

Volume 5
Number 1
Spring 2011

Open WORDS

*Access
and
English
Studies*

In this issue

*Guest Editor's Introduction:
Disability and the Shape of School*
Jay Dolmage

Able, Disabled, Enabled:
Mainstreaming the Disability Course
Lynn Z. Bloom

Rhetoric, Ethos, and Unease: Re-negotiation of
the "Normal" in the Classroom and on the Quad
Zosha Stuckey and Lois P. Agnew

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Returning Veteran:
The Rhetorical and Narrative Challenges
Bekah Hawrot Weigel and Lisa Detweiler Miller

Overcoming Rhetoric: Forced Disclosure and the
Colonizing Ethic of Evaluating Personal Essays
Tara K. Wood

Inclusive Teaching: Perspectives of Students
with Disabilities
Nancy Johnston and Tina Doyle

I Am My Language: Representing and Misrepresenting
Deaf Writers
Linda Rubel and Rose Marie Toscano

Scar Tissue
Nancy Viva Davis Halifax

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Table of Contents

- 1** *Guest Editor's Introduction:*
Disability and the Shape of School
Jay Dolmage
- 4** Able, Disabled, Enabled:
Mainstreaming the Disability Course
Lynn Z. Bloom
- 15** Rhetoric, Ethos, and Unease: Re-negotiation of
the "Normal" in the Classroom and on the Quad
Zosha Stuckey and Lois P. Agnew
- 29** Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Returning
Veteran: The Rhetorical and Narrative Challenges
**Bekah Hawrot Weigel and Lisa Detweiler
Miller**
- 38** Overcoming Rhetoric: Forced Disclosure and the
Colonizing Ethic of Evaluating Personal Essays
Tara K. Wood
- 53** Inclusive Teaching: Perspectives of Students with
Disabilities
Nancy Johnston and Tina Doyle
- 61** I Am My Language:
Representing and Misrepresenting Deaf Writers
Linda Rubel and Rose Marie Toscano
- 73** Scar Tissue
Nancy Viva Davis Halifax

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Guest Editor's Introduction:

Disability and the Shape of School

THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT OPEN words. Using words to develop pride in disability identity, to challenge discourse that devalues, to foster collective self-representation. Using all of the pneumatic power of words to remove barriers to access. Hammering most aggressively at those barriers that have kept people with disabilities out of social institutions like colleges and universities. Central to this history has been the idea that disability is created in part by a social, physical, and educational environment shaped in ways that exclude. *Open Words*, the journal, shares the mission of reshaping all that is exclusive about higher education.

My first encounter with the disability rights movement happened when I was a child, and my brother, who was disabled, was being bussed to a segregated school in another community every day. My parents fought the school board for his right to go to school in his neighborhood, with his friends and brother and sister, and to be included in regular classes. We lost this fight in the Ontario (Canada) Superior Court. So we moved. We found a city and a school board where he could attend regular classes. There was simply no way that my brother was going to be denied his right to an education. Through this experience, I came to see school itself as a powerful concentration of communal and social ideals. Looking at who is “schooled”—and who is not—offers a profound reflection of shared attitudes. To understand how a society teaches is to understand its deeply-held values. Still today, when we look closely at schooling, we see that our culture—in the main—has only a tokenized commitment to the true inclusion of all of its members in this, its most important social structure.

So, understandably, my initial experience with higher education was unsettling. It felt strange and wrong to be one of the “select few” who would get to go to university. I was encouraged to see myself as superior, to strive to further distinguish myself and rise above others. Higher education is extraordinarily ableist. The dominant educational paradigm still sees college as a place to sort society based on the education of the “deserving” few. And these values then reflect and reinforce pervasive cultural attitudes about human worth. We can either go with this flow or fight against it.

So, what if we saw colleges and universities as places to elevate all of society based on the education of all of its citizens? What if we believed that, given access, anyone could learn? What if we believed that this access is worth fighting for, that equitable education requires a constant critique and persuasive re-shaping of what we do as teachers?

The journal *Open Words* stands for exactly these educational values and has critical-DOI: [10.37514/OPW-J.2011.5.1.01](https://doi.org/10.37514/OPW-J.2011.5.1.01)

ly interrogated the forces that work against inclusion, equality, and access. So it is no surprise that articles on disability issues have already appeared in the journal. And of course, a full issue devoted to disability is a perfect fit. I am honored to be part of this partnership.

Here are a few themes that I see as central to this issue, central to the mission of this journal, and central to disability issues in higher education:

First, as mentioned above, colleges and universities are built of ideas. From their curriculum up to their architecture, they are deeply interested and invested places. This means they can also be rebuilt—retrofitted, annexed, or reconstructed from the bricks up. *Open Words* is about using our words to rebuild academia. Lynn Bloom shows us how this can be done with curriculum in "Able, Disabled, Enabled: Mainstreaming the Disability Course"; Lois Agnew and Zosha Stuckey provide a rhetorical framework for reshaping bodily attitudes on campus in "Rhetoric, Ethos, and Unease: The Re-Negotiation of 'Normal' in the Classroom and on the Quad."

Secondly, disability itself is used to shape school. The spaces of higher education frame bodies and minds profoundly—schools don't just subtly form students through education, they also freeze and fix cultural attitudes about human worth. Through educational techniques and regimes, and even through academic research, disability is used as a broad and flexible, easily applicable marker of stigma—the automatically unwanted. If we want to rewrite the values of education, we need to challenge the idea that disability is the haunting inverse image of higher education. In "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Returning Veteran: The Rhetorical and Narrative Challenges," Bekah Hawrot Weigel and Lisa Detweiler Miller challenge the ways that this stigma has gathered around returning veterans. Tara Wood also troubles predetermined rhetorical valences of disability in "Overcoming Rhetoric: Forced Disclosure and the Colonizing Ethic of Evaluating Personal Essays." These essays also offer means to recognize disability more positively and thus to shape new possibilities.

Finally, disability must be rewritten by its rightful authors. People with disabilities, because they have been historically excluded from all major social institutions, have also been disproportionately (and very detrimentally) shaped by these institutions. People with disabilities have been objects of research, not researchers. People with disabilities haven't been seen as writers, they've been written upon. People with disabilities haven't even been taught, let alone seen as teachers. Instead of being educated, people with disabilities were institutionalized (imprisoned, abused, sterilized). So, the script needs to be flipped, and the power of writing disability—and rewriting educational values—needs to be given to people with disabilities. In "Inclusive Teaching: Perspectives of Students with Disabilities," Nancy Johnston and Tina Doyle do just this. Linda Rubel and Rose Marie Toscano's "I Am My Language: Representing and Misrepresenting Deaf Writers" likewise gives voice to students.

Finally, Nancy Viva Davis Halifax's "Scar Tissue" offers a teaching narrative that challenges the messages we are so often given as teachers: that we must appear superbly able and invulnerable.

Let's be honest. Being a teacher or administrator in higher education is one of the most problematic positions in our society in terms of disability. We are asked to be the arbiters of ability and privilege. We are where we are because we have, throughout our lives, been encouraged to see ourselves (or to pass) as better than others; we've been asked to perform easy mastery (no matter how hard we've had to work to do so); we've been invited to join exclusive clubs—and these are now the nebulous castles that we somehow work the drawbridges to.

The authors in this issue interrogate these problematic positions. Following their lead, we can all look for opportunities to rewrite our institutions with new, powerful, inviting, open words.

Jay Dolmage

January 2011

Able, Disabled, Enabled: Mainstreaming the Disability Course

Why I Taught a Disability Course

I WAS IMPELLED, IN A WORD, BY PAIN. THREE ROTATOR CUFF SURGERIES in two years oblige me to live for six weeks each time in another country I have previously only glimpsed briefly while speeding past. *Pain* so searing that I can't move, accompanied by nausea and vertigo from an allergic reaction to the prescribed opiate. Pain leaking from beneath the edges of the Aleve, the only painkiller I can tolerate. Pain in staccato bursts from the tough but necessary physical therapy exercises. *Discomfort* throughout the forty-one long nights of trying to sleep upright in a recliner chair because the bulky sling-and-pillow apparatus necessary to hold the shoulder in place prevents lying down. *Disorientation* from having to do things with one hand that ordinarily require two—buttoning buttons, washing my hair, writing on the computer—and writing with the wrong hand when the right is immobilized by a sling. *Fatigue*. Everything I can in fact do takes twice as long, showering, getting dressed, mincing across the icy campus sidewalks for fear of falling. Even thinking. *Dependency* on my husband—I can't drive, tie my shoes, cut up my meat, trust myself to hold a hot heavy frying pan. *Indifference* from the world at large. The only acceptable answer for people who ask, "Hi, how are you?" is "Fine," even when they see the sling. But fellow sojourners in the land of joint repair show me slides of their journeys; on the scale of recuperative pain, rotator cuffs trump hips and knees. *Blame*. I am labeled "noncompliant" when I follow the physical therapist's exercise directions to the letter, tearing out all the stitches and the screws and thus requiring surgery #2. If this is all my fault, the doctor and therapist are exempt. *Guilt*. It could be worse; I don't complain. There will be no pity parties on my watch. *Humor*, preferably self-deprecating. "Ambulatory surgery," as I explain in "(Im)Patient," my essay on this experience, "strikes me as an oxymoron. Are patients—as an impatient person I think of us as scarcely patient at all—expected to walk around while the doctor operates on the run?" (187).

My experiences could be anyone's, I realized. There is ample corroboration—and more—not only in the locker room at the gym where I go every post-op day even if only to stagger a few laps around the track—but in nonfiction, my professional specialty. There are

numerous distinguished autobiographies by people with disabilities, caregiver narratives, physicians and science writers exploring issues of health and medicine for a general readership. Because these works are nonfiction, written by people with firsthand, real-life experience of the topics they address, they possess the authority and credibility necessary to compel conviction from readers accustomed to either hyperbolic or sentimental presentations of disability in fiction and the mass media. (This is not to deny the validity of fiction by such masters ranging from Dostoevsky, *The Gambler*, to David Lodge, *Deaf Sentence*—both writing from personal experience—but to justify the choice of the generous range of nonfiction genres.) A growing body of theoretical, literary, and pedagogical scholarship undergirds the burgeoning field of disability studies (discussed elsewhere in this issue). These materials, in combination with easy access to the news online—particularly the *New York Times*—make it possible to teach literature courses to a mainstream audience. Why not bring disability out of the closet and into the classroom, not only for students expecting to work in therapeutic professions but also for all students?

What I Taught

So I developed a course, “Able, Disabled, Enabled: Disability in American Literature and Culture,” which I hoped would transform, utterly, the students’ understanding of the world. They develop—to the extent that this is possible in fourteen fleeting weeks—an insider’s knowledge of an entire realm of information and fresh points of view that had hitherto been hidden in plain sight. As new, enthusiastic advocates for disability rights and recognition, the students, I think, feel as if they’ve joined a secret club, even though millions of people worldwide may actually share their understanding.

This nutshell overview of the course is proffered in hopes that this model may provide a useful template for innumerable variations—as many versions of a course as there are variations among people with a particular disability. For instance, Brenda Brueggemann’s “An Enabling Pedagogy” and various configurations discussed in Lewiecki-Wilson and Brueggemann’s *Disability and the Teaching of Writing* offer possibilities undergirded by the perspectives historical, political, cultural, theoretical, and experiential in Lennard Davis’s *The Disability Studies Reader*.

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The **course description reads:** “In a society that values high-level functioning from all its members, what does it mean to be able-bodied? disabled? Is disability a state of body, mind, (in)ability to perform, social attitude? Is *disability* itself even an appropriate term, in a world where surgery, genetic engineering, drugs, and other means can repair, alter, and create bodies—and minds—to order? Who makes decisions over people’s bodies, who holds the power, who is empowered—and to do what? There are no simple, easy, finite, even “right” answers to these controversial hot button questions, which we will examine from many perspectives, each and all subject to change” (Bloom, “Able” 1). So, through excellent works by and about disability by autobiographers, physicians, scientists, social commentators, essayists, artists, the course explored the changing and contested meanings of key concepts, such as able/ability, disabled/disability from multiple perspectives: physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, ethical, social, political, economic, medical and more.

Course Topics. The following topics and core works address the course aims.

Definitions: What is “normal”? What is disability? What does it mean to be able bodied? To have “a sound mind in a sound body”? (Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*; all the other core works before the authors became ill or disabled)

Social and political perspectives: Stigma, shunning, and some consequences. The normative standard—and personhood. In what ways the person’s social, political, legal status affect these conceptions? (Again, Douglass, *Narrative*; and all works.)

Historical: The default representation of disability in 20th-century America before 1985. (Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life*.)

Representational: Representations of disability: in theory, sports, law, the media, and in—gasp—real life. (John Hockenberry, *Moving Violations* (paraplegia); Kay Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind* (bipolar disorder); Marisa Marchetto, *Cancer Vixen* (cancer and body images).)

Ethical: Matters of quality of life, education, social life, professional opportunities and ethical issues. (All works. Ethics for professional practitioners: mental health: psychiatrist, Kay Jamison; physician, Atul Gawande, *Complications*.)

Medical and Public Health: Ethical Issues and medicine. Public health; Disability, disease and public policy. (Jamison, Gawande.)

Caregivers and family perspectives: Keller. When parents take (or try to take) control. (Short readings by Sea, Sanders, Hall, Martensen, McKibben.)

These are huge topics; they interweave, overlap, and embed a host of auxiliary issues, particularly when the assigned readings are augmented by updates from the *New York Times* du jour. It may be presumptuous for an English professor/course to take on these topics—after all, I’m not a real doctor, even though my first post-dissertation book was *Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical*. (I wrote about America’s most widely consulted

mid-century pediatrician, author of the bestselling *Baby and Child Care*, to understand biographical method and the author's creative process (my dissertation topic), not pediatrics.) Yet disability studies extends so comprehensively beyond the borders of a single discipline that it would be both impossible and mistaken—even unethical—to try to restrict this (or, I would argue, any) literature course only to the texts at hand. Disability studies has too many real world implications to confine it to the classroom, and it is these that make the course so exciting for the students.

What the Students Read

To further these aims, the students read distinguished autobiographies and creative nonfiction that largely provide a social activist rather than a medical model, which, as Tobin Siebers says, “defines disability as an individual defect . . . that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being.” Disability is instead “a cultural and minority identity . . . not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to social control and capable of effecting social change” (3-4). I chose works that represent common disabilities, all except the cartoon *Cancer Vixen* available in audio as well as print versions. Except for Frederick Douglass, the authors—white, well-educated, upper middle class professionals—are typical of the authors of disability autobiography, but not typical of people with disabilities. For, as Couser observes, autobiography “is not a universal human endeavor.” It is “confined to particular cultures . . . characterized by literacy, individuality, and the valorization of particular life scripts” (“Signs” 227)—in general, positive, triumphant accounts by successful people. The works that are published in paperback by mainstream presses are thus written by authors who demonstrate—in the mode established by Helen Keller—how to prevail over disability and lead fulfilling, mainstream lives. Nancy Mairs's 1986 essay, “On Being a Cripple,” about confronting MS head-on, determines the predominant stance and the appropriate, defiant language: “People—crippled or not—wince at the word ‘cripple,’ as they do not at ‘handicapped’ or ‘disabled.’ Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger” (9). Thus as core works I chose the following:

Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave* (1845 edition). Douglass's *Life* is an example of the profound effects—social, political, economic, ethical—of stigma on the lives of an entire class of people. His superlative physical and mental capabilities enabled him to become a 19th-century phenomenon, an African-American model of a paradigmatic American success story. There are significant analogies between the historically stigmatizing treatment of slaves and the treatment of people with

disabilities to warrant reading this American classic in a disabilities studies course.

Helen Keller, *The Restored Classic: The Story of My Life* (1903, 2003). This remains the 20th-century default disability autobiography, the single disability autobiography that students know, even though they are more likely to have encountered Keller through *The Miracle Worker* than her own work, and thus regard the author as a young child whose moment of triumph occurred when she learned to spell “w-a-t-e-r” after a tremendous struggle with her teacher, Anne Sullivan. In fact much of the autobiography itself focuses on Keller’s education—classical, sophisticated, and rigorous—during her college prep and work at Radcliffe. Her defense against accusations of plagiarism and dishonesty reflects a cultural suspicion of the learning and ethical capacities of the blind or deaf. Like Douglass’s *Life*, Keller’s *Story* is an exemplary model of the power of intelligence, perseverance, and hard work that can also be read through the lenses of class, gender, collaborative learning, and social leadership.

John Hockenberry, *Moving Violations: War Zones, Wheelchairs, and Declarations of Independence* (1996). A paraplegic since his auto accident at 19, Hockenberry is the very model of a modern major disability rights advocate, feisty and funny. He describes his career as an NPR reporter at Mt. St. Helen’s eruption, in Chicago, Washington DC, and in the Middle East; his finish-line race to be the first journalist in space; his love affairs; and his loathing of sentimentalizing and stereotyping of people with disabilities. “I’m a cripple for life,” he says, “I cannot walk. I have ‘lost the use of my legs.’ I am paralyzed from the waist down. I use a wheelchair. . . . I am a paraplegic. I require ‘special assistance for boarding.’ I am a gimp, cripple, physically challenged, differently abled, paralyzed. I am a T-5 para. I am sick. I am well. I have a T4-6 incomplete dural lesion, a spinal cord injury, a broken back, ‘broken legs’” (87).

