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Solidaristic Listening

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Abstract

Storytelling in solidaristic communities can foster agency and challenge oppression. However, power imbalances among community members can undermine that potential by contributing to the production of loneliness, where a person loses their sense of self and their sense of belonging within the solidaristic community. To prevent loneliness and to protect the liberatory potential of storytelling, we consider how what we call solidaristic listening might be supported. We first consider, but ultimately reject, empathy as a central feature of solidaristic listening. Despite its popularity in feminist philosophy, empathy is often unable to maintain the relational distance needed between conversation partners to appreciate their differences. Instead, we suggest an ongoing embodied, relational approach to foster solidaristic listening. We draw on three philosophical ideas to motivate our account: visiting the perspectives of others (Arendt 1992), visiting as a reciprocal exchange that requires multiple trips (Simpson 2017), and solidarity as traveling together (Medina 2013).

Introduction

Storytelling has the potential to reveal injustices, spark collective political action, and build solidarity. Still, the political potential of storytelling partly depends on listening, and power dynamics between people can impede understanding. Storytelling can only support the agency of individuals and marginalized groups when stories are actually *heard*, and listening to someone's stories, even in the spirit of solidarity, is a skill that requires practice and reflection. We will refer to this skill as *solidaristic listening*.

Consider the following example, which might be read as a failure to genuinely listen to someone's story: Tracy Llanera's (2019) account of being a brown woman in philosophy. She recounts how she entered a philosophy doctoral program at an Australian university, self-assured in her abilities as a philosopher based on her experience of teaching and studying in her home country of the Philippines. Yet racial microaggressions challenged her confidence. After an undergraduate student commended her English-language skills (in the student's words, "for a person like you"), Llanera reflects:

> Whenever I share these experiences, peers and authority figures respond with
> understanding and empathy, given the well-documented concerns of female

university instructors. However, it is hard not to notice that comments peculiar to my ethnic identity are the ones that people either ignore or dismiss. When I narrated this story to another doctoral student, she said, "Why are you annoyed? Your English is good. It's a compliment." Never mind the part where the student felt entitled to judge my ability to speak her language, or that what she did was irrelevant to the unit content, or that her comment exposed a vulnerability publicly and unabashedly! (378)

In our discussion, we will argue that microaggressions like the ones Llanera reflects on can render a person lonely, by which we mean that a person loses their sense of self and their sense of belonging within a solidaristic community.

The first part of our discussion examines how storytelling can challenge oppressive forces and promote solidarity within communities, but also how power dynamics can undermine the political potential of storytelling by producing loneliness, which is a risk when storytellers are misunderstood or ignored. To motivate the significance of solidarity and the dangers of loneliness, we engage extensively with an exchange between the poets and friends Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich (Lorde 1984; Nguyen 2024), and expand on the aforementioned reflection from Llanera (2019).[1]

To mitigate against loneliness and strengthen solidaristic bonds, in the second part of the paper we offer an account of solidaristic listening. Given its intuitive appeal and prominence in feminist philosophy, we consider empathy as a possible mechanism for enhancing listening skills. However, because someone can be empathetic without attending to power dynamics, we look for an alternative approach.

Our account of solidaristic listening begins with a discussion of three important features of solidaristic listening and the theorists from whom we draw inspiration. First, Hannah Arendt's conception of "visiting" the perspectives of others helps establish the need for a listener to expand the horizons of their understanding, while also reflecting on ways in which their position differs from the storyteller's. Second, we turn to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's telling of the story of Nanabush's journey around the world to illustrate the active and relational nature of listening. Third, we take up José Medina's metaphor of solidarity as having a "traveling partner" to capture the temporal dimension of solidaristic listening. We conclude by arguing that solidaristic listening can be facilitated when the listener acknowledges the power relations between them, and they are willing to mitigate the concerns that arise out of those power relations. Solidaristic listening is not just a matter of individual virtue or enhancing our individual relations with others; it is intended to help solidaristic communities realize their liberatory potential.

Storytelling in solidaristic communities

In this section, we outline the benefits of storytelling for nurturing individual agency and solidarity. Following Jodi Dean (1996), we define a solidaristic community as one that aims to advance justice. Being in solidarity is a willingness to act when called upon to end oppression (Gould 2008; Bourgault 2016). On Dean's account, members of a solidaristic community have a sense of belonging that is rooted in an affective commitment or a shared commitment to a common goal, such as resisting oppression. These two commitments are not mutually exclusive; nor do they indicate that solidaristic communities are homogeneous. Further, a sense of connection or political goals may bring together members of a community, but the community becomes a solidaristic one when its members work together to advance justice.

Feminist theories of narrativity have demonstrated that challenging and reframing oppressive narratives through storytelling is in itself an important act of solidarity (Benhabib 1999; Lindemann 2001; Lucas 2018). When individuals who have been marginalized or oppressed come together to share their experiences, the audience, in choosing to listen, recognizes the agency of these storytellers, affirming that their voices should be and are heard. For our purposes, a solidaristic community is a kind of political community that creates a space of appearance for collective resistance to oppression. Storytelling can help transform what Hilde Lindemann (2001) calls "master narratives," archetypal stories that reflect dominant cultural understandings, into narratives of resistance, or what she calls "counter-stories," that identify and draw awareness to the harms experienced by individuals because of these master narratives. As Lindemann tells us, many master narratives may be oppressive, and a person might internalize master narratives that undermine their agency. Furthermore, oppressive master narratives might be reinforced by others who have also internalized them. It is even possible for a person to feel a sense of autonomous agency even though oppressive norms structure the way they understand themselves and their place in the world. This is another reason why storytelling in solidaristic communities can be so liberating: done well, it can support a person's capacity for autonomous agency because it creates opportunities for others to recognize and respect the stories that are a part of her world (Benhabib 1999). Consider Vincent Jungkunz and Julie White's (2013) description of counter-stories that are told in the context of racism:

> stories of self-expression and self-definition, but they may also be stories of repair and resolution. The teller of a counter-story uses the story to elicit *recognition* from the community … To do this, her story becomes, as it were, a pair of spectacles that she extends to the inhabitants of the normal moral context who can't see her without them. (447; emphasis, ours)

This is not to say others are needed to serve as mere epistemic correctives or resources; the point is not to collect stories. The point is to advance justice by learning about the world with others who share our interest in advancing justice and/or who experience the world differently (Pohlhaus 2020).

