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Assessment Is Constructed and Contextual:

Identity, Information Literacy, and Interview-Based Methodologies in the First-Year Writing Classroom

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Abstract: Over the past fifteen years, the field of writing assessment has moved from scholarship that exposes how traditional assessment perpetuates inequality (Inoue & Poe, 2012; Kelly-Riley, 2011) and advocates new approaches that take social justice as their central goal (Poe et al., 2018) to scholarship that critiques some of those moves toward more equitable assessment (Carillo, 2021; Del Principe, 2023; Kryger & Zimmerman, 2020). We report on a collaboration between two writing instructors and a librarian that assessed first-year writing students' information literacy when researching and writing with popular news sources. In addition to the typical practice of analyzing students' written work, this project used interviews as an assessment methodology. This research produced three important findings: minoritized students demonstrated superior critical information literacy skills compared to majoritized students; these differences were made visible through the use of multiple measures (written artifacts and interviews); and the use of interviews is an assessment methodology that invites students to engage in counterstory and draw on personal experiences, revealing new sources of knowledge and countering narratives of deficit. Ultimately, we argue that interviews hold promise for antiracist revamping of student learning outcomes driven by programmatic assessment and research.

Keywords: critical assessment, counterstory, asset-based assessment, information literacy, higher education

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> People of color have experiential knowledge from having lived under such systems of racism and oppression. POC have thus developed methods and methodologies that serve as coping mechanisms and navigation strategies, while also serving as ways to raise awareness of issues affecting people of color that are often overlooked, not considered or otherwise invisible to whites. (Martinez, 2020, p. 10)

In recent years, researchers in higher education, library and information science, and writing studies have asserted the need for equity-oriented models of assessment. In a report from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), Montenegro and Jankowski (2017) argue that "those who lead and participate in assessment activities [must] pay attention and be conscious of how assessment can either feed into cycles that perpetuate inequities or can serve to bring more equity into higher education" (p. 9). To operationalize this directive, higher education researchers have called for race-conscious (rather than race-neutral) interventions (Randall, 2021). Such interventions include designing assessment mechanisms in accordance with diverse ways of thinking informed by lived experience that shape social relationships/orientations, epistemological beliefs/cognitive patterns, and temporal perceptions (Sato, 2017) and incorporating an antiracist approach to all aspects of the assessment process, from conception of the assessment project to the final evaluation of student artifacts (Randall et al., 2022). Taking up this call in the introduction to *Writing Assessment, Social Justice, and the Advancement of Opportunity*, Poe et al. (2018) agree that assessment can be a tool for increasing equity: "writing assessment best serves students when justice is taken as the ultimate aim of assessment; once adopted, that aim advances individual opportunity through identification of opportunity structures" (p. 5).

As part of the emerging research on equitable assessment, this study advocates an asset-based approach to assessment, a strategy that yielded the finding that minoritized students are standard-bearers in approaching popular media sources critically.[1] This result became clear to us as researchers only when we examined students' learning through a two-pronged approach: reading their written artifacts and interviewing these students about their work. This study demonstrates the value of using multiple modes of assessment, showing that interviews can be sites of meaning-making that invite students to reflect on the lived experiences that inform their writing and information literacy choices, a form of participant agency that shapes and enriches research and assessment projects. Our work suggests that pairing writing with other forms of assessment—particularly active, dialogic interviews—can help challenge and reframe historical inequities in learning outcomes. As such, we advocate the use of interviews in research on assessment and in program review processes.

Literature Review

Critical Assessment in Writing Studies

Writing studies has a long history of research that critiques and problematizes the ways in which existing assessment practices perpetuate and exacerbate inequality, especially racial

1 We use the term *minoritized* to follow Wingrove-Haugland and McLeod (2021), who argue for the use of the term *minoritized* over *minority* or *underrepresented* for several reasons, including (a) both *minority* and underrepresented signify a numeric size differential, obscuring power differentials that can lead majority populations to be *minoritized*; (b) the terms *minority* and *underrepresented* obscure the agency of majoritized people/culture in creating minoritization; and (c) the term *minoritized* is expansive enough to include intersectionality and multiply marginalized identities.

inequality, in writing programs. Challenging the use of high-stakes testing via the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE), a nationally administered multiple-choice test, and the results of the English Placement Test (EPT) administered within the California State University system, White and Thomas (1981) showed that these tests systematically undervalued the writing skills of students of color. Inoue and Poe's (2012) replication of White and Thomas's work showed that the EPT continued to yield racially inequitable results. Kelly-Riley (2011) demonstrated that portfolio assessment—often positioned as a more just and valid alternative to high-stakes testing—can also display racial bias, noting that Black students failed Washington State University's portfolio requirements at higher rates than students of other races. Further, scholars like Cushman (2016) have challenged the conceptual basis of writing assessment, problematizing the imperialist roots of the concept of validity, which calls into question equitable assessment as a project.

In response to such challenges, writing assessment scholars have proposed alternative assessment strategies that address these practical and theoretical issues. Drawing on the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing developed by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, Poe (2013) called practitioners to design assessments to maximize fairness. Pointing to the tendency of homogenous assessment teams to design projects that replicate racial inequality, Perryman-Clark (2016) argued that assessment teams must include a racially diverse group of instructors and writing program administrators. The labor-based grading contract model of assessment developed by Inoue (2012, 2015) offers a curriculum designed around antiracism and fairness in the effort to minimize the impact of racial, linguistic, socioeconomic, and other biases on student achievement. This influential assessment approach, however, has itself been criticized by scholars like Kryger and Zimmerman (2020), Carillo (2021), and Del Principe (2023) for assuming that time is an equitably distributed resource, and as a result failing to counter the disadvantages faced by students of color and students with disabilities.

Critical Assessment in Information Literacy

The field of information literacy has also seen debate about how best to assess students' skills and learning. Norgaard et al. (2004) asserted the essential connection between writing and information literacy. Walsh (2009) cataloged the variety of assessment strategies that practitioners used and commented on the challenges of reliability and validity that information literacy researchers faced. Head (2013) underscored the importance of finding out what students do when they search for information when making normative recommendations about search behaviors. Building on this emphasis on students' actual information behaviors and arguing for recognizing their sophistication, Bull, MacMillan, and Head (2021) call for assessment that positions students as dynamic actors whose information-seeking, -consuming, and -sharing behaviors are adapted to specific contexts and purposes and shaped by relational, networked-based understandings of credibility, recognizing students as developing information literacy experts, rather than seeing them as perpetual novices. Also reflecting a capacious view of information literacy, Wojahn et al. (2016) criticized the tendency to assess students' information literacy solely based on a final written paper.

While this research has called for changes to research methods, recent work on information literacy assessment has focused on power and equity gaps to highlight the biases that can underscore assessment, regardless of the tools used. Magnus et al. (2018) cautioned that

assessments often replicate the power structures of the institutions in which these assessments occur. Tewell (2020) rejected assessment modes that emerge from a deficit approach to learning, instead asserting the value of critical information literacy being taught in a manner consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy. In their work on current theories of information literacy, Hicks and colleagues (2023) called attention to the effects of social power dynamics in information creation, circulation, and consumption, drawing researchers' attention to the ways in which marginalized people have not only been denied access to information considered valuable but have had their own traditions and forms of knowledge denied or suppressed. As Lloyd (2023a) argued, this perspective also recasts the ontology on which dominant beliefs about information literacy and information literacy assessment are frequently based, characterizing information literacy practices as deriving from social contexts rather than from individual acts of thinking, reading, and writing, and emphasizing the extent to which autonomous and solipsistic views of information literacy are both produced by and reinforce racist, sexist, classist, and colonialist worldviews found in dominant information literacy scholarly discourses. Pedagogical work like Powell's (2020) on information privilege showed the potential for making these political and ideological dimensions of information production, circulation, and access an explicit focus of information literacy research. Lloyd (2014b, 2023b) further identified bodies as the culturally inscribed points at which texts, discourses, power relations, and lived experience come together, pointing to how individuals actively select, interpret, and create knowledge within the larger contexts in which they are situated and drawing attention to the central and understudied role material reality plays in information literacy practices and assessment.

