

# Setting boundaries. And saying No.

No.

# Welcome!

PREPARED BY  
Max Liboiron for the  
IndigeLab Network  
ALL ITEMS SHARED  
with permission  
and citation with  
special thanks to the  
Indigenous Land &  
Data Stewards Lab

**“Refusal is affirmation and repair** more than denial (though it’s certainly that, too!). Refusal “is not just a ‘no,’ but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned (Tuck and MacKenzie, 2015: 147).” In Liboiron 2021: 142.

Here are some resources to help you say yes to the things that give you and your students, family, community, and world life, health and joy by saying no to other things.

# 1. Setting boundaries.

You can set boundaries so you have to field requests less often.

Out of the gates, we have Dr. David-Chavez's beautiful automatic reply to all emails, which sets some boundaries and redirects inquiries. Dr. David-Chavez has this auto-response on her email at all times, not just when she is on leave or busy. It outlines capacity, priorities, and importance, and gives people instructions. You may want to set your autoreply to just external senders, and be sure to follow any university or union guidelines.

Mabrika-greetings,

**Capacity**

**Priorities**

Thank you for connecting. I will be checking messages less frequently the week of July 1<sup>st</sup> and on leave most of this time. In this busy season of family, research, teaching, and community responsibilities, and due to the ever-increasing volume of daily email requests, I'm unable to respond to all messages at this time.

My work time will prioritize existing commitments to scholars, funded projects, and Indigenous community-led efforts that clearly align with the focus of our Indigenous Land & Data Stewards Lab (see link below).

**Priorities in action**

For all current student advisees/mentees please message me through Slack if possible.

For any other new requests, including prospective scholars or research collaborators, and for requests for service or expertise, please submit these through [this contact page](#). You may also wish to explore our ILDS Lab 'Resource Hub' to find helpful resources.

For all other messaging regarding existing projects, administrative duties, and commitments I will keep an eye out for your communications via email and get back to you!

This process allows time for the deeper work that myself and our research teams hope will be most useful and meaningful to you and our broader community.

**Importance**

Hahóm-with thanks for your patience & understanding,  
Dominique



Image from Dominique David-Chavez. Tamara Layden, Serena Natonabah, and Gemara Gifford. 2024. "Using technology to create healthy boundaries for our time & energy," Presentation during Building Labs workshop. Online.

You can also set boundaries by using contact forms and proposal processes.

## Request for service/expertise

Our lab members and partners provide numerous areas of expertise and services focused on Indigenous and community-based science research and education through guest teaching and speaking, workshops and training, consultation support, media interviews, and many other pathways. **Due to the high volume of requests, we ask that you consider the nature of your request in terms of balancing time and energy asked with potential impact.** This will help us to protect our precious time dedicated to research, teaching, family, and community! Many frequently asked questions can be addressed through a self-guided tour of our lab's Resource Hub page linked below. Prior to submitting your request, we kindly ask that you read Dr. Jesse Popp's brief blog article regarding considerations when reaching out to Indigenous scholars.

DR. JESSE POPP'S BLOG

RESOURCE HUB

Name (required)

First Name

Last Name

Email (required)

Subject (required)

Dates and estimated time needed

How will our time and energy be reciprocated? (required)

Who will benefit from this service/expertise, and what meaningful outcome do you anticipate resulting from this? (required)

Message (required)

SUBMIT



## Potential collaborator

We welcome opportunities to collaborate on research and projects supporting Indigenous land and data stewards. Due to a high volume of requests we receive to join research projects that impact Indigenous communities and scholars, we ask that you review the following considerations regarding reaching out to Indigenous scholars from Dr. Jesse Popp and CLEAR guidelines for research with Indigenous Peoples prior to reaching out for projects led by non-Indigenous researchers.