Because narratives are relational and dynamic, storytelling and listening to others' stories also foster the ability to be creative and respond to restrictive norms that might have been accepted without question otherwise. Adriana Cavarero (2000) likens this process to that of writing an (auto)biography with a friend. For Cavarero, identities are neither fixed nor stable. Rather, identities are constantly in flux, "intermittent and fragmentary," described from different perspectives with words other than ones we ourselves might use (2000, 63). Our friends' charitable perceptions of us are therefore paramount. Without their generosity (even if critical), our autobiographies can lack coherence. If our friend acts as an accomplice, articulating our biographies back to us, stories about ourselves can be enriched by a plurality of perspectives that we, on our own, may never access.[2] Although Cavarero focuses on friends, her point generalizes to other relationships. In a solidaristic community, where members are focused on advancing justice, community members must be willing to collaborate with others to negotiate a shared world view that takes seriously and incorporates fully the experiences of diverse members.

This brings us to where we started: the importance of solidaristic communities committed to justice and anti-oppression. Resistance can begin with stories that reveal how

individuals and collectives have been affected by oppression. Listening to these counter-stories, Jungkunz (2011, 18) tells us, "may help create and/or perpetuate space for the constitution of other lives, lives for ourselves, and others." Solidaristic communities can therefore tell counter-stories that resist and reframe oppressive master narratives in a way that supports liberation and political action.

Power dynamics

We can glean from the previous discussion how solidaristic communities might be undermined by unsupportive or domineering exchanges. Even if there are feelings related to care and concern, or a common goal, that bind a solidaristic community, solidarity is not guaranteed (Lugones 1987). Familiarity with other members or the community's expectations is not enough. Solidarity may be undermined if power dynamics within the community are ignored.

We will illustrate the threat that unacknowledged power dynamics might entail for solidarity by considering an exchange between Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, drawing from Kim Hong Nguyen's (2024) analysis of how whiteness exerts itself in Rich's engagement with Lorde and results in Rich both misunderstanding Lorde and silencing her. The exchange is an interview, published in Lorde's seminal collection *Sister Outsider*. Although Rich seems to be in the host seat and Lorde in the seat of the featured guest, the poets were close friends. Their relationship is one that we would describe as solidaristic; they struggled together and loved each other, their thinking with and against each other proved generative to both. Thus, their friendship serves as a model for how we imagine storytelling might work productively and how it might fail within larger communities.

In the interview, Lorde tells Rich that, in her journals, she sometimes uses their friendship as a way to imagine conversations that might happen between Black and white women. These imaginings are informed by their friendship and past conversations. One impactful telephone conversation, which for Lorde highlights racial differences between Black and white women in time, revolved around assumptions about what constitutes knowledge. Lorde (1984/2007) states:

> I've never forgotten the impatience in your voice that time on the telephone, when you said, "It's not enough to say to me that you intuit it." Do you remember? I will never forget that. Even at the same time that I understood what you meant, I felt a total wipeout of my modus, my way of perceiving and formulating. (103–04)

What Rich had asked was for Lorde to provide evidence of her feelings. In her response, she emphasizes that her request for evidence is motivated by solidarity and a desire to better understand Lorde, to not make assumptions about her experiences. Rich states, "So if I ask for documentation, it's because I take seriously the spaces between us that difference has created, that racism has created" (104). Rich's request for Lorde to move beyond intuition may appear simple and unproblematic to many feminist philosophers who are often socialized to provide detailed citations and precisely outlined arguments. But for Lorde, it fundamentally challenged her status as a knower and as an interlocutor.

Although Rich insists that her probing was not intended as a dismissal, but rather as an invitation for further engagement, Nguyen's (2024) analysis leaves us questioning to what extent Rich fully acknowledges the power dynamics operating between herself and

Lorde as interlocutors. As Nguyen explains, what Rich did, even through her reply to Lorde's recounting of the conversation, was treat Lorde's knowledge claim as insufficient, to judge her "interior knowledge as insufficient evidence" against the backdrop of the "central tenets of the Western enlightenment project," which hold "documentation and articulation as superior knowledge" (n.p.). Rich does not, here, fully acknowledge how racism continues to structure her position in relation to her friend.

As we mentioned in the previous section, members of a solidaristic community are not homogeneous nor necessarily socially situated in similar ways, which means that some members will enjoy social recognition and influence that others may not. Alisa Bierria (2014) refers to individuals who enjoy these privileges as "shareholders of institutions that bestow meaning" (133). According to Bierria, these more socially powerful members of solidaristic communities may be institutional shareholders in the broader social context, thus they come to the solidaristic community with more social influence (even if this influence is unwanted or unrecognized).[3] When these power dynamics remain obscured or are ignored, the solidaristic potential of storytelling is undermined. Shareholders of institutions that bestow meaning, that enjoy social power and the support of the social imaginary, are members of dominant social groups that rarely have to worry about being understood. Their stories fit with what is socially sanctioned and so they can move through institutional contexts with ease and familiarity (Lugones 1987). On the other hand, if a person's narrative conflicts with master narratives about that person, then institutional shareholders are likely to not recognize that person's narrative as an instance of agency. This may invite paternalism at best and exclusion at worst.

