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Kate Viera  
*University of Wisconsin, Madison*

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## Writing's Potential to Heal: Women Writing from Their Bodies

*Kate Vieira*

### *Abstract*

While studies in the biological and psychological sciences have suggested that writing can promote physical healing, such studies offer a limited understanding of writing as a complex, embodied, and social practice. This article asks how and under what social and pedagogical conditions writing might promote experiences of healing in community settings. Specifically, I describe findings from a design-based study of a writing workshop held in conjunction with a physical therapy retreat for women seeking physical restoration. I find that highlighting the elements of narrative, metaphor, environment, and art in the writing workshops promoted women's experiences of physical healing, with the public sharing of body-based writing being especially empowering in a larger political context of gender oppression. The article concludes by calling for critical qualitative studies of writing to heal (including critical attention to the term "healing" itself) across varied community sites, which address writing's relationship to bodies, social context, and power.

In an age that is seeing the rise of writing (Brandt), more and more people are turning to writing to heal emotional and physical trauma, resulting in shelves of popular self-help literature on writing to heal (e.g., DeSalvo).<sup>1</sup> It appears they are on to something. Psychologists have shown that writing can help release emotional stress, resulting in improved physical health (Pennebaker and Seagal). And medical researchers have documented the beneficial effects of writing on a range of physical conditions, from asthma (H. Smith et al.) to high blood pressure (Houston et al.) to wounds (Koschwanez et al.) to arthritis (J. Smith et al.) and others (Craft). These developments are occurring against a scientific backdrop of advancements in MRI technology, which have enabled neuroscientists to document the surprisingly elaborate connections between mind and body (Davidson; Dum et al.). While scholars in composition studies have explored many ways that writing is embodied (e.g., Haas and Witte; Miller), we still understand relatively little about under what conditions writing may facilitate experiences of physical healing and what such experiences might reveal about writing as a complex embodied and social practice.

Understanding these processes requires more than an MRI. It demands, in the tradition of qualitative research in community literacy, grounded studies of literacy practices and the people whose lives are shaped by them. To address this exigency, here I describe a small-scale, design-based qualitative study of a week-long writing

workshop I developed and led for two consecutive years in conjunction with an immersive therapeutic physical education retreat for women seeking physical restoration (Design-Based Research Collective).<sup>2</sup> The writing workshop, developed using insights gleaned from work in neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, kinesiology, and writing studies, was aimed at heightening awareness of the relationship between body and mind, and thus enhancing experiences of bodily healing during the retreat. But to what extent—and how—did it work?

Based on interviews and participant observation, I found that the workshop's emphasis on four elements of writing—narrative, metaphor, connections to the natural environment, and artistic community building—amplified the way women in the retreat experienced the healing effects of body-based therapies. These elements, however, did not work in isolation from the larger power dynamics that are always present in sites of literacy activity. As both economically privileged enough to participate in the retreat and as women living in a context of explicitly body-based gender oppression, participants activated the healing potential of these four elements by writing from bodies enmeshed in complex social and political positions.

Ultimately, this study suggests that writing has curative potential, but does not autonomously perform it, pointing to the larger methodological and theoretical necessity of integrating understandings of, on the one hand, *writing's* potential to heal, and on the other hand, *people's* potential, in all their social complexity, to use writing for healing, however they may define it.

### *Writing as a Social and Embodied Practice*

While the apparatus of this study was pedagogical—to track how particular elements of the writing workshop helped women experience healing—at its core was a theoretical problem. How could I dig into writing's curative properties, as attested to by the various scientific studies I cited above, without attributing some kind of autonomous power to writing in and of itself? After all, as literacy studies research has shown for decades, writing's meanings and potentials are only ever activated in complex human practices undertaken in unequal social contexts. As a way to ground my study in this complexity, this section draws on interdisciplinary research to integrate some of the embodied, social, and political aspects of writing's potential to heal, particularly for women.

### **Writing and the Body**

As compositionist and disability studies scholar Elisabeth Miller has aptly put the relationship between bodies and literacy, bodies are “a technology of literacy” (“Literate Misfitting,” 36). Put another way, bodies are essential in processes of literate meaning making. For example, bodily gestures often contribute to writing processes (Haas and Witte); bodies are sensorially engaged in digital composition (Mills et al.); normative expectations of what writing bodies should do shape writing practices (Miller, “Literate Misfitting”); and writing can even cause physical pain (Owens and Van Ittersum). Taking advantage of the affordances of writing's status as an embodied process, some

compositionists have touted bodily awareness as a pedagogical methodology, both to improve experiences of writing (Lee; Perl) and to lead to deeper insights (Wenger). If the body is a “metaphoric and functional interface between mind and world,” as literacy researchers Haas and McGrath point out, then writing is one of the ways the body enacts this mediation (127).<sup>3</sup>

Writing’s potential for healing inheres—in part—in this relationship between writing body and writing mind. Work by cognitive scientists (Verala et al.), neuroscientists (Flaherty), and clinicians (Sarno), as well as more recent MRI-based neuro-scientific discoveries (Davidson; Dum et al.) have shown that by changing the habits of the physical body—breath or visualization or *writing*, to list some examples from these studies—one can change the mind, which, in a feedback loop, can enact changes to the body. For example, psychiatrist van der Kolk includes writing in a list of body therapies (including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, yoga, and concentrated trembling) that his studies show help people overcome trauma, which as the title of his popular book attests (*The Body Keeps the Score*), he conceptualizes as an embodied condition. In this way, writing, as a habitual practice that stems from the body, can also act on the body, potentially intervening in people’s experiences of pain and healing.

### Writing and Its Social Context

But writing can lead to such benefits only in relation to its social context. While many scientific and quantitative studies of writing’s ability to heal ignore this complexity, writing, as literacy researchers have long shown, is not just a cognitive or physical practice. It is also always (no exceptions!) a social and ideological one. Writing’s imbrication in social contexts means that despite its embodied and cognitive power, it can never be seen as a panacea for personal or social ills. For example, as Eileen Schell points out in a study of a writing group for veterans, writing does not single-handedly cure conditions of PTSD. For this reason, work in cognitive and embodied studies of writing must account for, as Charles Bazerman has put it, “the sociocultural contexts and purposes that make writing a meaningful and important human activity” (35). Such sociocultural contexts involve unequal power relationships. As rhetoricians Iris Ruiz and Sonia Arellano point out in their sharp analysis of the feminist decolonial material methodology of quilting, “healing” means differently based on how one is positioned in relation to legacies of colonization, which have attempted to erase indigenous medicinal histories. In other words, it’s not only literacy’s social context, but also such contexts’ histories of inequality that must be brought to bear on understanding its potential to heal.