### REQUIRED READINGS

DR. JESSE POPP'S BLOG

CLEAR GUIDELINES

Name (required)

First Name

Last Name

Organization

Email (required)

Subject (required)

Message (required)

SUBMIT

Images from Dominique David-Chavez. Tamara Layden, Serena Natonabah, and Gemara Gifford. 2024. "Using technology to create healthy boundaries for our time & energy," Presentation during Building Labs workshop. Online. Also see: <https://www.indigenouslandstewards.org/connect-with-us>



## Put boundaries on your day and work week.

workin g gro...	meetin g invit...						
		11:30 AM Emails	11:30 AM Emails	11:30 AM Emails			noon
		12:00 PM lunch	12:00 PM lunch	12:00 PM Lunch			
12:30 PM Brown bag workshop: quantitative methods with our funny data		1:00 PM ☺ Meeting with [REDACTED]	1 PM ? CLEAR lab meeti...	1 PM Thank you notes	1:15 PM ☺ Max & Veronica weekly meeting		1 PM
2:15 PM Jesse and Max Jesse's office		2:00 PM Hold Schemata	2:00 PM Natset (seal) & iKaluit (char) Paper WG	2:00 PM Lab manager meeting <a href="https://us02web.zoom...">https://us02web.zoom...</a>			2 PM
3:00 PM Drive home			3:00 PM End of day emails	3:00 PM End of day emails	3:00 PM END OF DAY. NO MORE TO DO. GO.		3 PM
		3:30 PM END OF DAY. NO MORE TO DO. GO.	3:30 PM END OF DAY. NO MORE TO DO. GO.	3:30 PM END OF DAY. NO MORE TO DO. GO.			4 PM
							5 PM

In the example of my (Max's) schedule above, you can see I have a hard end scheduled into my day. I do not schedule over that. If I have to (it's the only time a collaborator or student can meet), I take that time and subtract it from somewhere else--either ending earlier on another day or starting later. I also schedule time for emails (first thing in the morning, around lunch, and at the end of the day). Otherwise, that program is closed. This is how I work 35-40 hours every week. I never work more than that. I once heard a very established scholar say he only worked 35 hours a week and was shocked. My job was too big to fit into 35 hours a week! It took time to shrink my activities until they fit into a regular workweek (about a year). For the last 8 years, I have not worked more than 40 hours a week. I do not work on weekends, ever.

Other boundaries through scheduling:

- Set a hard start time and end time for your workday
- One day or half day a week held for writing or research
- Schedule non-negotiable time for class prep, emails, or other reoccurring activities
- Using Calendly to facilitate meetings only occurring during non-restricted time as well as easing the planning work of scheduling meetings (especially for students)
- All one-on-one meetings are 45 minutes as a default, not 60.
- Schedule bio breaks between meetings
- Block off entire months or weeks at times during the year when you tend to feel worn and burned out. For me (Max), that's March. I take on zero new meetings, events, speaker invitations, etc in that month because I consider quitting my job every March. Part of it is the timing at the end of the second semester and part of it is the weather--the island of Newfoundland sees almost no sun that month.

Do you have another scheduling boundary trick? Let us know so we can add it here!

Put boundaries on your work year.

YEAR IN PIXELS													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	KEY
01													
02													*
03													*
04													*
05													*
06													*
07													*
08													*
09													*
10													*
11													*
12													*
13													*
14													*
15													*
16													*
17													*
18													*
19													*
20													*
21													*
22													*
23													*
24													*
25													*
26													*
27													*
28													*
29													*
30													*
31													*

You need to look out for your capacity during the year as commitments ebb and flow. A year-at-a-glance planner, whether the pixel format to the right or some other format, helps to see when you need to say no to things at certain times of the year.

Include:

- grant deadlines
- writing deadlines
- heavy course preparation time including grading
- speaking and other events
- travel
- high advisement times (especially if you have an advised graduating or defending)
- life events that require your full attention

It takes about a year of systematically saying no before your schedule clears. This means that **\*you need to start saying No a year before your sabbatical starts to have a sabbatical clear of commitments\***

# 2. When to say yes, when to say no?

First, know that there is not a scarcity problem when it comes to people wanting your time or for opportunities to serve, collaborate, speak, travel, or research. If you say no now, it does not make a magical pre-emptive no in the future.

---

There is a research-based rule of thumb when committee work can only burn you out and not result in change. In 1977, white sociologist Rosabeth Kanter did research on the stress and strains of committee tokenism and argued that “skewed” groups that have only tokenistic representatives from equity-seeking groups result in harm to those members. But “tilted” groups with 16% equity-seeking membership allowed allyship, coalitions, and burden sharing, and eased the culture of the dominant group (usually White, male, cis, straight, and abled). Even better were “balanced” groups, where ratios were 2:3 or 50:50. Kanter theory, as it is known, can be used to help you say no (with citations!) when you know that your work on a committee is going to cause you harm based on the committee make up. Maybe this should also hold for panels....