Moreover, such shareholders may fail to attend to the ways in which agency is typically recognized only when actions mirror what is socially sanctioned, meaning that they may not even recognize that their misrecognition contributes to silencing and erasing the identities of community members with less social power. This is what we see as a problem for solidaristic communities more broadly. Power imbalances exist in solidaristic communities, and when they go unrecognized in favor of highlighting sameness among community members, they can undermine solidarity and silence marginalized voices. In the previous example, Rich is a shareholder in Whiteness, an institution which bestows particular meanings with respect to knowledge. The "central tenets of the Western enlightenment project," to use Nguyen's phrasing, serve Rich far better than they serve Lorde. Nguyen highlights how, in attempting to draw points of similarity between herself and Lorde without attending to race, Rich misunderstands and silences Lorde.[4] Nguyen further argues that Rich's ignorance is not a one-off mistake. She urges readers to re-examine Rich's other engagements with Lorde, such as the way she draws on Lorde's theorizing of lesbian joy in her work on compulsory heterosexuality in ways that reduce and generalize lesbian experience. This is, in Nguyen's vocabulary, a "performative citation" that reinforces Rich's argument about lesbian solidarity rather than thinking through the complexities of difference in lesbian experiences. Thus the threat to solidarity does not only obtain for Lorde and Rich's friendship, but also for feminist communities that engage with their work.

Misrecognition is connected to Robin May Schott's (2013, 218) notion of the "transformative demand." According to Schott, a storyteller places a transformative demand on her listeners because the storyteller's narrative can reveal power imbalances between the listener(s) and the storyteller. Schott argues that a supportive listener must attend to power imbalances that exist between themselves and the storyteller, that is, they must consider whether institutions and collective imaginaries lend support for the storyteller and her story. In the case that it does, the listener may take a narrative at face value

because it is likely that the listener will interpret the narrative as the storyteller intended. However, someone who is an institutional shareholder can unwittingly erase divergent narratives, even those authored by people with whom they stand in solidarity, simply because the institutional archives they rely on for their own narratives, which may be informed by racism, ableism, heteronormativity, and settler-colonialism, do not offer the same support for others. The result is that differences among members are assimilated under a common identity or goal, which erodes solidarity. What Lorde (1984, 47–48) calls "horizontal hostility" may arise too, meaning that misrecognition of members by other members of the community may occur in pursuit of justice, in trying to resist or challenge the very oppressive norms that affect their community (Fowlkes 1997). Thus by propagating the myth that power is shared equitably amongst community members, power dynamics may obscure loneliness as a threat to a person's agency (which we discuss below) and to community solidarity.

Loneliness

Because members of a solidaristic community may share a bond or goal, it can be easy to assume that everyone is equally situated within the community. However, relationships between conversation partners can be fragile and "almost always take place on unequal ground" (Lucas 2018, 136). This unequal ground often results when members of a solidaristic community are differently situated as shareholders in institutions that bestow social meaning. In this section, we consider how failing to attend to power dynamics between members of a solidaristic community can lead to what Sarah Drews Lucas (2019, 710) describes as the problem of loneliness, or "non-appearance before others." Loneliness is important to attend to because it can undermine the liberatory potential of storytelling.

 Lucas's account of loneliness expands on Hannah Arendt's conceptions of appearance and of loneliness under totalitarian regimes. Loneliness reveals the dangers of non-appearance, which Lucas identifies as an extreme lack of agency that exists along a continuum with full political agency at the other end. For Lucas, narrative exchanges require a person to first recognize herself as a unique agent, or a unique "I," who appears before and acts with others (she refers to this as ontological agency, a precursor to political agency). Loneliness results when someone cannot narratively locate themselves as a unique "I" in relation to others. This amounts to a loss of identity and also a loss of community, as a person becomes disconnected from the world. As Lucas (2019) notes, "Without the feeling that one is listened to and recognised, one is less capable of even attempting to express one's thoughts, feelings, opinions, and judgments" (715). This is not just the loss of a capacity, for Lucas, but also the loss of a mode of confidence, in oneself, the community, and the world. As Arendt describes in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1966, 477, our emphasis):

> What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the *trusting and trustworthy company of my equals*. In this situation, man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts and that *elementary confidence* in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all.

Arendt was particularly concerned with loneliness under totalitarian regimes and for refugees. Lucas expands this concern, suggesting that loneliness may be symptomatic

of many modern conditions, such as illness, homelessness, trauma, or social marginalization. The threat of loneliness is "ever-present," according to Lucas, even for privileged people who move through the world easily without encountering oppressive barriers (2019, 715).