Methods

Pedagogical Intervention

Julia and Loring—two White, middle-aged teacher-researchers—collaborated with Nicole—a Black, middle-aged librarian instructor—to design a first-year writing (FYW) curriculum centered around writing assignments that asked students to research and critique popular media discourse about a topic, supported by information literacy workshops taught by Nicole. Julia's assignment asked students to analyze popular discourse about a controversy in higher education and Loring's assignment asked students to analyze popular discourse about a topic related to food.[2]

Research Site and Participants

Our research team received IRB approval to study participating students' written artifacts and interview them about their research and writing experiences.[3] We conducted our research during the 2018-2019 academic year at Santa Clara University, a selective research-professional university located in the California Bay Area with a primarily undergraduate student population,

2 Although it is outside the scope of this article to reflect on the White supremacist underpinnings of our assignments, both Julia and Loring have realized over the course of this project that their assignments privileged White cultural norms in ways that undermined the experiences of students of color. Julia's assignment asked students to research news coverage of a college campus controversy to analyze the techniques used to present information, cultivate credibility, and appeal to readers by authors writing in right, left, and center news publications. This assignment was predicated on the White supremacist cultural norm of objectivity (see Okun, 1999), asking students to assume a neutral stance on issues that were hotly contested in their own lives (such as gun control, the legitimacy of gender studies programs, and racial profiling on college campuses) and write "fairly" about polarizing sources that touched on their lived experience. Loring's assignment asked students to analyze a food considered "taboo" in American culture without acknowledging the ways that taboos serve to perpetuate a White supremacist status quo.

3 This study was approved by Santa Clara University's Institutional Review Board, Protocol #18-09-1141.

just under half of which is White (with Asian and Hispanic students making up the largest BIPOC student groups).[4] Participants included 26 students from four FYW sections, all of whom contributed the final version of their research essays to the study. For ethical reasons and to minimize students' compulsion to participate and/or give teacher-pleasing interview responses, students were recruited for the study and interviewed by a research team member other than their FYW teacher and instructors did not see study data from their own classes until after course grades were submitted.

The researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with 16 of the 26 students, and this article focuses on the 16 students for whom we have both essay and interview data.[5] Interview questions (see Appendix A in supplemental materials) centered on the students' research processes and their information literacy/writing development during FYW. Two research team members coded each interview and essay, and all disagreements were reconciled via discussion and review of the data (see O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). In cases where agreement could not be reached by the two original coders, the third team member also coded the data in question to serve as a tiebreaker.

Research Methods and Methodology

Deductive Coding: Critical Information Literacy Assessment

To teach and assess students' critical information literacy, we used the Trust Indicators (The Trust Project, 2022), which were developed by a nonprofit organization that engages news outlets, reporters, and ethics experts to help newsrooms assess themselves and encourage citizens to interrogate the news they consume. The Trust Indicators are as follows:

- **Publication's Editorial Practices:** Who funds the site? What is its mission? What standards and ethics guide the process of gathering news? What happens if a journalist has ties to the topic covered?
- **Author/Reporter Expertise:** Who made this? Are there details about the journalist, including contact information, areas of knowledge and other stories they've worked on?
- **Type/Genre of Work**: What is this? Do you see story labels with clear definitions to distinguish opinion, analysis and advertiser (or sponsored) content from news reports?
- **Source Research:** What is the source? Does the site tell you where it got its information? For investigative, controversial or in-depth stories, are you given access to the original materials behind the facts and assertions?

4 Brown and Dancy (2010) define predominantly White institutions (PWIs) as institutions where 50% or more of students are White, but they situate this demographic designation in the larger history of North American higher education as a segregated enterprise invested in perpetuating the country's racist status quo. Following this argument, we categorize this institution as a PWI even though during the year this data was collected, the undergraduate student body on campus was 49% White. This university's decades-long, still ongoing history of Student of Color-led racial justice organizing through the UNITY movements (see Multicultural Center Santa Clara University, 2016; UNITY, 2023), indicates that students still experience the institution as predominantly White even as the White student population has fallen slightly below the numerical majority.

5 In light of the extensive literature considering how the interaction between the racial (Finkel et al., 1991), gender (Huddy et al., 1997; Kane & Macaulay, 1993), sexual (Kemph & Kassar, 1996), and linguistic (Reese et al., 1986; Yang & Bond, 1980) identities of interviewer and interviewees affect interviewees' responses through the influence of social desirability (van Bochove et al., 2015) and social distance/deference/attribution (Holbrook et al., 2019), we examined our dataset to determine whether there were significant differences in the students' interview response trends based on interviewer, but we found little to no evidence of such variation. Our finding of little variation among the interviews conducted by different research team members aligns with van Bochove et al.'s (2015) research on identity performance in interviews that emphasizes the malleable and contextual nature of identity performance, suggesting that context (rather than demographic characteristics alone) helps dictate which identity aspects are considered salient in the interview conversation and are thus enacted in interview responses (Brenner, 2020).

- **Source Methods:** Why was it a priority? For investigative, in-depth, or controversial stories, why did they pursue the topic? What was the process through which this story was produced?
- **Local Sourcing:** Do they know the community? Was the reporting done on the scene? Is there evidence of deep knowledge about the local situation or community?
- **Inclusion of Diverse Voices:** What are the newsroom's efforts and commitments to bring in diverse perspectives across social and demographic differences? Are some communities or perspectives included only in stereotypical ways, or even completely missing?[6]

To assess students' information literacy skills, we coded their interviews and essays for evidence of the Trust Indicators, using a scale that recorded whether in each artifact the participant considered (1), did not consider (0), or rejected (-1) each Indicator. This gave students a score for each Indicator, ranging from -1 to 1, for both their interview and their essay.

Inductive Coding: Student Identities and Lived Experiences

Although this study was not originally designed to probe students' identities, during their interviews, a number of students described how their research and writing processes were shaped by their experiences of watching people or groups they identified with be marginalized or stereotyped both in general and while working on their projects. These identifications were related to different characteristics, including race, gender, and affinity group (such as "gamer" or "home schooler") and intersected only partially with demographic information gathered by the university. Because students drew our attention to the inaccurate and/or problematic ways in which sources represented the groups they identified as members of, and because students noted how these experiences shaped their writing and research, we used an inductive coding approach (Miles et al., 2014) to add coding categories related to identity and lived experience to the deductively-developed information literacy categories we had initially designed the study to explore. The codes we developed through our inductive analysis were (a) experienced marginalization (EM) and (b) defended own culture (DC). These categories often overlapped with race, so we also included students' racial identity as a category of analysis.

We coded students as having experienced marginalization when, in their interviews or essays, we saw them drawing on their identities and lived experiences to engage with their topic or critique media representations: for example, when a student used their family's practice of eating durian as a celebration food to criticize a Buzzfeed reporter performing exaggerated disgust when trying durian in Vietnam (Student 1, Interview, Segments 25–58, see Figure 6), or when a STEM-identified student described their deeply skeptical response to articles in which anti-GMO groups discussed scientific research (Student 8, Interview, Segments 85–86). In these cases, students reported seeing themselves and/or members of groups they were part of be stereotyped, misrepresented, or discriminated against, often in ways that paralleled their own lived experiences. As these two examples illustrate, this understanding of marginalization helped us recognize cases where the interplays between the multiple aspects of students' identities—some of which were captured by standard demographic descriptors like race and gender, but others which were not—shaped their research and writing experiences.

