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RADICAL SOLACE AND YOUNG ADULT WRITING:
RACIALIZED DIS/ABILITY, FAN FICTION, AND
FEEL(ING)S IN COMPOSITION.

by

Jenn Polish

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2019

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of
the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Radical Solace and Young Adult Writing: Racialized Dis/Ability, Fan Fiction, and
Feel(ing)s in Composition.

by

Jenn Polish

Advisor: Dr. Carmen Kynard

Deficit-model pedagogies too often abound in our writing classrooms, in everything from punitive attendance policies to content selection and course design methodologies that inadvertently favor students whose bodies fit a white supremacist, ableist norm. I develop conceptions of fandom and consent-based pedagogical practices, and I argue that these can bring us closer to radical solace in our college writing classrooms, particularly when our classrooms are full of variously marginalized students. These students too often must endure deficit-model pedagogies that assume inexperienced writing styles in both their written compositions and, indeed, in the very composition of their bodies. What happens, I ask, when we dismantle deficit-model pedagogies in our classrooms and frame our students, instead of as automatically lacking, as being, themselves, capable of creating profound literature? These questions are fundamentally wrapped in both dis/ability studies and trauma theory; in composition-rhetoric theories and in critical race studies. Fan fiction is the literary glue I will use in this book, helping me string together theories of young adult writing with dis/ability and trauma studies. Through this book, I use composition studies as a framework through which to help bridge exigent tensions between dis/ability studies and trauma studies. By building on the works of my CUNY LaGuardia Community College students, José Esteban Muñoz, Margaret Price, Nirmalla Erevelles, Carmen Kynard, and Ann Cvetkovich, composition classrooms become my incubator for models of healing that can occur through writing in first-year writing classrooms. These models of healing call into practice fandom pedagogy and consent-based pedagogy, both of which are developed from dis/identificatory practices and decolonizing ethics in the classroom. With these models of teaching, I argue that a fundamental re-valuing of student/young adult writing as itself young adult literature subverts the tendency for first-year composition classes to emerge from oppressive deficit-based thinking about student writing.

“amidst a crowd still oblivious to her present circumstance, Sapphire locked eyes with her misery, removed her mind from her present, and traveled back in time; back to her contouring away the bruises and bite marks on her face in her little mirror.”

- skydomingo36, Spring 2018, CUNY
LaGuardia Community College

for my students, and for Leelee.

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Introduction: Then and Now

November 7th, 2016. The election—*the* election—was looming. And *Supergirl* was all I had.

Because on the CW's adaptation of the comic book series, Supergirl has an Earth sister: Alex Danvers. And I'd known (along with the rest of queer fandom), from episode two, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Alex Danvers is a massive lesbian. That stance. That power. That utter calm in the face of literal death, compared to that utter teenage hysteria at the very *thought* of her mother's disapproval. *That utility belt.*

And on Monday night, election eve, November 7th, 2016, in the fifth episode of the second season, the show finally gave us what we'd needed: Alex Danvers came out. And it was beautiful.

And it was life-saving.

Because the next day, that's all I had. All so many queer people had; that fictional hope, that fiction of joy, that fiction of possibility that maybe, in the face of horrific xenophobic and racist violence, we could maybe survive. Together. Queer and loved and *worthy*.

Fan fiction, exploring Alex's queerness, and exploring the queerness of the lesbian of color she'd fallen for (Maggie Sawyer, everyone: Maggie fucking Sawyer), became the only source of coping, of escape, of hope, for thousands across the globe. I know, because I was asked to write so many of these fan fictions.

Alex, depressed. Maggie, coming out. Alex, coping with her alcoholism. Maggie, growing up gay and brown in Blue Springs, Nebraska. Alex, loving Maggie through her past traumas. Maggie, loving Alex through her emotionally abusive childhood.

Eventually, I was asked to write Alex as a nonbinary lesbian. Eventually, I came out as nonbinary myself. Because of what these fan fictions gave me permission to explore. Because of the community these stories formed, the lifeline I created with thousands of queers across the globe.

Most of these people are at least a decade younger than me. And their writing, and their participatory styles of reading, are incredible.

It is their writing, their brilliance, alongside the writing and brilliance of my CUNY LaGuardia Community College first-year composition students, which led me, inevitably, to craft this project. Because this work, like the Harry Potter *series-length* fan fictions I've written, simply has called me to write it.

I'm interested, here, in investigating what kinds of pedagogies can promote the kinds of solace that fandom brought me and so many others after the election. The kind of solace that I'm interested in promoting and studying in college writing pedagogies is something I'm terming *radical solace*. *Solace*, because of the comfort, the healing, that it brings; *radical*, because of the way it confronts, rather than elides, structural violence. Too often, notions of healing (especially in dis/ability and mental health contexts) involve "cures" that compulsively cover-over the structural violences that created such pain to begin with. Radical solace heals through dis/identification and through creating ourselves back into existence, not to the exclusion of, but directly in the face of, all-encompassing pain.

How can we, in our writing classrooms, establish practices that encourage our students toward radical solace that expands, rather than traps, students' bodies and minds and (dare I say?) souls? How can we use our writing classrooms as spaces for marginalized students of various identities to write themselves into the world rather than contort themselves to fit the compositional narratives of a world that targets them for violence? Patricia Dunn points out that "How professors perceive students' difficulties with reading and writing influences how they attempt to address those difficulties:" this book is my attempt to ask these questions in a way that can influence how professors perceive and even *define* student difficulties, such that we can address them much, much differently (154).

I argue that fandom and consent-based pedagogical practices can bring us closer to radical solace in our college writing classrooms, particularly when our classrooms are full of variously marginalized students. These students too often must endure deficit-model pedagogies that assume inept writing styles in both their written compositions and, indeed, in the very composition of their bodies. What happens, I ask, when we dismantle deficit-model pedagogies in our classrooms and frame our students, instead of as automatically *lacking*, as being, themselves, capable of creating profound literature?

For me, these questions are fundamentally wrapped in both dis/ability studies and trauma theory; in composition-rhetoric theories and in critical race studies. Fan fiction is the literary glue I will use in this book, helping me string together theories of young adult writing with dis/ability and trauma studies. As an author and a writing instructor with mental dis/abilities of multiple diagnoses, I've found myself needing to pull together work that uses the brilliance of young adult literature to tease out the intersections of race and dis/ability in college writing classrooms. Because without centralizing the ways that racialized notions of dis/ability play out in the ways

we teach students to compose literature and to compose themselves, we only perpetuate the kinds of structural violences (like white supremacy and systemic ableism) that threaten our students on the daily.

Through this book, I want to use composition studies as a framework through which to help bridge exigent tensions between dis/ability studies and trauma studies. By building on the works of my CUNY LaGuardia Community College students, José Esteban Muñoz, Margaret Price, Nirmalla Erevelles, Carmen Kynard, and Ann Cvetkovich, composition classrooms become my incubator for models of healing that can occur through writing in first-year writing classrooms. These models of healing call into practice fandom pedagogy and consent-based pedagogy, both of which are developed from dis/identificatory practices and decolonizing ethics in the classroom.

With these models of teaching, I argue that a fundamental re-valuing of student/young adult writing *as itself* young adult literature subverts the tendency for first-year composition classes to emerge from deficit-based thinking about student writing. Young adult literature, as Roberta Trites reminds us, is typically defined as something that “[a]dults create... as a cultural site in which adolescents can be depicted engaging with the fluid, market-driven forces that characterize the power relationships that define adolescence” (7). She goes on to say that this market-driven analysis of whose literature gets to be *considered* literature makes sense in a socioeconomic climate in which, “[a]fter all, publishers rather than teenagers bestow the designation ‘YA’ on these books” (8).

The pages of this book constitute an argument that removes the market context, to the extent possible, from a consideration of whose writing is valued as ‘real’ *literature*: fan fiction, written and studied by young adults both in and out of the classroom, is one way to understand

the kinds of literature created for passion rather than economic profit, for community rather than name-based notoriety. Valuing this kind of writing as literature allows us to read our students' work as emerging from a place of potential expertise, rather than inevitable failure. This challenge to deficit-based pedagogical practices creates space for writing-based healing in the classroom that refuses to ignore pain and erase structural violence for the sake of privileged perceptions of comfort, safety, and empty resiliency narratives.

Consent-based Pedagogy

As a white, U.S.-born, middle class instructor at a CUNY community college, I have no delusions that I can ever get completely unmuddled consent from my students in anything we do in the classroom. No matter what I say or do, and no matter how many 'dad jokes' I make at my own expense (and there are a lot), the power dynamics in my classrooms will always be clear: white instructor, responsible for assigning letter-grades to a classroom full of mostly students of color, mostly immigrants.

Consent-based pedagogy, as well as fandom pedagogy, are concepts that I develop and explore here to help me along this journey. Consent-based pedagogy is, perhaps, what it sounds like: offering students plenty of opportunities to give their consent to what is happening in the classroom, with everything from what they're reading to when things are due and how they'll be graded. But more importantly, perhaps, is the way that consent-based pedagogy can be present in *participation*: actively checking for and negotiating consent with students for how they feel comfortable participating in classes is a crucial part of all my classes (both composition and theatre), and it is a central theme through this book.

For me, this desire to check for my students' consent with their day-to-day "low stakes" classroom activities stems from deep within my own anxiety-ridden body. Because activities that

other people generally find low-stakes? I often find my pulse thrumming extra hard and my clothes starting to get soaked with sweat and my brain hitting a loop of “I don’t wanna, I don’t wanna, I don’t wanna.” I know—because they’ve told me—that many of my students experience this, too.

So often, we think of “low-stakes” activities as things we do in the classroom that aren’t graded; writing we submit that will only be checked off as having been completed or not; etc. But for me, and for many students with anxiety (for example), these activities don’t *feel* low stakes at all. This is also time-dependent, of course: what’s low-stakes one day can feel extremely high-stakes the next, and vice versa.

Margaret Price expands on this type of academic space with her notion of “kairotic space” in the academy. She identifies these spaces as those that are the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged. A classroom discussion is a kairotic space, as is an individual conference with one’s advisor. Conferences are rife with kairotic spaces, including the Q&A sessions after panels, impromptu elevator encounters with colleagues, and gatherings at restaurants and bars on the periphery of formal conference events. Other examples from students’ experiences might include peer-response workshops, study groups, or departmental parties or gatherings to which they are invited.

Drawing on her logic, here—that the definition of low-stakes is directly linked to the production and reproduction of power—I’d like to draw attention to a classroom activity that seems to me to operate very explicitly along that line of low- and high-stakes learning. I do this to complicate what we mean — and whom we’re including and excluding — when we uncritically/neurotypically assume that what’s low-stakes for us is low-stakes for everyone.

Inspired by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network's Conference Communication Badges color coding system, as well as by an oft-used queer BDSM system of safe words, I want to offer as an example of consent-based pedagogy the consent-based model of participation that I use in my Theatre 101 classes at CUNY LaGuardia Community College. This pedagogical practice is something I carry out in my English classes, as well, though without the explicit color-coding system. It is an ongoing invitation into acknowledging the classroom as being, as Price says, "rife with" kairotic spaces. When this truth goes unacknowledged, we continue to privilege those identities and modes of learning which are so dominant as to be deemed invisible (e.g. whiteness, able-bodymindedness, etc.).

This is especially so because this class is a 101; it's "Art of Theatre", and yes, theatre majors must take it, but it's also a course that fulfills general humanities curricular requirements. Not everyone coming into the course aspires to be an actress, nor necessarily do they aspire to be familiar with acting, with improv, with collaborative writing of the intense intimacy that theatre courses can foster. And besides, even the theatre majors—perhaps *especially* the theatre majors, as theatre nerds often cope with our anxiety by diving so deeply into performances that we can, for a few shining hours, interact with human beings without being riddled with the weight of our own minds—have social anxiety, are on the autism spectrum, have depression.

So, what's a student-centered pedagogue teaching theatre to do? For me, I didn't want it to be a matter of limiting the range of activities in the classroom; but I did want it to be, fundamentally, about *consent*. I try to foster as much consent as I can in my system of assessment through contract grading practices and doing temperature checks with my students at various points in each class. Of course, consent—and thereby consent-based pedagogical practices—is muddied by differentials in power.

A white U.S.-born instructor teaching at a predominantly immigrant, POC institution? I can never get truly uncoerced consent for anything I do in the classroom. My body is inherently violent, in that space. I know this. My students and I discuss this. I write to my students about it on my syllabus. So consent, in that context? Can never be full. A white instructor in a white supremacist country, at the end of the day—contract grading, consent-based pedagogy or no—assigning grades to students of color? When I say *consent-based pedagogy*, I say it with a grain of salt, with a heaping helping of, ‘it is always an attempt, and the power dynamics involved must constantly be explicitly acknowledged and openly negotiated.’

That said, trying to think through how an *attempt* at consent-based pedagogy might operate in my day-to-day theatre classroom really had me re-evaluating the casual way we often deem certain tasks or assignments—like freewriting or small, informal group work—“low-stakes.” It’s all well and good to fill our classrooms with “low-stakes” activities meant to centralize student experience and foster active engagement, but without the ability to opt-out and back in at any time without stigma or judgment, even the most “low-stakes” of activities can become high-stakes in a hammering heart trying to beat itself out of a quaking chest.

For the past couple of years, then, I’ve been experimenting with a consent-based pedagogical model of participation that scholars and activists on the autism spectrum have developed for conferences: a system of wearable colors/symbols that broadcasts to people what kinds of social interactions you’re available for, and what kinds of social interactions you’d like to avoid at any given moment. This low-tech wearable tech—wearable consent, one might say—communicates without making the individual wearing it communicate directly; and, since everyone wears them, it helps diminish stigma around less social feelings.

In order to acknowledge this and explicitly negotiate consent in a space inherently full of unequal power dynamics, in my Theatre 101 class, we (myself included) use “Personal Traffic Lights” to try to establish a consent-based system of participation. The explanation that appears on my syllabus is as follows:

Each class, you will be expected to bring with you the cards I give you in the beginning of term: these cards will be our Personal Traffic Lights, colored green, yellow, and red. Though we will discuss these extensively in class, I want to explain our Personal Traffic Lights here as well:

Green: When you are feeling up for anything, ready to take intellectual and emotional risks with the rest of the class—or, just when you’re feeling ready to participate generally and speak out in class—please make the green Personal Traffic Light visible to myself and to your classmates.

Yellow: When you are feeling cautiously ready to participate—perhaps you’re nervous (a little or a lot), or having an off-day/you’re tired, but you’re ready to take some risks and dive into theatre class activities—please make the yellow Personal Traffic Light visible to myself and to your classmates.

Red: When you are feeling unable to participate in a traditional way—when you’re having a bad day, when it’s enough of a challenge and risk to be present in class so you would rather learn by observing, listening, and taking notes instead of directly engaging in the day’s activities—please make the red Personal Traffic Light visible to myself and to your classmates.

You can always change your Light in the middle of the class, because of course, our feelings fluctuate all the time.

You will never be penalized for how you're feeling, of course, but you might find that I'll check in with you privately if I'm noticing a lot of reds and yellows from you; this is to see if there's anything I can do to make the class a safer and more comfortable and accessible space for you to learn.

When we start doing projects and activities together, we will make sure we have roles for when you're feeling yellow and red. We will work as a team to find various ways for everyone to contribute to the class experience; perhaps the greatest thing about theatre is that there is always a role for everyone, from the most outgoing spotlight-seeker to the most introverted behind-the-scenes writer.

This piece of the syllabus—when my students did group investigations of the syllabus on the first day and first reported this finding to each other—has each term I've done it, evoked immense emotions in my students (and myself).

Yet the biggest critique I've encountered -- always from professors, never from students (at least, not that they've told me) -- to this consent-based pedagogical practice is, "won't students just use this to work their way out of working?" I am of the firm belief that this question itself has tints of racialized ableism, digging at our most cherished beliefs that students aren't to be trusted. That when a student doesn't show up to class, it's because they're just "not trying hard enough" or they're "lazy." Depression, lack of MetroCard money, anxiety, and different ways of learning -- these things don't exist in this question, and if they do, they exist only on certain terms. When a student presents themselves, performs, in a way that triggers us to "believe" them that they really are bringing their all to the class.

And when students *are* in fact checked out and *don't* want to do the work? Why not? Are we not making it seem relevant to their lives? Are we not letting our students recognize

themselves in our course work? Has K-12 education depleted their faith that they can ever recognize themselves in our course work? Those things are *our* responsibilities to address, to change. To be transparent with students, to work with them, to meet them halfway. But there is also a very practical, grounded response that I've developed to this question. And -- as with the most important lessons I've ever learned -- my students showed it to me.

Indeed, the first time I used this consent-based pedagogical practice in class, one student asked, near tears, "why has no one ever done this with us before?" It seems important, for me, that this student nearly always displayed his Red card. Sure enough, the same student, a few weeks later, was showing his Red card, but he still went up to perform a short piece for the class. The other students congratulated him on his bravery, performing in front of everyone while he was "feeling red."

"Hey man, I just wanted to say that I noticed you're feeling red," one of my students raised his hand to share after the first student's performance. "But you went up there and gave a badass monologue anyway. That's awesome, man. Great job." The entire class applauded. Upon hearing this, another student—also feeling red—immediately volunteered to perform for the class. He did spectacularly.

That's not because my pedagogy is great, or even good. It *is* because autistic self-advocates created an excellent system, and I was lucky enough to learn of it and try to integrate it into my own course. And it *is* because my students are brave, and powerful, and because we're all learning the strength of vulnerability in the classroom together. Consensually. And it is with this consent-based pedagogical model (or perhaps it's more of a pedagogical *energy*) that I enter the rest of this project.

Fandom Pedagogy

Fandom—the community of fans and their creations surrounding a book/series, movie franchise, television show, comic book, etc.—is far from a perfect place. Just as white supremacy, ableism, queerphobia, and identity-policing dominate too many interactions irl (fandom speak for “in real life,” referring to offline interactions with humans), these dynamics invade fandom with sickening pervasiveness. Fandom, of course, does not exist in a societal vacuum.

However, fandom is also a place—a community—in which dynamics thrive that we only aspire to in most classrooms. Passionately felt, thoughtful peer reviews; truly collaborative and in-depth projects; and analysis that makes the most academic of close readings look elementary are common in fandom. So, too, is a lot of fandom heavy with the consent-based, dis/identificatory practices I desire to create in our classrooms. Because fandom—particularly the kinds of fan fiction I’m going to use as the basis for much of my conceptualization of *fandom pedagogy*—is often where people turn to experience and pro-actively create radical solace.

To this end, I draw a lot of inspiration from fan fiction in this book and in my teaching (perhaps obviously, by now). For the uninitiated, fan fiction is fan-created stories— sometimes standalone “one-shots” and sometimes epic novel-length (and often better-than-novel-quality) works—that use characters and worlds originally published by other authors. For example: didn’t like the ending of Marvel’s *Infinity War*? That’s alright: fan fiction is how you can write your own. Do you think that Regina and Emma from ABC’s *Once Upon a Time* belong together, and it was only heteronormative television that kept them apart? In the lesbian OUAT fandom,

literally everyone agrees with you and would love to read your fan fic version where the Savior and the Evil Queen do, in fact, live happily ever after with their son.

In these ways, fan fiction offers a profound methodology for close reading and analysis, requiring us to peer deeper into scenes already established by published books, films etc.: did you want to actually *see* Miles Morales during the year after his mother was killed, instead of flash-forwarding through it like the comics sometimes do? Fan fiction can give you those details that canon (officially established facts of the story) leaves out. Perhaps even more profoundly, fan fiction is, at its finest, a form of protest.

Fan fic emerges from—and itself serves as—a highly intricate close reading of canon, and a protest against out-of-character writing, against racist writing, cissexist writing, writing that erases queer realities and destroys queer characters for the development of cishet characters, that murders characters of color for the development of white characters.

Because when we write the stories in which the lesbians live, get the girl, and actually get their traumas addressed and cared for (I'm not calling out the CW's *Supergirl*... but I'm calling out the CW's *Supergirl*); when we rewrite season 3 of CW's *The Flash* so it's not torture porn about Iris West—a powerful Black woman who's a journalist and a crucial member of Team Flash—being reduced to a helpless side character whom we watch die over, and over, and over again; when we rewrite these things, we are protesting them.

We are protesting, and we are *analyzing*. Good fan fic provides closer close readings than anything I've ever read in even the best research papers or academic essays. The form demands it. The form rewards it. The form thrives on it. Without deep, profound analysis of canon texts, fan fiction cannot exist. Without the need to write ourselves into canon that we are too often otherwise denied, fan fiction would not be such a powerful art form.

I've long been an advocate of fan fiction as a form of potential community building. Within that, fan fic—and, in this book, the pedagogical practices that emerge from fandom pedagogy—can encourage a radical reclaiming of who gets to create the narratives we tell ourselves. Emotions—the grief of straight cis white able-body-minded men writing everyone else's stories, as well as the sheer joy of recognizing ourselves on the backs of dragons—drive the fan fiction writing process. So, too, does a deeply-felt sense of social justice and the thirst to be included that marginalized creators feel all through our bones. Historically, fan fic is a genre created by and for marginalized authors who don't otherwise get the chance to recognize ourselves in canonized, dominant narratives.

And if fan fiction is about joy, about community, about justice and representation and improving our writing skills while flexing our inclusivity muscles, why, then, should it not be practiced in our writing classrooms? A labor of love—unpaid, ungraded, too often even unrecognized as “real” writing—fan fiction is a far cry from the stale essays we generally require our students to write, the ones that tell them not to use “I” statements and emphasize number of paragraphs over literary passion and the skills that can be honed through precisely that passion.

For the past year at LaGuardia, I've had my composition students write fan fiction of Nikki Giovanni's poem “Poem for a Lady Whose Voice I Like.” I have never seen them all take to an assignment with such fervor—and my students have made me comic books before, so that's saying something—and it has been amazing. Letting them analyze the poem and engage deeply with Giovanni's text and subtext while being able to craft their own original stories has been an absolute revelation. Their assignment guidelines were as follows:

So far this term, we have explored spoken word poems and experimented with creating some of our own. We have read, too, about another genre of literature: fan fiction. We've

read and discussed how fan fiction can be a profound, creative, and insightful way to analyze literature, television, movies, etc. For this assignment, we are going to *create a work of fan fiction that expands on the experiences of the narrator/characters in Nikki Giovanni's "Poem for a Lady Whose Voice I Like."* In other words: how can you flesh out the story told in Giovanni's poem? Do you want to write a story about what the "she" in the poem is thinking, or her backstory? Do you want to write a story about why the "he" in the poem is saying what he's saying, or about his past relationships? Do you want to write a story about their relationship history? Have they dated? Were they childhood best friends? Did they just meet? Where are they when this conversation takes place? Why are they both there? Exploring any of these questions -- or some of your own -- is fair game. The only criteria is that you write a short story (3-4 pages double-spaced) -- a piece of fan fiction -- that expands on Nikki Giovanni's poem somehow.

Their work my students have produced about this poem has been of spectacular quality; their peer reviews—in line with typical fan fic culture—insightful and supportive and helpful; and the depth and range of creativity and narrative, rhetorical skills they brought to the assignment were out of this world. (I will discuss this assignment, and my students' creations associated with it, in much more depth in Chapter 3.)

Beyond the infusion of joy—to the point that our students must be analyzing texts, close reading and crafting sophisticated arguments for their audience—this assignment has been, by far, the best I've ever given. Because it's often the assignment, rather than the students themselves, that starts determining the quality of analysis they will produce. That is not to say that students don't have agency when writing: of course they do. But it is to take responsibility for poorly-designed assignments that inadvertently ban many students from the process by

validating only one form of quality thinking and writing, rather than making multiple forms of complex analysis central to the creation process.

To write these fics, the students had to close read the text in ways that simply don't compute with most traditional research or argumentative essay assignments. Students had to get inside the characters for the sake of bringing them to life through their own bodies, rather than through the disembodied way we too often teach essay-writing. They had to examine every word, sink their teeth into the double entendres and imagined facial expressions and vocal tones and surrounding context; they had to leave no proverbial stone unturned in the original text, in order to use it as a base for their own explorations of the two people presented in the poem itself. The results were spectacular.

As I will discuss in more depth throughout this book, fan fiction has historically been a haven for people with many kinds of marginalized identities. But those of us who also live with depression, anxiety, and other dis/abilities that impact our feelings of self-worth, of energy, the very ability to get out of bed (which, too, are issues that affect most of us when we're in school, not just those of us with dis/abilities)? It's a massive haven in that context, especially.

Therefore, I believe fandom pedagogy (if not literal fan fiction writing itself) is essential to writing instructors interested in practicing anti-ableist pedagogies in the interest of promoting radical solace in our classrooms. Because fandom pedagogy, and by extension, fan fiction in the classroom validates the quiet nerds whose social anxiety keep them more on the internet than out of it; the depressed kids who need to scroll through fan fiction to keep ourselves calm, comforted, and feeling seen; the queer kids who just want to see ourselves, finally, being happy and safe and real in fiction; the kids of color who get to explore the intricate lives of characters whose importance is otherwise sidelined, if not completely absent.

Fandom has long been a haven in which people whose first language is not English practice their writing skills; and it's long been a home for fan fiction with which people of all language backgrounds find their first writing community, their first dis/abled community, their first queer community, or some combination thereof. Bringing this form, and the pedagogical implications drawn from it, into the classroom as a valid, important kind of writing not only sharpens students' analytical skills and close reading techniques; it also serves as key emotional and intellectual validation to those students whose skills, interests, and identities are too often sidelined by canonized academic texts and canonized academic assignment structures.

