Care and Rigor in Higher Education

by

Nick Marsellas

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This dissertation was presented

by

Nick Marsellas

It was defended on

June 30, 2021

and approved by

Peter Campbell, Assistant Professor, Department of English

Khirsten Scott, Assistant Professor, Department of English

Stacey Waite, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Dissertation Director: Benjamin Miller, Assistant Professor, Department of English

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Resistance to social justice work in the university has for decades argued that care and rigor are incompatible and imbalanced mandates of the institution – an argument I refer to as the care/rigor dichotomy. Rigorous pursuit of truth, so these critiques go, has been abandoned in favor of a political commitment to care. These critiques elide much of the violence students face, as is seen in university justification of police violence to students, and they reframe as moralism the rigor inherent in many pedagogical care practices, particularly those that benefit marginalized students. The dissertation also establishes the parallels between the rise of the care/rigor dichotomy, the outgrowth of anti-sentimentalist social Darwinist eugenics in the mid-19th century, and the austerity politics of the neoliberal era. These political and intellectual movements situate the care/rigor dichotomy within the question of authority, reframing students, particularly marginalized or politically active students, as children in need of stern discipline.

Drawing from queer, trans, and leftist frameworks of ethical authority, I argue for more deliberate acknowledgment and interweaving of care and rigor in university pedagogy. I build on my experience in composition pedagogy and teacher training, arguing that the practice of multicultural content scaffolding adheres to the care/rigor dichotomy and that we should instead foreground rigorous opacity in discussions of marginalized identity. I also highlight queer BDSM practices of consensual discomfort and street medic negotiations of hierarchical and horizontal teaching to argue for more nuanced approaches to classroom authority and responsibility.

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1.0 Introduction: Trigger Warnings and Safe Spaces

> Nice (adj.): of a person: foolish, silly, simple, ignorant
> Smart (adj.): inflicting pain, stinging, (of a weapon) sharp and cutting.[1]

In 2009, the city of Pittsburgh played host to the G20 summit, a meeting of the rulers of the twenty most economically powerful nations in the world. The summit primarily functions to coordinate policy, particularly economic policy, in ways that ensure the perpetuation of these nations' power. There were of course strong reactions and protests against this centralized global economic power from the people of Pittsburgh, both locals and students (inasmuch as one would care to or be able to distinguish these categories).

The University of Pittsburgh played host to several visitors from the G20, including the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev. The summit also featured a high-profile dinner at Phipps Botanical Conservatory just a seven-minute walk from the university, almost guaranteeing protests throughout the Oakland neighborhood where both the university and the conservatory reside. In response to the protests that formed at the heart of the university's campus, the police were quickly deployed to clear the area of protestors and onlookers, placing the entire university into a tear-gas enforced lockdown.

In discussing these events, Mark Nordenberg, the University Chancellor at the time, minimizes the violence brought by the G20, instead focusing on the "special educational opportunities" afforded by the visit. In a letter detailing the events, Nordenberg splits his remarks

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[1] Definitions taken from Oxford English Dictionary "nice" A.1.a. and "smart" I.1.a.

on the G20 into "The Good" and "The Bad and the Ugly." "The Good" highlights the way that the G20 positioned the University of Pittsburgh as a scholastic powerhouse, a driver of industry to be credited with the rebirth of the region's economy. Nordenberg gives a retelling of Dmitry Medvedev's visit, glowing with praise for the students who attended. They engaged Medvedev for an hour asking questions "covering a wide range of critical issues," with many of these questions in Russian. Nordenberg's language makes it clear that *these* are Pitt's students: cultured in European languages, diplomatic, attending university-sponsored visits by foreign heads of state.

Nordenberg is markedly less collegial towards the protestors. Within his segment on "The Bad and the Ugly," he notes the damage to storefronts, claiming that protesters damaged several storefronts on Forbes Avenue, the street where police were firing into the crowd of protesters. Nordenberg also takes great pains to distinguish between onlookers, peaceful protesters, and anarchists, attempting to evoke a sense of infiltration. He says that "black-clad anarchists retreated to an area near the Cathedral to change into collegiate attire so that they would blend in with our students." Nordenberg also discounts any agency of the students, any possibility of their civil disobedience, explicitly naming as students only those who were "caught up in crowds and unable to disperse as ordered, are treated fairly in the legal process."

If asked directly, Nordenberg would probably declare his allegiance to both care and rigor. He has made several statements over the years about the importance of student safety. Yet as we have seen from his writing on the G20 summit, Nordenberg is willing to use educational enrichment to justify the police occupation of campus and the attendant violence against students. He sets education and care in oppositional framing, elevating one at the expense of the other.

The argument of this dissertation is a misleadingly simple one: that care and rigor are *not* incompatible aspects of a university education, that they do not function as a mutually-exclusive

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dichotomy, that rigor does not imply harm and that care does not imply intellectual laziness. Surely many of you reading this could discern as much just by looking closely at your classrooms. But as soon as we drop our attention, the clarity of this nuance blurs and the dichotomy regains rhetorical power.

While we may know on some level that care and rigor are not incompatible, our evidence-based understanding must compete with our acculturation into a white Western tradition of thought that organizes the world into inescapable binaries. These false binaries have substantial sway, as Jane Flax says in *Disputed Subjects*: "Western philosophers created an illusory appearance of unity and stability by reducing the flux and heterogeneity of the human and physical worlds into binary and supposedly natural oppositions." (139).

Care and rigor fall neatly into correlate binaries of the heart and the head, emotion and reason; faulty heuristics all, but rhetorically persuasive enough to weather the poststructuralist movement and emerge unscathed. Moreover, care and rigor as orientations towards action, naming the tenor with which one approaches education, replicate the archetypes of the coddling mother and the disciplinarian father frequently invoked in political rhetoric.

Returning to the disruption of dichotomies, compositionist Ann Berthoff likewise writes with passion against the swell of "commonsense" theories that oversimplify in their attempt to make sense of their world through binary thinking. She calls these frameworks "gangster theories," a term she draws from I. A. Richards.[2] About these theories, Berthoff says, "A common sequence is for a theory to move from statements of the self-evident, based on incontrovertible fact, to

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[2] I take umbrage with the use of the term "gangster" to denote a theory which refuses to acknowledge nuance, elevates commonplace maxims to the place of prescriptivism, and lacks conviction in argumentation. Though I don't know whether racist stereotypes of the "gangster" were common in the 1960's when I. A. Richards' first introduced the term, it bears noting that Flax took up the term in 1993 when its racist associations were very much in place.

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pronouncements of absolute truth and then, gradually, to qualified and restricted application, not logically different from the original" (16). We might have as an example, an understanding of rigor which derives from the self-evident statement that "most learning requires some amount of difficulty and discomfort." Of course! One would be hard pressed to find someone who didn't believe this.

The trouble comes when this theory grows into its "strong phase," as Berthoff puts it. Pronouncements of simplified, absolute truth: "There's no growth in the comfort zone, and no comfort in the growth zone." "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." "Facts don't care about your feelings." Maxims are a useful way to distill the "strong phase" ideology for a crowd who already believes it; a pithy gesture towards the commonsense characteristic of the theory that draws sweeping conclusions from that original commonsense observation. There is an air of absolutism to these maxims, but when pressed, they fail. We often experience growth and comfort at the same time; sometimes we suffer debilitating injuries even if we aren't killed; facts are frequently amplified or ignored based on the feelings of the person learning or teaching them.

Sensing pushback, the theory might then split into a "killer dichotomy." "Killer dichotomies," Berthoff says, "are especially notable in the life of a gangster theory in the first stages of the weakening that inevitably follows the strong phase – when the unitary absolute splits in two. They are easy to formulate; they lend themselves to the old rhetorical tropes and schemes very well" (17). In our examination of rigor, we can see that the pushback is often against the absolute valuing of difficulty and discomfort. The strong theory "learning requires discomfort" balloons into something more sadistic, something like "a teacher's goal should be to make students as uncomfortable as possible at all times," but only the most pious adherents to the theory could hold it at that strength for long.

Instead, the theory recognizes that it cannot sustain such a strong form, splitting the theory into a dichotomy that preserves as much of the original theory as possible: we can either teach (and hurt) our students, or we can offer them care (and they will not learn). Killer dichotomies allow the original theory to remain intact, offering the appearance of nuance and appeasement, helping to "institutionalize dichotomies so that they work their harm unheeded" (17). Here we have the origin of the care/rigor dichotomy, rooted in a structuralist Western philosophy that turns simplified observations to didactic prescriptivism.

In my approach to care and rigor I do not argue that one is better than the other, as one would not argue for the supremacy of one archetype over another. Nor do I suggest that these two concepts are best understood in a dichotomous relation, that there is any sort of natural antagonism apart from the way that both concepts have come to signal the absence of the other to those who subscribe to a dichotomy between them in the first place. Rather, the care/rigor dichotomy's significance can be found in its profound influence over popular antagonism towards higher education. Naming the care/rigor dichotomy is a way of pulling this underlying framework into our attention in order to better argue against it, argue for the possibility of a care and rigor that can abide one another. It is an attempt to dislodge the enthymematic reasoning of this "killer dichotomy," a refusal to accept shared assumptions about the world. Furthermore, this dissertation offers an alternative, a co-constitutive framework of care and rigor – one situated in queer, trans, and leftist praxis and pedagogy.

I could certainly make an argument about the uniqueness of the theories I use for this project, about how they are useful because they disrupt structuralist binaries. As Susanne Luhmann says, "Queer theory and pedagogy place at stake the desire to deconstruct binaries central to Western modes of meaning making, learning, teaching, and doing politics" (128). Yet this would

be disingenuous, treating the fields as monoliths. Certainly much of trans theory is devoted to disrupting the gender binary, however there are important counter-currents to this totalizing appraisal of the field (Bettcher). Likewise, the disruption of dichotomies and critiques of cruelty masquerading as intellectualism can be found in a variety of fields of critical thought, not just the ones I use here. Even the intertwining of care and rigor can be found in other fields, with Patricia Hill Collins's "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" introducing the concept of an ethic of caring as a principal aspect of black feminist rigor.

It is more honest and straightforward to acknowledge that my choice of theoretical fields is principally an enactment of the leftist principle of solidarity: we start with our most embodied experiences of oppression and move outward by recognizing resonances of experience with others seeking liberation from the same systems in different ways. As a queer, trans, and leftist author primarily in community with others who share these identities, my primary experience with care and rigor, both in higher education and outside of it, has been through a queer, trans, and leftist lens.[3] I bring an embodied experience of the theories put forward here, and I use this experience to build understanding across other fields. Further, this attention to embodied experience necessitates grounding in the fields of composition studies and critical university studies; as a composition instructor in a university classroom, it would be difficult to engage my embodied experience of institutions thoughtfully without the insights these fields bring. Extending the principle of solidarity, as the target of harassment with the purported aim of "educating" me out

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[3] Of course, my understanding is also informed through lenses of privilege: I am white and mostly-able-bodied, and I often pass as neurotypical and cis and male. These privileged identities and abilities have provided fruitful ground for reflection throughout the project, and I hope that that reflection has led to a deeper practice of solidarity both within the dissertation and outside of it.

of the supposed mental disorder of transness,[4] I find particular solidarity with students whose experiences of harm are minimized under the guise of a rigorous education.

1.1 Dispatch from the Culture Wars

The police response to the Pittsburgh G-20 protests was swift and severe, with this marking the first deployment of a Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) in the United States (Parker). Use of the LRAD is controversial; the weapon was not built with the intention of short-range use against protesters, and its use can cause intense pain, confusion, nausea, dizziness, eardrum rupture, and temporary or permanent loss of hearing. Protesters were also subjected to a harrowing amount of tear gas, with anecdotal reports that dorm balconies and windows were coated with a dust/film coating of the gas in the days after the police violence. I include video citations below in order to highlight the violence inflicted on students at the University of Pittsburgh, particularly in order to contrast this reality with the portrayal of events by the University Chancellor.

In the first video, students responded like any local community with a sense of pride and belonging in their space. They stand their ground and assert their right to occupy the space by chanting "Let's Go Pitt" (Snafupunk); in the later video we can even hear them connect this sense of belonging to the G20 protests, saying "We love Pittsburgh, fuck the G20" (Glassbeadian). However, students' attempts to stand their ground are eventually thwarted even to the point that they can no longer retreat to their dorms, with one student saying "They're macing people on Forbes, [the street that provides access to most dorm buildings] where are we supposed to go?" In

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[4] See Chapter 6 for more on the connection between transness and mental illness.

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this video we see the sense of violation that comes with police occupation of campus space, the rupture it produces in institutional narratives of student safety and belonging. Yet we are simultaneously able to locate that safety and belonging in the students themselves. In this video we see scenes of students comforting one another, providing a single-carrier human crutch to help those with mobility issues evacuate the area, gathering and sharing information about the weapons being fired at them, and documenting violent arrests in an attempt at future legal aid and police accountability.
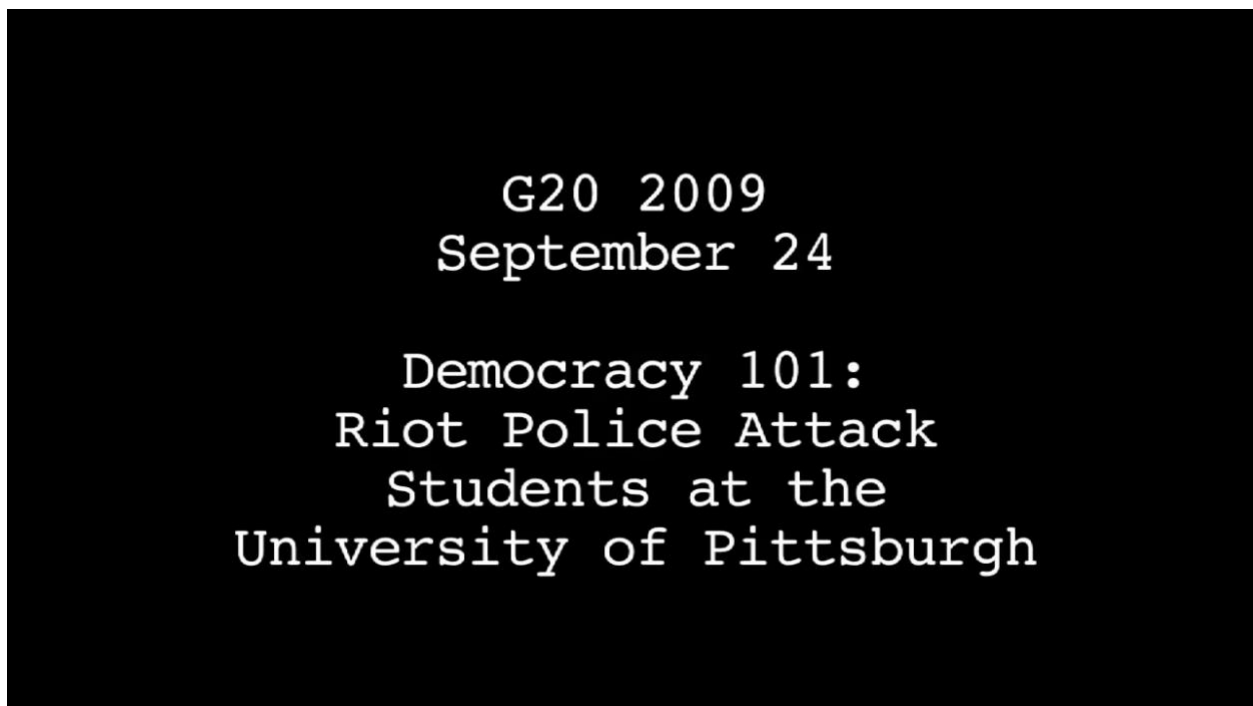
Figure 1: Video of Pittsburgh G-20 Protests (Snafupunk)
CW: loud/startling noises, audible retching, mass panic, police violence, aggressive arrests, deployment of
tear gas LRAD and batons (hyperlink embedded in figure)

Comparing the makeup of the protesters in this video to Nordenberg's account, we can recognize the great lengths to which Nordenberg goes in order to depoliticize the student body. In this video the streets are filled with protesting students. Yet Nordenberg infantilizes them as "curious onlookers," innocent bystanders who were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time,

rather than the vast majority of the crowd. He claims that large numbers of protesters descended onto campus, leaving a "troubling images of a campus not of our making." Nowhere in Nordenberg's account is any acknowledgment that a student might have chosen to protest for critically informed and thoughtful reasons. There is no space held for the way the protests function as an intellectual and methodological rebuttal of global capitalist power, or the way that students' participation in them could itself be considered a moment of learning. Instead, Nordenberg paints a version of education that centers prestige, notoriety, power, and capital. To Nordenberg, the rulers of the economic world are the sites of learning, and our students are unambiguously enriched by their presence (if only someone could get those troublemaking protesters off our campus).

Nordenberg's rhetoric also functions to subsume violence into the university's goal of learning. There is a striking absence of care throughout the letter, which instead minimizes harm and attempts to portray the G20 as a net-positive. In downplaying the violence of the police and highlighting the educational benefits brought on by the G20, we see a worrying cost benefit analysis. Nordenberg, speaking for the university, presents a version of events in which he admits that some students were likely arrested without cause, that they were tear gassed steps away from their dorms. Yet he still finds a way to say that "By virtually all accounts tied to customary measures, the G20's Pittsburgh Summit was a big success." Clearly Nordenberg does not consider the physical safety of his students to be a customary measure of success. We see no indication from Nordenberg that he is upset at the harm inflicted on students, that this harm is at odds with the mission of the university. Instead, we get a picture of a campus as full of necessary violence, where that violence is blurred and justified by the presence of unique educational enrichment opportunities that are specifically tied to capital and state power as the site of knowledge.

Jeffrey Moro's article "Against Cop Shit," published on his blog and circulated widely by leftist academics and teachers, does not mince words about the connections between the classroom and state violence. Moro defines "cop shit" as "any pedagogical technique or technology that presumes an adversarial relationship between students and teachers," techniques that prepare students to experience suspicion and cruelty from those in positions of power. He gives several examples including plagiarism detection software, tardy or absence policies that involve embarrassing students or requiring that they supplicate the instructor for forgiveness, and of course any interface with actual cops. Cop shit is armed officers performing wellness checks on suicidal students. Cop shit is an instructor creating austere course policies because they're afraid the students will take advantage of them. Cop shit is "Conditions May Be Deteriorating In Oakland. Students Are Advised To Remain Near Their Residences" (Nordenberg). Cop shit is "no growth in the comfort zone, no comfort in the growth zone."[5] The care/rigor dichotomy is cop shit.

At the same time that Nordenberg discounts the leftist thought that might prompt a student to protest, participating in the G20 protests becomes pedagogical in a different way. If acknowledged at all, harm to students is considered an unavoidable consequence of an institution fulfilling its educational responsibilities. Those who already fit neatly into the capitalist educational frameworks that privilege state power and prestige are able to escape the pain associated with resistance, while those who hold alternative epistemologies are violently acculturated into capitalist, statist frameworks. Of course Nordenberg minimizes the violence of this acculturation, assumes that the *true* students of Pitt are already chatting animatedly in the classrooms of state power. But in order for Nordenberg to align himself with the education the G20 brings, he must subsume its violence into that education.

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[5] See Chapter 4 for more on discomfort in rigorous pedagogy.

1.2 The Politics of "Care" and "Rigor"

While the care/rigor dichotomy appears across the political spectrum, it is not an apolitical rhetorical tool. Care, as Hil Malatino tells us, is "deeply political"; we can see this most visibly in care's "circulation as an affective shorthand for leftism" (9). Malatino highlights one particularly pointed instance of anti-care rhetoric in Melania Trump's infamous jacket, which reads "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U?," a jacket Trump wore on a trip to visit a detention center for immigrant children. "The jacket felt like a hyperdistillation of the callousness of Trumpism," Malatino says, "a glib summation of the kind of affective orientation one would need to cultivate in order to speed headlong into the apocalypse, screamingly denying climate change, cultivating xenophobia, White supremacy, and neofascism" (9). As discussed further in Chapter 2, the concepts of care and rigor are interwoven with the political history of capitalism, austerity politics, and eugenic thought. For this reason, one cannot discuss care and rigor in the context of the university without also attending to the care/rigor dichotomy as a politically motivated university critique.

Figure 2: "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U?"

Melania Trump's "I REALLY DON'T CARE, DO U?" jacket alongside stock image from retailer Zara

The care/rigor dichotomy regularly manifests in anti-university rhetoric through accusations of exaggerated care, most often leveled against marginalized students. Care that is administered specifically for privileged students, like the accommodation of white fragility in discussions of race, is rarely held up as an example of coddling. Rather, the establishment of LGBT safe spaces, the mitigation of hostile environments through the addressing of microaggressions, and the disinvitation of avowedly transphobic, misogynist speakers on campus are cited as emotional care run amok. Within this framework, the argument is that caring for students is directly in conflict with the university's mission of intellectually rigorous training. With the care/rigor dichotomy, one can dismiss activism and advocacy for marginalized groups as de facto anti-intellectual.

The care/rigor dichotomy is also frequently invoked against claims of injury that center students' emotional wellbeing. Sara Ahmed draws our attention to this type of discourse in "Against Students," where she writes on common rhetorical tropes that "position students, or at least specific kinds of students, as a threat to education, to free speech, to civilization." A significant archetype Ahmed identifies is that of the over-sensitive student. "The story goes: because students have become too sensitive, we cannot even talk about difficult issues in the classroom; because of their feelings we (critical academics) cannot address questions of power and violence, and so on." Those of us who have ourselves been called over-sensitive for issuing critique know well that the people who are accused of over-sensitivity are often the ones most interested in discussing the "difficult" topics of marginalization, power, racism, and sexism. Yet, the rhetoric of over-sensitive students as a threat to intellectual discourse persists.

A key figure in perpetuating this rhetoric is Jordan Peterson, who rose to fame in conservative circles as a pop philosopher who uses the status gained from his self-help philosophy to promote a right-wing political agenda. He proposes a self-help bootstrap ethic as a replacement for progressive politics, characterizing the latter as disempowering, anti-intellectual, and totalitarian. He attacks progressive politics, particularly trans activism, under the banner of "postmodern neo-Marxism," which he argues undermines a survival of the fittest, libertarian ethic. Providing an overview of Peterson's political thought, gender theorist Natalie Wynn says Peterson's "central political message is that leftist professors, student activists, campus diversity initiatives, and corporate HR departments are collectively following the philosophy of postmodern neo-Marxism to destroy Western civilization and sink us all into a totalitarian nightmare."[6] Through the moniker of postmodern neo-Marxism, Peterson portrays leftist thought as violently

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[6] Wynn acknowledges the similarities here to the antisemitic conspiracy theories of "cultural Marxism"

misinformed collectivism, care without rigor, unthinking obedience to illogical ideology for fear of causing harm.

Operating alongside Peterson, Ben Shapiro's "facts don't care about your feelings" is perhaps the most widely circulated slogan of conservative political thought of our time. [7] This slogan is a distillation of the care/rigor dichotomy as it functions to justify any number of conservative policies. However, the slogan is most often used in anti-university contexts, as Shapiro has made a name for himself touring college campuses and "debating" students. Shapiro's most popularly viewed "debates" are, with very few exceptions, debates against university students rather than against other journalists with similar rhetorical training. Shapiro debates these students without any sort of moderation, which means that Shapiro controls the amount of time the student has to offer arguments and rebuttals, always has the last word, and can speak over the student at any time. These videos are then uploaded and circulated on YouTube with the now widely ridiculed title format of "Ben Shapiro DESTROYS beta-cuck university student using FACTS and LOGIC" ("Ben Shapiro DESTROYS Liberals").

Shapiro's style of argumentation perpetuates the care/rigor dichotomy by encouraging viewers to see debate as a battle to infantilize and embarrass your opponent. As media theorist Sarah Z says, Shapiro draws the most applause from "snappy zingers," not from sound argumentation ("Why Debating Sucks"). The tone of the video titles can attest to this – despite Shapiro's supposed desire for civility (Shapiro), Shapiro has made a name for himself baiting students into arguments over issues they care deeply about and then adopting the aesthetics of a good debater in order to make their positions on these issues seem uninformed.

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[7] I name this as a slogan of political *thought*, an explicit articulation of ideology, rather than the more popular Trump-inspired slogans, which are primarily political calls to action that leave the ideology implicit: "lock her up," "build the wall," etc.

Sarah Z traces the success of these videos to the phenomenon of "dunking" or "takedown" videos, a trend which arose in the internet skeptic community in the early 2000's. These skeptics were a substantial community of media consumers whose initial interest in videos of atheists debunking Christian talking points slowly shifted to "anti-SJW"[8] content as women and people of color in the community spoke up about harassment from fellow skeptics (Z, "Tumblr's FAKEST Story"). Fellow media theorist Big Joel says that these types of videos and the community surrounding them grew to be so successful because they "allow the audience to engage in an aggressive superior intellectual posture that is justified by a very pragmatic and intuitive foundation," often an argument by an opponent that is easily refuted and then mocked for the sincerity and emotional justifications of their beliefs. We see resonances of the community in Shapiro's videos; a simple scan of online engagement shows that viewers are far more interested in Shapiro's takedowns of university students than videos where he presents his own ideas unchallenged.

Shapiro's "facts don't care about your feelings" debate style mocks any opposition that names the harm that could come from a conservative agenda, particularly if that harm disproportionally affects marginalized people. It dismisses that harm as feelings-based and thus uninformed by facts and logic. But set in opposition to care, rigor becomes just as much an affective orientation as care. It suggests that learning is meant to be unpleasant, that one should withstand the rigors of an education as one withstands the rigors of a cold New England winter.

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[8] Social Justice Warrior – a derogatory term for someone who promotes progressive views

1.3 Care and Rigor in Education

Policy makers' and educators' enthusiastic adoption of "rigor" as an unambiguously positive buzzword in the early 2000's might signal a growing complacency with, if not acceptance of, the care/rigor dichotomy in higher education (Harris County Department of Education; Gallagher; Jones; Blackburn; Williamson and Blackburn). Despite the waning of rigor's negative connotations in educational policy, this dissertation's use of rigor in the context of the care/rigor dichotomy will maintain the negative associations alongside the positive, naming as rigor the supposed growth-producing harshness that is the foundation of anti-care arguments about university practices. I find particular utility in "rigor" as a key concept because it joins together the amorphous demand for "better" education with the word's associations of harsh inflexibility, severity, and discomfort. These associations draw from the word's historical use to denote constriction of the body either from illness or death, as well more contemporary definitions that suggest rigor might be closer to cruelty than critical thinking.

The adoption of the care/rigor dichotomy as a framework of pedagogical thought is most often accompanied by the privileging of rigor over care, though it is of course possible to find oneself on the other side of this dichotomy. This often happens when one is uncomfortable with the institution of the university to the point that one cannot comfortably hold authority within its systems. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux accuse the radical school reform of the 1960's with taking on this sort of care, saying that they "surrendered the concept of systematic knowledge acquisition and uncritically privileged an anti-intellectual concept of student experience" (7). And this anti-intellectualism is in part substantiated within our field; as Carmen Kynard says of a training conference intended to prepare her for teaching the more racially diverse student body of

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the CUNY university system, "an anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual approach to the teaching of writing was expected of us" (3).

I still hold some recognition of anti-intellectualism in an earlier version of my own pedagogy as well. I was deeply worried about replicating the violences of the institution of the university to the point that I felt uncomfortable taking on the responsibility for pushing students to grow. I clung to Peter Elbow's "Writing Without Teachers," imagining a utopia where I would dissolve and my students would be free to write without me. This adherence to the care/rigor dichotomy where we see all authority as inflicting harm disavows the care that can come from the teacher as a curator of experience, provider of external accountability, and helpful gadfly, opening new horizons of possibility and disrupting habitual patterns of thought. In naming the two sides of the care/rigor dichotomy, I have deliberately chosen terms that evoke the oppositional relationship that some see between the two. I frame these debates through care and rigor because both terms, at their core, prescribe how one is meant to use their authority over others.

Thankfully, in many circles there is still something like a social taboo, albeit a weak one, against outright advocacy of cruelty. It is, how they say, a bad look. Few would outwardly revel in the suffering of others, at least not while trying to be rhetorically persuasive to those who still believe in the virtue of care. For this reason, care for university students is rarely dismissed wholesale. Rather than suggesting that we should not care for students at all, political commentators, university administrations, and public intellectuals make the argument that we have reached our caring quota, that we now have too much of a good thing, that now intellectual rigor is capitulating to the coddling of sheltered students (Lukianoff and Haidt). The care/rigor dichotomy is often employed by right-wing politicians and pundits to mischaracterize the project of the university, taking as one example the US Attorney General Jeff Sessions' accusation that

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universities are creating a "generation of sanctimonious, sensitive, supercilious snowflakes" (Quintana).

