's idea about having support for people to learn how to become a better reviewer. But I think we can also start with that. And the obvious one I think that we all know is that it's how we model it with our students and with young scholars, right? Are we engaging with them with this nice mixture of what I would say is pointing out the strengths of what they've done and how they might be able to really drive one particular part of it into something that is both publishable but also, I think to Devika's point, something that can demonstrate the importance of what they have to contribute to the discipline.

And also, just providing specifics about ways in which that might happen. But I would even go back further to say that within the classroom that that can happen too. I mean I can envision, I'm not teaching graduate students now but when I did, is spending time describing the process of reviewing and the obligations that it involves, having something. We know that not everything is published just perfect. Finding a particular publication and saying, okay, let's pretend that this is up for peer review. Maybe even telling some of them that it's being submitted to this journal and others it's being submitted to this journal. So they can consider the various factors that have to be involved maybe even using a rubric that actually is used with journals. And I think the peer review process in the classroom is really important where people are given here's are some systematic things one needs to consider in terms of writing a compelling essay. I think also as part of that, knowing that there's an actual live human being in the classroom who's going to get your review, that's powerful too because sometimes I think in the reviewing process, there is this separation and that's what encourages people to say things that are snarky, mean, unhelpful because they don't think about the fact that there's really a human being who's going to receive this.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I think all of that is spot on. If we drill down a little bit in terms of these workshops and the types of instruction or mentorships that we would provide to reviewers. And Mary, you've read thousands, undoubtedly thousands of reviews. What types of language commonalities would you say are characteristic of some of the best reviews? More than just tone, I mean what specifically are the language choices that you prefer to see and that are illustrative of this mentorship model or framing of the reviewing process do you think?

Mary Stuckey:
As other people have pointed out here, the best reviewing is collaborative. I loved Devika's phrase that reviewing is participating in a conversation, right? Because very often reviewers will remark that this essay is trying to contribute to X conversation without necessarily having the meta awareness that they too are participating in a conversation. So keeping that genre I think in mind is really helpful. I think too the second most important thing would be to address the work, not the author. People will often say the author failed. The author failed to do this. Well, no, maybe the essay doesn't do a thing but maybe also the essay didn't mean to do that thing. So to criticize work for not doing something it didn't intend to do may not be super helpful and pointing fingers at the author is never helpful. So to talk about the work rather than the person who produced it and particularly when you're making criticisms or you're issuing negative judgments, that is a really important thing because there's junior scholars often at the end of those criticisms and that distinction between yourself and your work is something they still, as if I don't at my advanced age struggle with this, right? And so that's an important thing. Secondly, I think the golden rule applies. Don't say things you don't want to read. It's not unusual for people to write the sentence I don't want to be harsh but… Check yourself because when you write that sentence, you're about to be harsh. I don't mean to be mean. Okay, fine, move that paragraph into the private comments you send the editor, right? Because the editor isn't going to take your comments about this essay personally. But if you say you don't want to be mean, you're about to be mean, right? And so revise that paragraph or send that paragraph to the editor. The obverse of that, of course, is that very often reviewers will say this essay has 12 fatal flaws and then because they don't want to be the bad guy, they'll say, so I'm giving it a revise and resubmit. It's not helpful for the editor, right? Like it is the editor's job to be the judgment person, to be the bad guy in that scenario. But if an essay has 12 fatal flaws, perhaps you should not offer an R&R.

And so I think what I'm trying to get at there is that kindness with honesty is important because if you're holding something to a standard and if this work, not the author, doesn't meet that standard, I think it's important to offer an unambiguous message about why you consider that the case. It's okay to hold things to a high standard but you need to think about that standard. Is it biased? Is it a relic of your long ago training from back in the day? Or is it appropriate to this essay doing this job at this moment, right? So people will often say, they'll use little short hands, right? This is not QJS standard. I mean there's a lot of stuff that got published in QJS that my students look at and they're like, oh my God, is this all you had to do to get in, right? So when are we talking appropriate standards for this moment? Where are your biases when you apply those standards? And to sort of try to be explicit about those. Like sometimes people will say, I'm an old curmudgeon and so this reads to me this way. But perhaps that's not the best standard. And so please feel free to think about this a different way, right? That's helpful. Positionality is not a small question.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Well, and that discussion of positionality raises the interesting dilemma I suppose that a lot of folks are suggesting the peer review process as currently envisioned merely reinforces and/or exacerbates a sort of white male and Western perspective towards research. And Taylor & Francis as our publishing partner is certainly sympathetic to that and they discovered in a study and a resource that they put out that we often rely on late career researchers and what that means is we're relying on white reviewers, mostly older reviewers and that this really happens in the sciences. I'm not so certain that it doesn't also happen in the humanities and in communication in particular. So Devika, do you think that's true? Do you think it does adhere to communication as well? And what can we do to address the problem?