Marisa Acocella Marchetto, *Cancer Vixen: A True Story* (2006). Here Marchetto, a cartoonist, narrates in pictures the story of her discovery of breast cancer three weeks before her marriage, at 43, to Silvano, a Prince Charming restaurateur. Her mantra: “Cancer, I am going to kick your butt . . . and I’m gonna do it in killer 5-inch heels!” Her “(s)mother,” her friends, and especially her fiancé—whose wedding gift is health insurance that absorbs much of the \$192,720.04 cost of the eleven-month treatment—rally round to defeat the enemy, not only cancer but jealous female rivals. Although this book fits the medical model of **a**: discovery of disease **b**: treatment **c**: cure, its upbeat fashionista central character serves as an activist, aspirational model for the book’s target female audience.

Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (1995). From the dual perspectives of a clinical psychologist and someone with bipolar disorder, Jamison writes “to change public attitudes about psychiatric illnesses in general and

manic-depressive illness in particular” (7). Because “the student years represent the age of greatest risk” of suicide, she also writes to encourage “students who struggle with mental illness” to fight against “the lack of understanding [of] professors and . . . administrators; the lack of adequate health insurance; their fears about being asked to go on medical leave and not . . . being allowed to return to campus” and other life-and-death aspects of discrimination (*Nothing*, 47-48).

Atul Gawande, *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* (2002). This collection of Gawande's *New Yorker* essays discusses how doctors learn, work, make life-and-death decisions dependent on intuition, ethical and technical judgments, collegiality—and sanitation; ways of dealing with obesity, pain; and medical errors and mistakes. Gawande himself represents the, yes, cutting edge of contemporary medical writing, humane, unsentimental, exemplifying medicine's high-stakes paradox of expertise and uncertainty, “doubts and missteps,” “failures as well as the successes,” “messy, uncertain . . . surprising” (4).

All these authors' dynamic lives and work confront and contradict the social stereotype that having an “able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being” (Siebers 4). Their versatile works may also be read through a variety of lenses emphasizing ethical, political, economic, social, legal, technological, medical, and/or religious concerns. Thus they speak to one another and provide many points of entrance to the ongoing conversation.

Additional material. The core autobiographies can be augmented by films (such as *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*; *Sicko*), articles on health and medicine from the *New York Times*, and, when available, outside speakers, and other writings categorized here.

Theory, though difficult for the students, provides a necessary underpinning, as addressed in such articles as Tobin Siebers's “Disability in Theory,” Lerita M. Coleman's “Stigma: An Enigma Demystified,” Simi Linton's “Reassigning Meaning.”

Science and medicine. A wealth of writings exists, readily accessible to the general public, and stimulating to the science students as well. Bill McKibben's “Designer Genes” offers a chilling, clearheaded analysis of what could happen if aspiring (and wealthy) parents employ genetic engineering to create new and ever-newer models of superior children in a “biological arms race.” He warns, “Suppose parents could add thirty points to their child's IQ? . . . Deciding not to soup them up . . . well, it could come to seem like child abuse” (Bloom, *Essay* 576). Charles G. Mann's “The Coming Death Shortage” addresses the ethical and social inequities that will result from increasingly long life expectancy, rising from age 47 in 1900 to 77 in 2000: “a tripartite society: the very old and very rich on top . . . a mass of the ordinary old . . . and the diminishingly influential young” (Bloom, *Essay* 427).

Caregiver and family narratives. Some families must play the cards fate has dealt.

Scot Sea's "Planet Autism" snapshots the bleak alternative universe where Sea and his wife have been on duty for the fifteen years of their autistic daughter's life, no time out, no days off: "Shit everywhere. Splashes of blood glistening like paint, black clots, yellow-brown feces, and a three-foot-diameter pond of vomit that your daughter stands in the middle of" (208). In "Under the Influence: Paying the Price of My Father's Booze," Scott Russell Sanders speaks for the families of the "ten million victims, fifteen million, twenty" million alcoholics in the United States who share the "family secret": "You swallow the bitter quinine of knowledge, and you learn to feel pity and compassion toward the drinker. Yet the shame lingers in your marrow, and, because of the shame, anger" (20, 8). People suffer from others' decisions. Meredith Hall's "Shunned" excoriates the social mores of the 1960s in a searing account of the "deep and scarring depression" she experienced at 16 as an unwed and therefore "dirty pregnant girl hiding upstairs in a cold, lonely house," shunned by her parents and exiled from the previously embracing society. In "Reflections on the Plight of Sick Children," Dr. Robert Martensen raises questions of bioethics in which federal policy and parents' wishes conspire to keep painfully ill children alive: "too little treatment has given way to too much" (122).

Privacy policy. "Able, Disabled, Enabled" by its very nature encourages telling and trading personal stories, a potentially great disclosure of intimate information. So from day 1 the privacy policy is in effect: "If you don't want others to read your work, simply label it 'Private.'" This is particularly important in a disability studies class where students may have, as E. B. White says, "secret reasons" for taking the course and for not wanting to disclose those reasons (425). Even though with time and comfort most students open up, they have a right to remain silent.

What the Students Wrote

Major papers. Of the three major papers, two were on the readings, one was a personal essay on "My Intimate Understanding of Disability" (for assignments, email Lynn.Bloom@UConn.edu). "The first two papers," I tell the students, "are to fulfill university requirements. The personal essay is for you." Thus students wrote about caring for relatives with cancer, AIDS, diabetes, and other complications of obesity; growing up with siblings with Tourette's syndrome, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse and the consequent family devastation; dealing with their own Chron's disease, chronic pain, broken bones, cleft lip, mysterious fevers, fibromyalgia, cutting, depression, attempted suicide.

The revisions were, for many, as important as the initial drafts; they needed freedom to approach the tough topics obliquely, to gradually understand the embedded issues, to change their minds if necessary, and above all, to be honest with themselves. As an English professor, I am not practicing therapy without a license, but I am providing a context for

growth. This may be the only opportunity students have in four undergraduate years to examine aspects of their own lives, the lives of their families and friends, from a long-term perspective governed by values and ethical principles, fears—and hopes. These are the papers, I like to believe, they will never forget.

Brief writings. To each class meeting the students brought a brief writing to jump start the day's discussion. Refined, revisited, and revised throughout the semester, they provided a cumulative dialogue on the topic at hand.

1. Unpack and compare the meanings of a variety of definitions of disability on the Internet from websites such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the World Health Organization, Women's Health Zone, and others.
2. List ten aspects of your ability to function physically that you take for granted. Rank order these with the most important ones first.
3. List ten aspects of your ability to function mentally and/or psychologically that you take for granted. Rank order these with the most important ones first. Identify negatives as well as positives, if you wish. For instance, are you a chronic procrastinator (how far in advance do you study for an exam? mind/psychology? ability to function)?
4. Get dressed using your dominant arm/hand only and write an analysis of your experience.
5. Now get dressed using your less dominant arm/hand. Analyze your experience and compare this with your dominant handed dressing.
6. Spend an hour blindfolded. Analyze your experiences, reactions, others' behavior toward you during this time. [I share in advance with my students the common Disability Studies critique of such role playing—that because this activity is transient, not genuine, and casual it cannot possibly replicate the authentic experience; all true. Nevertheless, however superficial, the students find these brief experiences are illuminating and moving.]
7. Map your typical campus route. How would you have to alter it if you were traveling by wheelchair? Is our campus truly “accessible”? If not, what could make it so?
8. Analyze a charitable appeal (I distributed mail solicitations for medical, health, and humanitarian organizations), noting its language, illustrations, and the nature of its appeals. Check its claims against the evidence in Charity Navigator. On the basis of what you've found, would you contribute to this charity?
9. Reaction papers to films (*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*; *Sicko*) and the out-

side speaker (Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize recipient; a speaker discussing her altered career and life expectations throughout a decade of breast cancer with a myriad of complications, positive yet realistic in confronting an anticipated early death.

Although these writings represented a lot of work, no one complained. Indeed, the students seemed energized by their variety and breadth, and discussed them with enthusiasm.

What We Learned (Students and Instructor Alike)

A lot, all of us. Among other things, as student final exams revealed, the complexity of disability extending far beyond medical issues: “I was [now] able to see the ethical, social, and psychological sides, among many others.” The myriad of opportunities for people with disabilities to lead full and varied lives, at work and play, love and marriage, in sickness and in health, however compromised: “Disability can affect you only as much as you let it.” Disability, concludes another, “should not be seen as negative but a special uniqueness. If disability were eliminated a lot of character would be eliminated as well.” Moreover, writing about disability can effect positive transformation, providing a new “outlook and understanding that change the person you are now and will continue to be.”

“Able, Disabled, Enabled” could have lapsed into solipsism, narcissism, or self-pity, but it didn’t. The students were inspired by the readings, exhilarated by their writing—particularly the short assignments and the “Intimate Understanding of Disability” papers: “I am incredibly appreciative that I was able to write about this experience”; “It was an important piece for me to write personally.” In addition to accomplishing the course aims, unique in their college experience, the course encourages students to use their writing and reading for self-understanding and—when possible—the resolution of personal problems. If the students’ enhanced personal awareness leads to greater social awareness and potential political activism, so much the better. Above all, however, what we all learned, with every reading, every writing, every experience with disability in and out of class was to see the world with new eyes, a world in which disability is made visible and ordinary, an integral part of everyday life.

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Zosha Stuckey and Lois P. Agnew

Rhetoric, Ethos, and Unease: Re-negotiation of the “Normal” in the Classroom and on the Quad

Introduction

IN THE LAST 15 YEARS, DISABILITY HAS GAINED A MORE VISIBLE foothold within the academy and in public spaces. According to the Center on Human Policy, U.S. colleges and universities currently offer nineteen disability studies minors, one major, and fifteen advanced programs in disability studies. In addition to an increase in academic programming, more students with disabilities are attending college. In 2007, 15.5 percent of people ages 18 to 34 living with disabilities, or 720,879 people, were enrolled in colleges in the U.S. In contrast, 25.1 percent of people without disabilities, or 15,849,237 people, were enrolled (Annual). The number of undergraduates who identified as having a disability increased from 7.4 percent in 2000 to 11.3 percent in 2004 (National).

Despite certain gains in the academic province, a fierce debate still ensues over who should be allowed access to college, and, once in college what ways of being are acceptable. Anxieties about the challenges that students with disabilities might pose to the academy's traditional instructional methods have at times led to bizarre outcomes. One particularly salient example is the mythical narrative of “Somnolent Samantha,” a story that achieved wide circulation after its first telling by Jon Westling, Provost and eventually President of Boston University, in 1995 (Beilke). Westling's account featured a student named Samantha, who disclosed after class that she had a learning disability in the area of auditory processing. In Westling's story, Samantha went on to demand copies of notes from lectures, a seat at the front of the class, extra time on assignments, and a separate room to take exams. Also, because she fell asleep without warning in class, she would need to be filled in on what was missed (“Fictitious”). Later, Westling admitted that the story was fictitious but maintained that “Somnolent Samantha” exemplified the unreasonable expectations universities were being held to and the challenges administrators faced in responding to their mandate to accommodate disability. Morton Silverman makes Westling's point more directly: “College is not for everyone,” he alleges.

The tension between the increased visibility of disability in public life and the persistent claim that “college is not for everyone” illustrates the historically complicated relationship between disability and public life. In *Staring: How We Look*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson gives us an intimate look at the lived experiences of disabled bodies in public. Garland-Thomson points out that, although the “extraordinary body” is being seen in public in ways it has not been seen before (20), this new visibility does not go unpunished. She notes that, even today,

Disability is a visual cue for lower expectations and discomfort for those who identify as nondisabled. Discomfort comes in part from the social illegibility of the disabled body. The social rituals in which we accord one another recognition depend on an accurate reading of bodily and gestural cues. Unpredictable or indecipherable cues create anxiety. It is not disability that itself creates unease, but rather people’s inability to read such cues disrupts the expected routine nature of social relations. (38)

While Garland-Thomson discusses how “stareable sights” demand that we use narrative to reconcile the initial disruption back into some semblance of order, these uncomfortable interactions have posed particular challenges on college campuses and in college classrooms, where discomfort has often blurred the lines among disability, difference, and danger. The difficulty of distinguishing between disability and danger, between difference and incompetence, has deep roots in rhetorical history that are worthy of further examination.

In this article, we wish to explore these roots in order to consider the vexed relationship that exists between rhetorical ethos and embodiment. We wish to look closely at the “common unease” (Garland-Thomson) or “aesthetic nervousness” (Quayson) that disability and embodied variation evoke in classrooms and more broadly on college campuses. We argue that divergent embodiments can constitute a site for rhetorical invention that reimagines ethos and authority as circulating through diverse types of bodies and mental states. Such inventive strategies can be devised through exploring possible intersections between the fields of rhetoric and disability studies and developing pedagogical strategies that help students confront their “aesthetic nervousness” in order to imagine a different way of encountering disability.

This endeavor calls for a change in the status quo. Garland-Thomson notes that rethinking the status quo requires that we evaluate the expectations we have of certain kinds of bodies occupying certain kinds of spaces (6). We are also interested in the generative aspects of embodied difference and the productive potential of discomfort that leads us to recognize each other in new ways and urges us to reformulate ways of seeing and knowing (Garland-Thomson 15). People with disabilities face challenges due to a long history that con-

nects particular types of embodiment to particular types of character; however, a consideration of the social and rhetorical construction of ethos across centuries of history can also promote a new vision of how embodied ethos can be recast and reimagined in the face of difference.

Classical Theories of Ethos

The concept of ethos has had a vexed relationship with the rhetor's physical presence from early stages of western rhetoric's history. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes the pursuit of true rhetoric as a process that is essentially disembodied, as individuals first "must know the truth" and then adapt their presentation of the knowledge they possess to the needs of particular souls, "offering to the complex soul elaborate and harmonious discourses, and simple talks to the simple soul" (167). While Aristotle shares Plato's sense that ethos derives from the rhetor's ability "to understand human character and goodness in their various forms," (Rhetoric I, ii, 1356a), he also believes that the rhetor's credibility with the audience is constructed through the delivery of the speech, which suggests an embodied *ethos*.

The link between ethos and delivery is more fully articulated by Roman rhetoricians, whose well-known interest in rhetoric's capacity to build individual character and promote civic virtue must be examined alongside a cultural emphasis on physiognomy and a consistent emphasis on the canon of delivery. In his study of Roman gesture, Anthony Corbeill examines how gesture and physical movement correlate to a fixed system of meanings and considers how these fixed meanings are modified across cultures and time. Corbeill concludes that movement was standardized in Ancient Rome in order to disallow access for the non-elites to public life, but when standardized gesture and appearance were modified, dissimulation occurred that could change the ways bodies were read (107-8).

The earliest extant Roman treatise on rhetoric, the *Rhetorica ad herennium*, provides extensive guidelines for delivery that emphasize the physical control Corbeill examines. Rhetors must methodically match their bodily actions to the content of the message, the emotions they seek to demonstrate, and the responses they hope to inspire in their audiences. Cicero, too, describes rhetoric as both a mental and physical activity, noting that "in an orator we must demand the subtlety of the logician, the thoughts of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer's memory, a tragedian's voice, and the bearing almost of the consummate actor" (*De oratore* I, xxviii). He consistently links ethos, style, and physical bearing; the qualities of an orator listed in *De oratore* include "a mild tone, a countenance expressive of modesty, gentle language, and the faculty of seeming to be dealing reluctantly and under compulsion with something you are really anxious to prove" (II, xliii). Cicero's insistence that delivery is the most important canon reflects his view that successful rhetoric depends upon

careful attention to the relationship among content, style, and physical performance; for this reason, it is essential that the rhetor cultivate a “natural state of looks, expression, and voice” (*De oratore* I, xxviii).

When placed alongside the belief that rhetoric both demands and supports the development of civic virtue, Cicero's assumption that rhetoric is an embodied art points toward the possibility that the cultivation of physical comportment has ethical implications. For Cicero, rhetoric that appropriately brings speakers and audiences together in order to pursue a shared vision has external manifestations: “The propriety to which I refer shows itself also in every deed, in every word, even in every movement and attitude of the body. And in outward, visible propriety there are three elements—beauty, tact, and taste. . . . In these three elements is included also our concern for the good opinion of those with whom and amongst whom we live” (*De officiis* 126). Although he emphasizes moral character and social sensitivity as internal qualities that are cultivated through language, he consistently returns to the notion that these qualities are to some extent visibly evident to observers. Such an observation can hold negative repercussions, as Cicero maintains that “we, if we wish to be keen and careful observers of moral faults, shall often draw important conclusions from trifles. We observe others and from a glance of the eyes, from a contracting or relaxing of the brows . . . and the like, we shall easily judge which of our actions is proper, and which is out of accord with duty and Nature” (*De officiis* 146). In Cicero's view, this ability to pass judgment based on language and appearance should be seen as a positive feature of human interactions: “Because that very quality which we term moral goodness and propriety is pleasing to us by and of itself and touches all our hearts both by its inward essence and its outward aspect and shines forth with most luster through those virtues named above, we are, therefore, compelled by Nature herself to love those in whom we believe those virtues to reside” (*De officiis* 32). Cicero's assessment that “moral goodness and propriety” possess an “outward aspect” that reflects and reinforces the individual's “inward essence,” and the underlying assumption that the shared pursuit of this “inward essence” and “outward aspect” naturally promote social stability, exemplifies the strong historical foundation that undergirds more recent conversations concerning the relationship between *ethos* and the body.