6 The Trust Project has also developed an eighth Trust Indicator (actionable feedback, such as soliciting reader comments), which was not included in our courses' information literacy curriculum or this study.

The code for defended own culture emerged similarly: many of the students who identified as members of marginalized groups that had been discriminated against, misrepresented, and/or erased from popular media characterized their purpose as researchers/writers in terms of exposing and/or correcting those distortions and omissions, positioning themselves as defenders of the groups they claimed membership in. For instance, one student described deciding to write about the southeast Asian delicacy balut because it was a food that was important to their family, but one that they were mocked and criticized for eating (Student 3, Interview, Segments 19–24, see Figure 5). Another student noted that their experience hearing about and eating *cuy*, a common Andean food, with their Peruvian grandparents provided the impetus for their project to decenter the American perspectives that sees guinea pigs only as pets and their consumption as horrific (Student 10, Essay, p. 1).

We also coded students' racial identities using the information they supplied in their college applications, in which students variously identified as Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic, Native American, and White (including some students who identified as Multiracial). Because of our small sample size (16 students), we collapsed these groups into Person of Color and White Person. Although this practice obscures important differences between BIPOC racial groups, it was necessitated by our small sample size (see Conclusion for further discussion of this issue).

Creating a Critical Framework for Inductively Coded Data

In our analysis, we considered each of these three categories—experienced marginalization, defended own culture, and race—in binary terms, creating the Framework in Table 1. In recognition of the connections between students' racial identities, lived experience, and rhetorical goals, we linked together the codes for Person of Color (POC), experienced marginalization (EM) and defended own culture (DC) under the umbrella term of *minoritized* and the codes for White Person (WP), Did not experience marginalization (NEM), and Did not defend own culture (NDC) under the umbrella term of *majoritized.* In creating these code groupings, we follow Causadias and Umaña-Taylor's (2018) view of marginalization as a set of "multidimensional, dynamic, context-dependent, and diverse web of processes, rooted in power imbalance, and systematically directed toward specific groups and individuals, with probabilistic implications for development" (p. 709). We used the macro categories of minoritized and majoritized to show connections across multiple minoritized groups of students and to illustrate how minoritized and majoritized groups of students are implicated in these social power dynamics (whether they recognize it or not).

Similar to our framework for understanding marginalization, we used the macro category terminology of minoritized/majoritized to reflect the way intergroup power dynamics operate contextually within institutions, including both popular media and higher education (see Armstrong, 2019; Lisle et al., 2020; Patton et al., 2016). Although race, experiencing marginalization, and defending their own culture were different forms of minoritization and occurred in different contexts, students who described minoritization articulated their experience as distinct from the experience of peers who identified with the dominant or mainstream discourse. In addition to foregrounding the contextual and dynamic experiences of students' identities and experiences, grouping students into macro categories allowed us to acknowledge the similarities across subgroups within the same macro category while retaining the specificity that distinguished each subgroup. Using an interpretive framework centered on the experiences of minoritized students

Table 1

Inductive Categories of Analysis for Student Identity Characteristics

Minoritized		
Person of color (POC)	Experienced marginalization (EM)	Defended own culture (DC)
Student who identified as Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic, Native American, and/or Multiracial.	Student described or referenced navigating personal experiences of discrimination or bias based on some aspect of their identity, bias or misrepresentation in sources related to some aspect of their identity, a research topic that elicited reflection on misrepresentation or bias they felt was directly related to some aspect of their identity, and/or a lack of culturally representative information related to some aspect of their identity.	Student characterized their work as responding to bias or misrepresentation of their identity or culture by creating alternate narratives, engaging diverse sources, challenging biased sources, and/or using their personal experience as a source of information.
Majoritized		
White Person (WP)	Did not experience marginalization (NEM)	Did not defend own culture (NDC)
Student who identified racially as White.	Student did not describe or reference navigating personal experiences of discrimination or bias based on some aspect of their identity, bias or misrepresentation in sources related to some aspect of their identity, a research topic that elicited reflection on misrepresentation or bias they felt was directly related to some aspect of their identity, and/or a lack of culturally representative information related to some aspect of their identity.	Student did not characterize their work as responding to bias or misrepresentation of their identity or culture.

rather than using the experiences of majoritized students as the reference standard provided an alternative to deficit approaches.

Results

Using the methods described above, we observed marked differences in the critical information literacy of minoritized and majoritized students. Specifically, minoritized students articulated the gap between media representations and lived experience in ways that aligned with several core concepts from the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

Table 2

ACRL Frames Considering the Relationship Between Information and Power

ACRL Frame	Associated Knowledge Practices
Authority Is Constructed and Contextual	Develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview Question traditional notions of granting authority and recognize the value of diverse ideas and worldviews
Information Has Value	Understand how and why some individuals or groups of individuals may be underrepresented or systematically marginalized within the systems that produce and disseminate information
Information Creation as a Process	Develop, in their own creation processes, an understanding that their choices impact the purposes for which the information product will be used and the message it conveys

Note. See American Library Association (2015).

(ALA, 2015; see Table 2) and majoritized students did not. As we detail in the Discussion section, minoritized students' deployment of the sophisticated thinking about information described by these ACRL Frames was enacted through referencing specific source characteristics denoted by the Trust Indicators, often through references to their own lived experience and goals for their research and writing.

In our data analysis, we used students' referencing of Trust Indicator concepts to identify different levels of information literacy skill and considered the relationship between those information literacy skills and students' lived experience of minoritization and majoritization. To bring those relationships to light, we calculated students' engagement with each Trust Indicator in both their essay and their interview, comparing the average scores earned by minoritized and majoritized students and then considering specific information literacy skills for each group of students according to the minoritized and majoritized groupings we developed.

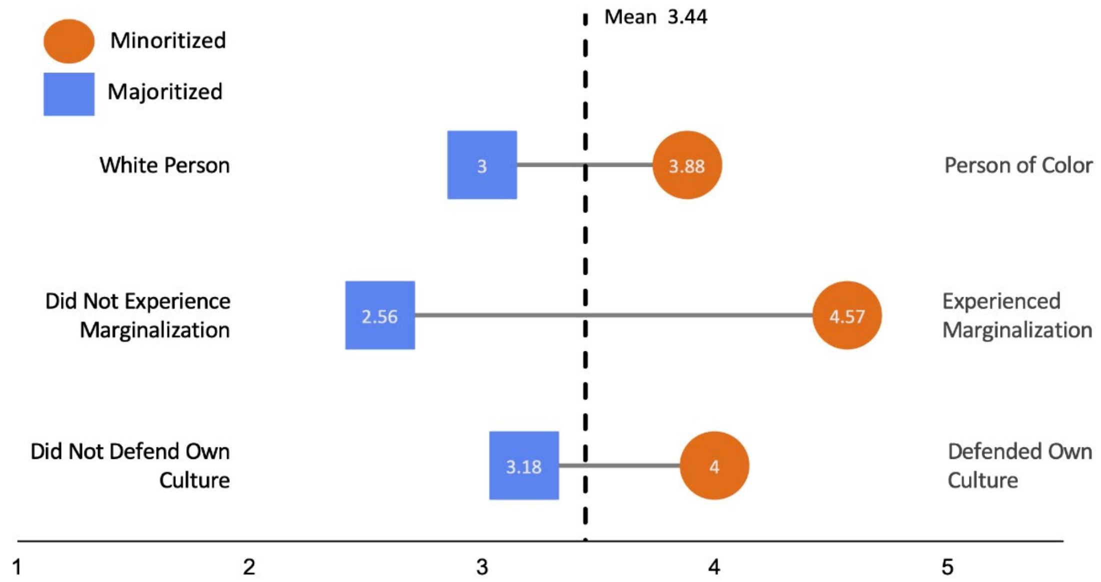
Overall Information Literacy: Cumulative Trust Indicator Scores

To provide an overall picture of students' information literacy, we tallied the number of Trust Indicators each student referenced and calculated the average cumulative scores for each group based on interview data (see Figure 1) and essay data (see Figure 2).[7] The dotted line in the center of each figure represents the mean for all students. The blue square-shaped endpoints on the right side of Figures 1 and 2 represent the average cumulative Trust Indicator scores for majoritized student groups: White Person (WP), did not experience marginalization (NEM), and did not defend own culture (NDC). The orange round-shaped endpoints on the left side of Figures 1 and 2 represent the average cumulative Trust Indicator scores for minoritized student groups: Person of Color (POC), experienced marginalization (EM), and defended own culture (DC). The data displayed here show how far above/below the overall average each minoritized and majoritized group fell.

