

Counternarrative Assignment

You've heard people say, "question authority?" Well, often "authority" isn't a person, an institution, or, for that matter, an exterior entity of any kind. Often "authority" is an idea that's so familiar to you that you don't even know it is an idea—you take it as a fact. Over time, many once-accepted ideas have been shown to be false (racism and sexism are two of the most obvious examples). Unexamined assumptions can do quite a lot of damage, both on the broader societal level and on the more personal level.

For this assignment, you will take on a "master narrative" you have a personal stake in disproving due to your identity, values, goals, and/or personality, and you'll write a persuasive essay that offers evidence of this master narrative's limitations. The first paragraph or so will explain where you see this master narrative in action. Be specific. Use quotes from friends or family members or from celebrities, popular advertising campaigns, or anecdotal evidence from your daily life (i.e. a visit to Target where you saw baby girl's clothing emblazoned with jokes like, "I hate my thighs" and the baby boy's clothing covered with superheroes might serve as evidence of a master narrative that concerns gender).

The second paragraph or so will begin your counternarrative. What evidence do you have that this master narrative is untrue? Again, be as specific as possible. Feel free to include images, snippets of interviews, quotes from journalistic and academic articles—any evidence that is persuasive and will help you make your case. Do remember, however, that when it comes to choosing sources, you are judged by the company you keep; the strength of your argument depends on the strength of these sources. Choose sources that have a strong *ethos*—don't just pull random articles off the internet.

Your counternarrative should include a reflexive statement that explains what gives you the authority to offer your opinion on the topic you chose. Usually such a statement immediately follows the introduction, but you may place it elsewhere if you have a good reason to do so. This essay should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced.

Scaffolding assignments for Counternarrative and their Deadlines:

Due 11/4: Bring in a statement of the master narrative you've chosen and an image that represents the master narrative you've chosen. You may capture this image yourself or appropriate an existing image. Write a paragraph explaining how the details of the image support the master narrative.

Due 11/11: Bring in three images that together produce a counter to the master narrative you've chosen. Just as before, you may capture these images yourself or appropriate existing images. Briefly describe in writing what about each of these images bucks the master narrative and/or why you chose it.

Complete in class 11/13: Interview someone about your master narrative. Where do they see it appearing? This should be a formal interview and, if you choose to use it in your counternarrative, you should cite it accordingly. EX: "According to Samika, a freshman college student at CUNY – Lehman . . ."

Complete in class 11/20: Write three brief stories that illustrate your point. To qualify as "stories," these must have narrative arcs in which change takes place. In other words, each will have a beginning, a middle (in which there's some kind of conflict), and a resolution. You may draw these stories from the three images you handed in last week, or you can source them separately. These stories can be only a single paragraph long, or you can extend one or more you consider particularly valuable. You may use real stories or fictional ones. However, if you use a fictional story, you must make it clear that it's fiction. Unlike Reynolds' speech, which is a work of epideictic rhetoric and therefore was meant to inspire above all else, the genre of this piece is persuasive *nonfiction*. Due to the difference in genre, a fictional story not designated as such would be a lie.

Complete in class 11/20: Shitty first draft.

Due 12/2: Second draft. Bring either a hard copy or bring an electronic device on which you can access your essay. You will need to be able to refer to it in class.

Due 12/4: A paper copy of your counternarrative. Either bring a fresh hard copy to class or send it to nwalker@gradcenter.cuny.edu by 10 pm Tuesday evening so I can print it out for you.