Anticipating the Unknown: Postpedagogy and Accessibility

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Abstract: *This article articulates postpedagogy through a feminist disabilities studies (FDS) lens. FDS asks us to interrogate, reshape, and "reimagine" (Garland-Thomas 2005) how bodies interact with one another and their environment and emphasizes how language shapes this environment. It is important to incorporate FDS in postpedagogical classrooms because a pedagogy that seeks to "disequilibrate" (Santos & McIntyre 2016), "risk" (Rickert 2007), and create "uncertainty" (Lynch 2013) has the potential to create barriers for students with mental illnesses and trauma and further reinforce the systems of power that lead many of these students to leave school before finishing their degrees.*

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> *A postpedagogy, insofar as it declines to participate in the dialectics of control, is an exhortation to dare, to invent, to create, to risk. It is less a body of rules, a set of codifiable classroom strategies than a willingness to give recognition and value to unorthodox, unexpected, or troublesome work.* (Thomas Rickert 196)

> *A college classroom, or campus, that adequately accounts for the material realities of diverse bodyminds is almost inconceivable within an institution built on awarding individual merit over acknowledging structural privilege and inequalities.* (Angela Carter, "Teaching With Trauma")

Introduction

The program of 21st-century composition studies has largely been one of clearing out old ideas, old processes, old ideological commitments, and old expectations. Much of this work has been done under the umbrella of postpedagogy, which, if it can be defined simply, is a way of reflecting on the idea that writing cannot be taught as a set of transferable rules or skills, but it can be learned. Postpedagogues approach this dilemma in a variety of ways, but common themes are a focus on new-media composition, student- generated assessment criteria, and by asking students to articulate their experiences and investments in unexpected ways. Neither instructors nor students in a postpedagogical classroom know precisely what to expect at the beginning

of a semester, assignment, or project, and this lack of rigidly defined expectations (in a sense, a lack of "pedagogy") creates opportunities for individuated teaching and learning (Santos and Leahy 87). Recent book-length works by Thomas Rickert (2007), Sidney Dobrin (2011), Paul Lynch (2013), and Sarah Arroyo (2013) speak to the degree to which postpedagogical thought has increasingly come to shape innovation in writing classrooms. As the body of practicable postpedagogical insights grows, two central concerns remain unaddressed:

> 1) If postpedagogy seeks to create unpredictable spaces within the writing classroom, how can we ensure that those spaces are accessible, safe, and create equitable opportunities for all students?

> 2) How do we avoid making unfair or potentially exploitative demands of our students when we make their experiences, investments, interests, and struggles the central focus of the class?

In this article, we view postpedagogy through a feminist disability studies (FDS) lens and articulate ways in which postpedagogical attitudes can better meet the needs of diverse students. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, FDS "seeks to challenge our dominant assumptions about living with a disability. It situates the disability experience in the context of rights and exclusions. It aspires to retrieve dismissed voices and misrepresented experiences. It helps us understand the intricate relation between bodies and selves" (1557). FDS asks us to interrogate, reshape, and reimagine how bodies interact with one another and their environment.

As postpedagogy is opening spaces where instructors are asking students to risk, push boundaries, and thus construct more meaningful compositions, it is necessary that instructors consider how to create spaces that will best allow students to complete these kinds of assignments. Ultimately, the language used to describe postpedagogical classrooms and student-teacher interactions shapes the classroom space and the experience that students have within this space. Through the creation of safe spaces— places where students have equitable opportunity to speak and be heard without the possibility of judgment, harassment, or worse—students can better engage in challenging discussion and the types of assignments proposed by postpedagogy. Despite declarations that safe spaces coddle college-aged students, we argue that these spaces challenge hegemonic notions of power, gender, race, and disability. By evaluating the language we use to shape our classroom spaces and conceptions of our students, we can better ensure that we can all risk and create within a safe space.

Who are our students?

Before we can construct spaces, we need to consider who will inhabit those spaces. There is a surprising ambivalence toward students present in much of the literature on postpedagogy, along with an understandable reticence toward putting its own insights into practice. As a response to process-based, postprocess, and cultural studies pedagogies that dominated composition programs at the end of the twentieth century, themselves responses to antiquated composition pedagogies that focused on imitating exemplary writing models, postpedagogical thinkers often saw the history of writing pedagogies as wave after wave of reinscribed, ineffective pronouncements about how to "write well." Any new insight risked being yoked to this historical, totalizing pedagogical imperative to control student writing rather than ensure that individual students had opportunities to understand the role that writing played in their own lives and in the achievement of their own goals.

Notably, Vitanza calls for a moratorium on turning theory into praxis (160), and Dobrin calls for composition studies as a whole to move beyond its focus on first-year writing students and consider writers and writing beyond the university (161). This tension between theory and practice is one of the main instigations for Lynch's 2013 work, which attempts to answer the twin questions, "How do I teach postpedagogically?" and "Having taught postpedagogically, how do I do so again without inadvertently creating a pedagogy?" His answer is to rely on the "practical wisdom" gleaned from the postpedagogical classroom, but to resist the urge to reduce uncertainty or the contingent nature of postpedagogy (137). Thus praxis never leads to theory, and vice versa. But, for a body of work so adamantly devoted to understanding individual, unpredictable acts of writing and individual, unpredictable writers, postpedagogy has spent very little time thinking about actual students. Instead the literature is peppered with exclusionary generalizations that cast students as self-centered, inexperienced, lazy, and unmotivated.