7 We used seven Trust Indicators in this study, meaning that the maximum cumulative score for each essay or interview was 7. Students' Trust Indicator cumulative scores ranged from 0-7 for essays and from 0-6 for interviews (6 was the largest number of Trust Indicators referenced in an interview).

Figure 1

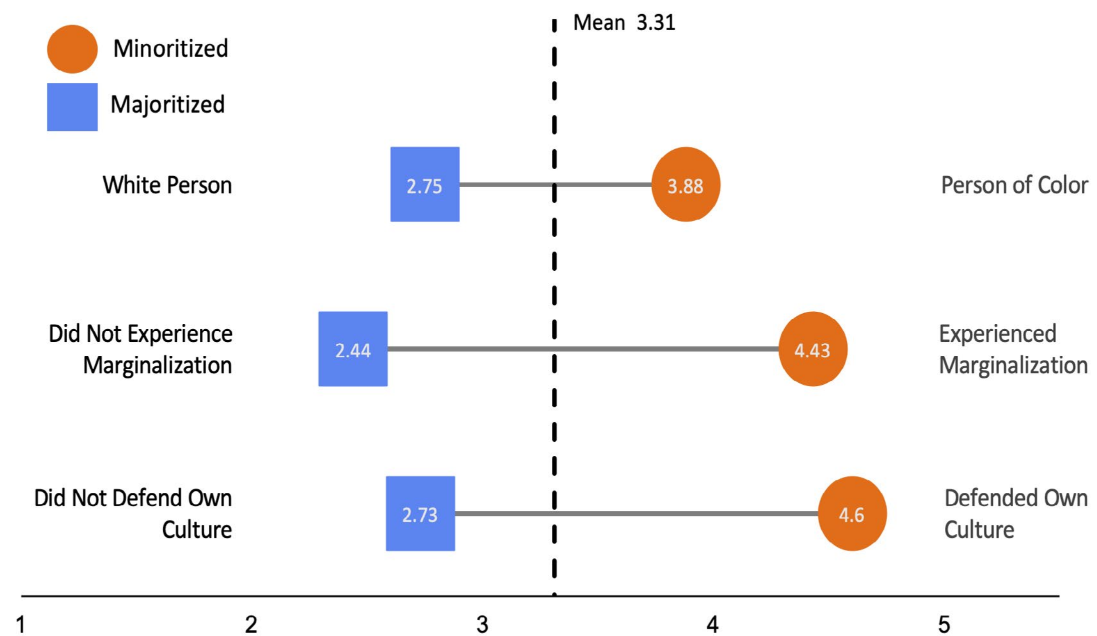
Comparison of Average Cumulative Trust Indicator Scores for Minoritized and Majoritized Student Groups in Interviews



Note. See Table 3 in supplemental materials for data used to create this chart.

Figure 2

Comparison of Average Cumulative Trust Indicator Scores for Minoritized and Majoritized Student Groups in Essays



Note. See Table 3 in supplemental materials for data used to create this chart.

Together, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that minoritized students demonstrated substantially more sophisticated information literacy than majoritized students. The difference between minoritized and majoritized students was greatest in the marginalization grouping: EM students averaged 4.57 interview and 4.43 essay scores, compared to NEM students' 2.56 interview and 2.44 essay scores. The differences between students who did versus did not defend own culture were also pronounced, with DC students averaging scores of 4.00 for their interviews and 4.60 for their essays and NDC students averaging 3.18 for their interviews and 2.73 for their essays. Minoritized and majoritized students showed less difference when grouped by race, although they still followed the same trend: POC averaged 3.88 on both their interviews and essays while WP averaged 3.00 on their interviews and 2.75 on their essays.

Individual Trust Indicator Use by Minoritized Students: Specific Information Literacy Skills

Cumulative Trust Indicator scores provide an overview, but examining individual Trust Indicators highlights specific differences in critical information literacy skills demonstrated by minoritized and majoritized students. Figures 3 and 4 show average scores for each of the seven Trust Indicators according to minoritized (POC, EM, and DC) and majoritized (WP, NEM, NDC) groupings in interview data (see Figure 3) and essay data (see Figure 4). For each Trust Indicator, students received a score of 1 if they referenced that Indicator in their interview or essay, a 0 if they did not reference it, and a score of -1 if they rejected it. The data reported in Figures 3 and 4 reflect the average score for each Trust Indicator for each minoritized or majoritized group, with averages ranging from 0 to 1. With very few exceptions, the average individual Trust Indicator scores of minoritized students were substantially higher than those of majoritized students in both interview and essay measures for all three groupings, following the trend established by the cumulative Trust Indicator averages.[8]

As Figures 3 and 4 show, the information literacy scores for minoritized student groups were higher, often substantially higher, for nearly every Trust Indicator. This was especially true for the marginalization grouping, in which the students who described experiencing marginalization scored higher on every single Trust Indicator than their counterparts who did not describe experiencing marginalization. To highlight some of the most marked differences between minoritized and majoritized students' information literacy, we focus on six of the seven Trust Indicator areas that demonstrate significant differences between minoritized and majoritized students, discussing local sourcing, source research, author/reporter expertise, source methods/source genre, and publication's editorial practices. For these Trust Indicators, minoritized students' average scores in their interviews and/or essays were at least one third (0.33) higher than those of their majoritized counterparts.[9]

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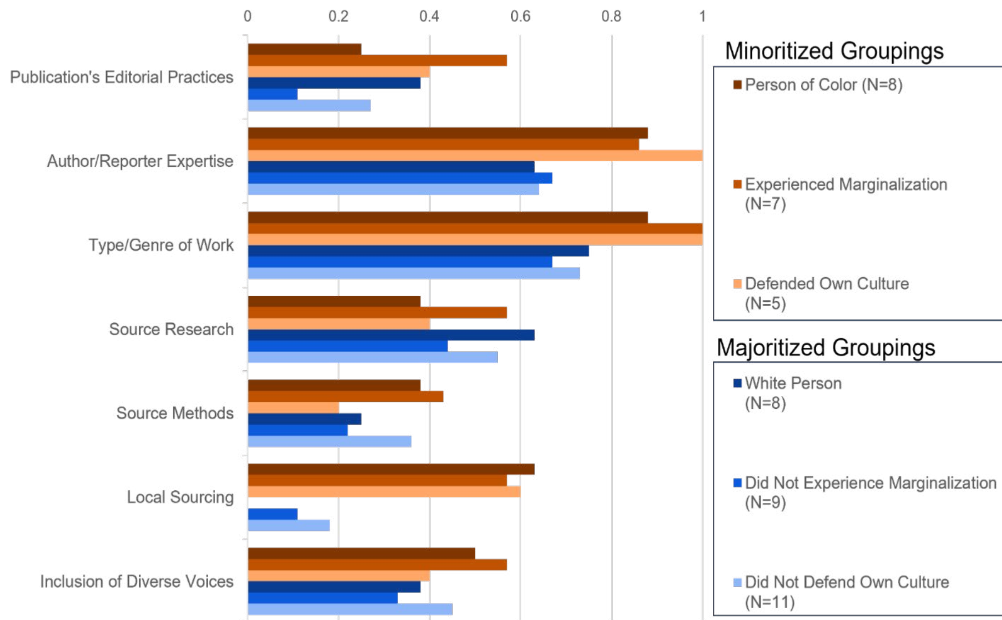
8 There were a handful cases across the seven Trust Indicators and the three groupings in which majoritized students' group averages were higher in interviews or essays than those of minoritized students (such as WP performance on Publication's Editorial Practices in interviews, or NDC performance on Source Research in essays); however, these differences were few in number and small in size (all <0.33).