Contemporary Theories of Ethos

More recent theories of ethos continue to maintain the link between embodiment and pre-suppositions of character, and many of them build on, revise, and/or diverge from classical views of ethos that emphasize the way a speaker's physical presence conforms to pedagogical and societal prescriptions. Rather than assuming that ethos evolves out of the action or presence of the speaker, contemporary theories of ethos attend to how people negotiate and

agree upon values collaboratively. In this sense, ethos is thought to be socially constructed; all knowledge, including the way someone is perceived as credible, authoritative, or believable is situated. Ethos is constructed within the social, physical, and cultural locations of individuals and communities, and ethos forms through interrelationships and interactions among people rather than through a solo performance where meaning and value is constructed only in terms of the behavior of the performer. Michael Halloran writes about this type of ethos as a “habitual gathering place” (60). Ethos, then is a location, a place, where people gather together and deliberate communally over values. Similarly, Michael Hyde depicts ethos as a meeting-place full of potentiality where “the self, communal existence, discourse, Being, and perhaps, God” come together (xiv). For Hyde, ethos embodies the ways we are with each other and the ways we interact with each other in the everyday.

Like Halloran’s “gathering place” and Hyde’s “Being,” Nedra Reynolds theorizes ethos as location or space that includes cities, communities, and bodies. Reynolds points to “location” in the context of corporeal feminism, and her notion that bodies are a site of knowledge-making invites attention to the varying forms that embodied ethos might take. In this sense, ethos is more than moral character, habit, virtue, and custom; ethos becomes “a complex set of characteristics constructed by a group, sanctioned by that group, and more readily recognizable to others who belong or who share similar values or experiences. The classical notion of ethos, therefore, as well as its contemporary usage, refers to the social context surrounding the solitary rhetor” (327). Ethos is a collaborative social construction, “a negotiated space where authority is established within and between communities” (334). Margaret Zulick agrees that ethos is an act of “symbolic imagination” or, as she puts it, “a subjective act of invention” (20).

Yet the imaginative formation of ethos can become a negative enterprise for those whose bodies place them beyond the reach of the social norms that surround them. Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson argue that the disabled body has a particular ethos imbued with defect, a position that constitutes a type of “civil death” (4). The historic links among physical presence, rhetorical ethos, and moral character are evident as people with disabilities are imagined to be incapable, weak, and inefficient, presumptions that may or may not be attributable to embodied differences. Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson ask us to rethink our ordinary habits in the attempt to “read” difference as something other than lack or deficit. Jay Dolmage embarks on a similar project as he recasts the Greek God Hephaestus’s disability as ability and rhetorical achievement. Hephaestus’ out-turned (“deformed”) feet allow him to be cunning and rhetorically savvy. Dolmage’s work is especially important for the way it reconstructs embodied difference as having positive signification..

In keeping with these calls to develop a more expansive notion of credibility, we are

proposing a re-conception of non-normative behavior, presence, and deportment in real-life encounters in the classroom and on the college campus. We argue that this re-conception can occur when we invent new visions of what counts as credible and authoritative. The question, then, that we continue to explore in the next section is how we as teachers of English and campus community members can begin to read difference by attending to rhetorical invention. We are not arguing that we need to reinvent our system of ethics but rather that we need to be more cautious in the way we fix meaning to embodied difference; we need to invent new ways of seeing in which embodied difference and disability can be included in rhetorical achievement. We also need to find creative ways of devising classrooms that can serve as sites in which students participate in this inventive process.

The Urgency Surrounding This Call

Based on reports in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, it has become evident that in the last ten years the broader campus culture (the quad, the dorm, the classroom) has not yet addressed what Ato Quayson calls “aesthetic nervousness” that arises out of frequent reactions to variation in behavior, habit, and appearance. At times, real people remain at odds with suggested (even legal) norms, and this can lead to exclusion from participation in campus life. The dialectical tension between “normal” and “abnormal” behavior becomes a prime site for rhetorical invention and the rethinking of ethos. In the following section we first wish to demonstrate the urgency for our argument by pointing to the real, material consequences that arise from a restrictive vision of ethos and then offering examples of ways that these material consequences can be positively affected through specific pedagogical initiatives that integrate disability studies perspectives into the classroom. We believe that changing how people think about disability can challenge longstanding assumptions that connect difference with danger.

These assumptions are evident in the common practice of enforced medical withdrawals on campus. We believe that these forced withdrawals often result from an automatic correlation of unusual bodily presentation with unacceptable ethics and that it is important to spend more time considering the assumptions that undergird these correlations. In the last five years there has been a wave of enforced medical leaves on campuses where students have been seen as a “threat to themselves or others,” “troubled,” “disruptive,” or too “eccentric” for college. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has documented this wave of routine dismissals and the development and expansion of mandatory-leave policies. The wide variation in behaviors that are seen to call for such a step suggests that, although medical withdrawals may sometimes be the result of a legitimate interest in the welfare of students and the campus community, they often may be the result of an unthinking assumption that physical

imperfection constitutes a flawed ethos that is inevitably detrimental to the community. In *The Chronicle*, Dawn Prince-Hughes reports that medical withdrawals have been assigned to students who “rock back and forth vigorously,” yell at a professor, suffer violent flashbacks during class, “ask a professor in a very loud voice the same question seven times in a row,” appear to be suicidal, or are seen as incapable of getting out of bed by themselves in the event of an emergency due to the fact that they are quadriplegic. Such instances make it apparent that colleges are now being forced to attend to divergent ways of being, ways that are not considered “normal” or acceptable (Prince-Hughes; Farrell; Hoover; Redden; “Disability May”), and that the responses of colleges at times reflects the desire to establish order at the expense of students whose physical appearance and/or comportment creates discomfort among other students, faculty, and administrators.

While students’ dismissals ostensibly serve the important purpose of maintaining the safety of the community, the broad scope of such measures creates a clash between the institution’s right to protect students and faculty and the student’s right to non-discrimination. Although college administrators argue that mandatory-leave policies allow “troubled” students to seek the help they need to correct their behavior, Eric Hoover notes that “[c]ritics, including legal experts and psychiatric counselors, describe the policies as dangerous and inhumane” (“Dismissed”). A social model of disability, one foundation for the field of disability studies, helps to clarify the discord between these perspectives. Fundamental to the social model of disability is the claim that change needs to occur in society’s organization and relations rather than in the person who has the disability. The emergence of such a strategic structural change opens the path to a new rhetorical ethos that is constituted for the purpose of opening the community to everyone, making possible the varied achievements that are sometimes denied not for the community’s well-being, but in response to the desire for a “norm” that can assuage the “aesthetic nervousness” caused by difference.

While we are not attempting at present to alter campus policy, we do seek to alter how we conceive of campus community members who express a divergent physical presence when that manifestation goes against prescribed norms. Campus policies that attempt to address the needs of students reveal that such inventive activity is essential in order to

“apparent that colleges are now being forced to attend to divergent ways of being, ways that are not considered ‘normal’ or acceptable”

provide all students with educational access. We need to rethink our ordinary habits and teach our students to do the same so that we can all begin to read difference differently. This re-conceptualization can begin very tangibly with the integration of a disability studies perspective into the humanities classroom. Our pedagogical suggestions that follow evolved out of the urgent need to affect the way people perceive difference and "danger" so that it might make sense to notice the nuances in such terms and imagine a different way of conceiving of rhetorical ethos. While reconceiving of difference also needs to take place in terms of the broader campus climate, the work can begin in the classroom. Towards this purpose, we give a few suggestions for ways to encourage the reinvention of ethos within English Studies curricula. We can best instill an expanded sense of ethos that does not correlate morality or credibility to bodily presence by showing how people with divergent embodiments have succeeded rhetorically. We will contextualize this objective within pedagogical activities and practices that could be incorporated in undergraduate courses in composition and English Studies.

A New Vision of Ethos

Typically, students attest to two supposed facts of their engagements with disability: they do not judge people by appearances, and they are at ease with divergent embodiment. Yet when we point out to them that they sneered at us on the day we wore Chuck Taylor Converse High-tops with a two-piece suit to class or when they admit that they have never seen anyone with no legs play football successfully, they finally acknowledge that perhaps at times they do correlate appearance with ethos. Many students, with the exception of those who have family members or friends who identify as disabled, rarely even think of disability; it is often perceived as invisible even though it is really everywhere. That disability is in fact everywhere and nowhere simultaneously is the paradox that presides over this pedagogical work. The tactic to best attend to perceived invisibility of disability is to introduce students to many variations in bodily presentation (in face-to-face encounters and in digital environments) so they can become accustomed to multiple corporealities.

This demonstration of difference leads to the possible understanding of difference as a human norm. By looking at difference so unapologetically, students can begin to move beyond feelings of shock or dismay that often occur as part of the initial staring encounter between able-bodied people and people with visible disabilities. To counter negative significations of disability that are ingrained in history and literature (one example might be how President Roosevelt hid the fact that he relied upon a wheelchair for mobility—the examples are endless), embodied difference should become visible in a way that provides a complex, positive signification rather than an overly-simplistic troped representation.

Zosha's classroom practices:

Garland-Thomson's seminal disability studies essay helps with the task of complicating images of embodied difference. In "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," Garland-Thomson argues that, generally speaking, visual representations of disability have not accurately depicted the lives of "real" people but rather have constructed tropes that oversimplify, medicalize, and pathologize disability (203-4). After looking closely at Garland-Thomson's argument and in order to deepen our understanding of her tropes of the exotic, the realistic, the wondrous, and the ordinary, I have students look at the delivery, performance, style, and content of two contemporary public speakers who are disabled, Nick Vujicic and David Roche, in order to move beyond the initial staring encounter that is often filled with the disgust and fear that students experience but find hard to acknowledge. Vujicic is a preacher and motivational speaker whose aim is to inspire universal hope through narrativizing his story of living with no arms and no legs. Students typically work through the pity trope to arrive at a reading of Vujicic that is more nuanced: he exploits his "wondrousness" in order to demonstrate how joy and pain are common (ordinary) to everyone. Roche is a professional speaker and performer who strategically places himself on display, as Vujicic does, so that his audience can stare openly at his facial disfigurement. Roche also forces people to try to see physical embodiment as a way to see beyond it. We discuss how both Roche and Vujicic start from a place where they assume dissonance; their audience, it is presumed, will judge them based on how they look. Following this initial dissonance within the staring encounter, both men then adamantly use their rhetoric to create a sense of identification of shared values. Both bring their audiences to the point of "being" with them; they strategically and intentionally construct a new gathering place where values can be remade together. Both performers strategically deploy humor to widen the comfort zone and the "being with."

After reading and discussing a manageable bit of theory on ethos (passages taken from classical and contemporary writers mentioned above), we continue with inquiries that include: How is the ethos of these speakers developed? What is the relationship between credibility and physical performance? How is their ethos collaboratively constructed by themselves and by their audience? How might different audiences perceive their rhetoric? How do they redefine "beauty, tact, and taste"? After reflecting and writing on these inquiries, we watch videos of both speakers, paying close attention to ways the men develop credibility and authority through and around their bodies as well as the ways we as the audience may or may not correlate physicality with rhetorical achievement. The work we do aims to reformulate ethos as a collaborative project where the speaker's presentation is not considered the sole determiner but rather where we recognize that Garland-Thomson's

tropes are enacted mechanistically as we stare. In order then to expand notions of ethos, we need to show students how we can promote this shared vision that reorients notions of beauty, tact, taste, and rhetorical success to include everyone.

In one semester, I was able to go even further to interrupt staring encounters. I had been fortunate enough to arrange for Roche, author of *The Church of 80% Sincerity*, a testimonial that urges the reader to face disfigurement head on, to give a public talk on campus, and I also invited him to meet my students. David graciously came to my class and spent an hour discussing life as he sees it; from this experience with David, the students' sustained research essays on aspects of the social construction of disability were given a kind of power that they never would have had without his visit. Students revised their notions of what constitutes ethos through engaging with the construction and (re)construction of it head on. All of this learning is meant to translate to the way we interact with each other in the everyday. Ethos then becomes a gathering place where we can collaboratively (re)construct shared values.

Lois's classroom practices:

Like Zosha, I have sought to engage my students in critically interrogating their assumptions about embodiment and ethos. In an upper-division course focused on the complicated connections between rhetoric and ethics, I encouraged students to consider the role of physical appearance and ability in the construction of ethos. After studying and discussing texts that explicate theoretical connections among rhetoric, ethos, and embodiment, my class watched several clips that featured speakers with physical disabilities. The students were able to identify immediately the cinematic techniques that emphasized Franklin D. Roosevelt's strength and concealed his use of a wheelchair as he arrived at his inauguration and delivered the inaugural address, and they were willing to challenge what they saw as an unfair assumption that the President's dependence on a wheelchair somehow interfered with his credibility. Their assessment of the inaugural address of David Paterson, the blind governor of New York, attended to features of the content of his address that in their view illustrated the problems that had plagued his time in office, which seemed to them to be unrelated to his disability. However, they also took note of Paterson's jokes about his blindness, and we engaged with their assumptions about how those jokes might reflect his attitude toward his disability.

The conversation became more uncomfortable after the class had viewed a clip from David Roche reading from *The Church of 80% Sincerity*. The students' responses to Roche's reading were for the most part quite negative. In the beginning, they struggled to articulate their objections to Roche in terms of the content of the text; several students maintained that Roche was too pessimistic, that his recognition that he sometimes had trouble liking himself portrayed a negative message that people don't need or want to hear. Others defended Roche,

acknowledging that he was honestly representing the experience of dealing with physical disfigurement and pointing out that he seemed to come to a true acceptance of his situation that was in fact quite hopeful. During the lively discussion that ensued, the students explored the possibility that their desire for an unequivocally positive message from Roche was based in their own discomfort with his disability. Finally, one student stated, "I don't know—I just found it creepy." Another contrasted Roche's approach with what one might expect to find in a "normal person," which led her classmate to interject, "But what is normal?"

I cannot claim that this class session concluded in a profoundly successful moment in which all of the students committed themselves to challenging problematic cultural beliefs about ethos and embodiment. However, I am convinced that important things happened during that conversation. First of all, my students had the opportunity to examine critically some of the assumed connections among physical ability, intellectual aptitude, and ethical propensities that they had to some extent unconsciously accepted. This examination led them to ask questions about the underlying values that limit public access for those whose appearance and abilities fall outside what have come to be defined as acceptable social boundaries. In the process, they confronted their own discomfort with physical difference, and they heard in response to that confrontation the question, "But what is normal?" It is my hope that as they continue to encounter physical differences on our campus and beyond, they will remember the discussion and their own encounters with "aesthetic nervousness," moving beyond the uncritical sense of difference as "creepy" in order to ask themselves the question, "But what is normal?"

Conclusion

As teachers of English, we need to recognize our long heritage in normative narratives that surround embodiment and ethos in our classrooms. The maintenance of these norms in the classroom contributes to the maintenance of these norms outside the classroom. We charge that we haven't been trained adequately in how to accommodate students; we hold classes in spaces that may not be accessible to students who use wheelchairs; we formulate shared values in appearance, habit, and behavior. As both teachers and members of college communities, we have the opportunity to challenge ourselves to a new vision of the type of access we can offer to all of the students who enter our classrooms.

We should also challenge ourselves to create spaces where our students can discover new ways of imagining the public realm that we are preparing them to enter. Of course, it is part of our job to teach our students how to negotiate the expectations that they will find in the public and professional spheres; however, we also need to offer and authorize counternarratives that challenge oppressive social structures and reveal the successes that are pos-

sible in the midst of contests about values, authority, and ethos. We need to teach our students, and learn ourselves, how to read variation rather than penalize it. There is much work to be done before notions of ethos in the academy and public life fully accommodate the presence of disability firmly and unapologetically rooted in civic and academic spaces. In the meantime, we can take significant steps toward that goal by helping our students expand notions not only of what ethos is but also who can gain it and how.

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Bekah Hawrot Weigel and Lisa Detweiler Miller

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Returning Veteran: The Rhetorical and Narrative Challenges

ON AUGUST 1ST 2009, THE POST-9/11 GI EDUCATION BILL WAS PASSED, offering both active and reserve members of the military full tuition, and universities began accommodating more veterans than before. To qualify for the Bill, the veteran must have served 90 days of active service following 9/11 or 30 days of service and have been discharged for a service-related disability (“The Post 9/11 GI-Bill”). As educators, it is our obligation to prepare for the presence of veterans in our classrooms, but also to understand that their bodies are “sites of memory,” both for their individual experiences and for a collective memory that is prescribed upon them.¹ We believe, then, that helping veterans transition into civilian life means allowing their bodies to perform identities that extend beyond that of a veteran. Our focus in this paper is on combat-related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), one form of trauma that is largely misunderstood, especially as an invisible disability. More specifically, we are interested in the way the identity of veterans with PTSD is constructed by politics and the media and how these constructs are absorbed by educational institutions as they work to create programs that assist veterans in their transition.

Understanding PTSD: The Invisible Disability

While most civilians expect veterans to be suffering from physical disabilities, PTSD as an invisible disability presents challenges not only to the veterans themselves but also to others around them. Although PTSD has likely been one of the major disabilities experienced by returning soldiers of many wars, it was “first formalized as a diagnosis in 1980, [and] is an anxiety disorder initiated by exposure to a traumatic event and characterized by symptoms of avoidance, reexperiencing, and hyperarousal” (MacGregor, et al. 224). According to MacGregor, et al., studies have indicated that there is a greater prevalence of PTSD occurring in those injured in combat (224). Likewise, Hoge, et al. “found that OIF veterans who indicated

1. Pierre Nora discusses “sites of memory,” or “lieux de mémoire,” as locations where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” and further explains that interest in these sites has taken place during a historical moment when it seems that “memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (7).