Rickert (2007) describes a specific set of symptoms exhibited by writing students that necessitate the postpedagogical classroom: "cynicism, apathy, disregard for others, and violence" (163). The failure of pedagogies in the traditional sense is its expectation of certain kinds of sincere participation or self-reflective cultural critique, expectations that only drive students further into postmodern malaise. Rickert seeks to "shift control of the dominant loci of contention from the teacher to the student" to create a space where the texts produced by such students can be valued even if they cannot be predicted or incorporated into any stable model of assessment (163).

Rickert cites two powerful examples of student writing that have troubled writing teachers and presented difficulties in assessment that were not easily dismissed. The first, a student simply identified as "Matthew" in Blitz and

Hurlbert's *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age* (1991), is an emergency medical technician inured to the violence and misery of his occupation who confronts the instructor with the cynicism and perfunctory performance Rickert classifies as indicative of contemporary writing students. When called upon to write, Matthew recounts the horrific things he has seen, and the instructor is at a loss for how to evaluate work that is at once below the writing standards established in the class, but beyond his expectations in terms of emotional resonance and depth. Blitz's pedagogy itself creates a disjunction between what the student has written and what he can assess, and it is this gap that postpedagogical approaches attempt to bridge.

Rickert's second example is the widely-cited Quentin Pierce essay reproduced in David Bartholomae's "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum" (1993). Pierce, a student in Bartholomae's writing class, turns in an essay that "negates himself, his writing, his composition course, and his world in general" (Rickert 191). Though "poor" by the standards of the composition classroom, the paper haunts Bartholomae and, after many years, he finds himself returning to it as an example of writing he felt at a loss to evaluate by traditional standards, but that deserved attention and appreciation nonetheless.

These are the kinds of students (coincidentally both male) and situations that Rickert's postpedagogy is designed to create space for. A student challenging the boundaries established by a particular writing assignment, producing a text that is, say, shorter than the page requirements stipulate, or demonstrating significant grammatical peculiarities, but who produced work that was otherwise arresting or successful, would find room within the postpedagogical classroom to explore their ideas. And, perhaps more importantly, the student would be assessed not simply by how well they fulfilled prescribed expectations, but by how well they fulfilled the new expectations they had a hand in creating—criteria the instructor could not have anticipated.

Building on Rickert's conceptualization of apathetic students, Santos and McIntyre (2016) note that the educational system itself has become apathetic: "we would position postpedagogy as a response to the broader socio-political and institutional changes in America's primary and secondary education systems" ("Toward a Technical Communication"). Such systems, Santos and McIntyre claim, push students through an educational process like they are products on a conveyor belt. Further, these systems kill creativity in favor of homogeneity and a "skill and drill mentality" ("Toward a Technical Communication"). While Santos and McIntyre also admit that each student may need different things from their classroom experience, the assumptions that a postpedagogical classroom is necessary to disrupt the conveyor belt-like approach to education does not account for experiences outside of

the university. This approach also imagines the postpedagogical classroom to be the sole creative outlet in the lives of increasingly apathetic student populations.

Rickert and Santos and McIntyre essentialize student experience in a very particular way, ascribing specific traits (apathy, cynicism) while ignoring other possibilities and experiences. We might assume that a student who was not bored or disengaged would be even better served in a postpedagogical class-room, just as free to explore the possibilities inherent in the act of writing. But Rickert's articulation of postpedagogy makes other demands of students, demands which imagine very specific experiences and resources at a student's disposal: "to dare, to invent, to create, to risk" (Rickert 196) in order to over-come their incipient boredom and make use of their resistance to the writing classroom. But what about students who are no stranger to risk, students who have not found their lives outside the writing classroom to be exercises in tedium, or whose experiences of violence have not been second hand? If, as Lynch (2013) says of Rickert's examples, "the entire postpedagogical project hinges on being sensitive to these situations" (113), how might that project be challenged by a more diverse understanding of the students we encounter?

When we consider, for example, that one in five women and one in sixteen men have been the victim of sexual assault on college campuses ("Statistics About Sexual Violence"), we must stop making assumptions about our students and the mundanity of their experiences and better prepare our classroom spaces to accommodate those who have suffered from trauma. While much research has already been conducted about access for those con-sidered physically disabled, both pedagogically (Dunn & Dunn De Mers 2002; Price 2007; Brewer et. al. 2014; Browning 2014) and theoretically (Dolmage 2013; Boyle & Rivers 2016), we will examine trauma as a disability and how the language of postpedagogy specifically shapes the experience of students with post-traumatic stress disorders in the classroom. Like Angela M. Carter (2016), we "conceptualize trauma as a disabling affective structure" ("Teaching With Trauma"). An FDS lens troubles the rhetoric used to articulate postpedagogy and our relationship with our students. If trauma is a part of our students' lived experiences, approaches that describe themselves as "painful," "risky," "disequilibrating," and "distressful" without accounting for the attendant dan-gers seem particularly careless. In light of Carter's "Teaching with Trauma: Trigger Warnings, Feminism, and Disability Pedagogy" (2016), in which she as-serts that we must adopt an FDS pedagogy, we feel that existing articulations of postpedagogy have not adequately considered students.