---

Have a way to identify the type of opportunities you want in advance, so you have a framework before an opportunity hits your inbox. Here is mine (Max Liboiron's, with tanks to Eve Tuck, Sarah Martin, and M. Murphy for conversations that refined it):

- a. The event feeds you more than it drains you
  - b. You will not be consumed (or fetishized)
  - c. You will learn
  - d. It is reciprocal (including but not limited to \$\$!)
-



# Indigenous Land & Data Stewards Lab New Opportunities Decision-Making Chart

## START HERE

**SCENARIO:** You have just been requested by a graduate colleague, work colleague, friend, family member, or community member to add a new project, speaking engagement, or the like to your plate.

**Do you find yourself saying yes more often than not to requests like these and therefore overlooking your life and feeling overwhelmed, high stress/anxiety or like you do not have any time for yourself to rest and relax, spend time with family/friends/community, do your favorite hobbies, etc?** Or do focus on and complete your current commitments?

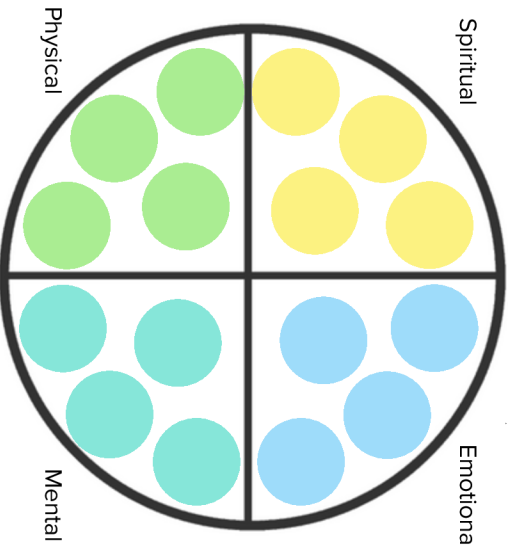
**Do you often say yes due to:**

- a) being excited to do the new thing and not truly assessing all you already have on your plate and the other positive goals/routines you are working hard to establish for your own spiritual, mental, physical, emotional and communal health
- b) FOMO (fear of missing out)
- c) feeling like you need to because it is hard to say no sometimes
- d) fill in the blank.

**If so, then follow the steps in designing a decision-making chart unique to you that will fit YOUR lifestyle goals, personality and support your work/life balance when these types of requests/exciting opportunities come up could support you to experience the JOY OF SAYING NO TO ADDITIONAL REQUESTS in order to SAY YES TO YOU, YOUR LOVED ONES/COMMUNITY AND YOUR CURRENT COMMITMENTS.**

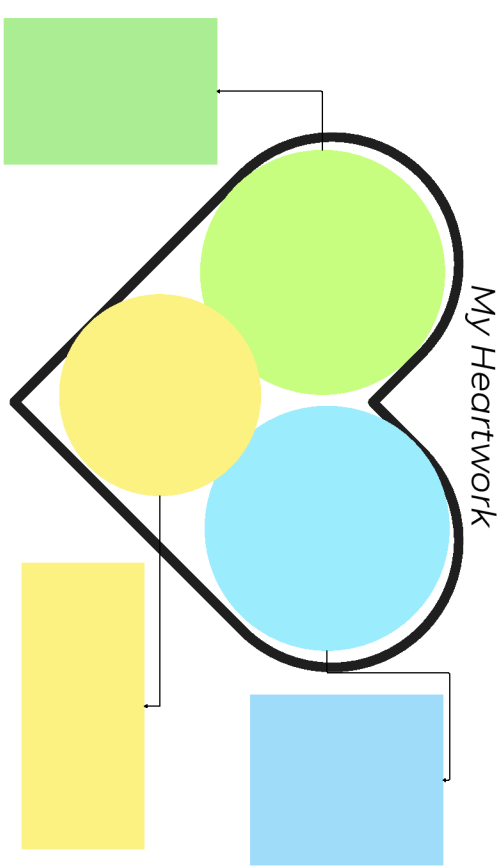
## Step 1

Fill out the diagram below with your Spiritual, Emotional, Mental, and Physical wellness practices that you love and want to center in your life:



## Step 2

Fill out this heart with all of your current commitments and the WHY behind why it is important that you focus on completing/making progress on these commitments.



