

99. Bringing the Grad Student Perspective w/ Leah Rubinsky

[00:00:00]

[00:00:00] **Dan Dissinger:** and hi everyone. Welcome to another episode of Writing Remix. I'm your host, Dan Dissinger, and today I'm here with a really amazing guest, Leah Rubinsky, who's a PhD candidate at University of Washington. Thank you so much for being here.

[00:00:16] **Leah Rubinsky:** Absolutely. It's great to be here. And again, I'm Leah. I'm a sixth year PhD candidate.

[00:00:22] **Leah Rubinsky:** At the University of Washington, and I'm actually currently coming to you from Colombia. I'm on a research grant. Actually, I don't know if I told you that, Dan, but um, yeah, I'm doing archival and ethnographic research in support of my dissertation Oh, here, which is awesome. And my dissertation actually examines themes of motherhood in contemporary Colombian and Caribbean women's writing.

[00:00:46] **Leah Rubinsky:** So that is what I'm currently working on. But I'm, I'm excited to, to be here and to bring a graduate school perspective on writing specifically from the humanities I should say. Cuz that's where I'm [00:01:00] coming from. I'm in the Department of Comparative literature. So, you know, I wanted to talk about a couple of things.

[00:01:08] **Leah Rubinsky:** Um, as graduate students, you know, we engage in different forms of academic writing. The big one, of course, is the dissertation because that is the big writing project that we as graduate students do. I'm grappling with it right now. Um, but we also write all kinds of different, you know, things. We write, prospectuses, fellowship, proposals, job applications, you know, which include.

[00:01:38] **Leah Rubinsky:** What cover letters, teaching statements, diversity statements. Mm-hmm. So we work in a lot of different, and also very specific academic writing genres. And so one of the big reasons why I wanted to come on the show is because I'm very interested in supporting graduate students and centering the voices of graduate students. [00:02:00]

[00:02:00] **Leah Rubinsky:** I think academia can be a really. Strange place, like a really strange, hierarchical place. Um, and it's been very difficult for me, actually, just to be totally transparent, academia has been very difficult for me. And so if I can support other grad students in their writing projects specifically, then that's, that's what I wanna do.

[00:02:25] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I thought I would, you know, talk about some things, offer some tips for whatever that might be worth for grad students. Based on my own experiences, maybe to help you. If you're a grad student and you're in the middle of your big writing project or whatever writing project, you know, maybe to help you kickstart your writing process or re-energize it or maybe get it off the ground just to support you.

[00:02:52] **Leah Rubinsky:** So a lot of these insights have been things I'm still trying to figure out. I should say that. So I'm not an expert in. [00:03:00] Any of this,

[00:03:02] **Dan Dissinger:** um, I don't think any of us

[00:03:03] **Leah Rubinsky:** are. Yeah. And it, it's just, it feels good to admit that, doesn't it? Mm-hmm. Um, so this isn't definitive right. You know, advice. It, it's also might not be the right advice for every grad student in the project you're working on, but I hope it can be helpful, at least in some way.

[00:03:21] **Leah Rubinsky:** So the first writing tip that I wanted to talk about is this thing that happens in graduate school where. We as grad students are somehow kind of expected to already know how to write in the genres of these very particular kinds of writing that I was talking about. So like the fellowship narrative, for example, we're supposed to like already know how to do that without ever having really learned how to write that.

[00:03:49] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah. This happened to me. So I would apply for fellowships and I wouldn't get any of them, and this would lead me to kind of think, oh, There's [00:04:00] something wrong with my project. My project is not good enough. It's not interesting enough. Or the writing on my fellowship proposal sucked, you know, or whatever it might be.

[00:04:13] **Leah Rubinsky:** But then a good friend of mine, she said, look, let me share with you my fellowship proposal narrative. It was successful. I got the fellowship, so look at it and see what it looks like, and you know, and so she did. She emailed it to me. And I started noticing when I was reading through it that she was writing in a very particular way that I had not been writing in.

[00:04:36] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I was like, Hmm, there's something here. So I got a hold of other successful fellowship proposal narratives and I saw something similar, and that's when it clicked. And I don't know why I didn't know this before. But anyway, fellowship proposal narratives, this is a genre. Of writing and I have to learn how to write in it to make my project legible, to make my [00:05:00] proposal legible to this audience that's gonna decide whether or not to fund me.

[00:05:05] **Leah Rubinsky:** Right. So the next time the fellowship funding cycle came around, I had, you know, read over 10 successful, I think, yeah, I was like reading through many successful fellowship proposal narratives. I had done some research on the genre. I was. Prepared and that year I got every single fellowship I applied for.

[00:05:29] **Leah Rubinsky:** Wow. Three out of three, which was crazy. My project didn't change. I was still writing the same project, working on the same project. I don't think my writing changed that much. I learned the genre and that's huge. I think So I think the insight here that may be helpful. Is to read successful pieces of writing in the genre that you're trying to write in, so you can get a feel for how it works.

