Shame and Trauma Go to Class

Transformative Practices of Disability Justice

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Abstract

To be a member of an oppressed social group is to face differential risk of trauma. Using Sandra Lee Bartky's recognition of certain emotional states as "primordial disclosure," I explore socially occasioned trauma, shame, and depression as gendered and racialized phenomena in higher education—a crucial site for exploring the processes that situate some bodyminds as normative, deserving, and competent, while others are situated as less able or deserving, or as intruders. Given systemic inequality, mental health can only be fully conceptualized and addressed, as Jameta Nicole Barlow says, "in relation to movements." This article examines the salience of Disability Justice for addressing depression, shame, and trauma as matters of justice. The ethic of interdependence embodied in this movement challenges the radical isolation imposed by differential shame and provides avenues for individual and collective agency and social change.

1. "Rendered Vulnerable"

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, as reports emerged of the rising number of seniors dying in nursing homes, Shelley Tremain observed:

> Elders in nursing homes and elsewhere aren't inherently vulnerable; nor are disabled people in institutions inherently vulnerable. Both of these groups (among others) are *rendered* vulnerable. That is, they are *made* vulnerable. Vulnerability isn't a characteristic that certain individuals possess or embody. Like disability, vulnerability is a naturalized apparatus of power that differentially produces subjects, materially, socially, politically, and relationally.[1]

To be a member of an oppressed or marginalized social group is to face differential risk of trauma. Shame is a known consequence of trauma, disrupting one's internal sense of self-regard, which in turn undermines the capacity for agency and possibility in the world. This article explores the mental health consequences of this differential in the context of higher education—a crucial site for exploring the operations of marginalization, labeling, stereotyping, stigma, and other processes that situate some bodyminds[2] as normative, deserving, and competent while others are situated as less able or deserving, or intruding in a space not their own. Educational spaces are predicated on preparing students for opportunities to advance their life prospects. Here, lessons are transmitted—deliberately or not—regarding who is capable or deserving of opportunities.

For those of us associated with higher education, the worldwide trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic compels us to consider societal dynamics of trauma as they intersect with education. Some students come to campus already "*rendered* vulnerable," to use Tremain's term, and some are rendered vulnerable *on* campus. Many or most readers of this journal spend much of our time in college classrooms (physical or virtual)—a space of privileged access implicated in the myth of meritocracy, yet also a space with transformative potential. In considering the mental health dimensions of the pandemic, how can we attend and respond to systemic anti-Black racism and other forms of structural violence as they affect our classrooms?

Drawing on Sandra Bartky's recognition of certain emotional states as "primordial disclosure" and on the intersectional framework of Disability Justice, I explore socially occasioned trauma, shame, and depression *as* matters of justice—as ways of being *rendered* vulnerable. This article aims to contribute to ongoing conversations regarding the social determinants of mental health, while participating in broad-

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1. Shelley Tremain, "COVID-19 and the Naturalization of Vulnerability," *Biopolitical Philosophy*, April 1, 2020, https://biopoliticalphilosophy.com/2020/04/01/covid-19-and-the-naturalization-of-vulnerability/.

2. Margaret Price uses "bodymind" to describe "the imbrication (not just combination) of the entities usually called 'body' and 'mind.'" Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, 1 (2015): 270.

er "reconstruction[s] of knowledge,"[3] with implications for collective pursuits of justice and healing.

Public health psychologist Jameta Nicole Barlow notes that "many social activists have appealed to the effects of grassroots movement work on their personal health," yet more systematic discussions are needed of relationships between mental health and social justice movements.[4] To this end, I explore the following questions: What societal processes of shaming are implicated and in what contexts? How are they connected to trauma (being *rendered* vulnerable), and what are the consequences for mental health and agency? How does shame operate in the context of social group oppression? If shame, as is frequently observed, isolates an individual, how can collective efforts use solidarity to combat isolation and promote individual and collective agency? Disability justice, as a critical framework and praxis, guides this exploration, raising provocative questions about concepts of normalcy and their impact on bodyminds, the limits and goals of treatments, and life through and beyond trauma.