Once More Unto the Breach

This book takes consent-based pedagogy and fandom pedagogy and uses them as vehicles in which we can begin to approach anti-ableist pedagogical practices. These practices can do the muscle work of pulling together seemingly discordant threads of trauma studies and dis/ability studies, using composition studies and notions of radical solace as a bridge between them. The goal? Creating theoretical and practical foundations for our classrooms to welcome *all* bodies, not just the privileged some.

My first chapter, "Composing the Bodymind in Classroom Spaces," discusses the racialization of dis/ability in writing classrooms and how damaging deficit model pedagogies are in that context. To discuss this, I pull trauma and dis/ability studies together, using the writing classroom as an incubator to think them through and how they can work well together to produce a radical model of healing instead of deficit. As Jay Dolmage summarizes, "[d]isability studies challenges the idea that disability is a deficit or defect that should be cured or remedied;" his emphasis on *deficit*, here, is one that I transform pedagogically into a critique of deficit-model

teaching. I use this first chapter to query what, then, is a replacement for deficit-model thinking? I begin to introduce the idea of radical solace.

The second chapter, “Radical Solace and a Redefinition of YA Literature,” takes a radical solace model and discusses it pedagogically: how can we assume expertise in our students’ writing rather than deficit? I discuss how redefining young adult literature to explicit *include* the literature that our young adult students write themselves can pedagogically encourage the creation of radical solace in our classrooms. If students are allowed agency rather than deficit in our classrooms, the limits of what can be composed drastically expand.

Chapter three, “Fandom Pedagogy, Consent, and Collaboration,” takes the theoretical components of chapters one and two, melding them into a discussion of fandom pedagogy and how harnessing that to respect young adult writing *as* young adult literature challenges deficit pedagogies in extremely generative ways. This chapter explores examples of how fandom pedagogy can dramatically alter the ways that students interact with themselves, writing, close reading, and each other in our classrooms.

Finally, chapters four, “Crippling Curricular Normalization: Syllabus Design and Content Selection” and five, “Consent-Based Pedagogy: Assignment Design and Assessment Processes” are “application” chapters. In these, I tug together the theorizations of the first three chapters and examine how these approaches to pedagogy can increase equity and access in different aspects of course design (labeled in the chapters’ respective titles). The “application” sections occur through series of questions that instructors can ask ourselves as we design various parts of our courses, all informed by the theorizations laid out earlier. I frame all of these as questions rather than as guidelines because a one-classroom-fits-all approach is precisely the opposite of the work I’m trying to do here to promote dually anti-racist, anti-ableist approaches in our classrooms.

Questions, rather than guidelines, can be customized to each classroom, as well as the physical and emotional capacity of instructors during any given term.

It is in the spirit of questions, rather than dictated answers, that I proceed.

Chapter 1: Composing the Bodymind in Classroom Spaces

The stories are ubiquitous: the anecdote about “that student” who’s “for sure on the spectrum.” The tale about the student who kept missing class with little to no explanation, but still begged to pass the class. The knowing looks—the ones that expect you to agree, lest you be deemed green or young or naive or some combination thereof, all of which amounts to “you’ll know better one day”—about students coming to class late, on their phones during class, freezing like a deer in the proverbial headlights when you call on them to speak in front of everyone, or even just in front of you.

And those anecdotes are even before we get to quips about how students somehow never do the reading, let alone submit their writing on time.

The midrash of teaching composition: the tales we compose about the ways our students compose themselves. Hearing these stories, I always cannot help but think of my mother; a special education elementary school teacher, who always refuses to call her students “low,” to set her expectations for them any lesser just because they’re “challenging.”

Code words, all. Code words for bad students, for dis/abled bodyminds. For troublesome, maybe even dangerous bodies. Code words for Black and for brown. All conflated, all tangled up

together; racialized dis/ability, tangled together with “is everything alright at home?” and “well, our students are too busy to worry.”¹

To me, these are code words for the tensions between the conflicting rhetorics of trauma and dis/ability, both in our scholarship and in our hallway conversations with bustling colleagues. Like dis/ability scholars Margaret Price and Nirmalla Erevelles, I understand classrooms—writing classrooms, more specifically—as incubators for both the tensions and implications of trauma and dis/ability theories. Trauma studies, with its general pathologization and hopelessness; dis/ability studies, with its general refusal to incorporate pain into notions of resilience.

In composition classrooms, we demand that our students compose literal compositions—pieces of writing meant, often, to encapsulate their spirits, their goals, their traumas, their aspirations. We also demand, however, that—through these compositions themselves and through more subtle means of participating, of performing presence—students compose their own bodyminds in our classes, lest they be deemed “troubled” and/or, more dangerously for students than for us, “troubling.” In this conception of “troubling” and “troubled” students, the specter of both trauma and dis/ability loom large in our writing classes. Students’ abilities, levels of access, and/or willingness to perform with a certain written and affective composure deeply shape our pedagogies, our assessment practices, and our scholarship.

¹ I refer here to a *New York Times* article by Ginia Bellafante, written in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election. The article was headlined “Trump’s Election? Some Students are Too Busy to Worry.” In the article, Bellafante utterly misrepresented LaGuardia Community College students as being apathetic, when in reality, they were sharing with her the fact that his election was not necessarily shocking to them, nor his brand of hatred something they didn’t already have to deal with on a daily basis. By portraying Muslim community college students of color as too busy to worry, Bellafante was attempting to create a whitewashed tale of POC resiliency that screamed of paternalism and willful misunderstanding. She did not, apparently, sit in our classrooms the day after, nor see the tears, puffy faces, and wide, terrified eyes the next day.

But it is not just our students that compose themselves in particular ways in our classrooms. When we compose our syllabi, how do we compose ourselves? What pieces of *us* are we performing for our students? What are we telling our students about how we expect them to compose themselves in our classes? Both explicitly through course requirements and assignments, and implicitly through the language and structure of our syllabus; through the content students are required to explore and generate; through the way we present ourselves (or artificially remove ourselves) through our syllabi?

As a composition instructor, my instinct is to take extreme pleasure, like dis/ability scholar Robert McRuer before me, in the duality of the words *composition*, of *composure*: because when we ask students to write *compositions* in our writing classrooms, we are asking them, sure, to *compose* a piece of writing. But we are also asking our students, in quite a profound way, to compose *themselves*—their bodies, their emotions—according to particular standards; standards that we are less likely to admit exist than we are to delineate percentage stratifications for our grading rubrics.

This duality is particularly apt in composition classrooms, in the writing classrooms that I spend so much of my mental, physical, and emotional space in; but I believe the questions I posed above are applicable with any course, all courses. Surely, whether we're in a biology lecture hall or an intimate political science oval-table seminar, we expect our students to compose themselves in a certain way, and we are often affronted when they don't: when they're on their phones during a lecture, when they're silent during a class discussion, when they sit waaaaay the hell back in their chairs, reclining like their bolted-to-the-ground desk is a beach chair, eyes fluttered closed and one earpod in and on.

It is these expectations for composition—both written/course-explicitly-required and unwritten/bodily-emotional/course-implicitly-required—that have compelled me to write this book. How can we change our classrooms by altering concepts—both ethically and pedagogically—of what kinds of composition and expression are *appropriate*, are *acceptable*, are rewarded and praised as *expertise* by our grading system, our university system, change our classrooms? What pedagogical approaches can allow, and indeed encourage, our students to compose themselves in ways that affirm rather than denigrate their racial and ability-related identities, backgrounds, and bodies?

To explore these questions, I plan to build on and expand the work done by Nirmala Erevelles, Subini A. Annamma, and Margaret Price, whose work in critical dis/ability studies cracks open the potential to create more affirmative pedagogical practices. In doing so, I will probe the intersections of the works of scholars like Carmen Kynard and José Esteban Muñoz—who have highlighted the dominance of (affective) whiteness in expectations of composition, both of bodies and of written materials—and the work of scholars like Erevelles and Price, who have called attention to the assumptions of able-bodiedness that characterizes most composition classrooms (and academic spaces more broadly).

Through the writings of these scholars, I will take young adult-generated young adult literature (my students' fan fictions and the theorizations that go with them), alongside Ann Cvetkovich's analysis of lesbian trauma narratives, to incubate contradictions between trauma studies and dis/ability studies in composition classrooms. This incubation will produce an understanding of mental health in the classroom that refuses to bleach color from understandings of dis/ability while also refusing to conflate race and dis/ability. Mental wellness in the classroom can, in this way, be reinforced with pedagogical practices that that will seek to create

conditions for solace while refusing to erase the structural enforcement and individual experiences of pain.

In bridging composition and dis/ability studies with the aim of forging dually anti-ableist, anti-racist pedagogical practices and academic discussions, I want to build out a conception the pedagogical encouragement of *radical solace* through the generation of young adult literature. Here, trauma studies and dis/ability studies merge in the vehicle of the composition classroom, the home of undervalued young adult literature and unacknowledged young adult authors. By radical solace, I am referring to forms of refuge and healing that counter the compulsory recovering and erasure of the structural violences of dis/ability, trauma, and racial power that accompany most pushes for “cures.”

As opposed to a willful forgetting of power in favor of “moving on,” radical solace accommodates and embodies both resistance to structural inequalities *and* a reclaimed form of healing. My students, now, actively bring the world into our classroom; with their explorations of fan fiction, they don’t seek to ignore pain and challenge. Rather, they seek it out, both reading and writing fan fiction that confronts pain head-on. Often, this pain is deeply personal to my students, though I make it clear that it need not be. Still, they insist on taking power for themselves through their fan fictions; one of my students, in Fall 2018, even presented at a CUNY Humanities Alliance conference with me to read their fan fiction about gender dysphoria and the comfort found in small moments of peace with their girlfriend. This mode of expression is too often squelched by requirements that force students to contort both their bodyminds and their writing into expectations designed to be only accessible through accommodation.

This accommodation-approach to accessibility, to pedagogy, is exemplified in syllabi that list the email address and room number of the Office of Students with Dis/abilities somewhere

buried deep within the syllabus, in courses that uncritically accept no “excuses” for absences or late work. This approach requires students to first access the medical-industrial complex by attaining the right paperwork required to deem them worthy of accommodations—only certain kinds of accommodations—in our classrooms. A deficit model if nothing else, it assumes that students with dis/abilities are the ones that are lacking, rather than our approaches to course design. Indeed, as dis/ability scholar Melanie Yergeau asserts, “A rehab approach to accessibility positions disabled people as passive recipients. It creates an us/them divide between able-bodied savior-designers and the disabled victims-users. It positions disability outside the scope of design or co-production, some of our dearest concepts” (“Space”, np). Yergeau here emphasizes the deficit-based positionality that our pedagogies assert when we do not attempt to make access a preemptive and essential part of our course designs. We compose ourselves, through these approaches, as able-bodied savior-designers, while students who might not be welcomed by our course design as dis/abled victim-users who must compose themselves as such.

I believe that approaches geared toward reversing this deficit-model approach to student learning can begin—only begin, because this work will never be complete, and certainly not by white instructors like myself—with approaches to pedagogy that attempt to bridge the tensions between trauma studies and dis/ability studies in a practical, design-based manner. Consent-based pedagogies and lesbian fandom pedagogies are two ways of thinking about course design that I explore in this book to try to approach teaching writing in a way that promotes radical solace through the validation and encouragement of student-centered modes of affective and written expression.

In Spring 2018 at CUNY LaGuardia Community College, one of my students drew quietly on her tablet all class, every class. She would barely make eye contact with her

classmates during group work, but it was clear she was listening; she would laugh (quietly) and respond in her own ways, but she wouldn't really speak. Only to me, and only sometimes a classmate or two. But when I told her that she could incorporate her (brilliant) drawings and comics into her final project on *Ms. Marvel*, she absolutely lit up.

I'd only seen her light up one other time the entire term; when I introduced the text of *Ms. Marvel* by G. Willow Wilson as a comic about a Pakistani-American Muslim 16-year-old who gets superpowers in New Jersey. Her immediate and renewed effort to dive into her project was the most affectively expressive she'd been all term; and it showed in the incredible skills and analytical prowess demonstrated in her project. She told me it was transformative to be able to use her interests and passions to channel her analysis; those were more words than she'd spoken all term. This is significant, because so many of our students are shamed for speaking aloud in classrooms that devalue their accents and tell them, forcefully, that they're speaking *wrong*. With her self-guided project, negotiated with me, her voice was rendered, this time, *right*.

Our students, like instructors, have a lot of healing to do: from mental health issues exacerbated by rigid classroom structures and from deficit-based pedagogies that assume that learning is mostly unidirectional, at least in first-year writing classes. For all these students, and indeed, for ourselves, it is essential to reversing the deficit-based, "cure"-based pedagogy of teaching first-year writing. This reversal clearly worked in the life of the student I mentioned above: as Kynard argues extensively, this model assumes that students who have non-dominant knowledge bases are inexpert, "remedial", and need to be better assimilated into dominant knowledge ways.

Pulling together the exigent work of composition scholar Kynard and dis/ability scholars like Erevelles and Price, I ask: What can happen to transform pedagogical practices/scholarship

and dis/ability studies when use consent-based and fandom pedagogies to centralize the writings of our young adult students as themselves *young adult literature*? This reframing could counter the common assumption in children's literature scholarship that children's and YA literature is written *by adults*, assuming—much like in composition classrooms—a deficit model of children and young adults' writing and reading capabilities.

What implications might such a redefinition of young adult literature have for unseating the supremacy of a particular form of (white) English, and along with it a whole host of deficit-model theorizations and pedagogies that racialize dis/ability and dis/able race in the classroom? If young adult literature consists, at least partially, of the writing our students generate—especially if our students are writing in the context of anti-ableist, anti-racist pedagogies that encourage them to claim and hone their own languages (my students often integrate Spanish, Korean, Hindi, etc., into their best projects)—YA literature can reclaim agency for marginalized young adults and constitute its own form of radical self- and community-care and solace in the midst of structurally hostile literary environments. Rather than a question of “lowering” standards, I, like Kynard, wish to fundamentally challenge definitions of “rigor”—like Sara Ahmed's assessment of the white, able-bodiedness of conceptions of “goodness”—to interrogate traditional definitions of and approaches to difficult texts. What forms of expertise are valued (my former student's comic book podcast, for example?), and what modes of incredibly intricate analysis are sidelined as inexpert, as wasteful, as simultaneously excessive and not enough?

If we accept for a moment that the writing that our first-year writing students (a majority of whom are young adults, even in the CUNY community college at which I teach) is, in fact, *itself* young adult literature, what then? What pedagogical possibilities are born when we explicitly open our classrooms to our students' self-created literature? How can our course

designs promote radical solace through this YA literature? How can student-centered pedagogies that encourage multiple modes of student composition—that, indeed, honor student composition as itself literature—flip the script of who is expert in the classroom, of what constitutes a literary “deficit”? How would this, then, impact our assessment practices and alter the very bones of our courses?

Dis/ability Studies, Trauma Studies, and (Un)Health

The tensions between dis/ability studies and trauma studies are not easily confined to the realm of scholarly compositions. They also, profoundly, inform my day-to-day life as someone who lives with various mental health diagnoses, including borderline personality dis/order. James Berger summarizes the disciplinary split between two fields that, logically and ethically, should probably be more in sync: in *The Disarticulate*, he writes that “[t]rauma studies warns consistently against forms of healing or closure that are merely ideological coverings over wounds that, in reality, are far from healed and still producing symptoms” (167). This perspective is, of course, tremendously important: forms of healing that serve only as artificial closure meant to cover over continuing structural violence and/or personal experiences of pain cannot truly hope to serve justice or deeper healing. Trauma studies refuses to put a neat bandage over wounds that are still oozing; refuses to make invisible that which is profoundly present, perhaps so pervasive as to be rendered unknowable by those who don’t have to experience it; trauma studies claims pain, recognizes pain, acknowledges pain. Trauma studies validates pain, but it also calls into question whether freedom from pain is something that is even possible.

Dis/ability studies, meanwhile, has moved from a medical model of dis/ability to a social model of dis/ability, giving it a dramatically different conclusion about pain than trauma studies.

The medical model of dis/ability pathologizes individuals with physical, affective, cognitive, psychological, and emotional differences as “the problem” to be “cured.” The social model, however—which dis/ability self-advocates and dis/ability scholars have put forth as a more apt model for understanding dis/ability—emphasizes the structural and environmental barriers that define what dis/ability is. Would wheelchair users indeed be rendered dis/abled, the social model queries, if the structural environment was truly conducive to navigating streets, workplaces, social spaces, and homes in a wheelchair? Would depression, indeed, be a dis/ability if capitalist structures did not require that a person’s value to society be defined by their ability to produce consistently and unyieldingly?

This social model has accomplished, and continues to accomplish, powerful advances for people living with dis/abilities. Instead of pathologizing individuals, the social model of dis/ability places responsibility and, indeed, pathology, squarely on societal structures and environmental conditions that benefit, prioritize, and privilege able-bodied people while actively (yet passively, invisibly) oppressing and excluding people with dis/abilities. This is a fundamental premise of Yergeau’s argument, discussed above, that access is primarily about proactive design, rather than retrofitted, after-the-fact accommodations.

And yet, this social model does not adequately account for the kinds of pain, of real, embodied suffering, that is often part and parcel with being dis/abled. Trauma studies prioritizes this pain, but dis/ability studies actively elides it. Berger frames this as an inability to simultaneously hold the truths of the social model of dis/ability *and* the deeply embodied, negative experiences of dis/ability. He elaborates:

“[d]isability studies has not yet conceived a way of thinking the negative... [refusing to] theorize the experiences of disability that are not directly socially induced—that involve

sensation, emotion, or physical or mental limitations that social reform will not completely alleviate, that will have further social consequences.” (160)

The complications involved in theorizing *both* a social model of dis/ability *and* addressing bodily experiences that “social reform will not completely alleviate” are difficult, to be sure. Yet, not attempting to do this will, as Berger alludes to, have social consequences such as eliding the real experiences of immense pain (and immense joy) that individuals do endure, social model or no. Even when chronic pain results from environmental conditions, for example, the pain is still real, regardless of how social conditions change.

Berger puts this tension between dis/ability studies and trauma studies—the former with an emphasis on resilience and the latter with an emphasis on pain—succinctly: “[D]isability studies is marked by an inability to mourn, and trauma studies is marked by an inability to *stop* mourning” (173, emphasis in original). While dis/ability studies, especially in its overwhelming whiteness, often artificially covers over structural oppression through the identity politics of compulsory re-covery, trauma studies often shifts the opposite way, implying that healing is never possible, that solace is nowhere to be found. That we are doomed, in other words, to stay wrapped within the pits of hell that our BPD, our depression, our PTSD, wreaks on our bodyminds without ever finding the solace of ourselves, our communities, our pain being witnessed; the solace of being, if only for a moment, *real* in both our agonies and our joys.

To dive deeper into the complexities of a model of mental dis/ability that holds both pain *and* joy; structural critique *and* individual agency; environmental design *and* affective embodiment, I turn our attention to the concept of “bodymind.”

Bodymind: Composing Ourselves, De-composing False Binaries

What do I mean when I write *bodymind*? When I refuse to draw out a false binary between body and mind? I draw my usage from that of dis/ability scholar Margaret Price, who writes of bodyminds that

Bodymind is a term I picked up several years ago while reading in trauma studies (see Rothschild 2000). According to this approach, because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other—that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two—it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term (269).

Price goes on to intimately describe instances of pain in her own bodymind, poignantly sharing a very familiar story—to me—about herself, her BPD, and her partner, who brought her a blanket and soup after ze saw her have a break for the first time. Ze simply explained that “you’re not okay right now,” even though ze had never seen Price like that before (280). Price—pulling her bodymind directly into her academic writing, something which is typically associated as *only* to do with the cleaner, tidier *mind*—writes that “[b]eing witnessed and cared for, even in the midst of unbearable pain, makes me think there may be some hope for all of my bodymind” (280).

Price invites her readers into this moment of witness, of being cared for—of validation of her pain, of her the chaotic and excruciating logical reality of BPD. This invitation explicitly bridges dis/ability studies and trauma studies in a way often neglected by both sets of scholars.

Angela M. Carter, too, in her work on teaching and trauma, does excellent, exigent work to bridge the theoretical gaps between dis/ability and trauma studies. She focuses on trauma and its effects and how it is fundamentally related to multiple kinds of neurodiversity (including autism, learning dis/abilities, epilepsy, etc.), arguing that though she focuses in this work on

triggers within the context of trauma, many neurodivergent people experience triggers in ways that often similarly impacts their embodied subjectiveness [or, one might say, bodymind]. I am using the experience of a trigger to call for solidarity between individuals typically understood as mentally disabled and communities who have experienced racial and post-colonial traumas. In doing so, I am purposely expanding the category of neurodivergence to include people who may never receive a medical diagnosis or clinical recognition as such. This is an overtly political move toward an intersectional approach to trauma and disability. In fact, recent advances in neuropsychology have legitimized what critical race theorists, women of color feminisms, and post-colonial feminisms have long been arguing. (np)

Her work is critical here: she does the muscle work of tugging together trauma and dis/ability studies by doing what whiteness-infused academic fields have, in the mainstream, neglected to do: making race a critical centerpiece in the fabric of our understandings of neurodivergence, pain, and pleasure. Absent an analysis or even an acknowledgment of the dually-reinforcing structures of white supremacy and ableism, neither dis/ability nor trauma studies can hope to come together in a way that can promote anything resembling power-inflected means of solace.

Yet for many dis/ability studies scholars, power is reclaimed as being housed in dis/abled bodyminds, often to the exclusion of intersectional powers of structural oppression that shape bodyminds. Indeed, dis/ability theorists write of the potential power of dis/ability aesthetics (or, perhaps, *dis/abling* aesthetics), arguing that an aesthetics created by disabled people can permit us to “use [our] own bodies as weapons to subvert and undermine disabling barriers and name able-bodied people as part of the problem” (Allan, 37). Similarly, Susan Gabel argues that an aesthetics of dis/ability “is a subversive discourse that confronts oppressive social reality and

converts it into something liberatory” (31). Personally, I find tremendous power in the potentially liberatory nature of dislocating the problem from my body and appropriately placing attention on structural oppressions designed to increase, not soothe, my suffering. And yet.

And yet, I worry. I worry about these important attempts to locate power in our bodies. To displace *the* problem onto capitalist structures that force us to be judged by our ability to be *productive* at a certain speed; that force us to assess our bodies in a political economy that is actively hostile to divergent bodyminds. Not that I disagree with the project, intellectually, emotionally, or ethically. However, my pain is real. I suffer. The social model of dis/ability does not contain my life stories; but nor do the trauma theories that elide the immense solace, the ecstatic joys, I get from my moments of healing.

Where does that leave me, in these theorizations that uncritically label our bodies as almost automatically subversive? Surely, I am proud of my bodymind, exactly as it is. I have superpowers that are simultaneously my own supervillains.² But is my bodymind *automatically* subversive? What is the cost of being “subversive”? And, indeed, as a white person, what is the cost of my pain? My pain can be recognized—at least somewhat—ableism notwithstanding. I am *allowed* to be dis/abled. Many, if not most, people are not.

Many—overwhelmingly often, people of color, disproportionately targeted for denied access to health care and healthful living environments—acutely feel the need to gain access *into* a system of diagnoses, to have their pain be *acknowledged* as a dis/ability rather than an individual failure or lack of strength (Mollow 288). The ability to reject the medical model of dis/ability comes with the assumption that we’ve had access to it to begin with. The privilege to

² Incidentally, my third novel is about a trans boy whose superpower is his ability to feel others’ emotions and transform that energy into healing power. Both a blessing and a terrible curse, to be sure.

be proud of a dis/abled bodymind is, structurally³, a white privilege. As Carter summarizes, “the ability to be recognized as a person living with trauma [and in her usage, trauma is inclusive of multiple neurodivergent experiences] is in many ways a political privilege” (np). This political privilege manifests in everything from job interview processes to student grades to assessments of faculty. The idea of recognition being claimed with pride or recognition being forced upon an individual—when we must beg for scraps of accommodation under tables not designed for us—until we must become prideful as a coping mechanism is one that deeply impacts our classrooms, our pedagogies.

Indeed, these critiques further unveil the re-covered problems attendant with professing the *uncritical* desirability of dis/ability: moving our bodyminds to students for a moment (the next chapter will bring us closer to classroom spaces), how desirable is it, really, for students to be labeled “unruly” by their/our teachers (Erevelles 72)? To be labeled as passive, ineffective (non)learners; to be labeled as problems, as disruptions, as both disturbances and disturbed; to be deemed incapable of learning the *right* things in the *right* ways; to be shoe-horned into remedial classes that cost students money, that cost students time, that cost students stigma and that cost students often unnecessary emotional and intellectual labor and turmoil; to be body-slammed into classroom desks and arrested in front of their classmates, to be hauled into the juvenile justice schools-to-prison pipeline because they dared to have a different opinion, dared to move differently, to speak differently, dared to challenge white supremacist knowledge, dared to be a Black girl with a Black girl’s body in a white supremacist classroom in a white supremacist country?

³ This structural critique does not negate, of course, the existence and affect of proud dis/abled people of color; dis/ability pride *should* not be, and indeed *is* not, exclusive to white people. I am simply examining, here, social narratives of who is allowed what stories.

For Erevelles, framing dis/ability politics as driven by “desire”—as McRuer and others cited above do—is to pay heed to the social model of dis/ability for only some of us. It is to overlook the structural issues that position both the specter and reality of dis/ability as something quite different for certain bodyminds than for other (white) bodyminds. Erevelles writes persuasively that,

it could be argued that the disabled body, notwithstanding its marginal status, can resist the disciplining discourses of schooling by producing narratives that will ‘blow apart the fiction’ (Kelly, 1992; p. 519) that have located it outside the scope of desire [...]

However, I am going to argue here that, notwithstanding the poststructural emphasis on desire, for most disabled people, it is *need* that is foregrounded in their struggle for social justice, and not *desire* (72-3).