## Step 3

Now Keeping ALL of the above in mind, answer these questions whenever a new request or exciting opportunity comes up, and feel free to add other questions that would help you decide to say yes, no or not at this time, but possibly later.

**Are you excited about this new request/opportunity?**

**Yes!**

Okay, exciting! But will this new project/opportunity be:  
a) reciprocal--it will not take more from you than it gives you/community?  
b) non-tokenizing  
c) compensate you with a stipend, honorarium or other way you feel is fair and respecting of your time, energy and sharing?

**Yes!**

Wonderful!! Do you have room or can you make room to take on this request/opportunity when you truly think about everything you have listed above?

**Yes!**

Okay, think about what you will need to reduce your time on, in order to make room for this new request/opportunity. Is it a short term project or long term? Do you still want to take this on?

**YES!**

Okay then, YES IT IS!! But first make sure to write up some practices you will do to make sure that even by taking on this new request/opportunity you are still going to spend time on your priorities in your medicine wheel and in your heart :D \*\*\*\*

**NO--the answer is NO, because you've got a lot you are excited about and focusing on :D**

No, it seems like it will be a lot of work on my end and it does not seem reciprocal---okay, it will be best to pass on this one. More opportunities like this that are more reciprocal and fair will come up in the future!

Sadly No--okay, do not fear on missing out of this opportunity, more like this will come up and by saying no now you are making space for someone else just as excited about it to have the opportunity to say yes!

No, I actually do not think I have enough time for it among my other priorities. Great job!! You are prioritizing you, your comunidad y tu commitments!!!



# YOUR PASSION ROADMAP

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO MAPPING OUT YOUR GOALS

## 1. MAKE A WISHLIST

Set a timer for five minutes. Imagine that whatever you write on this piece of paper will come true within the designated time frame. Think of it as a wishlist describing your ideal life. Ask yourself,

**"IF I COULD BE ANYTHING, DO ANYTHING, OR HAVE ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?"**

Write every single thing that comes to mind and be as specific as possible. Lastly, do not feel the need to be realistic or justify your dreams. Just write.

**READY. SET. GO.**



## 2. PRIORITIZE

Time's up! Now set the timer for 1 minute. Go back to each of the four sections and circle one goal that would have the MOST positive impact on your life.

**READY. SET. GO.**

These are the four goals that you are going to prioritize. Now we are going to create a Passion Plan to map out how to get there. A Passion Plan is a mind map that visually breaks down your goals into steps that are specific, actionable, measurable, and time sensitive.

## 3. CREATE YOUR FIRST PASSION PLAN

Your GameChanger is the goal that would have the most positive impact on your life right now. Write this in the blank box below. Set your timer for five minutes. Write down all the necessary steps needed to achieve your goal; the more detailed, the better. Connect each step to the middle box with a line (see example).



## 4. ADD SPECIFICS

Assign due dates for each of these tasks. Be specific and be sure to indicate how much, how many, or by when.

## 5. CREATE A TIMELINE

Number all the tasks in the order in which they must be completed.

## 6. MAKE A DATE

Write all these tasks in the corresponding due dates in your weekly layout. Throughout the year, use these as checkpoints to keep you on track.

## 7. WORK AT IT!

For this goal, strive to do at least one productive thing at the beginning of your day to get you closer to your goal. Consistency is key. If you skip a day, be sure to make up for it the next day.

## 8. REPEAT

Repeat this process for as many goals as you'd like.

## EXTRA CREDIT

Find a follow-up buddy to check-in with you and help you stay accountable for your goals. Cross out "Lifetime", "3 Years", "1 Year" and "3 Months" and replace them with "5 YEARS", "1 YEAR", "3 MONTHS" and "1 MONTH" respectively. Now challenge yourself to meet those deadlines.