9 The Trust Indicator we do not report on in detail is including diverse voices, for which there were not significant differences between the average scores of minoritized and majoritized student groups, although the trend of minoritized students outperforming majoritized students still holds for this Indicator (see Appendix C in supplemental materials).

Figure 3

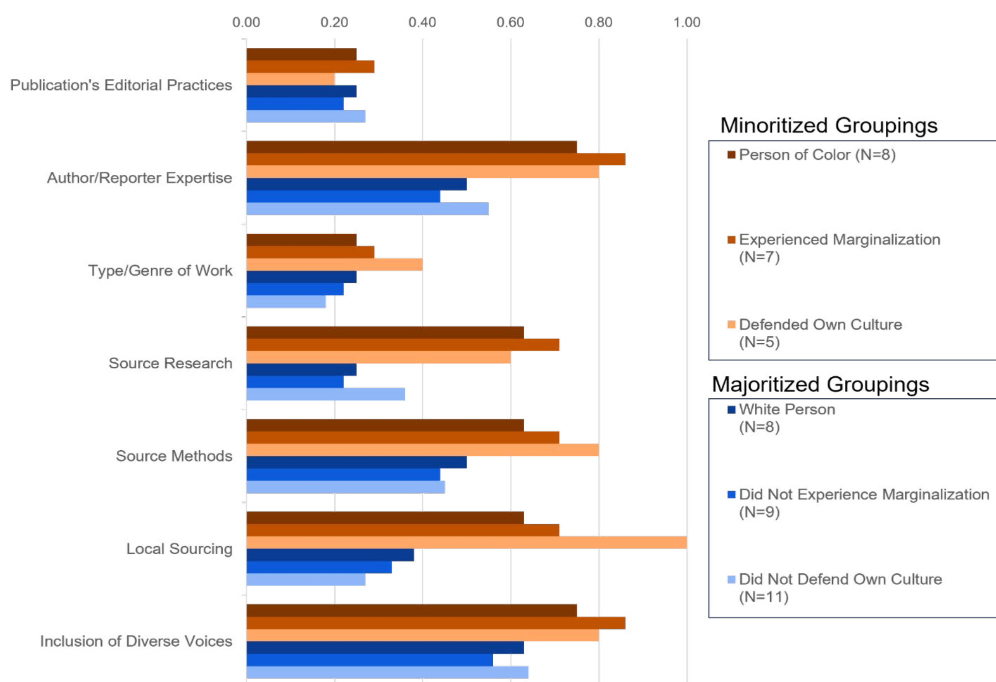
Comparison of Average Trust Indicator Scores for Minoritized and Majoritized Student. Groups from Interview Data



Note. See Table 4 in supplemental material for data used to create this chart.

Figure 4

Comparison of Average Trust Indicator Scores for Minoritized and Majoritized Student Groups from Essay Data



Note. See Table 5 in supplemental materials for data used to create this chart.

Local Sourcing

The Trust Indicator that most distinguished the information literacy skills of minoritized and majoritized students was the local sourcing, which refers to the student's examination of the efforts the reporter makes (or does not make) to integrate into the article the local perspectives and knowledge of the communities most centrally affected by the subject being written about. An understanding of the importance of local sourcing is demonstrated by a student who, in their essay about media coverage of attitudes toward free speech on college campuses, noted the absence of student voices in these articles:

> One trend that remained constant through every article was a focus on audiences outside of college students. They talk about students and use statistics from student surveys but rarely address students directly . . . These articles are written by adults for adults in an effort to diagnose the younger generation's condition. While this can be effective at assessing the situation, the only way to make real change on campus is to involve students in the broader conversation. The only piece intended specifically for a student audience was [the student journalist's] article for [the student newspaper]. While simply an objective news story, its deeper purpose was to engage students with a debate that seemingly takes place around but does not include them. The idea is that students will read about occurrences on their own campus and feel a stronger call to become involved. (Student 14, Essay, p. 6)

Minoritized students demonstrated far more consistent awareness of the importance of local sourcing than their majoritized counterparts, with considerably higher average scores in interviews for each of the three groupings: race (POC +0.63), marginalization (EM +0.46), and defended own culture (DC +0.42).[10] Similarly, in their essays, minoritized students outperformed majoritized students in addressing the role of local sourcing in the marginalization grouping (EM +0.38) and especially in the defended own culture grouping (DC +0.73).

Source Research

Source research (critically assessing the quality of the research reporters incorporate into their articles) was another area where minoritized students distinguished themselves as critical information literacy practitioners, especially in their writing. During their interview, a student whose essay focused on popular sources' representations of university gender studies programs described how they critically assessed sources by paying attention to the evidence and experts those sources cited:

> So for the most part, like, my first, like sort of, barometer test of sources is whether or not they cite any sources themselves. And of course, not every single source you can expect that of - sometimes, like, a tweet is not going to have a bibliography. But if it's a lengthy essay discussing . . . how the modern take on all gender science, gender sociology is wrong, you would expect them to cite some science or sociology in their discussion, but if it doesn't then that might become questionable. (Student 4, Interview, Segments 93–96)

This minoritized student and others made note of and objected to the limited or biased research reporters used. In this category, the difference between minoritized and majoritized students was

10 The +/-0.XX scores reported here and throughout the Results section indicate the difference between average Trust Indicator scores across parallel subcategories in the majoritized and minoritized groupings. For example, in their interviews, EM students averaged 0.57 for the local sourcing Trust Indicator, while NEM students averaged 0.11, so the difference between the average scores of minoritized and majoritized students in this category is EM +0.46.

most marked in essays for the groupings defined by race (POC +0.38) and marginalization (EM +0.49).

Author/Reporter Expertise

Minoritized students were also highly attuned to the expertise of authors about the subjects they were reporting on, which these students demonstrated in both interviews and essays. Distinct from source research or local sourcing, author/reporter expertise refers to the typical journalistic beat or body of work of the writer. Background expertise matters especially for popular media because journalists or other writers invited to contribute articles vary considerably in whether they are writing as an expert on a topic (for example, as a designated education reporter or an author who has published extensively on the seafood industry) or whether, to allow a publication to cover a story, a writer has been assigned to write on a topic about which they have little preexisting knowledge. A student who focused their essay on campus free speech noted the ways that a writer's professional knowledge and their lived experience can shape their reporting, engaging in background research on the authors of their sources as part of their analysis:

> The Atlantic article containing the discussion between Keller [professor emeritus at Brandeis University][11] and Zelizer [professor at Princeton], *Is Free Speech Really Challenged on Campus?*, is mainly an impartial medium for two conflicting viewpoints . . . Keller, being an older conservative man, falls into his position almost by default. He places much weight on campus protests and their potential dangers as he is a "free-speech traditionalist", meaning he is sensitive to any changes to the style of free discourse the Founding Fathers envisioned. Furthermore, as a political historian, he draws parallels between current trends and past situations of speech infringement, like the McCarthy era. In contrast, Zelizer is far younger than Keller and more liberal as well, which allows him to identify more with the current generation of college students. He responds to Keller to assuage the fears, irrational in his opinion, of those who believe current protests are some insidious threat to free speech rather than simply the next of a long series of campus anti-establishment movements (also a political historian, with an emphasis on contemporary politics, he draws a different conclusion than Keller) . . . Keller and Zelizer appear to be speaking to both sides; seeking to convince others of their view and reaffirm the beliefs of their own camp. In contrast, [Seton Hall professor] Healy seems to be speaking solely to the "conservative" camp in his article. As a first amendment scholar, he takes a stance based on legality, which allows him to seize the constitutional high ground usually claimed by conservatives. Healy's purpose is to discredit the validity of these claims by pointing out what he perceives as hypocrisy in the conservative stance: that they desire an open "marketplace of ideas" but reject disruptive protests; essentially seeking to protect one's own speech by limiting that of others. (Student 14, Essay, pp. 3–4)