Disability Justice writer and organizer Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha suggests that, in the pandemic, nondisabled people have more to learn from disabled and chronically ill people than ever before, including what it is to live with ongoing "care and risk."[5] Those who didn't already have to structure their days around this concern can gain vital perspectives, not only for getting through the day or the pandemic, but for envisioning and creating a world that welcomes all of us. Led by people of color and LGBTQ people of various races and ethnicities with physical disabilities, neurodivergence,[6] and chronic illnesses, the Disability Justice movement goes beyond a disability rights framework to address structural violence and the intersections of ableism, racism, heterosexism, and gender-based oppression involved in rendering many of us vulnerable. Disability Justice concepts of "crip time" and "interdependence" inform this analysis and resonate with my own experiences as a neurodivergent academic familiar with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its effects on academic life.

I begin by drawing on philosophical perspectives and critical education scholarship to explore gendered, racialized, and ableist processes of marginalizing, stigmatizing, and shaming that are structural and institutional. Using work in critical psychology, I then trace specific mechanisms through which social interactions can transmit shame. Finally, I return to disability justice implications for taking account of individual and collective vulnerability in the classroom and beyond, as well as strategies for promoting agency in times of heightened vulnerability.

2. Shame and Depression: Emotions Disclosing Self and World

Marginalized and oppressed groups are chronically subjected to what philosopher Debra Bergoffen characterizes as "debilitating shame—a self-destructive form of shame that, unlike the episodic shame depicted by Sartre forms the horizon of a person's life."[7] This "debilitating shame" is also distinct from shame as a necessary recognition of wrongness or injustice in which one is somehow implicated or situated. Philosopher Chris Lebron signals the importance of this function, recalling Frederick Douglass's 1852 message to the nation that "Americans should feel shame for slavery, given [our] country's foundational commitment to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We were failing our own ideals."[8]

3. Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 83.

4. Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018): 897.

5. Patty Berne, Lydia X. Z. Brown, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, moderated by Allegra Heath-Stout, "61: Organizing in a Pandemic: Disability Justice Wisdom," *Irresistible* podcast, April 14, 2020, https://irresistible.org/podcast/61.

6. Dr. Nick Walker offers a useful definition of neurodivergence as "having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal.'" Nick Walker, "Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms & Definitions," *Neurocosmopolitanism: Dr. Nick Walker's Notes on Neurodiversity, Autism, & Self-Libera-*

tion, September 27, 2014, https://neurocosmopolitanism.com/neurodiversity-some-basic-terms-definitions/.

7. Debra Bergoffen, "The Misogynous Politics of Shame," *Humanities* 7, no. 3 (2018): 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/h7030081.

8. Chris Lebron, "Who First Showed Us that Black Lives Matter?" *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/opinion/black-lives-matter-philosophy.html.

Traumatically induced shame is a very different situation, however. When one's own ideals, safety, and bodymind integrity have been violated, shame is purely corrosive. It often manifests as depression, which can be both a consequence of trauma and a risk factor for it.[9] The shaming of marginalized groups—including "micro-insults and micro-injuries" imposing a "cumulative lifetime burden"[10]—is itself a form of trauma. Members of marginalized or oppressed groups also face a disproportionate risk of *acute* trauma, presenting a significant cumulative risk for depression[11] and other mental health concerns.

As Bartky writes in "Shame and Gender," contemporary philosophy recognizes that emotional states can be "ontologically disclosive in ways that a passionless pure beholding can never be"—they "constitute a primordial disclosure of self and world."[12] "The search for a feminist reconstruction of knowledge," she continues, "must be augmented by a study of the most pervasive patterns of gendered emotion" as they reveal the lived experience of oppression.[13]

Bartky's pioneering analysis explores higher learning as a site producing and reinforcing other experiences of shame in "women's" lives,[14] describing a gendered pattern she began noticing among her own students. Women spoke less often and less confidently than men, and would often also apologize for their work when they approached her desk to submit a paper, "typically . . . delivering the apology with head bowed, chest hollowed, and shoulders hunched slightly forward," while "the male students would stride over to the desk and put their papers down without comment."[15] Initially puzzled to see these scenes enacted again and again, Bartky began to understand her female students as engaging in "rituals of self-shaming undertaken in order to bear more easily a shaming they anticipated" from her as an authority figure.[16]

Bartky describes the "primordial structure of shame" as "being ashamed of oneself before the Other"—the identity of whom "will be hugely overdetermined, for women in a sexist society are subjected to demeaning treatment by a variety of Others."[17] Women and girls arrive in the classroom already bearing the burden of this shaming, only to find the classroom itself a space of subordination. Bartky cites extensive research on "the many ways in which the classroom climate at all educational levels may produce a diminished sense of self in girls and women."[18] She notes that women of color face "double jeopardy," since "instructors may interpret [their] behavior in light of racist stereotypes"—and also that of men of color.[19]