Shaping Classroom Spaces Through Language

FDS emphasizes that space and experience are often shaped through language. Garland-Thomson (2005) notes that, while the language used by FDS scholars can often seem convoluted, the terminology is employed specifically to challenge assumptions about power relations: Garland-Thomson "use[s] phrases such as 'the traits we think of as disability,' for example, rather than words like 'deformities' or 'abnormalities'" (1558). Such attention paid to word choice and context is meant to "clarify by insisting that readers [also students and teachers] do not fall back on essentialist definitions of disability as inferior embodiment" (1558). Garland-Thomson (2011) also makes a distinction between the terms *impairment* and *disability*. Like the distinction between sex and gender proposed by early feminists such as Gayle Rubin (1975), Garland-Thomson's distinction between impairment and disability is between "bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired, and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments in the world" (591). Offering the concept of "misfitting" to FDS, Garland-Thomson identifies a *misfit* as "the discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is" (593). With much early FDS work shifting the focus of disability from a perceived problem within the body to a problem of social justice, Garland-Thomson's misfit helps scholars discuss the embodiment of disability without giving up the way disability is constructed as a social phenomenon through language and space.

While language has the ability to reinforce ableist perspective and power dynamics, we would like to consider that language can also help create equitable access for students (as, for example, in our usage of the term "student with a disability" instead of "disabled student" to counter the potential dehumanizing effects of the latter). In this way, FDS demonstrates both the "cultural work and the limits of language" (Garland-Thomson 2005, 1558). Kristina Knoll (2009) proposes that we consider how to best inform the "physical and social environments of our classrooms" (124) in order to make them more accessible to students with all forms of disabilities. "Language," says Knoll (2009), "can play a big role in social privileging. It can liberate or oppress students and instructors. It plays an enormous role in reinforcing and internalizing ableism in our classroom dynamics, from our syllabus to our readings and verbal exchanges" (125). Knoll's argument raises questions about how we construct environments through language. Pedagogies that seek to "disequilibrate" (Santos & McIntyre 2016) students, ask students to "risk" (Rickert 2007), or foster "uncertainty" in the classroom (Lynch 2013) have the potential to create barriers for students with psychiatric disabilities, such as post-traumatic stress disorders, and further reinforce the systems of power that lead to many of these students leaving school before finishing their degrees.

Part of the issue arises from a stark distinction between mental and physical processes in the body. FDS scholars, such as Margaret Price (2015), complicate a static understanding of binaries between psychiatric disabilities and physical impairments by offering the concept of "bodymind" (Price 269): "According to this approach, because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other - that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two - it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term" (Price 269). Calling for the inclusion of *bodymind* into FDS, Price indicates that the use of a single term to cover both mental and physical processes can create a new understanding of these processes as one, instead of treated as separate, distinct processes.

The current structural distinction between body and mind creates barriers for students with issues regarded as merely psychiatric in nature. In a study of psychiatric disability on college campuses, Collins and Mowbry (2008) found that students reported a number of structural barriers within institutions that complicated their role as a student: "interpersonal discrimination (lack of awareness or understanding of mental illness by faculty and peers), gaps in service provision (lack of campus-based mental health services or information about disability services), and difficult social relationships due to fears of stigma following disclosure of illness" (Collins and Mowbry, 92) all contributed to students' inability to participate successfully in a classroom space or, even worse, complete their degrees. And, while the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) places the dropout rate of students with mental disabilities at 56.1%, Collins and Mowbry report this rate as 86% (qtd. In Carter). One reason for the discrepancy in dropout rates is that students do not always disclose their mental disability. As we have already noted, disclosure is, as Carter (2016) points out, "a political privilege" ("Teaching With Trauma"). Further, Carter notes that "the vast majority of potentially traumatizing experiences are rooted in systems of power and oppression. The forces of racism/white supremacy, colonization, and global capitalism continuously instigate enumerable violences worldwide" ("Teaching With Trauma").