A sophisticated understanding of the ways that professional expertise and lived experience shape each writer drives Student 14's rhetorical analysis of the discourse about free speech on college campuses. Like other minoritized students, Student 14 demonstrated critical information literacy by scrutinizing not just the evidence used in sources, but also the factors that shaped the authors' decisions about what kinds of evidence to include and the perspective from which the authors

11 Student 14 provides Keller's, Zelizer's, and Healy's titles and institutional affiliations elsewhere in their essay (denoted in this block quotation with brackets) and draws here on their investigation of these authors' backgrounds via the authors' university webpages.

wrote about that evidence. Minoritized students' increased awareness of the significance of author/reporter expertise was particularly evident in interviews for the defended own culture grouping (DC +0.36) and in essays for the marginalization grouping (EM +0.42).

Source Methods and Type/Genre of Work

Minoritized students were also more likely to notice and critique sources on the basis of the related Trust Indicators of source methods and the type/genre of the source. The source methods refer to the techniques reporters use to build the article (interviewing eyewitnesses, summarizing scholarly research, etc.), while source type focuses on the genre of article (investigative journalism, opinion piece, etc.). These Indicators are related since certain genres lend themselves to (or even require) specific journalistic methods, such as the importance of eyewitness accounts to investigative journalism or the need to consult authoritative books/articles and leading experts for a longform essay. Students described navigating different source types and identified or commented on methods used by authors. They also referenced traditional popular genres, such as opinion pieces or reported news, as well as the growing industry of articles that summarize or recycle information from other sources, as illustrated in the quote below:

> Student: I found one source from *Vox*, I think, that gives a good amount of insight into, you know, just things around like dog meat, and like, the taboo of dog meat, and then I found another source that copied that article, basically.
>
> Interviewer: Oh really.
>
> Student: Like, it was very similar.
>
> Interviewer: But it wasn't, it wasn't just that article re-posted on another site. It was just a very similar article.
>
> Student: I'm like, fairly certain, it's the same thing. Or if not, it was a summary of that article. It was very uncanny. And so I, I ran into, like, you know, some problems like that. "Oh, here's another source, of the few that there are, but it just happens to be the same information."
>
> Interviewer: Well, so what did you do with that, did you end up using both of them?
>
> Student: I don't think I used it.
>
> Interviewer: You just kept the long, the better one?
>
> Student: Yeah, I kept the actual like firsthand account from the *Vox* article. (Student 11, Interview, Segments 46–51)

This student demonstrates their understanding of and critical evaluation of source types and methods by comparing and contrasting two types of articles encountered through their search process, the dubious summary article and the more in-depth article that included firsthand accounts. Minoritized students in the experienced marginalization grouping averaged considerably higher scores in their interviews for source genre awareness (EM +0.35). Minoritized students in the defended own culture grouping averaged higher scores in their essays for both awareness of source genre and of source methods (DC +0.27 for source genre and DC +0.35 for source methods).

Publication's Editorial Practices

The Trust Indicators also consider the editorial practices and policies of the publication as a whole, which reflect the guiding hands of editors and news organizations as institutions that shape the selection of topics, assignment of reporters, and parameters within which these authors write.

These practices can be found in new organizations' official mission and vision statements, but are also communicated implicitly through the selection of stories and angles of reporting, and the tone and attitude reporters take toward their content. Students who commented on the editorial practices of publications typically did so through the lens of their own experience as readers, especially by noting cases where they felt excluded from the target audience for a publication or story. This type of observation is exemplified by a student who discussed navigating sources built on questionable evidence, contrasted with the peer review practices used in scholarly publications:

> Student: When I looked into, like, the Non-GMO Project and these sources that were very, very anti-GMO then it was . . . I sort of looked into, like, the staff and how, like, none of them were scientists, and so, like . . .
>
> Interviewer: This raises some credibility questions.
>
> Student: Yeah. And so, or like they would reference, like, a study and then I would look into that study, and it would be like, "well, this was actually repeated a bunch of times and it never had the same result" . . . once. So there were some credibility issues there. And then on the other side, they would tend, I mean, this is also maybe some of my own bias, but it would tend to be more like they would reference studies that were more . . . they were peer reviewed, and they had been repeated and seem to be more credible. (Student 8, Interview, Segments 29–33)

As this student illustrates, their identity (in this case, as a scientist) made them more sensitive to the ideological agendas of the sources they read and shaped their reaction to these sources. In their interviews, minoritized students who had experienced marginalization referenced the editorial practices of their sources' publications much more frequently than did the students who did not experience marginalization (EM +0.46).

Discussion and Key Findings

The methods used in and findings derived from this study provide insight into minoritized students' experiences as researchers and writers. Frames drawn from theories of meaning-making, funds of knowledge, and Critical Race Theory (CRT) shape our interpretation of these findings and offer methodological techniques for critical assessment research in writing studies, information literacy, and higher education. These methods support antiracist and equity-driven research and assessment projects, offering tools that researchers and practitioners can use to design their projects and interpret their data and making visible the skills and ways of knowing that minoritized students possess.

Key Finding #1: Interviews Can Be Sites of Meaning-Making

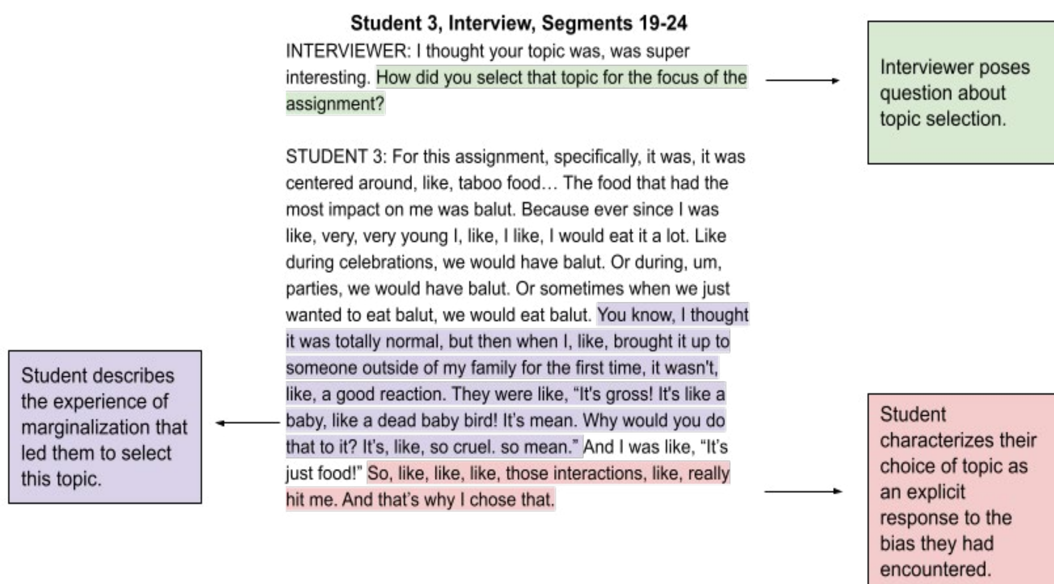
Interview methodologies and grounded theory approaches offer opportunities for both researchers and participants to engage in meaning-making. Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) explore constructivist approaches to interview methodologies, emphasizing the social and relational context of interviews for the interviewee. Such constructivist approaches to interviews are also characterized as "active." Active interviews are "focused on interpretive practice, the active interview study has two key aims: to gather information about *what* the research project is about and to explicate *how* knowledge concerning that topic is narratively constructed" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 56, emphasis in original). This type of active approach makes interviews valuable opportunities for participants and researchers to engage in collaborative meaning-

making. This approach also enables interviewees to do more than answer researchers' pre-existing questions, allowing new questions and categories of analysis to emerge based on knowledge created or shared by participants during interviews, as happened in this study. As researchers, this approach to interviewing allowed us to expand our understanding of how affective dimensions of student experience related to topic selection and/or engagement with sources, especially through minoritized students' accounts of the impact of engaging with biased sources and navigating topics that related to their identity or culture.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, interviews deepened researchers' understanding of students' critical assessment of sources and the way they negotiated conflicts between their lived experiences and the biased representations they encountered.