We suggest that loneliness can result from a persistent lack of recognition within solidaristic communities. Loneliness indicates a lack of a "trusting and trustworthy community" whose members recognize and affirm the agency of a storyteller (Arendt 1966, 477). Loneliness, that is, the erosion of political agency, thus occurs because others refuse to acknowledge or unwittingly damage the "elementary confidence" that appearance requires: self-trust, self-esteem, and self-respect. Although cultivation of these types of self-understanding is contextual, Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth (2005) argue that these modes of self-understanding are

> neither purely beliefs about oneself nor emotional states, but are emergent properties of a dynamic process in which individuals come to experience themselves as having a certain status, be it as an object of concern, a responsible agent, a valued contributor to shared projects, or what have you. One's relationship to oneself, then, is not a matter of a solitary ego reflecting on itself, but is the result of an ongoing intersubjective process, in which one's attitude toward oneself emerges in one's encounter with an other's attitude toward oneself. (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 131)

Self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem are all facilitated by our interpersonal relationships. Self-trust is facilitated by our intimate relationships; if we have family and friends that love us and support us, we learn to trust our particular subjectivity. Self-respect is similar. We learn to respect ourselves as someone who has the authority to enact their own life projects. Self-esteem is facilitated by networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of community members can be acknowledged. When all three modes of self-understanding are present, solidarity can be developed since others recognize and support one's agency.

Return to Llanera's reflection, cited in our introduction, about her colleague who failed to recognize Llanera's interaction with a student about her English-speaking skills as a microaggression. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that Llanera's colleague is a feminist philosopher who actively works to promote minoritized voices in the discipline. Even with these commitments, a similar sort of exchange might occur, where, because the colleague fails to recognize the microaggression, she feels as if she is uplifting Llanera by complimenting her English-language skills. About her experience being dismissed by a colleague, Llanera states, "These conversation-stopping behaviors—unreflective, matter-of-fact, and seemingly harmless—perpetuate a culture of exclusion in the space where philosophers with intersectional identities teach and work" (378). Such experiences, especially when they are consistent and repeated over time, may convince someone that they do not belong in philosophy, undermining their identity as a philosopher. They might change their area of specialization to something they consider more "friendly" to racialized philosophers rather than pursue their interests, which undermines their autonomy.

Lucas, again following Arendt, does not think loneliness utterly destroys the capacity for agency, nor the potential for solidarity. However, loneliness as non-appearance encourages us to attend to power dynamics within solidaristic communities, which have the potential to prevent or contribute to loneliness. Consider Lorde and Rich's

exchange again. If Rich consistently misinterprets Lorde, or if Rich continues to insist that Lorde align her methodologies with Rich's, or if Lorde feels that she can't correct Rich's understanding of her, it is not difficult to imagine Lorde wanting to end her relationship with Rich—it may even be in Lorde's best interest!

Similarly, it does not seem as if Llanera's agency was threatened to the extent of undermining her identity. Indeed, Llanera cites mentoring networks (i.e., one kind of solidaristic community) as a crucial support for being included within philosophy. But such interactions *can* produce loneliness. Someone who fails to be heard repeatedly, who experiences persistent narrative failures, may lose the ability to locate herself as a unique (and valued) "I" in a particular domain. If Llanera's mentoring relationship had not been supportive, the accumulative failures of listening Llanera experienced in philosophy may have undermined her ability to see herself as a philosopher with a unique and valuable perspective "I" within the discipline. On their own, failures of listening may appear insignificant. However, accumulated failures may erode a person's trust in the community. (Sometimes, it may be healthier for a person to leave a particular community if their stories are persistently not understood and respected.) They may no longer be able to make sense of the world; they may defer to others and lose trust in their own perspective. They may stop sharing their stories.

The experience of loneliness that most concerns us may not be global; it may obtain only within the solidaristic community as opposed to all dimensions of a person's life. Yet loneliness undermines bonds of solidarity, which, in turn, hinders the ability of solidaristic communities to resist oppression and achieve justice.

Empathetic recognition

So far, we have detailed the potential of storytelling to promote solidarity, and the potential for loneliness to disrupt the potential for solidaristic communities to challenge oppression. In this section, we consider empathy as a safeguard for the liberatory potential of storytelling for individual agency and solidaristic communities. Many feminists suggest that empathy is a valuable tool for solidarity and narrative recognition (e.g., Lindemann 2001; Zack 2005; Calcagno 2007; Harvey 2007; Gould 2008; Plantikow 2008; Lindemann 2014). Empathy can be taken as a symptom of successful exchanges (Lindemann 2014). It can also be a way to recognize and respond to differences between ourselves and others. When we are empathetic, we understand people from the inside; we know why they do what they do because we know how they think and how they see themselves (Matravers 2017).

According to Carol Gould (2008), solidarity is based in empathy. To act in solidarity necessarily requires attention to difference, as a person must understand what the other needs and how they can respond. She states that solidarity is grounded in "what we might call 'social empathy,' where there is an attempt to understand the particular situation of oppression of the individuals or group in question along with a shared commitment to achieving justice" (95). Further, she argues that solidarity goes beyond the abstract acceptance of the equality of all persons (that is, a measure of sameness between all persons): "empathetic or solidaristic recognition—includes a more feelingful (as well as cognitive) understanding of the distinctiveness of others in their concrete circumstances and the difficulties they face, along with an acknowledgement and appreciation of their agency in that context" (99). This is the kind of recognition that facilitates solidaristic listening.

Unlike Gould, we are ambivalent about whether empathy is strong enough to promote the kind of recognition of difference needed to sustain solidaristic communities. Recall that Llanera points out how people responded with empathy to her stories of racial microaggressions, yet empathy did not lead to solidarity.[5] Part of our ambivalence stems from a difficulty in pinning down what empathy is, given the plethora of meanings it has in philosophy and in science (Steuber 2019). More significantly, it seems to be an unreliable strategy for appreciating difference. What is attractive about a conception of empathy for many social justice projects is the affirmation of an affective component to understanding (Bartky 2002). Many philosophers are careful to define empathy in such a way that it includes a recognition of difference (e.g., Calcagno 2007; Gould 2008). Yet people who are shareholders of institutions that bestow social meaning often do not recognize their status when engaging their empathetic imaginations because empathy is insufficient for supplementing imaginaries that are informed by the master narratives (Spelman 1988; Harvey 2007; Bierria 2014). Empathy, in such circumstances, can also become a substitute for an identity-based connection, since the empathizer is likely only able to feel empathy for those with whom they share a dimension of their identity (Bailey 2009; Scholz 2010).