At the large research university where we work, for example, Students with Disabilities Services (SDS) offers accommodations for students in the form of extra time on a test, access to presentation slides, alternative text, braille, copies of class notes, deaf and hard of hearing services, excused attendance for medical appointments, physical movement during class, permission to record class, preferential seating, and the use of a laptop or other electronic device to take notes ("Classroom Accommodations"). In terms of acknowledging psychiatric disabilities, SDS provides accommodations for veterans suffering from PTSD in the form of time away from class for medical appointments. All of these accommodations are presented to the instructor in the form of a

memo that is issued to the instructor by SDS. With the exception of veterans with PTSD, the accommodations for students with physical disabilities do not fully consider students who have experienced trauma or their needs within the classroom. This is not to criticize SDS and the difficult work that they do at our institution. However, when the NCES "reports that students with mental disabilities are more likely to drop out of college than any of their peers, with dropout rates at 56.1% for those with 'mental illnesses' and 23.6% for those with 'serious emotional disturbances'" (qtd. In Carter), we must consider how we can better accommodate the needs of these students. And when we take into account that an instructor might easily read a withdrawn, traumatized student as a bored, apathetic student who needs to be pushed out of her comfort zone, we can see how troubling it might be when the theoretical framework we operate within only has a vocabulary for describing student malaise.

Postpedagogical Language

Santos and McIntyre (2016) label their teaching style as a "disequilibrating pedagogy" and an "intentionally distressful approach" that has the potential to create "debilitating anxiety" for students ("Toward a Technical Communication"). The insinuation of this pedagogical style is that if the classroom does not project this "radical perspective" ("Toward a Technical Communication") and students are not made to feel "disequilibrated," true learning cannot and will not occur. This false binary between safety, boredom, and homogeneity on the one hand, and chaos, invention, and creativity on the other overlooks the possibility that students can learn from places of safety. After surveying their students, Santos and McIntyre note that "while many of the students reported initially feeling some measure of disequilibrium or discomfort, most concluded that the course made a significant impact on their creative capacity and what Shipka would refer to as their "rhetorical and material awareness" ("Toward a Technical Communication").

Indeed, doubts and uncertainties can give rise to creative inspiration and opportunities for learning in nontraditional mediums. However, this view of creative acts as inherently chaotic, painful, and mysterious at times comes dangerously close to mirroring the language of romantic poets in the 19th century. In 1817, poet John Keats referred to the capability of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" as negative capability (Keats 277). Santos and McIntyre dub the result of this negative capability "painful creative work" ("Toward a Technical Communication"). Our students, particularly first-year writing and technical communication students, are not necessarily served by the lessons of Keats, Byron, and other Romantic, emotionally tortured poets. The imposition of such "painful" and "chaotic" rhetoric in writing classrooms creates an environment of risky,

personal, and confessional writing that, arguably, creates spaces that are not safe for all students.

Lynch also identifies uncertainty as a necessary condition for teaching and learning (9). Uncertainty, for Lynch, goes beyond mere risk, which is the weighing of known outcomes: "Uncertainty is far more unsettling than risk. In uncertainty we cannot perceive or imagine the possible worlds that may result from our decisions" (10). Our attention here is not simply drawn to the word "uncertainty," but also the word "unsettling" used to characterize it. Again, we see assumptions about what students have experienced and what they need as writing students exhibited by the language used to outline postpedagogical approaches. We cannot know what any given student's experience is, and to what extent being "unsettled" or producing "unsettling" work will be a productive experience. The prevailing assumption that our students are untroubled, spoiled, "the most elite, the most privileged" (Dobrin 16), caught in the throes of "the paralytic effects of large-scale, deep-seated cynicism" (Rickert 162), simply cannot account for the diversity of lived experiences of an actual student population.

Ironically, postpedagogy arose in part as a critique against liberatory and cultural studies approaches to writing classrooms that sought to guide students toward particular ideological insights and critical positions. Rickert's critique of liberatory pedagogies is that, in an effort to free student minds from the shackles of conformity, instructors expect or even demand certain ideological insights and specific forms of critique, "and thereby perpetrate a particular kind of authoritarian violence against the student" (182). But what postpedagogy retains from its precursors is an articulation of the student that assumes that they come into the classroom with specific cultural attitudes. Rickert advises that we recognize and appreciate student resistance (like the Quentin Pierce paper) in the writing classroom, rather than "trying to produce its possibility—which in any event harkens back to the strategies of control, of orchestrating flows and powers to produce a certain specific result" (196). Rickert's articulation of postpedagogy, then, explicitly avoids such expectations, but at the same time assumes that the kind of "inventive resistance to control" exhibited by the Pierce paper is "always happening" (197). Lynch agrees that "[t]he job of pedagogy is not so much to elicit this kind of work, but rather to make prudential judgements about how to respond to it" (116), but is again more interested in what happens when the prized Quentin Pierce-style essay inevitably shows up, and less interested in whether or not Quentin Pierce is an accurate representative model for all students. This conceptualization of the teaching of writing as a kind of receptiveness to the unexpected is then, paradoxically, limited by its assumptions about where (and who) unexpected writing comes from.

Along with the distressful and "disequilibrating" language used to create the classroom space, the language used to discuss the relationship between students and teachers is often fraught with metaphors that reinforce the instructor's control over classroom information, withholding what the instructor thinks, feels, and knows in an effort to create self-reliant students. However metaphoric this language may be, "metaphors often reflect and construct accepted ways of knowing" (Reynolds 5). If we accept such metaphors as a means of representing student-teacher relations, we overlook the potentially damaging effect such language has on students attempting to inhabit the classroom space with trauma.