Shame, Bartky writes, "'shatter[s] trust in oneself, even in one's own body and skill and identity.'"[20] She concludes that women are often "made to feel shame in the major sites of social life. . . . In the act of being shamed and in the feeling ashamed [it is] disclosed to women who they are and how they are faring within the domains they inhabit."[21] Though these disclosures may sometimes be "ambiguous and oblique," the consequences for women are devastating.[22]

Bartky's recognition that subtle patterns in women's daily lives indicating that they are out of place, they don't belong, constitute a major pathway to shame, also applies to members of oppressed or marginalized groups more generally, although the elements of these patterns vary with different groups. In college and university contexts, the message "you don't belong here" is conveyed to many students through policies, practices, and seemingly ca-

9. National Institute of Mental Health, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *National Institute of Mental Health*, Feb. 2016, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml#part_145372.

10. Maureen Duffy, "The Body, Trauma, and Narrative Approaches to Healing," in *Discursive Perspectives in Therapeutic Practice*, ed. by Andy Lock and Tom Strong (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 272.

11. See also Abby Wilkerson, "Wandering in the Unhomelike: Chronic Depression, Inequality, and the Recovery Imperative" in *Feminist Phenomenology and Medicine*, ed. Kristin Zeiler and Lisa Kall (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), 285-303.

12. Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 83.

13. Ibid., 84.

14. As in most feminist work of the time, Bartky spoke of "gender" in binary terms of male and female.

15. Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 89.

16. Ibid., 89.

17. Ibid., 90.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 92.

20. Ibid., 86.

21. Ibid., 93.

22. Ibid.

sual interactions, such as microaggressions. A wealth of research demonstrates the pervasiveness and harms of microaggressions targeting many groups, including Indigenous,[23] LGBTQ,[24] Asian-American and Latinx students.[25] I will briefly consider key themes related to gendered and racialized microaggressions targeting Black students (an especially well-documented and theorized body of research), then return to the value of a Disability Justice perspective for a full understanding of the intersectional dimensions of microaggressions and racial battle fatigue in higher education.

Significant research documents the persistence and power of Black male misandry and its impact on Black male college students. William Smith, Tommy Curry, and their coauthors describe Black male misandry as "an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black boys and men, created and strengthened in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies and practices."[26] Smith and coauthors' Black male participants (attending historically white research institutions) describe being steadily worn down by frequent racial comments and "subtle insults" by white faculty and students, being seen as out of place (e.g., reported to police for being in a science or engineering building, despite majoring in one of those fields), or through dehumanizing stereotypes: "criminal-predator,"[27] "ghetto,"[28] "non-student but athletic,"[29] and "anti-intellectual."[30] When one participant scored well on a math exam,

a teaching assistant insisted he could not have earned such a high grade, then compelled him to retake the exam—for which he then scored 100%. These accumulated insults and injuries "dehumanize" Black boys and men, placing them "at risk for self-alienation" and difficulty seeing themselves and other Black men and boys as "full human being[s]."

Nicola A. Corbin and coauthors conducted qualitative research on Black women's experiences attending historically and predominantly white institutions in the Western United States. The participants described interactions akin to those of Black men's experiences of racial battle fatigue but with particular pressures when broader stereotypes of Black women collide with Black community norms. The participants regularly felt the "silencing" effect of the "Angry Black Woman" stereotype,[31] robbing their responses to microaggressions of meaning and authority (as their male counterparts in the Smith study also experienced from white people). In response, study participants often drew on the contrasting "historically constructed *STRONGBLACKWOMAN* imagery"[32] connected to "racial uplift discourse" and "respectability politics."[33] Corbin and coauthors acknowledge both the "liberating" aspect of this vision of strength and calm, and the "repressive" constraints the *STRONGBLACKWOMAN* image can impose.[34] As the authors conclude, the two poles of character-defining irrational anger versus the demand of unceasing strength and calm "leave little room for human emotion and expression"—an agency-constricting double bind.[35]

I turn next to a closer look at the processes involved in repeated interactions that can influence the mental health and self-regard of members of oppressed groups, then take up the contributions of a disability justice framework for addressing these concerns as a social issue.