To be clear, this insight does not mean that the social world and its power relationships are a distraction from some kind of mythological or pure ideal of expressive writing to heal. Rather, it is only from within the social conditions in which writers find themselves that writing’s curative potential can be activated. For example, the thick descriptions of community writing offered in grounded ethnographic studies of writing to heal—including studies of recovery (Daniell), at-risk mothers (Florence), and those with AIDS (Nye), to name just a few—reveal how writers weave their per-

sonal literacy histories, their social struggles and triumphs, the very physical appearance of the room in which they share their writing into their restorative experiences. While these studies do not necessarily address experiences of physical healing, the topic of this article, they are instructive: they show that community efforts to use literacy activities in the service of any kind of change (spiritual and emotional growth, for example) can approach these goals only in relation to the historical, economic, racial, gendered, and other power-laden conditions in which people write—and in which they experience their bodies.

### Writing Women's Bodies

Acknowledging the simultaneously social and embodied potential of writing may be especially important for understanding the political potential of writing to heal. How writing is or is not experienced often depends on social constructions of the body, such as race and gender (Carey; Ife). As feminist theorist Bordo has argued, “[T]he human body as *itself* [is] a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control” (21). Put another way, social constructions of the body are also experienced *within* the body.<sup>4</sup> That is, both the inner understandings of the body and the meanings ascribed to it coexist and interact in the experiences of everyday writers.

Because writing is essentially communicative, such meanings can also be shared, with political implications. As witnessed by women publishing their stories of sexual harassment and assault in the international #metoo campaign, and as Audre Lorde pointed out decades ago, women writing about and from their bodies is at once personal and political. Such writing entails a process of moving, to quote Lorde, from “silence into language and action.” For these reasons, writing initiated from the body and undertaken with the goal of personal healing also has the potential to circulate as a public testimony (Cienfuegos and Monelli). The potential of testimony may be especially important for those writing from marginalized positions, for whom experiences of personal healing must often entail efforts to challenge the social conditions that have labeled their bodies as in need of recuperation in the first place (Cervantes-Soon; Cruz “Making Curriculum”). In these contexts, moving a personal story into a public realm, and naming it or enacting it in front of others (Heath and Wolf; Jones; Winn), can be powerful medicine, not just for writers, but also for those privileged to hear their words.<sup>5</sup>

Our historical moment, in which critical understandings of women's bodily oppression are receiving renewed public attention, throws this relationship between the corporal, social, and political potential of writing into bright relief. For these reasons, it appears to be a unique modality to integrate body, mind, and community in women's experiences of physical restoration.

But how? And under what conditions?

### *Study Context: A Body Awareness Retreat*

To begin to address these questions, I examined two iterations of a body-based writing workshop I conducted in 2016 and 2017 that was conjoined with an immersive therapeutic physical education retreat. Women (and occasionally one or two men) traveled from the U.S. to this retreat, located in a remote area of Baja California, in the hopes of physical restoration, improved strength, and relief from pain. The setting was more of a retreat than a resort, by which I mean there were no television sets in the hotel rooms, nor was there a swim-up bar. Instead, there were rock labyrinths laid out in the sand to promote reflection and a shared commitment to respect the desert landscape through water conservation. Participants paid for airfare, room, board, and the bodywork sessions (though I conducted the writing workshop for free). The program included four hours of physical education a day, led by Kathleen Conklin, a former health lawyer and Pilates-based body therapist, and one hour a day of a writing workshop led by me. In this context, the goal of healing through bodywork and writing was shared, explicit, concentrated. There was buy-in from the get-go, and the only distraction was the early rising rooster.

Conklin and I chose to work together because of our shared interest in the relationship between mind and body. (I first met Conklin as one of her clients when I was facing debilitating backpain in 2014.) Anatomically specific in her teaching, she keeps a model skeleton in her studio and often interrupts lessons to demonstrate, for example, how the psoas muscle wraps and how the thoracic spine is meant to curve. She has developed her own system for encouraging pelvic floor stability, which involves a meditative six-step process of attention to particular muscles. In sum, her classes are both intellectually and physically demanding, involving deep muscular attention, with the goal of bringing awareness to the body. This focus on bodily awareness provided an apt laboratory for examining the conditions under which writing might meet, and perhaps amplify, the same goals.

In line with neuroscientific documentation of the feedback loop between mind and body discussed above (Davidson), Conklin and I designed a program that we hoped would help participants experience deep physical and mental awareness, with the goal of facilitating what Conklin calls “human movement potential” during the retreat. In a recursive process, Conklin integrated discussions from writing workshops into the physical bodywork sessions she led, aimed at refining muscle coordination through deeper physical consciousness, and I integrated lessons from physical bodywork into writing classes, aimed at helping writers write from, listen to, and heal their bodies in community with other women.

This kind of targeted pedagogy in this (for participants) idyllic context is not meant to represent or serve as a guide for all community writing-to-heel efforts. All participants were middle to upper middle class, white (with one exception in the second year), and cis-gendered. The racially and economically privileged status of participants and the isolated “retreat” setting highlights the fact that people experience “writing to heal” in relation to specific social positions, histories and spaces. I see the value of a study in this context, then, not in its generalizability, but in its particularity.

That is, it is only from any study's situated nature that insights for and theories about uses of writing to heal can be drawn.

To develop these insights and theories, I used a research methodology I hoped would integrate both the embodied and social aspects of writing to heal for the ten participants with whom I worked. To understand participants' *past* experiences with both writing and the body, I conducted pre-workshop literacy-history and body-history interviews. To understand how the content of their writing shaped and was shaped by their experiences over the course of the workshop, I analyzed their writing and conducted text-based interviews. To get at their experiences of healing, I conducted post-workshop interviews. In my analysis of this data, my goal was twofold. First, I sought to link a) particular kinds of body-based writing practices and writing-based bodywork with b) participants' experiences of healing. And second, I sought to connect these experiences to the larger social context in which people wrote and shared their writing. (For more methodological details, see Appendix A.)

As someone who is cis-gendered, female-identified, middle-class (though not as wealthy as most participants), who experiences white privilege, and who had worked with Conklin for a shorter time period than most (many had been her clients for years), I collected and analyzed data from a shifting insider/outsider position.