[00:05:58] **Leah Rubinsky:** But I think the other [00:06:00] insight for me as a graduate student is let's share our successful writing materials with each other. Yeah, why not? You know? Yeah. This is how we help each other. And so asking peers and colleagues. For those materials, sometimes the organizations and the entities offering the fellowships, they will do that.

[00:06:21] **Leah Rubinsky:** They will, if you ask them, they will send you successful proposal materials, what you know, what they look like, and, and you can take a look at that. Um, and if you're looking for other kinds of materials in other academic genres to get your hands on. As examples, Hannah Alper Abrams, she's wonderful. She's a PhD who works in the digital humanities.

[00:06:44] **Leah Rubinsky:** Hmm. She's very interested in reforming higher education and supporting graduate students. She created a really cool online repository of academic materials that you can browse through all kinds of things, from teaching [00:07:00] statements to proposal narratives, to cover letters, you know, all of them. You can get an idea by browsing through these materials of how those genres work.

[00:07:10] **Leah Rubinsky:** So how can you access this? The Repository site is hosted on the Humanities Commons, so if you go to [h commons.org](https://hcommons.org), you'll

arrive at the Humanities Commons site and then just look within there for the site entitled Academic Job Market Support Network. You can also just Google academic job market support network and.

[00:07:32] **Leah Rubinsky:** You'll find it, but that's where you can find these kinds of materials. So check that out. Uh, share if you want to share your own materials. Um, and, and it's just a really great resource Also. This is where I go on and on, Dan, so you can just in,

[00:07:50] **Dan Dissinger:** I had a question. I do have a question. Uh, it's because, All the things that you're saying makes so much sense because also I, and I would also, I would also put out there too, like if you have a [00:08:00] question about whether or not a fellowship would support something or a grant would support something, we, um, a colleague of mine, uh, sorry.

[00:08:10] **Dan Dissinger:** Stephanie Renee Payne, who's been on the podcast plenty of times, amazing colleague. Her and I we're gonna, we were going to propose a gr um, a program at U USC that would put up, that would be considered an institute for like peace studies and, and things like that. We were unsure if the grant money would actually support the project that we wanted to propose because it seemed more research based instead of like contemplative based, like what we wanted to do.

[00:08:40] **Dan Dissinger:** Um, So we just reached out and said, this is kind of our idea. Would this grant support a program like this and institute that situation like this? And they were very honest. They're like, look, this is what we're looking for, blah, blah, blah. And they're like, okay. So instead of putting all that work into proposing phase one [00:09:00] and then, and then feel like we failed at something, we're just like, you know what?

[00:09:04] **Dan Dissinger:** It's just not for that. Particular grant. Um, and I think a lot of times we don't think of that part too. Just the simple question to like, like reach out and ask. And I think that's also a good tip, but the genre stuff that you're talking about makes so much sense. Um, it's something I learned when I was proposing conferences.

[00:09:24] **Dan Dissinger:** I was like, I don't know. What I'm, I'm proposing ideas, but I'm writing like a poet because that's my background. And someone like stepped in and like, Dan, here's kind of what we can do. And I was like, oh. And then I just use that now from now on and I can propose conferences. I mean, you still get rejected sometimes, but at least it's like it's an easier template.

[00:09:44] **Dan Dissinger:** You've got this idea and it's like, I know I have to hit this point at this point and this point, and then you can push that forward.

[00:09:50] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah. Yeah. And you know, speaking of templates and sort of. I don't know, maybe some more concrete tips, I guess. [00:10:00] Um, I was just thinking of a couple of these and these came from, I read an article that was pretty useful.

[00:10:05] **Leah Rubinsky:** I would say it's called On the Art of Writing Proposals. Mm. It's by, oh, I'm gonna put your name, Adam, I'm so sorry. Adamowski and Frank Solomon. Um, and they had some really great tips actually in that article, um, to do kind of what you're. What you're mentioning, that template, you know the points that you wanna hit.

[00:10:26] **Leah Rubinsky:** They talked a lot about this idea of, remember, remember, you know, like reviewers are wading through a lot of proposals, so you wanna make yours very clear. You wanna make sure to capture your reader's attention. You wanna sort of very quickly, if you can give them a couple of points specifically, you know, What are we going to learn because of your project that we didn't already know?

[00:10:53] **Leah Rubinsky:** And the stakes are always so important. Why is, why is your project so, so valuable, right? [00:11:00] Um, you wanna be clear and direct, so, A lot of times, and I didn't know this, but I learned quickly the reviewers who are looking through proposals, a lot of times they are from many different disciplines, so mm-hmm.

[00:11:12] **Leah Rubinsky:** You don't wanna be too inside of your own jargon and discipline. Right? Yes. You wanna just redirect and readable across a wide audience. And then the last thing I was thinking of is a good tactic can be to articulate how your project. Tackles some kind of contradiction or something unexpected. Mm.

[00:11:34] **Leah Rubinsky:** Something like, okay, so this is the tradition. This is what's been going on. Scholars have thought this, but my work Right. Takes this different tactic. Mm-hmm. Or it reveals this different side, or I'm exploring this interesting nuance or contradiction that can be persuasive to re to reviewers. I think. So anyway,

[00:11:52] **Dan Dissinger:** just a couple of things and you said, and that, and.