Devika Chawla:
I believe this is true of the humanities and communication. But it's also true that we're positioned better than the sciences in this regard. There has been more, not enough but more reflective and reflexive engagement about positionality, privilege, and whiteness by scholars who do social research across fields, right? I don't think that this matter can be resolved by a single approach. So late career scholars do happen to be predominantly white. But we cannot assume that the ideology of whiteness that runs through our paradigms, our theories, and methods can just be removed if we stop relying on late career mostly white scholars. Those scholars are also educators who are working with mid-career, early career, and graduate students across our field. So we have to assume and we know that the ideology is everywhere across the field and across disciplines. So the issue for me is what kind of reflective training about bias and reviewing is being done by individual scholars, by institutions, and by associations such as ours? So for instance, we all know that many late career scholars were committed to learning with and about how whiteness ideologies and therefore enlightenment logics permeate our intellectual and therefore publication processes.

As the editor of a cross-disciplinary UC press journal, I rely on many such scholars for reviews because I know from reading their work that they're committed to learning about other worlds, other approaches, and other ways of being and theorizing. So I see it as an editorial responsibility to be aware of the work that people that I invite for reviews are doing, not just past work but their most current work, right? So what else can we do? I return again to workshops that journal editors and research and publication councils such as ours at NCA should run consistently on a yearly basis but more particularly with incoming editors so that this refrain is the at the back of their minds when they're making editorial review choices. We also need to make difficult decisions about removing those late career scholars as reviewers if they show repeated pattern of tone deafness about how they read essays that do not comply with dominant paradigms also white within which they work. But ultimately on a meta level, this issue needs to be addressed in graduate curricula across the fields. Who is teaching? What is being taught? What paradigms are

being reproduced even when they have lost their purchase? Many of our late career scholars are crafting and teaching these curricula. I don't want to end on a pessimistic note but we all know that these are entwined issues, right? Pedagogy, research, reviewing, editing, publishing don't occur in a vacuum. So we have to sort of address this as a multiple pronged approach with a multiple approach.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
More specifically perhaps as a reviewer, as somebody who might be encountering this kind of implicit or explicit bias, Rebecca, a lot of your research has dealt with these questions of inequity. And what do we do in those instances? Now I'm all with Devika's workshops and all of that. I think that's fundamentally important. But at a sort of individual level, what's the role of the editor? What do we do to help the author who has received some kind of overtly implicitly biased review? What can NCA do, what can we do individually to deal with those inequities?

Rebecca de Souza:
Trevor, I'm actually not going to say anything different from what Devika has said.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Sure.

Rebecca de Souza:
I may just offer one more difference. But I think we need to just underscore the fact and we need to understand that at a fundamental level, peer review maintains status quo. It's a system that actually by design maintains status quo. You're trying to fit new knowledge into old knowledge into old molds. So it's designed to do that. And because of that system, it tends to privilege certain voices, interpretations, theories, methodologies while marginalizing and in some cases silencing others. As you mentioned earlier, most academic editors and reviewers are white, right? But white men and women, they comprise less than 20% of the global population. Yet they are reviewing and editing for the world, right? And this is an enormous responsibility. And so we need to really find ways in which to intervene in that system which produces and suppresses marginalized viewpoints. So I think there are some very basic things that we can do to eliminate bias and Devika has mentioned some of these things. So you want to make sure that you're hiring editors of color, ensure that your editorial board is extremely diverse on a variety of vectors, right? Race, religion, nationality, gender, or sexuality. We also know that representation is a start but it's not the end. We need to make sure, and I think this is sort of reinforcing Devika's point, that editorial boards, and if we can, reviewers are well versed and trained in knowledge production and the history of knowledge and how knowledge is produced and its relationship to power.