'being wounded or injured' had a 3-fold higher risk of PTSD" than other combat veterans (qtd. in MacGregor, et al. 229). This combat-related PTSD is carried by veterans through every part of their lives—in some cases, overtly experienced, and in others not. Since the ADA Amendments Acts of 2008 (ADAAA) added "'concentrating' and 'thinking' to its expanded, non-inclusive listing of 'major life activities'" (Shackelford 38), PTSD has become an acknowledged disability that is currently gaining attention as veterans return from Iraq and enroll in colleges throughout the U.S. Many symptoms of PTSD can likely affect a student's progress in the classroom, particularly if it has gone undiagnosed without proper documentation that would warrant accommodations. Understanding PTSD as an invisible disability, rather than just a reaction to war, is the first step for universities to begin learning how to accommodate returning veterans. Seeing PTSD as a disability might allow individuals access to rightful accommodations.

Yet, as a disability, PTSD is more likely to accrue stigma, rather than afford understanding and adaptation. PTSD is negatively represented through the military's rhetoric, which privileges the able body. In a presentation from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Gregory A. Leskin, Ph.D from the National Center for PTSD points out that resilient people are less likely to develop PTSD. Leskin defines resilient people as those who "stay fit physically and psychologically. Resilient people tend to be optimistic. . . . Individuals believe that they have the skills necessary to effectively manage or accomplish the task at hand, which results in a sustained effort and greater likelihood of success" (Slide 31). This suggests that veterans with PTSD may not be successful, and if veterans were more resilient, they would be less likely to experience PTSD. In short, this language assumes that the veteran with PTSD is inadequate and, therefore, incapable.

Likewise, the medicalization of this disability reinforces ideas of inadequacy based on the individual's inability to "contribute" to society. In "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Health Functioning in a Non-Treatment Seeking Sample of Iraq War Veterans: A Prospective Analysis," Vasterling et al. write that "Such functional impairment [as a result of PTSD], especially when health-related, may result in significant costs to society. For example, individuals with a PTSD diagnosis use more medical services and incur higher healthcare costs than do individuals with other psychiatric disorders" (347). This ableist rhetoric is perpetuated by the military and medical community and is condemning for the veteran with PTSD both as military personnel and as an American citizen. Because of the negative perception of the disability and the emphasis on the need to be an able-bodied veteran, the veteran with an invisible disability is pushed to a decision of what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson refers to as "whether to come out or pass" (14). Beyond the individual's decision, PTSD then also has a collective cultural meaning. The same ambiguity about coming out or passing is often a source of misrepresentation in the media. Political and social constructs of identity some-

times force identities to be prescribed upon veterans. This forced identity is often accepted by society at large and allows a collective to be identified in a way that is less threatening and more comfortable for the general public. Two prominent constructs of veteran identity are the Homeric hero and the Ticking Time bomb.

The Homeric Hero

This representation of the Homeric hero is a combination of the mythic, battlefield hero, with the role of civilian. This identity holds the veteran to a higher standard than a civilian and expects perfection and exemplification of a heroic masculinity. Omer Bartov discusses the role of myth in the formation of the nation state, arguing that, “The Homeric hero . . . represent[s] a view of human existence, reflecting and molding a social and political reality by practicing their image of war on the battlefield, and striving to adapt the reality of their civilian environment to their martial ethos” (Keren 3-4). This identity is created both by politicians and the military to enhance the support of the soldiers and the war overseas. However, this construct places a tremendous amount of pressure on the returning veteran to live up to the expectations of his identity, which becomes extremely problematic for the veteran struggling with PTSD or another invisible disability. Michael Keren develops the construction of the veteran as “The representation of war by the means of popular culture [which] tends to turn away from narrative toward image commemoration, but this involves a distortion rather than commemoration of soldiers’ war experience” (7). In order to become the hero, the soldier must display his loyalty in his “fight for freedom”— to adopt popular military rhetoric. This soldier, as an embodiment of freedom, is forced into presenting both a physical and mental strength that fulfills the mythical narrative of the nation. In the classroom and in a university setting, the veteran’s subjectivity is formed for him by the gaze of those around him, who perceive him as either a hero, or someone who should be heroic. We often neglect to realize that we are forcing returning vets into a fantasy, a fragmentary, idealized identity, rather than a more nuanced and complex whole. Within this construction, there is little or no room for deviation from the norm. The veteran body must represent the triumph of battle.

By acknowledging the role of hero, the veteran is unlikely to admit disability unless that disability is visible or has been somehow recognized and validated by the military with recognition like the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart, however, is only given to those who have sustained physical injury in battle, not to those who have sustained mental injury. According to Jenny Eliscu, “there will be 500,000 troops from Afghanistan and Iraq experiencing psychological injuries and [sic] they do not qualify for a purple heart, adding insult to injury” (qtd. in Church 47). Those who do qualify, however, are sometimes exploited by the media and politicians by what Shapiro calls “the inspirational disabled person” or “supercrip”

(16). For example in 2006, *USA Today* ran the story “Amputee Iraq Vet Fulfills Wish, Jogs with Bush” which highlighted a disabled veteran’s “recovery” from two leg amputations, resulting from a roadside bomb. The article reinforces an identity that calls for the heroically disabled veteran to return to a state of able-bodiedness. However, this story of the disabled veteran as a “supercrip” “does not reflect the day-to-day reality of most disabled people, who struggle constantly with smaller challenges” (Shapiro 17). Furthermore, the narrative of “overcoming” a physical disability is a more comfortable story rather than one that involves psychological challenges that are often difficult to “see” and thus to normalize.

Ticking Time Bomb: Hero Becomes Villain

PTSD has become a popular narrative device utilized by the media for portraying returning veterans as the stereotypical “ticking time bombs,” emotionally unstable men who resort to violence and alcohol as a means of coping with their war experiences. The PTSD veteran is then caught in a liminal state between his social identity construction as hero and hero turned villain. Just as the heroic vet seems to justify warfare, the image of the “broken” vet is used to condemn it. A 2008 article in *Rolling Stone* magazine by Eliscu furthers this stereotypical portrayal of the veteran with PTSD by representing Blake Miller, an Iraqi War veteran known to many as the Marlboro Man, as a smoking, drinking, swearing, reckless, porn-watching, ticking time bomb. Eliscu furthers this portrayal of the veteran: “I just want people to understand what PTSD is,” Miller says. “It’s not that you’re a wack job who needs a straitjacket. It’s just that you have thoughts not exactly on the level [as others].”² This representation, not unlike other media and entertainment portrayals, stigmatizes the veteran who has PTSD and reinforces negative stereotypes of the veteran to the civilian public.³

This becomes increasingly problematic when these representations can be reinforced by our academic institutions. One place where we see such reinforcement is in the creation of, and the rhetoric surrounding, exclusionary college programs and classrooms that separate the veteran from the civilian population.

2. Eliscu continues to focus on the veteran turned villain when she quotes Rep. Bob Filner, the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, who stated: “The military makes it hard for these guys to get help. . . . We’re letting ticking time bombs out into society. Suicides are increasing among vets, and many of those with PTSD have felony convictions. The VA and the Department of Defense won’t acknowledge the incredible size of the problem, and it’s yet another indictment of the war we’re fighting and how we deal with these fighters” (57). Although this statement is probably meant to show the lack of resources for veterans, it also emphasizes the negative attributes of vets that the general public fears, which is problematic because the general public is the intended audience.

3. Discussions of PTSD have been prompted by recent popular television shows like *Army Wives*, which at times perpetuate the ticking time bomb stereotype, as well as films like *Home of the Brave* (2006) which tell the story of returning veterans who left the war with visible physical injuries but continue to fight their invisible psychological battles while struggling to balance the demands of everyday life.

Confronting PTSD in the University Setting

As veterans begin to make their transition back into civilian life, the university has become and will continue to become an important site of transition that will need to negotiate the extremes of what the veteran has come to represent. Perhaps fueled by the value placed on able-bodiedness by the military, universities continue to ask veterans to perform an able-bodied identity even if they are struggling with PTSD, denying any connection between an individual's physical and mental state. In effect, this prohibits any admission of the disability that might allow the veterans to seek treatment, understanding, or some form of recovery. John Schupp is the pioneer of a program for veterans at Cleveland State University called Supporting Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV), which offers veterans the option of an exclusive classroom space. SERV recognizes the challenges that universities present to veterans. Schupp explains, "Colleges don't care if you succeed. Imagine going from a place you've been for four years that does everything they can to help you succeed, and then you go to a place that does not care." This said, such programs for veterans, which no doubt have good intentions and do "care," often also problematically absorb the public and national rhetoric about heroes or villains. The university, in its attempt to reintegrate veterans into civilian life as students, excludes them based on their differences, ostensibly "protecting" them and the public. Educators also need to be mindful of identifying these men and women only as veterans rather than as individuals who have survived a series of traumatic events. Exclusive classes, leading to less real contact between veterans and civilians seem unlikely to facilitate greater understanding. In other words, in our efforts to reintegrate, we take the risk of segregating returning veterans by refusing to allow them to escape their identity as veterans.⁴

In the SERV program at Cleveland State, Schupp supports the initiative by invoking

"need to be mindful of identifying these men and women only as veterans rather than as individuals who have survived a series of traumatic events"

4. As veterans are collapsed into one body, gender is as well considering that traumatic experiences differ for men and women. Women veterans are sometimes forced to cope with the trauma from the battlefield as well as any possible (sexual) trauma from within the military. John Schupp explains this important distinction by stating, "If you are a female in the military, you can't fail. You need to be stronger than the men." There is always "a threat of sexual trauma: 'If you don't give in to me, I won't watch your back in combat!'"

ing the heroism and patriotism: “They have volunteered to serve and they represent everything that makes America great. We owe it to this country to see that they have all of the opportunities for success” (qtd. in *VA Recognizes Cleveland State’s SERV Program*). Schupp’s statement also collapses all veterans into one collective body. It seems that the university is identifying veterans as representatives of the nation. In Schupp’s emphasis that “we owe it to the country to see that they have all of the opportunities for success,” educators have to ask themselves an important question: Why do we owe it to the country? Don’t we owe it to the veterans themselves? While it is clear that SERV’s purposes are admirable and specifically made with the veterans’ needs in mind, a patriotic rhetoric is never abandoned in these discussions.

The language adopted makes it sound as if these programs are necessary not only to aid the veterans with their transition, but also to help the universities in their acceptance of these veterans, the “ticking time bombs” perceived as potential financial and physical threats. Beneath this language is an inherited panic that comes from the media’s representation of PTSD.⁵ In a video titled “SERV-The American Veteran” sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Schupp discusses SERV and explains, “the GI Bill prepares the vets for the campus, the higher-ed section T prepares the campus for the vets.” Schupp’s discussion of “Section T,” as the video goes on to explain, is a reference to an amendment to the 1965 Higher Education Act titled “Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success,” which offers funding to institutions like Cleveland State that wish to pilot their own veteran programs to better meet the needs of this growing percentage of the student body. Cleveland State has adopted the veteran-only classroom as one part of their model. While proper funding and support is a necessity, there is an underlying assumption in this exclusionary model that without proper preparation the veterans would present a challenge to the university. The suggestion here is that the university requires a sort of quarantine, and that the veterans, unleashed upon the campus without this remediation, represent a threat.

SERV and other similar programs segregate veterans by offering exclusive classes. This further underscores the ideological segregation that results from the continued use of patriotic rhetoric and builds the rest of the university around a pocket of veterans. In the program at Cleveland State, veterans begin their first semester with three entry-level SERV classes, such as English 101 (only veterans) and only one class with non-veteran students. As Schupp explains, the fifteen minutes prior to each SERV class as everyone arrives, is a signif-

5. It is important to consider the role that patriotic rhetoric, which draws upon the image of the Homeric hero, plays in overshadowing some of the more problematic presentations of the ticking time bomb popularized by the media that cause of some of the underlying fears surrounding veterans and their growing appearance on university campuses.

icant community building time for veterans who use that small window to discuss whatever may be on their minds whether it be mundane comments about the day thus far or war experiences. Since these discussions sometimes take place prior to the professor's arrival, the teacher does not participate in these dialogues. For veterans coming to terms with physical disabilities and those who are still working to recognize PTSD as a disability, the possibility of even sharing their narratives can be difficult. Schupp argues that PTSD is not a disability because, "If you call it a disability, you'll lose them. They aren't disabled, they are wounded. They are extremely strong-willed people." In other words, operating within that national able-bodied rhetoric is central to veterans' transitions.

What Can Be Done

At the heart of learning how to accommodate a changing veteran population on university campuses is the recognition that a fine line often persists between inclusion and exclusion and that our responsibility as educators is, first, to the veterans but also to the university as a whole and what that space represents. While it has taken time to learn how best to provide for this growing demographic of students, there are some necessary steps that need to be taken. The first steps are to recognize popular cultural myths about veterans, the ways these myths enforce ableism or stigmatize perceived "weakness," and to resist writing across students' bodies and identities with these stories.

Despite the problematic nature of exclusionary classes, the SERV program has also begun to take pragmatic steps that could work at other institutions, too. On a smaller level of day-to-day interaction with veteran students, professors need to be educated on the trauma of war and how to approach students who may be dealing with PTSD and other disabilities stemming from their war experiences. Professors must also not, as Schupp says, "try and treat or talk about [war experiences]." Schupp explains, "I don't want the teachers to have to do anything but teach." Teachers are not counselors: the professor's job is to educate the student, to recognize the individual issues each student is confronted with, and to know how to point the student in the right direction if help is needed. There is no replacement for services like the counseling center, veterans' groups, and other veteran resources. This includes liaisons at every college and university who will help veterans sort through everything from complicated financial aid processes, registering for classes, and meeting with other veterans if they choose to.

Furthermore, space established for veterans outside of the classroom, including a veteran lounge—like a commuter center that many colleges have—can encourage them to network with people who understand the difficulties that returning to school can present. Ideally, such social spaces might replace exclusive classes. Veterans could find support from

other veterans here and would not need segregated classes for this network and community. Within the veteran lounge, resources on war trauma must be made available to students, including information on contacting veteran liaison(s) and where to find the PTSD specialist(s) on campus. According to Schupp, "[students with PTSD] usually won't go to the teacher, unless they have no one else to talk to about it." We may consider offering them the opportunity—through blogs or personal narratives—to talk about their trauma if they want to, to allow these stories to enter into the university community as a whole and combat the rhetoric that continues to label them. In the end, the most important thing we can do for veterans is give them our respect, ensure the resources are clearly available, and show we are invested in their success as unique individuals.

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Tara K. Wood

Overcoming Rhetoric: Forced Disclosure and the Colonizing Ethic of Evaluating Personal Essays

WHEN STUDENTS ARE ASKED TO WRITE ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL experience in a graded environment, instructors of composition are on shaky ethical ground. The question of a disclosure-based classroom has circulated heavily in our field since the rise of expressivism (Connors; Bleich; Hood; Berman; Gere), but while many have theorized the potential of personal essay writing regarding the big three identity markers (race, gender, class), the often invisible identity marker of disability remains inadequately examined. In this essay, I will argue that personal essay writing, due to its tacit invitation to write about traumatic experience, is troublesome for a student with disabilities. If, indeed, there is an association between successful personal essays and engagement with traumatic experience, what are the implications for a student who identifies as disabled? A potential result is a reproduction of a rhetoric of overcoming, one in which the student feels both invited to entangle disability with trauma (problematic) and compelled to deal with that trauma in a way that re-enforces the “normal” body. To prevent this reproduction (which I see as colonialist on the part of the instructor), disability must be addressed as a critical modality in all composition classrooms. Critical attention must be paid to disability as socially constructed in an effort to deconstruct the demand for overcoming. As this essay deals with some highly unstable terminology, I will begin my argument by asserting my definitions of three key concepts upon which my essay relies: disability, personal writing, and trauma. After examining these definitions, I will make clear the tacit connection between personal writing and trauma narrative followed by an analysis of two major debates regarding disclosure in the writing classroom. Finally, I will investigate the role of the instructor in facilitating personal writing that deflects a rhetoric of overcoming and resists the colonialist tendencies the permeate discussions of ablebodiedness and disability.

Defining Key Terms and Concepts: Social Models of Disability, Personal Essay Writing, and Trauma Studies

As with most of the “naming” in our world, definitions of disability are usually revelatory of the institution (and ideology therein) sponsoring that particular definition. Many legislative definitions of disability in the United States are embedded in programmatic discourse. Barbara M. Altman, former president of the Society of Disability Studies, addresses the rhetorical situations of particular definitions in her article, “Disability Definitions, Models, Classification and Schemes, and Applications.” She writes, “For programmatic administrative purposes, disability is usually defined as situations associated with injury, health, or physical conditions that create specific limitations that have lasted or are expected to last for a named period of time” (98). The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990 as a civil rights law aimed at ending discrimination based on disability, divides disability into three categories (initially established under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973): an individual who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Many disability theorists both rely on and reject programmatic definitions of disability, striving to address the socially constructed nature of disability and working in opposition to medicalized, individual-centered definitions. Susan Wendell, in her book *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, defines disability as “any lack of ability to perform activities to an extent or in a way that is either necessary for survival in an environment or necessary to participate in some major aspect of life in a given society” (23). She both echoes and complicates the definition espoused in the ADA. While she retains the word “lack,” she attempts to qualify it with an attention to the particularity of a given environment. Her definition reflects her response to the shift from a medical model of disability to a social model of disability. British disability author and advocate Mike Oliver coined the phrase “social model of disability” and Carol Thomas, in her essay “Disability Theory: Key Ideas, Issues and Thinkers,” summarized the central premise of this model: “The social modelist idea that disability is the outcome of social arrangements that work to restrict the activities of people with impairments through the erection of social barriers” (40). The emergence of a social model of disability would serve as the founding moment for Disability Studies. Historically, up until this point, disability, as a subject of research, had been relegated to medical professionals. Oliver, a leading researcher/campaigner for the social model, identifies two main problems with the medical model: “Firstly, it locates the ‘problem’ of disability within the individual and secondly it sees the causes of this problem as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability” (3). This critique supplied the necessary fodder to understand disability as a socially constructed

ideology that placed certain individuals in a socio-political position of lack. Within the last decade or two, a band of disability scholars (mostly disabled themselves) began to push for a critical, interdisciplinary response to the social shift (Davis; Albrecht et al.; Linton).