As Erevelles highlights above, the tendency for (white) dis/ability studies to focus on desire elides the very real structural and emotive needs of people of color with dis/abilities. Further, implying that dis/ability is or should always be based in desire threatens to erase the very existence of people of color with dis/abilities. This erasure is the opposite-twin of the somehow simultaneous, similarly racist *conflation* of people of color with dis/ability, i.e., the white supremacist assumptions that people of color are inherently dis/abled.

When discussing Lauren Berlant’s concept of slow death (which encompasses the mundane traumatics of daily oppression rather than discrete instances of violence such as genocide), Jasbir Puar asks, “which bodies are made to pay for ‘progress’? Which debilitated bodies can be reinvigorated for neoliberalism, and which cannot?” (180). This reinvigoration for neoliberalism all but defines McRuer’s elision of race from his analysis of what is desirable for people with dis/abilities; Puar invokes attention to self-advocates for dis/ability justice. She

contrasts this justice-based strategy, which focuses on “working-poor and working-class communities of color, [in which] disabilities and debilities are actually ‘the norm,’” with the more mainstream, whitened version of dis/ability studies, which “largely understands disability as a form of nonnormativity that deserves to be depathologized” (180).

The conflicting aspects of these agendas are central to my mission here: is there room to hold all the complexity and conflicting realities involved in studies and lived experiences of mental health, trauma, and dis/ability? In terms of writing classrooms, the consequences of both the dual erasure and hyper-dis/ablism of people of color has particularly strong consequences for our students, of course. Using Carter’s understanding of trauma as an ongoing violence against the bodymind, we can easily understand Susan E. Craig’s assertion that “[t]raumatized children often miss important information or content [in school] because they pay more attention to the teacher’s face and body language [as a protective mechanism] than to what is being said” (63). This has tremendously exigent implications for the importance of explicitly anti-racist, anti-ableist pedagogical practices (discussed in the next chapter), but it also brings us back to the aspect of trauma studies that Berger rightly criticizes: is there room in trauma theory for something akin to hope?

The situation—both theoretical and embodied—seems grim as we transition our discussion into classrooms, into scholarly literature that brings together composition studies with dis/ability and trauma studies. And yet, it is perhaps in our writing classrooms that we can find hope for the forms of radical solace that can forge generative bridges between trauma and dis/ability studies, all the while promoting explicitly anti-racist and anti-ableist pedagogical practices.

Deficit Models and the “Good Student”: Racialized Mental Health in Our Classrooms

Why discuss bodymind along with the tensions between trauma theory and dis/ability studies in the section above? And what does all this have to do with our writing classrooms, with our pedagogies, and with the fundamentally affective interactions we have with students at every single crossroad in academic life? This section will examine the ways that a bridge between critical dis/ability studies and trauma theory can enrich composition scholarship—and vice versa—to probe the questions:

How do the tensions between dis/ability and trauma studies play out in writing classrooms? How can these necessary tensions be transformed in and by these same spaces? What kinds of composition (bodily and written) are generally valued in college writing classrooms? What kinds of composition and emotional expressions (bodily and written) are pathologized and racialized as less than, consistently defined through deficit models of “remediation”? How does the overarching whiteness of composition and dis/ability scholarship and teaching shape these deficit models, and how do these deficit models in turn shape “cure” rhetoric and practices that pathologize students of color?

I ask these questions of existing scholarship to lay the groundwork for my ideas about the need for integrating facilitation of radical solace—through consent-based pedagogies and fandom pedagogies, discussed below—into our composition pedagogies. In the classroom, fostering radical solace requires attentiveness to all these aspects of trauma and dis/ability studies, using the writing classroom as a proverbial incubator for demonstrating where these theories can come together while holding, instead of eliding, all their contradictions.

Perhaps without intending to integrate explicit dis/ability-focused pedagogy into his work, Rusty Barrett gifts us with tremendously important insights into ways that dis/ability and race collide in

the classroom in real, embodied ways. He puts forth an understanding of physical and emotional manifestations—on our students’ bodyminds—of the structural constraints and pedagogical violences committed against our students. In his vital work on language ideology—“the dominant set of commonly held folk beliefs concerning language”—he gives insight into the ways that the undervaluing, demeaning, dominant language ideology cuts into the bodyminds of children who speak undervalued forms of English (17). Reminding us that “[d]isrespect for a person’s dialect is disrespect for that person,” he offers critical reminders about the ways our students *experience* deficit-model pedagogies emotionally, psychologically, physically (51). He writes:

Children who speak undervalued varieties often find themselves in classrooms in which the language they know is deemed *wrong* or *inappropriate*. Even when answering correctly, these students are likely to be treated as if they are inappropriate simply because they answered in a different dialect... The anxiety of self-monitoring [for “proper grammar”] also extends beyond the classroom. In conferences with teachers, job interviews, discussions with doctors or lawyers, and countless other daily interactions, speakers of undervalued varieties must watch not only what they say, but how they say it. (21)

Students’ language compositions—verbal and otherwise—translating into *students themselves* being rendered as deficient, rendered as less than, as dis/abled, as a “bad” student and incapable of learning “proper” English will, of course, create a particular form of self-monitoring anxiety.

I am interested in Barrett’s use of the word “anxiety” here, because it offers an insight into the casual way that anxiety is almost an expected part of education for students who compose themselves in undervalued ways. Comfort and praise are expected for students who

speak the overvalued variety; others are casted either as “exceptional” examples of their otherwise *wrong, inappropriate, incapable* group, or simply as wrong and inappropriate and incapable themselves. The dis/abling inherent in this deficit model of writing pedagogy is clear. The anxiety—the dis/abling—that is attendant with deficit-based understandings of teaching writing is often elided in composition scholarship, or worse, acknowledged but dismissed; dismissed as inappropriate, dismissed as disengagement because students don’t *want* to learn.

Sure enough, we can gain a lot of insight into the pathologization of certain affective modes of composition (both bodily and written/spoken) from trauma studies. Harkening back to Craig’s work on trauma-sensitive schooling, instructors that are sensitive to trauma—and indeed, being told *you* are wrong at every turn, combined with other structural violences, constitutes ongoing, so-persistent-as-to-seem-background trauma—refuse to engage with pedagogies based in deficit models. Rather, instructors who are successful teaching children with traumatic experiences “build children’s self-esteem by holding them to high expectations while providing the necessary scaffolds to guarantee success” (61).

This notion of *guaranteeing success* as a key part of an instructor’s pedagogical model is a tremendously important one, and it will be the basis of my later chapter on anti-racist, anti-ableist assessment. For now, the statement holds particular importance because, “[c]hildren living with chronic stressor trauma are wired to respond to threatening or dangerous situations... Their attention bias is toward survival. It follows them into classrooms, where it limits their ability to participate in classroom activities that require a willingness to engage in novel or risk-taking activities” (53). While this is a valuable insight and undoubtedly true for many students—and therefore, considerations of such realities need to be factored into pedagogical thinking—it is also emblematic of trauma theory’s “inability to *stop* mourning” (Berger 173). How can we

create structures that offer access to and welcome both students who meet this survival-mode-only model, as well as students who have experienced trauma that do not present as such, that might throw themselves enthusiastically into the role of “good students” to avoid criticism and negative attention that may, too, threaten survival? Who, then, will attend to their pain, when they pass as “good” and therefore “healthy”?

Without attending to the bodyminds of ourselves and of our students, we risk perpetuating the dually racist, ableist structural realities of college writing instruction (and scholarship on such). From trauma studies, the “radical” aspect—the part that refuses to erase structures and individual experiences of pain—emerges. From dis/ability studies, the “solace” of the rich possibilities of gaining comfort by refusing to accept deficit models, even in the face of the impossibility of “cure”, emerges. The need to radically infuse possibilities for solace into our course designs is foremost in this investigation into existing literature living at the intersections of composition studies and DisCrit (dis/ability studies + critical race theory). For indeed, writing is not the only composition that we require in first-year writing classes. To the contrary; everything from participation requirements and course content to lesson plan structure and term-end presentations mandate particular bodymind composites from our students.

DisCrit scholarship, innovated by Subini A. Annamma, reminds us that this scholarship has been built by people of color, by people with dis/abilities. This scholarship does not always or even often reflect new insights into life—because these are insights that students of color and/or students with dis/abilities know intimately, navigate day in and day out—but this scholarship does, often, present things in an academic context that has too long elided the varied realities of race and dis/ability in our classrooms. Indeed, as Kimberlè Crenshaw reminds us through Annamma’s narrative lens, “For students of color, race does not exist outside of ability

and ability does not exist outside of race; each is being built upon the perception of the other (Crenshaw 1993)” (14). This dual construction of race and dis/ability takes on a unique life in classrooms, especially when we’re trying to hold the complexities of trauma and dis/ability studies at once. DisCrit scholars Annamma, Connor, and Ferri harken upon the violently intertwined histories of race and ability, “which were clearly based on white supremacy,” and call attention to the complex ways that these histories make themselves manifest in the bodyminds of our students—particularly CUNY students—today (10).

In this vein, composition scholar Carmen Kynard refuses to erase the bodyminds of her students in her pedagogies or her writing. She reminds us, crucially, that the very purpose of pedagogical and institutional requirements such as grammar drills, departmental exams, proficiency exams, remedial classes (etc.) is “to create a sort of blockade on any aspect of students’ written or spoken speech that could be deemed ‘nonstandard,’ ‘incorrect’ usage and grammar, ‘ESL issues,’ ‘dialect interference,’ or ethnic rhetoric” (5). Kynard highlights the violence of the middle class, white “literacy codes of college” that actively seek to keep students of color, immigrant students, and, yes, students with dis/abilities locked out of higher education; or, should they be able to enter, they must first enter through the stigma of remediation (8). Those who survive the process will be deemed “articulate” and “exceptional”; those who survive the process will be deemed “inspirational” and “role models.”

In her exigent re-telling of the history of higher education student protests across the country in the 20th century, Kynard reverses scholarship’s “colorblind” erasure of the largely Black and Puerto Rican students who authored so much educational innovation and access in this country. In so doing, Kynard reminds us that,

since the explicit, race-conscious authority and rhetorics of students of color were a dangerous liability in the liberal orthodoxies of integration and the unrelenting reluctance of Northern desegregation [still continuing in New York City's schools today], the new literacies endemic to this race-conscious authoring has never been taken up by dominant composition narratives that describe [CUNY and composition] history (165).

I would argue that this conscious erasure of students of color is far from a coincidence alongside the erasure of dis/ability authorship in classrooms, in activism, in our histories. As noted by Erevelles above, race and dis/ability cannot be un-entwined, yet they must not be conflated.

Indeed, this holds particularly true in our schools-to-prison pipeline-full educational system (Ben-Moshe xi). In an educational system in which students of color are disproportionately pathologized as dis/abled, disproportionately funneled into segregating special education classrooms. Because of the pathologization of the very bodies, movements, and speech patterns of children of color, these students are targeted both for special education and the schools-to-prison pipeline. This multi-sided attack on youth of color is only perpetuated when they are punished for having *been* punished in K-12, by colleges (two- and four-year alike) that don't give them college credit for "remedial" courses and continue the racialized dis/abling that targets all students of color while ignoring the needs of students of color who *do* have dis/abilities.

Along these lines, when Kynard points out that histories of both CUNY and composition studies implicitly celebrate the dominance of whiteness through explicitly erasing students of color, she is also cracking open possibilities for critique of a system of teaching writing that assumes a certain kind of bodily composition of students. If our history is white, if composition

is ‘beyond’ race, then so, too, are our syllabi white, are our syllabi ‘beyond’ being themselves racist, ableist documents as generally configured.

Even though Geneva Smitherman reminded us years ago that “students who speak the “Black Idiom” are *already* bi-dialectical and know how to style-shift,” Kynard reminds us that deficit models of learning writing not only still form the fundamental structure of the university. They also serve as gatekeepers against students who cannot contort their bodyminds into the expected performance of white middle class (and I would add, able-bodyminded) composition (Kynard 138). This ability to perform white middle class standards of linguistic and affective composure is often cited as the driving force behind composition studies and “remedial” classes: if we are committed to dismantling injustice, the argument goes, we must make sure our Black and brown students can perform according to the standards that exist, for better or for worse. This will only benefit our students on the job market, the argument goes.

Yet, Kynard cites African American compositionist Marian Musgrave in her refutation that performing to the standards of affectively white composure has not unseated white supremacist structures in the past, nor will it do so if people keep trying (203). Musgrave’s own words are well-worth exploring here, as she reminds us in 1971 that:

Blacks have been speaking [Standardized English] since the time of Phillis Wheatley...

This country is filled with Blacks who speak SE while they carry suitcases, wait tables, strip tobacco, and if they’re lucky, sort mail. The new insistence by whites on SE

indicates to many Blacks its intended use as an exclusion clause. (cited by Kynard, 203)

Discussing with our students how to use standardized English as an explicit, transparent strategy with which to gain access to privileged (read: white middle class) societal spaces and opportunities is one thing. However, uncritically trying to sell our students the lie that

surrendering the ways many of them grew up speaking is, Musgrave reminds us, disingenuous at best, and violent at worst. The latter form of teaching locks our students into deficit-model pedagogical traps.

The conflation of “low-quality” work—even dis/abled work—with students of color in composition courses highlights the way deficit models of pedagogical approaches perpetuate the racialization of mental health in our classrooms. Edward Fergus further illustrates the damage done by deficit-based pedagogical models—models that expect “low-quality” student work—in his study of the bodyminds of instructors in several Northeastern state school districts “with a disproportionate number of Black and Latino students in special education” (119). By valuing the beliefs—the emotions—of instructors as a legitimate, intellectual, scholarship-worthy base of understanding, Fergus can identify the ways that structural problems that reinforce deficit models interact with the bodyminds of the instructors and students navigating these systems. He finds that “as [instructors’] deficit thinking increased, cultural responsibility, awareness, and knowledge decreased... as deficient thinking increased, color-blindness and racial discomfort increased as well” (126). Given the ways that instructors’ beliefs—combined with institutional mandates—intimately shape pedagogical practices, Fergus’s work sheds important light on the ways that when instructors expect their students to not be “good” students, their entire set of pedagogical beliefs and practices are impacted. And therefore, so are the bodyminds of their students.

This notion, this image, this ideal, of the “good student” is wrapped up, of course, in its counter image: the “bad student”, the student who does not or will not learn in the way they are expected to; the student, in essence, that the instructor refuses to understand, whose needs the instructor cannot or will not meet. These ideas are significant because perceptions and feelings

about “goodness” in the classroom deeply impact composition pedagogy. Particularly as deficit models of student writing still dominate the structures of composition requirements and assessments across the country, Leonardo Broderick’s study of “goodness” in U.S. education is especially exigent.

Goodness, as a concept—much like in the writing of Sara Ahmed—is figured as a cultural measurement of whiteness, or, at least, of the performance of aspirational whiteness. Broderick writes that goodness, especially as evaluated in educational contexts,

is a central valuation of who deserves or does not deserve certain social and material goods that contribute to differential access to life chances. In other words, goodness is a mode through which *dis/abling* occurs, including the overvaluation of Whiteness and undervaluation of Blackness within educational processes. (56, emphasis added)

He figures *dis/abling* here as an active verb that casts of the notion of someone (passively) *being* *dis/abled*, choosing instead to rhetorically recognize the means by which certain students are targeted for undervaluing, targeted by deficit pedagogies, and targeted, essentially, for special education classrooms, for “remedial” classrooms, for imperially-based writing centers.

Broderick goes on to clarify that *dis/ablement* is not a process that moves one way, targeting students of color and/or immigrant students for deficit thinking, for being labeled as “bad” students and forced to endure all that comes with that assumption. The flip side of *dis/ablement* is the active *enablement* of students who are “granted cultural privilege,” granted access to being labeled “good” students, granted freedom from being relegated automatically to the dangerous assumptions that they are dangerous, that they are negatively resistant, that they are incapable of learning in the “good” way (59).

This highly racialized approach to ability has a long and intimate history, of course, with composition instruction. Vershawn Ashanti-Young reminds us that “language is inherently tied to identity,” such that when we undervalue the language practices of some students and overvalue the language practices of other, “good” students, we are in fact undervaluing the very existence of the students whose language practices we are undervaluing (3). This undervaluation—this neglect, this critique, this white supremacist, ableist impulse to “correct” “deficient” modes of communication, forms of composition, expressions of bodymind composure—translates into a deeply felt neglect and critique of the very *personhood* and cultures of our students. Worse, this neglect, this critique, is denied a language in our classrooms. It is simply, students are told, a matter of which grammar is “right” and which is “wrong,” which storytelling methods are “effective” and which are “deficient.” We do not offer students a richer language to describe that their histories, their bodyminds, are being trampled.

Instead, composition classrooms often deem certain language forms as “broken,” are deemed *non-standard*, are deemed less than. They are deemed things to break out of, to switch out of, in favor of a superior—*correct*—mode of bodymind composition. Because, as Teresa M. Redd and Karen Schuster-Webb explain:

[h]istorically, AAE [African American English] has been labeled ‘broken’ English, slang, a dialect, and a language. These names both reflect and affect the status of the speakers. Some names me lead teachers to view their African American students as lazy, illiterate, or even learning disabled, while other names invite teachers to see their students as multilingual learners. Likewise, certain names can make African American students feel ignorant or competent, ashamed or proud. (3-4)

They highlight the fallacy that there *is* such a thing as Standard English, because at no time has there been a universal standard for speaking or writing English—for composing oneself in English—in the United States. There is, instead, a *dominant* English, an English that is enforced in our schools, often at the cost of the mental health—both assumed and lived—of students of color and/or students with dis/abilities and/or students who are immigrants.

And this is where DisCrit comes back into proverbial play (though truly, it never left): we have explored, now, the ways that pedagogical ideologies interact with institutional structures to create racist, ableist pedagogical practices based in deficit models. These models assume and reinforce the superiority of students who have access to easily composing their writing and themselves into dominant English composites. The entangled nature of assumptions about race and assumptions about ability are starting to become clear, if they were not before.

I believe that our pedagogies can create structures that can work to dismantle these assumptions, fostering instead writing classrooms that value student knowledge, student craft, and student expertise, while also respecting students enough to challenge them to create even more. I believe that consent-based pedagogies and fandom pedagogies can crack open spaces to create models of repair that includes neither admission nor exclusion of being broken: can create, in short, radical solace. I believe that these approaches can counter racialized, ableist deficit models deep in the very fabric of our pedagogies and therefore, the fibers of our bodyminds.

Because, in my body, at least, I can feel the violent clashing of dis/ability studies' inability to mourn and trauma studies' inability to *stop* mourning. I can feel the wars between pride and thirst for recognition, for community, for healing, for *solace*, with the stubborn desire to have my pain acknowledged, to have my pain honored, to have my losses, my instability, validated. My dis/abilities are both profoundly painful *and* profoundly desirable—or at least,

language and community surrounding them are—and we need theories *and pedagogies* that can hold both.

More importantly, the need to stem the violences that deficit pedagogies inflict on our students of color; the need to eliminate the pathologization of emotional registers that do not or cannot conform to the compositional, affective standards of overvalued English that locks students into special education and into prisons; and, most importantly, the ways that asking ‘which students?’ of ‘student-centered pedagogy’ can transform classrooms into spaces of radical solace for targeted students (and instructors), will drive the pedagogical explorations that comprise the rest of this project.

Chapter 2: Radical Solace and a Redefinition of YA Literature

For a moment, I want to slip out of our classrooms and out of discourses on trauma and pain and healing. We will return to these, because these are essential for the kinds of pedagogies I want to put forth. But, for a moment, I want to explore young adult literature; and I am taking us out of our classrooms to do this because, too often, composition instructors shy away from teaching young adult literature to introduce our students to college-level writing. Too often, we are concerned for our jobs, concerned for our reputations; concerned for teaching ‘low-brow’ writing, teaching writing that is not *true* literature. So young adult literature is marginalized in more than one way in our classrooms, often: one, as not sufficiently *literature*, and two, as not even written by young adults.

I write and publish YA literature. I do this through traditional publishing, and I do this with an embarrassingly large, extremely *young* young adult following on Tumblr. But I have years since aged out of “youth” programming, even at the queer resource centers whose youth programming extend to people in their early-mid-twenties.

And yet, I write *young adult* literature. Adult-generated young adult literature, if you will. And this, indeed, is the generally accepted definition of young adult literature, both in publishing and in scholarship; YA lit is generated by adults, largely for other adults, but ostensibly for youth consumption, for youth adventure, for youth exploration. Katharine Jones sums up this conundrum in scholarship about children’s literature nicely as follows: “Is [children’s literature] literature written by children or literature written for children? Children’s literature has conventionally been defined as the latter, but the apostrophe in the term continues to suggest possession—that this is a literature belonging to children” (304). Indeed, children’s literature scholars from Perry Nodelman to Jacqueline Rose and John Rowe Townsend assert—all from different perspectives and with different reasoning—that children’s literature is meant to be transmitted from adults to children. Though this is challenged by many in the field, with ranging opinions on what is innocence and what, indeed, is childhood—as well as why we fetishize the purported differences between childhood and adulthood through this literature—it remains important that the scholarship itself is written by adults (Butler 2). By extension, young adult literature—which, as a publishing genre, emerged from children’s literature—may indeed be thought to be written by adults, for young adults. Of course, rhetorically, Jones’s point about the possessive apostrophe in children’s literature is notoriously absent from young adult literature: an interesting absence.

Similarly, in my eagerness to bring an affect of eagerness into both the classroom and scholarship about such, I want to answer David Rudd's call to re-energize scholarship on children's and young adult literature. Rudd writes, "we sometimes seem to be trying too hard, that we have become too ponderous in our deliberations about children's books (we murder to dissect), such that we lose the excitement of reading" (1). While I don't wish to ascribe the excitement of reading only to the realm of children and young adults, I do want to suggest that certain kinds of affectively expressed excitement are labeled as childlike—and, in classrooms, even disruptively so. Thus, in exploring young adult literature and authorship, I want to focus on the emotionality that Rudd suggests we've lost; in line with my interest in affective expression in writing classrooms and its implications for racialized perceptions of dis/ability, the *excitement* of unbridled young adults' writing is deeply important to me here.

However, the absence of young adult possession of young adult literature is quite an active absence, as most of the trade publishing industry (and transaction power) remains firmly in the hands of established, post-college education adults. Some of these people, age-wise, may still in some circles be considered "young adult", of course: but then we encounter the same age-old (pun intended) semantics problem faced by the genre of children's literature. What makes a *child*? What makes, indeed, a *young adult*?

Just as Jones critiques the notion that children's literature "unproblematically belongs to children" (287), I believe it is important to challenge the notion of *children* and *young adults* more broadly: who *gets* to be children, who *gets* to be a young adult—instead of a delinquent, instead of a threat, instead of a traumatized body, for example—is highly racialized and tinged in ableism, as explored in the above chapter (not to mention gendered and sexualized). Given this, I tend to agree with Marah Gubar that it might be somewhat generative to abandon constant

attempts to define children's (and young adult) literature, "because insisting that children's literature is a genre characterized by recurrent traits [or groups of people] is damaging to the field, obscuring rather than advancing our knowledge of this richly heterogeneous group of texts" (210). However, while I don't want to keep our thinking bogged down in unproductive binaristic thinking, I also find it necessary to draw attention to the ideas of justice in the undercurrent of all these debates: there are tangible, physical bodyminds that are, in some ways or others, at some point considered and treated as children in our society. Who gets to decide what is appropriate to market to these children, what to stock their libraries with, what to read with them from kindergarten through college, *is* fundamentally an issue of justice.

For this reason, I agree with Gubar's conclusion that "although we cannot generalize about how children as a group react to literature, we can and should make room for more particular discussions of how young people have responded to individual texts" (215). Indeed, I believe it is our duty to dissect which writing *gets* to be considered, canonically, *literature*, in much the same way that we must pay attention to which children *get* to be considered, structurally, as children or young adults. Which children and young adults get to recognize themselves in canon? How can a justice-based approach to discussions of young adult literature shift the discussion away from the importance of joining the literary canon *per se* and toward fundamentally restructuring how we think about writing, and whose writing—whose voices—get to be canonized?

I will posit here, therefore, that we need to broaden our definition of YA literature—both in the academy and in publishing—to include, too, *young adult-generated* young adult literature. Not for the purpose of continuing definitional debates, but for the purpose of recognizing voices that already exist, that are already being published, but continue to be unrecognized, and indeed,

often maligned, in traditional scholarly and pedagogical thinking. While video game-based pedagogies are on the rise (an exciting development!), I believe there is room, too, for a Gillian Adams-type approach to pulling together children's literature scholarship and pedagogy. In her discussion on medieval children's literature, Adams argues that reading was defined, in certain places and times, largely through orality, and that these multiple forms of communication, storytelling, and knowledge-generation needs, too, to play a role in our thinking about children's literature at the time. What children were actually reading and writing at the time—and, in this context, speaking—was tremendously important in Adams' conception. I believe it, too, needs to again be tremendously important as the internet puts publishing—but not the publishing *industry*—at many children and young adult students' fingertips. Defining literature through the multimodalities that exist today—and the multiple forms of authorship—has enormous pedagogical implications.

Respecting young adult writing as itself literature includes, I firmly believe, the writing that we have our students create in their first-year writing classes. And how does this relate back to the deficit models, the racialization of dis/ability, and the promise of radical solace I vowed to focus this chapter on? Simple.

Literature, and by extension, literary canons are, themselves, contested terms. Add any genre to the mix, and they become even more so. One of my concerns about arguing for the expansion of the definition to include young adult-generated literature *as* young adult literature is that through the act of expansion, I am implicitly arguing that there *are* pieces of writing that are *less than* “true” literature. I do not necessarily believe that this is so.