23. Victoria O'Keefe and Brenna Greenfield, "Experiences of Microaggressions among American Indian and Alaska Native Students in Two Post-Secondary Contexts," *American Indian & Alaska Native Mental Health Research* 26, no. 3 (2019): 58-78.

24. Kevin L. Nadal, "A Decade of Microaggression Research and LGBTQ Communities: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 10 (2019): 1309-16, https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1539582.

25. Delida Sanchez et al., "Racial-Ethnic Microaggressions, Coping Strategies, and Mental Health in Asian American and Latinx American College Students: A Mediation Model," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 65, no. 2 (2018): 214–25, https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000249.

26. William A. Smith et al., "'You Make Me Wanna Holler and Throw Up Both My Hands!': Campus Culture, Black Misandric Microaggressions, and Racial Battle Fatigue," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 4, no. 9 (2016): 1189-209, https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214296.

27. Ibid., 1197.
28. Ibid., 1199-200.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. 1200-01.

31. Nicola A. Corbin et al., "Trapped between Justified Anger and Being the Strong Black Woman: Black College Women Coping with Racial Battle Fatigue at Historically and Predominantly White Institutions," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 31, no. 7 (2018): 626-643, https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2018.1468045626.

32. Ibid., 626.
33. Ibid., 628.
34. Ibid., 626.
35. Ibid., 639.

3. Social Groups, Shame, "Scripts," and Depression

Critical psychology scholar John Cromby demonstrates how societal interactions reflecting issues of power heighten the risk of depression for members of marginalized or oppressed groups. Societal interactions that position speakers in hierarchical relations with one another, repeated over time, become routinized as "scripts," typical patterns of talking and relating. Cromby refers to these as "transactions" due to their routinized nature of calling forth scripted responses.

Cromby identifies three central script patterns involving issues of power: positioning each party as more or less *capable*, more or less *powerful*, or more or less *worthy* in relation to the other. Through these processes, power can take on a "hyper-relevance" for those routinely positioned in any of these ways.[36] Being repeatedly positioned in a lower status often entails internalizing ("however unwittingly") experiences of relative powerlessness, which tend to be reinforced through additional similar interactions, heightening over time "the salience of the 'powerless' mode of relating and being'"[37] and magnifying the impact of the transactions as they become seemingly mundane and unremarkable.[38]

Repeated "transactions" such as Bartky's students' apologies ("less worthy"), or Black male students repeatedly being asked what they are doing near a physics classroom ("less capable"), influence individual subjectivity in ways that serve to maintain dominance and inequality. This helps to illustrate how experiences such as those leading to "racial battle fatigue" in one context, then reinforced in others, can cause

profound distress to individuals. When the balance of day-to-day interactions tips too far toward disempowerment, repeated regularly over time, Cromby argues, they engender depression.

Though Cromby does not address the role of shame in these processes, the dehumanizing processes he describes bear striking similarity to Bartky's account of gendered shame. Philosopher Luna Dolezal and bioethicist Barry Lyons do highlight shame as precursor to depression, especially chronic shame, which they note "can arise through . . . childhood relational trauma," "minority stigma," or "post-traumatic stress disorder."[39] Their account of socially occasioned depression draws on four behavioral responses to the crisis of being shamed or anticipating shame[40]: *attack others* or *attack oneself* (via self-blame or self-harm). Or, one may *withdraw* from others or else *avoid* feeling shame (through denial, addictions and substance abuse, thrill seeking and other distractions).

In Dolezal and Lyons's review of chronic shame research, "withdrawal and avoidance scripts mean that chronic shame commonly leads to states such as stress and anxiety or depression, where an individual may not even be aware that they are experiencing shame" because it is intolerable to admit into consciousness.[41] In the case of "minority stigma," "a salient aspect of one's identity—such as gender, health status, disability, race, sexuality, weight or ethnicity—is stigmatised" due to "cultural politics of inclusion and exclusion."[42] "Minority stress," they note, "is directly correlated to the experience of chronic shame."[43]

Neurological research identifies a clear physiological pathway from social interactions to shame and depression: "An increase in what has been termed 'social-evaluative threat,' or threats to self-esteem or social status, directly correlate with increased anxiety and heightened biological stress responses" including the release of stress hormones and other chem-

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36. While Cromby focuses only on the meanings and effects of these scripts on those positioned as powerless or inferior, this framework may suggest compelling reasons for why those positioned as superior might sometimes find themselves repeating the pattern as a means of defending this status (whether consciously or not). This could help to explain the pattern's persistence despite its toxicity for those in the putatively inferior position (indeed, for both parties). Studies of masculinity and of whiteness that emerged after Cromby's article indicate both the salience and persistence of such defensiveness even in the presence of internal conflicts related to status.