In what follows, I use four ethnographic "telling cases" to detail this analysis across two iterations of the workshop. Specifically, in the first iteration of the workshop I found that: a) writing body *narratives* helped women make self-reported "empowering" decisions about their bodies; and b) the development of *metaphor* in writing helped them to experience improved alignment and mobility. Additionally, analyses of these first-round interviews and texts indicated two other aspects of writing that could lead to experiences of healing that I then incorporated into the second iteration: c) drawing from their environment and d) experiencing writing as artistic expression within community. These elements, as I detail below, were activated within contexts of both economic and racial privilege and gender oppression.

### *Iteration One: Discursive Elements of Narrative and Metaphor*

**Narrative.** According to research in neuroscience, psychology, and education, creating a coherent narrative can be crucial to healing from emotional and physical trauma. Research has demonstrated that recovering from PTSD can be achieved in part through constructing a narrative in which one is agentive (van der Kolk); that concrete language ordered in ways that make sense of experience can have therapeutic effects (Bucci); and that constructing a happy ending in narrative can help people resolve emotional trauma (Pennebaker and Evans). In fact, one recent study of expressive writing among recently separated couples showed that putting a narrative order to events helped reduce the cardiovascular stressors commonly seen among those ending their marriages (Bourassa et al.). Of course, what constitutes an "ordered" narrative and a "happy" ending is contextual, as education researcher Daiute points out in her study of narrative conflict resolution with youth from diverse backgrounds.

The important part of narrative writing to heal exercises, it seems, is to delve into conflict and come to a resolution, however the writer defines or experiences it.

To exploit the potential of narrative to heal in the pedagogical design of both iterations of the workshop, I designed a series of writing assignments to help participants develop what I hoped would be an empowering narrative arc. Days one and two involved exercises designed to help participants attune to their bodies, adapting psychologist Proffoff's notion of dialoguing with the body (the first day) and neurologist Damasio's concept of the pre-autobiographical and autobiographical self to help people describe prelinguistic sensation (the second day). I then devoted the third day to the telling of a story about a scar, meant to help writers acknowledge pain in order to give them the chance to write how they overcame it, and then a subsequent day to speculative fiction, where writers could imagine the body healed and empowered. In other words, I structured the curriculum to invite people to listen to their bodies in writing, explore its sensations, and narratively address them.

For Faith, an artist who came to the retreat for what she described as a "reset" after having suffered from chronic back pain, the narrative she developed over the course of the writing workshop helped her experience empowerment and strength.

Consider these excerpts from her writing:

*Day One:* In response to a prompt asking about body stories, she wrote about her family's summer cabin and playing amidst the sand dunes as an escape from bullies:

"We would build houses with almost architect precision and then just pretend that was life . . . The last day of school couldn't come fast enough—the terror of bullies haunted me all year long until summer . . . the [sand dune houses were] a world away from the thing that scared me."

*Day Three:* In response to a prompt asking about scars and strengths, she wrote about being rescued by her father after a life-threatening injury, and also continued writing about bullies, homing in on one day when she was threatened: "I remember trembling the entire last period of school . . . I was small and blonde. I was ½ her size."

In these early workshops, Faith's narrative casts economic and racial privilege as part of her weakness: the vacations at her family's cabin were an escape, and her blonde hair signified vulnerability. She recast these experiences midweek, when she wrote of an agentive turn of events, forming a kind of narrative turning point. Specifically, she described outsmarting the bully by challenging her to a game of marbles with these terms: If the bully won, she could beat up Faith. If Faith won, she could walk. Her final sentence was this: "I remember smiling to myself as I turned the corner to home. I was free and all in one piece." In this workshop, Faith revised the trope of vulnerable white woman in need of rescue, instead emphasizing her ingenuity and ability to protect herself from bodily violation.

*Day Four:* The fourth day, we were to imagine the body's potential to do something that we would like to do but perhaps had not experienced. In order to help writers visualize such empowerment, first, from an outside perspective, I asked them to write in the second person.<sup>6</sup> Faith chose to imagine herself as a fighter.

“Your muscles start to awaken and you gaze at your opponent as if you could rip them in 2. Jab jab backflip front punch. Your enemy never saw this coming from your small presence.”

In order to help participants not just see, but to *feel* these powers, I then asked them to revise into the first person:

“My muscles start to awaken and I gaze at my opponent as if I could rip them in two. Jab jab backflip front punch. My enemy never saw this coming from my small presence.”

Here Faith’s writing reveals a detailed attunement to a fantasy of empowerment—a fantasy that in the process of writing seems to become embodied. This excerpt acknowledges Faith’s decidedly gendered “small presence,” and then overcomes it with an “awakening” punctuated by a staccato series of specific active verbs (“jab jab backflip front punch”).

*Day Five:* On the final day, the day of revision, I asked participants to compose a poem consisting of lines they had enjoyed writing throughout the retreat. As a coda to this compilation, I then asked them to write down what their bodies said to them. Faith wrote, “My body says you have the power. Just tap into it.”

Faith’s writing embodied a classed, gendered, and raced narrative movement from being scared of bullies, having to be rescued, rescuing herself, and ultimately defending herself with her physical power. This movement reflects the narrative organization of the course, illustrating one pedagogical condition under which it was possible for participants to rewrite disempowering endings. In fact, building on this potential in the next iteration of the workshop, I structured the narrative more tightly, so that when writers wrote about a scar or painful experience, they were invited to follow it up with “And then I . . .” in order to emphasize how they took action in relation to their experiences.

How did this narrative construction of agency in writing act on Faith’s experiences of healing? In a follow-up interview, Faith said the writing itself was emotionally “therapeutic”:

“I was writing about things I hadn’t spoken about in 20 years. . . Having to sit down in a writing workshop that I was reluctant to go to in the first place and being asked hard questions was an opportunity to get it up and out. . . I’ve been squashing it forever. The bullies.”

While Faith’s writing allowed for a kind of catharsis, what she referred to as getting these experiences “up and out,” her writing did not circle around or repeat childhood events. Rather, she wrote through them and revised them.

This process appeared to empower her physically. In her words:

[The writing] told me I didn’t have to be such a wimp, that I didn’t need someone to rub my back. And I’m thinking, I have back pain, but I can just handle it . . . I really felt like I f’in powered through . . . It was a milestone for me that I could get through a week of this kind of intense bodywork.”