Am I arguing, then, that *everything* is *literature*? In some moods, I might ask why not. In others, I might argue that the question is beyond the point: I am interested in deconstructing—or,

in my own classrooms, attempting to completely flip—the definition of what is valued, what is important. I am interested in whose voices *matter*, and whose voices—to harken back to this book’s introduction—whose voices *get to be published as literature*. Because, again, as Trites points out, “[a]fter all, publishers rather than teenagers bestow the designation ‘YA’ on these books” (8). Hence my interest in forms of publishing—including, but not limited to fan fiction and the works created and shared in our writing classrooms—that lack the same kind of gatekeeping as the traditional publishing industry.

The dominant, industry-sponsored and canon-endorsed definitions of *literature*, including YA literature, as they currently operate in our classrooms, often relegate authors of color, queer authors, dis/abled authors, young adult authors—let alone intersections thereof—to the end of syllabi, to the last few weeks of class. I have been told that a course on women’s writing was sufficiently “diverse” because it included—in one week, mind you—a single text by Audre Lorde. Anthologies, too, often consign “nontraditional” chapters to the end, focusing, for example, on trans, dis/ability, and racial identity issues last, if at all, thereby marking the rest of the chapters in any given text as cis, able-bodied, and white. The last weeks of term, the last section of an anthology, are reserved for what is least legitimate; for what we can get to ‘if we have time.’ These last weeks of term and last sections of anthologies speak rhetorical volumes about what literature—whose bodyminds—matter, in a very power-laden way.

In identifying these moments of power in the writing-classroom production of *what is literature*, I hope to generate and practice pedagogy that hopes to mitigate the reproduction of the power dynamics that tell first-year and “remedial” writing students that they are worthy of the writing center, not “real” publication afforded to “real” writers; that their writing is worthy of

competitive assessment, not community-based critique; that their narratives are insufficient if not sufficiently argumentative.

I believe that valuing undervalued student writing—young adult writing—as itself young adult literature can combat deficit model pedagogies by placing expertise and agency in the hands of those whose lives YA literature is supposedly about. Of course, young people can and do produce tremendously problematic work about young people; fan culture, like broader culture, is often a cesspit of racism and multiple forms of shaming and cruelty. However, marking something as a form of literature does not mark it, in my estimation, as automatically *good*: indeed, my students will be the first to testify that they've read better fan fiction than a lot of work by the dead white men they were required to read in high school. What does better mean? Young people's engagement may get to define some of it, and consent-based pedagogies can help us refine our writing skills together. These cooperative models of writing can be based on outside-of-classroom expertise rather than the erasure of outside-of-classroom life in favor of automatically assuming that knowledge in writing classrooms is supposed to flow one way.

In this vein, valuing young adult-generated work as young adult literature can deeply impact the structure and affective tones of our first-year writing classrooms; can structure our courses around the promotion of radical solace rather than punitive, deficit pedagogies that racialize mental health, that dis/able race; can begin dismantling the pedagogical ideologies that reinforce and are reinforced by sending our students to prison and pathologizing them for participating in undervalued ways in curricula and course structures that implicitly and explicitly exclude them.

Whose Literature Gets to Be Literature, and Why it Matters

Young adults today write and publish *Harry Potter*-length fan fictions (often, of better quality and depth than the original) without monetary compensation; labor over and publish drawings, animations, and masterfully remixed music videos that weave flawless, wrenching narratives without the reward of advances, royalties, or traditional publishing recognition; create incredible music, trailers, and poetry uploaded to YouTube with, perhaps, vague hopes of getting ‘discovered’ but, more often, with the resolution that they will not monetize, will not get traditionally picked up and published.

Young adults today produce art, produce literature, in heaps, in abundance and in impressively high quality, benefiting from peer reviews and writing communities that are forced and thoughtless and harmful at worst, and generative but most likely temporary—ending when grades are assigned at the end of term—at best in our classes. Yet:

Many of these young adults sit in our first-year composition classrooms.

Many of these young adults fail our first-year composition classes.

Academic fetishization and valorization of a particular kind of argumentative writing—even though narrative is, indeed, so often recognized as literature—creates a roadblock to students already likely to be pathologized and punished by writing assessment practices. The pedagogical assumptions about the importance of teaching a particular form of argumentation as the only kind of writing students should be doing/the most important kind of writing they should be doing target students who are experts in narrative forms that are devalued in these classrooms/institutions. These devaluations perpetuate the traumas of students of color and/or students with dis/abilities who are already targeted by other aspects of schooling systems; these

devaluations mark some students as other while rewarding the mediocrity of others. These dynamics are particularly strong in college composition classrooms.

Carmen Kynard, in her revitalization of otherwise white-washed student protest history to centralize the roles of Black and Puerto Rican students who took over CCNY with the University of Harlem in 1968, explores the boundaries—or potential boundarylessness—of student authorship. She writes, of these students’ successes in leading to open admissions, that these efforts were important sites of “student authorship”, which constituted “important site[s] of *literacy and writing*” (163). Kynard goes on to argue persuasively that:

Since the explicit, race-conscious authoring and rhetorics of students of color were a dangerous liability in the liberal orthodoxies of integration and the unrelenting reluctance of Northern desegregation, the new literacies endemic to this race-conscious authoring has never been taken up by dominant composition narratives that describe [CUNY and composition] history. (165)

I would elaborate here to argue that today’s discourses of “diversity” in the classroom, like the “liberal orthodoxies of integration,” continue to perpetuate only forms of “diverse” (code for “other”) authorship that fit the composition styles deemed appropriate by white liberal orthodoxy.

These dominant composition narratives likewise devalue POC authorship in our classrooms by constraining the definitions of what constitutes literacy, of what constitutes *literature*. Just as Kynard challenges the orthodoxies of what constitutes literacy, I argue that the creation of literature can and does emerge from young adults whose literacies may not be best demonstrated by the rigidity of deficit-model writing pedagogies. The power dynamics involved in who gets to access which kinds of literacies, who gets to be considered literate, and therefore

who gets to write literature abound, because who gets to be fully human is largely dependent on who gets to be considered literate.

Kynard's exigent analysis of rhetorical power and composition classrooms compliments Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson's work on (presumably white) dis/ability. Here, she offers important insight into the pervasive ways that assumptions of rhetorical/communication norms fundamentally impact who is considered *fully human* in dominant discourses. Her article attempts to work through the question: "[h]ow can people who have psychiatric and cognitive disabilities that interfere with communication exercise rhetorical agency?" (157).

The question of how this rhetorical agency—and ableist assumptions about who can exercise it and who cannot—has huge implications both for people with dis/abilities and for rhetoric. Reminding her readers that language is at once material-physical *and* culturally produced, Lewiecki-Wilson argues that, "we need... a broadened concept of rhetoric to include collaborative and mediated rhetorics that work with the performative rhetoric of bodies that "speak" with/out language" (157). She goes on to position facilitated communication as an example of such a redefinition of rhetoricity (and, perhaps, of literacy). Though negative thoughts and feelings about the efficacy and ethics of facilitated communication abound in popularized debates, the potential power of Lewiecki-Wilson's argument is that it has the potential to reframe anxieties about facilitated communication by questioning the root of non-autistic people's anxiety about it.

Lewiecki-Wilson argues that whenever marginalized people enter public debates, the pressures of liberalism push such voices toward using the rhetoric of 'we are just like you and want to be treated just like you.' This obliteration of difference from the norm neutralizes the potential power of multiple rhetoricities; this liberalized 'we are the same' discourse also delegitimizes any claim to rhetorical agency that is *not* 'just like [the norm].' It validates the norm, situating people

with “severe mental dis/abilities” as perpetually striving toward producing normate forms of communication. In this way, Lewiecki-Wilson’s praise of facilitated communication might serve to question the un-question-able: why might people with normate bodyminds be so dead-set against forms like facilitated communication if not because it poses such a threat to the supremacy of the verbal?

Regarding claims of facilitated communication’s relationship with exploitation and appropriation, Lewiecki-Wilson might suggest a reorientation of how we think about exploitation (though I worry that this might be too dismissive of the concern). Because the logics of ‘we are the same’ liberalism also (ironically) claims that we must be fully autonomous individual actors (aside from the fact that this is an impossible aspiration), Lewiecki-Wilson suggests that *we define exploitation with the underlying assumption that all people have access to autonomous, individualized, speech-oriented rhetorical patterns*. She elaborates, arguing that:

by insisting on such a sharp demarcation line between individual rhetorical agency and lack, we don’t solve these problems as much as silence them. We may also be revealing our general anxiety to hold back the undifferentiated physical and social flow of language, and our unwillingness to enter into caring and committed intersubjective dependency with others and with the material world (162).

This discomfort with “intersubjective dependency with others and with the material world” directly feeds into a cultural refusal to recognize as *human* people with primarily non-normate rhetorical practices. She argues, crucially, that “*we often demand some verbal response from an Other as proof of their humanness*” (157, emphasis added).

Texts whose authors demonstrate rhetorical practices that deviate from these normate expectations of rhetorical agency are thus determined to—like their authors—lack this apparent

proof of humanness. Absent an adequate performance of affective whiteness, texts that are undervalued in schools as not demonstrating sufficient rhetorical normativity also devalue their authors as less than human. The import of the ways that texts are interpreted—and tied up in the identities of their authors—is elaborated by cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter. Her attentiveness to the material histories of race and the violences of racism she argues persuasively that there are several “genres” of lower case-h humanity, which is to be distinguished from upper case-H Humanity. While Humanity is inextricable from western whiteness, those human beings that occupy lower case-h humanity populate rich genres dictated by the power dynamics and cultural interplays of various moments in time and history.

Wynter re-draws the lines of who gets to qualify for supposedly universal human identity in her exploration and fundamental restructuring of humanist and posthumanist thought. By encouraging and performing the reorientation of the field(s) to prioritize the material histories of race that white male-dominated theories of humanity and post-humanity (such as those found in the works of Giorgio Agamben), Wynter resituates posthumanism as fundamentally political and historical rather than (colorblindly) philosophical. Instead of assuming that (white) Man is a universal category that uncritically includes all human animals, Wynter prioritizes the fundamental colonial project of the violent animalization of people of color from which “humanity” draws its opposing identity.

The exigency of this re-prioritization is enormous, as Wynter argues that “all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, and sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources” are each “differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle” (“Unsettling” 260-1). This struggle, she asserts, can be articulated as the myriad ways that “our present ethnoclass

(i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves” (260).

Her simultaneous usage of both “itself/ourselves” to describe self-(non)identity with humanness confronts her readers with the fundamental duality of her own subjectivity as a Jamaican woman, as both self-evidently human and as a person whose body bears the collective history upon which (white) Human was created as a counterpoint. She further dramatizes this duality by separating these terms with a slash rather than an “and”: in so doing, Wynter both claims Humanity for the very people of color who have been treated as a foil to Man (“ourselves”) and rejects it as something separate (“itself”). This gesture toward radical disidentification both acknowledges/rejects the violent material history of the concept of Humanity and reasserts Wynter’s own claim to it.

Wynter here gestures toward the ways that people of color, through being excluded from western Humanity, are denied in the overrepresentation of whiteness as Human the “full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species” (“Unsettling” 260). Surely, cognitive and behavioral autonomy become, under the logics of “our present ethnoclass”, privileged characteristics of those who have access to the privileged status of the Human. The recognition of the connection between whiteness and “full cognitive and behavioral autonomy” allows for two connections between the crucial work Wynter is explicitly engaged in and the kinds of related work that her scholarship makes room for: specifically, her insight here provides a bridge for both dis/ability studies and composition studies to enrich and be enriched by her analysis.

Crucially, here, those who cannot sufficiently perform western whiteness – quite possibly an impossible performative status – are actively barred from achieving Humanity and gaining the

basic privileges that accompany this classification. This denial of capital-H Humanity to people of color is intimately intertwined with the kinds of dehumanizing agency-stripping that Wynter, Lewiecki-Wilson and Kynard are observing. Indeed, the history of interpreting non-normate communications and embodiments as less than human has a rich history of conflating racialized people with dis/abled people, through violent histories of dually racist and ableist eugenics practices; racialized reproduction ‘experiments’; and the disproportionate representation of students of color who are labeled as having mental dis/abilities in public schools, just to name a few. Attentiveness to these interconnections surely enriches the ways that we understand the relationship between rhetorical agency, interdependency, and the performative rhetorics of non-normate bodies.

Yet, I do not wish to focus solely on the forces that quash affective expression, the oppressive structures that seek and destroy devalued modes of student composition. Instead, I am interested in the tendrils of hope that shoot up from the writings of marginalized students themselves, young adults who create their own literature—even when they do so outside the reign of our classrooms. In the same way that the previous chapter discussed ways to hold both pain and resilience, I do not wish to elide the impact of oppressive forces in writing classrooms; but I do wish to examine the potential of shaping our pedagogies to foster, rather than squash, the formation of radical solace in response to structural and interpersonal traumas and violences.

I am not only writing about the kinds of solace that can come from writing through trauma. I am speaking of the kinds of radical solace that can emerge from pedagogical strategies that value forms of expression—kinds of composure—that students of color and/or dis/abled students have been and continue to be punished for in college writing classrooms. Because curricula are not, ever, benign; as Carmen Kynard observes about the linear, white enlightenment

narratives of the field of composition that centralize the contributions of Shaughnessy and Berlin, such “colorblind” historiography (and the pedagogies that emerge from it) “works to center white comfort and a white voice” (197). This centralization forces “color-conscious folk [as] always explaining one’s self rather than actually learning” (198).

This constant pressure to explain oneself rather than doing what one is ostensibly in school for—to learn—complicates McRuer’s argument about agitation being (uncritically) desirable. He asks, “What would happen if, true to our experiences in and out of the classroom, we continually attempted to reconceive composing as that which produced agitation—to reconceive it, paradoxically, as what it is? In what ways might agitation be generative?” (148). In situations in which the source of agitation is modes of affective and composition expression that insists on the validation of experiences not valued by normate instruction—or, indeed, that insists on nothing but its existence as such—what are the affective implications and burdens on the students generating these “agitating” texts? What might the repercussions be? For students who perhaps are learning academic English for the first time, attempting to write in the norm because they are aware of how little they are allowed to experiment with words, with expression, with composition, for the sake of “getting it right”? For students who seek not to agitate because they are disproportionately targeted and punished for such? For students whose very existence, whose very bodily composition, is an agitation in the classroom, for whom the burden of agitating—of teaching, of educating other students and indeed professors without receiving any credit or compensation for their affective and intellectual labor—is borne on their shoulders but they do not reap the potentially generative benefits of their own agitation? For whom, I wonder, is this compositional agitation helpful? For whom is it harmful?

How are we thinking about *risk*, then, in our classrooms? Who is allowed to take risks? Who is allowed to agitate? Because surely, McRuer raises an important point about the potential of agitating composition; I am simply arguing, like Erevelles, that we need to inject a more multi-faceted analysis of power into the mix here. I am also wondering what can happen if we expand the limits of what we think of as generative; there is a trend, especially in queer theory, to seek to reclaim the negative, the abject. What can happen when we don't dismiss the potentially harmful (the grief that trauma theory emphasizes), but we also don't dismiss the potentially uncritical identity-politics liberal (the pride that dis/ability theory emphasizes)?

And here we arrive at radical solace, at the idea of healing, of consoling without empty consolation; of self- and community-love without erasure of pain; of comfort without compulsory re-recovery. In the classroom, these topics can be tricky, to say the least. The ableist reminder that "we are not therapists" resounds from one end of the emotions-in-pedagogy spectrum, while the potentially fetishizing requirement that students write about their deepest traumas for others to assess booms from the other. How can we assess the cost of comfort in our writing classrooms? How can we divest our curricula from the pathologizing devaluing of POC voices that Kynard and others so rightly protest? How can we promote solace in our classrooms through pedagogies that value student writing as literature, that refuse to pathologize certain forms of composition and composure? Indeed, to move forward, we must further examine the multiple forms of pathologization, of cure, of rhetorics that fetishize "resistance" while structurally constraining the meaning of said resistance.

Like McRuer infusing queerness into his dis/ability readings (and vice versa), I find it generative to examine the potentials for radical solace in classroom spaces by looping in the queer of color theories by José Esteban Muñoz and queer trauma theories by Ann Cvetkovich

into conversation with the histories and analyses brought to us by Kynard, Erevelles, and the like. Muñoz's work on disidentification and Cvetkovich's on sites of trauma in (lesbian) public culture are foundational texts for me while examining modes of healing—forms of radical solace—that actively refuse to elide power from grief. That are capable, in other words, of both mourning and refusing to mourn.

Muñoz's [crucial] theories of the importance of disidentification have deep potential to interact with and promote radical solace. Of the brutal toxicity in the stereotyping of Latinx people (discussed in the introduction to this project), he describes the potential liberationist ethos of disidentification:

Rather than trying to run from this stereotype, Latino as excess, it seems much more important to seize it and redirect it in the service of a liberationist politics. Such a maneuver is akin to what I have described elsewhere as a disidentification with toxic characterizations and stereotypes of US Latinos. A disidentification is neither an identification nor a counter-identification: it is a working on, with, and against a form at a simultaneous moment. (70 "The Sweetest Hangover")

This disidentification—as both noun and verb—requires an explicit recognition of the pain and violence from which a toxic representation comes (refusing to heal); and then involves a deeply affective process of redirecting that oppression into an immense potential for healing (refusing to mourn). Both must be held in “a simultaneous moment,” thus holding both radical and solace, both trauma theory and dis/ability theory—in a way that centralizes, rather than elides, racialized oppression.

This ability to *hold both*—bridging trauma and dis/ability studies in a way that is attentive to *all* the complex realities of navigating the world in our bodyminds—also shines

through Margaret Price's concept of counter-diagnosis, in which memoirists with disabilities claim authority over their own diagnoses through their creative, strategic use of in/coherence and pronouns (such as claiming an "I" with multiple personalities) (11). Price argues that these strategies of counter-diagnosis are oxymoronic because they neither accept nor reject the psychiatric diagnoses but rather play with them to establish the authority of the narrator not despite but because of their relation to diagnosis" (125). Similar dynamics emerge, not just in memoirs, but in fan fiction, which will be the focus of the following chapter. Much of fan fiction provides us with profound models of radical solace and approaches to writing pedagogy that can transform our classrooms: in this literary vehicle, we can craft pedagogies that veer away from the dually racist and ableist conflation of race and mental dis/ability that currently reigns through deficit model assumptions about compositions and composure in our classes.

Crucially, the racialization of mental health has an enormous impact, too, on the ways we think about writing communities in our classrooms; assessments (only things we've done 'by ourselves', etc.); and what qualifies as 'good' writing, as literature, as valued. What if we *did* systematically, pedagogically value things like counter-diagnoses in our students' in/coherence? What possibilities could be opened from considering the writing our young adults do in our classrooms as literature? Moreover, how can our pedagogies encourage the creation of this literature, structure our classrooms with the intent of *restructuring* what schools teach us and our students to value?

The next chapter discusses the potential affective implications of these questions, drawing out ideas of fandom pedagogy to assert that consent-based pedagogical practices can help counter the structural violences in composition classes that render so many of our students lower-case h human, or not human at all. Following this vein, the following chapters bring us more firmly into

the actual logistics of course structure in the context of attempting to structurally foster radical solace as a counter to racist, ableist pedagogies that value white, able bodyminded students' compositions and affective modes more than anyone else's.

Chapter 3: Fandom Pedagogy, Consent, and Collaboration

The exigency of the question of how we define literature is now clear: identity is so tangibly wrapped in the warped power dynamics of composition and whose forms of composure are considered reflective of the author's Humanity. Thus, I will return to discussing a reconsideration of ways that re-valuing young adult literature *as* young adult literature can alter our pedagogies away from destructive, dually ableist and racist deficit pedagogies and transform our classrooms into spaces that promote the potential for our students—and ourselves—to find and create radical solace in writing communities. I will focus on fan fiction, arguing that something I am calling “fandom pedagogy” can help us revalue young adult voices and reinforce the idea that consent-based pedagogies, rather than “lower standards,” can in fact increase student engagement and sense of radical solace in our writing classrooms.

When I talk to my students about where they write every day, they usually don't immediately volunteer to talk about text messages, Instagram posts, or SnapChat messages. They often don't talk about their keen understanding of audience—the way your Facebook profile is different when you're Friends with your mom versus when you're not, or the way the kinds of pictures they text their parents might be very different from the ones they SnapChat their friends. But certainly, students usually don't bring up fan fiction, fan art, the comic book podcast they host with their friends on the side. The creations they breathe into life, inspired by the stories they dive into through late-night Netflix binges or downloaded episodes on the smallest screens possible during their commutes. They don't bring it up, that is, until I mention it. Until I validate

it as a form of writing, as a form of often very *good* writing. As a form of writing that they deserve to be recognized for. A few terms ago at LaGuardia, one of my students took nearly two months to tell me about his comic book podcast; we were firmly entrenched in our comic book unit when he told me, with the same blushing face and averted eyes with which many students come out to me as queer. He seemed to experience the same sense of elated relief upon telling me, too.

I imagine students don't mention these things on their own for a couple of reasons; sometimes, they don't think of texting or even fan fic writing as "real" writing. It might not occur to them. Sometimes, they might just be feeling quiet. But, under and through all those possible reasons, is the one that I want to focus on in this chapter: shame. There is a tremendous amount of shame surrounding the creation of fan fiction; in this chapter, I am going to delve into that shame—and the extreme affective opposites of pride and "squee-ing" (yes, that physical/auditory onomatopoeia is, in fandom, itself an emotion)—to argue that we treat fandom with a similarly pathologizing deficit model that we do "incorrect," "basic" student writing. More than that, then, I argue that deconstructing this pathologizing deficit model can help us to excavate a great deal of useful pedagogical insights from fan fiction writing specifically and fandom more broadly. By attending to both the violences and radical solaces within fandom, I argue that *fandom pedagogy* can promote radical solace in classrooms, putting literature into students' hands rather than shoving it down their throats.

The pathologization of fan emotions—the dismissal of fanboys as only white straight men in their 30s living in their mothers' basements, for example, *vis a vis* the exclusion and erasure of brown (and white) queer boys thirsting to be represented by Miles Morales or headcanons of trans Peter Parker—seems to obstruct the potential usefulness of certain aspects of

fandom in writing pedagogy. However, in my mind, this pathologization makes the relationship between fan writing and the writing our students produce for their professors even stronger. Both forms (fan emotions/writing and student emotions/writing: fan and student *composure*, in other words, or lack thereof) are pathologized and cast in a deficit model; they are both heavily criticized if/because they don't conform in many ways to standardized norms; they both potentially benefit from a massive amount of collaborative work that doesn't necessarily have to be driven by tangible reward, but rather by internal passion and external passionate *responses*. We strangle and evacuate these passions out of the classroom, out of assessment, and it seems to me that we can learn a lot from that which fuels fandom.

While “basic” writing and, by extension, “basic writers” are perhaps now more subtly pathologized than in years past, so too is fandom. While ‘nerd-dom’ has undoubtedly become more mainstream with the rise of Netflix’s Marvel series, the CW’s line of DC TV shows, and the rise of nerd merchandizing, the pathologization continues in a great deal of literature about fandom. Mark Duffett writes about the way psychoanalytic scholarship derides fandom:

For a number of reasons, interpreting the fantasies, motivations and desires [of fans] can leave researchers uncomfortable—defining whether their results are ‘true’ if they are also unique and unreproducible, for instance—psychoanalysis may still be a useful investigative tool because ideas about the social may not be alone enough to explain an individual’s continuous engagement with [their] object. (Duffett 114)

This trend is surely troubling, as qualitative analysis of “squeeing” and “asgdfgfsdsd” may indeed be more helpful than results that can be easily reproduced, especially given the ever changing, rapidly developing-and-focusing-on-the-next-thing nature of internet fandom. Even as I write this, for example, “squee” (an outpouring of positive, overwhelmed emotion) feels like an

older form of fan-speak, and I include it not because it is current, but because it feels like homage to my earlier fandom daze(days).

Yet, there is undoubtedly much more going on in fandom emotionality than the internal affective processes that psychoanalysis might tend to disproportionately focus on. Indeed, Duffett goes on to note that,

By focusing on fandom *purely as fantasizing* there is a danger that psychoanalytic researchers have artificially isolated individual communications, practices, and discourses... Such frames locate fandom as a compensation for personal lack generated by psychological processes like anxiety. There may be scope however to view the emotions manifest in fans' lives as more of a *boost* that [sic] a lack, something *productively added* rather than intrinsically needed. Hill notes, "Psychoanalytic accounts have generally been tailored to the cut of (ideological) academic arguments and moral dualisms, constantly placing fans as deficient, and constantly decrying the possibilities of fan 'knowledge' in favour of an emphasis on fan affects, emotions or fantasies (which of course, do not possess the status of [academic] 'knowledge')." (2002a, 104) (Duffett 120, emphasis in original).