An analysis of the implications of social models of disability for personal writing in the composition classroom requires that I draw the boundaries of personal writing itself. For the scope of this essay, personal essay writing will be considered any textual performance of meaning that takes the identity and lived experience of the author as its central focus. The phrase personal writing can encompass assignments commonly referred to as personal narratives, personal essays, or autobiographical writing. When I refer to personal writing throughout this piece, I refer not only to traditional textual essays but also multi-genre projects (Moulton; Mack), multi-modal writing, aural assignments (Selfe), and performative assignments (Fishman, et al.). This paper will assume that most personal writing assignments ask the author/student to make (explicitly or implicitly) some commentary on a greater issue; that is to say, an assumed goal of personal writing is to convey a collective message on how experience reveals or supports particular larger institutions. For example, a personal essay that relates the experience of overcoming the trauma experienced as a foster child should make some social commentary that applies to a greater issue such as underprivileged circumstance, fostering, adolescent development, abuse, etc.; the part (personal experience) should relate to the whole (collective experience). This part-to-whole relationship becomes a key component of any analysis of personal essay writing in that it resists an individualistic presentation of experience. While it may seem oddly contradictory to argue against individualism in personal essay writing, the encouraged resistance advocates contextualized attention to audience.

When students are asked to deploy personal experience in writing, any number of identity markers will most likely be present in a student's work.¹ Typically, our field recognizes and theorizes the big three identity markers: race, gender, and class. Other less visible² identity markers include sexual orientation and disability. Many have theorized the invisibility of both sexual orientation (Khayatt; Malinowitz) and disability (Brueggemann, et al.; Mossman) and more work is needed to understand what invisibility means for our students

1. It cannot be denied that there is no such thing as writing free from personal experience. However, for this essay, I intend to limit my discussion of personal writing to the generic convention, rather than the social construct itself. While most composition instructors would consider every assignment to be grounded in the personal (mediated by a number of identity markers), it is useful here to focus specifically on the assignments explicitly referred to as personal writing.

2. When I use the metaphor of visibility, I refer to an absence of examination or study, following the work of Brenda Brueggemann, Johnson Cheu, Patricia Dunn, Barbara Heifferon, and Linda White.

who consider these supposed deviations to be primary markers of identity. Taking personal writing as a site of analysis, it is important to theorize the rhetorical implications of engaging the identity marker of disability for an assignment that frequently invites students to recount traumatic experience.

What then does it mean to write trauma? In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud would refer to trauma not as something inflicted upon the body but as something inflicted upon the mind. Whereas Freud assumes a distinct binary of body/mind, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an infinite negotiation of material experience and reconstruction of self. Caruth theorized trauma, especially the narrative of trauma, as “a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7). To fully understand Caruth’s concept of double telling, it is useful to explore an example of traumatic experience. In the case of the trauma of rape, a survivor of sexual assault will forever negotiate two narratives: the memory of the event itself and the infinite re-storying of her life in the present as a result of that traumatic event. That is to say, surviving rape means re-conceptualizing everything once thought to be safe, normal, expected, displayed, and so on.

In the composition classroom, disclosure of trauma can be defined as the narrative recollection of any event that inflicted an intense emotional response that required some healing or recovery. When composition instructors assign personal essay writing, they frequently offer gentle reminders to their students not to disclose anything about which they cannot handle critique (through both peer review and instructor evaluation). Personal essay writing carries heavy potential for an engagement with trauma and therefore necessitates great ethical responsibility on the part of the instructor. Before I can make this argument, however, it is first necessary to establish the tacit premise that personal writing assignments engender trauma narratives.

Tacit Invitations: Privileging the Trauma Narrative

To fully understand the argument that personal writing tends to evoke a disclosure of trauma, it is useful to examine the genre’s history in composition classrooms. In 1987 Robert J. Connors published an article in *College Composition and Communication* that traced the historical emergence of personal writing, claiming that the genre emerged as an accepted form in the composition-rhetoric classroom in the 1890s and has managed to retain its position in contemporary college classrooms (177). Connors concludes his discussion of personal writing by mapping the debate about personal writing’s place in college curriculum onto the overarching debate over the purpose of education itself. He states, “It is easy to feel that one’s teaching is not striking the balance well between making writing meaningful to the student

and making the student meaningful to the community” (180). Again, the part-to-whole emphasis in personal writing is made clear. Connors addresses the seduction of personal essay writing claiming that “the seductions of an emotional ‘knockout punch’ are no less real for teachers than the seductions of a well-planned and carefully done research paper” (180). The emotional punch to which he refers further demonstrates the tacit connection between personal writing and trauma. Emotion and impact are closely bound up in a way that suggests the best way to move an audience is through pulling heartstrings.

In my own experience as a student at both the undergraduate and graduate level, I embodied this exact connection in each of my personal writing assignments. When asked to write a personal essay regarding a literacy sponsor, I responded to that call with an emotional essay about my relationship with my father. When asked in a graduate course to write a personal narrative, I wrote the story of my high school sweetheart who died tragically in a car accident during our freshman year of college. I believe that I associated an assignment of personal writing with trauma for two reasons. First, I recognized that some of my most profound lessons in life had come during moments of overwhelming loss and suffering. Second, I considered the heavy weight of tragedy the best conveyor of thoughtful and “good” writing for my professors.

In my own experience as a teacher, I have seen the exact same association (between personal writing and trauma) play out in my own personal essay assignments. Here at the University of Oklahoma, the core curriculum of English 1113 places personal narrative as its final major essay in the assignment sequence. In my experience teaching this assignment, the majority of my students have written about how a traumatic experience shaped their understanding of language, taking topics such as death, injury, loss, oppression, abuse, and addiction as their subject matter. Grading these essays is ethically burdensome in that I feel torn between wanting to express compassion for the bravery of putting trauma to page while also striving for fair and objective assessment of their ability to meet the criteria of my writing assignment. How can I ever put anything but an ‘A’ on an essay in which a girl recounts her experience with an abusive father?

In 1985, William F. Coles and James Vopat published a collection of 48 student essays, each responded to by 48 renowned scholars in our field, including Richard Ohmann, Susan Miller, James Britton, and David Bleich. Lester Faigley performed a rhetorical analysis of the Coles and Vopat collection in the essay “Judging Writing, Judging Selves,” published four years later in *College Composition and Communication*. In this article, Faigley contends that composition instructors privilege “honest” representation of the self in academic discourse and criticizes the essentialist notion of authenticity for its inability to empower the student. He writes, “The student selves we encounter in *What Makes Writing Good* are pre-

dominantly selves that achieve rationality and unity by characterizing former selves as objects for analysis, hence the emphasis on writing about past experience rather than confronting the contradictions of present experience" (411). While I agree with Faigley that writing the past typifies personal writing, I would further map the healing script on top of that propensity. When students write about past experience, they frequently write the trauma of past experience in a linear manner that results in a lesson learned or therapeutic resolve.

According to Anne Ruggles Gere in her essay "Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing," the essays in this collection "typify the prose that falls into the category of personal writing" (204). The student essays deal with events such as infertility, car accidents, and family/childhood trauma. The Coles and Vopat collection reveals instructor responses to personal essays that deal with trauma in a profoundly positive manner, stating that such writing is "moving" and "honest" (qtd. in Gere 204). Gere goes on to argue that composition instructors privilege personal writing that deals with traumatic experience.

In understanding that success in personal writing is closely tied to an expression of traumatic experience, it becomes necessary to theorize the implications of this connection for students with disabilities. The tendency in personal writing to disclose or deal with trauma troubles me as a scholar who is suspicious of required disclosure and who is also an advocate for disrupting the rhetoric of overcoming that pervades much discussion of disability. The pressure to deal connotes treatment, to take action against something in an effort to eradicate it. Associating the purpose of personal writing with treatment evokes a healing script, one that operates through a linear progression that ultimately leads to a cure of the abnormality—the wound. To make clear this problematic, it is useful to present a hypothetical example. If a student with vision impairment feels compelled to write about how their personal experience with disability has been difficult but they have overcome the hardships, what is missing? What is left out when this healing script (grounded in disclosure) reproduces a rhetoric of overcoming for the instructor? The resulting essay might neglect to recognize that vision impairment is mere difference, only relegated to hardship when set against the "normalcy" of full sightedness. If the instructor has not engaged disability critically and herself operates within a constructed notion of disability as trauma—how then is the student capable of reaching beyond personal experience (the individualistic representation of how disability got dealt with) without affirming the teacher's own desire for the student to overcome his/her hardship? The teacher might then applaud that student's ability to overcome, hence simultaneously reproducing a rhetoric of overcoming and continuing to privilege disclosure.

Recognizing this absence of critical examination puts pressure on the instructor of composition, indeed on the field itself to fully engage Disability Studies. While Disability Studies is certainly on the rise within the field of Rhetoric and Composition (e.g. Bruegge-

mann, et al.), its lingering invisibility as a critical modality in composition classrooms is undeniable. And here is my primary concern: if critical disability awareness is invisible and we ask our students (with disabilities) to write about their identity, and there is an implicit connection between successful personal writing and trauma disclosure, are we laying the groundwork for an equation between disability and trauma? Are we constructing a writing context that invites students to overcome their disability as a response to the Western healing metaphor's call for closure? I believe that we are and that we will continue to do so until we make disability visible both for ourselves and for our students. If we don't do so, we will simply perpetuate the able/disabled hierarchy. Making disability visible also means opening up its possible meanings and its revolutionary power.

Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity, written by Simi Linton, is a leading text in Disability Studies. In the opening chapters of this book, Linton describes a *rhetoric of overcoming* that pervades much discussion of disability in American culture. She articulates several common interpretations of this rhetoric, such as that the individual who overcomes is no longer limited by their disability and that the person has "risen above society's expectation for someone with those characteristics" (17). The common deployment (and subsequent internalization/interpretation) of overcoming as it relates to an individual with a disability is troublesome for Linton because it is often physically impossible to overcome a disability (17). She writes, "An implication of these statements is that the other members of the group from which the individual has supposedly moved beyond are not as brave, strong, or extraordinary as the person who has *overcome* that designation" (18, emphasis her own). The reproduction of a *rhetoric of overcoming* places all responsibility for change in the individual with a disability.

Representing disability as trauma might seem a common sense connection, but an analysis of published disability narratives proves revelatory in understanding the reversal of this ideology. Susannah B. Mintz combines disability theory and feminist autobiographical study to analyze the work of eight contemporary disability authors in her book *Unruly Bodies: Life Writing by Women with Disabilities*. Her central argument is that disability should be written as trauma not "to demonstrate the damaging effects of disease or impairment but, rather, of the cultural mythologies that interpret those conditions in reductive or disparaging ways" (Mintz 1). As previously stated in Carol Thomas's critique of the medical model of disability, when students encounter the social model (i.e. when they begin to critically examine the socio-culturally constructed notion of disability) "the effect is liberatory, enabling them, perhaps for the first time, to recognize most of their difficulty as socially caused" (40). In other words, this shift in defining disability shifts the attention from how the individual has survived their affliction to how the individual has survived the ways in which others have constructed their affliction.

Is incorporating disability as a critical modality in the composition classroom enough to validate the ethic of asking students (able-bodied and dis/abled alike) to disclose? Disclosure in and of itself is fraught with ethical issues. Therefore, it is useful to understand the debate surrounding disclosure in writing classrooms before positing specific solutions for students with disabilities. In 1993 an article appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "Requiring Students to Write About Their Personal Lives." This article, written by Susan Swartzlander, Diana Pace, and Virginia Lee Stamler (one English professor, two psychological counselors), pointed out the unethical practice of asking students to self-disclose in personal essay writing assignments, discussing such implications as gender, grading, and re-traumatization. Students become fearful that if they do not disclose personal trauma, the evaluation they receive from their instructor will negatively reflect their inability or unwillingness to tackle the "tough" subjects. Though the authors address the ethical implications of such fear for marginalized groups, as is often the case, students with disabilities are not addressed. Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler have one key point, however, which is central to my own argument: they express concern regarding an absence of ethical responsibility and adequate attention to personal writing in the composition classroom, arguing that genres of self-revelation are treated too casually by instructors.

In 1995, *College English* published "Collaboration and the Pedagogy of Disclosure," wherein David Bleich applauds Swartzlander, Pace, and Stamler's attention to ethics but disputes the abandonment of the potential of the personal in the composition classroom. A responsible pedagogy of self-disclosure was needed, one that used collaboration and collective disclosure to create a classroom environment of mutuality. According to Bleich, a pedagogy of disclosure means that "because each member of a classroom actually has an individual history, habitual and scholarly reference to it becomes part of the process of presenting opinions, interpretations, and reports of other things . . . pedagogy of disclosure asks each class member to announce, sooner or later, the *terms of membership* in the class" (48, emphasis his own). Bleich goes on to offer a list of examples of membership, which includes class, race, gender. Yet again, disability is absent from a key list of identity markers. To fully understand my critique of Bleich's lack of attention to disability, it is useful to examine how his pedagogy of disclosure might affect a student who considers disability as an identity marker. If a student identifies as autistic but has no desire to self-disclose, will Bleich's emphasis on announcement and history further alienate this student? Might it force this student to deny a primary identity marker? If a student identifies as dyslexic or developmentally challenged, what motivation does she have to announce her disability as a way to fully engage with both her peers and her instructor?³

3. I am only offering examples of disabilities that are potentially invisible; these students are capable of passing as able-bodied.

Bleich's examples deal primarily (and provocatively) with issues of race. He argues that "self-disclosure changes the vocabularies and the discourse styles of our classrooms [and] provides an unambiguous address for individuality while showing the deep implication of each individual in a series of groups, communities, societies, and political constituencies" (60).

Bleich's solution for handling disclosure in the classroom is insufficient in that he first fails to acknowledge the close relationship between disclosure and trauma. He further fails to explore the ideological hierarchy that often results from disclosed and multiplicitous identities; implicating an individual within a group often affirms one group while denigrating another. Without careful critical attention to this potential of defining *against*, a pedagogy of disclosure can *reproduce* rather than disrupt the dividing lines of personal and political identities. Furthermore, a pedagogy of disclosure suggests that a composition classroom is fertile ground for the seeds of therapeutic recovery, which is especially troublesome for a student who identifies as disabled in that it might imply a need to overcome one's disability (indeed one's identity).

Can personal writing ever serve both a therapeutic purpose for the writer (student) while also being ethically evaluated by the reader (teacher)? In 2001, Jeffrey Berman published *Risky Writing: Self-Disclosure and Self-Transformation in the Classroom*, arguing strongly for the power and therapeutic value of students' self-disclosures in writing courses. Reviews of Berman's work applaud his insistence on the therapeutic value of narrative disclosure and testify to his deft negotiation of how best to minimize risk such as re-traumatization and shame (Bracher; Harris). In fact, many of these reviews echo his therapeutic rhetoric, attesting to the powers of trauma narrative as healing and curative.

Berman's insistence on the therapeutic merits of personal writing in the classroom was not free from critique. In 2005, Carra Leah Hood published the article "Lying in Writing or the Vicissitudes of Testimony" in *Composition Forum*, in which she posited a fairly scathing critique of Berman's insistence of the inherent value of disclosure, observing that many students, especially those who have themselves experienced a significant trauma, will revert to lying in writing—directly resisting the forced disclosure for which Berman insists. Hood goes on to further complicate the ethical issues surrounding forced disclosure by analyzing the nature of the universal requirement⁴ and the complicated relationships between writing in a classroom relationship and writing in a therapeutic relationship. Hood points out that even when students are not required to write trauma, they do so inevitably due to the influence of the cultural connection between the personal and trauma. Both Berman's insistence and Hood's subsequent resistance reflect the field's desire to engage the personal as political in

4. Hood refers to the problem of assigning a disclosure narrative in a course that is required (such as first-year composition), pointing out the elective courses carry less of an ethical burden regarding forced disclosure.

the classroom and also the field's hesitation to encroach on the ethically shaky ground of requiring (and grading) disclosure narratives.

The question then remains: what happens when this therapeutic writing (narrative disclosure of trauma) happens in a classroom environment? Trauma Studies has pointed out that remembering, reflecting, and re-storying is a stage of the recovery process (Caruth; Herman; Zehr). However, the relationship between writer-reader in the recovery process is that of writer-ally or writer-witness. Judith Lewis Herman describes this role in her book *Trauma and Recovery*: "The choice to confront the horrors of the past rests with the survivor. The therapist plays the role of a witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak the unspeakable. The reconstruction of trauma places great demands on the courage of both the patient and therapist. It requires that both be clear in their purpose and their alliance" (175).

Herman situates the entire context of trauma reconstruction in the choice of the survivor, demonstrating that the relationship between the writer of trauma and the reader of trauma must be free of coercion. Consequently, it can be concluded that if one follows Herman's theory of trauma narrative and adheres to her stipulations regarding its therapeutic value, choice is mandatory. For the composition instructor, this means any personal essay assignment would have to be optional.