But beyond conservative politicians, the care/rigor dichotomy holds significant rhetorical power within the institution itself. The care/rigor dichotomy is visible anywhere from the University of Chicago's infamous letters to incoming students (Ellison) to the many articles critiquing overly sensitive students (and teachers and administrations) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Campbell and Manning "Microaggression"; Campbell and Manning "The End"; Flier; Gerber; Kipnis; Lilla; Stone; Yudof and Waltzer; Zimmerman "Historians"; Zimmerman "College"). Beyond punditry, the care/rigor dichotomy appears even in our peer reviewed journals, with esteemed colleagues in queer theory caught up by its rhetorical force. This is particularly the case in contemporary debates regarding trigger warnings, and the almost obstinate misunderstanding of trigger warnings as preventing rather than preparing students for difficult conversations.

As Jack Halberstam notes in his 2017 article "Trigger Happy," much of the early movement towards trigger warnings was driven by students, not faculty. At the time, most teachers had never heard of the trigger warnings the students were advocating for. The practice was drawn from a shared culture of care that many of the students experienced on online forums, where posts would be tagged with labels that described the content, particularly if that content could be generally understood as upsetting to someone who had unresolved trauma around the issue. In the article it initially seems as though Halberstam is in favor of trigger warnings; he says that "The trigger warning could easily be read simply as a protocol proper to new media forms in the early twenty-first century" (535).

But Halberstam's article quickly reveals itself to be a complicated engagement with the trigger warning debate. He sees obvious value in the practice while still at times making a strawman out of them, saying that they imply "a student or viewer who is unstable and damaged and could at any moment collapse into crisis" (537). His writing offers a perplexing distinction: that his problem is not with trigger warnings themselves, but with the assertion that they are needed. A quick summary of the upcoming novel or film clip that tells students that they'll see depictions of a traumatizing scene? Completely understandable. Doing so because some students might have trauma that could be activated by witnessing the scene? Infantilizing and paternalistic (536). He argues:

> Had the request been for a simple warning about content to come, few faculty would have resisted; most would have complied. […] Where the students and the professors begin to fall out, I suspect, is when the student not only asks for a content warning but also claims that he or she or they need the content warning because they are wounded, vulnerable, and could easily experience a flashback to some bad experience from the past if images are projected willy-nilly and without warning. (538)

But what is the distinction here? What is the difference in this request that makes Halberstam's imagined professors balk at the latter while being amenable to the former? Halberstam locates the falling out in the students' claims of vulnerability, from which he draws the conclusion that the student who requests trigger warnings must think of herself as "a defenseless, passive, and inert spectator who has no barriers between herself and the flow of images that populate her world" (541). Yet it's clear that the student is taking on a significant risk by making demands of the professor, asserting her agency and enforcing the very barriers Halberstam critiques her for not having.

Halberstam's view on trigger warnings is a clear example of the care/rigor dichotomy at work. He can acknowledge the pedagogical value of trigger warnings, that they provide a reasonable expectation of work to come, and that most anyone would benefit from more context

for the work they are being asked to engage. Yet this cannot square with the practical origins of

the trigger warning as a tool for care, cannot square with the fact that many students are indeed

traumatized and require care in order to arrive in our classrooms as emotionally well-regulated as

possible. This essay's back and forth theorizing on the merits and potential harms of trigger

warnings shows Halberstam wary of providing too much care. He assumes it will lead students to

become unable to identify a disingenuous promise of false protection, almost suggesting that we

should make students feel unsafe so that they do not trust feelings of safety, as if this is the

appropriate way to teach discernment. Halberstam asks, "Will those who ask for trigger warnings

to keep them safe today be more likely to surrender civil liberties when the government offers to

keep them safe tomorrow?" Phrased slightly differently – will those who demand better treatment

from those with authority over them today be more likely to allow worse treatment under false

pretenses tomorrow? It's unclear where this line of thinking could come from if not from a

care/rigor dichotomy.

1.4 The Student Response to Institutional Violence

It can be difficult to see the debate over trigger warnings as anything other than

inconsequential conservative outrage-spectacle. But when set alongside what we know of the

university as an oppressive institution of state violence, these debates carry dire consequences.

Cited in Halberstam's work is a text we'll return to throughout the dissertation, a viral touchstone

of the conservative culture-war against the university, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's "The

Coddling of the American Mind."[9] While Halberstam critiques the piece for its inattention to the complexity and diversity of the student body, he ultimately aligns himself with the conservative impulse that propels it. The core of Lukianoff and Haidt's argument is that students are overprotected and that the most appropriate pedagogy is to discomfort students, with little curiosity about whether there is a distinction between productive or unproductive, warranted or unwarranted discomfort. Halberstam does not go this far, but does express the same knee-jerk rejection of care.

Claims that students are overprotected function to normalize institutional violence. When conservatives talk derisively about students wanting a "safe space," I wonder how many of them consider the police violence many of our students encounter on campus. Those against trigger warnings and safe spaces make accusations of paternalism, say that we are disempowering our students, yet these practices ultimately come from our students themselves. Students are teaching one another clinically informed practices for being in a learning community that is better able to accommodate its members (Dawson), and those arguing against it are only able to see these practices as coddling anti-intellectualism.

A second video from the G20 Summit highlights both the unthinking quality of the violence enacted on students and the thoughtful attention to care given by the students in response. When police from opposite directions simultaneously instruct students to disburse under threat of violence, students must find a way to escape being trapped and exposed to more tear gas. A student attempts reasoned, deferential argumentation, saying to an officer, "please sir, I'm bleeding, we can't go that way." The situation placing on them superhuman demands for problem-solving and conflict mediation. We hear another student tell their cohort "let's just stay calm" with sounds of retching students in the background. They are finally able to escape (with the sound of a fresh tear

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[9] the viral article that was the precursor to their book of the same name

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gas cannister deployed behind them) and the scene ultimately resolves when the video cuts to a new figure, possibly an older student or protester. This person gently takes charge of the scene in order to spread calm, helps to reassure the bleeding student, and connects them to medical resources.

G20 2009
September 24, 2009

Riot Police Trap a Group
of University of Pittsburgh
Students on a Staircase,
Then Tear Gas and Pepper Spray Them
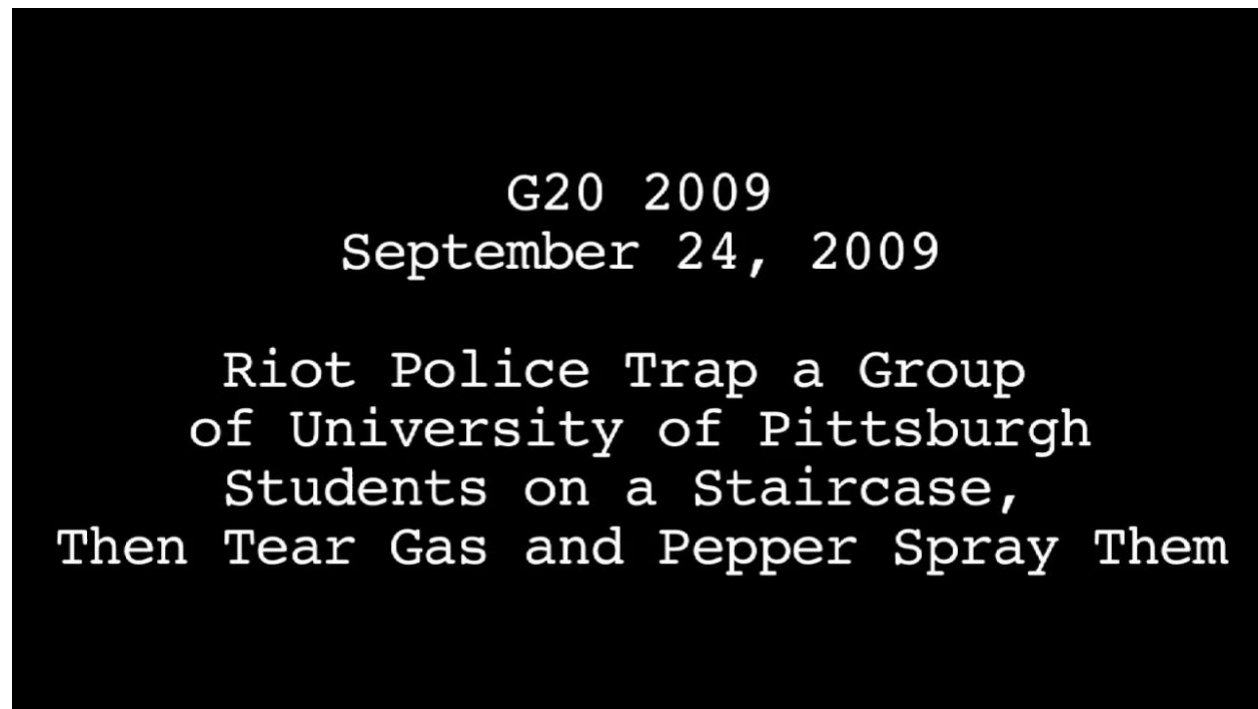
Figure 3: Video of Pittsburgh G-20 Protests (Glassbeadian)

CW: loud/startling noises, kettling (police prevention of dispersal), minor blood visible, deployment of tear gas, rubber bullets, audible retching (hyperlink embedded in figure)

In this video we see that despite myths of enforcing order, law enforcement on campus is often a fundamentally *dis*orderly violence, unsure of its aims, inflicting indiscriminate violence, unwilling to provide accommodation or situational responsiveness. Instead that accommodation and responsiveness comes from the student protesters themselves.

It is in this return to students that I find the most hope for the institution of the university.[10] As Herbert Marcuse says, regarding his faith in the university in 1968 after witnessing student protesters in France defending against the police, "The university certainly needs a radical reform, but this radical reform should be carried through in the university itself and should not take the form of destroying the university. […] After all, it is in the university that the opposition has grown, that the opposition has been educated and is being educated." And it is helpful to remember that this education often happens within communities of discovery and exchange among students, rather than the top-down indoctrination that anti-university conservatives often imagine.

Over and over again students form communities devoted to careful study in order to care for others, and to caring for one another in order to support their study. Whether in the streets or the classrooms, supporting one another in the face of psychological triggers or trigger-happy police, students are enacting practices of care, solidarity, and discovery. They are responding to situations using all of the information available to them, and they are constantly seeking out newer and better information to hone their practices. It is our responsibility to support them in these practices of rigorous care and careful rigor, even if those practices are illegible to the university's most vocal critics.

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[10] My desire for effective rhetoric and the dissertation's nature as a defensive document are at odds here. Of course, I acknowledge the wide range of experiences and motivations that students hold, some of which are based in a transactional rather than a cooperative mode. I do not aim to invoke the figure of "The Student" here or make any claims about their virtue. Rather, I locate my optimism in the individual students I have met and continue to meet through my interactions with the university. Suffice it to say, #NotAllStudents

1.5 Chapter Summaries

In the following chapter of this dissertation, "Eugenics, Rigor, and the Fight for Reality," I locate the origins of the care/rigor dichotomy in the eugenics movement and subsequent political invocations of anti-sentimentalist intellectualism. I argue that the juxtaposition of care and rigor is rooted in white supremacist eugenic thought as well as in the anti-sentimentalist conservative movement that has held sway since the Reagan era. This movement had its most striking effect on university culture though the government response to the student protests of 1960-70, with violently paternalist, patronizing language used to justify the increasingly militant response to student protesters. This paternalism recedes into a form of fatalism akin to Mark Fisher's concept of "capitalist realism," which suggests that capitalism has gained a monopoly on the "real" with the rise of neoliberalism. This chapter also engages eugenic echoes that can be found in the Science Wars of the 1990's, stoked by conservative paranoia towards the institutional progress of marginalized groups. As this chapter traces the history of the care/rigor dichotomy through anti-sentimentalist intellectualism, it highlights the effects of these larger cultural discourses on the university as well as the way that universities have been instrumental in the perpetuation of these discourses.

In the third chapter, "Off Scaffolding and into the Deep End," I explore the shortcomings of the multicultural scaffolding model of pedagogy through the frame of the care/rigor dichotomy. I argue that multicultural pedagogy reinforces the care/rigor dichotomy through its association of ethical behavior with content knowledge, creating an ethical dilemma for higher-order, more rigorous pedagogy in the classroom. Further, I argue that this model centers privileged students, taking their experience as the reference point for our classes and repackaging marginalized authors for these students' consumption. My proposed solution, deep-end teaching, pushes back against

the idea that helping students accrue content knowledge of marginalized peoples' experiences is the best way to foster empathy. I reflect on classroom experiences with student-directed projects, guided speaking and listening activities, and pronoun circles, incorporating student interviews to discuss student reception of this deep-end teaching. Building upon a framework of queer and trans pedagogy that centers opacity as an alternative ethical orientation, we begin to foster care and rigor in the classroom simultaneously.

In the fourth chapter, "So, You Want to Make Your Students Uncomfortable: Discomfort and Consent Through BDSM Pedagogy," I engage the care/rigor dichotomy through sustained engagement with pedagogical discomfort and right use of authority. While discomfort is critical for the success of much of our pedagogy, particularly that pedagogy which asks privileged students to engage with systems of oppression, discomfort is also weaponized against marginalized groups through the care/rigor dichotomy, treating any advocacy for care as avoidance of discomfort and therefore avoidance of rigor. I frame this engagement through practices of consent that have emerged in queer BDSM communities, finding helpful frameworks for discerning consensual and nonconsensual discomfort and engagement with discomfort across power dynamics. This understanding of discomfort is then applied to various university critiques that mobilize the pedagogical value of discomfort in harmful ways: Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's *The Coddling of the American Mind,* The University of Chicago's 2020 admissions letter, and Christopher Reed and Christopher Castiglia's "Conversion Therapy v. Re-Education Camp: An Open Letter to Grace Lavery." Ultimately, in this chapter I argue that a caring and rigorous approach to pedagogy necessitates a practice of discomfort that is able to discern between productive and unproductive discomfort, recognizes students' desire for discomfort, and fosters students' self-advocacy regarding their situational capacities for discomfort.

In the fifth chapter, "Street Medic Pedagogy," I extend the engagement with questions of authority further, considering the application of street medic practices for horizontal and hierarchical teaching relationships in university teaching and teacher training. The chapter highlights the intertwined nature of care and rigor in practices like mutual aid and community apprenticeship. The investigation of mutual aid encourages an orientation towards authority in the classroom that recognizes and makes space for student agency while also acknowledging instructors' responsibility for ethical pedagogical leadership. Engaging the street medic's apprenticeship model, where a short training is supplemented with experiential training from a community of practitioners, also provides a valuable foil for reflections on my experience as an administrator of my writing program's graduate instructor training. These reflections culminate in an invocation of "prefigurative politics," drawing from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten as well as from a leftist collective of students from the University of Pittsburgh to reaffirm possibility in the university as a site of pedagogical marronage.

2.0 Eugenics, Rigor, and the Fight for Reality

One of the fundamental claims of the current anti-fragility movement is in its supposed newness. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's *The Coddling of the American Mind* places historical and contemporary protest in conflict, saying that the motivation behind campus free speech arguments has shifted from preventing what was deemed "racist or sexist speech" to preventing any speech that "could jeopardize [students'] mental health" (8). While there are important legal factors contributing to this shifting rhetoric, discussed later in the chapter, Lukianoff and Haidt reveal a jumbled account of student protest movements. They write approvingly that students of earlier decades were protesting racism and sexism for the principle of the matter, and "back then, they were not saying that members of the school community would be *harmed* by the speaker's visit or by exposure to ideas" (7, emphasis in original). The harmless speaker being protested in the instance of student protest that they reference here? Edward Wilson, whose 1978 book *On Human Nature* advocated a sociobiological model of ethics, a model which Wilson saw as justifying a "democratically contrived eugenics" (198).

Lukianoff and Haidt's reframing of historical protest as rooted in abstract principles rather than the material wellbeing of marginalized peoples allows them to claim over-caring as a contemporary problem. It decouples contemporary invocations of care from historical battles against cruelty, and it ignores the eugenic strains of thought that follow the care/rigor dichotomy through to this day. This chapter makes these connections more explicit, tracing the history of the care/rigor dichotomy from the emergence of social Darwinism through to the contemporary maligning of so-called grievance studies fields.

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It's important to acknowledge that not all violence is avowedly anti-care. In fact, strains of eugenic thought have been and continue to be justified through the use of "care" discourses that obfuscate the violence of these systems of thought. Uma Narayan, writing on the use of "care" in colonialist discourses, reminds us that care is often used to make domination "more palatable" (134). "Care discourse," she says, "can sometimes function ideologically, to justify or conceal relationships of power and domination" (135). This is an important distinction, and I do not want my centering of anti-sentimentalist eugenics to imply that there is not also much violence done in the name of care. However, there is much still to be learned in examining those rhetorics and policies which are proudly against care. Drawing connections between eugenic thought, disciplinarian child-rearing, depressive realist politics, and the administration of the university, this chapter further explores the care/rigor dichotomy through the history of anti-sentimentalist eugenics and the impacts it has had on our culture both inside and in response to the university.

2.1 Reasonable Violence

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species*, a text which spurred great interest in evolutionary eugenics in the American academy and public. Many were unsettled by Darwin's dispassionate account of evolution, where traits emerge randomly over time. Much more popular was neo-Lamarckism, an alternative evolutionary theory which suggests that positive traits may be intentionally cultivated even in the span of one lifetime. Zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's writings on evolution endorsed the popular early 19th century idea that individual organisms were able to affect the traits they passed down through their use or disuse. Lamarck's work grew in popularity against Darwin's dispassionate theory. Neo-Lamarckian scholars were eager for

alternative formations of evolution that retained a sense of agency and teleology; in other words, they were looking for a model that allowed them to frame white colonial dominance as evidence of their hard work and God's favor. In effect, proponents took a small part of Lamarck's earlier theories and repurposed them for religious arguments about the evolutionary supremacy of the white race (Gould 177–178; Seiler). Neo-Lamarckian thought allowed for the belief in the earned supremacy of the white race through the superior achievement of its ancestors, both in empathetic goodwill and rigorous intellect (Seiler). Though I do not want to excuse the violence done in the name of neo-Lamarckism, its religious emphasis on the white race's supposed superior empathy provides an important counterpoint against which more explicitly anti-sentimentalist evolutionary theories will come to define themselves.

In contrast to the religious neo-Lamarckian emphasis on the evolutionary value of care, we see a more explicitly violent orthogenic rhetoric emerging out of England. In 1864, Herbert Spencer introduced the now ubiquitous concept of "survival of the fittest," drawing eugenic thought out of the field of biology and into economic and social policy. Spencer's *The Principles of Biology* incorporates the orthogenic aspects of neo-Lamarckism but withholds the attendant emphasis on empathy and sociality. Spencer moves back and forth from economic to evolutionary to philosophical theorizing in order to argue for a violent natural philosophy which justifies austerity measures on evolutionary grounds.

> So long as we contemplate only the preying of the superior on the inferior, some good appears to be extracted from the evil – a certain amount of life of a higher order, is supported by sacrificing a great deal of life of a lower order. So long, too, as we leave out all mortality but that which, by carrying off the least perfect members of each species, leaves the most perfect members to continue the species; we see some compensating benefit reached through the suffering inflicted. (341-42).

Francis Galton proposed a similar anti-sentimentalist framework in 1865 with his "Hereditary Talent and Character," which suggests that protection of the weak leads to mediocrity

of the species. "One of the effects of civilization," he says, "is to diminish the rigour of the application of the law of natural selection. It preserves weakly lives that would have perished in barbarous lands" (326). This anti-sentimentalist evolutionary eugenics quickly became popular in the United States through the latter half of the 19th century. The framework was used as justification for protectionist eugenic propaganda like the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the Supreme Court decision to uphold the constitutionality of anti-miscegenation laws in *Pace v Alabama* in 1883.

While eugenics is certainly about protection of whiteness from without, we see a concomitant paranoia developing of contamination from within. In 1893, Texas doctor Fredrick Eugene Daniel's paper "Should Insane Criminals or Sexual Perverts Be Allowed to Procreate?" was reprinted in three separate medical journals (Katz 209). States also increasingly targeted the mentally ill, passing laws banning their marriage in 1896 and adopting forced sterilizations beginning in 1907.[11] During this time, we also see the publishing of Jean-Martin Charcot and Valentin Magnan's "Genital Inversions, and Other Sexual Perversions" (1883), a landmark text establishing gender and sexual difference as a matter of racial degeneration. Charcot and Magnan's text soon entered United States clinical practice at Johns Hopkins University, becoming widespread as the American Medical Association held up Johns Hopkins at the gold standard of medical training (Ordover 71).

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English tell us that as practicing medicine became more scientized with the rise of eugenics and medical scientism in the early 1900's, medicine became a way to further eugenic interests. They connect this to Johns Hopkins University through the

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[11] This legislation was primarily tied up in courts, and the US would not see mass sterilizations of the mentally ill until Buck v. Bell in 1927

Flexner Report, a report conducted by the American Medical Association that demanded medical teaching institutions conform to the expensive and inaccessible Johns Hopkins model. White upper-class doctors acquired the "mystique of science" and set about shutting women and people of color out of the practice of medicine.

The Flexner Report forced medical schools to adhere strictly to the Johns Hopkins model of scientific medical education, the upper-class "regular doctor" protocols, with four years of medical school following four years of college. This forced scores of medical schools to close, including "six of America's eight black medical schools and the majority of the 'irregular' schools which had been a haven for female students" (Ehrenreich and English 32).

As a result of the Flexner report, over half of all American medical schools merged or closed. Yet these "regular" doctors could not show better health outcomes than the average institution, and in many situations had less medical knowledge than the alternative medicine traditions they were targeting. This practice is perhaps most familiar in the persecution of midwifery in black and working-class communities. States passed sweeping legislation restricting the practice of midwifery, despite reports that American doctors of the time were less competent than midwives. Naturally, this decision significantly increased child mortality in poor and black communities (Rooks).

After shutting people of color, women, and working-class practitioners out of the medical profession, doctors found themselves overrun by the needs of their patients. In order to respond to these needs, upper-class women began to take on roles in this system as nurses, "professionalizing women's natural functions" of obedience and domesticity and cementing the contemporary split between high-prestige curing and low-prestige caring work (Ehrenreich and English 38). Ehrenreich and English say that in contrast to the nurse's role as nurturer, "the doctor was idealized

Man – combining intellect and action, abstract theory and hard-headed pragmatism" (40). This split between cure and care found itself reproduced in the political arena, with eugenics posturing as the bitter medicine that would cure the race, as opposed to the sentimental nurturing that exacerbated supposed degeneracy.

In *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed draws our attention to the connections between evolutionary thought and anti-sentimentalism, particularly from a masculinist eugenicist frame. Ahmed tells us that in evolutionary discussions of human emotionality, "emotions get narrated as a sign of 'our' pre- history, and as a sign of how the primitive persists in the present. The Darwinian model of emotions suggests that emotions are not only 'beneath' but 'behind' the man/human, as a sign of an earlier and more primitive time" (3). She then connects this rejection of emotionality to white masculinist nationalism:

> The risk of being a 'soft touch' for the nation, and for the national subject, is not only the risk of becoming feminine, but also of becoming 'less white', by allowing those who are recognised as racially other to penetrate the surface of the body. Within such a narrative, becoming less white would involve moving backwards in time, such that one would come to resemble a more primitive form of social life, or a 'lower and animal like condition.' (3)

Nancy Ordover echoes this sentiment in her book *American Eugenics*: "Eugenics meant, to its proponents, the victory of rationality over short-sighted altruism, reason over 'un-American' (yet 'distinctively American') hospitality, science over sentimentalism" (53). Ordover draws our attention to several anti-sentimentalist eugenicists of the early 1900's. Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race,* cries out against the "altruistic ideals" and the "maudlin sentimentalism that has made America 'an asylum for the oppressed,'" which are "sweeping the nation toward a racial abyss" (Grant 228). Robert Ward, one year later, publishes "Immigration after the War," which calls out against care for immigrants, saying that the "backwash of the war – has begun to find its way to our shores" (147).

In this anti-sentimentalist shift from neo-Lamarckism, rather than empathy being a sign of the white race's superiority, it was now its fatal flaw. Ward goes on to dismiss sentimentality writ large:

> I do not believe that sentiment can solve grave national problems. I do not believe that the indiscriminate kindness we may seem to be able to show to some thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or millions, of Europeans and Asiatic immigrants can in any conceivable way counter-balance the harm that these people may do our race if large numbers of them are mentally and physically unfit. (R. Ward, 147)

Through this period, eugenicists set themselves against the more religiously inflected neo-Lamarckism that advocated care and sociality as a marker of racial superiority, moving towards an economic eugenics that sought to divorce itself from the perceived weakness of societal care. The primary proponents of this anti-sentimentalist eugenics were the economists, medical physicians, and race scientists finding a home in the university system. And as one might imagine, there were strong reactions against the naked violence of this eugenic movement that was coalescing in the university.

While we customarily associate academic freedom with the protection of leftist thought in universities, the history of these protections is a complicated one. The American Association of University Professors was founded in 1915 amidst a flurry of anti-sentimentalist eugenic activity, and their "Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" reflects this troubling period of history. While generally seen as a steppingstone towards protections for leftist professors, the Declaration makes far more sense when read through the eugenic trends of this era. The document stirs fears of conservative thought under attack in the university, and it promises to protect professors researching or teaching on "controversial" scientific matters from the "more hasty and unconsidered impulses of popular feeling" (American Association of University Professors). The Declaration, despite its supposed liberal inclination, also skirts any discussion of

academic discrimination or protections for marginalized academics. Instead, the document

functions, as John Wilson says, as a "radical statement of academic freedom for white men" (9).

Walter Metzger notes that the authors of the 1915 Declaration were particularly interested

in protecting "the Darwinian sciences" from antievolutionists interested in a "godlier biology"

(Metzger 21). Despite our contemporary mistrust of religious interference in education, Ann Marie

Ryan says that Christian opposition to evolution came most often from the Catholic church's

interest in protecting its largely immigrant congregations against the increasing xenophobia of the

scientific eugenic movement. "A steady stream of Catholic intellectuals confronted eugenics using

theological, philosophical and scientific arguments," Ryan writes, "Those challenges gained the

full support of the Vatican with its outright rejection of eugenics in Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical

Casti Connubii" (467).

Whereas earlier religiously and morally inflected rhetorics of neo-Lamarckian eugenics

were favored over blatantly exterminationist rhetoric, the medical scientism of the early 1900's

could successfully avoid moral scrutiny by aligning itself with rationalism and against the

sentimentalism of earlier trends within the eugenic movement. While I do not mean to say that this

was a moment of America's history more cruel than any other, it is a turning point in the rhetoric

of eugenic anti-sentimentalism. Now established, this idea of rationalism in opposition to

sentimentalism would be a mainstay of political rhetoric in the decades to come.

2.2 Spoil the Child

Eugenic concerns are principally concerns over the maintenance of a race, and therefore

concerns about reproduction and childhood development. We see this not just in forced

sterilizations and concerns about reproductive fitness, but also in the "better babies" contests held at state and county fairs across the United States. Eugenics requires its adherents to believe in a form of inheritance of acquired characteristics, otherwise eugenic ideology would not be able to moralize about the white race's cultivation of its supposed superiority. This preoccupation with childhood development and its ties to the health of the race and the nation had a profound impact on our nation's universities, particularly in the 1960's and the following decades. A particularly paternalistic flavor of anti-sentimentalism finds its way onto campus in the 1960's, with the paring back of universities' legal rights as surrogate parent, the emergence of adolescence as a framework for understanding university students, and growing opportunities for student self- and political advocacy. These factors coalesce in an anti-sentimentalist paternalism that comes to shape much of the conservative attitude towards the university today.

Historically, the university has held the role of surrogate parent in the eyes of both culture and the law. This was formally recognized through a set of legal assumptions about university rights known as *in loco parentis* protections. This allowed for universities to implement various morality codes including dictating student dress and prohibiting interactions with the opposite sex, and it also allowed the university to dismiss students on virtually any grounds. However, in 1961, six students who had sued Alabama State College for been expelled for unspecified reasons – presumably because of their participation in civil rights protests – won their case in federal court (*Dixon v Alabama*). The rollback of *in loco parentis* protections upset public notions of a university's role, prompting those who supported a disciplinarian university to become more vocal in their belief in university students' need for control.

The attribution of adolescence on certain members of society has historically been used as a form of governmental regulation. As Kent Baxter says in *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century*

American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence, psychologists at the turn of the 20th century began to articulate the category of adolescence primarily through negative traits in order to understand how best to rehabilitate this "increasingly conspicuous and troubling" demographic (8). As Baxter describes it, the figure of the adolescent is "bursting at the seams with unbridled sexuality and an innate disrespect for the rules and regulations that maintain adult society" (18). As the better babies contests revealed eugenic fears, so too did the growing concerns about student adolescence on college campuses.