For Faith, composing a trajectory from victim to victor, from weak to strong, brought awareness to an inner power that she called on to persist, strengthening her back, helping her to “power through.” In fact, she gleefully told me she achieved a rare wink from the taskmaster, Conklin, when she performed a particularly challenging exercise. Her writing seemed to reflect back to her—and in doing so reaffirm—her physical strength.

**Metaphor.** Writing also amplified participants’ experiences of healing via metaphor, perhaps in part because, as cognitive linguists, neuroscientists, and kinesiologists have shown, language acts on our minds via our bodies, with implications for how those bodies feel. Beyond simply imagining something in the mind’s eye, language, especially metaphor, is experienced physically. Neuroscientist Flaherty has described how metaphors engage the limbic system, the seat of our emotions, engaging the rational and the emotional simultaneously via the body. Likewise, cognitive linguist Bergen has documented what he calls “embodied simulation,” in which language creates particular motor responses. For example, one study showed that when people were drinking a liquid they had a faster response time for understanding the metaphor “filled with joy,” and when they were looking for something, they had a faster response time to understand “searching for happiness.” Kinesiologists and dance scholars have seen this relationship between body and metaphor play out in practice. They have developed a concept called *ideokinesis*, literally metaphor in motion, which assists in bodily alignment (Bernard et al.). The idea is that through the power of metaphor, one’s body can align itself.<sup>7</sup>

I built on this literature to examine how writing, as an embodied practice that regularly employs metaphor, could enhance the potential of ideokinesis to improve participants’ experiences of physical alignment, one of the central physical goals of the retreat. The experiences of Donna, which I recount here, suggest that metaphor, when taken up as part of the narrative movement towards empowerment and when integrated into physical bodywork, can not only promote experiences of personal healing, but can also circulate socially, potentially contributing to others’ experiences of healing, as well.

Donna came to the retreat with the goal of both emotional and physical healing. She had just separated from her husband and had also undergone two shoulder surgeries to repair injuries she sustained dirt-biking. Pilates had been suggested by her physical therapist, and she found the practice helped her feel physically and emotionally centered. Like Faith, the narrative she authored participated in a shift from pain and fear to physical empowerment, with metaphor in particular contributing to her experiences of bodily alignment and mobility.

On the first day of the workshop, Donna wrote about a memory of herself at age four, a story I read as being about the excitement of testing out new waters, laced with fear about the limits of her body:

Going under the water and I feel encompassed and embraced and quiet and  
I feel alone in a good way and I am not afraid and I can hear myself . . . I re-

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alize I am Free-freedom-yet underwater with my breath held—chest aching and little scared about how much longer I can stay below.

Given her recent separation, one can easily read into this underwater scene the kind of freedom that often follows the end of an oppressive relationship. Her writing itself, with its loose punctuation and pastiche of adjectives gives one a kind of liberated watercolor feel. But in this scene, there is also fear: Can she hold her breath? How long can she sustain this state?

By day four, when we were imagining our body's potential, Donna transformed that little girl, simultaneously free and scared, into a dolphin, with the lung capacity to stay under water, a metaphor that would ultimately shape her experiences of bodily alignment.

My eye focuses on the dark depths of the sea below as my breath instinctively calms me. I know my lungs are saturated with every molecule needed to sustain life for the next several minutes. My body contracts from its ease of stillness at the top of the surface mirrored glass-and like a jolt of lightening, electric, moves through my muscle fibers sending resounding shockwaves to my core, the true center of my existence, I feel the sensation of power strength stretch out to my back dorsal and explode with fury. Facing my nose head neck back downward with intensity yet grace.

As a dolphin, Donna had the “power,” the “grace,” the “fury,” to call on the solid “center of her existence” to dive. Unlike in the first day's writing, she was no longer scared to stay below. She accessed this strength and ease in part through the anatomical precision with which she imagined herself as a dolphin—the breath, the lungs, the molecules, the back dorsal. She embodied the dolphin via her writing.

For Donna, this metaphorical awareness of the body resulted in an experience of healing when this metaphor was taken up in therapeutic bodywork with Conklin. Donna, who recall was recovering from shoulder surgery, was struggling to bring her shoulders in line with her back. As a faithful participant in the writing workshop, Conklin had heard Donna's writing about the dolphin and called on the metaphor during a bodywork session, instructing Donna to “Pull your dorsal fins back.” In a turning point in Donna's shoulder mobility, Donna did. The dorsal fin metaphor, authored by Donna and reinforced in the physical bodywork sessions, changed the way she held herself.

This experience of healing via the embodiment of metaphor was both personal and social. As cognitive linguist Bergen writes, if meaning is based on experiences in particular bodies, and the particular situations we drag them through, then meaning can be quite personal (12). And yet while meaning is personal, one of the properties of writing is that it also has the potential to create shared meaning—and perhaps, I want to suggest here, shared experiences of healing. In this way, the dolphin metaphor came to benefit more than only Donna.

During a walk on the beach, Conklin came upon a dead dolphin. The spine, open for view, was curvaceous, expressive. “Look,” she showed me, “Dorsal fins back!” She was so fascinated with the dolphin that she asked management about bringing the

carcass back to camp. When the idea was nixed, she settled for organizing a fieldtrip for a dolphin anatomy lesson to emphasize the potential of this alignment for fluid, pain-free movement. In our group class the next day, Conklin followed up on the dolphin metaphor, reading from a 'dolphin medicine card': "Dolphin speaks to us of the breath of life, the only thing that humans cannot go without for more than a few minutes." In part through this skillful pedagogical uptake of Donna's writing, the dolphin metaphor infused the rest of the group.

Donna's writing activated a metaphor that she experienced as healing, in part in the writing of it, and in part in how it was leveraged by a perceptive bodywork instructor. As the work of cognitive linguists and kinesiologists would predict, Donna experienced the metaphor in her body, resulting in movement and change. And as the work of writing studies scholars would suggest, because writing is a social and communicative act, this metaphor was then semiotically remediated (Prior and Hengst).<sup>8</sup> That is, it circulated through word, image, and bodily practice, thus becoming a shared experience among participants in the retreat. By "circulated," I do not mean that the writing was simply understood or heard. Building on the insights of the linguists, kinesiologists, and writing studies scholars I have cited here, I mean that her writing was collectively embodied. We all tried to pull our dorsal fins back.<sup>9</sup>

### *Iteration Two: Environment and Art*

Besides the discursive elements of metaphor and narrative, two other aspects of writing to heal, this time more contextual elements, arose in the first iteration of the workshop that I emphasized more formally in the second: a) Writers' bodies' connection to the natural world; and b) writing as an artistic practice, meditative to produce and meaningful to share in community. This turn from the personal to the public in the second iteration resonated in ways I did not anticipate as I was planning: the second iteration of the workshop took place in the fraught months after the 2017 U.S. presidential election, when a sexual harasser came to power, reaffirming for many in the retreat the vulnerability of women's bodies in an explicitly patriarchal society, with implications for the experiences of healing that I describe below.