Rickert notes that power flow in the classroom is difficult to conceptualize, especially as instructors such as Gregory S. Jay call for a decentered classroom experience where students are "producers rather than receivers of knowledge" (Rickert 114). Rickert identifies the problems inherent with the power dynamics of a decentered classroom when he notes,

> Although we may try to curtail our power in the classroom by deflecting it through strategies of decentering, those forces still reemerge through the will to critique[.] . . . There exists a fundamental antagonism between teacher and student that cannot be avoided or dissipated. (118)

Rickert further argues that "institutional authority cannot be easily sidestepped" (120). As much as decentered classroom experiences seek to em-*power* students, the power differential between the student and the instructor, who must ultimately assign a grade or pass critique, cannot be forgotten.

What we find in the assignments proposed by postpedagogues, such as Santos and McIntyre then, is, instead of deflecting authority to the students, a willingness to allow both the teacher and the student to remain in spaces of doubt and uncertainty. For example, Santos and McIntyre reference a common conversation that takes place in their classrooms between students and the teacher:

> Student: So, what does Ulmer mean by Memorial?
>
> Teacher: I don't know, what do you think he means?
>
> Student: Well, something something.
>
> Teacher: Yeah, that sounds about right. So what does that mean/tell us/encourage us to do? ("Toward a Technical Communication")

Such a conversation demonstrates that postpedagogues are comfortable not having all of the answers. This strategy ultimately asks the students to think through their own questions, fostering a critical thinking skill that is not

achieved when they are simply handed the answer. What such an approach does not consider, however, is that such withholding of instructor input may lead many students, particularly those whose relationship to authority may be more complicated than apathy or resistance, to become even more dependent on their instructor.

To better explain this, looking at an assignment referenced by Santos and McIntyre, Marc Santos' online New Media for Tech Comm syllabus from 2015 includes a project called "Make Me a Map That Is Not a Map" (Santos). The project description says simply, "In short, this project will call upon you to construct a map out of mixed- media materials. I imagine the maps will be quite idiosyncratic. We will hold a gallery in which everyone displays their maps" (Santos). The project intentionally withholds what the instructor considers a map that is not a map is. This asks students to interpret the project but, while the instructor may not have an idealized "map that is not a map," students looking to achieve a good grade may assume, given previous experiences with expertise and authority in the classroom, that the instructor knows exactly what he or she expects. Thus, a student may work even harder to please and meet the supposed desires of her instructors. When such projects, as noted by Santos and McIntyre, often ask students to elicit personal information, the line between risk and safety may become blurred as many students are asked to "risk" and strive to meet the assumed desires of their instructor.

Such "intentionally ambiguous" (Santos & McIntyre) assignments offer a great opportunity for unexpected and interesting student work. But without a more nuanced understanding of who our students are and how they might respond to "intentionally ambiguous" assignments, it has just as much potential to cause anxiety that many students might be ill-equipped to handle. While Santos and McIntyre cite anonymous responses provided by their students about this pedagogical approach, as well as successful assignments completed by two male students, each in their respective classrooms, we challenge the validity of a methodology that asks students attempting to work while in a state of "disequilibrium" to respond to how successful such anxiety and disequilibrium has been. Though the surveys were conducted anonymously, there are many students who may have felt intimidated by the survey and simply responded in a way they *assumed* would please the instructor. Indeed, if many students with trauma are not reporting their needs to a University-governed body, as we established in a previous section, what is to say that students are in fact reporting their honest reaction to such classroom assignments via a Google Doc survey that they know the instructor, an authority figure, will read?

This is not to say that assignments that foster doubt and disequilibrium to help students create are necessarily bad things. However, since postpedagogy

calls on us to consider how we can more ethically inhabit the power we embody in the classroom, we need to consider the power dynamic that withholding information and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety may have on a diverse range of students with experiences that we cannot expect to know or understand. And, if we cannot (and should not) expect our students to disclose personal information regarding such experiences, we should remember what Nedra Reynolds tells us in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*: "it's a geographical instinct to try to orient yourself when in an unfamiliar place, behavior learned from home and other dwellings, streets, and cities; it's a habitual response to being faced with newness or unfamiliarity" (168). Students struggling with the power dynamic or who feel alienated due to the risks and anxiety they are asked to experience, may never voice their concerns because, given that the classroom is made to be a jarring and unfamiliar experience, they do not feel comfortable challenging the obvious but unspoken (withheld) desires of their instructor. The overwhelming "instinct" to "orient" oneself in this classroom space ensures that they simply accept their discomfort or leave.