Contributing further to these fears of student adolescence, in 1961 President Lyndon Johnson also instituted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, funding and implementing a national K-12 school system. This led to what many perceived to be a generational crisis, with citizens taking far longer to mature into the capitalist system than in the past. As Frank Fasick establishes in "On the 'Invention' of Adolescence," compulsory secondary education is the core of the emergence of "adolescence" as a popular concept, emerging from the attribution of adulthood to financial independence and full participation in the capitalist labor market. This perception of adolescence is even further prolonged when students choose to attend college immediately after exiting the K-12 system, choosing further education instead of participating in the labor market.

And many more students were making this choice. This decade saw incredible investment in the university system by the federal government, principally through the Higher Education Act of 1965. This bill greatly increased federal funding to universities, resulting in a vast influx of students into the university system. The university reforms of the earlier decades at the hands of the GI Bill set the stage for this influx of students; the GI Bill was influential in creating the structures to imagine a more accessible university, with remedial courses, academic counselors,

and other supports. However, the university as a rite of passage didn't emerge until the mid-sixties with the Higher Education Act. In the years after the GI Bill, total enrollment just barely surpassed 2 million students, just one eighth of the 18- to 24-year-old population, whereas in the years after the Higher Education Act of 1965, enrollment reached 8 million students, over one third of the 18- to 24-year-old population (Snyder 76-77).

The students entering after the Higher Education Act of 1965 were also far more critical of the university system, and far more willing to advocate on their own behalf and for causes they believed in. *Dixon v Alabama* ensured that students could not be disciplined or expelled at the whim of their university, and certainly not for exercising their right to protest. This period also saw an incredible amount of organizing across the US, particularly due to the growing influence of the Black Power movement. The meeting of these factors opened up possibilities for political action on campuses in a way that had never before been seen at a time when more of the nation's young adults were attending college than ever before.

As one might imagine of an era in which national tensions were playing out in universities, politicians capitalized on the opportunity to forward their political career. In 1966, Ronald Reagan won his bid for governor of California on an anti-protest anti-university platform, calling the Berkeley campus and its Free Speech Movement a haven for communist sympathizers, protesters, and sexual deviants and vowing to "clean up the mess at Berkeley" (De Groot, Kahn) In three years time, Reagan made good on his promise – sending in California highway patrol to subdue student protests on campus. Berkeley was occupied by 2,200 national guard troops for two weeks, with the national guard killing one student and blinding another.

While Ronald Reagan's winning campaign for governor in 1966 ran largely on a campaign against leftism in universities, it was Richard Nixon's vice-president, Spiro Agnew, who was the

most significant politician in creating the image of the university student as adolescent that persists today. On the cover of the May 8, 1970 issue of *Life Magazine,* Agnew stands with arms crossed beside the headline "Spiro Agnew Knows Best: Stern Voice of the Silent Majority." This title is a play on *Father Knows Best,* a popular radio show turned sitcom of the 1950's portraying a conservative ideal of the white middle-class suburban family. Agnew is painted in a sentimental and forgiving light, with jokes of Agnew's "knock-heads maledictions against the protestors, the youth marchers" ("Don't Get Agnew Wrong," 64). The article frames Agnew as a stern father throughout: "He began calmly, as all fathers do […] Then the tongue-lashing – what father is not going to put up with any longer" (66).

Returning to the eugenic impulses of this moment, particularly to the Moynihan Report (published in 1965), we see the preoccupation with stern fatherhood as a response against the perceived loss of cultural monopoly once held by the white nuclear family structure. It is further a paranoia about the rightful wielding of power, and the naturalizing of this power through familial metaphor. The Moynihan Report, with its attribution of black poverty to black single-mother families, argued that a matriarchal structure hindered black men's ability to act as authority figures, and that jobs programs must be targeted specifically at black men so that they are not alienated from their roles as fathers and husbands. As Hortense Spillers makes clear, "the African-American woman, the mother, the daughter, becomes historically the powerful and shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated - the law of the Mother" (80).

We can see these paternalistic anxieties throughout the culture of this time, particularly in books like James Dobson's *Dare to Discipline* (1970)*,* a parenting book indicative of the growing punitive parenting movement growing in popularity within conservative circles. This book set itself against Benjamin Spock's 1946 *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care,* an

immensely popular parenting book of the post-war period that invited parents to foster kind relationships with their children and understand them as fundamentally reasonable. However, the book fell out of favor in the 1960's when Spock became publicly involved in protests against the Vietnam War. Critics would come to blame the permissiveness of *Baby and Child Care* for the counterculture and student movements of the 1960's (Spock and Morgan 263).

In an anti-student address that Agnew gave to a Republican dinner, later reprinted in a 1970 issue of *Time* magazine, we hear Agnew's "knock-head maledictions" directly ("How to Roast a Marshmallow"). Throughout the speech, Agnew accuses the university of reneging on its paternal role, going soft, unable or unwilling to use the force Agnew associates with a good education. Agnew quickly establishes a familial metaphor as a means of advocating the use of force against student protestors. "Junior," Agnew says, arrives on campus to find "faculty even less demanding than his parents."

Agnew and other conservatives of the moment recognized the very real threat of a leftist movement emerging from the university. In 1968 they watched student protests erupt across the world, with several antiauthoritarian, leftist, and labor movements finding their start on university campuses.[12] In response, we see an even deeper commitment to anti-sentimentalism in Agnew's rhetoric, setting care and rigor at odds in order to dismiss the theoretical underpinnings of these leftist movements. Agnew reveals a hint of the political pessimism to come, mocking students who have fooled others, and even themselves, into thinking that they are "the architects of a brave, new, compassionate world."

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[12] These student protest movements in 1968 occurred in France, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and Yugoslavia.

Agnew bemoans "patently unqualified students," who make demands of the university not through rigorous intellectual debate but through force. It is not that Agnew is opposed to force per se, but that he sees the patriarchal monopoly of force questioned. "The rule of reason is the guiding principle in an academic community," he says, "and those who apply the rule of force have no business there." Yet Agnew speaks of students who require "very firm handling," he invites readers to imagine student protestors "wearing brown shirts or white sheets - and act accordingly." "The best way to put a tough coat on a marshmallow," he says, "is to roast it."

Reagan's crusade against students at Berkeley was not the only time a student was killed on campus by city and state police. Much less circulated in national media were the killings of black students at historically black colleges and universities at this time, namely South Carolina State University and Jackson State University. The Orangeburg Massacre in 1968 saw two university students, Samuel Hammond Jr. and Henry Smith, and a high school student, Delano Middleton, killed by state police on the SCSU campus. Governor Robert McNair blamed the violence on outside agitators from the Black Power movement and claimed that the event took place off campus, contrary to evidence (Bass). Another incident, the Jackson State killings in 1970, also saw one university student, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs, and a high-school student, James Earl Green, killed by city and state police. However, these killings at South Carolina State and Jackson State were unable to gain traction in the popular media in the way that the killing of white students was. As is frequently the case, one event – typically an event that centers the experience of white middle-class experience – comes to stand for an entire political moment. In the case of state killings on campus, that event was the Kent State Massacre.

Just as Agnew and those like him were launching into vigorous attacks against students' adolescence, news of the Kent State Massacre spread across the United States. The iconic Kent

State photograph, counted among the most iconic photos of all time ("Kent State Shootings"), shows 18-year-old Mary Ann Vecchio with arms flung open in pain as she kneels before a man lying face down unceremoniously on the pavement, killed by the national guard. The ubiquitous image came to stand for the horrors of these shootings, the percieved helplessness of the students themselves, and the inaction of the larger public symbolized in the onlookers behind them on the campus lawn.

Figure 4: Kent State Shootings (John Paul Filo)

In writing about the Kent State Massacre and its function in civic discourse, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites draw our attention to the intertwined nature of emotionality and dissent. Inasmuch as civic discourse is "based on muted affect," they say, "then emotional display can become a mode of dissent" (6). Highlighting the rejection of the paternal, Hariman and Lucaites argue that the cry in this image is more legible as a site of emotional protest because it comes "from a woman, who becomes the sign of both domestic order and its collapse" (9). Yet the power of emotionality in this photograph can just as easily be dismissed from a paternalist logic – as it was for the many readers who blamed the killing of these students on the protests, rather than

on the national guard. Even as the Kent State photograph is able to galvanize the public against oppressive state power, it does so by "feminizing that public" (20). This in turn reinforces the paternalist style of leadership that promises to return order to the nation through "leaders and policies that necessarily are more 'realistic,' less 'sentimental,' and often more violent than would seem consistent with democratic ideals" (20).

While the Kent State massacre did not eliminate the public's hostility towards student protestors, it did shift the conversation into different terms. As Agnew had adopted a stance of paternalistic punishment, so the Kent State Massacre shifted advocacy for students to a stereotypically maternal, protective nature. Coming into conflict with Agnew's anti-sentimentalist approach, we begin to see advocacy for student protections, particularly framed through the sanctity of the family and the need to protect the nation's children.

2.3 Family Investments

Coinciding with the framing of university students through the lens of the family we see a stark individuation of students. Through the 1970's and into the 80's, we see higher education framed much less as a social good and almost exclusively as an investment, a means of family uplift. We see the framing most starkly in the austerity politics that cut government funding for universities and replace them with federal or private loans, sending the message that it is the student, not the nation, who is investing in the university.

In California, Reagan's campaign against the social power of universities is perhaps most visible in his decision as governor to "cut funding for the state's colleges and universities" and "impose previously unheard of tuition charges on the grounds that they would 'weed out the non-

serious student'" (Schrecker 73). And Reagan's economic attacks on the university were not unique – state legislators across the country "introduced dozens of bills cracking down on students and threatening to withhold funds from institutions and their faculties" (73). This reduction of government funding pushed universities to rely more on tuition to generate the revenue traditionally provided by government funding, and it meant that more students were forced to rely on loans in order to attend university, still seen as the ticket to upward mobility.

The turn towards student debt also rearticulated the student's adolescence and dependence on the family. As Melinda Cooper says in *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism,* student loans, by nature of privatizing the expenses of a college education within a family, bind "generations together in webs of mutual obligation and dependence that are quite literally unforgiving" (217). Cooper draws our attention to the emergence of the concept of "investing in college" to help explain the rapid disappearance of protests. She tells us that the turn towards privatization atomized the student body and made them much less likely to understand themselves as a collective with political power.

With universities increasingly being seen as an expensive family investment, the US began to understand the vestiges of university *in loco parentis* through a framework of parental obligations of protection rather than paternalist right to discipline. These echoes of *in loco parentis* re-emerge for Cooper in the turn towards tort law – particularly in the obligations of a business to protect consumers against personal injury.

As is the trend throughout the emergence of neoliberalism, social problems are reframed as personal problems, social violences a matter of isolated bad actors. Through this time we see the first emergence of universities having an obligation to be "safe spaces," the idea that universities have some duty to their students as customers. Summarizing the evolution from

insularity to legal obligation, legal scholar Peter Lake says, "the closest analogy to university legal responsibility for student safety remains business responsibility for customer/consumer/tenant safety" (3). Universities were quickly finding themselves held accountable not just for the mundane upkeep of premises but for protection from dangerous persons – both in the greater community and dangerous students on campus. Court cases like *Mullins v Pine Manor* College and *Tarasoff v Board of Regents* placed more legal responsibility on universities for preventing acts of violence committed against their students.

Melinda Cooper points us towards the politics attached to these obligations: "right-wing commentators are among the first to have discerned a relationship between the rise of a culture of litigation in American society at large and what they perceive as a culture of grievance among today's college students" (255). Indeed, the rise of litigation as a means of protecting the student as family investment has been wrapped up in politics from the very beginning – immediately following the Kent State Massacre, the parents of the student-protestors killed filed lawsuits against the National Guard and Ohio state officials. However, as with nearly all police violence, there was no accountability to be had; the jury found no one responsible for the deaths and injuries (Wischmann). Rather than press for police reform or move towards collective action, most acquiesced to this threat of violence. All they could do was to tell their own child going to college to keep their head down and stay away from protests. The legal system had taken the horror of police killings on campus, a horror now witnessed across the nation and roundly condemned from all sides, condemned even by President Richard Nixon's own Commission on Campus Unrest ("The Report" 2), and it issued no repercussions to anyone responsible for these killings. What else was there to do?

2.4 Depressive Realism/Capitalist Anti-Sentimentalism

As is visible in the curtailing of freedom movements into legalist, individualist protections, the 1970's and 80's were a time of ideological warfare against practices of care. Most notable in this work was Milton Friedman, whose Chicago School of Economics was almost single-handedly responsible for the neoliberal austerity politics put into policy by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher (Klein 18). Friedman's main contribution to neoliberal policy was providing a counter to Keynesian economics, which advocated for measured government spending as a form of societal uplift for the benefit of the nation. Keynesian economics were the underpinnings of several of President Johnson's Great Society policies, the most relevant here being the Higher Education Act of 1965. Friedman, in contrast, advocated for the withdrawal of nearly all government services, even in the face of mass public suffering. This disregard for suffering is most visible in Friedman's close cooperation with Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, though it appears as well in Friedman's policy recommendations to both Ronald Raegan and Margaret Thatcher (Klein).

Friedman argued throughout his life that economics was a rigorous discipline, using his Nobel lecture to say that economics was a discipline on par with physics, chemistry, and medicine, complete with rigorous methods of analysis and experimentation (Friedman 452). Friedman saw himself as something of a scientist, certain that his theories of laissez-faire free markets would lead to unprecedented economic growth, and unconcerned with the violences needed to implement them. However, the resounding failures of economies where his policies were implemented, rather than evidence of the faultiness of his theories, were taken to be evidence that governments had not gone far enough in their austerity measures. Friedman took inflation to be the gravest problem facing modern countries – so much so that he was willing to align himself with oppressive dictatorships who were willing to implement his free-market solutions to inflation. Regarding his

partnership with Pinochet, he compared his role to that of a physician offering "technical medical advice to the Chilean Government to help end a medical plague," the "plague of inflation" (Friedman and Friedman, 596). Echoing medicalized eugenic arguments, Friedman stokes fears of the cultural harms that could result from protecting the weak, laundering these anti-sentimentalist eugenic philosophies into the more palatable field of economics.

Friedman's intractability in his beliefs was soon baked into the ideology of neoliberalism. As Margret Thatcher's slogan put succinctly in her defense of the market economy, "there is no alternative." This intractability was further solidified with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the perceived failure of socialism as a viable alternative to capitalism. Much as the anti-sentimentalist eugenicists defended their cruelty through the veil of scientific rhetoric, so too did the new economics of neoliberalism. Those pushing austerity policies were not cruel, so this thinking goes, just realistic.

Neoliberalism's deliberate ideological ignorance is a feature of what Mark Fisher calls "capitalist realism." Fisher names capitalist realism as "a pervasive atmosphere […] a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought or action," an ideology "that presents itself as empirical fact" (16, 17). The "realism" in the term signals less a true commitment to the real, and more a naturalization of a mode of neoliberal propaganda. This naturalization, which Fisher locates in the 1980's, names the shift from understanding capitalism as one among several competing ideologies to a "fact" with no credible alternatives. When even the mildest of opposing perspectives are put forward, like the anti-capitalist, anti-Thatcherite slogan "another world is possible," those forwarding this view are dismissed as utopian and unrealistic.

As with all manner of politics, this capitalist realism finds its way into our university. We can see this in the debate regarding Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (1977), which

came to stand metonymically for the conflict between the more conservative current-traditionalist pedagogy and the more liberal expressivist pedagogy in composition studies that had been gaining traction in the prior decade. Despite Shaughnessy ultimately arguing for an empathetic approach to "basic writers" that advocated their inclusion in the university, many critics argued that the book, particularly its return to grammatical instruction, symbolized a growing conservatism that was at odds with contemporary research in the field. John Rouse is one such critic, saying "Shaughnessy knows that teaching grammar as a method of teaching writing has no support whatever [sic] in research evidence. […] But what her argument lacks in substance it gains in political appeal" (3). Rouse draws connections between the teaching of grammar and desires for an authoritative teaching style, saying that *Errors and Expectations* allows those teachers so used to having power over the classroom to "be the expositors of an esoteric knowledge. They can still be authorities. Shaughnessy is satisfying here a powerful need." (3-4). Rouse instead asks us to conduct our classrooms through the expressivist model, arguing that these basic writers who are the subject of Shaughnessy's text require the same fostering of their creative and critical decision-making as any other students.

Writing in response to Rouse, Gerald Graff puts forward a defense of Shaughnessy brimming with an ethical and economic certainty that mirrors the capitalist realism of the times. Graff writes derisively of teachers who ensure that none of their students "feel 'threatened' by alien conventions," saying that "students and parents complain that they are being patronized, that the more relaxed, more personalist pedagogy fails to teach anybody how to write" (852). Graff explicitly critiques Rouse's recommendation for an alternative but still rigorous training in composition that departs from Shaughnessy, unable to see how Rouse's pedagogy could be simultaneously rigorous and responsive to students' personhood. Graff argues that Rouse's

"recommendation of rigor suggests that Rouse would concede that students must somehow be urged to achieve an impersonal level of thought and expression" (854-855). Graff then makes the common rhetorical move of connecting more liberal writing pedagogies to students' economic failure, saying that we must impose standard conventions of language to ensure students' success within a capitalist system. "In a society in which we necessarily make our peace with capitalism or are relegated to the vocational scrap-heap," Graff Says, "we have little choice but to play by the rules of the system […] To shield students from this socialization on the delusion that you are liberating them helps nobody." (852).

Carmen Kynard, reflecting on the affective politics of Graff's piece, warns us that despite Graff's certainty about the lack of alternatives, his argumentation "is not about simply accepting capitalism. It promotes capitalism and serves the aims of distorting and containing the demands for a radical restructuring of America" (214). In his inability to recognize the rigor of Rouse's arguments, Graff shows his commitment to capitalist realism. Kynard highlights the callousness of Graff's pedagogy, noting how Graff "casts any criticism of Shaughnessy's grammar pedagogy into a touchy-feely netherworld" (212). It is through this method that capitalist realism reinforces itself, both despite and through its commitment to cruelty. Graff surely does not see himself as intentionally discounting Rouse's calls for more empathetic and socially aware pedagogy, merely advocating for realism in the face of a cruel world.

Even among many of its proponents, capitalism is acknowledged to be a cruel system. According to Fisher, this is one of the hallmarks of its supposed veracity: "'realism' here is analogous to the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion" (5). Because of its depressive perspective, it is incredibly difficult to argue against capitalist realism from a moral stance, and in fact this argumentation sometimes

reinforces it. As Fisher argues, "poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naïve utopianism" (16). Capitalist realism draws rhetorical and ideological power from its invocation of the care/rigor dichotomy – it channels scientific justifications for cruelty that undercut and ultimately appropriate any attempts to indict the cruelty of these systems of thought.

Building upon the depressive state of capitalist realism, we arrive at a depressive form of reality enforcement that supersedes a purely economic enforcement of pessimism. Those who cannot see another model begin to take the depressive economic orientation to the world and apply it to other arenas of life. Fisher remarks that invocations of "realism" perpetuates a kind of "anti-mythical myth […] to have stripped the world of sentimental illusions and seen it for 'what it really is': a Hobbesian war of all against all" (10-11). The pessimistic economic epistemology of capitalism becomes the overarching epistemology of the capitalist citizen – a form of resigned pessimism that, while it cannot keep you from being hurt, will at least prevent that hurt from sneaking up on you.

Video essayist Natalie Wynn calls this a "masochistic epistemology: Whatever hurts [me] is true" (Wynn). Speaking on the similarities between trans people experiencing gender dysphoria and right-wing Incels experiencing altered perceptions of themselves, Wynn describes this masochistic epistemology as a form of psychological self-harm. According to this epistemology, society's demand for polite public affirmation calls the reality of any affirmation into question. Bullying is reframed as authenticity untethered from the social mores that hold people back from direct communication. The narrative shared is that the truth is painful, and that only some are able to handle that pain with others preferring comforting illusion. The masochism of this epistemology is in the preference for pain, which one begins to take as a priori evidence of truth.

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While it's useful to have an understanding of this masochistic epistemology, one cannot spend much time with masochism without encountering its foil, sadism. Wynn does not extend her analysis, but the absence of first-person pronouns in her description of masochistic epistemology suggests that she acknowledges the possibility of that extension. It is not just that whatever hurts *me* is true, it is that "whatever hurts is true." It is not a far stretch to imagine, then, a sadistic epistemology: whatever hurts *you* is true. Within a sadistic epistemology, if someone holds a belief that causes harm, there is little recognition that it may be motivated by internal desires, whereas it is a common notion that any beliefs that alleviate harm are fantasy. Sadism can thus be justified as tough love, brutal honesty.

These epistemologies, masochistic and sadistic, take as their foundation that care and truth are oppositional. This version of truth translates to rigor through an uncompromising adherence to the maxim "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," as seen in the ideology of Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. This conventional wisdom suggests that rigorous training entails harm, that those pushing you closer to breakdown are doing so for your benefit. Through a sadomasochistic epistemology, care is transmuted into coddling and harm into appropriate pedagogy. Thus, the holders of this epistemology may avoid the rhetorically unsavory position of advocating harm, merely sharing the cold hard truth.

2.5 The Science Wars

As Roderick Ferguson tells us in *The Reorder of Things,* the periods of student protest and university assimilation in the 1960's and 70's signaled a rupture in the myth of the university as striving towards apolitical truth. Certainly the politics of university admittance itself, as well as

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the fervor with which the university pursued eugenic projects in the 1920's belie the claim that this was the first time the university could be seen to be political. Yet Ferguson is right to name this moment as the first rupture in the myth of truth, where "truth as the ideal of the university and the mediator of state and civil society was joined by difference in general, and minoritized difference in particular" (11). Exacerbating the conflict was the way that much of the theory entering the university through marginalized knowledge practices directly confronted the myth of objective dispassionate truth that many within the institution and outside it had found so comforting.

The conflict between these two camps came to a head in the 1990's in a series of debates between the humanities and sciences known as the Science Wars, with the humanities falling roughly in line with the ideal of difference and the sciences falling roughly in line with the ideal of truth, though of course acknowledging the disagreement within these disciplines. Couched within these debates was also an argument between scientific realism and postmodern critiques of knowledge production, as well as concerns about eugenic ideology masquerading as scientific truths. Despite attribution of Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (1994) as the first shot fired in the Science Wars, as with all conflicts, this was merely the eruption of a long-simmering animus.

One site of especially sharp conflict was in the response to the AIDS crisis. In the late 80's and early 90's, there was a flurry of scientific research related to homosexuality, primarily concerned with identifying genetic markers that could be tested to predict its occurrence. Particularly of note are three well-funded and influential studies that stand against the drastically underfunded AIDS research and services of the time. These articles were Simon LeVay's "A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men" and Michael

Bailey and Richard Pillard's "A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation," both published in 1991, and Dean Hamer and Charles Thomas's "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," published in 1993. While there was of course important AIDS-related work being done in the field of medicine, the allocation of government funding to this genetic research was indicative of biological essentialist priorities through the AIDS epidemic (Ordover). These studies reflect the reemergence of latent eugenic scientism, this time making the disciplinary shift from Friedmanite economics back to genetics.

As Nancy Ordover identifies in her work on eugenics, the scientific studies being conducted in response to the AIDS crisis were preoccupied primarily with the genetic origins of homosexuality, leading to deeper stigmatization and isolation from the general public. These studies, she says, "were allocated money and legitimacy not despite the AIDS crisis, but because of it […] there was talk of AIDS being divinely ordained or, for the secular homophobes, AIDS as natural selection: a kind of passive eugenics designed to rid the earth of evolutionary misfits" (120). The great interest in these genetic projects was fundamentally a eugenic interest, an extension of earlier eugenic attempts to contain the contagion of sexual degeneracy.

In response, scholars in the humanities were highly critical of these research projects, particularly scholars in the budding field of queer theory. Eve Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet,* writes towards these types of scientific "advances" directly:

> If I had ever, in any medium, seen any researcher or popularizer refer even once to any supposed gay-producing circumstance as the *proper* hormone balance, or the *conducive* endocrine environment, for gay generation, I would be less chilled by the breezes of all this technological confidence. As things are, a medicalized dream of the prevention of gay bodies seems to be the less visible, far more respectable underside of the AIDS-fueled public dream of their extirpation" (43).

Amidst the AIDS crisis, another national crisis emerged, with nationwide outrage in response to the police assault of Rodney King in 1991, and the 1992 Los Angeles protests in

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response to the acquittal of the police officers. This, just as the field of critical race theory was emerging into the national attention with Patricia Williams' 1991 *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* and Derrick Bell's 1992 *Faces at the Bottom of the Well,* both national best sellers. Fears of a growing black political movement saw the nation renewing its commitment to scientific racism with a wave of eugenic publishing, most notably with Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's infamous *The Bell Curve*. For those unfamiliar with the book, Murray and Herrnstein argue against the very idea of structural racism, arguing that social disadvantages can instead be accounted for by genetic differences across race. They repackage old eugenic claims, stating that intelligence can be quantified and measured, that African-Americans score significantly lower on these tests than white Americans, and that genes account for this difference.

Rarely acknowledged as contributing to the antagonism between the sciences and humanities is a third intellectual tradition, a conservative publishing industry intent on maintaining the capitalist realism established by Milton Friedman in the 80's. We see the earliest example of this conservative impulse in Allan Bloom's 1987 *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom's tract against postmodernism, Foucault, hippies, and insufficient patriotism became the de facto template for these conservative anti-university publications. At the heart of Bloom's accusation against the university is that familiar anti-sentimental framing: "The purpose of their education is not to make them scholars but to provide them with moral virtue" (26). This deployment of the care/rigor dichotomy would come to be a hallmark of conservative critiques of the university, particularly those funded, like Bloom's book, by the conservative John M. Olin Center.

According to a nonprofit that advises conservative philanthropists, the Olin Center was a powerhouse of conservative influence that "shaped the direction and aided the growth of the modern conservative movement that first sprang into visibility in the 1980s" (Miller). The Olin

Center was largely inactive until John Olin witnessed a 1969 protest and occupation of a building by armed black students at his alma mater Cornell; former executive director of the foundation James Pierson says that this protest was a significant factor in Olin's decision to "dedicate his foundation to supporting the study and teaching of free enterprise at American colleges" (Wilhelm). Note the vacuous function of "free enterprise" in this statement, and the seeming detachment of economic concerns from the true impetus of the decision, student protest. After the success of Bloom's anti-university text in 1987, the Olin Foundation became increasingly active in anti-university publishing, particularly funding texts that attacked the rise of "multiculturalism" and "political correctness" throughout the 90's.

Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990), funded by the Olin Center, was immensely popular in conservative circles and gave the impression that the university had once again been infiltrated by the holier-than-thou left. Kimball deployed an anti-religious rhetoric despite his own and his audience's conservatism. Rather than writing against the church, which has long since been the domain of conservatives, Kimball operationalized the rhetoric of scientism's fight against religion by invoking multiculturalism as a form of religiosity. Kimball accused multiculturalism of being "nothing less than a new form of thought control based on a variety of pious new-Left slogans and attitudes" (xvi). He says that the "self-righteous emphasis on 'diversity,' 'relevance,' and 'sensitivity' provides a graphic example of the way in which the teaching of the humanities in our colleges and universities has been appropriated by special interests and corrupted by politics" (3). By accusing the left of "piety" and "righteousness," typically the realm of the church, Kimball positions himself apart from those with beliefs based in faith. As the popular rhetoric of the time associated the church with conservative politics, Kimball's equivocating the beliefs of the church and the left as irrational and overly moralistic distanced him from both. This established his

authority as an "unbiased" author while also tapping into a deep history of eugenic rhetoric that sets itself against religious moralism. Kimball can thus invoke anti-sentimentalist intellectualism in his resistance to the ideal of difference, a paranoia about kindhearted liberals corroding the university's commitment to free inquiry through their commitment to marginalized groups, all the while Kimball can claim to want politics out of the university.

Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (1991), also supported by the Olin Center, was another important factor in the conservative push against the ideal of difference in the university. D'Souza's first chapter, "the victim's revolution on campus," reads exactly as one would expect. He derides professors and administrators for coddling the student body, even making accusations that "University leadership often discourages faculty from presenting factual material that may provoke or irritate minority students" (5). D'Souza is perhaps best well known for his 2018 film *Death of a Nation* (a play on the KKK propaganda film *Birth of a Nation*), in which he offers a revisionist history of the United States that conflates liberalism and Naziism in order to absolve the white-supremacist appeal of the modern conservative movement (Gleiberman). Needless to say, D'Souza's devotion to factual material extends neither to the film nor his tract against difference in universities.