Part of what makes failures of listening worrisome is that they are unintentional. A listener may have a desire to act in solidarity, may accept the seriousness of loneliness, and may try to understand another's narrative. But, in the process, they may unknowingly collapse relational distance between conversation partners and, instead of learning about the other's perspective, project their own ideas of the other into the other's stories. (Rich's misunderstanding of Lorde in the aforementioned example strikes us as unintentional and projective). Mariana Ortega's (2000) conception of loving, knowing ignorance captures our dissatisfaction with empathy. Drawing on Marilyn Frye's conceptions of arrogant and loving perception, Ortega diagnoses ways in which white feminists produce ignorance about racialized women, even though such ignorance contradicts white feminists' expressed intentions to build inclusive feminist politics:

> Loving, knowing ignorance is arrogant perception that involves self-deception and the quest for more knowledge about the object of perception—the perceiver believes himself or herself to be perceiving lovingly even though this is not the case, and the perceiver wishes to make knowledge claims about the object of perception, even though such claims are not checked or questioned. (Ortega 2006, 63)

To rephrase Ortega's point, when solidarity amounts to loving, knowing ignorance, the community is not solidaristic for all its members and may fail to achieve justice for some of its members.

We think empathy often works as a mode of loving, knowing ignorance. A listener believes themselves to be listening with empathy and in solidarity with the storyteller. They might care about the storyteller and actively want to promote positive solidaristic relations. Further, the listener may have quite a bit of knowledge and competency around the issues being discussed. Nevertheless, a failure to recognize the ways in which members within the solidaristic community are not equally powerful can produce and perpetuate forms of ignorance. Rather than recognizing someone's agency and world view, the listener may take on what they think are the perspectives of others, neither getting to know that other perspective nor escaping their own. A listener may feel as if they are experiencing a new perspective but, in fact, still be rooted in their own imagination.

The way out of this voyeuristic trap is through *solidaristic listening*. Each member of a solidaristic community is co-responsible for maintaining solidaristic communities as spaces of appearance, and each has a part in making rhetorical space for fellow members (Arendt 1958). In his discussions of critical race theory and racism in North America, Jungkunz (2011) highlights that racism is often taught as a disadvantage conferring system, which makes it difficult to detect white privilege. Being on the lookout for disadvantages and barriers effectively keeps white privilege transparent or invisible, as a topic only tangentially related to the study of racism. Jungkunz's solution is to look at racism also as an advantage conferring system so that white privilege becomes visible, as an undeniable topic of study. Extending this line of thinking, we posit that storytelling in solidaristic communities also needs to incorporate what has been neglected in the past: listening. The liberatory potential of storytelling demands storytellers to also be listeners.

As we mentioned earlier, some community members will benefit from being shareholders of institutions that bestow meaning, which has resulted in unequal "air time" for community members. Those whose actions and behaviors are socially sanctioned, whose agency has been historically recognized as such, are more likely to have been storytellers in the past. They may have unintentionally, even despite good intentions otherwise, taken away other members' opportunities to share their stories or contributed to an inaccurate interpretation of them. Thus, solidaristic listening starts with an acquiescence of speech so as "to intentionally yield discursive space so that the life stories, experiences, and conceptions of the good can emerge from those we may hardly know. It is a position that recognizes one's own epistemological limitations," which fosters transformative understanding of others (Jungkunz 2013, 17; see also Schott 2013).

Visiting and traveling together

In this section, we begin to outline the active nature of solidaristic listening. We find three discussions to be helpful in establishing the foundation for solidaristic listening: Hannah Arendt's conception of visiting, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's story of Nanabush as the first researcher who exchanges stories with others in their world travels, and José Medina's metaphor of solidarity as traveling together.

We begin with Arendt's account of visiting because it explicitly rejects empathy as a foundation, and as we have argued, empathy is an unstable foundation for solidaristic listening. Arendt (1992, 43) describes empathy as a process "through which one can know what actually goes on in the mind of all others." This is an impossible task and problematic, according to Arendt, because attempting to know a person's actual experiences encourages a listener to ignore the ways in which the other's standpoint differs from their own. As Lisa Disch (1994) notes, empathetic listening for Arendt is a mode of assimilation, where the listener may unknowingly appropriate the perspective of the other.

Although skeptical of empathy, Arendt (1992, 43) argues that it is possible to "visit" diverse perspectives through an activity of the imagination called "enlarged mentality." We can imagine ourselves in the context of another and imagine how we might feel and think in that situation. For Arendt, "visiting" multiple standpoints improves an individual's ability to form normative judgments. It is a way to collect diverse stories, which encourages a person to reflect on their beliefs from new perspectives and appreciate that there is no underlying singular perspective (Disch 1994). On Arendt's (1977) account, once a person forms a judgment for themselves, they share it with others in

the community and refine their view through a communal negotiation of meaning. Thus, visiting is not primarily about gaining an understanding of the other, but rather, disrupting the singularity of a person's individual perspective. The point is not to compile stories into a single unitary voice; the point is to be able to think from a variety of perspectives. Arendt therefore insists that visiting only succeeds when a listener does not lose an awareness of their positionality, even as they try to distance themselves from that particularity to think from pluralistic perspectives.