[00:11:55] **Dan Dissinger:** In my rambling, I forgot that I was gonna ask a question that, um, so you said [00:12:00] something interesting. You said like you didn't change how you, like the way you wrote. Like, like, so are you saying like, you didn't change so much in the writing voice in which you were writing, but it was like, what was it, what you were writing instead because.

[00:12:13] **Dan Dissinger:** I always find these genres sometimes, and I guess in rhetoric, we talk about this too, like how academic writing is very can, well not can be, is very like white and very male and very Oh yeah. Misogynistic it. It's all in this patriarchal space. Right. So do you feel like in these genres like you have to do, do you feel like you're code switching much more as you're writing these things or is it.

[00:12:38] **Dan Dissinger:** And is that, is that frustrating to when you start getting the fellowships being like, oh, okay, I see you, like, you know, or is it just, you know, I guess,

[00:12:49] **Leah Rubinsky:** what a good question. I mean, I think you're bringing up something super important and it, it is so frustrating and I think it, it's also, let's be honest, it's violent to have to [00:13:00] kind of, to to think and to, yeah, to think that the only way that your work is going to be.

[00:13:08] **Leah Rubinsky:** Visible is if you sort of change it to fit into these, this voice that, like you said, is, is the voice of academia, which for too long has been white male, you know, heteronormative, north American centric. Mm-hmm. Um, so I do, I do, that's such a good question. For me, what's coming to me right now is this idea of, I take that idea of being direct and I go with it, and so, I think that that allows me to move away a little bit from that academic voice, you know, that, that is so venerated in academia.

[00:13:49] **Leah Rubinsky:** Um, and just to kind of be a, be more direct and it allows me to, to speak in the voice that I, that I use that's, that's specific to [00:14:00] me. So, so that's one way for me. Um, Because I find that when I, when I do that, my writing is more clear. Yeah. Which is something that, that I strive to do in, you know, fellowship proposals and stuff.

[00:14:13] **Leah Rubinsky:** But this question is interesting because I've been thinking a lot about it in the dissertation. Mm. I participated in a wonderful, and I can, I can talk about this as well. Um, a wonderful writing, basically it's a writing workshop that was put on. Last quarter in the gender, women and sexuality studies department at my university, which is an amazing department.

[00:14:40] **Leah Rubinsky:** Hmm. It was taught by Amanda Lock sw. She's a professor. She's fabulous. And the idea behind this writing workshop was to support graduate student writing. So the class would consist of, you would do some writing practice together, and then we would [00:15:00] also. Have this thing where each of us in the group were expected to sign up for a time slot during the quarter, and when it was your turn, you would post and give to the group a 20 to 25 page, excuse me, um, 20 to 25 page writing sample.

[00:15:19] **Leah Rubinsky:** Of a draft, like, like a draft. A draft that you're working on. And so for that week, each group member was to read it and to give you written feedback, but you'd also have this live feedback session where you would sit there and it was, it was nerve-wracking, you know? Cause you're kind of in the hot seat and you've got this group of people you so respect and care about your peers.

[00:15:39] **Leah Rubinsky:** And they're, they've taken the time, you know, graduate students, we don't have a lot of time. So they've taken the time to read your work and they're giving you feedback in person live. Hmm. Um, but it was so useful and enriching and wonderful. And one of the things that happened in my feedback session was I got to see [00:16:00] this discussion between them about my tone.

[00:16:03] **Leah Rubinsky:** My voice in my, in my dissertation chapter draft, and it was very interesting. There was a lot of, there wasn't, yeah, there was a lot of back and forth of, because my tone in my dissertation, I struggle with that because I don't like the academic tone. To express the work that I'm trying to express because my work, my work is about Colombian mothering.

[00:16:27] **Leah Rubinsky:** My mother is Colombian. I want her to be able to read and understand yes, my dissertation. Yes. So I wanna write for her. You know, so, so I, I do that and I, and I recognize that I am transgressing some sort of, you know, boundary of what academic writing is supposed to be. But I, yeah. The question of audience for, for my dissertation, for me, the answer to that is clear.

[00:16:58] **Leah Rubinsky:** I want, I want to [00:17:00] write in a way that my mother, my committee members, and anybody else can understand what I'm trying to mm-hmm. To say. And, and again, there was, there was some, there was not consensus when I got feedback from my group about whether or not that was maybe the most effective way. Hmm. For that chapter to be written.

[00:17:22] **Leah Rubinsky:** And I take all that feedback and I think about it and I just kind of, I think about what I'm trying to do, the stakes in my project and my audience, and I just, I go with what I feel that I need to do. It's a great question though, Dan.

[00:17:36] **Dan Dissinger:** It's something that I think a lot of grad students and even the students I teach, um, the undergrads and the first year students I teach are always dealing with and, and even, you know, there's a very, uh, Classist aspect to that academic voice too, which I, coming from a very working class, the union family had still have a huge problem with like an an [00:18:00] and challenge with doing that.