Writing both against the university but also against the ideal of difference more broadly, Richard Bernstein's *Dictatorship of Virtue* connects Kimball and D'Souza's anti-sentimentalist rejection of virtue directly to a type of colonizing eugenics. Bernstein's main complaint against the enforcement of liberal morality with a religious zeal is that it is the wrong kind of morality:

> educators have for years, and with reason, viewed the young people who enter their domains of higher learning as only partially civilized creatures. […] For years, the best schools were religious schools, and inculcating religious conviction was a part of the civilizing mission. […] The problem is that, as with much else in the multiculturalist initiative, the lessons imparted to students are difficult to separate from attempts to foster a radical political ideology. (61)

Bernstein's invocation of the university's religious history "civilizing" students bears eerie resemblances to Christianity's claims of civilizing third world and indigenous peoples, particularly when Kimball frames this as the appropriate response to arguments for racial equity. Bernstein's racial politics are even more directly on display in his first chapter, in which he offers a passionate defense of a journalist who suggested that we should have contraception campaigns targeted towards black communities as a way to address black poverty. When other journalists in the office note the inhumanity of that suggestion, particularly given histories of black sterilization in the US, the journalist concedes but Bernstein does not.

Bernstein is also credited with bringing the term "political correctness" into popular use through his 1990 *New York Times* article "The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct." The term was quick to gain widespread traction, so much so that in 1993, host Bill Maher would air "Politically Incorrect," a late-night talk show that remained popular through the 90's and early 2000's. The term is telling in its application of "political" to modify "correctness," with "political correctness" taken to be an ironic or enforced correctness. Bernstein himself acknowledges the derisiveness of the term, saying it "is spoken more with irony and disapproval than with reverence," but that he contends that it represents a very serious problem, "a large body of belief in academia and elsewhere that a cluster of opinions about race, ecology, feminism, culture and foreign policy defines a kind of "correct" attitude toward the problems of the world" (1). The term highlights the tensions between morality and scholarship that had been inherent in the university project throughout history, brought to a head in the 90's by the eugenic impulses in the rise of genetic sciences as well as the conservative rejection of expertise coming from fields that held the ideal of difference.

This rejection of expertise continues through to the 2010's and 2020's with the maligning of the ideal of difference now under the name "grievance studies," generally thought to encompass postcolonial theory, gender studies, queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, and fat studies (Pluckrose). These types of fields had been maligned under various names for decades, including "oppression studies" in Kimball's *Dictatorship of Virtue*. However, the term "grievance studies" became popularized in 2018 as a response to the so called "grievance studies hoax," an attempt to replicate the Sokal Hoax of 1996 that many scientific realists take as evidence of the inanity of humanities scholarship (Engber). The naming of these studies as coalescing around "grievance," despite the derision, is in fact an apt observation. As Sara Ahmed says in "A Complaint Biography," "diversity work in the first sense I have referred to – trying to open institutions to make them more accessible to populations that have historically been excluded – is often framed as complaint" (516). In *Trans Care,* Hil Malatino likewise rejects the premise that one cannot be emotionally invested in a particular argument while also making sound argumentation. "I *am* aggrieved," he says. "These students *are* aggrieved. Grievance is not adequate grounds for dismissing a critique" (14). These so called "grievance studies" fields are committed to rigorous study as a way of fostering more equitable conditions for marginalized people, and for this reason they are taken not to be valid fields of study.

A fundamental premise of the care/rigor dichotomy is that one cannot be simultaneously aggrieved and reasoned. This barring of grievance from reasoned thought places these grievance studies fields in a perpetually subordinate position – unable to be taken seriously as rigorous disciplines. Yet grievance is a legitimate response to systems of oppression, and it is often the spark of important theoretical and political advancements. These fields' survival in the face of epistemological and literal scientific violence attests to the resilience of their intellectual

contributions, and as their significance grows it brings the faults of the care/rigor dichotomy into sharper focus. However, we must remember that the care/rigor dichotomy is not confined to eugenics and austerity politics; its impact reverberates far beyond its anti-sentimentalist roots. In the next chapter, I explore these reverberations, locating the care/rigor dichotomy in practices of multicultural pedagogy developed specifically to forward the ideal of difference in our classrooms.

3.0 Off Scaffolding and into the Deep End[13]

> When I look at a movement that hungers for recognition from the
> very people who disown us I remember that we are grieving.
> Alok Vaid-Menon

In my role as a first-year teaching mentor for graduate students, I found the new composition teachers to be experiencing a tremendous amount of distress around the idea of teaching texts from authors with marginalized identities. Educated within a pedagogical framework primarily informed by critical pedagogy and multicultural education, these new teachers wanted to present their students with the work of various marginalized authors, but they struggled (as many of us do) with the attendant complications: How much bibliographic information is needed for students to understand the author's point of view? What happens if one of my privileged students[14] misinterprets the text based on racist or sexist stereotypes? How much extra information do I need to give my students for them to be able to have conversations about race, gender, etc., and do I need to do all of this extra work for each marginalized identity we talk about?

My answer – less fully articulated then than it is now – is to reframe our expectations for ethical student behavior. No matter how we may try, teachers cannot be responsible for offering our privileged students the scaffolding they need to "understand" other humans' existence. Instead,

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[13] An earlier version of this chapter was published under the same title in *Radical Teacher*, vol. 115, 2019, pp. 13-20.
[14] I intend the terms "privileged" and "marginalized" to be loose referents. Though I frequently refer to "privileged" or "marginalized" students in this chapter, I want to foreground the contextuality of these terms. I use "privileged students" or "marginalized students" as a shorthand for students who might hold oppression or privilege with regard to a particular issue being discussed at the time in the classroom, rather than any sort of pronouncement of the existence of a static, categorically "privileged" or "marginalized" student.

we must toss our students into the deep end, neither expecting mastery of another's subject position nor encouraging it. For me, one of the ways this has manifested is in teaching trans[15] authors of color in general writing courses without making these authors' identities the primary focus of their contribution to the students' learning – allowing students to fumble with the difficulty of nonbinary they/them pronouns, providing just enough guidance to encourage civil discussion, but trusting students to come to terms with the incomprehensibility of an identity that most of them have never encountered and that our course is not intended to demystify. While I affirm that a classroom needs the scaffolding of basic community language norms, as I discuss in "Preempting Racist and Transphobic Language in Student Writing and Discussion," this scaffolding does not imply a need for students to understand or relate to the experiences of marginalized authors or classmates.

The apprehensions I fielded from the new teachers come out of a multicultural scaffolding model of critical pedagogy. This model imagines that understanding the experience of another is required for, and entails, ethical behavior towards that other. Multicultural pedagogy has fundamentally encouraged engagement with questions of empathy according to the ethical maxim of "treat others how you would want to be treated." While noble intentioned, this rule presumes quite a lot about those we are attempting to support. We are encouraged to still center the self in this version of empathy, imagining not the complex affective register of others but instead imagining ourselves as the main character of someone else's reality.

In the context of care and rigor, the multicultural scaffolding model subtly reinforces the care/rigor dichotomy even in the context of providing information as a form of increasing empathy.

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[15] I use "trans" (not transgender) to refer to identities outside of a cis-normative framework that arise from a lineage of political thought embedded in queer and transgender politics. For this reason, I understand nonbinary identities to be encompassed by the term "trans" on a conceptual scale, even though some nonbinary people do not consider themselves trans.

Care becomes separated from rigor through care's association with the lower order learning processes of memory and recall, rather than higher order processes. If we examine the multicultural scaffolding model through Bloom's taxonomy of learning, the understanding that produces empathy falls in the taxonomy's lowest tiers.

Rather than associating empathy with the higher order work involved in the rigorous analysis of structural oppression that affects us all as members of a society, the multicultural scaffolding model tells us that in order to empathize we need to understand the lived experience of a marginalized group. I'm not against the goal of understanding to a point, but associating ethical learning with understanding can prevent learners from advancing towards that rigorous analysis of systems. Understanding is not rigor, in fact in many cases it is the opposite. If empathy is located in understanding, students can have trouble engaging in higher order learning, where simplified understandings are put under pressure. Further, attempts to acknowledge the distance between privileged and marginalized experience, to remind students that we can never fully understand the experiences of others, can come to sound like accusations against their ethical abilities. As an alternative to the ethical models that arise from the multicultural scaffolding model, my students and I work on habits of mind that cultivate our ability to respect difference and nuance without (or at least before) understanding. This way, we are less likely to jump to *mis*understanding as a way to avoid the discomfort of not understanding.

The multicultural orientation towards empathy through understanding is also prevalent among students, manifesting in doubt about their own capacity to be empathetic to others whose experience they are unfamiliar with, despite evidence to the contrary. This doubt sees as its solution not the rigorous examination of one's own biases and beliefs but instead the acquisition of content-knowledge about those whose experiences are not similar to their own.

This type of doubt arises frequently in my students, particularly in an early-semester assignment that asks them to describe their learning goals and motivations for the work of the class. The prompt, tailored to a gender studies section of my first-year writing course, asks students to choose a few questions of several to respond to, including the following: "What questions do you have about gender that you would like to spend the semester trying to answer? Why are these questions interesting to you? How might knowing the answer to these questions change how you show up in the world?" (Appendix A.2). Drawing examples from a class of about twenty students, roughly half of the class indicated that they wanted to learn more about the lived experiences of individuals not like themselves in order to better empathize with them. The following quotes are excerpted from student responses:

- I think that being empathetic is important, but without knowing the hardships and everyday struggles of people in the LGBTQ community, it can be confusing. After this class, I hope to be more aware and empathetic.

- Once I am able to answer some of these questions I have and better understand the different genders, I believe that it will be easier for people to talk to me about how they identify, especially if they know that I will not show any judgement on them and I will understand them better.

- In understanding a more modern way of thinking I believe that more people will be able to get along and the more we are educated on [gender variance], the more it will be accepted.

- As a whole, I am excited to learn about how individuals experience gender and how I can become a better ally to transgender, genderfluid, and nonbinary folks.

- Looking into others situations where they have battled through problems I have not is not only interesting but also a terrific learning opportunity […] my younger brother is gay and I feel that to be more understanding of him, I could take a class focused on gender and sexuality.

- I would like to have [answers to] these questions so I can better relate to people and work on my sense of empathy when relating to others.

- In order to empathize with others it is important to look at gender and how it enhances and complicates the human experience. I want to have a greater understanding of other people's perspectives and experiences.

In a multicultural pedagogy framework, critical pedagogy's emphasis on critical consciousness is translated for white, elite, American institutions, replacing the goal of liberating the oppressed self with the goal of cultivating sympathy for the oppressed other. This pedagogical acculturation makes it more difficult for students to recognize their own place in oppressive systems, to understand the broader effects of systems of oppression, and to see themselves in solidarity with people who are oppressed in ways they are not, affected by the same systems in different ways.

Critical race education scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, in their foundational article "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," argue that "At the university level, much of the concern over multicultural education has been over curriculum inclusion […] multiculturalism came to be viewed as a political philosophy of 'many cultures' existing together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance" (61). The multicultural model of education privileges including subject matter from a diverse (read: non-hegemonic) range of experiences, usually with the goal of promoting coexistence and understanding.

Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that multicultural education was envisioned as "primarily assimilationist," that it "was designed to help African Americans and other 'unmeltable' ethnics become a part of America's melting pot." (61). Writing in a similar vein, queer pedagogy scholars Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, in their article "Flattening Effects," emphasize the damaging effects of multiculturalism's forced intelligibility:

> Our experiences as multicultural pedagogues for nearly two decades have shown us that the "reconstructed language" often taught—and modeled in curricula and textbooks—is rather bland, emphasizing commonalities that prevent us from perceiving and analyzing critical differences. We call such emphases on "shared humanity" the *flattening effect*, or the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) erasures of difference that occur when narrating stories of the "other." (431)

The problem of the multicultural scaffolding model, following Alexander and Rhodes, is that empathy follows from identification and similarity, even as our course materials do their best to narrate difference. As Megan Boler states of pedagogical empathy in her *Feeling Power,* empathy "often works through reducing the other to a mirror-identification of oneself, a means of rendering the discomforting other familiar and non threatening" (177). Boler affirms the incredible effort needed from both students and instructors in order to facilitate a classroom ethics that can accommodate those unlike themselves.

Many trans studies scholars critique increased calls for visibility along similar lines. Eric Stanley rejects the assimilation inherent in calls for visibility, calling instead for an alternative trans "opacity" (617). Stanley asks, "how can we be seen without being known and how can we be known without being hunted?" (618). The concept of cisgender empathy for trans people is especially fraught with respect to pedagogy. Trans people are often told that we have a responsibility to be visible, that our visible existence is pedagogical, and that this pedagogy is ultimately targeted towards cis people who we must convince not to enact violence against us. Tourmaline [cited as Reina Gossett], Eric Stanley, and Johanna Burton tell readers in *Trap Door:*

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Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility, that visibility is offered as "the primary path through which trans people might have access to livable lives. […] representation is taken up as a 'teaching tool' that allows those outside our immediate social worlds and identities to glimpse some notion of a shared humanity." (xv-xvi). Yet this pedagogy of trans visibility relies on a version of empathy that tells cis people that trans people are just like them. When a cis ally is met with trans opacity, empathy becomes far more difficult.

This pedagogical existence is not the exclusive purview of trans people but is demanded of any group who is in some way marginalized. As Audre Lorde writes against the insistence that oppressed people teach their oppressors to understand them, "Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade their responsibility for their own actions" (115). Not only does this demand to know oppressed peoples place undue pedagogical burdens on oppressed people, it is also woefully ineffective. Michel Foucault tells us of the systemic refusals to accept the knowledge demanded from oppressed people, tells us that discourses of knowledge are imbued with "a refusal concerning the very thing that was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited" (55). He tells us that these discourses are regulated within the bounds of what can be understood by power structures even as those power structures scrutinize and then discipline those whose lives can only be understood outside of its purview. Given these failings of understanding as a site of ethical behavior, we might think towards an alternative ethical orientation towards learning in our classrooms.

Rather than assuming mastery of multicultural content as the ethical and intellectual goal for our classroom, we can facilitate learning differently - in ways that acknowledge the importance

of our work in introducing privileged students to conversations that our marginalized students have been having for their entire life, and in ways that also push our marginalized students further into those conversations than they are used to going. However, we cannot do this if we continue to privilege a mastery of content in cases where the content reflects the lived experiences of marginalized people. Instead of attempting to scaffold the lives of marginalized people, we can enact a model of education based in unintelligibility – a model I call deep-end teaching.

Where the multicultural scaffolding model aims for a shared understanding of marginalized identities, deep-end teaching dismisses the supposed need for common ground. It asks students to establish a certain level of comfort with radical difference. This comfort then bears the possibility of welcoming different experiences into our classroom without the demand that those experiences become legible, encouraging students to question the value of legibility. Practicing deep-end teaching shows that we trust our students to be good people, to handle topics with sensitivity, curiosity, and intelligence. Furthermore, it allows us to bring more diverse voices into the classroom without tokenizing their diversity, making that the sole focus of their contribution to students learning.

I would like at this point to break down the metaphor of the "deep end," hopefully assuaging any concerns about the flippancy of "tossing" students into anything. My primary metaphorical term, the "deep-end" [of a swimming pool], refers specifically to conversations about the experience of unlike others, particularly experiences so different from the students' as to make them unfathomable. As one of my students said in a post-class interview, it was particularly challenging and rewarding to work with a text from a nonbinary author precisely because she *couldn't* find a way to interpret the author's experience through a lens that she had already developed:

I think that, at first, my instinct was resistance to understanding it [nonbinary gender identity] because it was so foreign to me. Not that I was resistant to people who were nonbinary, but it was really hard to process what it meant. […] that subconscious resistance where my brain just didn't know how to link what I was hearing to how to understand it. (Russel)

In the quote, Russel reflects on her initial desire for quick understanding, though she acknowledges that this discomfort at an unmet desire did not preclude learning or caring about a nonbinary author. When I suggest tossing students into the deep-end, I certainly hope not to imply that discussing the experiences of others is dangerous enough to drown our students. Rather, there is untapped potential in our students –they can in fact swim already, albeit clumsily at first, and we do them a disservice by not recognizing this potential in them. Though they have been taught that the way to get to the deep end of unfamiliar experiences is to relate them – little by little – to familiar ones, students are able to abide vast amounts of unintelligibility, so long as they trust that this unintelligibility will not reflect poorly on them in the classroom.

My first opportunity to practice deep-end teaching was in the fall semester of 2017, where I was teaching a course called Imagining Social Justice. In one unit of the course, I taught a relatively unknown chapbook of poetry by Alok Vaid-Menon, a trans nonbinary Indian-American poet. Their work challenges homonationalism and systemic violence against queer bodies; they do this by exploring the complex relationship between pain, generosity, and systemic violence – or, on seeing the good in a world that is willing to destroy you in order to make sense of itself. I told students the pronouns Vaid-Menon uses, as I would any other author, but I didn't offer the students supplementary texts on nonbinary identity. Vaid-Menon's work focuses heavily on humanity's ability to connect with one another without/before understanding, and it felt like a powerful enactment of their philosophy to ask students to work with their poetry without the solidness of an academic-theoretical framework based in supplemental queer theory texts.

A large part of Vaid-Menon's emotional and pedagogical labor is devoted to daily interaction in public with strangers. These interactions are not explicitly solicited, but Vaid-Menon dresses in bright, genderfuck attire on the streets of New York City, resulting in abrupt, sometimes dangerous interactions that unsettle strangers' understandings of gender without the scaffolding process of a gender theory class. As one can imagine, these interactions often inflict a great deal of pain on Vaid-Menon. Yet Vaid-Menon is unflinchingly empathetic towards the world.

> Sometimes I wish "the world" staged a Q&A with "us." I would raise my hand and ask it: "WHO BROKE YOUR HEART?" I would listen. Tell it:
> **"I AM SORRY**." (27)

Conventional trans "visibility" is equally unappealing to Vaid-Menon. In one of their poems, they ask "what would it mean to have people say 'i'm here' instead of 'you're fabulous?' what would it mean to no longer have to be fabulous to survive?" (3). In another, they link typical affirmations of trans identity to typical transphobic comments:

> there are hundreds of photos of me circulating in text threads and web forums across the world. "look at this souvenir i found in new york" "look at this thing today i saw at the mall" "#me" "#same" "#mybf " "#tearemoji" "#wtf" "#goals" what i have learned is that it is only socially permissible to identify with me online. there is a type of loneliness that comes from everyone staring at you but no one seeing you. every time someone takes a photo of me i want to give them a hug to remind them that i am real. but the moment a meme becomes a person, the screen cracks and there is violence. (7-8)

Vaid-Menon enacts a prefigurative political relationship with their audience where "nonbinary 101" becomes superfluous to the project of empathy. They write not for a cis audience nor specifically for a trans audience but for an audience who can share in their vulnerability, for an audience whose confusion will not be a barrier to compassion. Readers are invited to be brave and vulnerable with Vaid-Menon, to create a world very different from the New York they recount in their poems.

Part of the impetus for my tossing students into the deep end with regard to Vaid-Menon's identity involved a course goal that asked them not to be paralyzed by the typical attitude towards social justice issues. I ask students to "thoughtfully and critically engage authors and classmates in conversations about complex topics, even when they are unfamiliar with the particulars of those topics" (Appendix A.1). I didn't want my students thinking that if they tried to hold a conversation without expertise in the subject that they would be at risk of causing grievous harm. I found that we were able to mitigate harm quite well in the classroom, and that students' fear of causing harm was actually often cited as one of the contributing factors to not doing or saying the right thing in a given situation. This coincided with another one of the course goals for the class: taking action in uncertainty. This course goal reads:

> Students will be able to let go of the rigidity of certainty and open themselves to engaging topics with inquisitiveness, even those topics they feel strongly about. They will understand the difference between spacious knowledge and claims of certainty. Most importantly, students will engage social action within this framework of inquisitiveness, while not allowing their lack of certainty to debilitate their social justice efforts. (Appendix A.1)

The decision to encourage action in uncertainty was also a political one. My course was designed to emphasize solidarity action rather than expertise-driven conceptions of social justice.[16] Students came into the course with one or two causes that they were passionate about, but they soon realized they were all working towards similar goals, even if they were using different analytical frameworks or specialized language. This allowed students passionate about net neutrality to collaborate with students passionate about indigenous Mexican rights without either student being an expert in (or even necessarily aware of) what the other passionately valued. It also worked to counteract some of the cultural hesitation with regards to having these emotionally charged conversations. I find that this reluctance to talk openly about race, gender, and other social

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[16] See Chapter 5 for more on solidarity.

issues often comes from a place of genuine caring, of not wanting to say the wrong thing, not wanting to hurt someone. But ultimately, we know that silence on these issues is part of the problem, so it is up to teachers to get our students to a point where they feel capable enough in their own ethics and basic intelligence that they can find that balance of confidence and humility that will enable them to join conversations where they may not already have expertise.

3.1 Uncertainty's Role in Good Thinking/Writing

As Dave Bartholomae says in his interview "Stop Making Sense," student-writers have been trained in "the rhetoric of mastery." They have been trained to make what they can of a text and to ignore what challenges them, what produces nuance, what is difficult (Bartholomae 267). A cohesive and well supported argument is valued higher than a paper folding in on itself because it's struggling to come to terms with the complexity of a topic. Students do not like to admit that they do not fully know a subject; they are terrified of mistakes, as we all are (Elbow 5). This is especially the case in the context of volatile topics, topics that could potentially offend others. This rhetorical gesture, admitting limited knowledge, is not one that is frequently rewarded within the educational apparatus. As such, it is more likely that the student has been encouraged to take a particular position in an argumentative paper, to ignore or counter obstacles to that argument, and to investigate/research a topic until they are able to tie everything neatly together, not until their argument unravels, though this unraveling may actually be where they learn the most.

Deep-end teaching asks teachers to prioritize teaching this rhetorical humility without embarrassment. When we reward well-constructed, simplistic papers over messy, entangled ones, we are inviting students to ignore the inherent complexity of their own thought processes, of the

experiences of others – we are inviting them to ignore the complexity of reality. Surely there are some teachers reading who would say that there is no way they could conceive of privileging simplistic, formulaic papers like the ones I have described, but to these teachers I ask how often they have written "is this your thesis statement?" or "this seems to contradict an earlier point" on a student's work. We all fall into these patterns at times. We teach students that to be unable to make sense of this inherent complexity of thought is embarrassing, that the proper rhetorical move is to pretend to be able to make sense of this world. As the student in Bartholomae's "Stop Making Sense" says when questioned how they were able to produce a cohesive summary of a difficult text: "Well, you know, I just ignored all the stuff I didn't understand in chapter 4" (267).

When students finally realize the impossibility of wrangling the complexity of reality, those trained in an ethical system that privileges content knowledge can enact a type of self-deprecation that reinforces their doubt in their ethical capacity. However, even though they doubt their abilities, students are able to empathize and take action based on that empathy. One of my students exhibited just this type of self-deprecation in an interview after our Imagining Social Justice course. In the interview, the student recalls getting into an argument with a romantic partner outside of class about the need to respect nonbinary people's use of they/them pronouns, yet the student still felt self-conscious about having "enough information" to handle nonbinary identity with care:

> I still don't have a lot of information on that subject [trans and nonbinary gender identity] and I don't know what causes someone to be like 'I'm not a guy I'm a girl, or I'm not a girl I'm a guy, or I'm both,' I don't know how that happens. And I don't want to speak on something that I know nothing about. And also if I'm knowing nothing about it and I'm just saying things it's probably really ignorant to someone who knows a lot about it or has experienced that kind of thing, and I also don't want to diminish their experience by talking on something like that - to try to act like I'm an expert. (Anonymous Student A)

The student had "enough information" to call out transphobic comments by a romantic partner, yet the student remains anxious when discussing the topic, cautious not to say anything that could

be seen as ignorant. In the interview, the student prioritizes gathering information as a way to behave ethically, even when clearly already making ethical decisions within this framework of "knowing nothing about it."

Multicultural pedagogy can make students paranoid about their ability to master knowledge of a subject position that they don't occupy. This mastery begins to look like a noble goal rather than an act of colonizing arrogance. The above student, certainly not the only one, positions ethical action as akin to comprehensive knowledge of another's subject position. The unachievable goal of understanding the other is taken to be requisite to speaking or writing ethically. It's no wonder students are hesitant to talk in our classes when we invite discussions of race, gender, and other social systems. Without inhabiting these subject positions, they believe that they do not have the requisite knowledge to act ethically. Rather than offering the generosity to forgive themselves for only having partial knowledge of nonbinary experience, the student interviewed becomes stuck in a mode of self-deprecation that vastly underestimates their ability to be kind and considerate to nonbinary individuals.

Dave Bartholomae gives us a perspective on interpretation that can help us better understand the multicultural scaffolding model. According to him, the act of interpretation itself "begins with an act of aggression" ("Wanderings" 89). Sometimes we think that students valuing a text sounds like a lively classroom, everyone working through their own approaches to the text, eagerly discussing their half-formed ideas with one another. Teachers can become anxious when our usually lively classroom stalls into silence the moment we bring charged topics to the discussion. Bartholomae suggests that this silence before interpretation of a text "could be said to be an act of respect," and that interpretation is "an attempt to speak before one is authorized to

speak, and it begins with a misreading – a re-composition of a text that can never be the text itself speaking" (89).

This is a helpful balm to the extrovert-panic that some of us experience in a silent classroom. Yet, this perspective, that interpretation is an act of aggression, can cause us to rethink some of the assumptions about the differences in power between our students and our course readings. I believe the aggression Bartholomae had in mind was that of a student's aggressive assertion of themselves as a writer who could stand among larger-than-life writers like Michel Foucault or Paulo Freire, but what happens to that aggression when the target of interpretation is instead the author of a narrowly circulated chapbook, or an author for whom misinterpretation is one of the mundane violences of their life?

Instead of taking for granted the value of interpretation, where we strive for descriptive certainty of the text and of the world, we might make the critical turn towards solidarity ourselves. The interviewed student could be taken as an example to be celebrated rather than as a failure of interpretive mastery. The student intuitively/affectively understood the romantic partner's insult to nonbinary existence and did something about it, even without having enough of an understanding of the topic that the student could articulate the precise reason the insult was insulting. This interpretation was based in affective resonance and advocacy without the need for certainty.

This concern also maps onto bigger theoretical debates regarding the place of descriptive certainty in advocacy work. For example, it's easy to get mired in the ontological squabbles associated with the slogan "trans women are women" (what is a woman, after all?). However, when we adopt slogans like "trans liberation now," we connect the lineage of transgender political thought to other critical traditions fighting for liberation through history.

From the frame of deep-end teaching, the interpretation required to answer the question "what is a woman" or "what is a trans"[17] becomes less important. Outside of a multicultural model that tells us we must understand in order to be ethical, the aggression associated with interpretation dissipates. We need not capture exactly what an author means to say, nor should we pretend that we can. By now, this is well worn pedagogical advice, yet many academic writers still operate from an ethics that privileges this type of knowledge-hunting, so that we may be authorized (not just institutionally but ethically) to speak about the experiences of others.

Because ethicality is so closely aligned to content knowledge in the multicultural scaffolding model, those who do not feel comfortable adopting a presentation of mastery risk not feeling "authorized" to behave ethically. They may begin to mistrust their ability to behave ethically at all (especially given the economic and cultural barriers to institutionalized knowledge), resulting in confusion, or worse, a self-identification against ethical behavior altogether. In writing, students might shy away from topics that ask them to behave ethically if they do not have intimate knowledge of an other's experience. Writing prompts that engage the experiences of others begin to look like minefields. How can one avoid saying something offensive while writing about someone else's experience? The challenge seems insurmountable when you add the essay instruction most students are used to – construct an argument, act like you know best, don't show your vulnerabilities. At the scale of the classroom, this self-deprecation translates to stilted conversation. As the student above says about the students in the class, "we're just all trying really hard not to be dicks" (Anonymous Student A).

Within a multicultural scaffolding model, a professor's invitation for students to speak on volatile subjects without mastery at best looks like the professor is unaware of the damage

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[17] Trans folks, please forgive my flippancy if you find it distasteful. Cis folks, don't call us "trances."

someone's ignorance can cause; at worst, it looks like we have set an elaborate ideological trap. This is an entirely sensible position for students working from a position where content knowledge necessarily precedes ethical behavior. The most ethical classroom participation for a student who is unfamiliar with the intimate lived experience related to the course's subject matter, according to the multicultural scaffolding model, is to try to absorb as much knowledge as possible. There is a sense that one is not capable of ethical action without mastering the other's subject position. Yet the students know that they will be forced to act at some point, either by being called on in class or in a written assignment. It may be that students' fear of "political correctness" on campuses is nothing more than a fundamental doubt about their own ability to engage with others ethically.

As my student expresses in the quote above, "I also don't want to diminish their experience by talking on something like that - to try to act like I'm an expert." Amassing and implementing knowledge is supposedly how one behaves ethically, yet to act like an expert rather than situating expertise in another figure in the classroom with lived experience (even if this person is only imagined) is to "diminish their experience." As my student expresses in the quote above, even after the semester is over, authority is not centered in the student's own knowledge but in the hypothetical "someone who knows a lot about it or has experienced that kind of thing." Thus, students may never feel comfortable speaking about marginalization and systems of oppression in this model, no matter how much scaffolding we provide.