Visiting is an important component of sharing a world with others. It recognizes the diverse and pluralistic nature of our communities, which is important for fostering solidarity and working for social justice. But visiting well is difficult, as Arendt's own writings about race in America indicate (Belle 2014).[6] Although visiting is, for Arendt, something public and political, it is also an act that one undertakes in one's imagination without necessarily engaging with others. One way to cultivate the ability to visit well is to emphasize the importance of physical presence and actual engagement *with others*. Because Arendtian visiting focuses on an imaginative engagement with others, Lisa Disch (1994) reads Arendtian visiting alongside María Lugones' (1987) account of world-travelling, which is more explicit in terms of interaction with actual others and with the feelings of disorientation a person experiences in recognizing the distance between their perspective and another's. As Lugones (1987) puts it, "We can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*" (16, emphasis original). That is, in visiting, we learn about our own perspective in trying to think from the perspectives of others. In concert with Disch and Lugones, we expand visiting beyond the individual perspective to understand how listeners engage in a relational, transformative conversation with help from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and José Medina. Each of these thinkers emphasizes how solidarity is an ongoing relationship, a form of traveling with others.

Simpson's (2017, 56) retelling of how Nanabush "physically walked the world twice after it was created" so that they could understand the world and their relations to others helps to illustrate the active nature of solidaristic listening.[7] Nanabush, on Simpson's account, serves as a model for Nishnaabeg research methods and knowledge generation. What is important for our discussion is how Nanabush models listening and visiting well. They cannot understand the perspectives of others without actually visiting others and sharing stories with them.

> On this [the first] epic journey around the world, Nanabush visited with the different human and nonhuman nations that make up our world. They shared and generated story, ceremony, song, and action. They carried with them the political and spiritual practices of the Nishnaabeg as they visited different nations' homes. They created a collective consciousness and a set of international relationships with each aspect of creation, which they passed on to the Nishnaabeg. (57)

In this story, Nanabush acts as a land-based teacher whose visiting enlarged their mentality, yet because visiting was physical, they were also able to share their perspectives and cultures with others. As Simpson notes, "Nanabush visited with, that is, created, a personal, intimate relationship with all aspects of a global creation as a prerequisite for the work Nanabush came to do on earth" (223). For Simpson, this is what Indigenous people repeat through their ceremonies and walking protests.[8] There is a feelingful (to use Gould's term) recognition that occurs when

visiting is done well; it can be "fun and enjoyable and nurtures the intimate connections and relationship building" (Simpson 2017, 165).

Simpson's use of "visiting" has a different resonance than Arendt's. As Nishnaabeg, Nanabush always has a particular land that grounds their being and that they return to after visiting others. This difference is instructive for us in moving beyond visiting as a merely imaginative exercise. The Nanabush story establishes the active, embodied nature of solidaristic listening. As Simpson says, "Walking a great distance to spend significant time with people and the land builds empathy, trust, and the ability to give each other the benefit of the doubt" (2017, 221).

There is another aspect of the Nanabush story which we find helpful, and that is how a sustained relationship with a traveling partner can support solidarity. In Simpson's telling, Nanabush is sent to travel the world a second time with the wolf Ma'iingan, which generated "a different, but related, set of relationships" and which gave rise to different knowledge (2017, 57–58). This new knowledge is about the shared world, about the other, and also about ourselves.

Nanabush and Ma'iingan traveling together serve as an example of José Medina's (2013) proposal that solidarity is forged not through agonistic engagements but by having a "traveling partner."[9] We suggest that solidaristic listening be understood as a cooperative action or a partnership. Having a traveling partner entails an ongoing relationship. Indeed, it is the ongoing relational work implied by traveling together that prevents imaginative visiting from slipping into objectification or assimilation, from becoming a voyeuristic trip inside one's own imagination. For the success of visiting depends on the relational distance of a conversation because the perspectives of others give us the distance to reflect on our perspective through comparison with another perspective. Visiting also depends on a listener being aware of power relations that form the background of the conversation. But this relational distance is sustained by an ongoing relationship that endures across time. The back and forth of a conversation helps reveal ways in which a listener's initial assessment may inaccurately or unjustly interpret a person's story. When we learn about the world with others, it is as if we agree to recognize the effects of the institutions that bestow meaning, the effects of social sanctioning, and choose instead to go against that. It is about becoming epistemically humble and open-minded.

Solidaristic listening

Given our discussion so far, it should be evident that not all hearing is listening, and not all listening is solidaristic. We have suggested that for solidaristic listening to address the problem created by under-acknowledged power dynamics within solidaristic communities, relational distance must be maintained between conversation partners. In this section, we expand on the significance of visiting and traveling together, emphasizing the importance of presence and time for an account of solidaristic listening.

Physical presence

As we learned from the Nanabush story, being with another not only enhances our ability to enlarge our mentality but also contributes to our mutual understanding of each other.[10] Further, physical presence enables a listener to pay attention to the embodied cues of the speaker and exhibit their attention through their own bodily comportment. These, often unconscious, ways a listener holds their body can signal to the speaker that

they respect them and care about their story. Simpson emphasizes this about Nanabush, that greeting and naming "every aspect of creation" is a form of recognition of their agency and an act of relationship building (2017, 183). Greetings and other embodied cues, for this reason, can establish conversations as collective endeavors. Greeting one another with a handshake (or an elbow bump or Vulcan salute) and sitting face-to-face at eye level with each other, for example, can be mechanisms for establishing equality between conversation partners (Young 2000). Furthermore, in the context of stories that may reveal past or present injustices:

> When we talk about justice and injustice, that concept is not just spoken words. Injustice is about hurt and pain, so that brings in parts of our body, including the heart and soul. [This] includes body language [and] knowing someone is listening and caring. If you are listening from your core, you will understand the telling of these stories of justice and injustice. (Joe et al. 2022)

It is not always possible (or accessible) to be in the physical presence of the storyteller.[11] However, a lack of physical presence does not preclude the possibility of solidaristic listening. Physical presence "adds a layer of complexity" that is missing from reading the narratives of others (Bourgault 2016, 317; see also Ortega 2006, 67–68). For example, physical presence usually enables a more dynamic, relational conversation, since the listener can observe the storyteller's embodied cues as she tells her story and be corrected by the storyteller if the listener has interpreted something inaccurately (Bourgault 2016). This does not mean that reading narratives cannot be a form of visiting, but rather that it lacks an embodied, relational component that facilitates solidaristic listening. Reading narratives can also be another way to visit the perspectives of others who would otherwise be inaccessible, most notably, those who have passed or can no longer, or are unwilling to, speak and share their stories. Moreover, there may be other ways of attending to embodied cues without physical presence that add different benefits. Teleconferencing, for instance, may provide better audio quality for those who are hearing impaired, and it can act as an invitation to those who would not be able to meet physically. As such, in our account, we hold physical presence along a continuum of benefits that enable solidaristic listening.

When a person listens solidaristically in the way we describe above, we suggest that the listener indicates a commitment to travel with the storyteller, that they are listening and ready for the transformative demand that might arise out of their story. They affirm that, even though they may not be situated equitably, the speaker is worthy of listening to, as a person whose story is important (whose perspective is worth visiting; whose world is worth traveling to). Solidaristic listening is thus always intentional. It is an engagement with the storyteller and not merely about harvesting epistemic gains from the speaker. For this reason, solidaristic listening can be a strenuous and tiring activity, precisely because we are supporting the other as we listen to them.

Time

As Medina's metaphor of a traveling partner implies, conversation partners need time to cultivate trust. A partnership is not automatically generated by physical presence and so a solidaristic listener must be patient; they must provide the storyteller with enough time so that they can hear a story in its entirety *and* set aside time for reflection. Listening is rarely completed "in the moment." It is more likely that one would be

able to imagine its details and visit that other world after the narrative exchange has occurred and before the conversation resumes. Visiting is not a one-and-done deal. Moreover, sharing narratives is also an act of vulnerability, which can take time and even multiple attempts before a narrative exchange can even be considered complete, let alone successful or not (Stauffer 2015). Traveling together provides more opportunities for conversations to develop, enabling a listener to recognize a storyteller's full narrative range. Solidaristic listening is about giving our time and attention to the storyteller(s), as a sign of our willingness to be changed by the narratives we may hear.

Part of taking time in solidaristic listening is also being open to surprise (Lugones 1987; Charon 2002). When a listener offers a storyteller their time, the listener indicates to the storyteller that they are willing to let the storyteller lead the conversation. As Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (2020, 243) puts it, "To call upon another is to direct them, but to listen is to be directed." Narratives have the potential to ask us to shift and question our perspectives and so a willingness to be surprised helps a listener unsettle their assumptions about the storyteller because it allows the listener to listen to the story as the speaker wants to tell it. Solidaristic listening thus creates a kind of reprieve where the speaker retains power or control over the narrative exchange despite a power imbalance that may still exist between the conversation partners.

Solidaristic listening then is essentially the practice of responding to the demands which a narrative may make on its listeners. It is not about becoming a skilled listener for one's own sake, but about being accountable to others within the solidaristic community. Solidaristic listeners listen to others' stories so that they can learn about others' worlds, which entails relaxing their epistemological and moral authority so that others can have an opportunity to construct theirs. Solidaristic listening, as we conceive it, puts the perspective of the other at the fore; it "is both self-disregarding and other-regarding … a silence meant to pave the way for another's voice … Paradoxically, it is an engagement in disengagement … that leads to a more thoroughgoing democratic engagement and polity" (Bourgault 2016, 12). Therefore, solidaristic listening will necessarily involve more effort from those who enjoy social positions with (relatively) more power because they will have to actively mitigate their status as institutional shareholders. They will have to refrain from relying on their imaginaries while trying to see that of another's. They may have to practice feeling uncomfortable (Lugones 1987; Bourgault 2016).

Towards a more robust account of solidaristic listening

We have deliberately not provided an exhaustive description of solidaristic listening. Nor have we considered all structural or situational barriers people may face within solidaristic communities. For example, our account assumes that conversation partners are similarly situated in terms of their ability to hear well enough and speak (or sign) the same language well enough. We wish to acknowledge that these are important considerations and that the success of some narrative exchanges will depend on the individuals' abilities to secure appropriate accommodations (e.g., the acquisition of a translation service or interpreter).

Still, someone may object that our account fares no better than empathy because we are relying on motivating the community members that have little incentive to change their behaviors. But solidaristic listening is not about improving the lives of those who are shareholders of institutions that bestow meaning. We intentionally do not address the apathy that socially privileged community members may experience. Our account includes an assessment of solidaristic communities and the positions of its members

so that we can clearly identify how misrecognition can arise in a solidaristic community and outline the responsibilities that accrue to community members with more social power. Whether or not solidaristic listening generates empathy, we take to be a question for future exploration. Like Arendt (1992) and Bourgault (2016), we think that empathy can collapse into an assimilationist perspective. However, given feminist philosophy's attention to embodied, emotional, and affective dimensions of knowledge, it seems strange to think that there is no connection between solidaristic listening and empathy (or something like empathy). Lugones and Ortega both refer to "loving," and Lugones' account of playful, world-traveling, for example, has been described as a mode of empathy (Yap 2021).[12] Further, Simpson describes visiting as a "lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and *in the presence of compassion*" (2017, 165, our emphasis). We have sketched some of the embodied aspects of solidaristic listening in this paper, yet further connections with the embodied, affective dimensions of loving relationships are worth consideration.