The Trouble with Triggers

Like other FDS scholars (Carter 2016; Knoll 2009), we believe that working to create classrooms that are safe spaces for our students will help to better promote accessibility for students with disabilities. Calls for safe spaces, however, have been met with large-scale oppositions, specifically from within academic institutions. In 2015, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt published an article in *The Atlantic* called "The Coddling of the American Mind." At the beginning of the article appears an image of a toddler sitting at a desk with a sweater that reads "college." Both the title and the image imply a common narrative among college faculty that tiptoeing around sensitive material in the classroom (what they believe defines a safe space) stifles debate and inhibits the intellectual growth of students. Lukianoff and Haidt rail against "trigger warnings"—alerts issued by a professor to warn of material that might elicit negative emotional responses from students—and safe spaces, claiming that they damage free speech and "coddle" our students. Lukianoff and Haidt define a safe space as spaces "where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable" (par. 2). This article and the many others that are opposed to safe spaces and trigger warnings (Bass and Clark 2015; Lukianoff and Haidt 2015; Schlosser 2015; Essig 2014) indicate that there is a misunderstanding about these terms and how they can help instructors to create more accessible classrooms.

The assumption that safe spaces are homogenous thought bubbles where students always agree and debate never occurs 1) overlooks the divergent

worldviews of diverse and unique student populations and experiences and 2) privileges ableist, white, male positions within the classroom by stifling discussions that challenge that normative worldview. The idea that safe spaces do not allow for debate is, in fact, entirely incorrect. For example, in Knoll's classroom she encourages positive discussions about disability that challenge the view that able-bodied students are the norm. Knoll does not wait for individuals to need specific accommodations. Instead, Knoll anticipates the necessary accommodations, such as handing out her syllabus in multiple different formats, in order to send the signal that the classroom is a "disability-positive space" (127).

By talking about issues of disability within the classroom, as Knoll (2009) proposes, we can do a far better job of creating a space through our actions and language that promotes acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities. Another method for creating positive, safe spaces is to no longer rely solely on academic institutions' disability services to inform professor behavior through individuated accommodation letters. Carter (2016) recommends that we get rid of accommodation letters altogether as these require "reliance on the medical model of disability" ("Teaching With Trauma"). Building on Carter's argument, however, we do not believe that writing instructors should be solely responsible for creating accessible classrooms in the absence of an accommodation letter. Instead, we believe that disability should be considered in all classrooms whether it has been precipitated by an individual student or not. Likewise, Kerschbaum argues for "the importance of imagining disability—of understanding disability as always present in any given classroom even if the specific ways that disability takes shape may not be immediately evident" ("Anecdotal Relations"). Waiting for an individual accommodation letter, then, only reinforces an environment where disability is differentiated from the other, "normal" students, or where only medically documented disabilities are provided with accommodations.

Postpedagogues, in attempting to resist creating preconceptions about their students, discuss student diversity only abstractly and fail to anticipate the everyday needs of diverse students. Lynch (2013) proposes that we "[n]ever make claims about student experience without evidence that they themselves have produced" (133). While Lynch is not talking explicitly about accommodations, but about student experience in general, the trouble with assuming that anyone with a "disability" can or will produce evidence is that not all students have access to the necessary accommodation letters: "people of color, poor people, and queer people are less likely to have the financial resources necessary to obtain the required diagnosis and documentation" (Carter). Our own university's SDS website, for example, states that "It is your responsibility as a student to identify yourself to SDS and present proper documentation of your

disability if you would like to receive academic accommodations" ("Overview"). All responsibility for effective accommodation rests with students who may or may not be able to bear that responsibility.

As Knoll has demonstrated through her anticipation and acceptance of disabilities that may or may not be present in her classroom, providing accessibility without coercion from disability services works to combat the othering of students with disabilities against able-bodied students. In author 2's classroom, for example, he has developed an assignment for his technical writing students that asks them to collaboratively write instructions for creating randomly generated folded paper shapes, and then trade those instructions with each other. After a partially blind student had trouble writing instructions by hand (which was a requirement of the assignment), author 2 has changed the assignment for all of his classes to ask students to use computers to write their instructions. Use of the computer allows for text sizes to be greatly enlarged, and for any number of additional accessibility technologies to be employed. In this way, a more diverse range of students can participate, including, for example, students with motor-function disabilities or hearing impairment. The assignment has neither become easier (collaborative writing never is) nor less conducive to moments of unexpected insight, but fewer students now struggle with the nature of the assignment itself, with the classroom logistics of writing, moving around the space, and discussing their writing with others.

This experience has also reshaped both of our classrooms in order to ask students to ensure that their work is accessible. As we prepare writing students for a variety of fields, we ask them to consider different audiences for the assignments they complete. For example, we ask students to provide captioning for videos and written descriptions for any images that they provide on technical documentation. These activities foster discussion about accessibility and normalize acts of accommodation by our students.