37. John Cromby, "Depression: Embodying Social Inequality," *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling, and Psychotherapy* 4, no. 3 (2004): 182-83.

38. Ibid., 177.

39. Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons, "Health-Related Shame: An Affective Determinant of Health?" *Medical Humanities* 43, no. 4 (2017): 259, http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2017-011186.

40. Ibid., 258.

41. Ibid., 259.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 260.

icals into the bloodstream.[44] Releasing these substances into "'healthy' volunteers produces self-reported feelings of depression and isolation."[45]

Though shame and depression can never be reduced to chemistry, this physiological process suggests a remarkable correlation with the felt bodily sense of the "transactions" that Cromby describes, in ways that I see as revealing the traces of shame. The *chronic,* debilitating shame in the lives of traumatized, marginalized, or targeted people—such as apologetic female-presenting students and the battle-fatigued Black students of all genders—can "persistently" alter levels of stress chemicals in the bloodstream,[46] heightening depression while reflecting the lived experience of oppression.

A disability justice framework provides a deeper intersectional understanding of the ongoing aggressions (micro or macro) characterizing the lives of people of color and other members of oppressed groups. This expansive vantage point illuminates the political nature of the chronic debilitation caused by microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and other assaults on identity (including ableist aggressions against disabled people)—and of the ways in which able-normativity[47] acts jointly with other vectors of oppression to constrain individuals. Anti-Black racism, for example, as reflected in the qualitative studies discussed above, is at least partly manifested in and through its impact on Black people's mental health *and* on the norms of emotional comportment that pathologize Black anger and judge the gendered appropriateness of emotions and their expression.

The deep psychological injuries of internal conflict, damaged self-esteem, chronic mood disturbances, heightened psychological stress, and associated physiological disturbances that are imposed by micro- and other aggressions must be understood as debilitating and unjust societal incursions on the well-being, life prospects, and day-to-day functioning of members of oppressed groups. In this way, a disability justice lens highlights the debilitation imposed by micro- and other aggressions while avoiding reductive notions of "mental illness" as a tragedy that happens to befall unfortunate individuals with flawed brain chemistry. At the same time, disability justice affirms disabled people, disability identity, and life with a disability, while fiercely opposing both able-normativity and societal incursions on a person's functioning, regardless of whether it meets ableist norms.

4. A "Healing Praxis" Intervention

Harms to self-regard and mental health by micro- and other aggressions demand ameliorative healing processes.[48] Community health psychologist and public health scholar Jameta Nicole Barlow's account of a student-organized retreat demonstrates how collective action can both incorporate emotional healing *into* social justice work and advance social justice goals *through* healing. Laying out the "structural determinants of health" that impact Black people and the intersectional burdens imposed on Black women—the ways in which they are *rendered* vulnerable—Barlow contextualizes the Movement for Black Lives as a response both to current manifestations of anti-Black racism and to legacies of "'intergenerational gendered racialized trauma.'"[49]

The Ujima Black Solidarity Retreat for student leaders of "Black organizations at a predominantly white institution in the state of Maryland" occurred in 2016, following the lethal injuries of twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray while in the custody of Baltimore police.[50] "Student protests," Barlow notes, "were rampant. People

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44. Luna Dolezal and Barry Lyons, "Health-Related Shame: An Affective Determinant of Health?" *Medical Humanities* 43, no. 4 (2017): 260, http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medhum-2017-011186.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Able-normativity refers to the idealized notion of physical and mental ability, functioning, and appearance as an expectation by which we all are judged. See Eddie Ndopu, "Able Normative Supremacy and the Zero Mentality," *The Feminist Wire*, February 5, 2013, https://thefeministwire.com/2013/02/able-normative-supremacy-and-the-zero-mentality/.