Perhaps a more serious problem, we think, lies in the exploitative potential of storytelling. Consider Elizabeth Spelman's (1997; as quoted in Jungkunz and White 2013) worry about those who listen to the stories of others for their own gain:

> what if … [they] are in fact more like scavengers, interested in the suffering of others not as a way of marking deep and pervasive similarities among suffering humanity, and making a case for mutual care, but mainly as a way of trying to garner concern simply for themselves. (10)

In this paper, we have mainly explored the liberatory potential of storytelling, but storytelling can also serve those who already enjoy social power. For example, when stories are told in socially sanctioned language to elicit sympathy or compassion from a listener (who enjoys being a shareholder of institutions that bestow meaning), then such stories may not be liberatory at all. They may, in fact, reinforce the very restrictive norms to which they wish to draw attention.

Furthermore, as Linda Alcoff (1992, as quoted in Jungkunz and White 2013, 444) warns us, storytelling is "also consistent with manipulating public understandings of the interests of others to serve one's own ends … Stories … can be motivated in ways that reflect privilege rather than resisting it."[13] The problem of speaking for others, even unintentionally or with solidaristic intentions, "both marks and perpetuates a denial of epistemological authority to those who are consistently spoken for" (Jungkunz and White 2013, 444). Indeed, Ortega's concept of loving, knowing ignorance draws attention to precisely this: some stories can still reaffirm the wrong voices.

As we have explained, power dynamics in solidaristic communities can be underacknowledged because feelings of care or a common goal can perpetuate the myth that everyone in the community is equitably situated, that storytelling has the same costs and benefits for everyone. Our account of solidaristic listening is intended to dispel this myth. Solidaristic listening safeguards difference in communities that highlight sameness. Power imbalances within communities where members take themselves to be in solidarity with one another can produce loneliness and thereby undermine solidarity. Secondly, it is about incorporating silences into discursive spaces that provide opportunities for transformative understanding and solidaristic spirit. Power differences between members in a solidaristic community may result in failures of listening, and consistent failures may produce loneliness and threaten a storyteller's agency. Solidaristic listening is a way to prevent loneliness and to bolster the solidaristic

potential of storytelling. Drawing on Arendt's description metaphor of visiting diverse perspectives, Medina's concept of traveling together, and Simpson's (2017) account of Nanabush's journey around the world (twice), our aim has been to provide the initial strokes of an account of solidaristic listening as an embodied, relational action.

Notes

1 The examples from Llanera and the Lorde/Rich exchange emphasize the recalcitrant nature of whiteness, which is a pressing concern within philosophy, feminist politics, and the academy. Each of us is motivated to pursue these questions based on personal experiences, even though we won't discuss our experiences here.

2 Similar to Cavarero, Thane Plantikow (2008, 93) uses the language of "co-autobiography" to capture the significant role others play in constructing an individual's narrative identity.

3 We want to emphasize that individuals who are shareholders of institutions that bestow meaning are often shareholders of multiple institutions. This means that, to listen solidaristically across a variety of solidaristic communities, these individuals will need to carefully consider how master narratives intersect and support each other. Consider the case of a member of a racial justice group that holds homophobic views. Without sufficient self-reflection, this individual could unwittingly undermine the solidarity of the community.

4 Conversely, Rich may be unaware of Black feminist methodologies that serve Lorde (like intuition and affect) or unreflectively reject them because they may conflict with those institutions that provide her with social ease and comfort.

5 Similarly, Rich rejects that understanding necessarily follows from love between friends, which might serve as an analog for empathy within larger communities (Lorde 1984, 104).

6 It seems unlikely that Arendt would meet the threshold Ortega sets out for loving, knowing ignorance, primarily because she lacks knowledge of Black experiences in the United States, in addition to not being reflective enough on differences between anti-Black racism and her experiences of anti-Semitism. See Belle 2014, ch. 1.

7 Simpson relies on this story to describe Nishnaabeg internationalism, a dimension of Nishnaabeg theory and practice, which emphasizes the importance of a reciprocal, embodied listening. According to Simpson, the Nishnaabeg's ontological and epistemological views are firmly rooted in their relation to the land, yet also deeply connected with other philosophies.

8 We note the tension between our ambivalence about empathy and Simpson's insistence that compassion is a central component of visiting. Better detailing this tension would be a worthwhile idea for further study.

9 Lugones (1987) critiques agonistic models of world-traveling in developing her account of playful world-traveling. To what extent Arendt's conception of visiting is agonistic we leave as an open question.

10 As previously mentioned, unlike Arendt, we do not accept that a person can enlarge their mentality and change how they see the world solely through their imagination. To accurately gain a sense of pluralistic perspectives, a person must actually engage with others (Lugones 1987; Spelman 1988; Disch 1994).

11 It may be possible to listen solidaristically to people who lived before us. Take the case of feminist historians. These scholars devote their careers to reading and understanding the lives and works of women and other marginalized groups from history, many of whom were forgotten, underappreciated, or misunderstood during their lifetime.

12 Love is also an important concept for Lorde (1984/2007).

13 Recognizing that ableist language may be exclusionary, we have removed the part of the quotation that includes ableist language. We believe the quotation remains just as illustrative of the potential of stories to reflect privilege.

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