Like Knoll and Carter, we build "trigger warnings" into our classroom experience in order to ensure that students who have experienced trauma are not triggered or re-traumatized by the content of a class. Psychoanalyst Avgi Saketopoulou describes being triggered as "a paralyzing, overwhelming cascade of emotional and physiological responses commensurate *not with the anticipation of danger but with the experience of the danger itself*" (qtd. In Carter). The use of trigger warnings, then, seek to inform students about potentially troubling content and avoid triggering these negative psychological and physiological reactions from students. Trigger warnings as a way of building safe spaces have come under scrutiny as instructors are claiming that the need to alert their audience to potentially psychologically triggering material stifles and "threatens" academic freedom. In 2014, the Academic Freedom

and Tenure committee, as a part of the American Association of University Professors, stated,

> The presumption that students need to be protected rather than challenged in a classroom is at once infantilizing and anti-intellectual. It makes comfort a higher priority than intellectual engagement and . . . it singles out politically controversial topics like sex, race, class, capitalism, and colonialism for attention. ("On Trigger Warnings")

Similarly, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2014) published an article by Laurie Essig called "Trigger Warnings Trigger Me." In Essig's article she states,

> The world is a painful and anxiety-inducing place, and human representations of the world are often painful to consume. But rather than retreating into a world where our courses are reduced to viewings of *My Little Pony*, let's all put on our big-girl panties (or big-boy tighty whities, as in the case of the Wellesley statue) and face that world together. ("Trigger Warnings Trigger Me")

Essig's argument assumes that making classrooms accessible infantilizes all students. These same arguments cannot be made for physical, medically documented disabilities but are routinely made about mental disabilities, in spite of the fact that both impact classroom experiences and limit access. Carter identifies this exclusionary tendency, saying that "[t]he false conflations of access with 'safety' allow accommodations to be dismissed, and only serve to further marginalize mentally disabled students by telling them they are in fact not welcome because their needs disrupt the process of learning *their* peers deserve" ("Teaching With Trauma").

"On Trigger Warnings" (2014) further warns that including trigger warnings about suicide in a syllabus, for example, is akin to giving students a "spoiler alert" that will deprive them of experiencing great literature, such as *Anna Karenina* and *The House of Mirth*, as first-time readers. The anti-trigger warning sentiment largely argues that if students want and need trigger warnings, they are childish, immature, and juvenile. Interestingly, these arguments also seem to assert that, since life is tough, it is the job of the college professor to initiate their students into the "school of hard knocks." The language of trigger warning critics so closely echoes that of postpedagogues because both discourses retain the same impoverished conceptualization of students as bored, lazy, and self-centered, having no experience of suicide or other forms of trauma prior to reaching our classroom.

One of the problems with this line of reasoning is the assumption that our students are "coddled" and have never experienced racism or misogyny prior to entering our classrooms. This assumption elides the experiences of

the students sitting in the classroom and, largely, privileges the position of the able-bodied, white, male students. Asking these students to "risk" their experiences means asking them to potentially rehash painful life experiences that they (understandably) may not want to share with the class or their professor. In a blogpost on *EdStateswoman*, the author argues the necessity of creating a safe space for students and writes:

> I learned very quickly that a woman who has been raped might not want to debate whether the length of her skirt determined her fate. I learned that the trans student who was assaulted on his way home didn't want to debate whether he was really a man or a woman. I understood that the black student who put up with people touching her hair "just to see what it feels like" didn't want to listen to the validity of the term 'micro- aggression'. I know that the Muslim student spat at on the bus might not want to listen to a speaker from Britain First in the interests of healthy debate.

> It is all too easy for people who have never faced any of these things to paint safe spaces as mollycoddling bubbles in which students are not allowed to debate difficult things because it might hurt their feelings, or worse, offend them. *If you feel the need to mock the concept of or complain about safe spaces*, *I don't want to generalise, but chances are, you've never felt the need for one*. (*EdStateswoman*, emphasis mine)

In 2014, author 1 taught a first-year composition course that integrated graphic novels and web-writing. As the class started reading *Watchmen*, a 1986 graphic novel written by Alan Moore that dramatizes contemporary fears and anxieties through a deconstruction of superhero narratives, a student tentatively approached author 1 regarding his hesitation to talk about the rape scene during class. With many pertinent themes and challenging material to discuss in a classroom, the treatment of the female characters in the graphic novel was often discussed during the class. This particular student identified a scene in which the main female superhero is raped by a fellow crime fighter. The story of this rape is brought up multiple times in the novel and addressed by different characters with different points of view. The student was having trouble discussing the scene because, as he disclosed, he had suffered from sexual trauma while serving in the military. He apologized for being unable to present an accommodation letter that would excuse him from such discussions, because SDS did not have an accommodation specific to leaving class discussions that became too difficult or "triggering." The student was offered the opportunity to leave the class any time that he felt uncomfortable and the

remainder of classroom assignments were given a warning about any potentially triggering material.

Despite our defense of safe spaces, we acknowledge that there are issues surrounding access to safe spaces and, as bell hooks claims, the very notion of "safety" itself. In a 2014 public dialogue between bell hooks and Laverne Cox, hooks interrupts Cox's discussion of safe spaces to note that she is largely critical of the notion of safety. "I'm very interested in what it means for us to cultivate together a community that allows for risk," states hooks,

> The risk of knowing someone outside your own boundaries, the risk that is love – there is no love that does not involve risk. I'm a little wary because white people love to evoke the 'safe spaces' and I have a tendency to be critical of that but I do believe that learning takes place in the harmonious space . . . (49:00-50:05 A Public Dialogue Between).