In highlighting the ways that deficit models serve to pathologize both fan affect and fan knowledges—reinforcing the false binary between emotion and knowledge, and therefore discounting knowledge based on its emotional premise and/or presentation—both Hill and Duffett make important contributions to the ways that we think about fan affect and knowledges. Marni Stanley also comments on the pathologizing deficit model surrounding psychoanalytic approaches to fandom, specifically queer fandom (Stanley 100). She writes of many analyses of yaoi and slash that "women are compensating [by writing/immersing themselves in yaoi], in this

case for fears and anxieties; a reading that leaves little room for pleasure, rather than reassurance, and none at all for play” (100). While I believe that Stanley misses an important opportunity to critique the straight cis women trend of fetishizing gay cis men, I also believe that it is important to point out a “lack-based” approach to understanding queer fan work. Additionally, I believe Stanley misses an opportunity to dive into what can happen when fans both *do* work out fears and anxieties through fan fiction *as well as* play and indulge in immense pleasure. I would like to explore the possibilities laying in this interplay; similarly, I would like to push forward Hill’s observations to imagine what could happen if we emphasize *both* fan emotions *and* fan knowledge. *How can this change what we are taught to think of fan writing, and, by extension, teaching writing?*

Certainly, thinking through fan writing and teaching writing—much like thinking through trauma studies and dis/ability studies in the context of teaching writing—necessarily raises issues of shame regarding pleasure, pain, and affective expression in the classroom. To help us think about racialized, pathologized notions of emotions, affective expression, and shame, I quote José Esteban Muñoz extensively. With his words, I believe we can gain crucial insights into the ways that the emotional outpouring that accompanies fan writing can help us dismantle writing shame and use our classrooms for transformative radical solace. He writes:

Minoritarian identity has much to do with certain subjects’ inability to act properly within majoritarian scripts and scenarios... Rather than simply reject this toxic language of shame I wish to reinhabit it and suggest that such stigmatizing speech permits us to arrive at an important mapping of the social. Rather than say that Latina/o affect is too much, I want to suggest that the presence of Latina/o affect puts a great deal of pressure on the affective base of whiteness, insofar as it instructs us in a reading of the affect of

whiteness as underdeveloped and impoverished. The inquiry I am undertaking here suggests that we move beyond notions of ethnicity as fixed (something that people are) and instead understand it as performative (what people do), providing a reinvigorated and nuanced understanding of ethnicity. Performance functions as socially symbolic acts that serve as powerful theoretical lenses through which to view the social sphere. I am interested in crafting a critical apparatus that permits us to read ethnicity as a historical formation uncircumscribed by the boundaries of conventional understandings of identity. In lieu of viewing racial or ethnic difference as solely cultural, I aim to describe how race and ethnicity can be understood as “affective difference,” by which I mean the ways in which various historically coherent groups “feel” differently and navigate the material world on a different emotional register. (“The Sweetest Hangover” 70)

Crucial here is the necessity to combat preconceived notions, embedded in our pedagogies, of which pieces of writing and what forms of compositional expression are “underdeveloped” and which are valorized as being markers of “good students.”

Fandom pedagogy can play a large role here, because, as opposed to the affectively white dearth of emotional expression that Muñoz recognizes as the unacknowledged norm and standard by which all else is pathologized, “fandom [offers] an alternative sphere of cultural experience that restores the excitement and freedom that must be repressed to function in ordinary life” (Jenkins 474).

This kind of affective expression and response to texts have the potential to create tremendously insightful knowledges, as well as, by extension, tremendously insightful pieces of literature. These forms of literature often arise when fans get a glimpse of what they/we want—what we identify with—in texts, but need to create our own versions of these texts to either go

deeper into canon or slightly alter canon (or both) in order to not just vaguely include, but focus on and richly explore all the aspects of characterization and relationship development we don't get to read about/watch/that aren't privileged in the text.

And often, it *is* those characters or story arcs that aren't privileged by the original texts that fan fiction focuses in on. In *Doctor Who*, for example, while many people love the Doctor (in their various iterations), a consistent draw for fans are the Doctor's companions. Duffett and Kowall elaborate on this form of identification with text. Indeed, Mary Kowall writes,

The real hooks to the show, though I didn't realize it [at] the time, were the Doctor's companions. For the most part, they were ordinary people, not just super-gifted or bizarre aliens. Discounting the odd robotic dog, a companion could be someone like me. You understand the allure, don't you? I don't think there's a single teen who gets through high school without feeling like a misfit at some point... (Kowall 2010, 165, cited in Duffett 76)

This kind of identification—not necessarily with the main character, but with the “side” characters who might be more recognizable to some audience members—is also a popular phenomenon in the Harry Potter fandom. In that fandom, Harry is often cited as people's least favorite—sometimes even scorned—character, with fan writers and readers alike often electing to focus more on developing less developed characters like Luna Lovegood, or subtle relationships, like the romantic subtext in the friendship between Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan. This desire to write into existence that which the original authors either neglect or don't have the space to develop (or some combination of both) reflects a strong desire to write oneself into narratives, even when the original creator doesn't necessarily provide direct space for that.

Fan artists are fully cognizant of our participation in altering canon texts. We have the popular phrase “headcanon:” what we very strongly believe about a character, world, or relationship based on what clues are provided textually in canon. We have the community phrase “headcanon accepted:” someone else expressing a headcanon that gives us so many feels and convinces us so hardcore that it becomes canon in our minds, too. With these headcanons, we often seek out the balance between making sure characters are not OOC (out-of-character) *yet* fleshing out/altering canon in a way that suits our bodymind needs: this artistic, analytical creation is the crux of the art of fan fiction.

Indeed, this alteration of texts is often the precise *point* of fan fiction, affectively and intellectually. Altering texts is fundamentally a form of altering—or enhancing—canon, a means of writing through the structural violence inflicted by mainstream TV tropes like “Bury Your Gays” (in which queer characters are killed for nothing more than shock value and the character development of cishet counterparts) and a seeming inability to have more than one lesbian couple on a show (it seems that one already pushes the quota).⁴ Writing back to canon is a way to combat its structural violences; a way of forming an artistic, affectively-engaged community around love and, perhaps just as often, an artistic and affectively-engaged community around mutual disdain and/or visceral hatred for a character and/or plot line.

Writing back to structural violence and structural erasure is, in fandom, far from an individual process. Indeed, Stanley writes,

Because slash is largely an online phenomenon, the conversations among creators and their audiences create an immediate community of shared interest in this fluid, labile

⁴ Or, breaking up a healthy, supportive interracial couple and replacing it with a glorified abusive relationship with a white male lead, excused by the fact that ‘well, now there’s a [deeply marginalized and underdeveloped, so enter fan fiction] lesbian couple on the show, too’: yes, the CW’s *Supergirl*, I’m looking at you.

fantasy discourse. The community of slash readers includes both active readers who send feedback and so-called lurkers who read but don't respond. Many slash sites make contacting the author very easy. Some have feedback forms attached to every story. Others allow readers to click on the author's name to send email; feedback is encouraged and lurking is discouraged. (105)

Though there are media that allow a middle ground between "lurking" and commenting (discussed in the section below), Stanley's commentary on the value in fandom of commenting and written communication is hugely important. An expectation of many unpaid fan fiction authors is that readers who enjoy our work will leave "more than just" a "like" without a comment; that they will repost with more than just a simple repost, but also include their own tags and comments below. There are many posts on the fandom-popular site Tumblr, tens of thousands of "notes" (comments, shares, and likes) that implore readers to leave comments on fan fiction: a particularly amusing example (typical of fandom affect) is,

"I wish I could leave more kudo—"

IT'S CALLED COMMENTS

JUST TYPE A SMILING EMOTICON IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO WRITE

OR JUST TYPE RANDOM LETTERS

OR OPEN UP THE DICTIONARY ON A RANDOM PAGE AND WRITE THE FIRST
WORD YOU FIND

OR JUST TRY TO WRITE YOUR NAME WITH YOUR HEEL IDEK

JUST LEAVE A FUCKING COMMENT (postmodermulticoloredcloak)

This cultural pressure to verbally interact has its pitfalls, of course—as in classrooms, discussed in the previous chapters—but the norm in online fandom is that comments are kindness and

appreciation, rather than a chore or something one does for a grade. This has deep implications for fandom mores of community building.

Indeed, many writers come to depend on this the formation and activeness of this community for continuation for their writing. According to Stanley,

Slash writer Meredith Lynne represents herself as a feedback addict. For her, it's an essential part of the writing experience. As she says in the preface to "Memory Lapse," "Feedback is a wonderful thing. =) If you like this, let me know. Please? You know what an addict I am. I'm pathetic. I write solely for the affirmation of my self-worth as a human being that you all give me through your wonderful letters." She acknowledges the readers who follow her work with that "you know"; they are her reading community and they *know* how much she repeatedly emphasizes the role of feedback in her prefaces. Of course, slash writers do write for free, so demands for feedback often acknowledge that it is the only payment they get. (Stanley 106)

This thirst for feedback drives much of the community formation and collaborative nature of fandom writing. Through comments and the like, many authors find beta readers and critique partners for their work, and many go on to collaborate on entire weeks or months dedicated to the community creation of fan art and fiction about a certain show or ship (*relationship*). With fans that have been in the fandom since the show began or the book was released (or was a fan of the comics, if that's applicable), many serve as mentors and guides to that fan culture for newer fans (Duffett 154). Much of this mentorship is unfortunately regulatory, enforcing headcanon norms or ways of writing a certain character in a certain way that have already been established in the fandom; this regulation can often take the form of punitive feedback, author dragging, and other forms of both online critique and bullying. Once a vocal segment of a fandom has accepted

a headcanon of a character or plot point, for example, woe betide the writer or artist who tries to subvert it.

In this way, fandom mirrors the “real world” that it both shapes and is shaped by. Like the “real world,” too, fans often gain coping mechanisms, community formations, writing skills, editing skills (both of writing and of images) and website development skills from participating in fandom; and this is not to mention the emotional development (one might say “character development”) that attends all these changes. As Henry Jenkins III writes in his exploration of *Star Trek* fandoms, “For some women... networks of fans grants a degree of dignity and respect otherwise lacking. For others, fandom offers a training ground for the development of professional skills and an outlet for creative impulses constrained by workday lives” (Jenkins 59). This collaborative, often affirmative community self-sustains itself by encouraging writing for the sake of writing and sharing the joy (or pain, or both!) of the process with eager readers.

However, it is crucial to challenge a sense of uncritical romanticization of fandom communities. As Duffett writes, “A problem with seeing fans as rebels is that they also form a significant section of marketplace to which media texts are promoted, a fact that can make them both courted and contested” (74). In my mind, this is the smallest (yet significant, of course) ‘infraction’ committed by the romanticization of fandom and fan cultures; just as queer communities often include intense racism, ableism, and transphobia, fan communities—even and perhaps especially queer ones—carry these dominant structural and interpersonal violences in our own headcanons and canons all the time. Violence within fandoms that form around already marginalized identities—for example, lesbian fandoms—often clash viciously with each other. Often, this dynamic includes anger—and even justifiable rage—at the overall dearth of varied, abundant lesbian representation; the burden of representation politics, therefore, is often heavy

on fan fic writers' shoulders. It is easier to express justifiable rage toward someone from whom you know you can get a response—someone who actively engages with their fandom community—rather than famous TV execs. So, for example, when the nebulous nature of structural lesbophobia understandably hurts fans, we often take it out on each other rather than the powers that be, so to speak: so, fandom is far from a utopian writers' and readers' collective. Similarly, the same racism and ableism (for example) that structures society "irl" ("in real life") structures fandom societies, and we must be mindful of these dynamics as we think about what aspects of fandom collectivity we can adapt to generate positive, radical solace-enabling, fandom pedagogies.

Lest the objections begin right away that fandom and fan fiction—stories, ranging from 100 word drabbles to 100,000 word tomes, based on an already-published book, show, or franchise—whose fights and victories rarely occur or are indeed spoken aloud irl, fall outside the scope of the compositionist, I want to call to mind Claude Hurlbert's reflections on what it means to be a compositionist. Hurlbert remarks that the job of compositionists is to "encourage writers who are engaged in the human project of examining their lives. My goal is to help them use writing to explore the possibility of better lives and ways in a troubled world" (4). If fan fiction is nothing else, truly, it is writing to explore the possibility of better lives: lives full, perhaps, of something like radical solace. Lives that do not erase pain, but form entire genres (hurt/comfort) around the idea that hurt, pain, and suffering—whatever its cause—deserves to be validated, to be treated with love, to not be erased but to be embraced and ridden through in the company of someone who loves you... or, as it were, your favorite character.

Indeed, fan fiction is an active exercise in José Esteban Muñoz's disidentification. The deeply felt affective impacts of disidentification—whether one uses the word to describe their

“feels” or not—can be enormous and can be observed (and felt) perhaps most easily in fandom.

Of girl-of-color Katniss Everdeen and mixed-girl Hermione Granger, Alexandrina has written for *Black Girl Dangerous* that,

Muñoz told us that yes, we could love *The Hunger Games* and the *Harry Potter* series and even use these stories in ways that empower us. Mainstream, capitalist media franchises could be refashioned and reimagined until they felt cozy in our hearts.

And feeling cozy in hearts—hearts that, in my classrooms, have thanked me with tearful eyes for bringing in copies of *America* (Chavez) and reading *Ms. Marvel: Volume 1*, because queer Latina superheroes? Muslim superheroes? Written by people who share those identities? For people who share those identities? The sweet relief of *not needing* to disidentify with a superhero to feel connected to the story can be even better than the disidentification process. And those feelings are precisely where ideas of radical solace in the classroom needs to attend to.

Yet too often, scholarly studies of slash fan fiction focus on straight cis women writing about gay cis men. Though she doesn't discuss fandom, I find Ann Cvetkovich's work on trauma and lesbian public culture to be tremendously instructive and inspirational in thinking about, writing about, and creating lesbian fan fiction. Cvetkovich is interested in sites in lesbian public culture that harken back to the dilemma discussed in the first couple of chapters and infused throughout the rest of this project: the tension between dis/ability studies' inability to mourn and trauma studies' inability to *stop* mourning. Cvetkovich examines aspects of lesbian public culture that unapologetically contain traces of trauma but refuse to pathologize it. She writes that these spaces “seize control over [trauma] from the medical experts [and] forge creative responses to [trauma] that far outstrip even the most utopian of therapeutic and political solutions” (3). I understand much of the impetus behind a lot of lesbian-generated lesbian fan fiction to be

ethically in concert with Cvetkovich's sites of analysis; surely, these fan fictions are crucial parts of today's lesbian cultures, particularly amongst younger lesbians.

Crucially, Cvetkovich writes that, "[a] queer healing practice would turn negative affect or trauma on its head, but by embracing rather than refusing it" (87). An excellent example of this embrace of pain and trauma rather than ignoring it for the sake of untrue-ringling plot development are the hurt/comfort fan fictions that populate lesbian fandom. Particularly in the *Once Upon a Time* fandom, the hurt/comfort fics (which feature one character being hurt either from canon or fan fic plot and receiving necessary recognition and comfort from another character) between Emma Swan and Regina Mills (the "Savior" and the "Evil Queen") are ubiquitous.

In particular, the prolific and highly skilled fan fic author sgtmac wrote the book-length fan fiction "Safe" to sort through both women's trauma. "Safe" started after a particular episode in canon, and spun the show off from there; slowing down the need for fast-paced action (something fan fiction does well and often), sgtmac created a written show in which Regina, Emma, and their son Henry had the space, time, and emotional sensitivity to explore each other's traumas and help each other heal without unrealistically erasing its impacts. No one was shown to fully *heal* from life's scars in this epic fic; nothing *happened*, either. Emma had her punching bag in the garage, Regina had her red wine, Henry had his fort on the beach; Emma and Regina had nightly conversations, eventually; Regina wore clothing that weren't designed for a queen, eventually. Emma and Regina kissed, eventually.

Eventually is key, in "Safe": because it would have been dramatically out of character for anything romantic or even remotely healing to happen any faster than the nearly 500 pages and 4 years it took the writer to finish. This kind of healing, through writing and through reading, takes

time and care and, in cases like this, no financial or commercial or grade-based assessment whatsoever. Just a fan community that needs, like the writer, to see what we deserve; two women allowed to grow to love each other, without the constraints of the show writers' compulsory heterosexuality forcing them into abusive relationships with cis het men. This powerful act of fan healing—of characters and each other, irl—is more evident in “Safe” than any fic I’ve ever read. Indeed, my first novel was inspired largely by the same frustration and desire that drove sgtmac: to get the representation we deserve from characters we love in a show that seems determined to do nothing but antagonize us (us, here, being queer fans).

Indeed, like in “Safe,” much about queer healing practices in lesbian fan fiction—radical solace, perhaps—has a great deal to offer our understandings of the relationship between writing pedagogy and radical solace in the classroom. From the importance of trust and power explorations to the emphasis on everyday life in lesbian fan fiction, issues of relevancy, community, vulnerability, and collaboration have the potential to bleed into our classroom pedagogies, perhaps as much as many of our students are already exploring these things outside the classroom through (lesbian) fan fiction. The emotional outpourings found therein can offer a profound source of writing back to canon in ways that heals without covering over trauma; of asserting rhetorical agency without bending to expectations of what canon has the power, money, and influence to impose; of taking back classrooms to centralize consent-based processes that give queer classroom practices such that excesses of emotions are acknowledged as crucial to composition processes rather than pathologized and devalued.

With this explicitly emotion-acknowledging pedagogy, it is critical to note who gets to be Human—who gets to have Human projects—in our classrooms, and who does not (and which of us have various in-between levels, and when, and in whose classes, and in which institutions,

etc.). Hurlbert expands on this problem of power inherent in our definitions of literature, inherent in every assessment strategy we put forth, writing that: “Truth be told, I wonder if many academics do not value narrative [like they do argumentation] because they associate it not only with lesser discourses, but also with lesser cultures: those “ethnics” cultures from elsewhere” (9).

So too, is fan fiction dismissed, while the affective push to produce it and consume it—for no money, significantly—far outweighs, for many, the desire to read the very same kinds of school books that marginalized young people can’t find themselves in. While fan fiction is often produced by people my age and older, it is also overwhelmingly created and read by increasingly young audiences, voraciously pursued and collaboratively generated after a basic, potentially un-engaging interaction with a source text (which can be anything from a television show to a book series).

These young people—both readers and authors—do not produce and pursue new texts because they must for a grade or to pass a certain requirement in school or at work. Instead, fans create and seek out fan fiction—and participate in fandom more broadly—to speak back to canon, to participate in canon, and, often, to reshape canon in their own image. Especially when canon so often targets people of color and queer people—and queer women of color in particular—for inexplicable death, tokenization, and “torture porn” storylines (when they get storylines at all), disidentifying with texts strongly enough to write oneself back into canon often becomes an emotional, intrinsic need, rather than an imposed, extrinsic requirement.

These tasks—the tasks of fans, of the marginalized segments of fandom—are not all that different from the tasks that ideally shape compositionist pedagogy.

How, then, might we take what many of our students are already engaged in and creating outside of our classrooms and reinforce the pedagogical importance of, for example,

collaborative writing, the strength and power of vulnerability, and (re)writing authority in our own writing classes? Of classroom—rather than fandom—canon, Carmen Kynard writes that there is, of course, a “usual cast of characters who have appeared in CUNY’s canon on basic writing and comp” (14). YA-authored YA literature—often, fan fiction; often, writing produced in and for our classes—offers a way for students to write their ways into and out and alongside the ‘usual cast of characters’ in canon. Students are often already doing this (re)writing and may already be part of vibrant writing communities (even if that vibrant writing community is, for example, a family group chat). However, recognition for creating *literature* where the institution only expects to read “basic” writing is a huge part of fandom pedagogy; because fandom pedagogy teaches us that headcanons are just as important as—and sometimes more important than—canon.

As mentioned in the introduction to this book, my own English 102 classes at LaGuardia Community College now feature a fan fiction writing assignment. To facilitate students’ analysis of Nikki Giovanni’s “Poem for a Lady Whose Voice I Like,” their first assignment is to write fan fiction of the piece. The poem itself is narrated as a “he said/she said” dialogue, making it easy to explain to students who are unfamiliar with the genre that their fan fiction should fill in who these poem characters are: write about the “he” and the “she,” and why they’re having this conversation; what brought them here, and where do they develop from the conversation we’re privy to? Even my students with no experience with fan fiction, or even writing fiction in general, use this assignment to really take off.

Some focus their stories on abusive relationships, writing through emotional nuances in beautiful and wrenching vividness. One LaGuardia student from Spring 2018 began her narrative directly in the rising action:

The house was a mess. If anyone were to ever come over they'd be disgusted. I was disgusted. Seinfeld was on and Zach was opening a beer. *SNAP* OR *KLSKK*? Is that the sound of a beer cap opening? I notice some drip to the floor and I look over to Zach but he pays no attention. I roll my eyes. That's another thing to clean up. (sanjidaridhe)

Her ability to focus on the mundane while elucidating the very not mundane responses we have demonstrated her ability to peer deeper into the poem and pull visual details from where there were few.

Other students focus their pieces on relationships between sisters and daughters and dreaded work dynamics. On leaving her daughter behind for her nightshift job, one of my students writes of her main character, "As she shut off her favorite part in the world, she sulked off towards the other part of her life she dreaded existed" (pquezada).

It's important to note that all these main characters, all these women, were based off the same "she" portrayed in the canon text, demonstrating—as my students and I always discuss at length—the breadth and depth of possibilities that lay, barely dormant, in the subtext of each piece of literature (even the ones they create themselves). Many of my students, verbally in class and even in their fictions themselves, acknowledge the multiplicities that words create, through assignments like this. Indeed, one of my students starts his fan fic with precisely this kind of exploration:

She is not the same person she was. On some level, she understands that something fundamental had changed. Words can be roads, bridges that connect A to B. But words can also be walls that separate and isolate. Words can be both things at the same time. A word can have more than one meaning. A word can have opposite effects. (fbardier)

Just as my students become extremely conversant in subtextual meanings through their fan fiction journeys, so, too, do they become conversant in many of the other benefits of approaching writing classrooms with fandom pedagogical practices in mind.

Below, I discuss six key potential contributions of fandom to our writing pedagogy; in doing so, I hope to create literature-based entry points into the discussions that follow in Chapters 3 and 4 about anti-ableist pedagogies.

Passion in Pedagogy

Typically, our pedagogies actively discourage and penalize the passionate expression of passion. As discussed at length in the chapters above, the reign of affective whiteness threatens to quash the potential of radical solace by pathologizing emotional registers not deemed *appropriate* for the classroom space. But, as evidenced in the sections above, certain passionate emotional registers are pathologized outside of the classroom—i.e., a psychoanalytic approach to fandom—as well. With fan fiction, it is passion and the rewards of community alone—nothing monetary and nothing society considers “real”, and in fact disparages as a “waste of time”—that drive people to create and read novel-length works. Yet, our students often groan at “term paper”-length assignment; so surely, we must re-evaluate the role of passion in our pedagogy.

In my classroom, we discuss citations as conversations with fellow scholars, my students giggling at my reenactment of imagined conversations with the arguments presented in different articles and pieces of literature. Just this term, one of my students nearly busted out of his back corner chair in his excitement to share with the class what we mean when we say “headcanon” versus “canon”; and not one, not two, but five separate students wound up reading (independently of each other!) fan fictions of *Grey’s Anatomy* in which one of the main

characters, Derek, was never killed off. This helped us talk about the restorative powers of fan fiction, and of literature in general; and passionate analysis brought us there.

How can we integrate passion into assignment design? The presentation of the syllabus? The selection of course content? Classroom activities? Is it an exercise in futility to anticipate what students will be passionate about before we even meet them? Of course. This is where the consent-based aspect of fandom pedagogy comes into play: just as fandom is something participants opt into; how can we structure our courses—even our required first-year writing courses—to be as based on “opting-in” as we can? How might we teach about citations with passion?

Vulnerability

The role of vulnerability is enormous in fan fiction; the hurt/comfort genre, especially in lesbian fan fiction, seeks to reframe sharing vulnerability with a cherished partner (whether that be a brother or a lover) as a profound form of strength. Writers, too, put our vulnerabilities on display—during any act of writing and publishing, of course, but perhaps especially in this genre. This vulnerability often draws extreme emotional response and gratitude from readers (peer reviewers, perhaps); yet this kind of vulnerability is often pathologized in classroom settings.

We ask our students to be vulnerable with their literacy histories or their personal narratives, for example; but the vulnerability is commanded. It is required, and it is graded. It is, in many ways, fetishizing, when the requirement comes from white instructors at largely POC schools. We fetishize student vulnerability—as with affect, of course, we encourage *some* but not *too much*, constraining this vulnerability to private written assignments ostensibly to protect the privacy and prevent anxiety of students, but also to regulate the free flow of unchecked emotions

that broader sharing, in various media, may induce. Yet, we very often deem it “unprofessional” to be vulnerable ourselves with our students.

Indeed, the very definition of vulnerability is determined by our own comfort zones and the privileges and oppressions that shape them. How can we use understandings of vulnerability and risk as powerful in fandom to challenge the notion of what is “low-stakes” in our own classroom (low-stakes for whom, we might ask)? How can we examine the vulnerabilities we’re asking our students to engage with when we ask them to free write, have small group conversations? Hand in short but passionate assignments in which they might only receive a checkmark as a response? How are we willing, and not willing, to reflect our students’ vulnerabilities with our own?

Relevant Content

A great deal of fandom-based writing—especially lesbian fandom writing—steers toward the domestic genre. These stories—domestic fics—go to great lengths to explore the home lives of characters. Seemingly mundane interactions like brushing teeth and choosing a side of the bed to sleep on; making coffee or popcorn together; making someone else dinner; cuddling on the couch; these everyday activities, in domestic lesbian fan fiction, elicit extreme emotional responses in lesbian fandom. Often, this domesticity is aspirational for young people who live in violent homes, for people who do not have (healthy) romantic partnerships. Regardless of the reason for the immense amount of queeening that domestic fics often induce, this aspect of fandom not only speaks, but flails excitedly to the importance of being able to both read and produce content that someone considers *relevant* to their lives (or aspirations).

The domestic genre reminds us that sometimes, the most seemingly mundane, potentially conservative things can be radical. For example, my student who read their fan fiction aloud on a

conference panel this term wrote a scene that one of their classmates/peer reviewers told them, with admiration and awe, that he couldn't believe how they did it: they'd written an entire five pages about a scene that couldn't have spanned more than two or three minutes-worth of movement, of still breathing and thought. Yet, he pointed out, it was captivating and just as intense as it would have been with a solid "plot," if not more so. This scene was a simple moment in the life of a young person waking up from a dream and experiencing an intense bout of gender dysphoria; the fic revealed a kind of domestic normalcy (not to mention vulnerability) that transcended "moving the plot along." It welcomed the author's cisgender classmates into the life of an agender character, and by extension, into the author's (and my own!) life, simply by being (much like sgtmac's "Safe") unapologetically domestic and lingering in the seemingly mundane.