[00:18:03] **Dan Dissinger:** Um, which is probably why I podcast more than I write at this point in my career. Um, because I can, you know, say the things that I need to say and I can be more upfront, um, with what I want to do. But with being a grad student, it is you're trying to satisfy so many people plus yourself. And like, cuz the dissertation is your project and you want it to be you and you want it to be for the audience, you want to read it.

[00:18:30] **Dan Dissinger:** And then there's so many people to satisfy. And at that point, then you have to just make that choice. But,

[00:18:37] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah, totally. You know what's interesting too about, you were saying that you work now more on podcasting. Um, podcasting is interesting in that you get to capture accents Yes. And phrases and things, and I think that's hugely important, maybe to a more authentic voice that you might lose in writing maybe.

[00:18:55] **Leah Rubinsky:** I don't know.

[00:18:56] **Dan Dissinger:** It's weird. Like, I feel like it depends. It's weird. There's [00:19:00] an amazing, um, one of my teachers from St. John's, uh, Dr. Carmen Kynard. Amazing writer, um, amazing teacher. She has an amazing book called Vernacular Insurrections. Um, uh, she also showed me for the first time, um, Vershawn Ashanti Young's article Should Writers Use Day Own English, which is an amazing article written, um, in black vernacular, which is argumentative, argumentatively like so on point, and at the same time, When I hand it to students, they have, they don't, they have such a strong reaction either.

[00:19:41] **Dan Dissinger:** Yes. I finally see myself in the academic space, or I don't understand this. I don't know if I can read this. And it's funny because it's like, You hear people speaking in kind of the, in within these linguistic spaces,

but when they [00:20:00] see it on paper it's very shocking because we only see one voice on paper a lot of times.

[00:20:05] **Dan Dissinger:** That's right. But we walk around and we hear multiple voices in the air. So I feel like it's interesting cuz your project, as you were saying too about mother um, mothering and motherhood and how. That you, when you understand like kind of when you're doing that work, it seems like there is a very specific way that you'd want to kind of voice that and yet the academic voice is very much like, it's such a small, like narrow keyhole to try to get through.

[00:20:37] **Dan Dissinger:** Uh, yeah,

[00:20:38] **Leah Rubinsky:** totally. And, and to be honest, I'm a proponent of, of changing that, you know, I. I mean, I don't know how my committee feels about me, but I, I propose a lot of things to them and I just kind of, I really am trying to fight my way to do a different kind of dissertation that fits the work [00:21:00] that I'm trying to do.

[00:21:00] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I, I am trying to incorporate a podcast element of, of my dissertation as well. So I wanna do chapters, but I also wanna do, um, I wanna do sort of, A podcasting segment because I can activate sort of the oral storytelling. I can activate. I've been doing some wonderful ethnographic work that I, you know, bringing the voices of mothers here that I'm talking to and working with.

[00:21:27] **Leah Rubinsky:** I wanna bring those voices to my dissertation and, and have, and make space for them. And so, so I'm a big proponent in. And pushing back against. Yeah. You know, I understand though that there's risk with that. Mm-hmm. And people are in different positions Absolutely. Positionalities. And so it's not like everyone they, you know, can do that.

[00:21:49] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah.

[00:21:50] **Dan Dissinger:** So what kind of things, like when it comes to those types of genre, like as a grad student, That you've learned that maybe you would pass on? Like you, you, I mean, the [00:22:00] fellowship stuff I'm taking with me, I mean, everything you said about that, I'm like, well, I, I'm gonna go there and learn that. But other way, like in other genres, other academic genres.

[00:22:10] **Dan Dissinger:** As a grad student, what have you learned about, um, that you could pass on? Possibly?

[00:22:16] **Leah Rubinsky:** That is a good question. Um, I think the things that I've learned about the fellowship, Proposal process and genre, you could apply those to the other ones in, in that, I think what I've learned is go out and get your hands on a lot of different kinds of whatever it is that you, you know, the genre that you're working with and go read.

[00:22:41] **Leah Rubinsky:** Hmm. See what they are, see what they do, and, and let that kind of help you. Um, But I think, I think one thing that's been helpful and it's, it's pivoting a little bit away from genres, if that's okay. Yeah. But it speaks a bit more to sort of writing the writing process. [00:23:00] Cause I think that is another area where I've struggled as a graduate student, I've really, really gotten so much support and so much out of writing groups.

[00:23:15] **Leah Rubinsky:** That was the other thing I was gonna kind of. Talk about a little bit, and in a writing group, it's a perfect place to ask questions about a genre that you're struggling with. For example, like, Hey, I have to write a diversity statement. Basically, I have to put all of my complicated and nuanced and important and heartfelt ideas about diversity into like what two, three paragraphs help, you know?

[00:23:38] **Leah Rubinsky:** Right. So you can go to your, um, writing group for that, but I think. One of the beauties of, of a writing group is it also, it pushes back, there's this, yeah. It pushes back against this idea that I think happens in graduate school as well, that you kind of, you work alone, you know, you work [00:24:00] independently, you do your thing.