48. On "Healing Praxis," see, Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018), 900.
49. Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018), 896.
50. Ibid., 898.

were organizing, and for many, layers upon layers of trauma were emerging."[51] Barlow situates these events within the historic context of white elite operations in Maryland resulting in structural barriers that led to physical health disparities, severely undermining the mental health and well-being of Black people.[52]

One goal of the retreat, then, was to provide "tools and space in which to unpack the emergent trauma."[53] Thus, Barlow facilitated a "healing circle" for the group, utilizing the "Emotional Emancipation Circles" (EECs) framework created by Black psychologists. Barlow describes the EECs as "evidence-based" and "culturally congruent in their strengths-based approach," using "learning modules . . . dedicated to African culture, history and movements, and imperatives and ethics" while offering students "an opportunity to unpack personal stories and to begin to address the root issues of healing Black communities."[54] Student concerns included "institutional change . . . on campus," "colorism, . . . thriving in the classroom, and managing challenges at home while in college."[55] Through sharing and nonjudgmental listening, they began to "uncover the gendered ways and multiple jeopardy inherent within Black experiences."[56]

After participating in this challenging process, Barlow concludes, "EECs, or similar social support circles, are necessary spaces for Black liberation, mental health, and well-being":[57] "healing praxis is the critical matter for Black lives."[58] From a Disability Justice perspective, the EEC project's "emotional emancipation" focus frames mental health intersectionally and provides a valuable model for framing mental health as a matter of social justice and addressing it collectively.

5. Concluding Reflections: Interdependent Agency as an Antidote to Trauma-Based Shame

Disability Justice shares key assumptions and principles with the Emotional Emancipation Circles framework, while explicitly centering anti-ableism.[59] Like the EEC model, Disability Justice also frames healing as interdependent rather than solely individualistic work. By integrating collective healing spaces into the larger settings of activism as intrinsic to the work, these projects confront the shaming, isolating impacts of acute and cumulative trauma and promote agency by providing tools for collective action. Like the EECs, they engage in "emancipatory practices that heal individuals in relational and collective ways."[60]

Rejecting "independence" as an individualist legacy of "the massive colonial project of Western European expansion," the disability justice performance group Sins Invalid frames the contrasting notion of *interdependence* as a core disability justice principle: "We attempt to meet each other's needs as we build toward liberation."[61] They declare, "We move together, with no body left behind"[62]—simultaneously conveying their aesthetic as a performance troupe and the effort to bring about "a world in which every body and mind is known as beautiful."[63] Barlow's EECs, Disability Justice, and Sins Invalid manifest a praxis of interdependence through collective action and a vision of mental health grounded in solidarity.

How can those of us on college campuses apply these principles of radical inclusion? First, how might we draw on disability culture's value of interdependence? Making collaborative work a significant component of coursework is one

51. Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018), 898.
52. Ibid., 898-99.
53. Ibid., 898.
54. Ibid., 900.
55. Ibid., 901.
56. Ibid., 904.
57. Ibid., 901.
58. Ibid., 900.

59. Leah Lakshimi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 104.
60. Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018), 902.
61. Leah Lakshimi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 28.
62. Ibid., 23.
63. Qtd. in Leah Lakshimi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 29.

tangible strategy, by helping students to develop skills in working together—to paraphrase Barlow, learning "in relational and collective ways."[64] A vast literature in critical education research draws on "student sense of belonging" as an important measure of inclusion.[65] Collaboration—"moving together," to quote Sins Invalid—can combat the sense of "not belonging" and the related shame and depression imposed by micro- and other aggressions that many students encounter on campus. Collaborative learning involves tangible skills that instructors can promote in the classroom; many resources from the academic world and beyond are readily available for adaptation to specific classroom contexts. I have found that teamwork functions best in my courses when I 1) thematize collaboration in ways that are intellectually meaningful for the course and connected to articulated course values; 2) frame successful collaboration as both a meaningful intellectual challenge and versatile life skill; and 3) provide structure through specific strategies for working together throughout clearly defined stages of a project.

For a major collaborative project, it is useful to guide students in creating groups based on shared interests related to the course focus, aiming for each group to generate a distinct contribution to the class. To ensure effective and meaningful inquiry-based collaboration,[66] groups can begin by reviewing conflict resolution guides to inform them in establishing their own conflict resolution process as part of a group contract for internal use and for instructors to review and comment on.[67] The

act of building skills helps to promote agency and self-regard, but building skills *together* in relational contexts seems to afford a deeper experience of this for many students, while combating the isolation and loneliness that are linked to trauma, shame, and depression.

