Reflexivity and Revelation

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"Paying attention to accidental moments . . . starts with noticing stories and encounters that catch the researcher's attention, without prejudging how they will relate to her research later" (Fujii 2015, 536).

Professor Lee Ann Fujii was an expert at *noticing*. In my experience, she was just uncannily good at remembering details, sussing out nuance, picking up on shaded distinctions, and hearing the scream in a whisper. This is likely a large part of why she was so skilled at recognizing, parsing, and illuminating the complexities of person-level political violence. Lee Ann was intrinsically committed to understanding how personal interpretations of one's own relationship to violence influence its production, and vice versa. The source of this sense-making was straightforward to her: individuals make decisions in context, and neither can be well understood without paying systematic attention to the other.

Lee Ann's encouragement to embrace the "productive potential of . . . those periods when the researcher is no longer trying to 'control for bias,' but navigating a social environment . . . from which she cannot fully remove herself" has greatly influenced my own scholarship, which bridges positivist and interpretivist approaches (Fujii 2015, 527). She confirmed for me that, whether by training or by accident, paying attention to the interstitial moments of violence research—sandwiched among episodes of high drama or instrumental procedure—reveals much about how individuals organize their worlds, execute their choices, and process meaning (Fujii 2015, 526–7). She supported me in remembering that violence, its perpetrators, and its victims co-inhabit a universal context with violence research and researchers: Individually and collectively, all embody the material consequences of socially-constructed relationships (Fujii 2018).

"Once the researcher begins to pay closer attention to accidental moments, she might begin to make discoveries. She might become aware of expectations she did not know she had . . . " (Fujii 2015, 527).

It is not controversial for interpretivist researchers, such as Lee Ann, to acknowledge that the interpretation of observational data always reflects how researchers navigate the world we co-inhabit with the individuals, events, circumstances, and systems that we purport to study. It can carry a different charge for those who engage positivist methodology, and particularly for those who work primarily with quantitative data and statistical hypothesis testing.

Minimizing bias—systematic and non-random deviations in our measures, evaluations, and estimates of reality—is particularly important to positivist orthodoxy, in its elemental search for some objective, stable, and fundamentally observable Truth. For scholars who use statistical methods, deep consideration of how well our data-handling strategies help to offset the effects of bias should be, and often is, second-nature. However, too many smart positivist scholars wrongly equate reflexivity—the sort of scholarly *noticing* that Lee Ann advocated—with introducing bias where it previously did not exist. Precisely to the contrary, in quantitative as much as in qualitative research, reflexivity is a way of neutralizing pre-existing bias to improve the scientific value of our work. It invariably adds more and better data that we can use to describe more accurately the breadth, depth, and distribution of social experiences. It is inferentially edifying as it bares the distortionary effects of erasure (observation and sample selection bias), ignorance (omitted variable bias), and misrepresentation (measurement bias).

Reflexivity also helps us to estimate bias' effects on not only what we observe, but also how we do it. Mere identifications of bias are themselves statements of positionality: For each scholar, they evince whose truths are ineligible to be understood as lies; which experiences have been normalized into standards; and what perspectives stand reified as canon.[1] All observational researchers then rely on these often-unstated assumptions to determine what sorts of information qualifies as data that we can use to represent (someone's) truth. This is not an objective process, nor can it be made more so simply by choosing one method or another.

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1 One excellent example of positivist work on this topic is *Media Bias, Perspective, and State Repression: The Black Panther Party* by Christian Davenport (2010).

"She might notice the different ways that people type her. She might detect similarities in social dynamics across dissimilar sites . . ." (Fujii 2015, 527).