How do we let marginalized students be domestic (and not domestic slaves) in course content; how do we honor the fact that "escape"-esque domestic fics that put a highly intimate pause on the impossibly busy lives of idolized characters can have highly emotional implications for expanding the limits of what is possible? For what is allowed to be aspirational? For what kinds of lives can be imagined? For what kinds of radical solace can accompany both extreme adventures and extreme oppression? How can we honor all that in our content selection and assignment design?

Analyzing and Critiquing Through (re)Writing

There is perhaps no one more equipped to provide intricate, complex analyses of a television show, comic book, or epic fantasy series than a fan; particularly one who actively writes and/or reads fan fiction in that fandom. Following from and guided by passions and seeming extremes of emotion, fan fiction often offers profound analyses of character

motivations, passions, flaws, and relationships. These forms of intimate ways of knowing characters precipitate deep analyses that typical essays assigned in classes can only ever aspire to.

With their fan fiction assignment serving as the first piece of writing they submit for a grade to me, my students immediately get a sense of what it means to have a voice in their own education. Through activities where each student shares and workshops their idea for their fan fic during the drafting stage, the entire class—it never fails—winds up in awe that no two stories wind up the same, even though they're all taking inspiration from the same source poem. With these new analytical, close reading tools in hand, my students' research papers inevitably turn out sharper, more focused, later in the term than they do in classes where I haven't assigned fan fiction first.

Can we imagine assigning short stories *as* a form of analysis, along with reflective components? Can we imagine encouraging students to make reaction videos to particular texts, and proceed to create a written analysis of their own reaction? Can we imagine, in short, the profound ways that fan fiction is a sharp, analytical form of critique and weave this into our assignment design?

Collaborative Processes

Fan fiction authors very often do not limit our writing about a show to the writing of fiction; we often engage in commenting (whether through actual comments or through tags on Tumblr), Discourse debates, editing of each other's writing, joining forces to create fan-based games, fiction weeks, gif weeks, and even full-out conventions. These collaborative processes are indicative of creation rather than *resigned* consumption of “proper” (canon) knowledges. The trust-building and interdependence inherent in both the form and content of many of these

processes lends itself to the creation of trust through a reframing of vulnerability as both profoundly painful *and* profoundly strong. This radical solace both generates and is generated by the creation of (re)written literature.

When I have students peer review each other's fan fics, they almost always wind up with their comments to each other sounding just like a comment thread on Archive of Our Own (a popular fan fiction site). They greet; they compliment; they offer help when asked for. In that order. Even their non-fan fic interactions change, I've noticed; their comments on their other assignments (whether helping each other or asking me/each other questions through our class collaborative documents) get more personal, more community-oriented, more public-facing, and funnier. More infused with their personalities, and a sense of being in it together, rather than a sense of fulfilling yet another stupid requirement. The affective experience created by fan fic reviews creates palpable student excitement.

Yet, in our classrooms, peer review and collaboration are often sidelined in favor of creations imagined to be individually-generated; because, of course, grades are ultimately an individual assignment. How can the types of collaboration in fandom seep into our classrooms? How can peer review take on more than a resigned, obligatory tone in our classes? How can collaboration driven by students themselves generate more in-depth projects than individual projects may allow? How can day-to-day classroom interactions learn from Tumblr culture of "boosting" other people's thoughts and needs, of voluntarily beta reading work before publication, of debating canon and swapping headcanons well after classroom hours are over?

Rethinking Presence

We often observe in irl classrooms many of the same participatory phenomena that we do in fandom. Above, Stanley highlighted the notion that amongst fan fic readers, there are those

who leave replies and send messages to creators (and amongst themselves), and there are those who “lurk” without leaving written responses. Various platforms—like Tumblr and ArchiveOfOurOwn (Ao3)—offer a middle ground between lurking and commenting; “kudos” on Ao3 and “likes” on Tumblr involves the simple pressing of a heart to leave your appreciation for the story. However, you can only like or kudo something once (a fact much bemoaned by “lurkers”, writers, and commenters alike) on both platforms; this is unlike comments, of which you can leave many.

As in fandom, students in our classes often “lurk.” How can we give these students the option to leave “kudos”? How does the expansion of these options fundamentally challenge the concept of “presence” that Price rightly critiques as ableist? How can we tell when students who are “merely” lurking are often, too, profoundly engaged in learning? How can we reward students for this learning, rather than penalize them for the ways they’re doing it?

The next two chapters explore these possibilities in multiple aspects of course design.

Chapter 4: Crippling Curricular Normalization: Syllabus Design and Content Selection

If fandom pedagogical practices would involve passion and affirming excess, what might this actually be like in classroom environments? How do we attend to “excess” spillovers of feelings—in our classrooms, for example—without pathologizing them as disruptive, as dangerous, as inappropriate? How do we create learning environments that encourage the dis/identificatory potential of both creating solace and refusing erasure? Ann Cvetkovich writes of this balance that there is a need for cultural sites that contain traces of trauma without pathologizing it: in much of the lesbian public culture that she studies, she finds that lesbians have “seized control over” trauma, wrangling the notion of expertise away from “medical experts” and instead of submitting to or basing an identity solely on resisting pathologization, “forg[ing] creative responses to [trauma] that far outstrip even the most utopian of therapeutic and political solutions” (3). (Again, I always think of “Safe” when I think of these creative responses.)

Rather than evacuating counterpublic spheres, Cvetkovich argues that trauma can be a *foundation* for creating counterpublics; though Muñoz might remind us that not all responses to cultural and historical traumas need be counter and counter alone (15). Entering the discourse on trauma and cures, Cvetkovich writes that by depathologizing assumptions about trauma, scholars and communities can “[open] up possibilities for understanding traumatic feelings not as a medical problem in search of a cure but as felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics” (47). This framing of trauma—as felt experiences, deeply felt and deeply painful, but also as bearing great mobilizing potential, healing potential—is inspired by African American and African diaspora studies and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave narratives and sentimental novels these scholars often

examine. From these texts emerge rhetorical strategies surrounding trauma that are so complex as to shatter the false perception that there can be any “transparent representation of trauma nor any straightforward context of reception” (38). Surely Kynard and others’ work on the importance of Black literacy, in the chapters above, attest to this.

And yet, as Chen notes in *The Melancholy of Race*, “[w]e are a nation at ease with grievance but not with grief” (x). We are uncomfortable with grief, with trauma; we would like to cure it. We would like it to disappear, even as we inflict it. We would like to not be faced with guilt, with pain, with anything but cure. We do our best, too, to keep affect out of the classroom. But without affective expression, there cannot be the vital thrill of dis/identification; without affective expression, there can be no challenge to the overwhelming absent presence of affective whiteness, that dearth of expression, that emotionally impoverished normality that, when performed by already marginalized students, is nonetheless pathologized. And as Ashley Taylor notes, “the *concept* of able-minded normalcy is upheld through attributions of mental incompetence to bodies of color” (183, emphasis in original). Uncritically upholding standards that enforce affective whiteness into student composition (both bodily and written) squelch the creation of radical solace by and for marginalized students. These pedagogies actively create hostile environments for so many of our students to learn.

By attending to the ways that curricular standards and requirements reinforce trauma rather than radical solace, pedagogical approaches to teaching writing can crack open spaces for anti-racist and anti-ableist classroom practices. The notion of radical solace is my attempt—indebted to scholars of color like Muñoz, Erevelles, and Kynard—to pull together the unhealability of trauma studies with the unmourn-ability of dis/ability studies; to inject racial power analyses into the pervasive and destructive whiteness of dis/ability studies and composition

studies; and to offer a frame of reference for modes of resistance in our classrooms that do not cage off all undervalued speech as inherently resistant and therefore as inherently abject. I suppose in doing so I am disidentifying with the concept of resistance: because yes, of course there is much in this world to resist. But it is just as important, in a quest for justice, for our marginalized students and their marginalized compositions to just *be*.

How, in other words, can classrooms be *for* the radical solace of marginalized students? Recognizing young adult student writing as itself literature, rather than as remedial work that has no broader meaning than the letter assigned to it at the end of term, is a start on this path; because surely radical solace cannot take firm, nurtured root in classrooms that operate under deficit model pedagogies. Nurturing interrelated structural critique and emotional solace through young adult literature is key here. These last two chapters explore the pedagogical necessities of exactly that.

Surely when we teach writing, we are not just teaching the mechanics of linguistics (which, indeed, are themselves infused with such rich histories and power relations that even “just” teaching writing mechanics isn’t “just” teaching anything). The first two chapters laid out the ways that personal conceptions and structural power dynamics intertwining (and often conflating) race and dis/ability dominate every moment in which we ask our students—in one way or another—to compose something for us as instructors. The third chapter elucidated the ways that fandom pedagogy can help shape classroom dynamics in a way that promotes radical solace. These final two chapters, now, will further elaborate these theoretical insights into our pedagogical processes—the places where trauma studies and dis/ability studies careen into our classrooms, often with a bang but more often unnoticed/unremarked-upon—with pedagogical practices that unsettle deficit model thinking that racializes and effectively dis/ables students. The pedagogical

approaches outlined herein are attempts to bring radical solace into the classroom by elevating the ways we think about student writing as itself literature; by redefining “standards” of participation, attendance, and “necessary” content; and by reassessing assessment practices that structurally disadvantage and inflict rhetorical violence to students of color and/or students with dis/abilities. It should be noted, before moving forward, that there is an emphasis on the word *attempts*: these chapters constitute attempts toward promoting radical solace, nothing more, since teaching is never formulaic and since I am writing this as a white person in a white supremacist country

Bearing this firmly in mind, these chapters will ask how theoretical models of radical solace can actually *behave* in a classroom; how, at a practical level, reframing our instruction to value YA writing as YA literature can fundamentally alter our pedagogical practices of teaching writing; and explicate certain student-centered pedagogical approaches that can promote dually anti-racist, anti-ableist classroom spaces that can facilitate possibilities for students to create radical solace in our classes. This chapter will specifically focus in on syllabus design and content selection in relation to the above inquiries.

I begin with these course building blocks because of the power that syllabus design and course design have on both the structural ways the course plays out through an entire term, as well as because these are large parts of the initial affective impressions we give students of a class. When syllabi and course content are forbidding and exclusionary—especially in contexts where many students are receiving multiple syllabi in the span of a week—students can begin term in an affective lull from unenthusiasm, or, on the flip, an affective excess of panic. While these emotions are to be expected at the often-overwhelming start of term, they are often—at least to a certain degree—pedagogically preventable, as are the repercussions of immediately establishing a course as not *for* a particular student or group of students. Inaccessible syllabi and course content not only

normalize and reward certain kinds of “good” students (discussed in the previous chapter), but also to alienate, undervalue, and punish students whose bodyminds cannot and/or will not conform to normate expectations.

Nirmala Erevelles investigates the implications of oppressive constructions of this kind of regime of normality on our curricular design and implementation. In doing so, she argues that curricula inherently serve as normalizing texts. The texts we offer our students, combined with the ways we frame them and collectively instill only “high-brow” literature as “canon” or, indeed, as literature itself, solidifies—both in form and in content—a firm institutionalized representation of what is “normal.” As with fandom and fan fiction, the question of what is “good enough”—and, by extension, which student bodyminds are “good enough”—to be considered literature and literate, respectively, is strong here.

Significantly, a large part of our poetry unit this past term, as I was teaching fan fiction, was the question “am I ___ enough?” It organically came up in a discussion of various poetic texts, and my students went with it; some even included variations on this theme explicitly in their fan fics. Interrogating the limits of toxic masculinity when they talked about their characters asking, “am I man enough?” and the burdens on Black women in this country when they wrote about their characters trying to be “strong enough” helped deepen their analyses. It is no coincidence, I think, that we grappled with these questions both with our characters and with constructing our own literature.

It is vital to note that valuing forms of literature like fan fiction as such, and valuing young adult literature as such, is not about lowering difficulty levels or decreasing standards: to the contrary, the level of analytical prowess and argumentative power demonstrated by the narratives of many young adult fan fiction authors far exceeds that which they often will demonstrate in term

papers they don't want to write anyway. Rather, the discussion is about reframing and challenging what *is* "normal" to begin with, and who gets to access this normalcy.

By extension, our curricula teach (even when we are not explicit about these learning objectives) which bodies and emotional registers are "normalized"—acceptable, "good enough"—and which are other, which are "subversive," pathologized. What makes it into our curricula—both implicitly in terms of course requirements and explicitly in terms of content—shapes that which is allowed to be normalized and which must remain (in a negative sense) on the margins. Of course, there is much to say for the desirability of being on the margins: there can be something affectively attractive, something *sexy* and community-forming, about being on the outside. Indeed, this devil-may-care attraction is precisely why I am attempting to pull together insights from *both* trauma theory and dis/ability studies through the concept of radical solace, to both incorporate the benefits of living and creating from the margins *and* shatter the structural oppressions that create the margins and make them excruciating to begin with.

Given the way that Erevelles centralizes our curricula as a normativizing force in education—one major way that institutional structures most clearly manifest in our individual classrooms—I find it important to further tease out her ideas about the harm and potential radical solace that can be generated from curricular development. In doing so, I want to both expand her exploration to approach the implications of curricular "normalization" for young adults—particularly for variously marginalized young adults—and simultaneously attempt to address a vital call she makes the educators. Erevelles wonders: "How can educators construct a curriculum that enables the collective interests of all students, such that they can produce oppositional knowledges that will contribute to the possibility of not just textual but also material and social transformation?" (422-23). This attention to collective interests is crucial: in writing classrooms

(and overall academic culture) that too often reduce composition to individual, non-collaborative processes, curricula that work toward both oppositional knowledges in terms of course structure *and* in terms of content seems key. Part of this oppositional knowledge can, often, manifest in knowledges of the value of dis/abled interdependence and a critique of the hyper-independent (ableist, access-based) culture of American individualism often glorified in our classrooms.

Though resistance is often romanticized in suitably radical academic circles, I want to ponder, for a moment, the potential impacts of normalization and the potentially radical, emancipatory impact that normalization can have within our curricula. For what, I wonder, is dis/identification if not the attempt to radically resist toxic representations of marginalized groups *while also* directing one's own mode of healing and self-authoring positive representation? (Interestingly, these active, analytical, dis/identificatory skills are refined and encouraged through fan fiction.) How, then, can reframing and expanding what we define as “necessary” for students to learn in our classrooms help, too, reshape the contents of the emotional labor we make students perform for us?

It seems, then, that the goal is getting to a place in which we value student bodyminds through valuing multiple forms of their writing; this re-valuing of systemically de-valued composition can promote radical solace in our classrooms through affirming, collectively-oriented course structures. By operating on a consent-based pedagogical model—in which we seek consent from our students for what we can, and transparently explain the things we cannot alter due to personal, departmental and broader requirements—we can increase a student sense of ownership over the direction of a course, over their studies, over their learning.

This is complex—of course it is—because students often resist not being told what to do. I've had many students who've asked me if they could just give me, for example, a percentage

breakdown of their assignments' value in their grading contract, because they've grown to both internalize and be comforted by numbers-based standards of assessment. Relatedly, many students of various learning styles require advance notice of any kind of change, rather than feeling a benefit from something free-flowing and loose requirements; that kind of structure is often exactly what my students ask for.

So, I want to make clear here that consent-based models do not mean that a class cannot arrive at a specific, bullet-pointed set of requirements that tend to bring students a lot of comfort and necessary structure to reduce anxiety: I simply advocate for consent-based student participation in the creation of these criteria.

One way to attend to these needs is through intersectional attention to crippling the classroom. According to Claire McKinney, crippling the classroom (even and especially courses not explicitly focused on dis/ability issues) “entails developing a political understanding of disability as a socially constructed category that focuses attention on questions of accessibility as central normative concerns for interpersonal, intellectual, and social relations” (114). I would expand on this important definition to explicitly accommodate—and, indeed, centralize—the ways in which histories of structural racism and ableism collide and feed each other in our classrooms. This kind of DisCrit-oriented crippling of classrooms can, I believe, go a long way to promote radical solace and valuing marginalized bodyminds in our classes; possible pedagogical methodologies for DisCrit-cripping our classrooms follows through the final three chapters (including this one) of this piece.

Throughout this section, I've been drawing a distinction between the *structure* of a curriculum and the course *content*. I want to be clear, here—in a similar way that we often teach our students about the ways form and function interact—that these interact and inform each other

very intimately. However, the distinction I'm drawing here is between the implicit curriculum (the design of the syllabus and the things we emphasize/require/model on it) and the explicit curriculum (the actual texts that we are assigning). The following section elaborates on implicit curricula through examining the potentials to promote radical solace through syllabus design; the next section elaborates on explicit curricula through exploring the ways course content can enhance the potential for generating radical solace in our classrooms.

Syllabus Design

Everything about our syllabi direct students' emotionality. From the aesthetic quality (are there images? How are the sections arranged?) to the tone (is there a lot of jargon? Is it first person? Second person? Third?) and presentation format (is it editable? Digital only? Print only?), everything we teach our students about form shaping content and vice versa also applies to the first document we usually present to students every term. When our syllabi are distant, explicitly anti-emotion for the sake of "intellectual" endeavors (as though the two can be separated), "rational" and static documents, we are conveying to our students that this kind of detached, affectively white composition performance is what we expect from them, too. This threatens to immediately alienate students who were not raised with academic English and whose subject positions (whether that's from personality/affective registers, mental dis/abilities, and/or cultural backgrounds) prevent them from blending into an affectively white classroom landscape.

Here it is clear that syllabi serve the function that Erevelles critiques about curricula, above: they are one of the first normativizing forces students encounter from our classes, made even more (seemingly) concrete because of their written (often immutable) form. Just as we often teach our students that form follows function, and vice versa, the syllabus explicitly (and

implicitly) communicates through its form what a students' function should be in the classroom: what is considered "normal" in this classroom. The other side of this normalizing, however, is the pathologization of the various "others" that we teach, that we are; in normalizing some forms of composition (both of the bodymind and of the written word), syllabi have the power to continue pathologizing certain forms of composition. In her insightful and exigent *Mad at School*, Margaret Price attends to the hostility of the academy to people with mental dis/abilities. Her text provides a useful springboard for elaborating the power of syllabi to include and to exclude; to welcome and to alienate.

Even after the initial impression, syllabi serve as the first written indicator of what kinds of presence are expected and accepted in our classrooms. Price reminds us of the importance of syllabi through her discussion of the casual assumptions these documents make about students' bodyminds in classroom spaces and related kairotic spaces. She harkens to discussions of "goodness" cited earlier, writing that:

the conflation of presence, goodness, freedom, control, and individuality is used to construct pedagogies that presume that, first, presence is the sine qua non of learning in higher ed, and second, that the "choice" of whether or not to be present belongs to the individual student. (65)

Here, Price's attentiveness to choice helps reveal how these assumptions twist the model of consent around to damage rather than open space for students with dis/abilities. The implication that students whose presence is not or cannot be normative within a classroom setting are *choosing* to be "bad" reminds us of the need to create consent-based models *with* students through which to opt-*in* to *various* ways of expressing presence and participation (rather than one or two hegemonically accepted ways). Yet, syllabi reinforce the conflation between "good"

students (and the value judgements associated therewith) and the desire/ability to physically attend class in the expected comportment when they make, for example, bolded statements about attendance and participation standards.

Pedagogies that assume individual students are not constrained by jobs, children, health, or—frankly—disconnected from irrelevant course content also assume that it is not the job of the instructor to create a classroom that welcomes multiple forms of presence rather than expecting students to constrain their bodyminds to fit one narrow definition of presence and participation. Price elaborates on multiple modalities of class participation—ranging from in-person office hours to online office hours—and multiple forms of presence that locate problems, not in the slouched posture of an exhausted student (for example), but rather in a classroom that is actively hostile to this student’s needs.

McKinney offers us further insight into the ways that syllabic policies demanding only certain forms of “presence” can be crippled, in attempt to allow space for radical solace and valuing of othered bodyminds rather than punitive, pathologizing deficit models. She writes of the transformative potential of crippling our syllabi, arguing persuasively that:

a dedication to disability as a pedagogical method would require any teacher to make decisions related to attendance policies, modes of assessment, inclusive class activities, and class procedures. Attendance procedures that are inflexible may communicate to students with chronic impairments that they cannot participate. (115)

Of course, inflexible attendance procedures are usually out of the proverbial hands of individual instructors due to departmental, school, and financial aid policies; yet, being transparent with students about these policies and why they exist can often be an excellent practice of rhetorical

analysis and consent-building in classrooms that typically exert power and requirements without any consensual buy-in from students.

One might further argue with McKinney, however, suggesting that if students need a certain accommodation because of a “chronic impairment,” they can simply say so. Yet, this requires not only documentation (which students without access to insurance and/or community support will not have access to), but also requires that a student out themselves in order to be welcome into the learning space. McKinney herself used to subscribe to the ‘let me know if you need special accommodations’ syllabic pedagogy, but realized that “Putting a student in the situation of disclosing the illness in order to request flexibility revealed the ableist assumptions of my own practice and allowed for a reflection on the aims and goals of that policy” (116). Surely, too, it is clear how requiring disclosure/outing can affectively impact students who are already likely to feel unwelcome in spaces that so stringently regulate the bodymind.

Beyond attendance/presence requirements, though, syllabi can create both hostile and affirmative spaces which can promote or stymie radical solace; which can value or devalue student composition. Often, instructors include “inclusion” as a cameo in our syllabi; a shout-out, so to speak, to the dis/ability services office or whatever wellness centers we have on our campuses. This unemotional, purportedly detached and “professional” directive to students to seek “special accommodations” from the appropriate office is, in fact, an emotionally-loaded section for those of us who learn differently, whose emotional registers are, for one reason or another, pathologized by the unacknowledged normalizing force of ‘this syllabus is for all students: except *you*.’ McKinney offers some suggestions for normalizing dis/ability in the classroom through an accessibility section of the syllabus:

In designing a syllabus, educators should include, alongside course objectives, assignments, reading schedules, a lengthy discussion of the accommodation procedures of the classroom. Beyond simply directing students to their college's disability office, it should explain the use of assistive technology like computers, how students should speak in class to make their words accessible to those who are hard of hearing (do not speak with one's hands in front of one's mouth) or visually impaired (describe any images one presents, or read visually presented text aloud), and information on legal constraints to inform students with disabilities about what they do and do not have to disclose and what accommodations in the class will exceed the legally mandated minimum. (118)

These responsibility-sharing pieces of information have the potential to offer students a written invitation to forming a class culture based on collaborative, cooperative learning rather than implementing the kind of pedagogy that only values normative forms of learning.

It is important, however, to take accessibility sections in syllabi beyond educating students *without* certain dis/abilities about how to share space *with* students with certain dis/abilities. An emphasis on digital tech accommodations is important, surely, but Price reminds us that focusing uncritically on digital tech benefits to people with dis/abilities can reinforce the assumption that dis/abilities are static, biological, and based in individual bodyminds, rather than (also) socially/structurally contingent (58). Instead, Price focuses on attempting to ethically design kairotic spaces such that equity and access are foregrounded rather than retrofitted afterthoughts. Avoiding these retrofitted afterthoughts, too, include thinking about the structure of what Brewer reminds us are “the [disability services statement on our syllabi](#), whether or not we mention the campus counseling center, and what we might lightly refer to as “insane” all

send messages about how welcome a space our classrooms are for psychiatrically disabled people” (Brewer).

These ethically-designed kairotic spaces—of which textual and emotional interactions with the syllabus qualify, given how much casual power is imbued into the text of each syllabus—surely cannot only include dis/ability-oriented structural invitations. To this end, I argue that accessibility statements in syllabi must take a DisCrit approach to crippling: one that understands the process of crippling normalization as an inherently intersectional task. That said, pro-actively welcoming students with immigration issues, court dates, and familial and/or financial responsibilities into our classrooms must, too, be a part of a syllabus that truly seeks to promote a pedagogy of radical solace. Casually integrating these invitations of student life and embodiment into the classroom—through centralizing and normalizing a diverse range of student needs in the syllabus—can perform the essential function of shifting the location of the “problem” with participation (etc.) to the *actual* problem of our *perceptions* of students and the structural barriers that we underwrite through our syllabi that prevent students from learning safely and effectively in our classrooms (Price 91).

For those of us who prefer minimalistic approaches—letting students fill in their own blanks rather than risk leaving something off an extensive explication of accessibility possibilities—Margaret Price provides a succinct guideline. In her syllabi, for her obligatory ‘dis/ability section’, she writes: “*I assume that all of us have different ways of learning... Please communicate with me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them*” (90). This flexibility and student-centered approach is crucial for opening spaces in our classrooms for students to generate radical solace in our courses.

In my own syllabi, I address this need for student-driven adjustments by presenting students with an explicit note—both verbally and written early in the syllabus—that this syllabus, even the printed copy they receive, is a working draft that invites their input. Each section concludes with invitations for suggestions and critiques, and students' first assignment is to comment on the google doc version of the syllabus with their critiques, excitements, and suggestions. We negotiate these comments openly throughout the term (for more on these negotiations, head to the next chapter where I discuss contract grading), and I always alert students when we alter the syllabus. Particularly important, here, is balancing the kind of flexibility that welcomes multiple forms of student presence and affective expression with a kind of clarity and consistency of requirements that tends to alleviate a lot of student anxieties. Transforming agreements with students that could otherwise be rendered nebulous into written and verbalized bullet-points is a way to both codify agreements and bring oft-needed structure to flexibility.