Because I think once you understand that and you realize and recognize that, you really can't unsee that and you're going to see it everywhere and you're going to be alert to it everywhere. Anytime the content of a paper addresses a counter-hegemonic perspective, editors and reviewers need to be on high alert. It should immediately be a red flag for this is a precarious point of view that I need to deal with in a very sacred manner almost because I need to preserve it. Anytime the content of a paper deals with an international or even a topic from the global south, the same thing, editors and reviewers need to be on high alert. This is a precarious oftentimes marginalized voice that we need to encourage and we need to make sure is cared for and respected. And then just basic things, editors should not be sending work to unqualified reviewers. Don't send a piece about race to somebody who has little knowledge about equity and racial bias, right? Don't send a piece of our race to racists. And maybe you do that the first time but then hopefully you recognize it as an editor and absolutely, like Devika said, you need to sideline people, right? You need to put them in a box and never send them work again. And then that's how you do it.

The same thing for if you have a piece about an international or context or context from the global south, don't send it to somebody who lacks a sociological or geographic imagination, right? They are not going to be helpful and have that expansive view that Devika sort of mention earlier. So I think that's really, really important. I've served as officer of Asian Pacific American Studies Division and Caucus for the last six years and this is actually something that I've heard repeatedly from students and faculty in that caucus and in that division, that reviewers are always looking for more context. And I call this like a context fetish. And it's a very curious thing because immediately as you send something from a context that is not white, not Western, not U.S. centric, suddenly there are these demands for context. And so we've got these brilliant students who want to make deep intellectual contributions. But they're spending their time in papers writing about what you can get on the CIA Factbook or through Google search about context because that's really what is at the heart of that question for context. It's not about thick description. it's not about detailing some distinguishing the winks from the twitches, right? But it's just about we need some basic knowledge about this place. Can you tell us something? So I think that's something that burdens students and they're kind of puzzled by it especially new students who are entering the discipline. Like how do these reviewers not know about this? Why am I explaining the political context of the Philippines to reviewers when basic Google search would like take care of that? But now I've got to spend all of this time and word length because it's also counting against words in your manuscript, talking about something that's really basic. So that's another thing that editors and reviewers should take note of. I'm not sure how you solve that problem but it's something to put on the radar for editors. I'm sure there's a way to balance that sort of inequity and burden and that labor in doing that extra work.

So the best way to support scholars who might have experienced bias. So there are the more obvious ways, right? If you want contact, if you know a student, you know an early career scholar who's experienced this, you give them ways to be resilient and to sort of push back. One of the best things an editor once told me, and I didn't even know this when I was early in my career, that you could actually not do something that a peer reviewer told you to do. I really didn't know that. It took an editor to say, you know, you write the best piece that how to write. You make your argument and you can just say that. And that was like a light bulb moment because I never knew that. I always thought you had to appease the reviewer because that's sort of part of what my training was in graduate school. Like you make the changes and then it gets accepted. And so it took an editor actually telling me that explicitly. You write the best piece that and what you think is best and that's it. So I think those are some very obvious ways.

But I think drawing on what Devika was saying about curriculum, I think that's really important as well. We need to talk more about this but I also think we need to write more about this and incorporate these concerns into our body of knowledge. And here's what I mean. Anytime you try to move a counter-hegemonic assertion through academia, you're most likely going to experience some kind of suppression. If you're writing about race and whiteness like I do, I oftentimes have received pushback on many of those assertions and claims to the extent where I second-guess myself. Should I even do this? Should I even be saying this? You're dealing with things like white fragility in academia. It's incredible that none of our communication methods books deal with this concern and it's even more stupendous that none of those critically acclaimed handbooks of qualitative research methods deal with this. Now there are a lot of chapters and sections which talk about reflexivity and especially in my kind of ethnographic sort of qualitative research. So they'll talk about reflexivity, about race and class. But it's usually from the perspective of the dominant group. How does a white person studying black and brown spaces deal with their privilege? But power operates differently for researchers of color in white spaces. But that is never talked about, right? And that is something that has not made it into our methods books. And yet this is sort of a central epistemic question, right? It has to do with epistemology and how we construct knowledge and how we come to know what we know. And I call it the micro politics of knowledge production, right? Because it's these conversations that happen behind closed doors on paper which no one ever sees.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right, right.

Rebecca de Souza:
Right? But which have such enormous power and can shape our work to such a degree that we need to call it into the light and not just that sort of in panels. We should do that too. But put it in our textbooks because that's where we're training the next generation of scholars on these issues.