One deep-end teaching technique that has helped my students overcome some of this paranoia of mastery is a knowledge-gap exercise adopted from *Teaching Queer* by Stacey Waite. Waite offers a preparatory activity for argumentative writing that attempts to circumvent students' desire for exhaustive knowledge of a subject. She asks her students to list 25 things they do not know about a topic and 25 things they cannot know about it. In Waite's words, the assignment

"asks you to begin by recording the limits of your own knowledge and experience. […] It asks you to acknowledge that all knowledge is partial knowledge, and to begin your project with a full examination of what you have failed to know, uncover, or see about this subject" (69-70). The assignment arose in response to students who wanted to "advocate for their already formed positions," though it quickly showed itself to be a useful precursor for any self-directed student writing (69).

In addition to the epistemological benefits of the assignment, inviting students to consider the limits of their own knowledge and experience, this assignment also serves as a form of ethical catharsis. Particularly when having knowledge is seen as a necessary precursor to one's ability to empathize, lack of knowledge is seen as ethically paralyzing. The assignment invites students to admit to what they do not know about their topic, often a social cause they care deeply about, and more importantly, it assumes that all of us had these gaps in knowledge. Additionally, it asks students to acknowledge that there is much important information they will never have access to, and that they were going to write about this topic anyway.

3.2 Multicultural Scaffolding's Originary Point, The Privileged Student

Any model of scaffolding requires that you make assumptions about your students' prior knowledge. In many ways this can be a useful tool for learning, but one place that scaffolding fails is when making assumptions about how much your students know about race, gender, and other types of knowledge that can come from lived experience. In these cases, I find that any attempts to scaffold these ideas result in surface-level discussions, where the conversation can be derailed by any student questioning foundational premises like "oppression exists" or "nonbinary people

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are real." One of my deep-end teaching practices is to preempt these questions with a set of community agreements adapted from the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA). Some of these are content-oriented, while others provide guidelines for how we interact with texts and with one another.

For example, I use "No One Knows Everything, Together We Know a Lot" to introduce the idea of embodied knowledge and to deconstruct the myth of the objective observer that my students will often use as a critique of autoethnographic writing. Another, "Speak Up Listen Up," encourages quiet students to contribute more and for more talkative students to hone their listening practices; this establishes a preemptive referent when group discussion becomes unbalanced. From the outset of the class, students know that there is ample room for questions and curiosity, but they also know that we will be refining our ability to differentiate discussion questions that take our classroom community deeper into thought from questions that students should investigate on their own or with me during office hours.

Even with these community agreements, many teachers would be wary about introducing nonbinary identity into a course that is not explicitly about gender and has no gender studies prerequisite. I certainly was. Often we are told to scaffold everything we teach, especially the experiences of marginalized people. We must start with white straight male experience, the conventional wisdom goes, because that will be the most relatable and therefore understandable to our students. Then we may branch out, add on a queer lens or a racial lens once we have established students' understanding of our course's subject matter through the supposedly neutral framework that they are used to. How can we prevent the normalizing impulse to imagine our students as homogeneously privileged (especially when many of them are), and our pedagogies as primarily concerned with reception by those privileged audiences?

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Even in teaching a course with social justice in the title, I was still afraid that I was going too "out of the box," that my students would rebel or that they would not be able to handle nonbinary identity with care and intelligence. I thought I might need to make the content more relatable. It is this type of thinking that keeps our syllabi filled with privileged canonical pieces even when we devote our final unit of the semester to ways that marginalized people have complicated the topics we are discussing.

Teachers can feel beholden to the well-worn advice to "meet students where they are." However, in all of the conversations that I have had regarding teaching about marginalized identities in composition classrooms, the student we are "meeting" is invariably imagined as the most privileged student possible. Our scaffolding is oriented towards these privileged students – we work hard to catch them up to students who may have lived the marginalization that is now appearing in our course materials. However, especially in these types of conversations where privileged students do not have the same life experience to draw from, this means that we ask our marginalized students to perform some of this remedial education. Or we ask them to sit patiently, to wait until they get to the most advanced special topics courses before they will find colleagues who will be able to match their lived experience with the "adequate scaffolding" to talk meaningfully about race, gender, etc.

Where the project of multicultural education is ostensibly to introduce all types of students to all types of different experiences, in practice, marginalized students have always needed to maintain a double consciousness to understand both marginalized and privileged experiences, while multicultural pedagogies disproportionately function to make marginalized experiences palatable for privileged students. Speaking to this problem, a special issue of *Radical Teacher* from 2011 interrogates the "special guest" model of presenting students with trans topics. Situated

within a critique of multiculturalist education, the authors discuss theoretical and practical violences that occur in the classroom. Within the context of the "special guest" special issue, Erica Rand explains that in a multiculturalist model of difference, trans people in the classroom are often seen by students as a pedagogical resource for the singular topic of transness. "One ironic effect of the 'special guest' phenomenon," she says, "is that special-guest status based on oppression can obscure the other reasons that the presence of special guests might well be solicited, preventing them from being seen as authors, artists, thinkers, writers, creative beings, theorists, [etc.]" (42). This result of the special guest phenomenon is noted in Marilyn Preston's article from the issue as well, as she notes that "students often also express that they 'feel bad' for transpeople having to 'survive' in this world, and how 'brave' transfolk must be to exist" (52). Students are so used to engaging with difference by recognizing the (very real) identity-based oppressions that are taught through a multiculturalist lens that they are not trained (or don't think that teachers want to hear) ways of engaging with the special-guest other than in gestures of pity.

The special issue also highlights the ways in which transness is most often used to illuminate the experiences or improve the status of cisgender students, and it argues forcefully that this should not be seen as a victory. Rand invokes Priya Kandaswamy to say that "requirements and teaching about multiculturalism and diversity often direct [or are directed towards] white, privileged students heading for careers in business where such knowledge is now considered an asset" (42). "Diversity is a commodity," states Diana Courvert, "a mother lode of 'new facts' that provide value to normalized students. The focus is on how the marginalized can serve the needs of the normative student" (27). Kate Drabinski highlights how even in women's studies classrooms and departments, trans issues are still "never central in their own right and always interesting only insofar as they illuminate more clearly 'women's' issues" (10). If we are beholden to the practice

of multicultural scaffolding, our classrooms will never be able to center the needs of marginalized people, even those classes purportedly *about* marginalized people.

Mary Bryson and Suzanne De Castell show the disproportionate control hegemonic discourses have in our classrooms in their reflections on a co-taught "lesbian studies" course in their women's studies program. Even in these special topics courses, it's quite likely that there will still be resistance to foundational premises that function as scaffolding for these more in-depth conversations. Bryson and De Castell recount one particularly difficult student in their course:

> This student showed us the disproportionate power of one. For as long as only one student 'held the line' […], all our discourses, all our actions, were permeated, were threaded through with the continuous and inescapable subtext of white heterosexual dominance, the backdrop against which everything else in these institutions happens. (And how unlike this is the 'invisibility' of one lesbian or gay man in these same settings). (294)

In a sense, there is no solution to this dominance of one in integrated spaces; marginalized communities in the academy will always be subject to the fact that discussions of race are tailored towards white students, that discussions of gender are tailored towards cisgender male students. At least this is the case under a model of multicultural scaffolding. Deep end teaching, on the other hand, allows us the freedom to let the classroom be unintelligible to our privileged students, and for this not to be seen as a failing on either their part or ours.

3.3 Ethics from Opacity

Students expect us to give them the tools to predict what is most ethical in a situation. I can almost hear your students' exasperated response to difficult discussions: "just tell me what I'm supposed to say." I certainly hear it in my classrooms. This stems from an understanding of ethical discourse practices as static, universal, and rules-based. When students are trained in a

multicultural scaffolding model that tells them that the way to prevent harm is to follow all of the rules, how could they not want to know what those rules are? The model tells them that they should wait for us to transfer some ethical discourse practice to them rather than to take up the agency involved in trying to determine, situation by situation, what would be the most compassionate action. Furthermore, multicultural scaffolding fails to acknowledge the discomfort of knowing that this deliberation is never going to guarantee the right decision. Truly ethical discourse practices are always contingent, always malleable, and they help us more quickly adapt to unforeseen dilemmas in discourse.

When discussing Vaid-Menon, many students expressed surprise that the material was so relatable. But this claim of relatability allowed for some misrecognition of experience. Various men in the class identified with the expectations put on someone assigned male at birth and various women identified with the misogyny Vaid-Menon experiences, though conversation about nonbinary identities was limited. I take this to be a result of multicultural pedagogy's suggestion that the way to empathize with others is to place their experience within one's own frame of understanding as quickly as possible. In a multicultural model, lack of identification signals a lack of empathy. In our culture, it is conventional to express empathy with statements like "I know just how you feel," or "This must be really difficult for you." However, the more important work seems to be getting students to admit that they may not be able to achieve total mastery of the content, they may not be able to identify with the author, and that they should not let that stop them from engaging with the author's work on its own terms.

Deep-end teaching is about becoming comfortable operating in a place of limited knowledge – not knowing the details of a situation or whether there is a "correct" course of action (situations are rarely that simple). We are always working from a limited knowledge. While we

strive in good faith to understand a situation, that understanding is not the foundation of our ethical decisions, and so we are not shaken or paralyzed when we realize there is more we do not know.

Another deep-end teaching technique I incorporate into my classrooms is dyad conversation practice, a type of mindful conversation practice I was first introduced to and began teaching through my local meditation community. Dyads are a practice of listening without the demands to perform "understanding" as a form of empathetic response to someone sharing their experience. There is a certain type of empathetic listening we are more familiar with: we hear a speaker explain things from their point of view, then try to fit their experiences into our own understanding of the world. This is the model of empathy that asks you to walk a mile in someone else's shoes without acknowledging that you have different-sized feet. Dyads help students practice listening in a different way – allowing space for complexity and confusion, listening without trying to categorize or assimilate what you're hearing into existing schemas, listening in a nonconceptual way.

Drawing from Russel's pedagogical reflections on dyad practice in our class, she notes both this tendency towards fitting new information into existing schemas and the growth in being given space not to understand.

> [In dyad practice] I was just listening [to the speaking partner] and processing everything they were saying. I think that sometimes, especially when you're in an environment where you're talking to people that you don't know or if you're in a conversation that you're really passionate about, you're more worried about anticipating what they're going to say so that you're more prepared to respond as opposed to just actually unbiased-ly listening to what they're saying. […] The dyad practice really helped people. The whole class - we were better at listening and taking time to respond before just saying whatever we were going to say, and there was a lot more value in the conversation. (Russel)

In the first dyad session, I invite students to get into pairs and look their partner in the eyes for a few minutes. I use the language of invitation because I am clear with my students that they do not need to participate in activities they are uncomfortable with. If a student prefers not to do an

activity, we work together to find other ways that they can participate in the lesson. Students often feel a little awkward – we can become somewhat self-conscious when we're sharing connection with others, especially nonverbal connection. Eventually, though, students settle into the experience of connecting with that person without needing to speak to fill that discomfort, growing more comfortable bearing witness. In this activity, done in the first week, students get familiar sharing intimacy and connection while also giving space and respecting boundaries.

After the initial silent dyad, most other dyads involve taking turns speaking and listening. I ask a question and one partner has some time to respond to the question uninterrupted, then I ring a bell and the second partner has the same amount of time to respond to the same question. At the beginning of a semester, the student responses are typically superficial and tentative, but as the class begins to trust one another more, the responses become quite heartfelt, in part because there is an understanding that the speaker does not need to tailor their speech in order to elicit a certain conversational response from their partner.

After each partner has responded to the question, we discuss as a class, only occasionally allowing students the time to respond individually to their partner. There is an expectation that the listener will want to respond to something or to take the conversation in a different direction based on a thread of connection they have identified with their partner; this is how most conversation happens. The structure of the activity prevents this impulse to build on similarities. The instruction is to let go of that itch for identification and to practice the intimacy that comes with giving space to others' experiences.

Related to the goal of fostering empathy across difference, I will sometimes ask students questions that challenge them to recall the pervasiveness of difference even among friends. A dyad that I enjoy facilitating with a class who has formed close bonds over the course of the term asks

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the question "What's something that your classmates will never understand about you, even if you tried your best to explain it to them?"

3.4 Rigor and Care in The Deep End

An important pedagogical tool of my classroom is asking students to share how they would like to be referred to in the third person, including their name, and their pronouns if they are comfortable. I tell them that they are not required to share pronouns, but I do encourage them to do so. Students are also explicitly invited to share new pronouns with our class later in the semester, and I have experimented with the utility of a "pronoun check-in" for this purpose. I also let students know that they are responsible for referring to one another with only what is shared. If a student uses "they/them" pronouns, we refer to them either by name or by their pronouns. If a student introduces Em's self as Em but does not share Em's pronouns, we commit to addressing Em by name.

I remain committed to the now common "pronoun circle" as pedagogical practice despite the discomfort it can bring to queer trans and nonbinary students who are unsure of whether they can trust others in the space. That hesitancy is not unwarranted. I am particularly sympathetic to students who are early in transition and do not want to choose between outing themselves as trans or asking to be misgendered, and this is one of the reasons I invite "just my name" as a valid response. However, as I explain to my students, we will be required to address one another in the third person. Without further investigation, we are forced to make assumptions about one another that are frequently misinformed. Students and I talk about gender presentation, about the ways that gender is communicated through clothing and names and all sorts of other features, but we also

talk about the way that those systems of legibility fail. "I have a hard time guessing people's gender," I tell students. And it's true. I cannot guess how to refer to someone based solely on their gender markers. And neither can most people. I know too many "they/thems" who get misgendered, too many "he/hims" and "she/hers" too.[18] And they've got nothing on the folks who only want to be referred to by name, or those who use less common pronouns like "ze/hir" or "xe/xem." The pronoun circle does not require us to justify our pronouns, to share our lived experience in order to teach each other how to act. Instead, the only scaffolding given is the very opacity of that lived experience.

Presenting a workshop on accidental misgendering at the 2018 conference of the Cultural Studies Association, I was asked whether misgendering had more to do with people's inability to adopt new language patterns or whether it was a more "substantial" issue. I responded that the inability to adopt new language patterns *is the substantial issue*. This question reveals the way that many of us fail to recognize the interplay of language and thought. In fact, the inability to adapt to new language patterns and the inability to acknowledge new realities are intimately intertwined. The language that we speak becomes the reality we inhabit. Thus, "these are my pronouns" is not simply a statement of grammar. It is certainly that, but it is also an invitation (or perhaps a pleading) to join the speaker in a world where gender is opaque enough to require further investigation.

A classroom that allows for gender opacity is simultaneously a more rigorous classroom and one less prone to gender misrecognition. It is a classroom where students understand care through the realization that people's gender expression and their physical appearance cannot

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[18] These terms in quotations are used by many people in queer communities as a tongue-in-cheek way to deflate some of the solemnity and gravitas often ascribed to gender pronouns. They are terms that spotlight a person's pronouns rather than their gender, which is helpful here but unhelpful in many other conversations. Not everyone likes this phrasing or uses it; people have complicated feelings about it, and it's not great for cisgender people to use it. (With gratitude to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha for modeling usage notes in a written work)

reliably predict how they should refer to a classmate or an instructor or an author. Without the humility and rigorous work it takes to dislodge our habituation into gender-dimorphic thinking, people will continue to slip up, make errors in their speech and writing, misgender others, even if they might have the best intentions. They might "know" the right words, being taught about the experience of others in a scaffolding model, but this information is deeply in conflict with internalized assumptions that have yet to be dislodged. Thus, they continue to make mistakes, to misgender others, and to otherwise cause harm out of an intense situatedness within a gender-dimorphic framework for reality.

Deep-end teaching reorients our classroom's approach to empathy. We acquiesce that we might not know someone's reality as intimately as they do. We adopt humility in the face of even what we think is certain. Furthermore, we understand this ignorance not to be a barrier to compassion but a fundamental condition of self and societal reflection and care. There will always be undetermined, unknown and unknowable subjects to interact with. There will always be mistakes made from ignorance. If we are brave enough to acknowledge this reality, then we cannot possibly advocate for an ethics based on understanding of the other, as is so often the model of multicultural liberalism in our classrooms. Rather, we must adopt an ethical practice that privileges the care and rigor made possible through unintelligibility. As shown in the next chapter, this approach to pedagogy opens up the inquisitiveness and situational responsiveness that teachers need to employ if we want to invite students into moments of rewarding but uncomfortable growth.

4.0 So, You Want to Make Your Students Uncomfortable: Discomfort and Consent

Through BDSM Pedagogy

Submit. Within the teacher-student relationship, and in fact many academic relationships, submission is an inevitable result of writing. One submits work to their teachers, submits for peer review, submits to academic journals and hiring committees. It's all incredibly erotic in a way. A teacher's demands for submission – even as unassuming as the submission of a final project – reflect the power differentials that students and teachers enter into in the classroom. Much has been said on the distribution of power in teaching. The field of composition studies as we understand it today could be understood as a result of the student empowerment movement of the 60's and subsequent responses that attempted to name and wield teacherly authority justly (Kynard). These approaches can sometimes lead one to perceive the power differential in a classroom as an intractable problem. Yet many students find support in the predictable and structured hierarchy of the roles. In my own classroom, many students have asked me to be *more* strict with them, holding them to tighter deadlines in order to support their time-management with projects, for example. The question of care and rigor in our classrooms is one of authority – what is our obligation to our students? Here I argue that we might find the answer in an unlikely place, BDSM.

To be quite explicit, I am drawing attention to the polysemy of submission here in order to highlight connections between teacherly best practices and safer-sex practices related to BDSM, particularly the negotiation of consent and the desire to be pushed into a place of discomfort. I am of course not advocating that we bring our riding crops and St. Andrew's crosses into the classroom (unless you and your students are into it), but that we draw from a lineage of knowledge that has

particular expertise in the realm of administering discomfort on willing participants. This work feels particularly compelling as a project of queer pedagogy, which has a long history of pushing back against the taboos of sexuality and of finding wisdom in that which would otherwise be considered too vulgar, suggestive, or intimate to discuss in the context of the classroom (Alexander 2; hooks 191).

Queer theory's questioning of the normative is commonly invoked to support a sort of laissez-faire freedom in which consensual interactions between adults are not subject to community reproach (Warner). This is often the understanding of BDSM held by those who are not intimately familiar with the community, but this libertarianism is a poor representation of actual BDSM practices and values. This framing fundamentally misunderstands the need for safety, care, and community critique that are central to BDSM and other queer spaces that rely on an ethic of care in community (Crabb; K. Stryker), while also ignoring the centrality of these inter-relational ethics to significant arenas of queer/feminist theory (Hoagland; Huffer).

The composition classroom is no stranger to discomfort, as Megan Boler establishes in her *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education,* published in 1998. In this text, Boler introduces a pedagogy of discomfort, widely adopted as an affective framework for introducing critical pedagogy into composition classrooms. Boler is writing into a budding debate in the field, where Min-Zhan Lu's advocacy for conflict and struggle in the pedagogical process is met with resistance from those who advocate for a pedagogy that centers care and accommodation. Yet as with most academic debates, those at the center of them have far more in common than one might imagine based on the vehemence of scholars denouncing one side or the other. As Brian Ray says in his summary of the conflict, the two sides were virtually the same, advocating for the gentle pushing of students to stretch their capacities and make space for the conflicting identities they bring with

them into the classroom. "One calls the pedagogy 'conflict,' the other 'caring'" (116). Boler synthesizes the finer details of these trends in her *Feeling Power* to arrive at a pedagogy of discomfort, one which centers the wellbeing of the student while also naming the somewhat dangerous situation that can be found in the classroom.

Boler introduces her influential pedagogy of discomfort by asking the reader, "What do we – educators and students – stand to gain by engaging in the discomforting process of questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions?" (176). Boler goes on to argue persuasively for a critical pedagogy that acknowledges the affective labor of the classroom, asking us to admit that much of the work of education is helping students overcome their aversion to the discomforts of failure, difficulty, and critical self-reflection. Boler's work speaks to much of what we now might refer to as resilience training for social issues – unlearning white fragility responses that respond to discomfort with unthinking defensiveness.

Teachers themselves hold much ambivalence in the actual implementing of discomfort, as Andrew Anastasia illustrates in his "Teaching Discomfort: Students' and Teachers' Descriptions of Discomfort in First-Year Writing Classes." He describes situations in which "teachers voiced desires for using discomfort to push students, yet were also afraid they would 'cross the line'" (26). Anastasia also points to the various types of discomfort possible in the classroom, with students raising concerns about discomfort being uncritically taken up without specialized training, and the potential for teachers to harm students through their attempts to discomfort them. Teachers might apply discomfort overzealously, taking discomfort to be evidence of growth with little acknowledgment of the space between discomfort and the growth that may have incited it or of the possibility that their students' discomfort may arise from a wholly different source than the one the teacher imagined.

Not all discomfort is "productive" (however fraught that term may be). Many in positions of power hold a dangerous assumption that the mere presence of discomfort is evidence of a rigorous learning environment. However, some discomfort *is* productive, and students know this. Acknowledging the desirability of discomfort and the pleasure that can come from being discomforted, BDSM frameworks act as an important antidote to the paternalist assumption that one would never choose discomfort without a coercive force. This recognizes the desire among students for an education that will push them to grow in new and exciting ways, and it recognizes the judicious application of this push can in fact be an act of care. A queer consent framework is our best way forward for discerning when to apply discomfort in our classrooms and how to do so in a way that elicits the most growth from our students. Adopting the harm-reduction ethic of BDSM communities allows for teacherly attunement towards students' situational capacities for discomfort as well as students' development in their ability to understand and advocate for their needs as they engage in rewarding and discomforting growth.

4.1 Discernment

In my FYW Gender Studies course, we spend one week learning about feminist governance and decision-making structures, namely consensus decision making. Among other materials, students read Seeds for Change's "Consensus Decision Making" with the instruction that we will make an in-class consensus decision on the readings to be discussed the following week, drawing from proposals that they submit ahead of time. In one section of this course, several students expressed interest in a set of readings that investigated gender's relationship to religion. Some other students, however, were skeptical that this conversation could be handled respectfully. They

argued that it would result in unproductive discomfort, potentially triggering religious trauma in students and damaging classmates' relationships.

All concerns had been phrased impersonally up to this point, so I took a quick poll as anonymously as I could to determine if any students in the class were concerned that they themselves might be triggered – there were a few – and I communicated this to the class. As students still seemed conflicted about abandoning the proposal, I offered them my own boundary, solidifying as I watched the conversation. Even though students were willing to stay in the discomfort of our consensus process longer, it was clear to me that we had shifted from the discomfort of trying out new forms of discussion to the discomfort of social gridlock: the discomfort was no longer moving learning forward. So, I offered a "block."[19] I would not agree to consensus on this proposal given the possibility of harm and the fact that students had signed up for the class to discuss language and gender, not religion – advising the students who were eager to have these conversations to take them up outside the classroom.

After I initiated the block, the students and I felt a sense of relief that there was some forward movement, as the class had stalled in their discomfort and disagreement, yet I still had a nagging feeling that I was going through the motions of consensus without its actual presence. Although I was merely one member of the consensus decision-making body, my boundary meant that this proposal would not move forward. This would have been the case if any student had enacted a "block," but they hadn't. I felt like we had fallen back into the teacher-as-decision-maker model, because in that moment of discomfort, we had. A block is available to any consensus-based decision-maker, but it hadn't come from anyone, it came from me. Still, given the discomfort of

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[19]A block, as articulated by Seeds for Change, is shorthand for "I have a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal that has not been resolved. We need to look for a new proposal."

most students in the classroom compounded with most people's discomfort in their first time engaging in a consensus process, it only makes sense that I felt much more authorized to name and set a boundary around my discomfort than students were. This reveals the ways that the teacher-as-decision-maker isn't always something that should be avoided. Holding this role can often be deeply supportive for students who may have less training in self-advocacy in our institution and less authority in the classroom than we do.

Multiple students felt uncomfortable enough that they expressed indirect resistance to the proposal, offering compromises or alternatives that made it clear that they were not comfortable with themselves or their classmates being hurt by the proposed discussion of religion. Yet none had specifically blocked the proposal in order to clear the way for those compromises or alternatives, even though the utility of the "block" was explained in our review of the document they were given. Despite popular accusations of college students being fragile and censorious, none felt comfortable blocking the proposal even though multiple students had fundamental disagreements with the core of the proposal and didn't feel comfortable moving it forward. They had every permission to "block," but they stayed in the discomfort even after it stopped being productive. Or they could not see a way out of the discomfort that didn't force them to go through the additional discomfort of naming a firm boundary, one which would likely be met with some amount of resistance from their classmates.

While students did have the same authority to block as I did, their ability to truly advocate for themselves was inhibited by the social conditioning of the classroom, which often trains students to minimize their needs and exhibit a type of hyper-cooperative attitude towards their peers.[20] In light of these social inhibitions, we must be particularly cautious of our drive toward

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[20] A hyper-cooperative attitude familiar to any teachers who assign discussion board responses

discomfort, as students are often pushing themselves to be more discomforted than we give them credit for.

I am not generally at odds with the prevailing sentiment towards discomfort that runs through composition studies and other fields attenuated to critical pedagogy – that discomfort can be a productive site of student growth. More concerning to me is the reckless and undiscriminating application of discomfort advocated by many conservative critics of the university. "Kids these days," the critiques go, "are too fragile, too coddled, too emotional, too protected. They need to know what the real world is like – uncomfortable. And it is our responsibility to acculturate them into that world." This view finds discomfort of any kind to be beneficial. This "all discomfort is good discomfort" framework is the thesis of Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's *The Coddling of the American Mind,* which offers a vastly influential attack on student accommodations in university settings disguised as an apolitical plea for "emotional resilience."

While split into three parts which variously accuse the university system of encouraging fragility, irrationality, and black-and-white thinking, the book's main solution to all three problems is to discomfort students. The book's first section specifically grounds its methodology in "antifragility," making the case that universities have gone too far in applying safety measures not just to protect a student's physical safety but their "emotional safety," a term which the authors are predictably derisive of. The authors argue from the maxim "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" to dismiss any amount of care work being advocated for by students, teachers, or administrators. Lukianoff and Haidt's solution to their caricature of the litigious, intolerant, and fragile student body? More discomfort. The more fragile the student, the more dire the need for teacherly administration of discomfort.

This administration of discomfort as a pedagogical solution for the supposedly fragile and intolerant social-justice oriented student can be found not only outside the university but increasingly making its way into university as well. The University of Chicago's 2020 admissions letter, the document meant to invite the student into the university's learning community, offers one paragraph of welcome and congratulations, one half-paragraph on the importance of civility and mutual respect, and over four paragraphs on the importance of "the free exchange of ideas," which builds into an attached free-speech monograph taken from University of Chicago professor John Boyer's *Academic Freedom and the Modern University* (Ellison). The welcome letter dismisses "so-called trigger warnings" and safe spaces, and it states clearly that they do not cancel invited speakers because they are "controversial."

Most notable here is the hostility towards the very notion of warnings and safety. One could respond (and many have) that universities are responsible for the *curation* of speech as much as the protection of controversial truths. In the letter there is a denial of the student's ability to be hurt (as there is in Lukianoff and Haidt's dismissal of emotional injury as a valid form of harm), yet a valorization of discomfort as evidence of learning, an expectation that students "engage in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement." Note the paternalistic and dismissive "*even* disagreement," [emphasis added] as if any student expects to have rigorous debate without disagreement. We have this paternalistic tone again in the following sentence, where the student is warned that at times this type of debate may "*even* cause discomfort" [emphasis added]. Missing is any mention of the racism, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, and a litany of other sources of discomfort that are often defended under the guise of free speech and academic freedom.

Likewise, the actual claim of rigor is deeply suspect. There is no mention of cancelling invited speakers because they are hawking pseudoscience. The very premise of "controversy"

signals to the University of Chicago and to those sympathetic to "free speech" "marketplace of ideas" rhetoric that there is something valuable in hearing this person's views. And yet, as the tired response to this assumption goes, no one would expect a university to protect and promote the speech of an invited speaker who believed that the Earth was flat. Rigor is evident, according to the logic of the letter, by the very fact that people are claiming grievance. We know this not to be true, and yet we may occasionally find ourselves or our colleagues falling into this way of thinking anyway, perhaps even supported by the misapplication of various discomfort pedagogies in our fields.

But all this sloppy and overzealous application of discomfort is unsafe and unsexy – let's return to BDSM. The application of discomfort through a BDSM framework allows us to bring together the disparate work on discomfort in queer pedagogy and composition studies towards a discomfort pedagogy that is resilient against paternalistic overapplication of discomfort. Through this framework we might find a distinction between the judicious, careful discomfort emerging from trends in critical pedagogy and the undiscerning, totalizing discomfort that is a result of paternalistic anti-care politics.