In integrating environment and art in the writing-from-the-body workshops, I built from three areas of study: First, I drew from the work of Pennebaker and Evans's studies of writing to heal, in which they found a correlation between self-reported happiness, less use of the pronoun "I," and more use of pronouns directed outside the self, suggesting that people felt better when they focused not only on themselves but on others. My plan, then, was to build into participants' writing a connection outward—both to their environment and to an audience who might find pleasure in their work. Second, I drew from work in environmental psychology that has shown that experiences in nature, depending on frequency of interactions and type of interactions, can improve mental health (Bratman et al. offer a useful review).<sup>10</sup> Building from this literature, and using what I had learned in the previous iteration about metaphor, I developed a writing lesson to help participants develop embodied connections to landscape.<sup>11</sup> Third, inspired by work documenting the use of the arts to heal

(Stuckey and Nobel), I wanted to help participants turn these metaphors into something beautiful that could be shared with others, that is, into art.

In order to further develop our identities as a community of writers/artists in the second iteration of the workshop, then, I began each lesson with brief readings from poetry and prose centered on the body.<sup>12</sup> For the day dedicated to writing our bodies' connections to the environment, I asked workshop participants to find an object, an aspect of the landscape, and an animal that represented parts of their bodies. I opened the lesson with Ada Limón's "Fieldbling" from *Bright Dead Things*, in which she describes looking at fireflies (*fieldbling*) and then wanting to take off her "skin suit/and seeing how/my light flies all/on its own." I then asked students to compare their body part to the object, landscape, and animal, and to complete the sentence "I am all this. But if I take off my skin suit, I would be . . ." The goal here, again, was to connect students to the environment and to each other through literary artistic practices.

For the focal participant I describe here, Jody, connecting her body to the environment in an artistic practice helped her to see her pain objectively, mitigating some of the anxiety around it and her experience of pain itself. Jody came to Pilates to overcome a torn labrum on her left hip, and over the course of the week wrote about severe burns she sustained as a child and chronic pain that she felt was connected to childhood trauma and fear, because, in her words, the pain "never got better." In her poem she connected her body to the earth, discursively moving through the valences of emotional fear and anxiety to a sense of freedom. In her poem, her body is grounded, but it can also take flight.

This valley reminds me of my body, the whole body, with its base, then each event breaking out of the whole, creating its own life, extending out still connected but diluting the sense of the whole integrated being growing out of the earth

A woodpecker like shoulder able to flit forward and back up and down twirling around the top of a cactus then with rapid fire strikes, punching, probing into the soft tissue, extruding and flying away with another ounce of my tolerance

**I am all of this, but if I could take off my skin suit I would be** the air able to fly and dance and swirl, speed for miles or calmly hover over a beautiful river, be a sunset, creative beautiful clouds, express every emotion and still be whole

The air is never hurt.

Jody's valley and woodpecker metaphors are not celebratory, at least not in the beginning. The power of her body, as "valley," is "diluted." The energetic description of her shoulder as a woodpecker dissipates as her shoulder's "tolerance" lessens and as the woodpecker flies away. Gradually, however, this connection to these fleeting aspects of the earth around her eases into more integration with the environment: After she takes off her "skin suit," she becomes the air, sailing above rivers and *being* the sunset and clouds in a way that allows her to "express every emotion." For Jody, the air is

“never hurt.” At least within this poem, the speaker’s connection with the landscape is not idealized, but rather enacts a shifting relationship with the physical world and with the physical experience of pain itself. In this way her poem produces a movement towards freedom from pain.

Jody’s self-reported experiences of healing aligned with this narrative movement, speaking to the power of writing for her as a meditative artistic practice. In a follow-up interview two months after the retreat, Jody described feeling freedom from particular pains in her body, in part through continuing work with a body-based therapist. She believed the writing was effective as a way to ease her pain and is considering using writing to target other areas of discomfort in her body:

[Writing] takes away some fear about [physical pain]. It puts it more on a level field, makes it more objective. When you write, you pay attention to what is it, when does it hurt, and maybe it’s not so bad. Or it removes the anxiety by writing about it.

For Jody, writing helped her develop a kind of objective view of physical and emotional pain, thereby allowing some healing distance. Her explanation mirrors that of studies of meditation (Davidson) that show how one can train the brain to experience painful experiences with less suffering. Her interview suggests that it is not just the content of what people write when they write from their bodies that can contribute to experiences of healing. Instead, for Jody, the act of writing about the body itself allowed her to externalize her pain in words, giving her an artistic vantage point from which to acknowledge it without being subsumed by it.

Emphasizing the artistic nature of expressive writing as a means of connecting with the outside world may be a way to extend writing’s potential to heal to those with experiences of other modalities of expression: For example, over the course of the week, Jody, an accomplished vocalist who described feeling mind-body integration while singing, worked the writing into a singing performance, where she wrote lyrics (with a brief consultation with me) for a song she performed on the last night. Likewise, Faith, whom readers will recall from the section on narrative, a visual artist, said that after the writing workshop in the first year, she started to use words in her art, finding phrases from poetry to interlay with and inspire her visual work.