For hooks, this form of risk ultimately means the ability to confront people and ideas outside of one's comfort zone. In lieu of the term "safe spaces," hooks opts for "brave spaces" because it is an act of bravery to work to communicate across differences. It is much easier to hate, argue, belittle, or even ignore such differences, but hooks sees it as an act of bravery to create possibilities for exchange and communication.

Despite hooks' use of the term "risk," however, she clearly indicates that these spaces are intended for communication and not violence. The discussion of safety and safe spaces between Cox and hooks follows a story of hooks meeting Janet Mock, a well-known trans-rights activist, writer, and TV host. A friend called hooks and said she did not want to meet Mock because she "is an abomination." hooks made the decision to turn away her friend because she was not going to explain to Mock that there is someone who feels violently towards her identity: hooks states, "I don't allow that kind of violence" (47:02).

"Brave spaces" is not the first term seeking to reimagine safe spaces. Campus activists have also worked to recognize "safer spaces" as a more inclusive means of creating community spaces. The Coalition for Safer Spaces states, "We say 'safer' realizing that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way as others, so any one set of guidelines established to create safety may not meet the requirements of everyone and there may be complications or lapses in fulfilling those guidelines in practice" (par. 2). Both brave spaces and safer spaces work to be intersectional and to acknowledge lapses in our understanding of safety as well as access. In both cases, however, safer spaces and brave spaces seek to allow for diverse voices to speak without the threat of being seen as an abomination or experiencing other forms of violence.

Claiming that our classrooms should not be safe spaces, brave spaces, or safer spaces closes the door on student experiences and those students'

potential need to discuss or not discuss those experiences free of judgment and penalty. The critics of safe spaces and trigger warnings seem to conflate discomfort and trauma. Safe spaces are not opposed to challenging students and asking them to complete difficult assignments. On the contrary, discussing and drawing attention to the normative view of gender and disabilities within the classroom is extremely challenging for many students. It is difficult to act within spaces that ask us to consider perspectives and experiences that are not our own (the kind of risk hooks proposes when discussing brave spaces). When talking about her own classroom, the author of "Safe Spaces: Still Needed, Still Important," writes, "everyone is allowed to be there, but micro-aggressions, assumptions and triggers are discussed, defined, questioned. Do I shut down some discussions? Yes, because if they go on to cause someone distress, my classroom is not the place for that" ("Safe Spaces: Still Needed").

These spaces - safe, safer, brave - indicate an ever-evolving understanding of how communities, such as classrooms, can best help communication happen between members of that community. Accessibility, safety, understanding, and communication are all an ongoing process. Adopting changes in the classroom in order to better meet the needs of students is a great start towards fostering accessibility in the classroom, but this is a part of the *process* of accessibility and not an end point.

Conclusion

In attempting to create a space for the unexpected in writing classrooms, postpedagogy challenges the writing teacher to shrug off old assumptions about how students write, what makes good writing, and even what "writing" is. Free of these expectations, new and meaningful work that would have proven troubling to pedagogies of the past can be explored and even valued. None of the literature on postpedagogy describes this position as easy to inhabit. Lynch (2013) describes what is asked of instructors as "[c]ultivated naïveté, beginner's mind, undisciplined expertise, all leading to a kind of pedagogical *sprezzatura*" (138). It is in part due to this desire to remain open to possibility that postpedagogy resists entering into discussions of privilege and disability. Pedagogies that ask students or instructors to adopt specific ideological positions or perform specific forms of cultural critique often wind up re-inscribing the kind of prescriptivist or territorializing writing practices they were designed to combat. These are the very pedagogies that postpedagogy attempts to avoid.

But this resistance to assumptions and expectations intentionally creates a lacuna around student experience. With the exception of a few exemplary cases of resistant students or surprising student work to serve as benchmarks, students are largely absent from the discussion. Student experience

is flattened and homogenized into an unknowable morass, waiting to come into focus in our classrooms. However, the radical uncertainty that we adopt toward student writing should not extend to our understanding of our students themselves, and the "discomfort" and "anxiety" that we ask of ourselves as instructors entering these uncertain spaces cannot be what we ask of our students. The stakes are too high and the risks are too great when we are talking about students with physical or mental disabilities. If these students are unable to participate in the classroom at all because the instructor has not adequately considered issues of access *prior* to their arrival, none of the surprise that distinguishes postpedagogical classrooms from any other classroom can be created.

By challenging the language used by postpedagogues we do not mean to insinuate that students be "coddled" or allowed to ignore worldviews that diverge from their own. Instead, we seek to create spaces where postpedagogical assignments that foster creativity and push our expectations of student work can be performed without fear of exclusion or retraumatization. Creating safe spaces through FDS helps these students to risk because they know that the impact of risking is not as drastic as retraumatization. The world outside of the ivory tower is extremely difficult and many of our students have already learned that lesson. Why can't these students count on their classroom to be a safe space for discussion and asking difficult questions without fear of exclusion, harassment, or trauma?

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