Looking at practices of discernment in BDSM, we see a heavy emphasis on consent and pleasure[21] in what "counts" as BDSM. While legal and psychoanalytical frameworks indiscriminately pathologize BDSM, practitioners have sophisticated schemas for understanding their own practices and take umbrage particularly at the grouping of BDSM alongside sexual acts for which consent could not be possible, like pedophilia and various types of sexual harassment (Bauer 7). Darren Langdridge and Trevor Butt tell us that central to BDSM practitioner's

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[21] I use "pleasure" expansively here to include sensations traditionally recognized as pleasurable as well as sensations of pain, humiliation, etc. that simultaneously feel rewarding for the participant.

understanding of themselves is consent (40), which we will address later in the chapter. However, there is an additional aspect of practitioner's self-understanding – their expertise – that must be accounted for as well: "*we know what we are doing* [emphasis added]*,* and what we are doing is consensual. Period" (Moser, Madeson, and Madeson 71). Negotiating BDSM includes "collecting information, opening up possibilities and pointing out options," as well as developing the "skills to read body language and to communicate verbally and non-verbally throughout any encounter or relationship" (Bauer 81; 85). These techniques are all forms of discernment – gathering information before a session, paying close attention during, and checking in afterwards in order to ensure that the person administering the discomfort is following the lead of the person enduring it. This discernment is particular to the person and also to the moment. Ongoing verbal and nonverbal communication is essential; someone's personal history might make a certain type of play feel especially risky where to someone else it might feel relatively safe, or something may have happened earlier that day to make their body less able to withstand discomfort that they are usually excited about.

Another important aspect of BDSM safety is the acknowledgment that not just personal but also cultural histories will affect someone's tolerance for certain types of discomfort. As Ariane Cruz states in *The Color of Kink,* BDSM dynamics are always inflected by the history of slavery, with many aspects of BDSM – domination/submission, slave play, and the use of ropes, collars, and whips – calling to mind cultural memories of racial trauma. And yet Cruz refuses outright condemnation of BDSM, saying that "BDSM is a critical site from which to reimagine the formative links between black female sexuality and violence" (33). Cruz argues that race play (a BDSM practice that explicitly centers and heightens interplay between partners' racial identities) is "a particularly problematic yet powerful BDSM practice for black women" (24). Cruz

problematizes earlier work in black feminist critiques of BDSM, yet she acknowledges the deep risks and traumas that are associated with this exploration of discomfort.

Bauer as well notes that despite the risks, the discomfort associated with BDSM has the potential to be not just transgressive but transformative, resulting in "shiftings or changes within the individuals which enabled them to relate differently to their social contexts" (187). Yet Cruz and Bauer take great pains to center individual actors in their discussions of the transformative power of discomfort and are understandably reluctant to make any prescriptive claims. The prioritization of situational awareness is essential for the dangerous intimacies being played with in the realm of BDSM, but this awareness is just as necessary in the dangerous intimacies of the classroom.

While there has been resounding support for the idea that discomfort can be pedagogically valuable, there is little articulation in the pedagogical literature about where the distinction between valuable and unnecessary discomfort resides. Despite the utility of discomfort frameworks provided by Boler's pedagogy of discomfort, I cannot help but notice the flattening of the "educators and students" in Boler's question above: "What do we – educators and students – stand to gain by engaging in the discomforting process of questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions?" (176). Rather than differentiate between students' varying levels of exposure to discomfort and self-reflection, emphasis is given to the potential benefits to educators and students as a whole. Though our field has had decades-long debates about students' differing levels of preparedness when it comes to the more technical skills of our classroom, our professional literature seems unable to acknowledge that some students are much more familiar with discomfort than others, and that different types of discomfort will be more or less useful for different students.

Discomfort can be attributed to a variety of sources that are often deeply at odds. Students can feel discomfort as a result of the difficult and rewarding work of interrogating their own values and beliefs and developing more complex ways of understanding the world. They can feel discomfort at the loss of privileges that they have come to expect in a classroom: as the widely circulated adage goes, "when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression" (Unknown). They can also feel discomfort as a result of an environment which is unable or unwilling to accommodate them – as many marginalized students know, activities that are supposed to get students "out of their comfort zones" are often designed with little attention to their potentially retraumatizing effects on marginalized students. These have included writing prompts in queer pedagogy texts asking students to freewrite as the opposite gender and then share their work with a classmate (Alexander) or middle school writing prompts that ask students to "choose to be a slave or a slave owner" (Matney). Discomfort can appear as a shorthand for any one of these types of experiences, positive or negative. However, it should be clear that only some types of discomfort are valuable, and any instructor advocating discomfort should be able to differentiate the many types of discomfort that appear in our classrooms.

While much queer pedagogy aligns with the counter-hegemonic possibilities of discomfort, some use discomfort to justify linguistic violence through queer pedagogical frameworks. Blu Buchanan, in their piece "A Burning White Ga(y)ze" in the *Confronting Trans Antagonism in the Academy a Digital Toolkit*, shows us that this violent discomfort can be seen particularly in white gay men in the academy. These men invoke the playful/provocative attitude that is a hallmark of queer theory and activism to protect the power afforded them by their proximity to whiteness.

Buchanan is speaking directly to the "Grad School as Conversion Therapy" controversy, brought into the national spotlight with Grace Lavery's article "Grad School as Conversion

Therapy." In the article, Lavery critiques the manifesto, no longer available, of Penn State University's Christopher Reed, Distinguished Professor of English, Visual Culture, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. The manifesto on his departmental profile page outlined his pedagogical dismissiveness towards student pronouns and justified his practice of knowingly misgendering trans students, a practice he continued after being confronted by students on multiple occasions (Lee and Forsyth). Yet Reed cloaks himself in the language of rigor and intellectualism, citing academic freedom, free speech, and rigorous debate. Reed says in the manifesto that he desires "a reasoned variety of pronoun address and citation" (cited in Lavery). In response to Lavery's criticism, Reed and another colleague, Christopher Castiglia, publish "Conversion Therapy v. Re-Education Camp: An Open Letter to Grace Lavery," saying that current trans advocacy in the university system "looks less like activism or scholarship and more like adolescent acting-out." Reed and Castiglia's article is filled with these accusations of youth, accusing Lavery of adopting "the pose of youthful outrage" and saying that "perhaps we should not be surprised to find behaviors associated with adolescents proliferating, tolerated and sometimes even encouraged within educational institutions." If this infantilizing rhetoric sounds familiar, it's for good reason.

Reed and Castiglia's article is an almost beat-for-beat reiteration of Lukianoff and Haidt's anti-fragility argument. The two professors claim that Lavery's article is "a textbook example of the problems we face – with the textbook being Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt's *The Coddling of the American Mind*." They dismiss the "'violence' of being misrecognized" and enacting a bombastic declaration of reverse-oppression in the university at the hands of Big Trans: "Apparently it has come to this: furtive acts of solidarity and melancholy retreats from teaching by gay, lesbian, and feminist faculty in the face of a vocal constituency that, enthralled by the spectacle of its own outrage, has substituted a 'call-out culture' of buzzwords around sex and

gender for any semblance of dialogue." Yet buzzwords abound in Reed and Castiglia's article, deploying terms like "toxic call-out culture" and "grievance studies" taken from Lukianoff and Haidt. Reed and Castiglia are right to cite discomfort and provocation as an important pedagogical tool, especially for queer pedagogy. However, the burden of imposed, inescapable discomfort must also be considered, a discomfort borne by those most incongruous with the university as it is often imagined.

Reed and Castiglia make frequent references to the ineducability of the trans people who advocate for themselves and one another. They say that Lavery is trying "to shut down, rather than understand" the instructors, that trans students "enrolled in the course not to be taught, or even to learn together, but to monitor and suppress any deviation from their righteous litany." Reed and Castiglia express their disgust not just with trans theory but also trans organizing, bemoaning "the angry protection of carefully curated trans self-fashioning on college campuses." Reed and Castiglia see all discomfort as pedagogical, and thus see misgendering as educative – attempting to produce resilience in hyperfragile trans students.

In Blu Buchanan's analysis of the controversy, they particularly note the racial tenor of Reed and Castiglia's "free speech" claims, pointing towards the ways that speech is evacuated of its materiality and potential to cause harm in an attempt to reinforce norms of white masculine rigor set against the emotional infantilism ascribed to marginalized people. This white masculine devotion to "free speech" despite potential harm to others manifests particularly in the ways that the instructors justify and find pleasure in oppressive behaviors, in their "attempts to garner the right to abuse" (Buchanan). These professors "want the academy, and 'reasoned discussion' to be fun (for them)." Buchanan suggests instead fostering instructors' own negative affects, particularly discomfort, as a way out of the "pleasure-at-oppressing." Buchanan advocates "holding yourself

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still and embracing discomfort when your power is revealed." Thus discomfort for Buchanan is something not to be forced on others in positions of lesser power but instead should be elected into by those with greater power as a practice of opening to others. Buchanan is particularly attentive to power differentials here, moving us towards the issue of consent through discussions of power imbalances in the classroom.

The "pleasure-at-oppressing" that Buchanan is attending to is a taboo often worked through in BDSM practices. Yet Reed and Castiglia's disregard for their students, their inability to see their desire to learn and grow, present all of the hallmarks of a bad dom. Where the dom/top role in a BDSM encounter is characterized by "responsibility, risk awareness, technical knowledge, and self-control," Reed and Castiglia abandon any sense of responsibility in favor of a form of "subversion" and "play" that centers their pleasure not *in accord with* but *instead of* the pleasure of their students (Hitzler 141; Reed and Castiglia).

Ultimately, what practices of discernment indicate is that a totalizing adoption of discomfort is dangerous to our students' wellbeing. Yet discomfort must be faced if we are to address social issues in the classroom. The distinction lies in who gets to initiate the discomfort, whether discomfort may be refused, and the extent to which those experiencing the discomfort find pleasure in it. We should not imagine our students as ignorant of the utility and occasional pleasure of discomfort in the classroom. But if we are to incite discomfort in our students with a clear conscience, we must demonstrate those rewards and invite our students into discomfort rather than have it forced upon them.

4.2 Pleasure

Our students are overwhelmingly willing to buy into our classes on the day-to-day, though there are of course plenty of barriers they face on the way to an enthusiastic reception of our lesson plans. Students don't *want* to be wasting their time, and despite their exhaustion, many *do* see inherent value in the course goals we set for them. I've found most students to be eager for the self-shattering experience of ambiguity that makes way for newer, more complicated paradigms of understanding the world. Students want to be pushed. Students want to grow.

Yet from the way our pedagogy discusses discomfort, one would think that it was the most bitter medicine imaginable. Making space for students to be uncomfortable while learning is very important and powerful, but framing students as reluctant to grow to the point that they need to be non-consensually pushed beyond their limits is paternalistic, maybe even verging into sadism (and not the fun kind). Instead, we might ask ourselves what it is about discomfort that we are so attracted to, and whether we might find a way to share that attraction with our students.

I do not want to discredit the drive towards discomfort; there is nothing wrong with the desire to push students beyond their capacities, to watch them develop resiliency, to grow through what they could not have imagined being able to withstand at the beginning of the semester. As we know from the role of the dom/top in BDSM, the drive towards discomfort can in fact be quite benevolent. And the discomforting teacher hopes for the students to enjoy the discomfort. They hope for a student who *wants* to be discomforted. And many students do. Many come to our classrooms with a desire to be pushed, to learn about our subject from someone who has been thinking deeply about our course materials and topics for much longer than they have. Many want to be shaken out of old ways of thinking, so long as there are compelling alternatives to replace that thinking. In these drives there is a desire to have their ideological boundaries challenged,

tested, to be irrevocably changed by the professor and the course materials, a desire to have old beliefs questioned to the point that the student realizes that they want to abandon them in favor of more thoughtful positions.

Megan Boler's pedagogy of discomfort is primarily interested in the discomfort associated with losing a solid sense of self, the discomfort one experiences in outgrowing the familiar and habitual thought patterns and scripts one inhabits. She cites from John Dewey's work on the self-shattering discomfort of growth, saying "To 'break' these habits that constitute the 'very structure of the self' necessarily faces one with fears of loss, both felt losses (of personal and cultural identities) and literal losses. 'Loss is our human lot … The rhythm of expansive growth [is] a way of learning to cope with the paradoxical relation between expansive growth and loss'" (Boler 193; no amendments). While Boler and Dewey are right to highlight the sense of loss that can arise from this discomfort, it is important to acknowledge the other sensations that can arise instead of and alongside loss. One might come to understand that the squirm of discomfort can be a pleasant one.

It's true, the shattering of the self can lead to pain; to suggest that a teacher should provoke students to question their identity and beliefs when they may be only tenuously holding to their sense of self in the first place might be reckless and irresponsible. Yet with students' consent, student and teacher may find the practice of letting go of ego-driven habits, beliefs, and thought patterns to be an intensely pleasurable experience.

Queer theory is an apt site of exploration for the thin (sometimes untenable) line between pleasure and discomfort. Articulating the pleasure that can be found in this destruction of the self, Leo Bersani takes up Georges Battaile's work on jouissance, an experience of ego-destroying that is sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes ecstatic, and often both. In experiencing jouissance,

according to Bersani, "the opposition between pain and pleasure become irrelevant […] the self is exuberantly discarded" (217-18). Drawing on the work of Foucault, Bersani says, "pleasure occurs whenever a certain threshold of intensity is reached, when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes" (217). Losing oneself can be initially discomforting, yes, but also self-shatteringly pleasurable.

Aneil Rallin, author of *Dreads and Open Mouths,* reminds us that the transformative work of writing and teaching writing is full of this discomfort that undoes us, some invited and some unexpected. Embedded in discussions of discomfort is a framework of letting go of the self and all its attendant habits and beliefs – a deeply troubling premise for many members of this institution who do not have a secure sense of self in the university to begin with, given the university's history of exclusion. Of the young writer returned to throughout the book, Rallin says, "he is afraid that if he doesn't write in the master tongue, he will not be taken seriously, will not be heard. But he is more afraid of losing himself in the master tongue even if it is only a socially constructed self (and what other kind of self is there?)" (52).

Rallin asks us to consider the pain of language work, both the pain imposed from others and the pain of unmaking and rediscovering ourselves outside of the stories told about us. They ask us to consider pain a source of deep pleasure and power. They spend much of their book contemplating the nature of risk and the rupturing of the self as it pertains to writing and the teaching of writing. "Ruptured by rhetoric/language," they say, "my dreads and open mouths rupture back. In such rupturings may lie the possibility for decolonized queer imaginaries to emerge, for other(ed) subjectivities, spaces, discourses to surface" (3). They depict the deep pleasure and agency of this discomforting work in a vignette of a boy in love with language: "Language does not come easily to him. He struggles with words. He loves words, but his

relationship to words is uneasy, troubled, tentative. He wants both to do and undo language at once" (54). Rallin reflects the beauty of becoming unmade, the intimacy, the pleasure of dissolution and reconstruction of the self as a practice of composition, particularly for marginalized people who typically have little control over the stories we are interpellated into.

Hil Malatino takes note of the intimate connections between BDSM and transness, reminding us that "care is necessary in the wake of profound recalibrations of subjectivity and dependency […] It is what needs to be provided in order to help a subject heal in the wake of massive upheaval and transformation, and it is what facilitates and supports emergence into a radically recalibrated experience of both bodymind and the world it encounters" (3). Speaking directly on the paradox of trans pleasure through self-shattering discomfort, Susan Stryker celebrates queer BDSM communities and articulates BDSM as "a technology for the production of (trans)gendered embodiment, a mechanism for dismembering and disarticulating received patterns of identification, affect, sensation and appearance, and for reconfiguring, coordinating and remapping them in bodily space" (43). Here she speaks to the mixture of pain and pleasure in queer and trans BDSM communities as an enactment of increased agency, performing the sometimes painful but often ecstatic practice of disarticulating and reconfiguring the self.

Consensual risk taking is of central concern to BDSM communities, and the associated discomfort is frequently invoked as a transformative source of pleasure and self-understanding. Robin Bauer also explores the union of pleasure and discomfort in her *Queer BDSM Intimacies,* where she says her interview partners "used BDSM for exploring, pushing and transgressing their own and cultural boundaries. This helped them to encounter the limits of their bodies and to experience bodies as boundary projects that can be opened up to transformational processes" (14). For many in the BDSM community, particularly those who take on a bottom/submissive role, the

practices elicit pleasure in the sense of agency that can come from pushing the body/mind to its limits, finding power and security in enduring that which is difficult or uncomfortable (Bauer 50).

In an analogous way, our field has talked at length of the increased sense of agency that can come from engagement with difficult writing work. We can turn to Mariolina Salvatori, whose *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty* has been a foundational text on the topic of student resilience and their ability to find pleasure in challenging pedagogy. For Salvatori, difficulty might be understood as possibility mistaken for impossibility. The difficult is what we often do not know we can do until we try, fail, and try again. While negative affect often accompanies difficulty, a variety of other affective responses may accompany it as well. We can think of tenacity, pride, excitement, and any number of other positive affects one might feel at performing a difficult or uncomfortable task. Salvatori encourages us to reframe discomfort/difficulty as an invitation for students to expand their understandings of their own agency, where they may have initially seen discomfort or difficulty as a sign of their powerlessness.

The resonances of Salvatori's work can be felt throughout debates over rigorous education and the importance of pushing students to achieve what they couldn't imagine possible. *Elements*, and the subsequent pedagogies that draw from it, treat students experiencing difficulty as something to be embraced, rather than something to be eased. *Elements* establishes a pedagogy outside of the student satisfaction model, encouraging teachers to allow their students to struggle with difficult texts as a way to foster students' sense of agency. Salvatori names the problem of student helplessness in the face of confusion: "They placed [their confusion] beyond their ability to negotiate, whether they located it in the text or in themselves" (xi). Additionally, Salvatori establishes what might be thought of as *the problem of* "the problem of confusion," that is to say,

the problematic idea that confusion is in itself a problem. Salvatori laments that, "whenever students expressed confusion, we believed it our responsibility to step in and clarify it" (xi).

There is incredible merit in developing student resilience against the powerlessness that many of them have been conditioned to feel in situations of discomfort or confusion. Students who are resilient against the discomfort of difficulty are better able to engage the difficult work of systemic analysis and the examination of oppressive frameworks. As Salvatori says, "When there is a 'mismatch' between new ideas and the old frameworks used to make sense of them, readers tend to experience difficulty, confusion, a 'say what?' moment" (35). If learners are unable to stay in that difficulty, they may seek to rationalize old beliefs rather than critically examine that "say what" moment. However, as Salvatori says in "Difficulty: The Great Educational Divide," of the students who learned to "see that their difficulties were not a sign of inadequacy but markers of a particular kind of understanding," Salvatori "noticed, and they noticed, their skills and the pleasure they took taking ownership of those skills" (87)

Building upon the synchronicities between the pleasures of writing and bodily pleasure, Joseph Allen Boone writes in *Libidinal Currents* that both writing and sex "are not only overpowering but expressions of absolute powerlessness, enacting the intense human desire to let go—to be released, to yield to an 'other' (a lover, a text) that ceases to remain other in the imaginary intercourse that is constitutive of sexual and fictional exchanges alike" (1-2).[22] But like sex, the vulnerability that accompanies writing requires deep respect and care.

Queer theory is about pleasure and about the ways that people are able to find pleasure in what is normally considered disturbing or grotesque – finding pleasure in what discomforts others, and even what discomforts ourselves. Yet queer theory is also invested in establishing right

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[22] With appreciation to Stacey Waite's *Teaching Queer,* which introduced me to this quote (119)

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relationship, individual agency, and exploring the ways that institutions and systems can turn our desires against us. This is a particularly apt lens for pedagogical discomfort because there is obvious widespread pedagogical investment in discomforting students, over whom educators wield significant institutional power, yet concurrent investment in establishing right-relationship with those students.

4.3 Consent

An essential practice of pedagogical consent that I'm sure I share with many teachers is taking time for frequent check-ins with students and foreshadowing upcoming work – analogous to the type of ongoing communication one would hope for in a romantic encounter. However, this is complicated by the fact that, in some heteronormative populations, communication can be interpreted as a sign of failure. (Bauer, 88). This tracks with some somewhat puzzling student feedback I received early on in my teaching, where students told me that I was too concerned with getting feedback from them and allowing them to collaborate in determining the direction of the course. The students' discomfort of a disempowering but familiar institution was outweighed and overridden by the discomfort of being invited into vulnerable collaboration. In future classes, I took this unfamiliarity and discomfort with open communication into account, much as one might need to have similar establishment of communicative norms with a new romantic partner not used to explicit conversations about consent.

In *Teaching Queer*, discomfort is rarely taken up lightly. Waite struggles with what it means to invite discomfort from strangers over whom she holds power and influence. She shares a syllabus statement that foregrounds discomfort: "it is your discomfort and unease that will

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educate you […] By remaining in this course, you agree to spend this semester considering the idea that that which brings you discomfort, that which you might find unthinkable is that which you most need to read, re-imagine and (un)learn" (97). Waite's negotiation of her students' and her own boundaries regarding the application of discomfort brings her to a direct comparison of her own materials and BDSM. She references approvingly the connection one TA drew between this syllabus statement and BDSM play, saying "the connection does help to illuminate the paradox of trying to 'create a safe and open classroom' and at the same time demanding of my students a significant amount of risk" (98). The source of this paradox here, and the challenge of adopting these pedagogies of discomfort wholesale, is that there is no attendant notion of consent alongside pedagogical invocations of discomfort. Whereas BDSM play has a robust set of harm-reduction techniques for negotiating consent across power differentials, these techniques remain largely absent for discussions of pedagogical discomfort. Many of us have surely developed some techniques for negotiating consent in our own classrooms, but the pedagogical literature makes little acknowledgement of this. There is no clear distinction being made in the literature regarding consensual and nonconsensual discomfort. Who gets to initiate discomfort? Who gets to say no? Is consent even possible within the context of the university?

These questions are complicated by popular understandings of consent that are framed through a legalistic rather than ethical and situational approach. This work is doubly important given our work in an institution that is committed to a legalistic notion of consent. As Avery Edenfield explains in his "Queering Consent: Design and Sexual Consent Messaging," universities often teach sexual consent, among other types of consent, as a binary, discrete rhetorical moment that ultimately serves the function of rape prevention. Queer activist and community-led initiatives, while incorporating discussions of rape and sexual violence, teach consent as a

"contextual, ongoing ethical issue that is deeply pro-sex and pro-pleasure while also acknowledging the inescapable power differentials in all manner of human relationship" (6). Edenfield analyses a variety of messaging by universities that suggests consent is unambiguous and easily assessed, usually by recognizing its absence. The university-supplied information nearly always invokes legal or institutional repercussions for violations of consent. This model is a helpful but incomplete approach to consent – it is primarily one of legal clarification, not fostering ongoing communication about wants and desires. The legalistic model is not one of ethical interrelation but instead one of corporate protection and liability frameworks. This may be why the model has been taken up enthusiastically by many universities (Edenfield).

A legalistic model of consent has as its goal a type of "pure relationship," a commonly aspired-to egalitarian relationship between independent and equally autonomous and empowered people (Giddens). In its striving for this pure relationship, it can sometimes overlook the power dynamics and social relations still in play. A notable departure from queer BDSM ethics and towards this legalistic model arose in the mainstreaming of BDSM contracts.

Contracts are primarily understood within the BDSM community as the *beginnings* of a conversation. BDSM contracts are written as "legal style" documents, performing legal rhetoric for play but understood not to be legally binding. Rather, as the author of several popular contracts states, the relationship must "be one of mutual trust, understanding and consent at all times (not just at the time of signing). The purpose of entering into the Contract is more to help guide your relationship. It enables both of you to clearly express what you'd like from the arrangement and what you expect from each other." (Liliana). However, popular culture takes much of its understanding of BDSM contracts from the *50 Shades of Grey* books, mistaking the book's erotic fantasy of inescapable sexual contracts for legal truth (White). Where BDSM contracts play with

the fantasy of a binding contract signed between partners of unequal power, those outside this community adopted the sex contract literally in a way that reinforced rather than deconstructed the violences of the legalistic framework for consent.

The app LegalFling introduced sex contracts into popular hookup culture, marketing itself as allowing users to create a legally binding contract prior to sex (Ritschel). App users' desire for the egalitarian and predictable boundaries of a "pure relationship" presented a model of consent that was dangerous in its inability to account for situational factors. Little thought was put into negotiations of consent *during* a sexual encounter, including acts consented to in the contract that the participant didn't want in the moment. Needless to say, the legal standing was dismissed, and the app failed soon after it was released. However, the appearance and initial success of this app points to a desire for clear, discrete, predictable parameters in consent. It also signals a paranoia at the thought of causing harm, as well as a fundamental misunderstanding of where that harm comes from (Ritschel).

This desire for "pure relationship" can be found not just in sexual relations but in all relations, particularly those where power is unevenly distributed and those with power are self-conscious of that distribution. Contract grading, popularized by Peter Elbow in his 1993 "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking," is likely the first connection most teachers will make between the classroom and consent. Contract grading attempts to be clear and precise in what it asks from the students, and it attempts to depart from assigning grades based upon a teacher's stylistic predilections. Asao Inoue's labor-based grading, a popular new variation on the grading contract, attempts to remove all punishment or reward of student's linguistic competencies, instead evaluating time spent working. Inoue states that, in labor-based contract grades, "all labor counts and all labor is equal when it comes to calculating course grades. This in and of itself builds equity

among diverse students with diverse linguistic competencies since it is a grading system that does not depend on a particular set of linguistic competencies to acquire grades" (130). While I agree that labor-based grading is more equitable than judging linguistic competencies, I do not see grading for labor as equitable in and of itself. Systems of oppression still exist in our culture, and these systems create a type of time inequity. The maxim "we all have twenty-four hours in a day" may be true on its face, but for students who take public transit rather than drive, who cannot afford to buy prepared foods, who are working while in school, who have a chronic illness, who are taking care of families – these students' 24 hours are significantly proscribed by their circumstances. These inequalities cannot be dissolved by labor-based grading, nor by any grading. In a system that ties grades to economic outcomes like continued funding and career opportunities, and a system that asks us to evaluate students' progress in isolation from their lived circumstances, there is no pure method for grading that corrects for systemic inequalities. And yet, bound by our professional obligations to our institution, we must grade anyway.

Framed in a legalistic model, Inoue's grading contract is a failure in the face of the intractable problem of grading. A "pure relationship," and therefore legalistic consent, is not possible. Nevertheless, labor-based contract grading has proven to be deeply supportive to many educators and students who have taken Inoue's work as a model. We can draw insights from framing Inoue's grading contract through a queer alternative to the legalistic model, recognizing its ability to reduce harm while also acknowledging that its solutions are imperfect. Highlighting the limits of legalistic consent, Edenfield offers queer DIY/community education approaches to consent, which teach about navigating consent in sex practices from a harm reduction framework. These community-produced materials rarely invoke legal consequences or binary categories.

Edenfield takes our attention to a common pedagogical tool in DIY consent education: the "spectrum of consent."
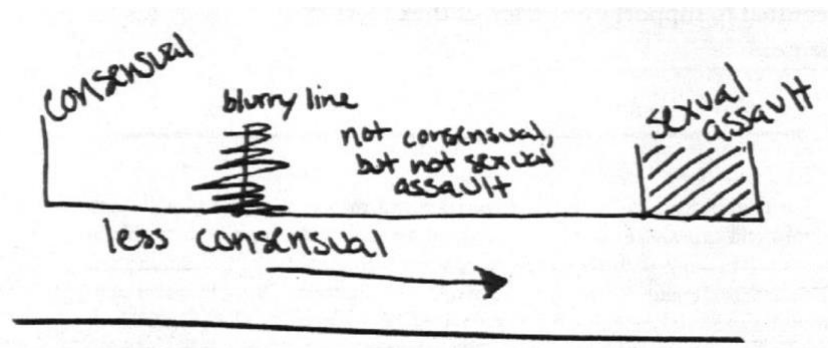
Figure 5: Spectrum of Consent (Down There Health Collective)

The "spectrum of consent" is a framework that shifts our thinking from a binary of egalitarian-relations/violence and instead invites us to take up the work of consent as ongoing negotiations of power in relation. As pictured in Figure 5, queer consent pedagogy sometimes invokes a literal spectrum to help disrupt common binary thinking about consent (Down There Health Collective). Despite its sometimes literal invocations, the spectrum is better understood as a loose collection of beliefs and commitments about consent that arose out of DIY queer spaces rather than being an identifiable and broadly implemented pedagogical paradigm with a clear source.

In her research on Queer BDSM practices, much aligned with the spectrum of consent model, Bauer presents several beliefs and commitments about consent that circulate in queer communities.

- Consent is situational mutual agreements that are practice oriented (79)

- It involves "empowerment that enables one to deal with the material, social and emotional consequences of saying no" (80)

- It maintains a sense of spontaneity while "collecting information, opening up possibilities and pointing out options" (81)

- It requires "respecting the limits imposed by each participant," particularly if "something arises that has not been part of negotiations, if there was a lack of clarity in the agreements, or if something is experienced differently than expected" (84)

- It is committed to avoiding pseudo-consent driven by inaccurate self-assessments and interpersonal power dynamics (88)

- It requires "responsibility, risk awareness, knowledge and self-control" (94)

- And it requires those in charge of a scene to acknowledge their own limits as well (94).