[00:24:02] **Leah Rubinsky:** You don't share your, your research. I don't know if it's like you're scared that other people are gonna. I don't know. Yeah, take your I, whatever it might be. Take your ideas. I don't know, people can, you know, whatever. But a writing group is like, it's useful in so many different ways. It's useful for motivation, it's useful for accountability.

[00:24:22] **Leah Rubinsky:** When I had to, like, I was more scared to bring my 25 page draft to my peers than I was to my, to my thesis advisor because, I don't know. I just have, well, first of all that, that writing, it was a writing group basically. And you know, like Amanda really facilitated this. She was the professor who facilitated the course.

[00:24:48] **Leah Rubinsky:** She really facilitated a, a space that felt encouraging and, and we created a discourse community. So I was invested in that writing group. And also, [00:25:00] I, it's not that I, I don't even know how

to explain it really. I just so value my peers and their. Feedback, again, them taking the time out of all the things they have to do to give me feedback.

[00:25:12] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I, I brought my, a game to that draft and, and it was, it was intensely helpful. So there's something about peers for me that really helps me with motivation, accountability, bringing my best to my drafts. Let's see. I had another thought and it disappeared.

[00:25:33] **Dan Dissinger:** No, I, you know, oh yeah. Go, go ahead. No, go right ahead.

[00:25:36] **Leah Rubinsky:** Oh, no, no. I, this is what it was. Um, and the feedback that you get, I think, from your peers is really, really great. I don't know if you've had this experience, Stan or other people listening, or other graduate students, but I, I've had, I've had experiences where I, I bring writing samples. To, let's say a professor, and I've gotten really, [00:26:00] harsh is not the right word, but it's just like feedback that almost doesn't seem meant to help so much as to kind of tear you down in an academic hazing kind of way.

[00:26:14] **Leah Rubinsky:** And yeah, I find that so traumatizing. I mean, it's so like, I don't think any human being. Wakes up and is like, oh, yay, today's the day when I get to hand my draft into someone to kind of, it's very vulnerable is what I'm trying to say to, to give a draft to someone for feedback. Right. And so to have that happen without any kind of encouragement in terms of anything Right.

[00:26:39] **Leah Rubinsky:** You might be doing in, in the draft, I think is hugely traumatic and so not useful. Mm-hmm. In contrast to that, I've found that when I'm in feedback groups, When I'm in writing groups with my peers, there is encouragement, there's honest feedback, but it's from a place of care. Hmm. When you're invested in each [00:27:00] other, in, in the group.

[00:27:01] **Leah Rubinsky:** So, so I would say I, I love writing groups. Yeah. I would say look for those, that's.

[00:27:08] **Dan Dissinger:** As you're saying that I'm thinking of all my workshop experiences, uh, in my MFA at Naropa, uh, and my, the dissertation writing workshop that we had with, um, my professor, uh, Dr. Steven Mentz, who listens to this podcast. Thanks for listening.

[00:27:24] **Dan Dissinger:** St. Dr. Mentz and shout out to Dr. Mentz there, St. John's University, but, and also my cohort that was in that workshop, and I, I,

and I get what you're saying, like I was always. I was always nervous when they had to read a gir, a chapter draft, and I was just like, though, and this is not something to kind of go as like bragging, it's only like for context that, and the people that went to school with me knew I was very out, uh, far out ahead in the writing process when I went to that workshop because I was just like, I need [00:28:00] to finish and I need to get on a market.

[00:28:03] **Dan Dissinger:** I want to be done. And so, My thesis advisor, Dr. Ganter, amazing professor and thesis advisor and mentor now still, he was like, let's do this. And he was the best advisor because he would just, he would give feedback as quick as I was writing, so it was just like back and forth, back and forth. But when I went to the workshop and I was reading other people's work, it would make me like, oh my God, my work is just not.

[00:28:30] **Dan Dissinger:** I don't know what I'm doing. Like thi this is like so much more nuanced than what I'm doing. The one person in particular I remember, um, um, Melissa Rampelli, who's been on this podcast, shout out to Melissa Rampelli and congratulations for her promotion and she is. Her, her work is so, it was so deep. She was looking at medical archives and books and like from the 18 hundreds and I was like, am I not smart enough to do this?

[00:28:59] **Dan Dissinger:** But it, it [00:29:00] gets in your head sometimes cuz you're just like, this is my project, I'm doing this. And I feel like that was great to see that because it made me want to do more. And at the same time, I remember workshops as an MFA just being like painful at the end where people's feedback just didn't make sense anymore.

[00:29:22] **Dan Dissinger:** And it was just over feedback. It was over, it was too much. And, and one situation in particular, I was sitting next to my friend Travis Cebula, amazing poet. Um, and someone I just was so just like checked out. And they were like, what did, and the person giving feedback looked at me and literally said, Dan, what do you want out of this workshop?

[00:29:46] **Dan Dissinger:** And I was just like, and I was like, you know what? Nothing. And now, and he is just sitting there going like, oh God. And no one knew what to do. I was like, I don't know. I'm done. Uh, nothing anymore. I, I can't do this anymore. Because sometimes it's just like, [00:30:00] no one's given the feedback. You're right. Like it's not helping the piece be it's best version of itself.