Furthermore, Herman's discussion of the role of ally becomes obviously problematic when one attempts to position a composition teacher as witness. There is no way for a teacher to simultaneously occupy the dual roles of ally and evaluator. This would be analogous to a psychologist assigning a letter grade at the end of a therapy session. Not only are composition instructors not qualified to analyze the "therapy" session, it is highly unethical for them to ask for the revelation in a graded environment.

The Colonization of Dis/abled Bodies: How Personal Writing Reproduces Rhetorics of Overcoming

While it is certainly problematic to complicate the notion of teacher as therapist and to speculate on the troublesome ethics of defining the student-teacher relationship as therapeutic, the problem of pedagogy remains. If personal writing is not to be thrown out (and to be clear—I'm not suggesting it is), and the instructor cannot take on a role of therapist or witness without operating in an ethical black hole, what role should the teacher/reader occupy?

bell hooks warned against the racial and gendered relationships at play in a disclosure-based classroom, describing the colonizing impulse that may occur in the reader:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in such a way that it has become

mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (152).

If composition instructors create a personal writing assignment that places an expectation of overcoming for a student who identifies as disabled, they act as the colonizer of bodies. Through privileging a student's ability to overcome his/her hardship, their trauma, instructors validate his/her own position as able-bodied. To respond to personal essay writing reliant on overcoming and reproducing a medicalized notion of disability, constructs disability as a problem of the individual afflicted rather than as a symptom of the greater

“constructs disability
as a problem of the
individual afflicted
rather than as a
symptom of the
greater culture”

culture. One might interpret hooks “telling back” as the instructor endnote on a graded personal essay. If a student with a disability writes an essay that deploys a rhetoric of overcoming—testifying to his/her ability to prevail over the trauma of their heavy burden—and the instructor⁵ applauds this effort as evidence of therapeutic healing, she colonizing that student's identity. She makes it her own. The student has only written what she thinks the professor needs to read—the suppression of difference—the

triumph over freakery—the return to normalcy. What needs to be overcome is the tendency to ask for healing. The appeal to uphold the hegemonic discourse of ablebodiedness must be critically examined to prevent just such imperialist desires.

If personal writing for the student with disabilities is likely to reproduce a rhetoric of overcoming and I argue for a critical examination to prevent that colonization of dis/abled identity, what does that look like in terms of writing curriculum? First and foremost, it requires that every composition classroom that requires personal writing (even personal writing that doesn't explicitly ask for trauma narrative) include critical examination of disability narrative. The work of Nancy Mairs is often used for just such a task (Mintz; Garland-Thomson). Furthermore, all graduate programs in composition, rhetoric, and literacy need to incorporate disability studies in their reading list. The invisibility of disability must be dealt with, and I argue for its inclusion at the graduate level because of the high number of graduate teaching assistants in composition classrooms. Furthermore, many first-year composition core curricula call for personal writing in their major essay sequence. The absence of critical

5. A major limitation of this essay is its tacit assumption of the ablebodiedness of the professor. Much scholarship addresses the instructor embodiment of disability (Lindgren; Krefling; Kleege; Kuusisto; Chrisman).

training in disability is perhaps the main contributor to the colonialist tendencies I have pointed to throughout this essay. Throughout the course of my own experience as a rhetorical scholar interested in Disability Studies, I all too often am confronted by the invisibility of disability—in reading lists, in the work of my peers, as concentration in programs, in textbooks, etc. Thirdly, personal writing assignments that take disability as subject should be dealt with reflectively and critically. Jacqueline Rinaldi, in her article “From Rhetoric and Healing: Revising Narratives about Disability,” suggests two important pedagogical moves: incorporating disability into the classroom and revising “typical” disability narratives. While I unwaveringly support the former, I find the latter to be only the first step in structuring personal essay writing that examines disability. While Rinaldi certainly attempts a revisionist and reflective examination of the clichéd metaphorical description of dis/abled experience, she still affirms the healing power therein. She writes, “In a final writer’s memo accompanying this reflective and revisionary paper, students could comment on the difficulties and satisfactions of consciously trying to revise narratives and discourses to achieve a sense of personal and cultural healing” (205). Again, the desire for overcoming (for healing) is evident. Might disability be written in a way that doesn’t demand healing? Might it affirm dis/abled experience as preferable? While this may seem a radical claim, the tendency to read “disability as preferable” as radical is representative of the ideology of ablebodiedness. Examples of persons with disabilities who have stated their preference for their disability include Mark Zupan, Aimee Mullins, and many in Deaf communities. Instructors might deliberately present disability narrative examples that illustrate healing as well as disability narratives that function as affirmation for purposes of juxtaposition and critical dialogue.

While integrating disability in graduate courses and bringing disability into the classroom are integral moves towards preventing the uncritical perpetuation of a rhetoric of overcoming, listening and learning from students with disabilities is critical to understanding and empowering. While I certainly feel that the teacher/student power dynamic creates particular responses in personal writing, it is important not to neglect the agency of the student. How might they resist particular rhetorics? Might they use silence (Gere), lying (Hood), or anti-writing (Neel)?

If composition classrooms retain the inclusion of personal essay writing, disclosure isn’t the only ethical issue on the table. Understanding how particular disclosing rhetorics either impair or empower is paramount to constructing a critically conscious classroom environment. Not only do teachers need to be crucially aware of the ethical issues surrounding evaluating personal writing that discloses identity performance through trauma narrative, they need to be theoretically versed in the rhetorical consequences for particular subaltern groups. A rhetoric of overcoming pervades Western culture itself and to privilege student

writing that heals only serves to falsely aggrandize the instructor as playing some pivotal role in a falsely therapeutic process. Only through a decisive analysis of our own desire for a reproduction of the able/disabled binary will we critically facilitate (and ethically evaluate) the personal writing of our students.

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Nancy Johnston and Tina Doyle

Inclusive Teaching: Perspectives of Students with Disabilities

THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM IS A PLACE WHERE STUDENTS WITH diverse needs and abilities are accommodated in all stages of their learning process; it requires our commitment, flexibility, and creativity from the earliest planning of goals and course design to the consideration of weekly activities and assignments. This article was inspired by one of our students who encouraged her instructors to embrace this pedagogical challenge and who suggested that making small but creative changes could bring positive change: “A university student with disabilities wants to learn like any other student. Learning requires a little creativity and an open mind.” The benefit of inclusive teaching to our students is clear. And when students with disabilities are supported and made equal participants in our courses, they enhance the quality of the classroom experience for us, for themselves, and for their peers.

Bringing students into the conversation about inclusive teaching values their voices in creating positive change and encourages student participation in developing best practices for higher education. To underscore the value of student perspectives on learning, this article summarizes student responses from a confidential survey, a collaboration between the Centre for Teaching and Learning and *AccessAbility* Services at the University of Toronto Scarborough. This survey invited students registered with *AccessAbility* Services to respond to key questions about their learning and to give advice for positive teaching methods that had improved the quality of their learning or that they believed supported students with different learning styles and needs. In this article, we share the results of these surveys and then use these results to make broader suggestions to faculty and TAs beyond our university.

Best Practices for Teaching: Students’ Perspectives

In 2009, Tina, in her role as Director of *AccessAbility* Services at the University of Toronto Scarborough, designed a new survey to invite registered students to talk about their learning and classroom experiences at the University of Toronto Scarborough.¹ We (Tina and Nancy) had both offered previous surveys to students registered with *AccessAbility*, and we wanted this one to explicitly solicit student responses to survey and write-in questions on their learn-

1. To see this full survey, and our full results, please contact us via email Nancy Johnston <mailto:johnston@utsc.utoronto.ca >

ing environment and on inclusive teaching. We wanted to discover student priorities in learning, especially what worked for them as students with disabilities and by extension, what worked for their classmates with or without disabilities. The survey was conducted in 2009 and again in 2010, and it was answered by a much larger-than-average number of student respondents than previous surveys on similar topics. The student pool was composed of the approximately 300 students who were currently enrolled with *AccessAbility* Services. Students enrolled with *AccessAbility* Services do not represent all students at UTSC who have disabilities, only those formerly seeking accommodation and other services.

Interestingly, 91% of the survey group self-identified as having “invisible disabilities.” Indeed, the majority of students seeking accommodation at *AccessAbility* Services have “invisible disabilities.” These may include students who have a learning disability, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), mental health disability, Acquired Brain Injury, Aspergers (on the autism spectrum), chronic health conditions (e.g. bowel diseases, cardiac disorder, cancer, MS, epilepsy), mobility/functional disabilities (e.g., arthritis, back injuries), hearing loss and/or low vision. To varying degrees and depending on individual learning, students may experience difficulties in the speed in processing information, concentration, memory function, attention, and energy levels.

The “Inclusive Teaching: Perspectives of Students with Disabilities” Survey

With our survey, we wanted students to reflect on their classroom experiences, answer questions about typical classroom accommodations, and describe what they considered to be successful inclusive teaching practices. Students were also asked for input on teaching strategies that they believed fostered positive change and to encourage a welcoming environment for students with disabilities. We discovered in our survey that a majority of students believed that their instructors had accommodated them above their expectations and beyond formal requests or institutional standards.

Our students suggested that improved communication and accountability were foundations to improved learning environments. They suggested relatively easy-to-implement strategies that might be introduced in planning stages or during the regular teaching of a course. Speaking mostly from positive learning experiences, these students offered teaching strategies that they believed would benefit all students. By identifying the best practices among their instructors, students were advising all instructors to adopt these strategies.

The following sections will expand on their perspectives and explore these and other suggestions.

Providing a Descriptive Syllabus

“A clear, logical, linked manner is the best way of presenting material for me.”

—Student Comment

Perhaps not surprisingly, students wanted to know learning goals, course expectations, and requirements as soon as possible. They preferred a course syllabus that communicated what they should expect in terms of learning goals, and how they should prepare and plan for their discipline-based learning. Several students read the syllabus before the first day in order to review key information, such as our course goals, the required texts, and weekly assignments. A well-organized syllabus, rather than an exhaustive one, foregrounds key learning goals, assignments, and outline expectations. This can alleviate stress and also stimulate student interest in our courses.

Students also praised a syllabus that communicated specific course goals because this encouraged students to make advance arrangements to have other alternative formats for required texts and to read material early or review past course material. They were also more likely to seek advice from advising and access offices or to ask questions in advance. By determining for themselves whether the course is right for them, they gain an added sense of autonomy and independence.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

“Open invitations to speak with them in their office tells you that they are supportive of your needs.”

“When instructors include *AccessAbility* Services information on the syllabus, I feel that it reminds me as well as other students that some people need more help than others and that it is okay to ask for help.”

“When an instructor is approachable, and provides a friendly learning environment for the students, anyone is able to feel comfortable.”

—Student Comments

A majority of students surveyed stated that an accommodation statement signaled a welcoming environment. These students agreed that a positive foundation was created simply by adding a statement about supporting students with disabilities or by an oral invitation to come and talk to the instructor. When instructors paused to read a statement made on the first day or pointed it out in a syllabus, it allayed student fears about discussing their accommodation requests. A statement opens an opportunity for dialogue with students. It also signals our acceptance of the students' rights and helps set a positive tone for the entire class.

We are telling all our students that everyone, including their peers with disabilities, have the right to be respected.

Inclusive Language

“Hopefully via being more open about it, we can reduce stigma which makes everyone feel more comfortable.”

—Student Comment

Students appreciated an instructor's sensitivity with language about disability and pointed out how negative and colloquial language about disabilities could contribute to their feelings of exclusion and damage their self-esteem. They objected to language by instructors and fellow students that described acquiring disabilities as a “tragedy,” and others were offended by the use of unnecessarily colloquial language about mental illness. *AccessAbility* Services and other student support offices recommend that instructors avoid using colloquial language about disability and mental health issues, understand that terminology may change, and refer to students first, and their disabilities second (e.g., a student with low vision).

Breaks and Moderate Pace

“I have a slower processing speed, so the extra ‘silent time’ in between comments allowed me to gather my thoughts and formulate what I wanted to say. I felt left out when discussions were held at a fast pace.”

“I've had professors who didn't answer for students when they took too long to answer. They waited patiently and encouraged students to speak up.”

—Student Comments

The number one request by students involved formal breaks and a moderate pace. These practices allowed students to preview course concepts and questions and allotted them more time to process during class. Students wrote that a break was an opportunity to consider new ideas, find their place in their notes, review an outline, or ask questions. The common teaching practice of taking a democratic vote in class on whether to take a break or “end a class early,” while well-meaning, can backfire when many students, especially students with disabilities, medical conditions, may not want to risk inconveniencing others. One student recommended breaks, which allow the “professors [to] catch their breath” as well.

Students in our survey also praised instructors who used a moderate pace in their lectures, and slowed to repeat key points or add emphasis. Students wanted time to think about questions and by implication, wanted to participate. They praised instructors who waited for all student responses and those who did not react impatiently when students gathered their thoughts.

Posting Lectures and Other Material Electronically

“The majority of my professors have been very understanding and patient with me throughout the semester. I have even had professors print off the lecture notes for me before class just in case I forgot to print them off myself.”

“Lecture notes and slides posted a few days before class [allowed] more time for a student to read them before class. [This] makes you pay attention more and learn.”

“Having visual powerpoints or lecture slides made it much easier to follow material that was discussed in class.”

—Student Comments

The second most frequent request was for instructors to provide electronic copies of lectures and other materials. Students who had difficulties with processing and organizing said they benefitted by previewing lecture outlines or reviewing posted slides. Others used them as an aid for organizing their notes. Most students, especially second language learners, can benefit from previewing definitions, main points, or lecture and class outlines. However, instructors sometimes hesitate to provide electronic materials such as lectures because they are concerned that their students will stop attending class or become passive learners.

One alternative to posting or video-taping complete lectures is to post outlines of upcoming lectures (with key questions or readings highlighted) or to post only a selection of slides in advance or after the lecture was delivered. Students surveyed preferred to read posted lectures or outlines before class as a guide to their learning or to help ground their learning process. Students described how using pre-posted lectures helped them prepare answers or to formulate their questions in lectures, or even to participate in small discussion groups.

Supporting Class Activities and Scaffolding Assignments

Students praised instructors who used a variety of teaching methods and activities to include a breadth of learning styles and abilities. Best practices for active learning are means to accommodate diverse learning styles and to foreground opportunities for developing higher analytical skills and research methods. All students can benefit from understanding the learning process and breaking down explicitly the steps involved in larger assignments. Similarly, students praised instructors who offered sequenced or scaffolded assignments rather than one heavily weighted large assignment. Each piece builds on the previous foundation. This allows students to take inventory of their knowledge and skills gained in previous assignments and to break larger projects into more manageable chunks. Students described how this method reduced their stress.

Active Learning in Groups, Field Trips, and Labs

In our second survey in 2010, we added questions about active learning, especially student participation in discussion groups, peer review, and so on, because these activities often require higher peer-interaction or special skills that can generate anxiety for students. These concerns may be based on negative experiences in their past. Students with disabilities may need time to arrange their accommodations and may appreciate developing an action-plan to prepare for activities and assignments.

The following is a summary of student ideas about active learning and additional advice we give to faculty and teaching assistants. Advice from The Washington University Do-It site was especially valuable and is highly recommended for accommodation advice.

Activity Tutorials and Seminars	Inclusive Teaching Practice Ask for volunteer student note-takers in small tutorials and groups. Create permanent breakout groups to smooth transitions between activities. Evaluate the physical class environment for barriers: location of exits, accessible tables, position of furniture, and noise levels (such as fans). Establish guidelines about participation and state alternatives to in-class writing (after-class responses or posts) Break down the class task with advice on time needed to complete: for answering questions, for writing or presenting, for group discussion.
In-Class Writing	Use in-class writing to encourage skills development and practice. Consider allowing all students to submit some informal writing or discussion points within a set time frame after class. Allow students to use computers in-class for writing tasks.
Group Work and Presentations	Outline expectations for participation for all members to ensure ideas are respected and included. Allow some time in class for student planning, especially defining group roles. Encourage on-campus or in-class group preparation. Create online forums for small group discussion and planning. Investigate library and other space for group meetings.
Field Trip, Fieldwork and Off-Campus Activities	Communication is key for successful participation of students. Post early any instructions for future trips and activities. Review instructions in advance and in alternative formats. Break down tasks orally and in writing: e.g. suggest time expected for tasks, traveling time, etc. Seek support from access services to discuss accessibility for off-campus and alternatives to this work when necessary. Review access to locations: physical access, parking availability, travel accommodations, etc. Invite students to give feedback or suggestions for future participation.

Achieving Success in Higher Education

“By taking the time to show me different ways of approaching work, instructors have reduced my stress levels and made me feel more capable of achieving success at university.”

—Student Comment

We undertook our research to discover what students with disabilities had to contribute to inclusive teaching practices. We also wanted to offer students a forum to critique current teaching practices and to help us articulate concrete strategies for best practices in university teaching. Student perspectives add credibility and weight to our discussions when advising faculty and TAs about how to improve their teaching. Listening to student voices is an essential step to help us all become more responsive to the complexity of student learning needs and to empower students to participate in improving learning.

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Linda Rubel and Rose Marie Toscano

I Am My Language: Representing and Misrepresenting Deaf Writers

GLORIA ANZALDÚA, IN HER TEXT “HOW TO TAME A WILD TONGUE,” declares that language and self-identity are inextricable, a claim that resonates loudly for those of us teaching Deaf college students. She describes the shame and diminished identity she feels when using her native language. Naming it “linguistic terrorism” (80), she says:

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself, . . . and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than have them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (81)

Given the thrust of Deaf identity politics over the last 25 years, this metaphor strikes us as particularly ironic. The Deaf community has battled with the dominant hearing culture over the very issue of “tongue,” first arguing successfully against the focus within Deaf education on the ability to speak and then arguing for the acceptance of American Sign Language (ASL) as the community’s legitimate language—or “tongue”—and the acceptance of Deaf Culture.