If I had known 15 years ago the challenges that I would face as a brown woman of color studying communication process in white spaces, and by that, I mean both doing ethnographic research in white communities but also moving my assertions in a predominantly white academic context, white reviewers, white editors, like that would have been amazingly helpful. But I was unprepared for it. And then when I went looking for some help in where I would usually go as an academic which is books, there's very little. You've got black feminist theorists talking about it. You've got a few post-colonial feminists talking about it. But it's not made it into our mainstream textbooks and I think that's where it needs to be because that's where students learn how to do research, how to be scholars. And it's important not just for supporting scholars of color or scholars typically minoritized in dominant spaces. But it's also good for them sort of supporting good reviewers in the future, right? Because you've already put the seed of knowledge production and all of these the micro politics of knowledge production into the minds of everybody in that classroom. And they go on to be editors and reviewers. And yeah, so I think that's really critical.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I really do too. And I think that placing the reviewing process within the larger schemes of knowledge production as you say and the power dynamics of knowledge production is really important. Devika, did you want to follow up on that?

Devika Chawla:
I just wanted to tag along the issue of context. When a scholar, when a BIPOC scholar sends an essay to an editor to ask for context often means, and I'm going to reinforce what Rebecca said, so you are basically forcing this minoritized author to produce the history of their country or culture or race in that article because you did not know anything about that context. And so it's a failure of the editor for having assigned that essay to this reviewer and it's the failure of the reviewer thereby. And why this is racist is that it causes a distraction. It makes the author work on distracting issues rather than the central issue that they are working with in that essay, right? So and I use Maya Angelou's words, not Maya Angelous. Sorry, Tony Morrison's. When racism is a distraction, right? And it prevents you from doing your work. And one of the ways that happens is when authors, younger authors, minoritized authors are distracted by having to reproduce the histories of their continents in ways that are amenable. They're always explaining themselves, right? And explaining your history is tedious on a continuous basis when you're doing important work.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's all really important advice I think for reviewers, for editors, and the like. When I was a graduate student, Martha Solomon, Martha Watson came to Indiana University and gave a talk. And they did this little workshop with all the graduate students. And one of the pieces of advice that she said, and it bears on something that Mary was talking about earlier, is that to be

successful in academic publishing, and grant me some leeway here, this was way back right. I'm an old guy so this was way back. But she said to be successful in academic publishing, you need to take yourself out of your work. And I thought, okay, that was good advice for Mary's point which is that reviewers need to recognize that they're critiquing the work and not the person. I'm thinking in terms of what Rebecca and Devika just talked about. It may not necessarily be all that great advice because it does sort of assume a kind of positionality with regard to scholarship and knowledge production that may in fact reify white Western notions of how these things happen. So I'm thinking in my experience that this is a good piece of advice and possibly a bad piece of advice. And I'm curious if you all might offer a similar kind of reflective moment. When do you recall from your experiences when you've received a really good piece of advice and a really not so good piece of advice? And they might be the same thing. But from your experience as a both publishing author and as a reviewer. Denise, what do you think? Do you have any instances of when you thought, wow, that was really important advice?

Denise M. Bostdorff:
Well, I think in general the advice that I've gotten that has been helpful has been the kind of advice that has told me what they thought I was doing well and that also, rather than just simply dismissing my framework or dismissing arguments, asked probing questions or provided me with possible alternatives that encouraged me to dig a little bit deeper and then to produce a better piece ultimately. And I've always appreciated editors too who took kind of a triage approach I would say, who said all those things that those reviewers said, here are the things that are most important. But also recognizing, I had the same experience Rebecca did, I didn't realize as a young scholar that you could choose not to do something that a reviewer said and just maybe you explain why you chose not to do that, that you could make that choice. In terms of things not helpful, I think that it would be the reviews that you get that are about one paragraph long. So they're very short, there's very little feedback, and where it sounds more like it's a personal attack more so than anything that's helpful. And even a few years ago, when you told us you were going to ask us this question, I sort of felt like, oh. And so I had this, it's down in the basement somewhere, but this person has said, this is a countless stringing together of arguments at a leisurely pace and said that I wrote without a scintilla of clarity or grace. And I was like oh. I'm not easily offended but I was kind of offended. And the thing is even if the reviewer had provided me with some helpful feedback, it would have been very hard for me to process that because of the other things that were said. So that would be my take.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Mary, what do you think? Again, you've received thousands of reviews, right?