Such incorporation of writing into other forms of expression also may benefit those who don’t consider themselves writers. After all, one of the limitations of writing as a healing practice is that, as decades of literacy research have shown, literacy as a resource is not equally available to everyone. For example, another participant, Deb, a visual artist and retired engineer who came to the retreat to “be stronger and hurt less,” was adamant about hating writing. In fact, she stopped me several times during the week to describe how she felt she had never been able to and never would be able to write well. (She joined the writing workshop, she told me in all kindness, to kill time.) She accessed writing in part through art, writing in a journal she had handmade from leather, on whose pages she had created images over which she layered her words. On the day we were choosing metaphors from the landscape for our bodies, she sketched barbed wire to describe her “stiff brittle spine, rusted from years

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of summer rains.” Writing for Deb did not necessarily heal, though she did say that like painting, the prompts I gave made her “stop and pay attention, appreciate more.” While Deb’s interview suggests that writing may be less helpful as a form of healing for people who dislike it or who have had difficulty accessing it, it also holds open the possibility that writing may complement or enhance the effects of other kinds of art therapy, forcing one to “pay attention” (as Jody also affirmed) in new ways to the world and the body.<sup>13</sup>

To embrace not only the meditative aspect of artistic production but also its potential to build community, we held a poetry reading, where participants read for each other and for members of the larger group a composite of their favorite lines from the week. Psychologists Pennebaker and Evans have advised against sharing personal writing because the response of readers or audience members might be hurtful, undermining the potential of writing to heal. Yet sharing, in the words of Jody, was where the “emotion is released,” in ways that for her led to experiences of physical healing. And even Deb, the hater of writing, recited some lines that inspired whoops (“With warm tequila providing the courage, my feet glide in old gringos, my hair flies with the breeze in the bright blue light, and my hand is snug in the back pocket of my partner’s Wranglers”). Having been born in El Paso, Deb was reminded of the desert by our location in Baja California, thus activating the history of her body, the environment, and the support of what she called a “good group” in her public body-based writing. Making meaning public in an artistic display seemed to help people access long forgotten body memories, to connect more deeply to the environment, and to publicly revalue and rewrite bodily experiences in a supportive community.

One part of experiences of physical healing via writing in this retreat, then, was profoundly personal: accessing the intimate sensations of the body, describing its “strengths and scars,” and imagining it as free. But another piece was public, involving acknowledging one’s body’s journey in a community with others. These simultaneously deeply intimate and profoundly public uses of writing form one of its, for me, most fascinating paradoxes—a paradox that Colombian poet and peace educator Juana María Echeverri Escobar has resolved by observing that writing allows one to be “accompanied in one’s solitude.”

This kind of accompaniment, especially in the interior journey of the body, may be especially salient for those who identify as women, whose bodies are often viewed as private and shameful—and as was on the minds of many of us, vulnerable to “grabbing” by powerful men. On poetry night, in contrast, our bodies were loud. Our breasts were the mountains that lined the valleys, our hands were snug in our partner’s pockets, our skin was ripped off our legs. In letting our bodies speak, experiences of physical healing began to look something like political empowerment, as a way to make public women’s bodily experiences in a moment of gender oppression.<sup>14</sup> Here, bodily self-care appeared as discursive attention to a muscle in the pelvis, which could stabilize the entire body, free the shoulders, help us move. After all, writing, like breath, like blood, is charged with circulation.

To be clear, in suggesting here that writing to heal physically can also have political potential, I am not claiming these body-based exercises in this workshop inculcated a critical awareness of privilege, contributed to a particular social movement, or helped people articulate radical political positions. If I were to run this workshop a third time in this context, I would stretch us further in this direction. I would take the work of critical writing pedagogues Maisha Winn, Susan Weinstein, and bell hooks as starting points. I would begin from our bodies, extend to our community, and then examine what might happen for participants if, beginning from a place of empowerment, awareness, and love, we wrote towards a critical awareness of our socially ascribed bodily positions that would result in action. The workshop I developed and described here did not take this step.

At the same time, I believe that women's experiences in writing towards physical restoration, and then letting their bodies publicly speak in ways that both recounted their pain and celebrated their strength is politically significant. After all, speaking the truth of women's bodies in 2018, as those of us following the news have recently seen, is an infraction that can be threatened with death. In this sense, this second iteration of the workshop pointed to the potential for writing to heal to incorporate body, mind, community, and the wider social world, a world which constructs our bodies and in which we also corporally intervene.<sup>15</sup>

### *Future Studies: The Social Body*

By drawing on both the social and embodied aspects of literacy in this way, participants seemed to be able to use writing to become more aware of and even shape some of their bodily experiences. This effect was best captured in the words of another participant, Taylor:

“[The writing] connected my mind and body. I felt peaceful and healed. . . If you're doing a mind/body experience, like you're giving cues with the writing, and I couldn't have written without the cues, and then you're doing the body work. You're doing the outside and the inside.”

For Taylor, and for others, intentionally designed “cues”—that is the writing prompts developed from interdisciplinary insights about the relationship between body, mind, and language—allowed her to write in a way that connected the “outside and the inside,” the public and the personal.

As I have emphasized throughout, such healing integration of body, mind, and community occurred in a particular context: among normatively abled educated middle-class white women who were invested in using writing and bodywork techniques to experience physical restoration (or at least to “hurt less”) in a rarified environment away from the responsibilities of work and family and with the full attention of an experienced body therapist. No one was facing debilitating or life-threatening pain and illness (I was not testing the notion that writing could cure cancer). People in this workshop exploited the healing potential of the features of writing I have examined here—narrative, metaphor, environment, art, and community—in concert with their particular social and embodied positions.

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What this situatedness means is that experiences of writing to physically heal will look different for people in different social contexts, and with differential access to power. As education researcher Cindy Cruz has written about the importance of theorizing Chicana bodies, education research must “be committed to exposing how systems of power have privileged certain kinds of narratives that serve to undermine and invalidate others” (662, “Toward an Epistemology”). Put another way, the kinds of narratives that heal some might be predicated on systems of power that hurt others (Carey; Cloud). To fully address writing’s potential to facilitate experiences of physical healing in light of its (and all of our) imbrication in unequal power relations, qualitative work that is sensitive to power and context is needed across diverse groups of writers.

In the hopes of understanding how people might use writing to heal outside of this privileged environment, I have been working alongside and been enlightened by graduate student researchers who have developed and analyzed the potential of “writing to heal” in community contexts including with manual laborers, women recovering from sexual assault, students with disabilities, pre-service teachers, and composition students among others.<sup>16</sup> I have also recently been privileged to work alongside poets, peace activists, academics, and educators in Colombia, in which we are building on these insights and those of Latin American peace and writing studies scholars, to examine the practices through which young Colombians use writing, in embodied ways, to address Colombia’s armed conflict and to construct a peaceful future, that is to promote social healing.<sup>17</sup> How people experience writing as healing (or not), we have postulated, depends on emic definitions of healing, the legacy of literacy for particular writers, and the way society positions their bodies and the stories they can tell. We lean heavily on the studies of Fisher, Weinstein, and Camangian, to understand the grassroots uses of writing to expose power, to express oneself artistically, to experience pleasure, and to be seen and heard.