The audiological perspective, formulated by the dominant hearing society, was a formidable foe in the battle for acceptance. From this perspective, deafness as a medical condition was characterized by auditory deficits. Such a perspective naturally led to efforts to try to remediate and was premised on the belief that Deaf people are inferior to hearing people. For the longest time this construction of deafness resulted in “efforts to try to help the deaf individual to become as similar to a hearing person as possible . . .” (Reagan 45). There was little understanding or acknowledgement of the inextricable link between language and identity in the audiological perspective.

Since the 1970s, a re-conceptualization of deafness as identity rather than as disability, coming from within the Deaf community, has prevailed. Deaf cultural identity presupposes competence in ASL, and in fact, the use of ASL as the primary language is “arguably the single most important element in the construction of deaf cultural identity” (Reagan 51). As the 2006 protests at Gallaudet best illustrate, it is not merely signing that is necessary, but specifically the use of ASL, which “functions as a ‘language of group solidarity’ for deaf

people . . . serving both as a badge of in-group membership and as a barrier to those outside the cultural community” (Reagan 51). To suggest such a binary, however—insiders and outsiders—would be inaccurate and misleading. In fact, within the Deaf community, we can see a wide range of groups who identify themselves by virtue of amount of hearing loss, language preference, educational experience, and integration into either the Deaf or the hearing world.

The language of Deaf identity politics continues to evolve. Since 1993, when Paddy Ladd coined the term, some members of the Deaf community have been examining an identity based on “Deafhood” rather than deafness. In this new paradigm, being Deaf is perceived as originating from a colonization process. Deafhood broadens and defines how Deaf people view their Deaf selves, with some deciding to live within existing definitions of Deaf Culture and others deciding to move beyond the category. More recently, an idea has emerged from the Innovation Lab at Gallaudet University focusing on “DEAF-GAIN,” a concept that moves away from hearing loss and de-emphasizes deficit. This idea differs from other readings of colonization to emphasize that Deaf people and their culture constitute an important form of human diversity that can offer significant contributions to the rest of society (Bauman and Murray).

“Pride in their language yields pride in themselves, not the shame that Anzaldúa describes for those deprived of their native ‘tongue.’”

Despite these distinctions within the Deaf community, it seems safe to say that there is general social acceptance of ASL as a legitimate language and of Deaf Culture as a unique and valued sub-culture in America. Deaf individuals in America today, with the support of ADA legislation, have earned respect for ASL and for the bilingual/bicultural approach to education. Pride in their language yields pride in themselves, not the shame that Anzaldúa describes for those deprived of their native “tongue.”

As teachers of Deaf, college-age students at the Rochester Institute of Technol-

ogy, home to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, we are in a unique position to observe this pride. Let us offer some examples from our students’ writing.

Student A: Anyway, I consider myself as identity as an American Sign Language user. ASL is completely visual and natural language. ASL has morphology (rules of creation words), phonetics, (hand shape forms), and body/facial

language effects communication as language. ASL defines me as person and symbolizes in Deaf communication that affects Deaf community and values of ASL and I cannot imagine living without ASL. When I am in a hearing world, I always feel Deaf as strong identity. I can merge with the hearing world without a problem with my access in oral communication or writing. In the Deaf world, I am a happy person in Deaf world and Deaf culture. . . . "Be proud of your identity and your language!"

Student B: I primarily use American Sign Language due to my deafness. ASL allows me to communicate with other deaf peers as well as understand what is going on in the environment. . . . Language often times creates a culture of its own. The Deaf has its own culture as well as English speaking people. In the Deaf culture, we have our style of ASL, our tendency to use ASL in a specific way, and add non-verbal behavior to our language. I enjoy using ASL and I know the traits of the deaf culture. I am able to fit into the Deaf culture with no problem.

From these few examples, we can see the pride these students take in their language, in themselves as users of that language, and in their identity. While ASL has been legitimized, Deaf individuals are still accommodating to English users in their academic and professional lives because of the insistence on producing Standard Written English. What concerns us and what is the focus for this paper is how Deaf students' written English influences the ways in which they are perceived by others and, consequently, the ways in which they perceive themselves.

In the article "Toward an Archeology of Deafness: Etic and Emic Constructions of Identity in Conflict," Timothy Reagan discusses the ways in which the construction of Deaf identity provides an especially powerful example of the tension that Michel Foucault discusses. He refers to Foucault when he explains that "identity is constructed both personally and socially. . . tak[ing] place within the context of cultural, social, and historical understandings (and misunderstandings)" (44). Much of Foucault's work analyzes the tensions that have emerged between personal and social constructions of identity as well as tensions between what the anthropologists call etic and emic. Referring to J. Clifton's terminology in *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (1968), Reagan explains these terms in the following way: "Every construction of identity occurs within a situated context; some constructions of identity are those of participants in the identity [emic], whereas others are those of observers outside of the identity [etic]" (44).

For some of our students, their emic construction of identity reinforces a positive

self-view; they see themselves as fluent users of written English. What happens when this complex identity runs head-on into the assumption commonly held that Deaf people are, at best, not skilled writers, and, at worst, incapable of producing acceptable prose? One former student, a brilliant writer who communicates solely in American Sign Language, describes her experience in a college class in which her teacher mistrusted the originality of her work because of the elegance of the analysis and of the prose. In an email, she writes:

At RIT . . . uhh, I was in Dr. S's . . . class and we were doing an essay on James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist* and we hadn't done any class discussion at all and she asked us to write a paper about parallelism about the story and Joyce's life (from the blurb on the book). So I wrote a paper and handed it in. She handed it back with a note that said she couldn't grade it as it was and that I needed to see her. So I did, and she said, "Where are your sources?" and I said, "I didn't use any. . . . I didn't know I was supposed to." She said, "You're telling me you wrote this all by yourself without any outside research?" And I said, "Yeah, why?" She said it was because it was an absolutely spot-on analysis. She said that if I could give her an earlier draft to prove that it wasn't plagiarized, she would give me an A.

This was hardly an isolated incident. Another question was raised about the authenticity of this same student's work in a biographical literature course and in a history course. Ironically, that history teacher offered a course in Deaf history and taught in the graduate program at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

These sample experiences, no doubt, produce that etic/emic tension that Foucault writes about. These students believe to be true that they are skilled writers and have "dual identities" relative to their abilities to function in both the Deaf and hearing worlds. But, in the face of continual questioning and skepticism about their "written English identity," we can only conclude that their "sense" of their own identity as inviolable is undermined.

The same skepticism and assaults are endured by members of other minority groups. Writing about the work of Maxine Hong Kingston, critic Juan Li says that *Tripmaster Monkey* offers one protagonist who is an American born Chinese, "as competent in mainstream Standard English as white Americans are [but] his Chinese appearance often denies him access to the dominant language and culture" (276). Li describes this protagonist, Witman, as a fluent user of English, both in his academic major and his professional goal to be a playwright. Nonetheless, based on his appearance, he faces the stereotyped assumptions that Chinese-Americans cannot use Standard English. As Kingston has her character say, "The one [question] that drives me craziest is 'Do you speak English?' particularly after I have been talking for hours. . . . The voice doesn't go with the face" (Kingston 317).

While this tension between etic and emic constructions of identity does indeed cross ethnic, racial, and class lines, others would argue that there is a difference for the Deaf. Timothy Reagan claims, "The social construction of deaf identity differs from that of most cultural communities in that it is primarily an emic construction in conflict with a dominant etic construction of deaf identity. . . . What is notable in the case of the deaf and Deaf identity is not the tension, but rather the fundamental incommensurability of the etic and emic constructions" (44). Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in those people who are Deaf but do not have the double self-image resulting from bilingual (ASL and written English) fluency. A large number of these people fall into the category of inter-language users based on their written English.

These writers are not the traditional basic writers who have been identified because of typical surface idiosyncracies, such as comma splices, agreement errors, fragments, shifts in verb tense, etc. Rather, this group demonstrates a written English that contains elements of sign and elements of Standard Written English, sometimes following the syntax of ASL, at other times following English word order. Veda Charrow says that there does appear to be a variety of non-Standard English that the Deaf use instead of Standard English. Her premise is that this "deaf English" possesses variable forms, and that "The deaf have learned many obligatory Standard English grammatical and morphological rules, but they apply them optionally" (144).

Researchers Mayer and Akamatsu, in "Bilingual-Bicultural Models of Literacy Education for Deaf Students: Considering the Claims," describe the genesis of such written texts as coming from the absence of a one-to-one correspondence between signed and written utterances. They claim, "While signing about a topic will undoubtedly assist the student in elaborating and expanding ideas, it does not, at the actual moment of composing, assist the student in making correct lexical, morphological, and syntactic choices." Mayer and Akamatsu cite Biber's work with spoken and written aspects of English and conclude that, "These choices for hearing writers are shaped and determined to a large extent by their knowledge of the spoken language that gave root to the written form" (4). These researchers show clearly the etiology of the surface features of "deaf written English."

For the purposes of this paper, the inter-language used by Deaf writers will be labeled pidgin written English, although we understand that this label is not completely accurate and carries with it serious social stigma. We feel distaste for adopting a term that is so closely associated with the demeaning attitudes of colonialism and that runs counter to the heart of our argument. But, at the same time, we know of no other terminology to describe the texts produced by some Deaf writers and hope that a better and more respectful terminology can be developed in the future. Even Veda Charrow admits that real "deaf English" is probably

more complex than most pidgins but does conclude that it can be considered an example of pidginization (144). Linguists have defined pidgins in a variety of ways from marginal languages, to a means of communication among people of different language backgrounds, to an epitome of the “complex relations between language and social life” (Li 272). We are using the term “pidgin” in the same way Robert Hall does: “for a language to be true pidgin . . . its grammatical structure and its vocabulary must be sharply reduced” (xii). We do not want to discuss the unique linguistic features of what we are calling pidgin written English (nor explain the reduced grammatical structure or vocabulary). Rather, we want to stay focused on the ideological debate of the linguistic rights and status of pidgin written English and its reception, and how that reception influences self-perception and perception by others.

In order to clarify how texts in pidgin written English are received, consider the following student response to a placement test prompt asking writers to examine the idea of public schools requiring school uniforms:

Should some public schools be stricter on a school uniform? Will it affect all of students in High school and Junior High school bad? Are there some positive and negative points about a dress code or a school uniform? There are many schools having different opinions on a dress code. I will tell you some positive and negative points about that. There are three things: Regular dress, a dress of limitation, and a school uniform.

Next, a dress of limitation is the better way to show the people so impression. Dress of limitation is a kind of useless to wear for the students in their junior high schools and high schools. For example, in positive points I was in high school called Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville, Illinois. My school wasn't allow the students to wear tanks, flip-flop, and sweater pants because it wasn't regular to wear during the school except weekend. My high school was the stricter than my junior high school because of the safety. One negative point is some students didn't like to wear simple dresses; for example, on springtime, I can't use flip flop when I need it for let my feet got cooler. They started to be frustrated by that. However, there is a better way to make the students to learn how to wear so right during school time.

The initial response of most readers is to be overwhelmed by the errors at all levels, from syntax to diction to spelling. They may even, privately, consider this text as illiterate, incomprehensible, inadequate, unintelligible. If these readers are also compositionists, they write on these texts in less negative terms, perhaps limiting themselves to comments such as “What does this mean?” “I cannot understand what you mean here.” “This idea is not clear.”

“This sentence is not in Standard Written English.” “I have no idea what you are trying to tell me.” Certainly the pages of these texts would be riddled with under-linings, crossings-out, references to pages in grammar handbooks, whole sentences edited and re-written. Although they might recognize and appreciate the ASL underpinnings to these texts—how the ideas would come through clearly in Sign—their tendency is to view the entire text as a study in error.

They may hold their comments to the polite. In their heart of hearts, however, they may not be so generous, viewing the texts as failures and, by consequence, the

writers of those texts at best as unskilled and at worst as incapable. They see these students not always as themselves but as the texts they produce. While they would not agree professionally or theoretically that language equals thought, their practices and their responses often equate them. So it is that the language equals *the person*. Texts produced by Deaf writers, who are already labeled “language deficient,” seem doomed to reinforce already-negative stereotypes about the writers.

A study of the published research on the reading/writing conditions of Deaf individuals serves only to compound these stereotypes. When we reviewed a sample of articles on ASL and on the bilingual-bicultural approaches to education, we found very positive portrayals of students’ abilities and a strong connection between the importance of ASL to Deaf identity and culture. In contrast, our reading of recent research into the written language challenges faced by the Deaf, the tone and language changed and seemed to revert to the deficit model and the error paradigm.

A representative example comes from the article. “Vocabulary Use by Low, Moderate and High ASL Users Compared to Hearing ESL and Monolingual Speakers” published in the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 2004. The article focuses on the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and literacy development, showing how Deaf second language learners of English approach English vocabulary acquisition in ways that are different from hearing ESL learners. The study recommends that ASL might be an entry point for vocabulary acquisition, supporting ASL and its users, for Deaf students, educators and literacy instruction. In describing their results, however, the researchers reinforce skewed notions of who these writers of pidgin written English are, based on their writing skills. They state: “Many researchers have documented the *depressed English vocabulary* [emphasis ours] and reading comprehension scores among deaf children.” Singleton et al. provide another example from DeVilliers and Pomerantz, who write that “many hearing impaired students

“their tendency is to view the entire text as a study in error.”

are caught in a vicious circle: their *impoverished vocabularies* limit their reading comprehension and *poor reading strategies and skills limit their ability* to acquire adequate vocabulary knowledge from context" [emphasis ours] (qtd. in Singleton et al. 87).

Another example comes from the 1996 *Journal of Deaf Studies and Education*. In "Can the Linguistic Interdependence Theory Support Bilingual-Bicultural Model of Literacy Education for Deaf Students?" the authors argue, "When it comes to learning to read and write . . . there is general agreement that deaf children find this *much more difficult* than their hearing peers." Mayer and Wells refer to a study done in 1983 by King and Quigley and claim, "In acquiring literacy in English, for example, deaf children *rarely progress much beyond a fourth grade level*" [emphasis ours] (96). Mayer and Wells further suggest that "deaf children have much less to build on. They do not 'know' the language they are attempting to write" [emphasis ours] (99).

Nor can we exempt ourselves from this misrepresentation of Deaf students. In our first collaboratively written article, published in *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry*, 1997, we made this claim:

Equally frustrating for our deaf students are the obstacles presented to them by writing. . . . It is not surprising, then, that in response to college-appropriate writing assignments, students produce narratives using sentence structures that are either short and simple (and thus perceived as childish) or long, cumbersome, and convoluted (and thus incomprehensible) (21).

In our proposal for a 4C's conference a few years ago, we submitted the following:

One particular group for whom this goal of improving the quality of life for themselves and for their communities is deaf students who—like many other basic writers—often come into the classroom 'owning' neither written nor spoken English. Many of these writers who are deaf lack proficiency in critical reading and the language conventions of academic discourse. These 'deficits' coupled with fragmented world knowledge yield prose that does not accurately represent the sophistication of their thoughts.

It is, therefore, not only the teachers' commentary on Deaf students' written texts which communicates to these writers how we feel about the pidgin written English, but it is also the way Deaf writers are portrayed to the public by researchers and other professionals that must, eventually, influence their sense of self as users of written English. One student writes:

Some ways that does not represent my identity is my writing skills. I definitely have a weakness in that. A lot of people misunderstood, thinking that the way deaf people write will explain their intelligence when it does not at all. I feel like I am pretty smart and maybe above average in some cases, but

because of my writing skills isn't the best, they quickly assume I am dumb. Some people just do not understand that when you sign, you don't sign every single word but you still get the picture. So sometimes it makes me ashamed of whom I am and that is stupid of me. The reason why it is stupid of me because that is who I am and it is part of my identity. I should have pride in that.

How much the worse for another student, who writes with grim resignation: "Written English is my biggest barrier in a lifetime and never will change at all."

The broad acceptance of ASL as a language of instruction for Deaf students and the popularity of ASL offerings in high schools and colleges are demonstrable evidence for Deaf people that their language and culture are valued beyond the Deaf community. There is no analogous research or hypothetical stances regarding the possible connection between the use and reception of pidgin written English and its relationship to Deaf identity. Our observations and anecdotal comments from students point to its negative repercussions relative to identity. So, how do we apply the lessons we have learned from the acceptance of ASL to our responses to pidgin written English and the students who use it?

One possible opening is offered by Suresh Canagarajah in his article, "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued," in which he argues that we should work towards the acceptance of the integration of local varieties of English into Standard Written English, "contesting the monolingualist assumptions in composition" (586). Canagarajah talks about "a re-consideration of the native/non-native distinction . . . that embodies multiple norms and standards. English should be treated as a multi-national language, one that belongs to diverse communities" (589), a refreshing and encouraging view of Standard Written English. His model encourages teachers to train students to choose consciously those locations in a written text where non-standard usage, resulting from the interference of a first language, becomes an active choice. That choice would be motivated "by important cultural and ideological considerations" (609). He also insists that teachers read these choices not as a sign of error or lack of proficiency, but as evidence of independent and critical writing.