[00:30:04] **Dan Dissinger:** It's what they want to see the piece to do, and it's just like, it's not always gonna do that. I've had professors do that in grad school

where they just wanted to like, They just didn't grade my project and I'm like, excuse me, like I put in work, like I want the feedback. And it just didn't fit their aesthetic.

[00:30:23] **Dan Dissinger:** And it's just like, well, your aesthetic is going, is not gonna, is gonna be, you know, not applicable soon. So, you know, and I, and I think like they really make grad students panic over like what the, what the, what it's like out there when it could be so much better.

[00:30:41] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah. And I, this is really great. It, it makes me think about something that's, I think, really essential about feedback, which is, and this is what I tell students, you know, in my writing classes as well, when I give feedback mm-hmm.

[00:30:56] **Leah Rubinsky:** It's feedback. Well, I, feedback should come from a place of care, [00:31:00] I think is the first thing. And the second thing is not all feedback applies. There might be things that. Student A in my class is, is trying to do that. I, I'm not quite seeing yet when I'm reading their work and giving feedback. And so I think it's really important.

[00:31:21] **Leah Rubinsky:** I think it's important to consider all the feedback that you're given. Mm-hmm. But then I think it's very useful and very real to sift through and say, this feedback applies. I'm gonna go ahead and integrate that this feedback. It doesn't apply cuz that's not exactly what I'm trying to do. Just like you were saying.

[00:31:38] **Leah Rubinsky:** So yeah,

[00:31:40] **Dan Dissinger:** I mean it really is kind of interestingly, uh, connected to your project, right? Like when you think of different types of motherhood and different types of mothering, like. My parent, my mother was very different than other people's mothers. And it could have been, it can be because of the cultural background.

[00:31:58] **Dan Dissinger:** I mean, she came from an [00:32:00] Italian family. So there's gonna be a lot of differences then, like my friend is Colombian. Uh, shout out to Tommy. Um, Tommy Gomez's amazing. A person out. They're and his mom's Colombian. Totally different experience and we. And everyone had different, you know, in on Long Island, everyone's, you know, it was pretty diverse, but like, and I also lived in Queens, so it was like much more diverse there.

[00:32:24] **Dan Dissinger:** Um, but you have different experiences in motherhood and mothering because you have different cultural experiences of what that is. So do you see that kind of like connection like and how that's happening? Yeah.

[00:32:38] **Leah Rubinsky:** I love that. I love that you pointed that out and I. I, I wanna write this. No, this is recorded.

[00:32:44] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I'll, I'll be able to listen back to this, but that's really useful and important and I hadn't really thought of that connection, so maybe something that I can work into. Um, I'm doing a pedagogy chapter Oh. On my dissertation, so, and I'll be sure to that idea to you. Oh, I love that connection. I, I do. [00:33:00] No, I think you're, there is no one kind of mothering, I mean, that is part of what I'm looking at, which is, We need to be moving towards thinking about, you know, more expansive ideas of what mothering is and not just, you know, the ideals upheld by religious narratives or, you know.

[00:33:18] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah. There's a total connection there. For sure, for sure. So what

[00:33:22] **Dan Dissinger:** are you finding, like you're doing archival research now and stuff like that. Like what is the. Well, what type of archival research are you doing and like what are some of the things that are like kind of coming to the surface as you're doing that?

[00:33:34] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yeah, so I, I arrived with one idea and then as I looked through sort of the archives that were available to me here, I kind of started getting pulled into another idea or section. So it ended up the, the archive. So I made , which is on the, on the Caribbean, um, coast, and. There is a wonderful library here that [00:34:00] I've been connected with and they have these really great sort of collections of Afro-Colombian poetry and, and I've just kind of been drawn into those.

[00:34:13] **Leah Rubinsky:** There's a lot of stuff on motherhood there. There's a lot of audio recordings of ethnographic interviews and, and digital recordings of stories and things like that. Storytelling. Oral narratives that I've been kind of thinking about. And for me, that was my computer. For me, I just feel like I've been so interested in this connection between race and so I'm looking a lot at Afro, Afro Colombian writing and voices and, and things and mothering and sort of the ways in which these kinds of ideas, uh, you know, it's.

[00:34:53] **Leah Rubinsky:** Slavery and, and the, the trauma of that on motherhood really does leak [00:35:00] into the present now, still in, in a lot of different ways. And a lot of the, the poets that I'm looking at and things, they, they look at that and they speak that. And, and so that's kind of the, there's been that, and then the ethnographic work is, I'm literally just sort of talking to.

[00:35:21] **Leah Rubinsky:** To people in the, you know, marketplaces, you know, sitting in the park and I, and just sort of getting these wonderful, you know, people, people, Colombians are so generous and so, you know, open-hearted and warm. That's been my experience. My family is from here. People open up, and I, I've just gotten a lot of really, really personal stories from tenacious.

[00:35:48] **Leah Rubinsky:** Single mothers and, um, you know, single parents and people who've had experiences with abortion and things like that. Just, just telling me these very [00:36:00] nuanced and rich perspectives on motherhood that, that I'm really interested in, in listening to. Yeah.