The spectrum of consent also offers an alternative to judicial or administrative retribution if consent is breached. While laws and policies can be important tools, those of us with some understanding of the dangers of punitive institutions are reticent to invoke legal and institutional repercussions. In the spectrum of consent, these are replaced by the threat of social retaliation or potential ostracization for violation of community norms. This can both increase reporting and signal to the larger community that violations of consent will not be tolerated, even if it is unlikely that there would be any legal or institutional repercussions if those avenues were perused. Take, for instance, the "Graduate School as Conversion Therapy" situation, in which mistreated students who sought official recourse were unable to elicit any concessions from the institution until Reed and Castiglia were publicly shamed by a prominent scholar in their field. Situations that were too murky to apply the logics of institutional harassment policies instead found resolution in the public criticisms of the offending figures, much in the spirit of the #MeToo movement.

The spectrum framework is also helpful because it discourages paralysis. Rather than waiting for a "pure relationship," the spectrum of consent model can help us to develop more

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ethical relationships now, despite the disparities of agency inherent in our deeply imbalanced society. Kathleen Livingston offers us an understanding of the ongoing and imperfect process of consent that is better captured by a spectrum of consent model.

> "Queer rhetorics invite us to know consent as a collaborative, self-reflexive process, not simply a fleeting conversation about the benefits and risks of relationships that happens at the beginning of play. [Consent is] a set of practical elements, which are part of ongoing, rhetorical negotiations where people can come to know their own power, privilege, and desires, and use them well." (11)

Approaching consent from a queer community-based model allows for a more nuanced understanding of consent in the classroom. Primarily, it avoids the "egalitarian relations are impossible" rhetoric that handwaves considerations of consent. Students *can* consent, at least in part. *Inviting* students into uncomfortable situations with the opportunity to participate differently if desired is significantly different from coercing or forcing students into these uncomfortable situations (Foss and Griffin).

And the distinction between an invitational and a coercive approach is not a matter of simply softening language. The softening of language without concurrent praxis-oriented reconsiderations of one's teaching leads to obfuscation of consent rather than generosity. Some in our discipline are squeamish about communicating forthrightly to our students. "You will submit three projects" "you will make a five-minute report" – this clear communication of expectations is offered as an example of authoritarian language by Mano Singham in his article "Moving Away from the Authoritarian Classroom" (50). Likewise, despite Anne-Marie Womack's otherwise incisive contributions to accessible pedagogy, her emphasis on positive over punishing language causes problems for her proposed universal design.

In many situations, invitational language is less accessible, particularly to students with language disabilities that require clear communication without subtext. Indeed, Womack's

invitational phrases "you are welcome to," substituted for "you are allowed to," and her "I encourage you to," substituted for "I only accept," do not indicate the important distinctions of the original commands (514). In applying both substitutions, where is the original distinction between optional (allowed) tasks with no repercussions if neglected and mandatory (only accept) tasks with associated penalties? Substituting invitational language for direct commands can obfuscate the consequences if a command is not followed. Can students reasonably predict the consequences of declining your invitation? While it's impossible to outline all possible consequences, we should at the very least not be afraid to communicate our policies with language that clearly states what we are asking for and what will happen (either by our own ruling or by university mandate) if students do not meet these expectations.

While I am somewhat uncomfortable assigning a student a failing grade for a mental health crisis that leaves them unable to attend my class for much of the semester, I am tied to this action by my role as instructor at my institution. Through the language of BDSM, this is a hard boundary imposed by professional responsibilities. And while these boundaries may be the result of systems that we do not agree with, our immediate classroom responsibility is to communicate these boundaries clearly while staying true to our own politics as much as possible. This commitment to clear communication of boundaries and my operation within and against them is perhaps most visible to students in a section I include on my syllabus about mental health – a section I could no longer avoid composing after my second student suicide attempt in the span of one year.

After talking with these students, I began to realize how ineffective our university's messaging around mental health was, primarily because none of it was transparent about necessary tradeoffs. The university encourages rest and resilience but does not account for the breakneck pace of undergraduate education or the economic realities that force students to overload their

schedules. Any time spent resting might mean missed assignments or poor participation. And this is okay! In communicating this boundary regarding grades to students, a teacher should make visible as many alternative routes of agency as possible. I offer the following statement in my syllabus to try and communicate my desire for students to prioritize their wellbeing while also acknowledging potential repercussions:

> **Can I take time off to work on my mental/emotional wellbeing?**
> YES! Please do. Often, students are told (either covertly or overtly) that their education is more important than their physical, mental, or emotional health. I would like to tell you otherwise. **It is more important to me that you care for your health than that you pass my class** – in fact, some of the students I am most proud of didn't finish the semester with me because they took a leave of absence to care for their mental health.

Reflecting on my discussions with students who attempted suicide, I realized that students could not prioritize their mental health even in moments of crisis because potential negative academic outcomes were not clearly communicated as viable alternatives to overwork and fatigue. Of course I work with students to accommodate their needs as much as I can, but my students who were in crisis had so internalized the idea that mental health was important only in support of their work that it did not occur to them that they could postpone their schooling or repeat my class in another semester.

In approaching pedagogy from a queer consent framework, it is important to leave room for spontaneity and play, but also to have a general sense of parameters at the onset and multiple opportunities for both the students and teacher to say "this isn't working for me." Clear and direct establishment of boundaries, negotiations of consent, are essential building blocks to a classroom that is resilient to and takes enjoyment in discomfort. Particularly in the early moments of the semester, approaching discomfort from a queer consent framework sets the tone for the classroom and establishes the trust necessary for students to speak up and ask for accommodation when they have reached their threshold. It's important to encourage students to feel empowered to speak up

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about what's working and not working for them, especially because they're in an institution where they're taught to surrender their own agency at every turn.[23]

The relationship between teacher and student is deeply fraught. Imbalanced power dynamics abound. Students are vulnerable in many ways, yet many contingent teachers are also vulnerable to the administration and to their teaching evaluations, informed at least in part by student satisfaction. Amidst these power dynamics is also an ethical and sometimes institutional imperative to bring students into work that is deeply uncomfortable for them and for us. And many of us see great value in this work, but we may not be sure how to move forward. As I have argued throughout this chapter, there are worse ways to start than by foregrounding consent and pleasure in our conversations about student discomfort. In doing so, we return to the spirit of student agency inherent in critical pedagogy, and we resist the marginalizing, coercive discomfort that is weaponized against academic disciplines that advocate for the wellbeing of marginalized peoples.

And we may take the investigation of authority of further. In the next chapter, I discuss authority as it appears in the teaching practices of street medics, particularly in the disruption of the teacher/learner hierarchy and in the decentralization of care knowledge. These community-led and community-oriented educational initiatives provide models for a relationship that incorporates both care and rigor into an instructor's relationship to authority.

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[23] I'm sure I'm not the only one who found it necessary to include a "you are allowed to leave the class to use the bathroom" clause in my syllabus.

5.0 Street Medic Pedagogy

On Monday, March 25, 2019, the streets of Pittsburgh were filled with over a thousand grieving, terrified, furious, heartbroken protesters, mostly high-school and university students who had organized a student walkout (Simon et al.). The protest was in response to the acquittal of Michael Rosfeld, the Pittsburgh police officer who shot and killed seventeen-year-old Antwon Rose as he was fleeing a traffic stop. The students who organized the walkout had some experience with protests, having taken the streets in response to Rose's killing the prior summer. They developed networks of communication that allowed them to reflect on previous protests, develop better methods, and call people in when organizers needed additional expertise. They knew the dangers of marching in the streets, having experienced both police and motorist violence the previous year. But they knew how to get people to show up, too, and how to get connected to the expertise that they needed.

The organizers reached out to the local street medic collective, asking for in-person and pre-protest support. The street medics offered advice to be communicated on social media before the march, telling them to make sure students were dressed in layers, that it would be colder and wetter than they expected, to bring umbrellas and waterproof shoes and extra sweaters in their bags. This was a spring protest, not summer. The temperature only rose to 45 degrees that day, and it was raining through the entire four-hour protest, very different from the conditions for the marches in June and July the year before.

During the protest, street medics scanned the crowd for wet shoes and blue lips. We made sure no one fell into the particularly nasty potholes filled with water, and we handed out ponchos and hand warmers. Thankfully, the police didn't respond aggressively towards the protesters, so

we were able to focus on the weather. Our most important role, though, involved targeted teaching, helping protesters solve what many did not recognize as problems at the time. When we saw students we suspected of having hypothermia, usually someone sitting to rest, someone who looked like they should be shivering but they weren't, we introduced ourselves. We gave a quick and targeted lesson about the signs of hypothermia and let them know a few solutions, including ducking into coffee shops along our route. Most of the time it only required a gentle nudge, an acknowledgement that the protest would be fine without them, before the student recognized how much they were putting their body through. They would then find a friend to walk them back to a warm place, or back to their car to return home.

Most university teacher training does not prepare you to become a first responder. Despite the amount of responsibility an instructor holds, there is little acknowledgment that you will be looked to during a physical, bodily emergency. Instructors seem to recoil at the physicality of this responsibility, often incredulous at how much bodily control students expect, even though we know the tight restraints high-school teachers often place on them. We say things like "If you're coughing, you don't need to ask permission, just go get some water!" The student's body is treated as an uncomfortable disruption, we tell them to leave the class, go off on their own in a moment of bodily distress. Most instructors are filled with fear in these moments, as we have not been prepared for them despite our training as instructors. In helping to design my department's graduate instructor training, I have introduced some very basic first responder preparations, making sure instructors know where fire extinguishers and AEDs are kept near their classrooms and how to use them, but this is no remedy for the disembodied notion of a community of scholars that most universities reinforce.

From the typical framework, to be reminded of embodiment is to put learning on hold. Tasked with promoting student learning, it's easy for student wellbeing to be treated as an afterthought, an interruption in the lesson plan. During a teacher training, preparing to respond to student bodies takes away the already scant time to prepare for the myriad other tasks required of us. It's no wonder that most teacher trainings and resources have a simple solution to any emergency that reminds us of a student's vulnerable physicality: call university police (Student Affairs; University Counseling Center).

This chapter highlights several areas of street medicking[24] that can provide models for university teaching practices that intertwine care and rigor in the pursuit of ethical authority. The first of these is the practice of mutual aid, which shifts the way we consider agency, expertise, and responsibility in the classroom. The second of these models is community apprenticeship, which invites us to reconsider the teaching training we find in our departments and universities. These two models together reaffirm the possibility of a university pedagogy that exhibits both care and rigor, emerging through a practice of prefiguration in the undercommons of the university.

5.1 Democratizing Medical Care and Rigor

Street medics originated in the U.S. in the early 60's as a part of the African-American Civil Rights Movement.[25] The Medical Committee for Human Rights began as a medical observer group, much as the legal observers operate now, often attending protests in lab coats and scrubs.

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[24] Following the practice of a few different street medic collectives, I use the term "street medicking" rather than "street medicine." The latter is often used to indicate nonprofits that provide services to homeless/houseless people.
[25] Much of the following history of street medicking comes from an oral history shared in street medic trainings, though a written version of this history is available through Atlanta Resistance Medics (Grace).

But they quickly found themselves called to act – shifting their role to administering first aid and emergency care. By the late 1960's, a core set of training methodologies emerged, and licensed professionals were getting trained by medics who had specific experience with street medicking for protest injuries, though many of these medics didn't have the institutional credentials of the earlier doctors and nurses.

In the 1970's, street medics worked in Black Panther community programs and People's Clinics, the American Indian Movement battle at Wounded Knee, and other revolutionary projects. As street medics grew in community with these organizations and other revolutionary projects, lines between movement organizers and medics became blurred. While there is still a substantial number of medical professionals who enter into the movement as medics through bridge trainings, this is no longer assumed to be the case, and street medics are just as likely to start out as people who are introduced to bodily care and community health through street medic trainings.

In partnership with national liberation organizations like the Black Panthers, street medics pioneered in the field of public health. Working in coalition with a variety of other organizers, street medics helped to develop rat abatement programs, free breakfast programs for children, and community drug prevention and treatment clinics. They supported the long struggles to reform the VA hospital, advocate for Agent Orange sufferers, define and acknowledge Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, close the asylum system, and end the diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental disorder.

Medics have been widely researching, testing, and promoting best practices in a variety of intensive programs, short courses, and informal conversations. Influenced by revolutionary teaching projects like the Freedom School movement and mutual aid skill-shares, street medic knowledge has been widely practiced and widely shared, and we are always eager to discover new and better practices – the more each of us know, the safer we are together.

Even as some within the medical system worked as/with street medics to innovate and develop best practices, the medical establishment would take that innovation where it could and gatekeep it from widespread practice by marginalized people. Many point to the 1967 Freedom House ambulance project in Pittsburgh as an on-the-nose representation of this co-optation (Amarto). Prior to Freedom House, medical transportation was conducted with a patchwork of hearses and paddy wagons. No prehospital care was offered, and emergency personnel were reluctant to respond to calls to black neighborhoods. Freedom House partnered with both a local hospital and a civil rights/jobs training program in order to train dozens of black men in emergency response. These men began innovating and providing pre-hospital care during emergency transportation, leading to what we now think of as EMS/ambulance care.

However, a change in city government meant that Freedom House was soon targeted with racist gatekeeping. The program was shut down and funds and protocols were transferred to a new EMS agency that privileged affluent white neighborhoods. Many of the first Freedom House paramedics were barred from continuing to provide care, either fired for having criminal records or failing tests that didn't encompass what the Freedom House medics were taught. Others quit after racist treatment, being passed over for promotions in favor of white suburban doctors who had no experience with EMS care (Amarto).

While many people think of street practices as rough approximations of the quality of care that can be received in the medical establishment, the people facing barriers to access in medicine – the people who are used to having to take care of ourselves and others on our own – are often the ones who are able to provide the best care. We are innovating, learning, and teaching together. And once the medical establishment sees something it values enough to appropriate, it tells us that

the only place to learn those skills are in expensive, time-consuming, and geographically distant programs.

Matthew Weinstein, writing in *Anarchist Pedagogies,* asks us to think of street medicking as a form of *ciencia popular,* a science of the people, knowledge "not just applied to people's struggles, but developed to advance them" (104). Weinstein further highlights the street medic's role as a community educator, their responsibility to spread this knowledge:

> In general, medic collectives are involved in multiple kinds of education projects. Of course, all collectives are involved in getting new members, which is done through formal trainings. They also brief protesters in what the SSMC [Seaview Street Medic Collective] calls health and safety workshops. Finally, collectives engage in a wide variety of education programs to empower the communities they serve. (99)

Further, I would argue that much of a street medic's pedagogy can be seen as they are practicing, teaching both their fellow medics and their patients. While Weinstein is right to highlight these more orchestrated moments of teaching, a significant part of medic work is situationally responsive education. Operating as a pair of medics with complementary skills, much of street medic training involves allowing your partner to take the lead where they have more expertise and using that situation as a moment of learning, then engaging in a debrief after the action, in line with John Dewey's framework of experiential learning.[26]

This experiential learning also appears in the education of our patients. As the street medic handbook from a local training states, "In theory, *all* medical caregivers are responsible for patient education. In practice, street medics work a bit harder than most mainstream providers at decentralizing our knowledge" (Street Medic Handbook, 11). Street medics have no incentive to protect their expertise, and in fact benefit greatly when protesters know how to keep each other

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[26] I follow David Kolb's interpretation of Dewey's experiential learning to mean participation in and reflection on an activity in order to determine what information was useful and how to use this information to perform another activity.

safe and cared for. When I treat a protester with heat exhaustion, for example, I ask if they've had these experiences before, hoping to help them identify a pattern if one exists. I then talk them through the treatments I'm offering and invite them to bring some of the same supplies to the next protest they attend. If they do this, not only will they be more conscious of and responsive to warning signs in themselves, but they can also spot these warning signs in others and offer support to them as well.

5.2 Student Solidarity, not Charity

As much as our universities express a commitment to fostering a community of learning in our classrooms, the hierarchical organization of power makes it difficult for the classroom to feel like a true community. One important manifestation of a healthy community is that members are giving and receiving with one another all the time, mutually. Such mutual aid is one of the most common aspects of leftist praxis and care work, and a core principle of street medicking. Mutual aid emphasizes the power and resilience of the collective acting together, rather than of individuals. Each member of a community has something to contribute, and we all have needs. No one is helpless or all-powerful. Yet the architecture of the relationship between teacher and students can solidify or even exaggerate its inherent power dynamic.

As Marguerite Helmers says of composition studies in her 1994 book, *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students*, our scholarship reflects a common belief in "an essentialized student, a generalized entity whose primary characteristic is lack" (28). Teachers "cast themselves as heroes, while the students are delegated to supporting roles as those who resist new attempts at teaching" (23). Writing in 2019, Kristine Johnson notices a continuation

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of this trend. Conducting a corpus analysis of composition scholarship, Johnson notes that students are ascribed a consistent "40:60 agent:patient ratio" across 60 years of composition scholarship. The terms "agent" and "patient" as they are used in linguistics are semantic properties, with "agent" being the participant of a situation to perform an action and the "patient" as the participant who undergoes that action.[27] Johnson draws our attention to the fact that "from the perspective of grammatical agency, composition scholars have not assigned students significantly more or less agency over time" (418).

There is a connection to be drawn here between students as grammatical patients and students as metaphorical patients. Among the fifteen most common representations of students that Johnson shares, there is a striking resemblance to the treatment of medical patients. In our scholarships students are portrayed as "ideologically or cognitively limited" (fourteenth most common collocate),"poorly prepared" (tenth), "diagnosed and evaluated" (fifth), "progressing towards a goal" (second), "controlled and monitored" (seventh), and "supported by teachers" (fourth) (Johnson 418).[28] This portrayal of students as deficient, needing diagnosis and monitoring, then progressing towards a goal under the supervision and support of their teachers, bears a striking resemblance to the typical relationship between a doctor and patient. And as we know, our culture often doesn't give enough credit to (grammatical or literal) patients as actors with their own agency and expertise.

The hero/savior narrative in medicine creates a harmful paradigm where doctors do not listen to their patients and often impose solutions that the patients know will not work for their

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[27] This is correlated but not congruent with the subject and direct object of a sentence. For example, in the sentence "Avey teaches Pidge" and "Pidge is taught by Avey," Pidge remains the patient and Avey remains the agent despite the change of grammatical structure.

[28] Top five collocates were "associated with written products," "progressing toward a goal," "perform writing acts," "supported by teachers," and "diagnosed and evaluated"

bodies. A hero/savior narrative can do the same in our classrooms. This warped sense of agency is an important hurdle to be overcome both in our scholarship and our classrooms reflected there, and one way to start moving out of this paradigm is to reflect on teaching projects like street medicking that operate from a model of mutual aid.

Mutual aid emerges as the praxis associated with the worldview of "solidarity, not charity." This popular slogan is often used as a shorthand to signal the recognition of community agency and expertise regardless of official, bureaucratic accreditation. As Dean Spade says, people engaged in mutual aid projects recognize "that many people – including themselves! – have something to offer. This departs from expertise-based social services that tell us we need to have a social worker, licensed therapist, lawyer, or some other person with an advanced degree to get things done" (16). This slogan affirms the dignity of those who accept help and acknowledges that they may be the ones offering help tomorrow.

Mutual aid is a movement against the disempowerment inherent in fixed hierarchical relationships. It is a movement to help us acknowledge that our communities are fundamentally reasonable, capable, and caring, that to be responsible is to be empowered rather than burdened, and that to relinquish tightly held authority can be freeing. Toni Morrison leads us towards this view of response-ability in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison tells us that American culture is an ideology obsessed with concepts of freedom and independence, growing out of a fractured white imaginary where the specter of slavery looms large: "individualism is foregrounded (and believed in) when its background is stereotypified enforced dependency. Freedom […] can be relished more deeply in a cheek-by-jowl existence with the bound and unfree" (64). Morrison tells us that freedom and agency in this national imaginary are

found not in the collective but always in the independent self, particularly in the authority one can wield over others.

This warped sense of freedom and agency makes us resistant to mutual aid practices of exchange. The first version of this, more widely talked about (and called out), is the potential for entitled behavior. Folks showing up in the space and taking more than we give. The second version, and perhaps more insidious, is the resistance of aid. The idea that asking for or accepting what is offered from others is immoral, or dangerous, or a sign of weakness. Mutual aid is a tool for helping unlearn this toxic individualism that is threaded throughout the national imaginary.

Often in the classroom setting, it seems as though we are called to educate our students about everything. This is in part a function of the hero/savior tropes mentioned above, which imagine our students as uninformed recipients of our teaching, and in part a function of the institutional expectations for teachers, which often require the performance of ubiquitous expertise. We may want to offer our students opportunities to step into their own responsibility, but how much are we really prepared to ask from them?

In the first class I ever taught, I recall wanting to offer students several options for readings, inviting them into a round-robin form to share what they learned. It was all content I had seen and thought would make for fruitful discussion, but I hadn't spent a great deal of time imagining how I would frame it in the context of a lecture. My teaching mentor discouraged this because she was worried about how much work it would require of me to master all of the content well enough to teach it, even though the purpose of the exercise was to externalize some expertise and responsibility onto the students, inviting them to choose the readings they were most excited about and connect that back to the themes of the course. Although I had seen my students make these kinds of connections with earlier readings, and although I could rely on my prior experience

facilitating discussions as well as pedagogical training in round-robin facilitation, my abandonment of content expertise elicited some anxiety for my mentor.

My mentor's hesitancy reflects broader assumptions about the teacher's role in the class and what we are allowed to request from our students, which is in fact very little. Despite our official role soliciting work from students, when we separate ourselves from our administrative roles, we can reflect on how little we allow ourselves to ask from our learning community. Even in the moment of pedagogical upheaval associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers still struggle with how much support we imagine is possible from our students. While there certainly have been "please excuse my [child, dog, Wi-Fi connection]" moments on Zoom, most of us have doubled down on our responsibilities to one-sided support that reflects a charity model more than a true learning community.

And it's true that there is a greater responsibility for us to show up for our students than the other way around – we have professional, contractual obligations to fulfill. Yet sometimes these obligations encourage us to forget our own human needs, and in so doing forget that our students are capable of being invited into agency and responsibility. I noticed this tendency very distinctly in the context of an "Accessibility during COVID-19" workshop, where some teachers were expressing fatigue at teaching online. These teachers were particularly having trouble because their students had all taken them up on their offer to turn their cameras off, a gesture towards accommodating student discomfort with being on camera. The teachers were reflecting that teaching without being able to see any of their students was exhausting, demoralizing, and unsustainable, but they felt unable to teach any differently given their desire to accommodate students' preference for participating with their video muted.

I reminded teachers that they were allowed to need accommodations in the same way that students were, and that the solution to this problem was probably more likely to come from their learning community than from our employer. I also highlighted that these needs were probably well within the realm of the class to accommodate – that the teachers could ask a certain number of students each class to keep their cameras on, even rotating and having sign-ups (with opt-outs) if that felt supportive. Students are used to us asking them to do things a certain way. But usually, they see these requests as related to departmental policies or learning goals. They are not used to us making requests rooted in our own vulnerabilities or needs. And neither are we.

One of a street medic's most useful tools is the ability to invite others into their agency. Street medics don't want to be the only ones responsible for people's health at a protest. If people start getting confident that street medics will be at every action and always serve a certain function (bringing water, for example), it can mean that people displace that responsibility onto the medics as a discrete group rather than understanding the responsibility as held collectively by the community. Then, when all of the medics are at work, or burnt out, or arrested, who's bringing the water?

Instead, medics will often try to make responsibility as diffuse as possible in order to foster feelings of belonging and shared authority in community. If a task that supports the crowd can be performed by a protester rather than a medic, like the distribution of water, we invite someone to take that task on rather than doing it ourselves. This allows us more space to stay appraised of health and safety risks in the environment, to check in with people who look like they might be having trouble keeping up with the crowd, and to keep an ear out for medical emergencies. And often a small invitation is all that's needed for a protester to take on a more active role, shifting

from just another body in the crowd to someone who is responsible for some amount of the group's wellbeing.

Responsibility can be fragile. Our culture reinforces a type of disempowerment through insecurity, especially when we see anyone else step up to enact responsibility. Often, when we start enacting our responsibility, we're very tender and insecure. We think "this can't be right, maybe I should just wait for someone to tell me what to do. I'm just going to mess it up, so if nobody gives me instructions, I'll just let someone else to do it instead." This tendency is particularly strong for students in our current educational setting, which can be characterized by, as Mark Fisher names, a sort of "reflexive impotence." Students "know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can't do anything about it. But that 'knowledge,' that reflexivity […] is a self-fulfilling prophecy" (21). Fisher's totalizing appraisal is better understood as a tendency, something found in gradations across the student body. Yes, neoliberalism disempowers those who are subject to its ideology, but students still continue to take up agency and play a significant role in the shape of the university.

Roderick Ferguson, in *We Demand: The University and Student Protests,* tells us that student movements "are doing now what they did then [in the 1960's and 70's], drumming the idea that the university and the social world are in motion and can therefore be moved in other directions, that they are fluid and hence responsive to change" (12). I was reminded of students' commitment to change in reading responses to an assignment that asked them to critically examine and reimagine university language (Appendix A.3). This was my first assignment asking students to engage the university as an institution, and we hadn't done any reading in critical university studies. I was concerned that they would be too unfamiliar with the culture of the university to be able to make a cogent critique. After all, "students are entering an unfamiliar culture," "students

are poorly prepared," and "students are novices" are respectively composition studies' twelfth, tenth, and eighth most common discourse prosodies representing students (Johnson 417).

Yet nearly all of the students had meaningful critiques of the institution and research-informed solutions for alternative practices. Three students in the course critiqued the obfuscation and delay built into bureaucratic policies of redress, a critique mirroring Sara Ahmed's work in *On Being Included* and *Complaint!*. Each of these three students critiqued nondiscrimination policies for their lack of efficacy, proposed clearer policies regarding expectations for student conduct, and proposed explicit consequences for student racism. Two others named the institutional racism embedded in the institution's operations, with one student calling for an end to the university's "see something, say something" campaign and another naming the victim-blaming, racism, and xenophobia in the university's written resources for student sexual health while studying abroad. Another student proposed a reform of university plagiarism policies, replacing extra-legal language and procedures with a restorative justice approach. Three more students proposed a harm-reduction approach to university adjudication of drinking and substance abuse, particularly advocating the removal of the "knowingly present" clause of the student code of conduct, which punishes sober students for witnessing underage drinking and drug use. Instead, they proposed a medical amnesty policy to protect students who call 911 in the case of an overdose from institutional repercussions.

These responses came from first- or second-year students. Sure, there were some grammatical errors and some gaps in logic, but these students showed not just promise but sophisticated political and institutional reasoning. Despite the common narrative of students as outsiders, these writing assignments affirmed that students are often far more aware of the inner mechanics of our institutions than we are as instructors. Particularly for instructors who are intent

on bringing a university-studies orientation to their classroom, this survey of student responses shows just how much of our theory students already know and how well equipped they are to understand and apply it in the context of our own institution.

5.3 Teacher Training in Community

Street medic pedagogy is particularly useful at deconstructing the disempowering frameworks of teaching and learning that many of us are most familiar with, particularly because of the nimbleness of the shift between horizontal and hierarchical learning. Typically, in composition studies we conceive of teaching and teacher training as two separate practices. Street medic pedagogy, by contrast, rarely distinguishes between the two. As in the practice above regarding the treatment of heat exhaustion, the conversation would be virtually the same whether we were teaching a protester or sharing our specific technique with a fellow street medic. Something like "look how versatile these ice pops are" or "here's why I prefer instant ice-packs."

However, sometimes the distinction between protester and street medic is important. Street medics hold training and experience that most protesters do not, and for that reason, they are trusted with a remarkable amount of responsibility, as is the case with classroom instructors. When in charge of a scene, whether caring for an injury or in front of a classroom, those who hold roles of authority often have more relevant expertise than those without authority. Certainly this expertise is not all-encompassing, but often by virtue of sustained practice and repeated experiential learning over time, this statement holds true. It is especially important that we have a community to develop this expertise within, to be able to partner with those who have more experience as we practice our own skills.

To be called a "street medic" in the activist community, you usually need to have completed a 20-hour training specifically for street medicking. These trainings allow you to connect with a group of practicing medics who are also new and excited about getting into the streets, as well as connecting with more experienced medics who are willing to partner with newer medics and form mentorship connections. While I would trust any newly trained medic to offer me first-aid if I needed it (or to admit their limited scope and find someone with the skills needed), the 20-hour training is just the beginning.