Lee Ann pushed all political scientists to purposefully account for how the bodies and social spaces we occupy and navigate affect our work, from conception through execution and reflection. She particularly saw the perspectives of historically marginalized folks as critical to bolstering the collective rigor of our field. We agree that they are not weapons, nor ought we allow others to weaponize them through insisting on self-awareness as a danger to science. Take me for example: as a Black American woman *inter alia*, the stories, dynamics, processes, and relationships that catch my attention are opportunities to understand the nature and value of political contestation in distinct perspective. My experience-informed intuition tells me that the difference between inclusion and tokenization, and the range of options available to power-holders for disguising it, is often more real than apparent. Perhaps as a result, I collect and analyze large-N data on militant organizations that accounts for the ways that organizational attitudes about sex and gender are codified in official, public rhetoric *along with* information about the actual presence and activities of people of different sexes and genders (Thomas and Bond 2015). The same intuition reminds me that 'militancy' is a perceptual quantity that, depending on one's vantage point, can be understood in systematically different ways. Consequently, I also examine structures of social dominance within these organizations *accompanied by* information on their outwardly-directed activities (Bond 2016). Both are approaches that few others have taken. I have no idea how many others have considered them.

"These smaller, less dramatic moments can reveal patterns, logics, and practices that other, more procedure-driven methods cannot" (Fujii 2015, 527).

Lee Ann and I were continuously "finding revelation in the mundane" of our own lives (Fujii 2015, 526). She ribbed me endlessly on the (what she called boring) titles I give to my work. We regularly debated our exercise preferences. We shared raw honesty about how taxing immersive research on the production of violence can be on the emotions and on the intellect. We compared the sharp pains of racialized and gendered workplace macro-aggressions and their common recasting as overblown inconveniences. We soon folded all of these conversations into a collaborative exploration of the devastating power of grief, and its curious generalizability. We listed as many ways we could think of through which grief decimates and concretizes one's past all at once, and how it obscures and illuminates one's future simultaneously. In the doing, we shared fury and sadness over how our common experience as racialized women never relents.

In the same vein we hated on the volume of emotional labor for which non-white women are often mined; that is, the ways in which we are required not only to notice but also to manage *others'* frustrations, insecurities, and, yes, even their grief (Matthew 2016). Years of observation and experience convinced Lee Ann that indifference, rather than embarrassment, is what keeps so many in the academy from uplifting, protecting, and championing many scholars of color and their work. She railed against the reigning diversity management paradigm of contemporary higher education, in which institutional gatekeepers 'grant new access' to individuals traditionally excluded from the power centers of academia (diversification) only to instantly assign competing values to their bodies and experiences; those values are wholly determined by the same gatekeepers' ability to efficiently manage or trade them (commodification). Lee Ann knew intimately that the violence of institutionalized marginalization in our profession replicates not in the practice of *noticing* diversity, but in the business of *consuming* it.

"We can't get through this BS without some sanity-making check-ins on a regular basis."[2]

After publishing her exceptional analysis of racism in political science in the Duck of Minerva blog, Lee Ann told me: "It took me all these months to revise it . . . because everything about the issue enrages me."[3] To assert this in her written work was sanity-making in itself and, for her, a source of immense satisfaction. For Lee Ann, privilege was "simply having a choice;" the ultimate act of academic privilege amounted to "choosing not to think about whether to be bothered by inequalities in the field (or wherever)."[4] In that blog piece, she located that privilege at the core of appraisals of quality in political science, which she called out as inextricably linked to "the kinds of bodies the faculty see as capable of *embodying* quality in the first place" (Fujii 2017). As

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2 L.A. Fujii (personal communication, 2017).
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she affirmed us, Lee Ann too took the racialized woman scholar's journey through the fraught territories of advocating for ourselves, and by extension, our work, as already so capable. Her scholarship and advocacy was as Kimberlé Crenshaw explicated intersectionality as praxis: challenging those parts of ourselves which are made "at home" in our environs, in the name of those parts of us that are not (Crenshaw 1991). Her commitment to requiring that political scientists at least *notice* the oppressive hierarchies in our discipline that "hide in plain sight" (Henderson 2013) and the scholars of color that traverse them, was often incredibly costly. It was also astounding.

Lee Ann is one of the precious few tenured, non-white, women mentors that I have known in international relations or comparative politics. She is also my trusted friend. As I experience acutely the loss of her presence on multiple dimensions, I remain grateful to have been strengthened by the warmth of her magnanimity and the force of her inspiration.

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