© 2020 ANGELIA TRINIDAD

A personal note from Max: This exercise helped me realize that if I wanted to retire when I was 55, which has been a long-term goal of mine, then I had to start working towards that now, not when I was 52. If I was to survive on a smaller pension, I had to be mortgage-free. For me, that involved building a house. Which involved learning how to drive since the land I could afford (and the land I desired) was rural. Four years after my planning, I write this on a plywood desk in a mostly-finished 850-square-foot house that I built (with help from my dad, friends, and neighbours when they were available). I am already living parts of my best life, and I didn't have to wait to retire to do it. So I really dig this planning stuff.

Free download from Passion Planner. Passion planners are fancy paper-based planners if that wags your tail. <https://passionplanner.com/products/passion-roadmap>



You can form a No committee. what Dr. Vilna Bashi Treitler has to say about them:

"When an opportunity comes to me, I send them [my friend/colleagues in my No Committee] an email with the subject line "Here's one for the No Committee" and ask them for their advice. In the email I describe the opportunity, what information I have about what it entails (and whether I can trust the information I have), and further, I normally list all my reasons for saying yes to this thing plus whatever doubts I might have, and I hit "send." Then I wait. I think the subject line tells them enough that they each tend to answer rather quickly. It probably also helps that I always listen to their advice. I have not yet ignored the No Committee's vote." (2016)

---

Do you have other ways to structure whether you take on new requests or opportunities? Please reach out to share!

---

# 3. Templates

Saying no takes emotional labour. Here are some tried and proven email templates for saying no that do that labour for you. Edit as necessary.

I (Max) also highly recommend having ChatGPT write your emotional labour emails for you. It does a *really* good job.

---

Remember: do not apologize for turning down an offer. You do not owe anyone a reason for saying no.

---

I once asked Eve Tuck how she handled all the requests for speaking, chats, requests to “pick your brain,” etc, especially when they are off-topic or tokenizing. She said, “**I don’t answer.**” Mind blown.

Hello,

Thank you for the generous invitation. Unfortunately, I’m at capacity for travel and talks for the foreseeable future. Thank you again for your consideration—I appreciate it! I wish you all the best for your speaker series and hope you find brilliant and inspiring participants, both as speakers and audience members.

All good wishes,  
Dr. Max Liboiron

---

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in joining my lab. Your work sounds interesting. However, I do not have any available graduate positions for the foreseeable future. I wish you the best in finding a placement.

All good wishes,  
Dr. Max Liboiron

---

Also see:

Boogaard, Kat. (2020). “7 Email Templates That’ll Help You Say “No” (Without Having to Overthink It)” The Muse. <https://shorturl.at/k47nm>

Hi X!

Thank you for thinking of me for this project, it sounds very relevant to my work and an exciting effort overall! At this moment, I am completely at capacity and cannot consider any new projects. I may be able to refer you to others who have similar skill sets if you'd like, please let me know!

Take care, and thanks again for reaching out.  
Gemara

---

Dear [name],

That looks so cool. I am at capacity and can't take this on right now, unfortunately. Please keep me in mind for the future. My schedule starts to open up again in the last quarter of 2024, so feel free to reach back out then.

-Lydia (paraphrase from Lydia Jennings during Building Labs workshop, online, 2024)

---

Hello X,

I understand that you are operating on a short timeline and are seeking my advice for this project. However, I engage in work with people whose needs are aligned with my expertise, and only when we've reached an agreement around the scope of work, budget, and timeline. Your request seems like you would like to pick my brain without any payment. I do not take on unpaid projects, nor work under a sense of urgency. I suggest you re-evaluate this project and whether you have the right approach with contacting potential collaborators.

Thanks,  
Gem

Disclaimer to the last section: Yes, you could just ignore the email altogether. I find that it is worth taking the 20 seconds to copy & paste this response because it teaches people that they cannot treat you this way. If they only hear silence or do not get a reply, they will send this to someone else. I'd rather not risk that! So if I am feeling extra generous I will send this email out.

---

Thank you very much for inviting me to [Event Name]. I appreciate your thoughtfulness in including me. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend due to prior commitments. I hope the event is a great success and that everyone involved has a wonderful time.

Thank you again for thinking of me, and I hope to have the opportunity to participate in future events.

Sincerely,  
ChatGPT

---

Also see:

Gemara Gifford. (n.d.) "Gem's Saying No MegaThread" Google Doc.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/19Fo4vYuy2D1CFA6Oe4IVIFyz-HUHXawgNMUUBk5bFt8/edit>

Dear [Recipient's Name],

Thank you very much for extending this invitation. I truly appreciate the opportunity.