Moving forward, it seems crucial to more fully integrate the personal and social aspects of writing to heal. In Haas and Witte’s path breaking 2001 article that detailed the extent to which writing is embodied, they treated the social body and the physical body separately. Likewise, in Pennebaker and Evans’s work, the social does not shape what they define as a largely inner process of healing. The insights of disability studies, however, show the limits of such analyses. The social and physical aspects of the body interanimate each other (Miller, “Literate Misfitting,” 35), participating in what Kerschbaum has called an emergent process of “marking” difference in dialogic acts of writing. These insights suggest that future studies might more directly address how the unequal and ideologically laden nature of writing textures the kinds of healing that can be experienced by those in various social, historic, and embodied positions.

For example, we might explore, as Miller does, how the embodied nature of writing might shape communicative access to the kinds of healing possible in community writing groups that include those with diverse abilities (“Negotiating Communicative Access”). It is also important to question, as Tamika Carey does, what kind of healing is possible for whom in contexts of racial, gender, and class inequality—and the potential harm that can be done by individualized rhetorics of healing. As scholar

Stephanie Larson has pointed out in her analysis of the novel *Hunger* by Roxane Gay, healing might not be the right concept at all, as it presumes a kind of fault or illness within the body to be fixed or cured. Perhaps trauma is trauma, pain is pain, and one of the ends of writing is not to overcome, but instead to practice living with the body, and with one's experiences of it, as it is (Larson).

The question I am left with is how writing might be used to promote physical well-being in ways that aren't predicated on pathologizing writers' bodies, their pasts, or the communities to which they belong. Clearly, more work remains to uncover both the potentials and limitations of how people can use writing to heal, however they choose to define healing, as well as how writing from the body can intervene in the larger social conditions that contribute to experiences of trauma.

What this study has offered is a description of some of the pedagogical and social conditions under which and ways in which—and there are many more—particular people can use writing, both personally and publicly, to shape their experiences of their embodied lives.

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## Appendix A: Research Methods

As a teacher-researcher in this context, I saw my role as twofold: First, I participated in creating conditions under which I thought writing might be experienced as healing. And then, I worked to understand participants' experiences in these conditions. To meet the goal of linking particular writing pedagogies to healing, I employed design-based research (Design-Based Research Collective), a method developed to help instructors use qualitative methods to iteratively revise classroom practices to meet particular learning outcomes. In this case, the desired outcome was an experience of healing.

In order to understand students' goals and their experiences of healing and writing, I collected four kinds of data with participants in both rounds:

1. To understand participants' pasts and goals for healing I conducted *body and literacy history interviews*. These interviews involved asking demographic information, including education level, family status, and income, as well as eliciting narratives about participants' literacy and bodily experiences.
2. To be able to link pedagogical practices with reported experiences of healing, I took *ethnographic field notes* and audio recorded all writing workshop and bodywork sessions.
3. To examine the rhetorical and/or aesthetic modes through which people experienced healing, I *collected all writing*, which I analyzed (along with field notes) in advance of text-based follow-up interviews.
4. To understand to what extent participants experienced healing (or did not) and how such healing might be related to writing, I conducted *text-based follow-up interviews* (Bazerman and Prior).

I collected data with a total of ten different participants, all middle-class white women, six in the first round and six in the second (two of which were returning participants from the previous year). I also collected data with one man, but chose to focus my analysis on women. In the first year, eight of fourteen total retreatants engaged in the writing workshop, and in the second year six of fourteen retreatants participated.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of one participant who missed one workshop day in the first year, each participant came each day.

To analyze, I coded all data using a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz) based on the following codes: developing a narrative; developing bodily metaphors or images; using precise language to link body and mind; experiencing strength; experiencing weakness; experiencing and defining healing; connecting to the environment; connecting to others; connecting to political and social context. To develop theories based on findings recursively, I employed a constant comparative method (Glaser). Specifically, I compared codes in field notes, texts, and interview transcripts to link experiences of healing with particular pedagogical activities. Finally, I paid attention to the ways that these discursive elements interacted with the larger social and political context from which women had come and to which they would be returning following the retreat.

## *Appendix B: Pedagogical Design*

In the first iteration of the workshop I synthesized work by psychologists, dance scholars, kinesiologists, and compositionists. Namely, I drew from: 1) psychologist Progoff's innovative body-focused journaling process, involving dialoguing with the body, and listening to what is said; 2) work in dance scholarship and kinesiology that has developed "ideokinesis," metaphor-informed physical therapy that improves body alignment by asking people to embody particular images (Bernard et al.; Todd); and 3) expressivist writing pedagogies aimed at helping people write fluently and freely (Elbow; Pennebaker and Evans).

In line with design-based research principles, I developed a second iteration of the workshop the second year, in which I built on what I had learned from data collection and analysis after the first round, with the goal of augmenting experiences of writing's healing effects. In this round, I additionally drew from work on the healing power of the arts (Stuckey and Nobel) to add poetry and short prose excerpts to each of the lesson plans and to organize a poetry reading, as well as from work on the healing potential of nature (Bratman et al.), to add a sixth day involving writing and the environment.

The following syllabus lays out these activities, with elements added in the second iteration in bold.<sup>19</sup>

### Day 1: Body Stories/Narrative

- I introduced the class, narrative, and letting the body speak.
- **Read: Olds, "Ode to Hymen"**
- Writers picked 12 body parts, then chose one to dialogue with using prompts:
  - What does the body part want to say?
  - What happened to this body part? Tell its story.
  - **If you could write a better ending, what would it be?**
- Homework: Writers focused on a sensation.

### Day 2: Sensation/Description

- **Read: Olds, "From the Sick Couch" and Lidia Yuknavitch, "Happy Childhood."**
- Writers used the following prompt:
  - If your sensation were a color, texture, animal, name, place, piece of clothing, dwelling, smell, and/or voice, what would it be?

### Day 3: Scars/Metaphor (the first iteration included "super powers")

- **Read: Limón, "Valencia," and Sharon Olds, "Legs Ode."**
- Writers drew a picture of a scar on their body and three metaphors for it, one from nature, one from their job, another from anywhere
- Writers used the prompt: Scar, the day you were born the sky was . . . and I was feeling . . .