Mary Stuckey:
Yeah. And I mean I always tell students that when you get reviews back, spend two days crying, two days being pissed off, and then shut up and do the work. Because for me, I always have to process the, and that's a relic of the way things got reviewed back in the day when I was more sensitive to these things which was you did kind of spend two days crying because this work is important to you. It's work that you've spent a lot of time on. So it's work that I take still fairly personally when people attack it. And so I think I'm also in a unique-ish position because I come from a discipline not communication. And so I literally am where I am because of the kindness of reviewers. Because I didn't know what I was doing. I never had a class in rhetorical theory and the rhetorical theory I know, I pretty much learned one review at a time with somebody saying, well, this seems smart but I don't understand why she's not citing X. And I would be like who's X? And I would run to somebody's office or send an email and be like, the reviewer told me to do this but who is this person? And so I really did benefit greatly from other people's willingness to share their expertise with me. And so I think the idea that you are sharing expertise with someone which circles back to the comments people have made about the importance of pedagogy to this process. So those have been the most helpful. And like Denise, it's the name calling. I was told once that this essay—I like it that we all have notes and this was one, I don't still have this file folder in my basement because I've moved so many times. And it's important to know here, I was trained as a political scientist before coming to communication. So when I was told, “This essay read like it was written by a poorly educated undergraduate with no knowledge of how politics works,” that perhaps stung a little bit. But it didn't just sting, it made me be like, so what are you? Stupid? Like I actually felt pretty good about my expertise in that area. And like Denise, that comment undermined, and this unlike Denise, this was in a five-page review of great detail of the evils and shortcomings of my essay. But I wasn't able to learn from any of those five pages because the reviewers so undermined themselves in my opinion. So that wasn't helpful to anybody I think.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Right. So Devika, amongst all of your workshops, maybe there's room in NCA for a workshop for young scholars or old scholars or scholars about how to read reviews and how to process reviews. What advice might we give in that kind of workshop, not just how to write really good reviews but how to read them and how to deal with them, aside and capitalizing on what Mary suggested about the sort of stages of review grief?

Devika Chawla:
I mean I think how to process reviews is, I always, well, with me, I tell my students, do you believe in the strength of the essay? And if you believe in the strength of the essay, how willing are you to counter the reviewer? Because you are. I mean, and so I want to go back to talking about like the best reviews I've received have been the most strenuous reviews. But at the same time, they

have been the most generous in the sense that the reviewers have provided me with outs. And I had to read into the review to understand they were providing me with options and they were inviting me to say, okay, I won't do this and why I won't. And they were even often, and so you have to sit and look at the review and see what they're offering you because sometimes a good reviewer is giving you three options to choose from but you are thinking it's three different things that you need to do. But they're saying, no, you can choose this and then tell me why you won't do the other two, right? And so for me, actually my best experiences have been with the most strenuous reviews and my best experiences have also been in doing experimental sort of performance work. I knew I was writing experimentally but I didn't know that I was really doing what people in performance studies do and I hadn't been trained in performance studies or educated in it. And it was through these very strenuous reviewers pushing me to do those readings that I'm now actually in the area of performance and I teach courses in performance studies and performance method and performance ethnography. And it's because early essays as a grad student, as a third, fourth year grad student, reviewers were strenuously pushing me to read that material, right? So I have to say I've had my share of nightmarish reviews. But I've had so many strenuous reviews that have been so generous in the way I was able to read them and in the way that they allowed me to read them because of the options they provided.

And I think that's also the job of the editor, when the editor also provides you an out and that's the meta work of the editor which is so critical. And as an editor, for instance, I have worked with the press and said, look, I don't want to send this review. And they have said, we are going to, edit it. I'm working with Oxford on something right now and a really terrible review came in. And it was actually monstrous. So and I wrote to Oxford and I said, look, I cannot send this review to the reviewer. And we walked through eliminating segments of the review and just we worked through making me the main reviewer for the essay and we came to an amenable agreement about how we would go about it. So last point, my early first sort of field work was on arranged marriages, Hindu arranged marriages in urban India. And I wrote an essay on postcolonial feminism, looking at my fieldwork and was relying on Syed for some basic framing. And I remember that a reviewer came back, telling me in the review that Syed was really not a literature scholar. I just decided not to do, I pulled the essay. I decided that if the editor had not read through that review to understand that Edward Syed was a scholar in comparative literature for much of his career, like it was an insult for me to like to read that sentence. I don't know where that goes but that's one of my sort of bad moments in reading reviews.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
And Rebecca, any good or bad moments there that you'd want to share?