Directly and explicitly engaging students in co-authorship of the living document of the syllabus can be a tough endeavor. I tend to write my syllabus in the form of a letter to my students, with language that avoids jargon as much as possible; with a tone and form of address that explicitly acknowledges the power dynamic at play but simultaneously tries to place myself on as equal a level with my students as I can. I fear, always, that inviting students to edit a document that's written as a letter from me to them prevents them from wanting to do so earnestly: letters are personal, and critiquing someone's personal work is so often more difficult and awkward than critiquing something that seems divested of the bodymind. This is certainly even more so when you consider that I am in the place of professor, the assigner of grades, the gatekeeper. In my context teaching at LaGuardia Community College, I am the *white U.S.-born*

gatekeeper, which ensures that no matter what I try to do pedagogically, I can never achieve anything close to structural equity or true consent with my classes of predominantly students of color and/or immigrant students.

In my mind, these almost intractable power relations must be addressed in the syllabus to begin to carve out space for radical solace in our classroom. It should not be the responsibility of my students of color and/or my students with dis/abilities to do the emotional and intellectual labor—laden with immense risk!—of making the initial cuts into our classroom to attempt to gain some equity for themselves. I must make the first incisions into the white supremacist, ableist structural context of our shared learning space. For me, this means being very explicit with my syllabus design and very frank (one might say *meta*) about my intentions. In its most current iteration, my Assignment Expectations section begins as follows:

Before each assignment is due, you will get a hard copy and an online copy (through Google Docs) of the specific expectations. Before each assignment is set, we will always have the opportunity to review these assignments in class together. Further, you will be encouraged to edit/comment on the assignment parameters on Google Docs to make sure everything is crystal clear and that you get to shape expectations.

Through this process of shaping our expectations, I'd like to share something that is important to me. Education is often designed for people who already have access to education: academic writing is designed by and for people who have experience with... academic writing! Perhaps you've experienced this in your previous courses/school work. This racialized power that accompanies language -- allowing white professors, like me, access to a world that many students, especially students of color, are often denied access

to -- is important to discuss, and we will be doing this a lot in our class. In the same way that I want you to feel empowered to correct me if course materials aren't accessible in terms of learning styles and dis/ability, please do so also if there are culturally relevant methods that would help you learn better that I am not thinking of or currently valuing.

In addition to this, there are a few things each of the assignments will have in common:
[etc.]

My students almost always, in their group investigations of the syllabus on day one of term, comment on this section, bringing their fellow classmates' awareness to the part about racialized power. It always seems emotionally significant to my students, and having it in my syllabus ensures that we'll talk about it from the beginning.

Perhaps this should, by this point, go without saying, but I don't believe that it is sufficient to place even the most expansive "Accessibility" statement toward the end of the syllabus, where students often do not deign to glance or by which point they are often exhausted, emotionally and intellectually, from the exercise of combing through an entire term's-worth of expectations. Granting Accessibility sections 'prime real estate' in the syllabus demonstrates the prioritization of multiple learning needs, rather than a cloistered-off-at-the-end attempt to bury deeply embodied student needs under the swamp of "more important" course requirements and content.

In the Accessibility section of my syllabus—the longest section, and the one that students encounter right after an introduction in the form of a letter—is one of the places that I try to make it clear that student needs and desires are central to my courses. My most recent iteration is as follows:

It is very important to me that our class is as accessible as possible for everyone in it. This means that if I'm ever using language that is not easily understandable, or am speaking too quickly, or am generally coming up short in my responsibility to help you learn the best you can, I always encourage you to let me know in any way that you can (saying something during class, notes, emails, in-person, etc.).

Additionally, if any factors you cannot control — public transportation availability/safety, family safety in the midst of changing immigration policies, etc. — are interfering with your ability to benefit from this class experience, know that there are many resources available to you through LaGuardia.

Some of these resources are housed at the Wellness Center (discussed below and linked here: <http://www.laguardia.edu/WellnessCenter/>) and others — including legal counseling, financial assistance, health care enrollment, etc. — can be accessed through Single Stop (linked here: <http://www.laguardia.edu/singlestop/>).

What can you access through Single Stop?

SINGLE STOP:

Single Stop USA has partnered with LaGuardia Community College to connect students with federal and state financial resources, and local community services to overcome financial barriers, stay in school and graduate. Single Stop provides financial assistance

with daily living expenses, e.g. pay for doctor's visits, medications, food, rent, utilities, child care, transportation and more! All of our services are free for LaGuardia students and their immediate family members.

Do I qualify for benefits?

If you answer "yes" to any of the questions below, you may qualify for additional financial services and/or benefits:

- Do you need help paying for college?
- Are you finding it difficult to meet basic living expenses such as for housing, food, rent, clothing, etc.?
- Are you receiving limited or no financial support from your family?
- Are you financially responsible for children under the age of 24?
- Are you a veteran?
- Are you in need of financial assistance?
- Are you undocumented?

<http://www.laguardia.edu/singlestop/#>

You can also access free and confidential immigration assistance is available through CUNY Citizenship Now, linked here: <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/citizenship-now/> and CUNY CLEAR, linked here: <http://www.cunyclear.org>

In addition, dis/abilities — ranging from anxiety to chronic pain — often go un-discussed in classroom settings, but my goal for this class is to foster a generative learning environment for each student: if I am not succeeding at this, please let me know so that I can make the necessary changes. As I will repeat throughout the syllabus, if you anticipate needing any kind of modification to the class as structured, please let me know as soon as possible.

This includes the ability to draft a separate grading contract with me if you know that any component of the contract is going to be overly burdensome or impossible for you to achieve due to life circumstances or any dis/ability you might experience. Additionally, if you have a documented learning, sensory, physical, or other reason for needing any kind of special accommodation in this class, contact the The Wellness Center in room C-249, email WellnessCenter@lagcc.cuny.edu, and phone 718-482-5471. Please feel free to reach out to me for additional assistance.

This section receives priority in my syllabus over the parts that talk about grading and even hardcore course content; because this information is the background against which many of my students will breathe while navigating the explicit content of the course.

The content pieces of the syllabus—which texts we assign—will be the focus of the next section of this chapter. Before diving into this content, however, I'd like to pose a few guiding questions that might be useful when developing our syllabi. These questions can serve as points of self-reflection and structural analysis when challenging the assumptions we make and potential harms we inflict with our syllabus structure: answering these questions with DisCrit-style crippling in mind can help broaden our syllabi to welcome all types of bodyminds into our

classroom spaces, allowing those who have gone through K-12 targeted by oppressive education structures a course in which to perhaps, finally, breathe.

- What is the presentation format of the syllabus? Digital only? Print only? Multiple modes? How will changes to the syllabus be communicated to students?
- Aesthetically, what kind of encounter does my syllabus offer my students? Blocks of text with little-to-no white space? Lots of white space? Gridded information or paragraph-style? Both? Are there images? Links? How are sections spatially arranged?
- Are students invited to edit the document with the goal of sharing their own input and needs? Do I explicitly ask students for feedback and refer to the syllabus as a draft, or present it as a final product?
- What kind of space do I give issues of Accessibility in my syllabus? How do I define it and what burdens do I place on my students with dis/abilities to be able to access my course?
- What is the tone of my syllabus? Is it the tone I wish to convey? Is there a lot of jargon? How am I navigating my own authority and power dynamics within both the text and form of the document?
- What types of learning styles and needs am I welcoming here? Which am I excluding? How can I open up the syllabus to welcome more ways of learning and engaging?
- What are my goals with this syllabus? Why do I have these goals? Which students might have different goals, or need to get there in a different way than the one I'm suggesting?
- To what extent does this syllabus invite or exclude students with mental dis/abilities, including depression, extreme anxiety, PTSD, or ADHD? With varying ranges of social needs and comforts? What specific pieces of the syllabus indicate this responsiveness?

(See Part IV for suggestions of how your syllabus might do this. Briefly, here are some questions to consider: e: Do I require in-person presentations to the class? Do I indicate/intend to call on students at random during class? Do I explicitly tell students they cannot eat or be on their phones during class? Am I coming off as shaming about things like absences and lateness?)

- How do I respond—and what assumptions are implicit in my response—when a student tells me they’re sick? How might an ethos of trusting students when they say they cannot complete something on time or simply do not come to class alter my assessment methods and the diversity of ways that I offer students to engage in coursework?
- How do I respond—and what assumptions are implicit in my response—when a student sleeps in class? When a student is on their phone/computer in class? When a student gets up and leaves multiple times during class?
- Do my attendance and participation requirements automatically exclude or alienate students for whom interacting in particular ways is burdensome? Am I proactive, rather than reactive, about providing multiple modes of engagement within the course?

Content Selection/Framing

At the 2017 CAST Professional Learning third annual symposium, the theme was UDL for Social Justice: Using Universal Design for Learning to Educate Underserved Learners. Promoting the hashtag #UDL4Justice on Twitter, the symposium attempted to model accessibility for those who, for whatever reason, could not be at the conference, as well as to serve as a conversation-hub and community-builder both within and across panels. During the conference, participant Lizzie Fortin [tweeted out](#), ““Just moving around furniture doesn’t change our pedagogy.” @edtech4change #UDL4Justice.” While not being at the conference prevents me

from knowing the exact context from which this quote emerges, it is a common—but perhaps not common enough—sentiment when discussing accessible classroom practices. Practices that, in my mind, should be geared toward promoting the justice-oriented transformative compositional affect of radical solace. It is not enough to provide captions and alt-text—though these are basic, fundamental necessities to making our classrooms welcoming spaces for multiple learners. Accessibility is also, fundamentally—as discussed in the above chapter on fandom pedagogy and the self-driven reworking of canon—about *content*.

Too often, pedagogical discussions of access erase the power and privilege inherent in the texts that we assign, perhaps particularly in first-year writing courses. What we compel our students to read in those courses, theoretically, serves as a model of what is “good,” of what is “smart,” of what forms of composition are acceptable and which are unworthy. As the first three chapters discuss, these value judgments about written composition translate—both explicitly and implicitly—into value judgments about the human beings who create them, whose bodyminds are behind and within these compositions. So, to a degree, a classroom—even one with a deep integration of UDL principles—cannot truly be welcoming to marginalized students if they are not represented in the course content (Hackman 26). Providing ways for students to write themselves into the canonized texts of the course—like young adults do on the daily in fandom—is key here.

To illustrate this crucial point, Heather Hackman provides an example of the importance of cultural relevancy in our text. She weaves a narrative about a white male community college film instructor supposedly integrating “universal” design principles into his classroom, but he remains uncritical of the term “universal.” In so doing, he shows his students a film with a white, middle class man as the lead, and explicitly expects his students to be able to identify with this

character. When students objected to his assumption, he “tells the students to stay on point and that their questions are not really pertinent to the discussion of the film” (25). This moment of student-driven content—content about white privileged, gendered assumptions that would be relevant to these students’ education—conflicting with and being shut down by a white male instructor is not uncommon in classrooms that develop goals that privilege only certain forms of learning and certain forms of knowledge-acquisition.

Hackman convincingly argues that “all of the structural accessibility in the world does not compensate for the fact that he has just assumed that everyone in the room can relate to the experience of a White middle-class male” (25). For me, it is important to not discount the potential power of disidentification here: for example, there is a trend in the Marvel fandom to headcanon Peter Parker—a white working-class boy—as trans, not cis. Many in the Harry Potter fandom identify with Harry—canonized as white in the films—as a boy of color. So, I more than open to the power of dis/identification. We can take white male characters and make them our own, because the power of *our* creations is immense. However, the classroom described above was not a space that was interested in carving out room for critique of representation and a student-led recapturing of power through imagination and dis/identification. Rather, the assumption was that white maleness is good; white maleness is something to aspire to and identify with “universally.” There is a difference, here, and I believe we must be explicit with our students about these possibilities.

One way we can do that is to value their own writing as literature, to value their own creations as just as important—if not moreso—than the typical white straight cis able-bodied minded middle-class male canon. Part of this valuing is exactly what we so often say when people ask how to write: read, read, read. In this respect, and in so many others, we need to be

forthright about the power of literature that probably brought most of us into this game: its power to transform. Its power to take bodies and stitch them back together, and its power to elevate conversations and birth new worlds, in mind and spirit as well as in the physical realm. If we believe this to be so, surely, we must also believe that our students deserve to read themselves. And therefore, to be able to write themselves. However that may be.

It is important, too, however, to avoid the trap of tokenism; the typical syllabus and anthology play of putting the “special interest” items in the back of the text, the end of the syllabus. Too often, classes will spend the penultimate week of term on a tokenized Audre Lorde and the last week on white gay texts (because heaven forbid we talk about Lorde’s queerness. Only one intersection at a time). Erevelles, as well, cites Wares to caution against consigning dis/ability (and other marginalized literatures) to a “sideshow status” (Ware 2001:113, cited by Erevelles, 435). Instead of tokenizing marginalized literatures for the sake of crossing certain authors or themes off a checklist, we need to truly transform the way we lay out the content of our syllabi, the texts we assign, and how we ask students to interact with them.

Without power and structural analyses, even courses with great design and culturally relevant content risk falling flat, risk continuing to devalue students’ literature and therefore, students themselves. As Hackman reminds us, “We can literally flood our schools with what is called a “heroes and holidays” (Lee et al., 2002) curriculum, but that will never address why a White teacher constantly calls on the Latino student in class to speak for all Latinos on a certain issue” (38). Ann M. Fox constructs a similar argument, reminding us that while *what* we read is extremely exigent, it is also *how* we encourage students to read it. For example, there are too many examples of classes in which texts featuring beautiful lines of AAVE that students are taught to “correct” the “improper” grammar of these works. Indeed, this kind of policing

becomes so ingrained that in fandom, too, many authors proactively apologize for any grammar mistakes when English is not their first language. Significantly, the strain of ‘don’t apologize, this is beautiful and brave, thank you for writing it!’ comments that often flood in afterwards in fandom are not often replicated in the classroom. So sure, examples of literature written in AAVE may well be present in a classroom; but they can be used to do violence to students who speak AAVE and/or other forms of undervalued Englishes. Our *approach*, too, must be constantly geared toward interrogating power and privilege.

Fox writes about this power and privilege analysis in the context of crippling our classrooms and consequently crippling our canon, not only in *which* literatures we present to our students, but *how* we present them and what kinds of interactions we model and encourage with these texts (more on some of these details in Chapter 5 through discussions of assignment design and assessment processes). Fox argues that,

“[t]o cripple the canon might also mean crippling our rather canonical ways of reading, researching, and otherwise approaching and engaging an individual discipline, its core ideas and subject matter, introducing or framing them instead with a disability perspective” (40).

Expecting our students to only perform U.S.-based, middle class white-style analyses of texts—rewarding them for doing so and punishing them for using other methods, for interacting in other ways—reinforces deficit-model degradation. It only reinforces the notion that what students with undervalued writing practices create—with their thoughts and with their written and spoken words—is less than, is Other, is not good enough. *Ways* of reading, too, must be geared toward collective access, rather than an approach that attempts to universalize one set of ways to learn.

Aimi Hamraie argues that we must be attentive to power and privilege in what we require our students to read and how we require them to read it. This attentiveness can promote a classroom culture of collectivity that does not seek to erase power, but rather engages it by being explicit about our values when we design and teach our courses. Hamraie writes, crucially, that:

“Value-explicit design exposes the reliance of design on a presumed cohort of typical bodies... the crux of value-explicit design is that there is no neutral position or "view from nowhere" untouched by materiality, context, and identity (Haraway 1991)...Value-explicit design does not privilege expert knowledge, but rather provides a framework within which designers can be held accountable for the types of environments that they produce.” (np)

This de-centralization of “expert knowledge” is absolutely critical to creating classrooms that value student writing as literature; that value and encourage students’ abilities to use this literature to promote for themselves a deeply-felt sense of being affirmed, of justice, of, perhaps, a form of healing that refuses to erase the structural oppressions that our bodyminds still navigate. I would argue further that as we de-centralize what is traditionally—oppressively—considered to be “expert knowledge” to open up our classroom to multiple forms of expertise and multiple forms of knowledge, we also must be explicit about the value we place in our students’ knowledges and expertises. By demonstrating that they can recognize themselves in the literatures we assign and offer up to them for possible aspiration, we offer a model in which they can imagine that they, too, can create valuable literature.

If we do not allow our students to read themselves into the course content—if we force them (without acknowledging and encouraging dis/identification explicitly) to dis/identify with the course texts rather than directly see themselves represented in it—it becomes much harder for

students to feel their voices as literature in our course values. Without explicitly seeking to restructure our courses *for* our students, we threaten to bury student composition—and, by extension, student bodyminds—amidst more “real”, more “valid”, more valued forms of “real” literature.

To help facilitate some of this kind of restructuring, I humbly offer the following questions as possible springboards for deepening the extent to which we explicitly value our students’ work as literature, their experiences as valuable, their intellect as expertise.

- What kinds of learning do I expect students to be able to do with this text? Are there students whose own expertise might conflict with my expectations?
- Can my learning goals be accomplished through teaching different texts that might be more engaging to students, more relevant to their lives? In what way is this specific text relevant to these specific students’ lives? Does it need to be? Could I leave room in my syllabus for students to choose between a range of possible texts?
- What affective response do I expect this text to elicit in my students? Why do I expect that? Whose experiences and expertises might contradict my expectations?
- By holding this text up as an example of writing that my students should aspire to, what am I implying about students’ current language practices? Their potential? The value of their work and their bodies and minds?
- Am I providing spaces for students to share their own readings with each other (both of their own creation, but also texts that they’ve found engaging in their own lives)? What are the expectations of that space? Is it woven into the deeper texture of the course? How?

Chapter 5: Consent-Based Pedagogy: Assignment Design and Assessment Processes

The previous chapter took us to syllabus design and the notion that accessibility needs to be featured, not sidelined, in our course documents and first-day encounters with our students. Yet the question remains: what then? What happens after we lay out anti-ableist principles in our syllabus? What happens to our assignments and assessment practices if we are truly committed to opening our classrooms to as many types of learners, as many types of needs, as possible? How can this student-centered, open, accessible model be also accessible to professors—that is, how does it “accommodate” the labor required of us to scaffold, guide, and grade such projects? How, indeed, can assignment design and assessment practices be used to advance radical solace in our classrooms, to elevate rather than devalue our students’ compositions and therefore their bodyminds?

Assignment design and assessment practices inherently interlink as they—much like syllabus design and course content selection—play off each other to give students both implicit and explicit messages about what types of composition (both bodily and written) are encouraged and disallowed in our classrooms. By creating standards—both for individual assignments and overall assessment practices—that our students must conform to, we are communicating what is

valued in our classroom and, by extension, who is allowed to exist in it. Erevelles writes about the intensity of this communication when she talks about public schools, arguing that:

the everyday functioning of public schooling is predicated on the institutionalization of a complex array of evaluation strategies used to predict the productive capacity of future workers. Using the results of these evaluative tests based on standardized norms, students are segregated on the basis of their ‘natural’ abilities and labelled ‘gifted’, ‘regular’, or ‘special’, and assigned to different curricula that educate them for their designated slot along the social division of labour. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) have pointed out, these tests have also been effective in compelling students to conform to the hierarchical organization of the social order that mimics the ‘normal’ development of the ego and super-ego of European-American males. (433)

These patterns of segregation and the privileging of Euro-American cis men’s learning patterns and development as “normal” continue in higher education. As Carmen Kynard reminds us, the colonizing practices inherent in “basic” writing classes and “remedial” courses that don’t even earn college credit serve to perpetuate the divides that Erevelles writes about in the context of K-12 education.

In order to disrupt these colonizing practices, we need to seriously reflect on our assignment design and our assessment processes. Kynard is explicit with her students on her syllabus for her course at the CUNY Graduate Center on African American Literacies, Rhetorics, and Resistance, where she writes transparently of her assessment practices that, “[Y]ou are not graded on the skills that you brought with you to the course, skills that are more representative of socioeconomic status [and experience with academic English] than knowledge.” In the Spring 2018 term, one of my students cited my citation of Carmen’s brilliant, ethically-infused words to

help flesh out their thinking on the racialization of language, power, and authority. Of course, we can likely never get to a point where students aren't, in some way, graded on the skills they brought with them to the course; however, attempting to do just that must bleed through both our assignment design and assessment scaffolding.

Assignment Design

Stephanie Kerschbaum, in her contribution to the webtext “Multimodality in Motion”, critiques the notion that multimodality itself is inherently about promoting access. Rather, she discusses multimodal inhospitality, in which “the design and production of multimodal texts and environments persistently ignore access except as a retrofit (“Modality”). When only available as a retrofit or an afterthought, multimodality still can actively disinvite students from the classroom, protected by the appearance of a rhetorical welcome banner.

Just as Kerschbaum expands on Price's conception of kairotic spaces to explicitly include online spaces, I am interested in expanding Kerschbaum's brilliant notions of multimodal inhospitality to dive into an area that Kerschbaum herself only alluded to in “Multimodality in Motion”: she writes that multimodal inhospitality is born both in the “design *and* production of multimodal texts” (emphasis added). She pays important and close attention to the ways institutions and instructors design and produce these texts. In addition to discussing the importance of offering students' texts that are flexible enough to be manipulated by the user to suit the user's needs and preferences (as I did in Chapter 4), I want to go deeper into the texts that we encourage/allow *students* to produce. How can we generate that flexibility in *creation*, not just distribution? How can the instructions set forth in our assignment design (and assessment practices, discussed in the next section) promote multimodal inhospitality in *student-generated* literature? How do we limit—and then penalize—students' abilities to compose themselves in

multimodally *hospitable* ways? How can we encourage multimodal hospitality through our assignment design? Indeed, since the act of designing and then explaining assignments to students are enormous spaces in which “knowledge is produced and power is exchanged” (Price), how do we think about this kairotic space in terms of generating radical solace rather than anxiety, inadequacy, and de-valuing? How do we critically consider what forms of knowledge and knowledge-production processes we privilege through the design and presentation of our assignments?

Much like a syllabus, the design of assignments is often thought of as an isolated process: perhaps, as is the case in backward design, not isolated from the rest of the course, but generally, the process is isolated in terms of student input and in terms of being isolated from multiple forms of creation. Even when we make multimodal hospitality a priority in our classes—even when we seek to actively value our students’ work and knowledges—we prioritize the argument that ‘we must ethically teach students *this* form of writing and presentation for the job market.’ Therefore, we often gear our assignments toward production rather than creation, toward a particular type of knowledge rather than exploration of multiple types of bodyminds creating multiple forms of academic expression.

However, within systems of education that prioritize and privilege forms of white, middle-class, able-bodied knowledges and expressions of these knowledges, designing assignments that are conducive to multiple modes of creation can be difficult. Indeed, Erevelles reminds us that

Within a school curriculum committed to the discourses and material practices of technical rationality and capitalist accumulation, students [with undervalued knowledge processes and/or pathologized affective expressions] are assigned little value or worth

because they are not seen as economic assets in the community. However, the ‘normalizing’ curriculum should not judge [students] on the basis of [their] economic productivity in a competitive and exploitative economy. (436)

Indeed, in power-laden contexts in which many composition instructors, too, feel the grind of this competitive and exploitative economy as graduate students and/or adjuncts, department requirements may mandate that stick to certain curricular requirements and strictures in our assignments. Even within these constraints, however, it is possible to scaffold into our assignments ways to engage students in multiple forms of validated expression.

Claude Hulbert, in *National Healing: Race, State, and the Teaching of Composition*, draws attention to assignment design and presentation as a site of a contested power that often goes both unacknowledged by those in power (characteristic of kairotic space) and unwon by students. Hulbert writes that, “[s]omething in the assignment... has to make an opening—or better—suggest why students should want to participate” (35). Failing this, assignments are often doomed to affective apathy at best, punishing anxiety, isolation, and disconnect from class and education more broadly at worst. Students who experience the latter are often students whose bodyminds are already targeted by academic strictures to begin with. While much of assignment design is intimately tied with assessment processes, I will hold a more in-depth discussion of said processes until the next section. Suffice it to say for now, the way we create assignments—not to mention the ways that we present them to students—are critical pieces of anti-ableist, anti-racist pedagogical practices. Just as devaluing student writing often indicates a devaluation of student bodyminds, discussed in Chapter 2, assignment design can target particular students for automatic devaluation by refusing to honor and hone the skills students already enter with and are interested in developing.

Creating high-stakes assignments—term papers, final essays, midterm essays, etc.—that are open to student creativity and expression often involve swapping out “paper” or “essay” for, simply, “project.” Writing a particular type of essay—that requires a particular type of composure and condemns others, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2—is not the only way students can accomplish various learning goals. Indeed, McKinney critiques assignments that only contain written components and/or independent work. The fetishization of “autonomous learning styles”—wrapped in ableist ideals of American individualism—implicit in this type of assignment often goes unnoticed by professors. Structuring and rewarding collaborative work—especially popular in fandom—could go a long way toward fostering an environment of radical solace rather than professor-centered pedagogies.

Kate Chanock presents a compelling argument for the inclusion of forms of learning other than writing in our assignments. While she does not dispute the oft-cited premises that students must write to learn, to process and organize information, she also generates quite a compelling argument about the writing patterns of students with dyslexia. Though this is the focus of much of her argument, I would like to suggest here that rigid, inflexible assignments also disproportionately impact and constrain students who are learning (academic) English for the first time:

my work with students has shown, time and again, that many students are more articulate in oral discussion than they are in writing and, for some, the requirement to produce a polished product can be an obstacle to learning in itself. This is most dramatically demonstrated by students with dyslexia, for some of whom ‘The mechanical and conventional demands of producing text appear to interfere with the fluency and quality of written expression’ (Clark, 1988, p.26). Because their writing is very slow, they lose

the coherence of their train of thought; and because they know that it is inaccurate, and that they cannot recognise the inaccuracies, they devote much time to correction that would be better spent in learning (e.g. Pollack, 2001). (22-3)

Oral discussion is not, of course, preferable for all students—what of students with both dyslexia and social anxiety that manifests as a fear of speaking in class?—but Chanock is getting at very important ideas here. In suggesting an ‘alternative’ reason for papers being labeled, for example, ‘unfocused’ and ‘incoherent’—words that are often used in dually pathologizing and racializing ways in composition lexicon—Chanock dis/orients our understanding of our own assignments. She dis/orients the way those of us who don’t experience dyslexia, in this case, often fetishize writing as the end-all-be-all of expression in the writing classroom.