[00:36:08] **Dan Dissinger:** You know, speaking of like, you know, you're, as you're doing this research and you're there here in the United States, How many like Roe v.

[00:36:19] **Dan Dissinger:** Wade is? There's, I mean, we're in a moment right now where the, you know, women's, uh, autonomy over their body is under attack. I mean, it's been under attack, but now it's even, there's a real cultural shot being taken. And so as you've been, is, is that in the back, has that been in the background of what you've been doing and like what kind of impact has that had possibly on?

[00:36:46] **Dan Dissinger:** Maybe urgency in your work? Possibly

[00:36:48] **Leah Rubinsky:** a lot. Oh my gosh, yes. I mean, it's interesting. So remember, Colombia is a country that just recently passed legislation allowing access [00:37:00] to abortion this year. So, and it's a majority Catholic country. So I, that is in the back of my mind as I'm interviewing people on their experiences.

[00:37:12] **Leah Rubinsky:** And then when I get questions back about what's going on in the us I don't really know how to respond because it does, it feels like, it feels like I'm so proud of the work that, that people have done here in, in Columbia to ensure that access. And it feels like Colombia's going this way and the United States is just going a a completely different way.

[00:37:36] **Leah Rubinsky:** It it is absolutely in the back of my mind and it's, it is super urgent because, The stories that I'm collecting and gathering, they're sp, they're contextually specific to Columbia, don't get me wrong, but there are some threads that overlap with, with maybe some stories in the United States. Things like I'm hearing things [00:38:00] like I wish I had had access to abortion at that time because if I did, my life would've been different.

[00:38:07] **Leah Rubinsky:** I wasn't ready to have a child at that time. I wasn't, I wasn't given the education, the, the family planning sexual health education. Mm. And I wish I had been given that because my life is this way now. And, you know, I'm a single parent. Life is very different. Economically things are very hard. And, and this one person was telling me just the other day, I don't have the relationship with my child that I would have liked to have where I have time to spend with with them.

[00:38:39] **Leah Rubinsky:** Because I have to work a couple of jobs to make ends meet because I didn't have the basic access, you know, to bodily rights that everybody should have. Yeah. So it's, it's very urgent. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:38:53] **Dan Dissinger:** And it's, and I mean, just the thought of that, of these, of this [00:39:00] happening here and how much that you're saying this and it's, something's sticking out to me so much is that, It's the, it's on the mother's, it's on the mother to, to support this child and the, I don't even wanna say father, but like the, the man who is part of this is not there.

[00:39:26] **Dan Dissinger:** So there is no, there's no support system and, and so like, When people argue about being pro-life or pro this unborn, you know, child or whatever, it's, they're not thinking past. The idea of, you know, well there's this child and stuff. I was like, well what about their, how they're going to grow up? How about It's like there's a lot of things to go that go into that, and yes, it's painful to kind of think about, but also it's not on you like it's gonna be on this person unless there are other services [00:40:00] that you're gonna set up to ensure anything else, then you can't take something without replacing it with a support system.

[00:40:09] **Dan Dissinger:** And we know there's not gonna be civil support system. We know that. Like, I mean it That's correct.

[00:40:16] **Leah Rubinsky:** That's, that's right. Mm-hmm.

[00:40:18] **Dan Dissinger:** That's how it's, yeah. Um, it, it just like, it's interesting too, I'm thinking how when you're a grad student and you're doing

this work, you're, you think of academia as this thing that's in such, in this container.

[00:40:34] **Dan Dissinger:** But I do feel like there's been a turn. Even more recently as like I'm talking to you about your project and other grad students and even undergrad students that are going into grad, graduate, graduate school. How much their work is so much more connected now to like the actual outside world. I. Do you feel like there is this like, shift in graduate students where it's just like, I want my work to matter much more than [00:41:00] just in this dissertation space.

[00:41:02] **Dan Dissinger:** Like it, I want it impactfully gonna touch a lot more spaces.

[00:41:07] **Leah Rubinsky:** Yes, absolutely. I mean, among my peers, I can say it a hundred percent. It's, it does matter. I mean, the, the stakes of what we're trying to do is it drives everything. It's, you know, it. Graduate school, I would say is, is not, oh man, I don't wanna, I don't wanna say that about graduate school.

[00:41:27] **Leah Rubinsky:** Graduate school. I'm not bitter. Um, it's just, it's very, it's a long haul and it's very, yes, very tough. And so it, I think one of the things that can keep you there with it is, is to make sure that you are always coming back to the stakes of your project, you know, and why it matters and, and so, Yeah. I, I, there's, that's, that's one of the most beautiful things about, I think going to graduate school and doing the work that you want to do there is, is connecting it back to something that really is important [00:42:00] to you and that matters to you.

[00:42:01] **Leah Rubinsky:** Hmm. I think that's huge.