Figure 5

Student Uses Interview as Opportunity for Meaning-Making



The exchange highlighted in Figure 5 provides insight into a minoritized student's experience navigating topic selection and demonstrates how the active interview process revealed a new axis of analysis for us as researchers. The student's process of topic selection aligns with the ACRL Frame "Information Has Value," demonstrating minoritized students' ability to understand and articulate the lack of representation and diversity of voices in media they encountered. The student's experience of topic selection was shaped by the denigration that their family's culture had been subjected to; the student then selected this topic based on their previous experience of marginalization. As researchers, we had not anticipated this approach to the assignment, or the impact that it would have on students' critical information literacy skills.

Key Finding #2: Dual-Mode Assessment Can Reveal Funds of Knowledge and Invert Deficit Hierarchies

In the 1990s, education researchers began to recognize and address the problematic practice of deficit theorizing, which "blames the underachievement of ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies related to minority students themselves, their families and their cultures" (Hogg, 2011, p. 666). Since that time, scholars have developed various asset-based approaches to studying student learning and skills that recognize the strengths and capacities afforded by diverse cultural and community experiences. One such asset-based frame is Moll et al.'s (1992) funds of knowledge (FoK), describing "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133) and arguing that incorporating FoK into pedagogy is a way to integrate real world knowledge into academic experiences and, in so doing, make learning more meaningful.

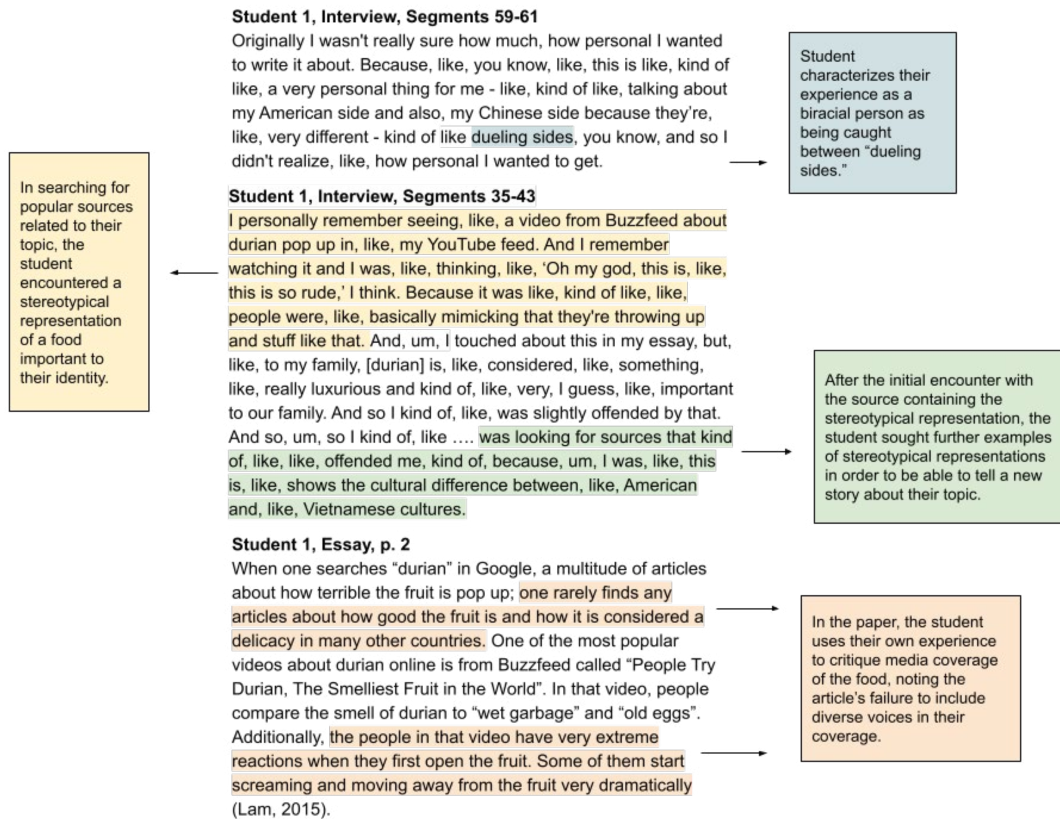
While some conceptions of real world knowledge have focused on household and cultural resources, which are typically depicted as positive or beneficial, other theorists have expanded the concept of FoK to include the more challenging experiences that minoritized students may confront in their families and communities (such as experiences of political unrest, violence, and substance misuse), variously termed difficult FoK (Becker, 2014) and dark FoK (Zipin, 2009). Zipin contends that by shying away from engaging dark FoK, educators may replicate deficit theorizing, resisting a fuller engagement with the life experiences of students and signaling which FoK have value in school settings and which do not. Burnett and Lloyd (2020) theorize the concepts of light and dark knowledge for information literacy scholarship to emphasize the cultural power dynamics that dictate which forms of knowledge are considered light (publicly available/taught, institutionally sanctioned) and dark (hidden/forbidden, challenging to dominant culture and power structures).

In this study, we consider *experiencing marginalization* and *defending one's own culture* as dark FoK, informed by experiences with racism, xenophobia, sexism, ageism, and other forms of discrimination. Furthermore, we connect these dark FoK to our finding that minoritized students were better at critically assessing information than students who did not approach research through a lens of power and marginalization. This interpretation suggests that experiences of minoritization are an asset to students in assessing information. The quotations from Student 1 highlighted in Figure 6 exemplify how the interview process brought to light the dark FoK that minoritized students possessed, and show how that knowledge shaped minoritized students' ability to assess popular sources critically in their essays.

In the quotations in Figure 6, we see Student 1 articulating dark FoK (navigating cross-cultural dynamics within their family and viewing and recognizing racist and stereotypical depictions of their culture) and using this knowledge to critique and evaluate sources. In particular, this student—and other minoritized students—demonstrated skills related to the ACRL Frame "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual." Qualitative data like the quotations in Figure 6 illustrate how FoK, including dark FoK, influenced the information literacy skills of minoritized students. Students showed their ability to assess the quality of information, including the lack of authority of some authors, the importance of cultural understanding as a form of authority, and the way lived experiences shaped students' own analysis of sources. We can see in these instances how students draw parallels between their lived experience and media representations, a strategy that yields more rigorous evaluations of sources and as well as deeper considerations of source use.