Could you kindly provide more details on how this opportunity could benefit an early career researcher like myself? As you are aware, securing first-authored peer-reviewed publications, obtaining formal funding agreements, and having the ability to fund my own students are crucial for my job security and career progression.

Any additional information on how these elements are integrated into your invitation would greatly assist me in making an informed decision.

Thank you once again for considering me for this opportunity.

Warm regards,

Dr. Jennings (paraphrase from Lydia Jennings during Building Labs workshop, online, 2024, with emotional labour by ChatGPT)

---

Dear [Recipient's Name],

Thank you very much for reaching out to discuss this area of expertise. I appreciate your interest.

At the moment, I am writing an article on the topic and would be delighted to share it with you once it is accepted by a journal.

If you are looking for a more dedicated and formal expert consultation, you can find information about my rates and availability on my website here: [URL link].

Thank you once again for your interest. I look forward to the possibility of discussing this further in the future.

Best regards,

Lydia (paraphrase from Lydia Jennings during Building Labs workshop, online, 2024, with emotional labour by ChatGPT)

---

A heartfelt thank you for your kind words about my work. I truly appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with me. You can never tell how your work will land in the world, so I am especially grateful for hearing how it is useful in your context.

I hope things go well for your work, and that you, your family, and your community are healthy and safe.

All good wishes,

Dr. Liboiron

This email is for when someone compliments your work and includes a request for a chat or collaboration at the end.

Dear [Recipient's Name],

Thank you very much for this generous invitation. It aligns perfectly with the work our lab conducts.

Unfortunately, I am not available at the moment. However, I would be happy to pass the opportunity along to another lab member or alumnus who may be interested. Would you be open to this?

Please note that at CLEAR, we are committed to ensuring sustainable research and recognizing the value of our knowledge, skills, and time. Therefore, I do not share or forward unpaid opportunities to lab members.

Could you kindly provide the amount of the honorarium associated with this opportunity? Including this information would help alleviate the burden on junior researchers of having to make that request themselves.

Thank you once again for considering us for this opportunity. I look forward to your response.

With gratitude,  
Dr. Max Liboiron (and ChatGPT)

---

Thank you very much for the invitation. I appreciate your consideration.

At this time, I'm unable to take on any unpaid work. However, your project sounds very interesting, and I would love to stay informed. Please do keep me in mind for future opportunities when you have a budget available.

Thank you again, and I hope we can collaborate in the future.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jennings (paraphrase from Lydia Jennings during Building Labs workshop, online, 2024 with format and emotional labour by ChatGPT)

---

Do you have an amazing template or need a form-email for a particular type of refusal? Reach out!



# Works cited

Boogaard, Kat. (2020). "7 Email Templates That'll Help You Say "No" (Without Having to Overthink It)" *The Muse*. <https://shorturl.at/k47nm>

David-Chavez, Dominique, Tamara Layden, Serena Natonabah, and Gemara Gifford. (2024). "Using technology to create healthy boundaries for our time & energy," Presentation during Building Labs workshop. Online.

Gifford, Gemara. (n.d.) "Gem's Saying No MegaThread" Google Doc.  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/19Fo4vYuy2D1CFA6Oe4lVIFyz-HUHXawgNMUUBk5bFt8/edit>

Indigenous Land & Data Stewards Lab (2024). Connect With Us. Indigenous Land & Data Stewards Lab.  
<https://www.indigenouslandstewards.org/connect-with-us>

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. (1977). Some effects of proportions on group life. In *The gender gap in psychotherapy* (pp. 53-78). Springer, Boston, MA.

Liboiron, Max. (2021). *Pollution is colonialism* (Duke University Press).

Popp, Jesse. (2021). Want to reach out to an Indigenous scholar? Awesome! But first, here are 10 things to consider. *The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com/want-to-reach-out-to-an-indigenous-scholar-awesome-but-first-here-are-10-things-to-consider-168558>

Tuck, Eve, and Marcia McKenzie. (2015). *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*. New York: Routledge.

Treitler, Vilna Bashi. (2016). Get Yourself a NO committee. *Get a Life, PhD*.  
<https://getalifeph.d.blogspot.com/2016/01/get-yourself-no-committee.html>.