- Writers answered: What happened up to the point of injury?
- Writers wrote a line from Limon's poem, "Valnecia:" I thought I would die, but I didn't
- Writers answered the following questions:
  - What happened instead of dying?
  - What did the event teach you?
  - What role did it play (guide/tormentor)?
  - Personify it.
- Homework: Writers chose body parts that reminded them of part of the landscape, a natural object, and/or an animal.

#### Day Four: Environment/Travel Writing

- **Read: Wendy Ortiz, *Bruja*, p. 8, about the word turquoise forming in her body, Lidia Yuknavitch, on rocks, p. 32, Limón, "Fieldbling"**
- **Writers were instructed to write three metaphors for parts of their body based on homework, activating color/smell/taste/texture, which they learned in the lesson on sensation.**
- **Writers were asked to write, loosely based on Limón's "Fieldbling" using the following prompt: I am all of this. But if I could take off my skin suit, I would be . . .**

#### Day Five: Imagining the Future/Fiction

- **Read Limón, "How to Triumph Like a Girl"**
- Writers were asked to imagine some things they would like to do with their bodies and write five (e.g. win a race, stand up straight, forgive your father, become a mermaid, fly, etc). Writers chose one, closed their eyes, and meditated on it.
- During the meditation, I asked these questions:
  - What does it feel like?
  - What parts of your body are activated?
- Writers were asked to list those parts and what they were doing using verbs and activating sensation.
- I asked:
  - If someone saw you from the outside, what would they say?
  - What animal would they compare you to?
  - What would your best friend say?
  - What would change in your life if you could do it?
- Writers wrote what they imagined in the second person progressive, read it to themselves, then revised it using the first person progressive.

#### Day 6: Revisions/Poetry

- **Read: Rumi, "Water, stories, the body/all the things we do are mediums/ that hide and show what's hidden," p. 172 and Gilbert on treasures, p. 27.**

- **I recapped some memorable lines students wrote, the “treasures” they had shared.**
- Writers were asked to choose their five favorite lines from the week, to copy them and change them if they wanted, and to put them in some kind of order: (head to foot like body order, chronological, narrative order, etc.)
- Writers completed the prompt: “My body says . . .”
- **These poems were the basis for the public reading that evening.**

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## Notes

1. The author is grateful to the Vilas Associates Award from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and the NCTE/CCCC Chairs Research Initiative for funding data collection and analysis, to graduate students in the Writing, Healing, and the Body graduate seminar for their insights, to conversations about writing to heal with Shirley Brice Heath, whose mentorship the author benefited from under the auspices of the National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship, to Tami-ka Carey for conversations about her critical rhetorical apparatus for understanding healing, to Kathleen Conklin for artistic and scientific conversations about body/mind therapy and for her generous collaboration, and to Calley Marotta for crucial research insights and editing assistance, and to reviewers for their suggestions

2. In conjunction with Kathleen Conklin, I have chosen to focus on “physical restoration,” instead of “overcoming trauma,” in order to highlight the future, goal-oriented nature of the healing in which women engaged.

3. Writing, in fact, may be a special kind of physical practice, in that the hand, used to type or hold a pen, may have evolved not only to use tools, but also in order to create art, thus linking mind, body, and public through creative practice (Wilson) and craft (Sennett).

4. For example, gender identity is performed through practice (Butler). Trans scholarship makes this point crystal clear: while the felt sense of experiences within the body are both products of and subject to cultural interpretations, this sense—the interior feelings experienced by particular bodies—is no less genuine or real (Salamon).

5. As Herman’s classic work on trauma and recovery has put it, “In the telling, a trauma story becomes a testimony” (181).

6. See Bergen on how grammar constructions change bodily experiences.

7. The principles of ideokinesis are: that the image or metaphor needs to be in motion, it needs direction, it needs location, and there needs to be no voluntary movement to make it happen. So, for example, if you are sitting reading this article, imagine a plumb line hanging from your head down to your pelvis. And don’t do anything, but just experience that. And feel if anything in your alignment changes.

8. For example, compositionist Roozen conducted a study of a high school teacher who “semiotically remediated” the meaning of *pi*, having developed a meaning of the concept in stand-up comedy troupe in college and then remediated the concept as a teacher via posters and jokes to promote learning.

9. All other follow-up interviews also emphasized metaphor as healing, and many spoke about imagining their bodies with anatomical precision facilitated by metaphors used both in writing and in the physical bodywork.

10. Popular culture sources have taken up this idea, showing how walking in nature, for example, may help us think (Jabr).

11. Though I was working with white women in this project, the insights of Gloria Anzaldúa in this regard nonetheless rang in my ears, namely her metaphors of the earth as a body whose “skin . . . is seamless,” that is without borders (25), as well as her descriptions of the *mestiza* body in relation to the earth.

12. I used Sharon Olds's *Odes*, Ada Limón's *Bright Dead Things*, Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Chronology of Water*, and poems from a compendium of Rumi that I serendipitously found in my hotel room.

13. In this sense, writing is like Pilates: See Caldwell et al., "Pilates, Mindfulness, and Somatic Education."

14. For more on the connection of self care to social change, in particular for women of color, see the work of African American feminists, including hooks.

15. For a grounded example of this potential, specifically in regards to anti-racist work, see community educator and scholar Beth Godbee's blog, <https://heart-head-hands.com>.

16. Researchers on these projects include: Calley Marotta, Stephanie Larson, Brenna Swift, Allison Murrow, Jesse Nixon, Kassia Krzus-Shaw, and John Koban.

17. In this project, I am grateful to be accompanied by Juana María Echeverri Escobar, Rodrigo Aicardo Rojas Ospina, Jhoana Patiño Lopez, and Luís Fernando Cuervo, among others; for the funding provided by Fulbright, ICETEX, and the Susan J. Cellmer Distinguished Chair in Literacy; and for the institutional support of CINDE.

18. Initial data collection with the first-run syllabus included: eight participants with whom I conducted pre and post interviews (12 hours total), ethnographic field-notes in Pilates bodywork classes and writing workshop (25 hours), and collection of all writing (120 pages).

19. It's important to acknowledge, as Molloy explores, that composition instructors do not necessarily have the expertise to guide students through "trauma writing."

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### *Author Bio*

Kate Vieira is associate professor and the Susan J. Cellmer Distinguished Chair in Literacy in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is the author of *American by Paper: How Documents Matter in Immigrant Literacy* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016) and *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). She received a 2018-2019 Fulbright Scholar fellowship to investigate the role of writing in peace building in post-conflict Colombia.