Paul Matsuda and Christine Tardy offer a similar argument in their article, "Voice in Academic Writing," in which they claim that voice (which they define broadly as a combination of discursive and non-discursive features) influences the reader's construction of the writer and, by extension, of the writer's identity. They define discursive features to include "sentence structures, organization, the use of transition devices, word choice, as well as content." They also cite syntax, mechanics, and careful editing as "features used by reviewers in constructing author voice." Matsuda and Tardy conclude that readers do construct identity through voice (as they have defined it). While Matsuda and Tardy include other components of voice, their reference to surface features is most applicable to professionals working with

writers of pidgin written English. These theorists/practitioners base their conclusions on hearing writers of “other Englishes.” However, the opening they offer is wide enough for deaf writers of pidgin English to walk through.

Another compelling change Canagarajah suggests is the importance of “shuttle[ing] between “communities in contextually relevant ways” (593). Students would make deliberate choices about when and how to use their dialect (in the case of deaf writers, pidgin written English). Canagarajah labels this movement between writing communities as “code meshing”—in which writers intentionally take advantage of their language variety for a rhetorical purpose, which results in a “hybrid text” (598). Code meshing is not new to academic writing (for example, bell hooks and Gloria Anazaldúa), but Canagarajah suggests it should become more universal, not limited to those with “elite bilingualism” (598). And it is certainly new for Deaf writers to consider such an intentional rhetorical move. We posit that a more accepting reception by readers trained to understand and value this code-meshing would result in a more positive identity emerging for these writers.

Like Canagarajah, we, too, want to challenge the monolingualists’ assumptions about Standardized Written English and open the ideological debate about the linguistic rights and status of pidgin written English. To do so requires that we shift the lens away from the deficit model, especially for readers both inside and outside the academy or the profession who think of pidgin written English as “dumb” and illiterate. It would also require pragmatic resolutions that we can locate in the academy, particularly in how we teach our students to “code mesh.” Such solutions would prevent these writers from experiencing the emotions expressed in the poem “Discourse on the Logic of Language” by Marlene Nourbese Philip:

“a more accepting
reception by readers
trained to understand
and value this
code-meshing”

. . . and english is
my mother tongue
is my father tongue
is lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
a foreign anguish
is English-...

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Nancy Viva Davis Halifax

Scar Tissue

z

OVER THE COURSE OF 2 SEMESTERS THERE ARE TWENTY-FIVE classes and if I add one more, the one where I sit, a teacher in her deserted classroom, this last lost letter, the zed of my alphabet of weeks may begin to make sense and words form beneath the ache of these walls.

These too-close walls crowd a sprawl of chairs; each chair the same size no matter its body, answering the call of a university administration that wanted always more bodies.

a

Our bodies¹ are present in the academy and with our bodies come their glorious leakiness, their sensuality, their transience.

This writing like my body bears scars, interruptions in its flesh, reminders of injury to tissue where cells repeat information in their efforts to repair. This is a work of repair. As a work entering the world it bears the scars that many bodies bear, working the in-betweens of teaching and learning. This body, marked by medicine, culture, is the producer of scarred knowledge.

b

I cannot find my notebook
And for days my thoughts are stuck here
And here I leave some with a young Canada goose and her ducklings
Pale green as new grass,
While others are stuffed into a paper bag
With a half eaten sandwich now
Attracting fruit flies
Who may be able to make something better of
These thoughts than me still looking for that white skin
And pale lines

1. Pressure brought to bear on every concept, I begin to not know what is body. Forever moving body is a material object, split open and sewn, re-sewn, it is prior to what it will be constructed as in discourse. Consequentially, the body is thick with ambiguity.

c

As an instructor in an introductory disability studies course, I may come to "embody" the field for my students. When this occurs, resistance to disability studies knowledge becomes deeply personal. While students stare and shift in their seats, I wonder whether disability, uncertainty, and vulnerability are performances that students are ready to receive (or participate in) within a scholarly context. Student calls for "more structure," "more PowerPoints," and their further wishes for setting boundaries around time, language and emotion may be grounded in a desire to contain the leakiness that they never invited into their lives, much less the classroom. Throughout the year I begin to wonder what work vulnerable pedagogy does for myself and my students and how it relates to and complicates the power I hold as a teacher.

d

Vulnerable pedagogy is characterized by a bodily perception briefly in my consciousness. I could step away, altogether deny the presence and effect of the barely perceptible, but the subtle mark rendered upon my flesh draws my attention. Etymologically the notion of the vulnerable means "to wound" but also "to be wounded." Teaching, wounding, being wounded . . . building up scar tissue.

e

That year was my first year co-teaching an introduction to critical disability studies, and it was filled with my vulnerability and that of my co-teacher. Contemporary scholars working from a feminist postconventional ethics (Price and Shildrick) acknowledge the importance of writing together from the positions of ability and disability and we would add to that the necessity of teaching. These pages, however, find me here alone. What is significant is how together we shored each other up, learning about the limits of our bodies, our relationship, and our teaching. Here I will perform the classroom for you, retelling my perspectives on the teaching and learning story, through a lyrical and poetic inquiry (Neilsen) into vulnerability, its discontents and containments in the disability studies classroom.

f

Disability enters the classroom. I bring it in, embody it but hesitate to define it. As a couple in the classroom, I am the body that is marked, yet not always visibly. I can pass—we will leave that conversation for another day, when we might place the rehearsal of nondisability, the years in rehabilitation and the attempt to erase disability, this lived body, at its centre. But in today's classroom there is some grumbling. I feel forced to come forward with some provisional definition of disability, my body isn't enough for them; I waver. My hesitation is grounded in the apprehension that many disability scholars experience: a definition can become restrictive, in error it begins to normalize our field—so I turn toward words that

will open up the apprehensions of disability discourse.²

My desire is not to define or normalize disability. Yet in teaching, I am obliged to provide in some large or small way an instance of language that provides a ground. And as various experiences, theories, categories, and aspects of what comprises this messy, inconstant, category are brought forward I feel other facets slipping away, as if I am disabling the field in which we are studying. . . .

Most importantly I have to convey to these bodies that inhabit this room that disability is ever shifting and changing. Anomalous embodiment (Shildrick, "The Disabled"), non-mate (Garland-Thomson), nondisabled (Linton), extraordinary (Garland-Thomson), ableism (Campbell) are terms used in juxtaposition with disability and these begin to force students to consider the notion of the fluidity of embodiment and its inconsistency. We begin to understand how words and concepts are fluid, not frozen, cold. And neither are bodies. The carpenter's square knows that it was never meant to be set against this body, this living, flesh.

g

I stand in front of the class breathing. Orienting in my usual way, obliquely. Like Emily Dickinson who I learned approached her work askance, from the side. And so she taught me this tactic.

h

What happens when disability is brought into the classroom as the central focus of study and hence tension? And when the professor exhibits disability and vulnerability—performances the students may not be so ready to perceive or understand; within a scholarly context, the professor may find herself or significant aspects of herself becoming various things: a target, reformed, rehabilitated, fixed, cured, wished away—and her awareness and response are not trivial.

Here we may perceive the manner in which students shift in their seats as they stare, desperately never wanting to be like us in our scholarly vulnerability. Theorizing not so much about bodies but from bodies as lived entities. Social institutions and discourse cannot be understood apart from the real lived experiences and actions of embodied human beings across time and space. Social theory must be rooted in our embodiment (Williams and Bendelow 209).

2. Shildrick cautions us that if there were agreed upon parameters we would "close down, and thus normalize, what must otherwise remain a shifting nexus of both physical and mental states that resists full and final definition. On the simplest level, what counts as disabling anomaly varies greatly according to the socio-historical context, and even were the inquiry limited to a westernized location in our own time, the category remains slippery, fluid, heterogeneous, and deeply intersectional" ("Dangerous" 223).

i

I awake in the middle of the night trying to find an example to speak from. Whatever I know seems to hurt, seems to cause pain for some. I have been here before.

During my lecture on queer theory, I walk through the aisles speaking about the coding of bodies, categories, and their blurring. When I end, I await a response. Silence. There is a wish for hard categories, for knowledge that does not shift, knowledge that is stable and reliable. An expectation for expertise. These are the expectations I continuously attempt to take apart. Yet my own authority in the classroom complicates everything.

Walking through aisles, between students, between knowing and not-knowing, between theory and practice, is a current of breaking waves. Waves seize and cast along the edge that tracks water and shore. In between we ride the tides.

j

In the coldness of this room, I was witness to the complexities of a group of students that left me wondering about my persistent hope for pedagogy and maybe the naivety of hope. I wore an extra sweater in this building, and carried my scarf and hat with me. Was I coming or going? As I walk through this room so early in the day and I wander amongst the chairs at the end of the semester, I remember the bodies that such a short while ago inhabited them. Each body full of breath and such passionate spirit!

k

We are creatures of relationship (Abram). I come to know myself anew with every class. I am called to witness how students begin to know themselves differently, through relationship and through resistance.

l

Anomalous, nondisabled and disabled bodies have brought into themselves the cultural norms that suggest bodies of difference are not what is celebrated and brought forward with delight. . . . There is a cultural and social pentimento that accompanies disability. The norms against which we are judged are exposed under the fat of oil, and no matter how thickly we are painted, the original composition remains.

I don't want this teacher, is the silence in the room.

m

"Abandon the sense that [we] can by sheer strength of will and desire, make the classroom an exciting, learning community" (hooks 9). I cannot enforce a learning community, I have to set the conditions in place.

This means being aware of how the world enters the classroom. Our classroom becomes a place to witness the suffering that has accrued to each body. It is filled with bodies that are hungry and that have experienced a mix of social injustices and privilege. Living

in this Northern country we cannot deny our privilege, but we cannot argue against the poverty and violence that still exist in our homes and on our streets. Each student is a curious mixture to me of privilege and suffering. As Walt Whitman might say “a great poem.”

These poems in front of me.

Lines lived already with autobiographical urgency.

Listen.

n

The sound is of a woman crying. Or maybe more than one. It is halfway through the alphabet—one semester almost finished and exhaustion is settling, if only it could find a spot. Rising from her chair she moves toward the noise. A thin line drawn with red chalk, its dust smaller sighs that tremble in the air before coming to ground where they outline forgotten wanderings. Again the sound. She is astonished to find this ruby din coming from within her skin.

o

Body/s of students no matter how she tries there is always one that is hurt, late, cloudy. Once upon a time a student leaves class perhaps the thought is leaving means nothing, it has no effect.

The student leaves because there are as yet no words for what she has experienced. Only an action, though this could be a lie.

p

She leaves her learning like a trail of crumbs that the teacher cannot follow
And birds hungrily fly off with them.

The teacher stands in the woods wishing she could understand birds
Their paths of flight would surely tell her where this student had stopped
Shadows of words would cease lingering in her dreams.

q

I do not rely on theory for much, theories are like a compass rose (Bringhurst). “If it tells me where to find true north, of course, I’m grateful, yet I don’t suppose that any north is permanently true” (Bringhurst 9). And so it is in the classroom. No permanent north and perhaps no permanent resistance. Just a rose blossoming, crumbs falling from beaks.

r

We are studying disability from critical perspectives in this classroom, reflecting upon its presence in the world and in the classroom. The students arrive with knowledge that they will have to learn to question and at times even to hold silent as knowledges that are at times given priority in this classroom may not come from the disciplinary home that they feel comfortable within. Some may have to learn the difference between critiquing a

social structure and a person who works within that structure, while some arrive with that knowledge. And they have to deal with me as their teacher, who looks for knowledge not only in books, but in the cracks of the sidewalks and in the bodies of worms (Davis Halifax). I believe we must take worms (Phillips) and the more than human (Abram) seriously as we shift our perception to life and all of human endeavor including suffering.

S

Students are not the only ones who suffer and resist in the classroom. It is also those of us who teach. We resist the lessons that we are being taught and there are days when I am uncertain what those are. All I can do is breathe and try to find a way to make sense.

T

To refuse breath to normative discourse and normative representations is a political pedagogical encounter with resistance. Interrogate words as they move from breath to sound. Breathe deeply to “uncover and reclaim subjugated knowledge” (Mohanty 185).

U

Subjugated knowledges enter the classroom.

We turn off the lights and continue to keep them off. The bright fluorescents uncover too much and we are naked under their cool radiance. The darkness is a blanket. The material is contentious and we need covering.

V

I speak through metaphor, and lyric, sensually and ambiguously constructing knowledge. Will students be amenable to the blurring of disciplinary distinctions as we begin to roll and walk and find a rhythm of knowing shaped by scarred body/s?

W

A poetics of disability scholarship is one way to respond to challenges to make available subjugated knowledge. Representations of cast out bodies. Knowledge of/from subjugated bodies. So we have to make “this” present in the classroom. Not just write about “them” in journals. And so I bring my feminist self into the classroom and the response is: a 10% solution. No more than that should be allowed in. I suffer and have a fever. I ache. What to do? I

“I will not allow
these knowledges,
this body to be pushed
out the door”

have to be congruent otherwise I cannot teach. So I bring myself to teach in the classroom. The students will have to learn that I teach a curriculum that counters particular practices and embodies others. And while I do not want to suggest a hierarchy of discourse I will not allow these knowledges, this body to be pushed out the door

anymore through arguments that are isolating. It will not be an easy semester.

This is resistance.

x

Why is it what I speak never reaches your ear?

The air thickens with this tragedy. The impossibility of this experiment

Whereby you never answer my questions

Makes me wish it come to an end.

You hear the voices only when they are ashes

Buried under iron red earth.

I pray for language not

Light but unavoidable

Trembling wet darkness.

The smallness of my body sticks to your tongue

Disclosing the weight of a body unheard

One moment the world language-full

The next a shallow grave. (Davis Halifax, "I Pray")

y

And so I stand there swaying. Wandering through the class holding a conversation with whoever will come forward. I speak and I listen to the room. There is a shifting of bodies

They say the readings are too hard I say read them like a poem And do not forever read for meaning Let the words arrive On your skin pricking slow wonder Through anaesthetized scars and calluses.

Read because you have a cup of tea beside you Read because your friend is laughing Read because someday these fragments Will knit themselves into a Sweater that you will wear to a conference Or a classroom that is too cold or warm.

z

Over the course of 2 semesters there are twenty-five classes and if I add one more, the one where I sit, a teacher in her deserted classroom, this last lost letter, the *zed* of my alphabet of weeks may begin to make sense and words form beneath the ache of these walls.

These too-close walls crowd a sprawl of chairs; each chair the same size no matter its body, answering the call of a university administration that wanted always more bodies.

3. This project is a feminist one, done in order to "understand the specificity of meanings and the particularity of participants, with the result that its answers must always be held open to modification at least, and possibly to radical change" (Shildrick, *Leaky* 3).

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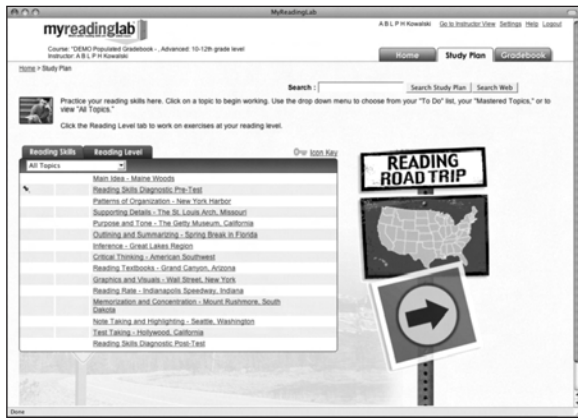
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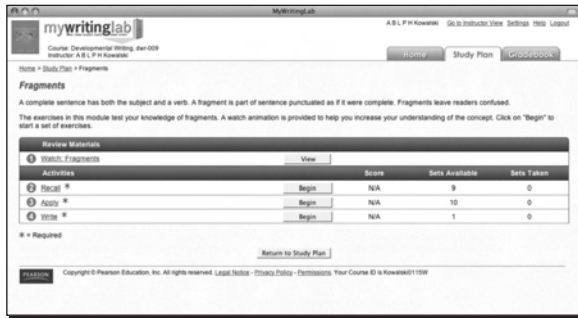
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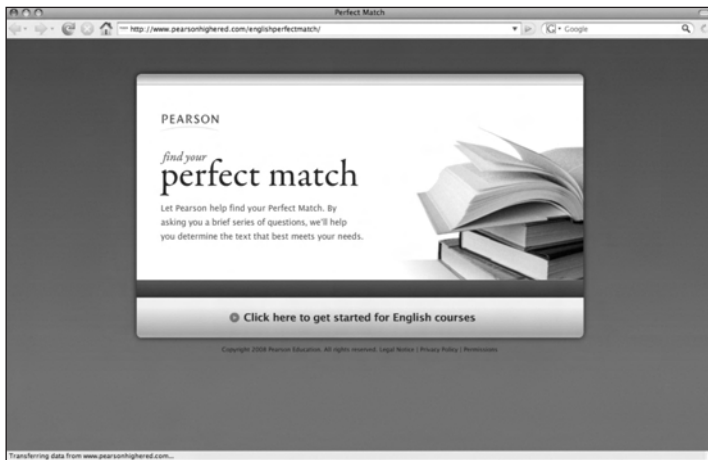
TAKING THE MARKET-LEADING RESOURCES for writing, grammar and research that users have come to identify with the program, the new **MyCompLab** integrates those resources with an online composing space and new assessment tools. The result is a revolutionary application that offers a seamless and flexible teaching and learning environment built specifically for writers. Created after years of extensive research and in partnership with composition faculty and students across the country, the new **MyCompLab** offers: an easy-to-use online composing space; help for writers in the context of their writing; instructor and peer commenting functionality; proven tutorials and exercises for writing, grammar and research; an e-portfolio; an assignment builder; a gradebook created specifically for writing classes; and more.

To see a video tour and find out more information about the new MyCompLab go to www.mycomplab.com



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