Rebecca de Souza:
I'm one of those people, I like peer review and I enjoy that process and I think it's because of similar to what other folks here have said. I think it's been fundamental to shaping my identity as a scholar and that's where it becomes sort of a mentoring process. Because I think without those peer reviews, I wouldn't be the scholar I am today because those generous reviewers who were so generous with sharing their intellectual property basically. It's sort of this murky space where they're telling you how you might think about something and sharing their literatures and sharing their bibliography with you and making connections that you might not have seen. And all of that can be incredibly generous because there's no way else that you can get that and then use it and sort of take off from it. So I enjoy when I get those reviews and those are the best kinds of reviews when reviewers will say also, and this is where it speaks to I think we do have to keep the person, at least for me that's been really important, to keep the person attached to the work. Because when reviewers are able to say something like, I see what you're doing over here and you seem like you're really interested in this fieldwork and looking at frontline workers in organizations and how they negotiate stuff at this level. But what I really think you want to do is like here. Like you want to talk about politics and political organizing. And maybe you should just do that. Go there. And that has been phenomenal and life-changing for me and has changed the trajectory of my work because it sort of gave me the license to say, oh yeah, maybe that is what I do well and maybe that is what is unique and novel about my work. And maybe now I need to find a way in which to get there. Why don't you switch from this to that or to do both together? And that's kind of what I do today. And those peer reviews have been fundamental to doing that. And there are like two or three even that I can think of and that I remember where people have said, broaden the ambit of your work. And you need to go there. So those are some of the best reviews that I've got that have helped me figure out who I am as a scholar and my own identity and the work that I do.

In terms of negative reviews, I think similar to what everyone said here, I think any time it sounds personal and it's not focused on the work, that is very unsettling and it sort of just puts you off. And you know it immediately. Something in your body tells you that this is not about the work, that they have sensed something else in the piece, and they're reacting to that. And it takes a while to figure that out I think and for younger scholars, it can be incredibly disheartening. But I think once you can pinpoint it and sort of know that it's not coming from a good place, then you can sort of just sideline that and as you get more confident, also talk to the editors about that. But yeah, I think for me, those have been ones that have not been useful.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's really good. And I think that's a great place to sort of wrap things up for today because it really, Rebecca, the way you framed the positive review experience I think really captures what we're all after and what we're all about in this knowledge production process and the generosity

and the grace and the open-mindedness of reviewing is really fundamental to the mentorship there. So that's fantastic. Thank you. And thank you all for being on *Communication Matters*. I think for any of our listeners, rather new to the process or seasoned old curmudgeon I think was the term somebody used, curmudgeonly reviewers, I think this this episode and your insights have been extremely helpful. So thank you. And listeners, as always, thank you for listening to *Communication Matters*. And don't forget, subscribe to *Communication Matters* wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Mary Stuckey:
Thank you, Trevor.

Devika Chawla:
Thank you.

Denise M. Bostdorff:
Thank you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
In NCA News, our journals web page has been redesigned to be more user-friendly. Visit natcom.org/journals for easy-to-access information about NCA's 11 scholarly journals, including the current editors and submission information. NCA members can read the journals for free by logging in on the NCA website. And if you're interested in becoming a journal editor, be sure to visit NCA's Resources for Aspiring Editors page at natcom.org/resources-for-aspiring-editors. That's natcom.org/resources-for-aspiring-editors. The page, which will be added to regularly, currently includes information about the resources and support provided to NCA journal editors, a position statement about the value of editing an NCA journal, and an episode of *Communication Matters* that features a conversation with former NCA journal editors about the rewards and challenges that aspiring journal editors can expect.

Listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the June 3rd episode of *Communication Matters* which will focus on two award-winning communication books. Mia Fischer will discuss *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State*, the winner of NCA's 2020 Diamond Anniversary Book Award. Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz will address *Homeland Maternity: U.S. Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime*, which was the winner of NCA's 2020 James A. Winans-Herbert A. Wichelns Memorial Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address. So please join me for this interesting discussion about gender, maternity, and the surveillance state.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Conclusion:
Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles. The podcast, organized at the national office in downtown Washington DC, is produced by Assistant Director of External Affairs and Publications Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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