What if we also take the upheavals of pandemic time as an occasion to reconsider standard practices of assessing student work? Recent and ongoing reevaluations of conventional grading in and beyond higher education,[68] many grounded in equity and justice considerations, provide one avenue. Composition scholar Asao Inoue contends that conventional grading tends to reward the most advantaged students, while compounding the harms that many students have experienced in educational and other settings before they enter college classrooms.[69] He is also concerned with how grades become fetishized as ends in themselves, diverting student and teacher investment in learning and skill-building as overarching goals. His influential labor-based framework offers possibilities that could be adapted to a range of courses, in ways that may alleviate student experiences of teachers as adversaries judging their work rather than allies in learning and of classmates as competitors for a limited number of top grades.

Finally, what can instructors and students learn from what many disabled people know as "crip time," and what might it offer in *pandemic* time and its aftermath? Before the pandemic, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha would (grimly) joke that for nondisabled people to understand disabled people's lives, they only needed to imagine what it would be like to get hit by a bus. But now, she says, "'We've all been hit by a bus in different ways'"—ways that serve as a crash course for nondisabled people in

64. Jameta Nicole Barlow, "Restoring Optimal Black Mental Health and Reversing Intergenerational Trauma in an Era of Black Lives Matter," *Biography* 41, no. 4 (2018), 902.
65. See, for example, Antonio Duran et al., "A Critical Quantitative Analysis of Students' Sense of Belonging: Perspectives on Race, Generation Status, and Collegiate Environments," *Journal of College Student Development* 61, no. 2 (2020): 133-53, http://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0014.
66. See C. J. Brame and R. Biel, "Setting Up and Facilitating Group Work: Using Cooperative Learning Groups Effectively," *Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and Learning* (2015), http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/setting-up-and-facilitating-group-work-using-cooperative-learning-groups-effectively/; "Group Work," *The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University*, https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/group-work; and Scager, Karin et al. "Collaborative Learning in Higher Education: Evoking Positive Interdependence." *CBE life sciences education* 15, no4 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-07-0219
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68. See, for example, Colleen Flaherty's overview, "When Grading Less Is More," *Inside Higher Education*, April 2, 2019, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/04/02/professors-reflections-their-experiences-ungrading-spark-renewed-interest-student.
69. Asao Inoue, *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* (WAC Clearinghouse, 2019), 21-47, https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/labor/.

the "care and risk" that structure the days and nights of many disabled people.[70] Here, she echoes philosopher Susan Wendell's observation, "The oppression of disabled people is the oppression of everyone's real body."[71]

Piepza-Samarasinha goes on: "We are all, in ways that maybe haven't happened quite the same way before, being impacted by chronic illness and disability or the fear of it, the failures of the medical-industrial complex, the failures of capitalism, the failures of the insurance companies on this wide scale."[72] As the pandemic disrupts "the ableist normal," Piepza-Samarasinha calls on us to find in this interlude of crip time "an opportunity and an opening for there to be a sea change around us all really taking ableism seriously and remaking the world."[73]

On a more quotidian level, when a connection fails on a WebEx call, crip time prioritizes inclusion over perfection or efficiency, waiting until the connection can be reestablished or perhaps taking a moment to reconnect using a backup plan. Piepza-Samarasinha emphasizes: "One thing that you can do to bring in disability justice . . . is to embrace mess, is to embrace that . . . things are not gonna go according to plan, and that there's gonna be a learning curve . . .. And that you can move at the rate of the person who needs the longest to get there."[74]

But taking the values associated with "crip time" seriously requires shifts in institutional culture that cannot only begin or take place within our classrooms. Those of us with institutional affiliations must work to hold these institutions accountable, calling on them to institutionalize practices of justice and inclusion at every level of institutional function, from student recruitment to staff and faculty job security. Teaching and learning in and beyond the pandemic requires an embracing of, or at least attending to, "crip time" through institutional policies, guidance, and support for more flexible teaching and learning practices that promote meaningful work, skill development, and connection with others.

Together, the perspectives considered in this article demonstrate the value of academic/activist interfaces in communalizing trauma, and for addressing the crisis of societally occasioned depression and shame as an imperative for public health and social justice. They offer an ethic of interdependence that fosters connection in the wake of radical isolation, and instructive possibilities for individual and collective agency.

Acknowledgments

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