To be sure, it might seem odd to suggest non-writing writing assignments in writing classes, but writing need not be the *only* component of assignments, whether they are high-stakes term papers or low-stakes freewriting activities. Of this dynamic, Chanock writes that, “[a]ctivities and assessments can be scrutinized to determine whether they necessarily assess what they purport to, and whether some other activity might not assess particular learning objectives equally well, or better” (24). These assessments of our own assignments and activities should dig underneath the surface of the assignment to discover which bodyminds we are excluding, and which we are welcoming into the academic community.

Indeed, these questions are important to ask of both assignments and activities, as Chanock suggests. A large part of what I think about when I think about assignment design is, indeed, the higher-stakes assignments referenced above. Surely, in my classrooms, these are consistently broken down into smaller, lower-stakes assignments—with my students’ assistance and input, both in the beginning of term and throughout the process—and I let students know

when pieces of an assignment (or an entire assignment) is a departmental or school requirement. This transparency is, I believe, an important part of student agency and sense of emotional/intellectual investment in their coursework and their course community.

Additionally, however, I find it imperative to also question our day-to-day assignments—activities, as Chanock might say—which include tasks that we set our students to throughout regular, “low-stakes” lesson plans. Of the immense value of assessing our own day-to-day assignments, McKinney reminds us that these can be an important mode of navigating small, manageable changes to our curricula to make them more accessible (both for students and for us). I also suggest (bracketed, below) that McKinney’s following suggestions for multimodality in the classroom can be particularly useful in situations in which certain forms of composition are required of our students by power structures beyond our immediate control. Of these potential situations, McKinney proceeds to argue that:

A teacher may decide, however, that the goal of constructing a well-written argument is worth the sacrifice in inclusivity [or a teacher may *have to* assign an argument-based essay as part of a department/school requirement]. Alternatively, individual class days could be designed with means of communication that are accessible to students of different learning capabilities, so a teacher must decide if course content can be presented in multiple ways, including visual representations of information or through multiple media, as a matter of course (115).

Harkening back to Kerschbaum, it is tremendously important that we ensure that this multimodality is hospitable, of course: rather than simply offering a host of overwhelming choices that are not necessarily in themselves accessible (either for physical or emotional bodymind reasons, or for reasons of internet/device accessibility, or both), we must also ensure

that these options are redundant and consistent, yet manipulatable, by students for multiple forms of usage.

Even offline, however, the modalities that we use in the classroom can reproduce notions of deficit in students' needs and/or preferred modes of learning by promoting only certain methods of textual analysis, argumentation, or test-taking as "A-worthy," of the mark of a "good student." Hackman reminds us—like the syllabus design/content selection connections discussed in the last chapter—that not everything is about assignments *per se*. How we expect assignments, including everyday classroom activities, to be carried out is also a huge factor in anti-ableist, anti-racist pedagogical practices. Hackman suggests ways to think about which kinds of cultural knowledge we are mandating through our assignments and activities, as follows:

instead of simply analyzing a passage from a text, students can be asked to analyze the text by comparing and contrasting the text to their own cultural framework. In this way, students will not be reduced to a singular analytical frame but will develop a range of analyses for the text. When this analysis is shared in small or large group discussion, it will by default add layers of complexity and critical discussion where a fairly homogenous discussion might have taken place without approaching it from a critical cultural context. This exercise can apply to any text in any classroom. (30)

This diversity of methodology bears extra consideration when we consider what Hackman goes on to say about quizzes.

Regarding the practice of policing student behavior outside of the classroom by assessing them on their abilities to recall certain facts under pressure and time constraints from their reading assignments inside the classroom, Hackman reminds us that the process of knowledge

production itself is often inaccessible due to the structure of assignments/activities/assessments.

She writes:

Whether a quiz is done individually in class, as a take home, or in small groups is irrelevant if the questions on it are inherently biased to White, male, middle-class ways of knowing, thereby making it still inaccessible to a wide range of students (39).

I would argue that this insight—about our classes being “inherently biased to White, male, middle-class ways of knowing”—is also applicable to broader issues of assignment and activity design. I would also add “able-bodyminded” to this list, because quizzes are often given at the beginning of class to penalize lateness and privilege physical presence; they often induce immense anxiety in students in ways that other means of refreshing and reinforcing homework may not; and because often, quizzes are used as a marker not only of knowledge, but of “participation.” As we know from Price’s analysis of “participation” and “presence” discussed earlier, these are huge barriers to many, many students.

I include a brief discussion of quizzes here—in the Assignment Design section—rather than in the section that follows (Assessment Processes) precisely because of this reason: quizzes are such intimate ways to police presence and a particular form of bodily, mental composure in the classroom that they seem to me to span across both assignment design and assessment processes. Often considered “low-stakes” by the professors who give them, quizzes often feel very high-stakes to students, who—more often than not—have little to no say as to how they will “prove” that they did their homework. This is fundamentally, I should point out, itself a policing practice that already locks students into a deficit-based pedagogy. When used for either punishment or punitive threat (*do your reading or else*), quizzes usually only test for certain kinds of knowledge, memory recall, and rote learning. Even as “low-stakes,” “quick” exercises

meant to regulate both hegemonic reading practices and attendance time, quizzes are rarely affectively experienced by students as “low-stakes.”

On this note, I believe it is crucial to point out that assignment design need not be an isolated process. When we ask students, for example, to generate a list of rules they’ve learned about what constitutes “good writing”, and then as “what kinds of writing and writers does this ideal include and exclude?”, we are encouraging the forms of systemic critique that can crack open classroom spaces for students whose bodyminds bear the weight of exclusion and (multimodal) inhospitality (Stenberg 84). When we actively invite and integrate student input into not only the syllabus structure, but into the kinds of work they are expected to create both outside of and inside the classroom—including, yes, whether to have quizzes—our pedagogies inch toward radical solace models and away from deficit models that put students’ bodymind in a carefully composed stranglehold.

With these critiques and suggestions in mind, I offer the following questions as a means by which to start interrogating our own assignment design processes so that accessibility is built into, rather than awkwardly retrofitted onto, our assignments.

- What are my reasons for choosing the assignment format I am requiring? How do these reasons mesh with my learning goals? With my students’ learning goals? Are there other formats that could also advance these goals?
- For each stage of this assignment, are there multiple points of entry that engage students creatively, aesthetically, intellectually, emotionally? What kind of experiences do I want my students to have with this assignment?
- Am I encouraging and/or allowing students to work collaboratively? What am I implying, through my assignment structure, about the value of collaborative work?

- Are there multiple access points into the assignment? For example, if a student has difficulty following class discussions, are there other parts of the class they can draw from for help developing their assignment?
- What influence do students have on assignment topics and formats? Is there a low-stakes place where they can share their views about the value/lack of value in an assignment? Is there a transparent mechanism for integrating this student feedback into the assignment structure where possible? Have I paid attention to/asked what kinds of assignments tend to be most generative for this group of students?
- Is the assignment integrated into the larger course, or is it just something students do at home? Will the assignment be integrated into the class dynamic even after it is completed and graded? How so? How will it be connected to previous assignments?
- Can students complete this assignment easily without internet access at home? On their phones? Using limited data plans? If not, are there clearly-presented alternatives and options for access presented as part of the assignment?
- Do students have the chance to discuss and brainstorm the assignment together and with you before they begin? In more than one communication format?
- What low-stakes scaffolding—both in and outside of class—is built into the assignment to help guide students? How and when do they receive feedback from you and from other students?

Assessment Processes

While it is perhaps easy to focus on the theoretical boundaries of radical solace as pedagogy—a theoretical denunciation of deficit models—its potential impact becomes clear in a practical sense through assessment processes. In practice, radical solace pedagogy attempts to

shape a course's structure such that students are not confined to deficit models of learning.

Radical solace, in practice, involves structuring courses that assume that students will do well—assuming, indeed, that students *should* do well, rather than assuming failure, or structuring the course to punish students who do not perform in a certain way.

Radical solace pedagogy does not treat the “feminized” nature of healing to be antithetical to “rigor”, and it does not either pathologize or femininize different affective registers as threatening, passive, or lazy. Radical solace pedagogy, instead, values active and explicit consent from students (through consent-based pedagogical approaches like contract grading) and collaborative work (through fandom pedagogy approaches to learning). Valuing what is typically demonized as “weak” and “lacking in rigor” actively encourages students to allow their full bodies and emotions to join us in the classroom. The opposite forms of pathologization and feminization are—whether they're formally present in the grading rubric or not—deep, integral parts of understanding assessment as an affective process rather than as a discrete act that occurs when professors sit down with their grading logs and attendance records.

This assumption of success, rather than using courses as gatekeepers to lock certain students out of rewards, may well be restricted by institutional constraints that mandate a given percentage of each letter grade, for example. Just as Ira Shor notes that collaborative learning is fundamentally stymied by competitive grading—and this collaborative learning, we've learned, is of huge importance in both fandom and consent-based pedagogies—it seems that the assumption of success, even within a forced system of letter grades, can alleviate the competitiveness of grading (83). I would argue strongly that we need to interrogate systems that demand a certain percentage of student “failure” (grading with a curved system that ensures certain student failure rather than class success) examining which students are likely to benefit

and suffer within this system: in the meantime, being as transparent as possible with the process of assessment—both with ourselves and with our students—is tremendously necessary. Part of this transparency can be accomplished through participatory design.

Melanie Yergeau, in her essay “Reason” in the webtext “Multimodality in Motion”, writes beautifully about the agony of the question “**is it me, or is it them?**” (emphasis in original). The grief that can accompany finding yourself nonverbal in public—especially in the kairoic spaces of academia, where (a particular form of) “collegiality” is expected of us and (a particular form of) “participation” is required of our students—is often a question that drives us to ask what is wrong with *us*. But, as Yergeau argues, we are not affectively taught—or, often, permitted—to question that the problem may, in fact, be *them*. She writes:

Whether in our scholarship or our departmental meetings, the discourse on disability and access often takes shape, linguistically speaking, as **accommodation**. As someone who receives accommodations, I do not take up this argument lightly, nor do I suggest that people and institutions should dispense with accommodations altogether. Rather, I am suggesting that our institutional conceptions of accommodation are predicated on problemed bodies and spaces rather than [problemed infrastructures and practices](#). To accommodate is to retrofit; it is to assume normative bodies as default and to build spaces and infrastructures around those normative default bodies; it is to deal with deviant bodily and spatial conditions as they bubble out at the seams. Accommodation is, as Rob Imrie (1998) described, a subtle yet potent form of “design apartheid,” an ideological “system that methodically excludes disabled bodies” (Siebers, 2008, p. 84). (emphasis in original)

I would extend Yergeau's insightful remarks here to the space of classrooms. When she says that "accommodation is retrofit; it is to assume normative bodies as default and to build spaces and infrastructures around those normative default bodies", I argue that this analysis can yield insight into our assessment practices, as well.

When we stop short of structural changes to our grading policies—which include the ways we police our students' bodyminds through attendance and participation policies—we rely only on accommodations; on the letters that students must have access to medical gatekeepers to give us; on "extenuating circumstances;" to make us bend our grading policies. We say that this is the most objective we can get in a subjective world, and that anything else risks unfairness, favoritism, and unethical behavior. I wonder, however, why we often only categorize this unfairness, favoritism, and unethical behavior as an interpersonal interaction between teacher and student; what of the unfairness, favoritism, and unethical bias demonstrated by assessment practices that demonstrably favor students with various intersecting privileges in their backgrounds?

It is possible to be welcoming to all kinds of students, including and especially those marginalized and targeted by hegemonic classroom policies, in our participation and attendance standards. My students have, over the years, helped me develop the following as the

Participation section of my syllabus:

Participation and attendance are very important parts of this class: the classroom is where we will do much of our learning, writing and collaborating. For the LaGuardia Community College requirements for participation and attendance -- which is very important for financial aid! -- please see page five of this document:

https://www.laguardia.edu/uploadedfiles/main_site/content/academics/catalog/pdfs/academic_requirements_and_policies.pdf

If internet access is ever a problem for you, or if you anticipate it becoming a problem, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work something out for you!

Participation -- and even attendance -- can mean different things to different people, at different times, and not everyone is comfortable or able to participate and attend classes in the same way. *So, if you anticipate or develop difficulty attending class or participating in traditional ways, please let me know as soon as you do so that we can work out an alternative for which you will receive equal participation credit.*

Much of our class time will feature in-class writing, group activities, and discussion, and while these in-class writings will not be graded, each student is expected to contribute in their own way to the classroom's collaborative creative process. If students cannot write by hand, alternative methods will be made available.

Remember, too, that this class is a one-day-per-week class. You can, of course, eat, drink, and use the restroom during class: I will always make sure to give you breaks, too, because this is a long class! However, the length of the class and its once-a-week nature means that coming to class each week is important! As stated, please always feel free to let me know if physical attendance is inaccessible for you so that we can make sure your needs are met!

Much of what's included in this section is both language and suggestions from students I've had over the years, who both talk to me informally about what they need, and who, as part of class, write to me about what conditions they need in order to learn best.

Absent this direct student involvement in crafting participation standards, there is a methodical exclusion of dis/abled bodies that is written into the way many assignments are designed; the ways assessment is conceived of and dictated from top-down; refusing to take into account the different ways that students learn well, the different ways that students learn ineffectively; the ways that students practice their strengths and sharpen their weaknesses, and the way we do not have to afraid to admit ours. In terms of assessment practices, contract grading is one way to think about the participatory design that arguably is the only way to effectively attempt to account for the different learning styles present in a room in any given term. Contract grading—in which students help create and give their consent to what they're graded on and how—can help explicitly engage and dismantle racialized, ableist assumptions (often, assumptions that students share!) about the meaning and value of particular affects and compositions. These assumptions, of course, deeply impact processes of assessment. Of composing processes, assessment, and assumptions, Andréa Davis writes that,

“When we see students in class listening to iPods, instant messaging their friends, and updating their status messages in social networking spaces while they take notes or work on class projects, there is an implicit assumption that students are simply not paying attention. However, when we examine the way composing processes—perhaps especially for the digital generations—occur seamlessly in and across networks, media, and genres, we should question the assumption.” (194)

Contract grading offers a structured format to break open this conversation and question the assumptions Davis raises, to shape a collaborative learning experience that assesses students on how they learn, rather than on imposed, unchallenged values of how they *should* learn.

This form of grading is not perfect, nor can any assessment standard ever be. However, it allows students to begin internalizing the idea that *it may not be them; it may be us*. If a student needs to not attend a certain number of classes because they can't get out of bed? Or because, as a student once described to me, they can get out of bed, even shower, but run right back under the covers when they try to touch the doorknob heading outside? If a student needs to submit a paper late? Robert Reid-Pharr always tells his graduate students that he'd rather receive our—I'm pretty sure this is a direct quote—"sweaty, bloody, tear-stained papers" on time than the over-marinated, stale paper he'll get four months later to replace an Incomplete grade. I share this with my students, and—like we grad students do—they laugh. But I also do what Robert does, and I tell them why: sometimes, our most authentic voices and our most insightful thoughts come through when we're just writing, when we're just making ourselves get through it. And the chaos of that may, itself, be much more instructive than a stale just-writing-it-to-get-the-Incomplete-off-my-record essay. And—while this takes some of us decades—we will eventually learn the difference between 'this will be hard, but I can do it and I'll be happy I pushed myself' and 'I need to not do this right now because it will be healthier for me to not push myself.' This consent-based approach to risk, I have found in my classrooms, encourages risk rather than promotes 'taking advantage' of 'relaxed' standards.

Contract grading can be a way to normalize these processes for students rather than singling out those who know they might have trouble attending every class, who might have trouble breathing before a class presentation, who might go nonverbal in small group work.

Because assessment is so much more than grading papers and projects; it is more than an assessment of written composition. It is also an assessment, a set of value judgments, about the composure of students' bodyminds. What kinds of pain do the constrictions of our assessment practices impose on students? What kinds of pain can occur when one student needs a kinesthetic learning environment, while another needs silence, both visual and auditory?

To address this problem of conflicting learning needs, I turn to Allison Hitt's insightful blog post about her process through understanding Margaret Price's theorizations of both pain and participation. I quote Hitt at length—who quotes Price at length—below, to demonstrate a narrative, self-reflective form of argumentation (which can go a long way toward helping students hone academic expertise in a variety of formats):

So then a more complex, abstract example is two people in a room: one who wants to inflict pain on herself and one who wants to stop that person from pain. Price writes, “Both subjects are fully immersed in their own realities. And each one is occupying a reality that is *real*, important, and complete. Who is the misfit here?” (273). It's easy to determine the misfit when the affective value is bad, but what happens when it is less clear? What is “good” or “bad” in the situation of the person who wants to self-harm and the person who stops her?

What is the desirable action or outcome?

This is a difficult question because then we have to assess the behavior, which means asking: “Are some disabilities worse than others?” and then that leads to “Is disability sometimes bad?” (273). And as Price (and Wendell, and FDS and DS scholars argue), those aren't productive questions because disability is not inherently bad (but oppression based on it is) nor is it a competition. But then, how do we come to terms (as a field, as

individuals) with impairment as something that involves pain—that’s sometimes just really and truly bad (274)?...

And as I struggled to think through these questions and what it means not just to describe but to *evaluate* difference, Price returned to the example of the two people in the room.

And everything clicked. Instead of thinking about who is the misfit or what action is desirable, Price asks us to think about pain through the lens of an **FDS [feminist**

dis/ability studies] ethics of care:

[C]are means moving together and being limited together. It means giving more when one has the ability to do so, and accepting help when that is needed. It does not mean knowing exactly what another’s pain feels like, but it does mean respecting each person’s pain as real and important. Finally, care must emerge between subjects considered to be equally valuable (which does not necessarily mean that both are operating from similar places of rationality), and it must be participatory in nature, that is, developed through the desires and needs of all participants. (279) (np, emphasis in original)

I turn to this narrative realization about an ethics of care—of radical solace, perhaps—to demonstrate the *lack* of care often demonstrated in assessment practices. Given that care requires consent and consent requires care—and assessment practices generally contain neither, at least not explicitly in what we convey to students in official documents—the attentiveness to care here is a necessary component of consent-based pedagogies. Without attention to care, students are clearly misfitted in many non-participatory assessment practices; but what would happen to the value of the misfit—to the relevance and meaning, indeed, of the very question of ‘who is the misfit?’—assessment, like care, is participatory in nature? If assessment, like care, is “developed through the desires and needs of all participants”?

Contract grading is one form of (potentially) participatory design grading that is often regarded as an anti-racist assessment tool. This consent-based form of assessment is impacted, of course, by the way that contract grading is presented to students: this presentation *matters* regarding the likelihood of students seeing the standards as *actually* malleable or simply malleable in theory. Contract grading can ultimately be both multimodal *and* inhospitable (unable to be manipulated by the user), but it can be a useful place to start in terms of attracting student investment in the collaborative creation, rather than resigned, individual struggle toward their grades.

However, just as Hackman critiques the idea of “establishing groundrules” in a classroom because, “without a stronger critique of how power, privilege, and social justice issues [the “groundrules” can] play into what one group perceives as “acceptable” or “normal” ways of being in education” (38). Similarly, contract grading risks reifying cultural norms than mark some bodyminds as deviant and others as something to aspire to. This is yet another reason that multimodal hospitality is important; in a situation where students, at the beginning of term with minimal trust built between themselves or you as the professor, have to assert themselves, multiple redundant (and anonymous) platforms for giving feedback may be the only way some students feel comfortable inscribing their learning needs into a class grading contract. This is especially true when students have often spent much of their K-12 educations being taught certain definitions of “rigor” that, both explicitly and implicitly, exclude them.

I would argue that Hackman’s critiques of establishing groundrules can apply quite easily to contract grading, especially because of the affective and temporal moment in the term that these establishments occur: an often chaotic moment—either within “syllabus week” or just after its overwhelmingness has washed over students and settled into their bones—into which we try,

often falsely, to establish a sense of peace, stability, and comfort. Like with “safe zones”, however, the *comfort* of already privileged students often takes priority over the *safety* of already marginalized students. Hackman elaborates, cautioning that:

Too often the “groundrules” established in U.S. classrooms are really White, male, middle-class ideals being disguised as a neutral set of beliefs. This of course is problematic because it automatically defaults to what the dominant society presumes is welcoming and safe in terms of classrooms, or society as a whole, and leaves students from subordinate social identity groups once again on the margins. Likewise, when “determining the essential components of a course”, I have yet to see the UID [Universal Instructional Design] literature mention social responsibility and an ability to apply classroom knowledge critically and thoughtfully to the larger society as an essential component or skill. Much of the commentary about this UID principle seems instead to be about content acquisition and skill development as it pertains to the retention of knowledge and its narrow application on classroom assessments. (38)

This social responsibility is often lost when we engage in assessment, even contract grading, which can simply reify the very kinds of academic extensions of white (able-bodied/minded) supremacy that it attempts to unsettle.

The questions that follow offer an exploration of our own processes while we set out to define the means by which we will satisfy institutional requirements to assess our students.

- How do students help shape the ways that they are assessed? What spaces are created for students to assess themselves? How can students share these self-assessments with you? What agreements do you and the students have about the weight of these assessments (for instance, in the form of contract grading)?

- On what bases do we assess students' participation? What "counts" for participation, and what does not? For what factors beyond their control might students be penalized or rewarded for? How do the ways that we shape our participation criteria exclude certain students while rewarding others?
- What is the process by which students can offer you feedback on your own performance and what they need from you during the course?
- Do I tell students—both on the syllabus and with written and verbal reminders—when their deadline to withdraw from the course without penalty is? Do I reach out to students who seem to be falling behind ahead of this deadline?
- Which of my assessment practices are required by my department or school? How can I be transparent with my students about these constraints?

Conclusion: I'm Too Gay for This Shit

When I was explaining their fan fiction assignment to them, one of my students murmured that they were “too gay for this shit,” a popular Tumblr phrase expressing a general enthusiasm (often, but not always, sexual) combined with the exasperation of feeling a little *too* much excitement. Upon hearing their outburst of ebullient excess, my other students laughed along to the rhythm of my own joy. To me, that’s what pedagogies meant to create radical solace can do in a writing classroom; foster an environment where my trans and queer students of color with mental dis/abilities can fully live in their bodies in the classroom, and they can bring that fervor into assignments that mean something to them beyond just another checkmark off their overwhelming to-do list.

Fan fiction is what happens when we aren’t quite satisfied with (or when we simply burn for more of) a world someone else has created for us. To me, the fan fiction experience is too like the classroom to be dismissed; students are presented with a canon, and they are asked to interpret it and articulate its problems, its importance, its value. Fan fiction does all of that and more; it permits, encourages, and in fact *requires* a more active form of participation and analysis. It requires not only analysis, but a profound form of *creation*. This literature is, really, what our students are doing when they write term papers; fan (non)fiction of their favorite (or most hated, or whomever they could find on jstor) scholars’ work, hopefully adding their own spin.

Yet too often, our deficit-model pedagogies rip away from our students the creative license that fan fiction can crack open. We assume that our students must passively consume literature, that they haven’t learned enough yet, that they aren’t expert enough yet, to create

literature of their own. Recognizing that the work our students create is, itself, a form of young adult literature is crucial, and fandom pedagogy helps us do just that.

Radical solace also requires, though, that an immersion in consent-based pedagogy. Not all students are self-identified nerds, though I would argue that everyone is a fan of *something*. Even my ‘I don’t watch TV but holy crap I love basketball’ students laugh knowingly when we, as a class, frame the film *Space Jam* as basketball fan fiction. To get to this level of intimate knowledge, though, we need consent, or at the very least, a sense of buy-in from students; they must believe that their voices are, in fact, the *point* of the course.

To do this, we need to make it clear what we value when we assess students; we need them to make it clear, moreover, what they value when they are working toward being assessed. What do they need in return and what do they want to leave with? If we are to earn our students’ active and even enthusiastic consent with our pedagogical practices, they need to, in a sense, be *fans* of the process. That level of investment and passion is something that we too often tell our students to leave outside the classroom doors.

This book is about what can happen when we invite mess into our classrooms instead of pretending it does not penetrate school walls.

The journey has taken us to seemingly disparate places; from trauma and dis/ability theories to consent- and fandom-based pedagogies and back again. Our students would be quick to regurgitate what they’ve been taught, that a conclusion should sum up and solidify the frame of what’s come before; our fan fic readers (and writers) would come up with a pithy “comments are love, so leave them please!” request. And indeed, comments are love; an engagement in a writing process that becomes both individual and collaborative, that we are invested in for the sake of the story, rather than the sake of the grade.

And that is precisely where I want to leave this narrative; in the space between individual and collaborative. The connections I've drawn and connections I've made throughout this project are just mine, though they have been inspired by the brilliant students and scholars of color that I cite here. In published form, though, I imagine this project much like I do my syllabi, assignment sheets, and grading contracts; an open-to-comments forum which eventually gets full of highlights and cross-talk (that can, of course, be stripped away and sorted systematically for usability purposes). My hope is that it becomes, like my other course documents, filled to the brim with student commentary; some questions, a lot of suggestions, and some good old-fashioned dad jokes.

My hope is that the pedagogical questions raised in this book blossom into more questions, and more questions; and that student writers will be the ones to continue asking and answering them.

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