Most of a medic's education happens when we work in our buddy pairs, learning complementary skills from one another. We're attuned both to the needs of the situation and also how our partner is responding to those needs, appreciating the differences and debriefing to learn more when we can. When street medics share skills with one another, we see a practice of rigor that is self-motivated rather than forced. Street medic pedagogy is driven by an external, tangible, and emotionally driven goals shared by partners who simultaneously teach and learn from each other depending on one another's expertise as it brings them closer to their goal of caring for the physical and emotional health of the protesters they're supporting. Our community is our greatest resource, and if you pair up with enough people, you can develop an incredible skill set through appreciation and gratitude for your partners.

Rigorous study is essential to street medic training, especially to unlearn disempowering capitalist approaches to healthcare. Yet part of street medicking's mutual aid and anti-racist foundations is working against the gatekeeping of the practice. There's a particular manifestation of liberalism that convinces us that there's always one more book to read before we're ready to take the streets. Or that we don't have the competence to share our skills with others. If we start worrying too much about learning absolutely everything we need to know before we start running

as a medic, folks could feel intimidated and disempowered, deciding street medicking is more trouble than it's worth. But if we ignore important skills we need to learn, we increase the chances that we could do harm through overconfidence. And if we don't pay enough attention to the lineage of street medicking, we risk losing the revolutionary potential of the practice. To alleviate this paradox, medics have their 20-hour training, but much more of our education happens informally, situationally, after we have already been practicing. The same situation can be found in writing program teacher training, particularly at the graduate student level, where teachers often receive some combination of pre-teaching seminar, a weekly graduate practicum, and most commonly, ongoing teaching workshops (Isaacs 65). There is a core difference between these street medic trainings and instructor trainings though: for college-level instructors of writing, especially graduate-student instructors, our first experiences in front of the classroom are rarely playing a supporting role for someone with more experience.

In order for this model of training that privileges ongoing training to work effectively, we need to reinforce teaching in an apprenticeship model. And in order to do that, we need a dedicated community of practice, and seasoned instructors committed to apprenticing newer instructors. As Cory Holding and I say in our syllabus for Writing Pedagogy I, the graduate instructor training course at our institution, "A strong teaching community is essential for an educator's growth." Part of the way that communities form is when we see one another as valuable and skilled in ways that we are not and acknowledge that this represents a diversity of complementary skills rather than a lack on our part or someone else's. "Class discussion and the sharing of materials will encourage you to look to your peers as a pedagogical resource," we tell our new instructors, "and to offer your own skillsets/areas of expertise in return."

The first of our course goals is to establish a teaching community that outlasts the class. Yet I am pessimistic about the success of this goal, primarily because teaching is imagined as a solitary responsibility. As Lee Shulman says in "Teaching as Community Property," "we close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities" (24). And the English department at the University of Pittsburgh does have a robust teaching community, owed in part to our continued emphasis on pedagogues as scholars in their own right. But the activities of the community often resemble the activities of scholarship: workshops on teaching difficult subjects, reading groups where we discuss a piece of composition theory, talks from visiting scholars on accessibility and accommodations. These are all crucial elements of community, to be sure, but they signal a community of reflection and planning, rather than community in the classroom itself.

In order to foster more pedagogical community in the classroom, the teacher training that I hosted with Holding asks students to observe or guest teach in one another's classes. This assignment was intended to shake students out of any initial fears or reluctance about learning from one another. But because guest teaching and peer observations are not common practice in our department, it was difficult to convey the material benefits of this practice or to imagine that it will continue beyond the training. Students still conducted most of their course individually, as most teachers do.

In stark contrast, street medics don't do anything without a partner. I mean this quite literally – our training is such that if we don't have someone watching our back, it is often too hazardous to provide care alone. The buddy system is a core tenet of street medic practice. A buddy is someone to turn to in uncomfortable situations, someone who can contribute their own expertise to a problem you're facing, or someone to confirm that it's too risky to stay in a scene.

Additionally, one of the benefits of street medics always running in pairs is that we can turn to the other in moments of insecurity comparable to the insecurity that most first-time teachers face. We can turn to someone who was physically present as we took charge of a scene and say to them, "Do you think I did okay?" to which the answer is almost always "yes."

It's also important that the larger affinity group that my street medicking partners come from is healthy and secure enough that I can show up to an action confident in the person I'm medicking with. As a medic, I regularly have new partners that I have the privilege of learning from, but I don't want to partner with people I've never met and don't trust. Our core principles, which ask us to recognize others' autonomy, to minimize our egos, and to collaborate whenever possible, provide the foundation for this trust (DNC Medic Points of Unity; Boston Area Liberation Medic Squad). The ideal community for practicing together has a shared set of values, a commitment to continued learning towards liberation (anti-racist practices, improving accessibility at actions, etc.), and a good vetting and acculturation process.

This need for trustworthy vetting and acculturation is a major obstacle for collaboration in university teaching. As Lisa Delpit tells us, this is particularly difficult in institutions that are acculturated in white middle-class forms of norm enforcement. Many of our colleagues operating from a white middle-class liberal framework "seem to act under the assumption that to make any rules or expectations explicit is to act against liberal principles, to limit the freedom and autonomy of those subjected to the explicitness" (284). In this case, to explicitly acculturate someone into norms of right-relationship, even if we hold these norms dear, would still trigger a cognitive dissonance that makes the norm-enforcer question their commitment to those very norms.

I do not think it would be controversial to say that we are being vetted and acculturated already. We are hired, go up for review, and receive updates to department policy; we undergo any

number of forms of professional acculturation. It is simply that acculturation into the bureaucratic functioning of a department is mandatory (you will teach X number of courses, to request a room change please email this person by this date), whereas any acculturation towards a shared ethos is optional and without teeth in order to preserve the tenuous peace between various factions of the department. How can we invite other teachers into our classroom when we cannot have frank conversations with them about the ethical impacts of their pedagogical decisions (or, for that matter, the impacts of ours)? How can we trust a teaching community when it cannot be explicit about its ethical commitments?

A further challenge, collaboration in academia is rarely rewarded and often requires more work than completing the same tasks individually. As Betty Robinson and Robert Schaible say in their article "Collaborative Teaching: Reaping the Benefits," collaborative teaching "can be difficult even when you are friends and know each other well" (58). Though they were writing in the 1990's, very little has changed in the culture of English departments with respect to collaborative teaching. There are still a few, like Robinson and Schaible, who are avid practitioners of collaborative teaching, but the idea of collaboration is still quite intimidating for most instructors. One wonders just how counterintuitive instructors find collaboration, given that Robinson and Schaible's published and regularly cited advice includes commonsense recommendations to choose a collaborator who "doesn't appear to have a strong need for power or control," as well as recommending the reader to engage in "attentive reading of all materials supplied by your prospective partner," and to "be willing to consider compromising with your colleague" (57-58).

We might think towards alternative avenues for collaborative teaching and pedagogical development, practices to normalize collaborative pedagogy. It is especially important to do this

in ways that acknowledge the barriers of uncooperative institutions, where one might need to take on a higher teaching load in order to run a collaborative course. It's also important for this collaboration to be true collaboration: too often pedagogical collaboration is little more than one tenured professor lecturing from the syllabus they created while an army of TA's grade assignments according to the rubrics the professor provides. Truly collaborative teaching requires shared respect, shared expertise, and shared authority over the classroom. One common example is the shared syllabus, most successful when it is jointly assembled by all those who plan on using it. This collaboration can be taken a step further, with instructors alternating leadership for classes or even entire units across multiple sections of a class. It certainly depends on the instructor, but especially for instructors teaching new courses it may be easier to imagine planning half of a semester for a course and running those lesson plans twice than having to plan and run an entirely new course from scratch. I offer these examples not as tested solutions but as imaginings that might foster a sense of possibility in the face of institutional barriers, something to cut through the pessimism that is often a necessary accomplice of critical work.

5.4 In the Shell of the Old

Street medicking has a complex and contentious relationship to explicit politics, relying on neutrality to collaborate across a leftist organizing scene often rife with ideological disagreement. However, while medics "exist to enable a politics" they also "embody the culture of the protesters and practice forms of democracy and practice with deep roots in anarchist struggles" (Weinstein 90). Street medicking could be thought of as an anarchist-adjacent praxis that necessarily includes

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both the mitigation of the harms inflicted by systems of oppression and the spread of beliefs and methods for making alternatives to that system possible.

Anarchism is often imagined as accelerationist, desiring the chaotic transition from capitalist to post-capitalist society as quickly as possible without regard for those who are hurt in the process. Yet most anarchists do not think fondly of revolutionary apocalypse. In *Anarchy in Action*, Colin Ward offers a helpful summary of this common anarchist outlook: "The State is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but it is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other behavior, by behaving differently" (23). No, most anarchists are not interested in a power struggle even more violent and bloody than the current violence of the state. Instead, they are usually thinking of revolution through "prefigurative politics," a term coined by Carl Boggs but in practice for much longer, which refers to practices of living that create on a small scale the type of future they want to live in (Boggs). This politics is often referred to as "building the new world in the shell of the old," a phrase borrowed from the constitution of the International Workers of the World.

Anarchists deliver free food to their communities, volunteer in teaching circles, and take on other practices that build alternatives to the shame-inducing and sometimes violent safety nets of the state. Anarchists recognize the harm that comes from interfacing with the state, especially harm to people of color, queer and undocumented people, people with disabilities, and others not recognized as worthy of the state's protection. Many want to move towards a world where the harmful systems of the state are abolished, but much of that drive towards abolition sees the best way forward as abolition through obsolescence – developing and promoting practices that will eventually make those institutions obsolete.

Street medics provide medical support because we recognize that a community-supported emergency response can do what a corporate medical practice cannot. While medics are trained to cooperate with EMS in many ways, medics are able to enter situations where EMS are not allowed, as police restrict EMS access to any part of a city that is not under police control. Sometimes this means that a patient must be transported away from a protest before an ambulance can pick them up, but other times it means that a community could be prevented from accessing medical care for days or even weeks while officials wait to make the call to distribute aid, as was the case in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.[29]

Street medics teach medical knowledge in ways that make community-supported healthcare and healthcare far more viable. This holds not just for protest first-aid but for community health and resilience as well. "The more you invest in being a medic for your community, the more you share your passions and skills, the closer we get to a world where self-care and preventative care are taken seriously. Where in the event of disaster FEMA will show up to the scene two weeks late and find that they have very little to do because the community already knows how to take care of its own" (Street Medic Handbook 63). Medics know the government will show up two weeks late regardless, interested in reestablishing order first and providing bare-minimum care second (Klein). There's little that calls for dismantling and redistributing FEMA funds to local mutual aid projects will do to fix that.[30] Instead, it's our responsibility to develop the skills and training to care for one another in ways that these institutions can't, to show what proper response looks like, and to make our practices so effective that the whole community becomes unwilling to settle for half-hearted attempts at care.

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[29] For more on the street medic response to Hurricane Katrina, see the Common Ground Health Clinic.
[30] Though of course we should be making these calls regardless of whether we think they're likely to be effective

As Dean Spade, author of *Mutual Aid,* says on the prefigurative politics of mutual aid programs, "getting support at a place that sees the systems, not the people suffering in them, as the problem can help people move from shame to anger and defiance" (13). We can adopt this prefiguration in our classrooms as well. Justin Mueller tells us that education has always been an important part of anarchist thought and practice, that it has been "part of the very practice and prefiguration of the anarchist ideal of creating freer and more critical minds, and more open, cooperative and nonoppressive relationships within society" (14). When we work with students to share our understandings not just of outside systems but the very institution we are operating in, we can open up the path from apathy to resistance, both in our students and ourselves.

Prefigurative politics are both akin to and in contrast to the theory of the undercommons put forward by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. Jack Halberstam argues in his preface to Harney and Moten's text that "We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming" (6). Halberstam is reflecting Harney and Moten's rejection of utopianism, and he is right to acknowledge the difficulty of orienting towards a new future within the strictures of an oppressive institution.

Like Halberstam, I have sometimes lost sight of the prefigurative potential of the university. I find that I, like many others, can fall into pessimistic fatalism and totalizing rhetoric. "I don't want a seat at the table, I want to flip the table," as one of my colleagues said at a recent anti-racist teaching workshop. And this outright rejection of the institution can be a helpful affect for critique, but it can sometimes make us miss the nuance of a situation. There's room for both bombastic condemnation and prefigurative politics.

As is often the case, I find inspiration from the students of the university, particularly The Pittsburgh Autonomous Student Network, the authors of "The University of Pittsburgh's Student Orientation Guide: Very Dank Edition." These students mock the PR platitudes offered by the university's traditional student orientation, countering Pitt's self-definition with evidence from their own experience:

> Pitt is Chancellor Gallagher, decked out in the best suits money can buy, threading his way through the lines of underpaid janitors, cooks and security guards rallying outside his office for a better contract and a living wage. Pitt is a private police force taking pictures of student protestors to build files on troublemakers

They share a scene familiar to any instructor, where lectures on "massive population displacements and inevitable global destabilization elicit raised eyebrows but nothing more. After all, tomorrow is Thirsty Thursday and my geology lab was due yesterday." Yet they also warn us that "apathy has been institutionalized," that a totalizing critique of the institution is more often paralyzing than empowering. After their critique of the institution and acknowledgement of the fatalism it produces, they invite us into prefigurative imagination instead:

> Maybe you want to throw parties where sexist assholes are kicked out, maybe you want to use your parents' money to buy weed to share with your classmates who can't afford it, maybe you want to 'redecorate' the walls and alleyways of Oakland, maybe you want to join a student group that vibes with what you feel, maybe you want to kick our asses for writing this bullshit. The point is nothing's going to change unless you act in your own interests, here and now. Let's fuck shit up this year.

"The undercommons is not," Harney and Moten say, "the kind of fanciful communities of whimsy invoked by Bill Readings at the end of his book. The undercommons, its maroons, are always at war, always in hiding" (30). Yet this warfare and hiding are not incompatible with a prefigurative politics. In fact, the description of marronage Harney and Moten provide sounds precisely like building the new world in the shell of the old.

We know that the university is an oppressive institution, but it is also an institution with minimal surveillance where we have a significant latitude over our classroom methods and often the content we teach. There is a reason that conservatives have made such a concerted effort to target the university over the course of its history, and a reason why so much of US activism is tied to student movements. Harney and Moten tell us that the subversive intellectual "disappears into the underground, the downlow low-down maroon community of the university, into the *undercommons of enlightenment,* where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong" (26). The historical practice of marronage itself refers to a fleeing into alternative community, hidden but lively and thriving, a community that is accruing enough power to outlast, outmaneuver, or overthrow the current system.

And as The Pittsburgh Autonomous Student Network reminds us, it's possible to both rail against unjust systems while simultaneously establishing new networks of practice that operate outside of and against the institutional purview. While we are here, we can hone the skills to help our communities grow smarter and more capable of caring for one another, and we can spread these skills among our colleagues and students. There will still be a place for teachers after the revolution, perhaps even a place for the university.

6.0 Postscript: An Ode to Trans Psychosis

"The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for an other. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity. And to support it, honor it, empower it, to protect each other. A radical kinship because once we are all ill and confined to the bed [...] and there is no one left to go to work, perhaps then, finally, capitalism will screech to a halt."
Johanna Hedva

Genderqueer Korean-American mystic Johanna Hedva, in her talk "My Body is a Prison of Pain so I Want to Leave it Like a Mystic But I also Love it & Want it to Matter Politically," introduces us to what she terms "Sick Woman Theory."[31] Sick Woman Theory builds on the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and many others to affirm that our bodies and minds are sensitive to regimes of oppression, that most modes of political protest are embodied and invisible, that existence in a body is always vulnerable, and that infrastructures of support should be reimagined to acknowledge this. Hedva's Sick Woman Theory is an ethical and political undercurrent throughout this dissertation, yet the constraints of the genre have made it such that I had difficulty imagining a "coherent" dissertation that explicitly interwove Hedva's attention to the anti-capitalist implications of disability and mental illness into the current (already unwieldy) threads of queer theory, trans theory, leftist praxis, critical university studies, and composition studies. I affirm the importance of engaging questions of care and rigor from a queer, trans, and leftist perspective, yet the absence of direct sustained engagement with disability studies is a felt

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[31] Hedva acknowledges that the "woman" in sick woman theory is an imperfect referent, and she asks that it be read as "a strategic, all-encompassing embrace and dedication to the particular, rather than the universal [...] the un-cared for, the secondary, the oppressed, the non-, the un-, the less-than."

absence, particularly for questions of care, for the rigor that care requires, [32] and for the stigmatization of those who require it.

One specific direction for this project that warrants further consideration is the connection between trans politics, mental illness, and the depressive capitalist realism mentioned in Chapter 2. These connections are particularly apt given Fisher's reference to "radical theory and politics (Liang, Foucault, Deluze and Guattari, etc.) [of the 1960's and 70's, which] coalesced around extreme mental conditions such as schizophrenia" (19). Historically, political resistance has been treated as psychosis, as a break from reality. This is perhaps best known in the case of drapetomania, the supposed mental illness that caused slaves to attempt to escape plantations. It can also be seen in the attribution of black protests to schizophrenia, with the politicization of the condition and the targeting of its diagnosis against black men in the 1960's and 70's (Metzel). Of course, mental health has also been weaponized against gender nonconformity both historically and in the present; even until 2019, the World Health Organization classified transness (gender identity disorder) as a mental health condition. In considering the political weaponization of mental health diagnoses, I am curious about the radical potential these conditions hold, particularly situating transness in affiliation with mental disability/madness rather than furtive attempts to distance ourselves from these diagnoses.

One of the most common forms of harassment against trans people is the labeling of transness and non-normative genders as mental disorders.[33] While many transphobes point to gender dysphoria's appearance in the DSM as evidence that transness is still a mental disorder, the harassment ignores any nuance of mental diagnosis and portrays transness as a psychosis, an

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[32] See also Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's "crip intelligence" (69).
[33] I was debating putting evidence here, but I decided it's not necessary. You know the memes.

experience of distorted reality, delusions, and false perceptions. In Talia Mae Bettcher's "Trapped in the Wrong Theory," she describes transphobic practices of "reality enforcement," which "anchor identity invalidation in the notion of genitalia as a kind of concealed reality" (392). These invalidations are rooted in an "appearance-reality contrast" that represent the trans person's gender presentation as misaligned with their real (genital) sex. This reality enforcement is often extended to an association between gender nonconforming presentation and violent psychosis, most notably in films like *Psycho* and *Silence of the Lambs* (Ellis). Naturally, trans people are quick to distance themselves from these accusations.

Yet psychosis, as in a break with reality, bears significant resemblance to the political work ahead of us, confronting capitalist realism and bringing new forms of being and knowing into the world. Johanna Hedva makes this connection explicit in her grounding of anti-capitalist politics in a mystical practice that emerges out of what psychiatrists termed a "depersonalization disorder." This condition is characterized by persistent recurring episodes of dissociation in response to trauma, episodes which feel "like you've been yanked out of your body and blasted into an abyss-like space where nothing holds together," an "explosion of the self." Hedva connects this persistent dissociation to her understanding of what she calls "mystical anarchism," leading her to a deep spiritual and political commitment to solidarity and the interconnectedness of all beings.

Hedva defines mysticism as "a state of experience that attenuates – or blurs, and interweaves, and undoes, or, in a word, dissociates – the boundary between the self and: the other, the world, God, nothingness, grace, love." In this dissociation, Hedva tells us, the mystic recognizes the permeability of the body, the fiction of the contained, immutable self, and the wisdom and responsibility that come with interconnection. Mysticism as a practice of dissociation allows us to see more clearly the totality of wisdom shared in our communities by "obliterating

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the self as a container that separates us from all things."[34] Yet Hedva is clear that she is advocating the obliteration of the ideological ego-driven self, not the truth of embodiment that is often mistaken for selfhood. The feminist mystics she draws from "insisted upon the knowledge in their bodies, left society, *and wrote*." The mystic, in listening to their body, finds a form of care work, anti-capitalist protest, and knowledge making that connects them more intimately to the rest of the universe.

A mystical practice is often essential for those of us who exist outside of the bounds of contemporary realism, allowing us the space to live until we can make a habitable world. As So and Pinar of the nature education and ancestral skills program Queer Nature say, "For those oppressed and subjugated by the future-making machine of empire, envisioning alternative futures has always been a natural and necessary part of resistance, not a past time, but an emotional and spiritual and mythological necessity." ("Ecomystics"). They go on to connect this trans futurism to practices of mysticism, describing mystic experience as

> A psycho-spiritual method for engaging with uncertainty / A way toward a "secure"/creative relationship with Mystery / Faith in the insurrectionary power of things that have yet to emerge, or that are emerging // *Belief in the soul's natural capacity for insurgence //* A space of so-called 'madness,' un-sanity & imagination carved out by Love // (So and Pinar "The Case for Mysticism").

So and Pinar draw our attention to the connections between politics, psychosis, transness, and mysticism, much as Hedva's work does. These associations are not a feature of new age queer spiritualism either. Rather, they are a reclamation of mytho-poetic spiritual practices that have been consistently erased from the history of the struggle for trans liberation.

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[34] Hedva draws this definition from her research on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Simone Weil, and accounts of enlightenment by Buddhist monks and nuns

While I certainly find affinity in So and Pinar's naturalist mysticism, which roots itself in the primordial link between transness and the chaotic beauty and mystery of the natural world, I have lately taken a greater interest in specific mystic communities. I am particularly struck by the community that formed around Père Jean, a transgender Catholic mystic healer and prophet practicing in Belgium from 1920-1967. Père Jean reveals the historical entanglement of care and rigor as practiced within mystic traditions, with his practice as a healer tied directly to his veracity as a prophet. Jean's credibility was attacked on all sides, with the Catholic Church denouncing his unfeminine dress, particularly when he was still practicing under the names Bertha Mrazek and Georges Marasco.

Under accusations of fraud, medical experts were brought in, and Jean was diagnosed with the same condition as Johanna Hedva, a "dissociation disorder or disintegration of consciousness," (Van Osselaer, 152). The Catholic press enthusiastically repeated these charges, calling Jean "definitely insane" yet simultaneously fraudulent and exploitative (153). To their accounts, Jean was both a victim of psychosis and a threat of contagion, saying that over "people of weak mind [he] exercises an unhealthy influence, because they are affected by [his] own mental state" (152). The connection to contemporary paranoia about the effect of trans visibility on children is remarkable.

Père Jean's devotion to practicing his healing and prophecy as a man belies claims of exploitation and deceit that surface even in scholarly accounts of his life. Tine Van Osselaer writes of Père Jean's deployment of feminine archetypes of the miraculée, the suffering soul, and the prophetess for their rhetorical advantage in deceiving the public early in his life, yet Van Osselaer does not extend that rhetorical analysis to Jean's later adoption of rhetorically disadvantageous masculine performance. If Van Osselaer was correct, that Père Jean's mysticism was a rhetorically

effective fraud, she makes no acknowledgement that his transness in any way affected his reception. In contrast to accusations of deceit, we see a community devoted to healing through truth emerge in Père Jean's group of religious devotees. This community even came to name itself *Pro Veritate* [For the Truth], and a banner hung in their chapel with the words "May those who do not have faith kneel before this humble altar," presumably a retort against accusations of Père Jean (154). The chapel was adorned with Catholic iconography that is generally recognized as open to queer and trans reappropriation, particularly dedications to Saint Michael, Saint Sebastian, and Joan of Arc. Though little is known of the direct practices of *Pro Veritate,* one may speculate at the healing that took place through their devotion to rigorous practices of mystical discovery, practices which likely found revelations based on that same dissociation that is at the root of Hedva's mystical and political work.

Despite the remarkable connections between politics, psychosis, transness, and mysticism, this is likely as far as I will take this line of speculation publicly, as the ramifications of associating transness and psychosis are of course politically fraught and dangerous to the lives of trans people. Rather, I will end the dissertation with the acknowledgment that those practices of mystical selflessness (a self-emptying that leads to compassion and wisdom) which are often diagnosed as psychosis in fact appear in many theological and political wisdom traditions both historically and contemporarily.[35] The intense commitment to an impenetrable self and the separation of care from the pursuit of wisdom are relatively recent and local developments, rooted in a number of toxic ideologies specific to our political moment. In recalling the smallness of this political moment, this moment in which those wishing to justify harm have so thoroughly colonized the very concept

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[35] Some examples include anatta in Buddhism, ubuntu in Sub-Saharan Africa, kenosis in certain sects of Christianity, solidarity in Peter Kropotkin's work on mutual aid, and the face-to-face relation of Immanuel Levinas

of reality, I am reminded of the magic in the dissolution of the supposedly real, the healing that can be found there, and the vast and disparate traditions that support the twinned pursuits of deeper understanding and compassion towards the universe.

Appendix A Teaching Materials

Appendix A.1 Imagining Social Justice Course Goals

Collaborative Knowledge Discovery – Students will be able to thoughtfully and critically engage authors and classmates in conversations about complex topics, even when they are unfamiliar with the particulars of those topics. In response to reading, listening to, and discussing the beliefs of others, they'll compose essays in which they develop informed positions that engage with diverse views. Students will give critical, spacious attention to the texts they read, and they'll compose work that puts their ideas into conversation with the ideas voiced by others.

Reading Literature for Social Justice – Students will explore how literary forms (and literary criticism) are distinctive in the ways in which they grapple with questions of social justice. They will analyze the ways in which literary works reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies and understand how literary works produce varying emotions in readers that might serve to promote (or undermine) social justice.

Taking Action in Uncertainty – Students will be able to let go of the rigidity of certainty and open themselves to engaging topics with inquisitiveness, even those topics they feel strongly about. They will understand the difference between spacious knowledge and claims of certainty. Most importantly, students will engage social action within this framework of inquisitiveness, while not allowing their lack of certainty to debilitate their social justice efforts.

Self-Knowledge and Aspirations – Students will be able to engage in self-directed learning and problem solving. They will choose texts that will teach them what they want to know, and they will use that knowledge to propose solutions to the problems in the world that they see as most pressing. Students will set objectives for themselves and will check in with the class and instructor about how those aspirations have succeeded, failed, or changed shape throughout the course of the semester.

Appendix A.2 Seminar in Composition: Gender Studies "Assignment 1" Essay Prompt

Assignment 1: Course Orientation Essays
Big Question: What do you want to get out of this course?

Main Task:
Your task for this assignment is to write two short essays (each should be at least one full page double-spaced) about your learning goals this semester.

Assignment Rationale:
Much of your learning in this course will be self-directed – you will set goals for yourself individually and as a class, and we will use the course materials to help achieve those goals.

Writing Advice:
You should use the prompts below to *guide* your essays. The essays should NOT be written in SAT essay format, formulaically answering one question per paragraph. Instead, think about how you would express your enthusiasm for the course to a friend or relative. For each essay, answer the big question (above) first, and use that answer (or something similar) as the thesis statement of the essay. Think of the prompt as questions someone might ask you in the span of a conversation, rather than a blueprint for a good essay. One solid strategy for working with prompts in this style is to brainstorm answers to each of the questions in the prompt first, then spend time arranging those brainstormed ideas into an essay that has solid transitions and makes sense structurally.

Prompts:
1. Gender Studies: What questions do you have about gender that you would like to spend the semester trying to answer? Why are these questions interesting to you? How might knowing the answer to these questions change how you show up in the world? What might your writing for this class look like if it was trying to answer these questions? What work is required to start answering them?
2. Composition: What features of other people's writing and speech do you admire? What would it look like to spend the semester cultivating these in your own writing? If not already clear, how might you break these features down into skills whose progress you could check in on throughout the semester? What might your writing for this class look like if it was written in a style that you admire? What work is required to make that happen?

Appendix A.3 Seminar in Composition: Gender Studies "Assignment 6" Essay Prompt

Assignment 6: Re-Imagining the University
Big Question: If you could do things differently, what would you change?

<u>Main Task:</u>
Write a three-page proposal outlining changes you would make to university language (policies, rhetoric, etc.) that would improve the university for student learning and wellbeing

<u>Assignment Rationale:</u>
This assignment introduces you to the practice of imagination as a critical faculty while also asking you to demonstrate your understanding of the material and ideological consequences of language choices. It also asks you to grapple with difficult, sometimes contradictory goals. Programmatically, this assignment fulfils course goals 1, 2, and 3.

<u>Writing Advice:</u>
Balance your own experiences and needs with the experiences and needs of others. Don't position yourself as the only one affected by your proposed changes, but likewise don't imagine yourself as having no vested interest in the proposals you're putting forward. Proposed changes will likely have an effect on all students, regardless of how visible those effects are at first glance.

<u>Prompt:</u>
- Do some initial research into university language (policies, rhetoric, etc.) You may consult syllabi, university webpages, Title IX policies, administrative emails, news articles about the university, and any other language that results in your better understanding of the university's norms and values. (You should cite this research informally)
- Spend a short time (less than one page) offering an analysis and critique of current language features that you would like to change
- Propose an alternative form of this university language that would improve the university for student learning and wellbeing
- Justify your proposal. Argue that the proposal will in fact improve the university for student learning and wellbeing

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