Figure 6

Student Interview Reveals Dark FoK; Student Essay Demonstrates Critical Approach to Popular Source



Key Finding #3: Interviews Revealed Counterstories Within Student Work, Highlighting Differential Learning Experiences of Minoritized Students

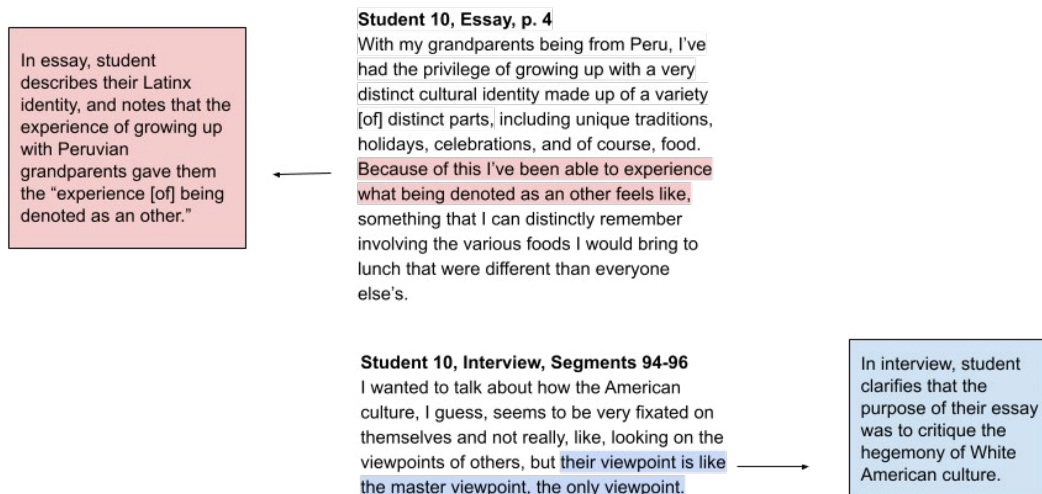
Building on interviews as opportunities for meaning-making, the methods of this study afford insight into how minoritized students engaged with sources to craft narratives that resisted and rehabilitated stereotypical, racist, and/or misogynistic stories. This construction of new narratives can be understood through the frames of CRT, specifically the CRT methodology of counterstory. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) expanded CRT to extend to critical race methodologies that center race and racism and are inherently intersectional, asset-oriented, liberatory, and interdisciplinary. Furthermore, critical race methodologies center the lived experience of participants and draw on narrative techniques such as "storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Martinez (2014) characterized counterstory as a CRT narrative form and methodology "for marginalized people to intervene in research methods that would form 'master narratives'" where "voices from the margins become voices of authority" (p. 65). Martinez argued that counterstory can resist deficit narratives about people of color by reframing stories of failure and underpreparedness as critiques

of race, class, and gender oppression to highlight the valuable knowledge minoritized people bring to academia.

Martinez's theorizing of counternarratives emphasizes the dialogic nature of counterstory, underscoring the value of building counternarratives through conversation, especially by drawing on personal narrative and lived experience. As described above, in our study, interviews became a site for open-ended conversations where participants could reflect on and articulate their experience crafting counternarratives. The quotations in Figure 7 demonstrate how the interview space centered students' lived experiences and offered room for exploring the way this lived experience shaped the counterstories they told in their written work.

Figure 7

Student References Counterstory in Essay, Expands on it in Interview



The interview provided Student 10 an opportunity to expand on the theme of "being denoted as an other" that they mention in their essay, elucidating the intent behind their written argument and deepening the counternarrative they had begun to craft. Students who took the opportunity of the assignment to defend or rehabilitate their own culture demonstrated the ACRL Frame Information Creation as a Process, articulating their choices and producing information to convey a specific message. This student's use of counterstory demonstrates two important aspects of student experience and student learning: minoritized students described differential experiences from majoritized students when encountering and using sources and minoritized students used topics and sources to construct alternative narratives, elevating counter-majoritarian voices. In these examples we see how sources presented minoritized students with choices that majoritized students may not have faced about how to navigate issues of power and inequity and how minoritized students leveraged those choices to create sophisticated analyses.

Conclusion: Dual-Methods Approaches Offer Opportunities for Asset-Based, Critical Assessment

This study shows that including active, dialogic interviews in the assessment process provides an opportunity for students to engage in meaning-making, which positions them as creators of knowledge. In our research, minoritized students' use of counterstory during their interviews alerted us to the ways that these students' experiences of marginalization and motivation to defend their own cultures informed their encounters with popular sources. These student-generated identity categories guided us to examine our data in terms of the lived experiences students brought to their research, and ultimately evinced both the sophisticated critical information literacy skills that minoritized students possess and these students' status as standard-bearers.

Our research builds on the growing body of equity-driven and antiracist assessment scholarship, suggesting methodological interventions that build on the work that White and Thomas (1981), Kelly-Riley (2011), and Inoue and Poe (2012) have done to expose the racial inequalities built into many standard approaches to assessment and placement. Our emphasis on using interviews to guide the analytical frameworks that structure the work of assessment heeds Cushman's (2016) call for assessment scholars to decolonize validity by "[d]welling in the borders begin[ning] with the knowledge, languages, histories, and practices understood and valued by the people who live these realities," and using these lived experiences to "identify understandings in and on the terms of the peoples who experience them." Similarly, this approach takes up the injunctions from critical information literacy scholars like Head (2013), Wojahn et al. (2016), Magnus et al. (2018), and Bull et al. (2021) to construct understandings of student search practices on their own terms, creating research designs focused on challenging inequalities found in existing institutions and assessment paradigms. It aligns with Randall's (2021) call to rethink the constructs that assessment schemes are predicated on and to consider the identities and experiences of the people being assessed, involving marginalized stakeholders in the processes of developing analytical frameworks and Lloyd's insistence on recognizing how embodied experience affects research practices (2014b, 2023a) and how frameworks of information literacy themselves are often predicated on epistemologies rooted in racism, sexism, and colonialism (2023a). In our case, framing our research around minoritized students' use of interviews as opportunities for meaning-making and counterstory guided us to view our data through the perspectives of those students. Through this approach, we resisted centering the learning goals and experiences defined by majoritized groups (including traditional assessment practitioners) whose experiences are shaped by Whiteness and other markers of privilege.

We acknowledge the time-consuming nature of the interview process, and want to clarify that we are not calling for individual instructors to augment their classroom assessment practices with interviews.[12] Rather, we address our findings here to assessment researchers and practitioners, who—as part of the ongoing effort to revise methods to seek more just outcomes—we encourage to consider including interviews and other constructivist methods. As we have shown, integrating interviews encourages meaning-making, helps invert deficit hierarchies, and invites counterstories. Although some existing assessment research uses interviews (see Kelly-Riley, 2011; Watson, 2023), we follow Lloyd (2014a) in advocating for an open-ended participant-

12 For a pedagogical tool based on this study's findings designed for use by individual classroom instructors, see "Peer Reviewing Sources: A Framework-Informed Approach to Information Literacy in First-Year Writing" (Kovatch et al., in press).

directed style of interviewing that encourages the participant to tell their own story, which opens up the possibility of uncovering knowledges, practices, and experiences that the researcher could not envision in their design of the study.

One of the limitations of our project is its size: our sample of 16 student interviewees did not allow us to explore differences between distinct racial subgroups or identity characteristics, or to examine the interactions between these intersectional identity characteristics. Larger studies would allow for more nuanced findings about the nature of minoritized students' information literacy skills, especially considering the contextual, experiential nature of the minoritized and majoritized identities articulated by students in this research. Another valuable research direction would be to study the relationship between identity and information literacy in institutional contexts where the populations and missions invert conventional definitions of minority and majority, for example majority-minority institutions, first-generation-serving institutions, or women's colleges. A final implication of our research would be to use its finding that information seekers draw on lived experience when they critically evaluate and produce information to add nuance to future frameworks for critical information literacy like the ones developed by the ACRL and the Trust Project.

Demonstrating how students' experiences of marginalization shape their approaches to classroom tasks, our study refutes deficit-based approaches to information literacy and writing assessment and instead shows the critical awareness of power that minoritized students bring to their interactions with popular sources. Our process revealed students' counterstories, giving rise to axes of analysis that point toward methods assessment scholars can use to continue adding complexity to our understanding of students' knowledge and capabilities.

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