[00:42:03] **Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Wow. Well, Lea, we're, we're like, kind of winding down and I just wanted to ask you like the. So what are you excited about coming up for you as like as graduate, as you're coming through as a candidate, you are, um, your project is building. What types of things are you excited about as like you're coming towards this, I guess end like towards this end, I guess, of your project or getting closer as you're doing this work?

[00:42:31] **Leah Rubinsky:** Totally. I am so excited about. The eventual light at the end of the tunnel. I'm defending. I want, just like you were saying with your experience, I need to be done. I need to finish this thing and move on. So I'm super excited about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I was

mentioning a fellowship earlier and I'm really excited about, yeah, about this [00:43:00] particular fellowship because it's gonna give me the opportunity.

[00:43:02] **Leah Rubinsky:** To be in a writing group. You know, I love writing groups. I already talked about that. But a writing group of, of some faculty and grad students where I can, again, get some valuable feedback, you know, do what I need to do, finish the chapters, and, and continue on to the next thing. I'm excited about that I'm excited about.

[00:43:22] **Leah Rubinsky:** I've been really excited about alt Act jobs, so that's kind of where I'm trying to kind of position myself. So, yeah, so there's that and. I'm, I'm, yeah, I'm really excited. The la I'm really excited. Actually, can I sha mostly plug my podcast? Yeah,

[00:43:38] **Dan Dissinger:** go ahead. Related. Okay. Absolutely. We're gonna put the link to your podcast in, in, in the show notes.

[00:43:43] **Dan Dissinger:** Absolutely. Awesome. There's no sh no shame. Plug away, plug away

[00:43:49] **Leah Rubinsky:** and, and it's related. So I, I am super excited. So this I, I do a podcast. It's very homemade, but it's called Grad Share. You can find it on [00:44:00] Spotify or Apple, and then the link in the show notes here. But it's a podcast where I interview folks and we talk about some of the challenges of being in graduate school and ways to maybe handle or, or overcome them, and specifically some of the challenges that don't get talked about a whole lot.

[00:44:15] **Leah Rubinsky:** So I'm about to do an episode on graduate school and mental health. Which I'm super excited about. Yeah. So I'm excited about that. We've talked about alt act jobs, if you're interested in that. Um, and just a lot of cool interviews with people. Speaking of which you should, if you were ever interested, Dan, you should totally be a guest

[00:44:34] **Dan Dissinger:** on the show.

[00:44:34] **Dan Dissinger:** Oh, I would love to, of course. Hope. I would love to. Yes. Absolutely.

[00:44:39] **Leah Rubinsky:** A lot of exciting things. And I just, since we're coming to the end, I just wanted to add in this Yeah. Thing right here, which is,

I, I really, yeah. If, if there are graduate students listening who are struggling in writing, I was one. I, I still struggle in writing.

[00:44:54] **Leah Rubinsky:** I just wanna put this out there that if you need to hear this, your writing project [00:45:00] is valuable and your work is needed. So go seek out peers and people who support you, who share materials with you, who collaborate with you and lift you up, who give you feedback from a place of care. And if you don't have those kinds of people reach out or reach out to me.

[00:45:16] **Leah Rubinsky:** I mean, You can, you know, email me leia ruby 33 gmail.com. So Leia, l e a h r u b y 3 33 gmail.com. Or on Twitter, you can find me, Leah Ruby 3 33. Um, reach out and I'm, I'm happy to help support, answer questions, all kinds of things. But you've got this, you've got this.

[00:45:38] **Dan Dissinger:** Excellent. Wow. Thank you so much, Leah.

[00:45:41] **Dan Dissinger:** This has been so great. Really, um, I know there are gonna be so many people listening to this that are gonna be so grateful for everything that you've said. Um, for these, you know, Pointers about how to like, get through some of these, you know, hard writing challenges, but [00:46:00] also just acknowledging how like the amazing work that you're doing as a grad student.

[00:46:06] **Dan Dissinger:** Um, I think sometimes even the idea of like, like the title grad student kind of takes away the, sometimes the, yes, the unbelievable work that people are doing. And I think that you're doing some excellent, amazing work. I am. Um, just, it's humbling to hear how much amazing work that everyone out there is doing and you in particular.

[00:46:29] **Dan Dissinger:** So thank you so much for coming on and sharing with us. I'm forever learning so much from this podcast and you just added so much value to it. So everyone please. Put your comments, um, uh, to the podcast, you know, your questions and comments below. You could tweet, uh, your, you know, comments as well when this episode drops at writing Remix Pod.

[00:46:52] **Dan Dissinger:** We're on Instagram now at writing Remix Pod as well, so I don't know what I'm gonna do there. Trying to still figure it out, but [00:47:00] it's there. So, follow and, um, And yeah, and if you have questions, Fale, definitely reach out to her. Um, we'll put all those links in the, you'll see

all the links in the website so you can contact and just support some of the stuff that she's doing.

[00:47:13] **Dan Dissinger:** And also if you just wanna send her some encouragement, why not? I mean, she's doing some great work. Solea, thank you so much for being here. No, this has

[00:47:21] **Leah Rubinsky:** been fun. Thank you so much, Dan.

[00:47:23] **Dan Dissinger:** And everybody will see you on the next episode.