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From Poetry to Pedagogy: Exploring the Intersections of Disability Studies and Feminist Theories

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FROM POETRY TO PEDAGOGY:

EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF

DISABILITY STUDIES AND FEMINIST THEORIES

by

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Forward and Acknowledgements

I want readers to come away from this project with some understanding that it is OK to be uncomfortable. It is OK to be messy. And, although scholars and teachers are constantly facing boundaries and limitations either through disciplinary or theoretical divides, it is ultimately generative to push those boundaries.

I see this project as a culmination of my master's degree work. While I know this is the point of a thesis, I feel like this project is exceptionally representative of all of the directions my thinking has gone in the last few years. Most predominantly, my work has caused a major rift in how I think about English Studies. On one hand, I am a literature person — I have a certain attachment to literary analysis. It is where I hit my stride and decided to take the path to a doctoral degree. On the other hand, though, I found myself questioning what the point is. I wanted to be an Emily Dickinson scholar… But do we need another one? And, if so, what is the purpose?

I think, in some ways, I am hoping to first answer those questions. The purpose of literary scholarship is to say something about how we are human, yes. But it's more than that. In today's world — or in my world — literary scholarship must work to show how we are human in a regulated and, at times, unjust society. I believe this thinking comes from my introduction to rhetoric and composition the past two years as a full-time graduate student and teaching assistant. I encountered new ways of thinking about language and literacy, as well as the power structures and struggles behind it all. I saw it in the literature I was so fond of, such as Susan Howe, but I also saw it in my students. They came into my class the first semester of teaching, sharing my fear of academia. I felt I didn't belong in many ways, probably just as a symptom of imposter syndrome. But

many of my students expressed the feeling they didn't belong either. They had a whole new set of rules and responsibilities they weren't prepared for. They wanted me to walk them through every single step, but I couldn't. I was also navigating a new landscape I didn't quite understand.

After a couple semesters of learning about disability studies and gender studies alongside my English courses, I saw concepts that I thought could open up opportunities for thinking and writing to become more open, flexible, and individualized. After reading texts like Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* and Cheryl Glenn, Andrea Lunsford, and Lisa Ede's "Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism," I started to noticing a pattern in the things I was interested in: chaos — things going not as planned, but then that messiness being the most productive part of the process.

It eventually clicked that that is what I admired about Susan Howe. Her poetry is nonlinear and hard to read, but it said so much to me. Her poetry resists rules and norms, but can still speak to me in a language I understand. And I wanted my students to feel the same way when I asked them to read a difficult text or write an essay. I wanted them to read something as themselves, freed from writing and reading "the college way" or according to some rules high school teachers and/or professors provided them. I wanted students to understand how they became the communicators they are, and how they can continue to develop their communication and critical thinking in individualized ways, not by a set of standards. And I saw disability studies and gender studies, intersectionally, as the perfect platforms for that investigation and disruption. I thought I could introduce the concepts and ideas, and let those be a guide both for me as the instructor and for them as the students, closing the gap between theory and practice.

This project attempts to show all of that: how I see literary scholarship, feminist and disability theories, and composition pedagogy as intersecting. While the two chapters that make up this project are incredibly different — they were written differently, they read differently, the first chapter is all about a poet, and the second chapter is all about students — what unites the whole project is the fact that it is actually about *me*. It's about me coming to understand English studies in new and dynamic ways. I don't have to follow the rule that one must choose either the path of isolated literary scholarship or the path of being a writing teacher and researcher…yet. Even though I had planned on being a literary scholar, those plans shifted as I got further into my graduate work. And I had to be and am OK with it. I had to be comfortable with the discomfort and the chaos that graduate work introduced me to.

I suppose I'm trying to say that this project is about how I have navigated academia thus far. This journey has and will continue to change me as both a scholar and a teacher, pushing boundaries and asking my students to do the same.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members for helping this project become what it is. I will be forever grateful for their time and support while I dove further and further into the world of English studies. I am most grateful for Suellynn Duffey's constant generosity as both a teacher and a boss; Steve Schreiner's enthusiasm when I need a sounding board for all of my ramblings about poetry; and Lauren Obermark's devotion to this project, treating it with unbelievable care and attention as if it were her own. I would also like to thank my family and friends who have let me wander off. And, of course, Alex deserves extraordinary acknowledgment. His never-

ending encouragement, as well as his willingness to pick up the slack when I am too tired

from writing, is something I take for granted far too often.

Chapter 1
Erasing the Dividing Line: Susan Howe and Feminist Rhetorical Theory

I. Introduction and Argument

From an early age, Susan Howe considered herself "a library cormorant," diving into the depths of libraries to find and recover texts and histories. However, from an early age, Howe also knew that the libraries and resources available to her were limited, bound by the rules and regulations of institutions, as well as the organization of texts and histories. In the "Introduction" of *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*, Susan Howe recalls her father taking her into Harvard's Widener Library to retrieve some "out-of-the-way volumes" (18). Because she was the daughter of a Harvard Law School professor, she was allowed in the library. However, because she was *only* the daughter of a professor, she was not allowed in certain areas, which held the volumes she wanted: "My father said it would be trespassing if I went into the stack to find them" (18). The term *trespassing* reminds readers that the constraints of academic spaces, both spatial and figurative, are based on a history of exclusivity of knowledge; the texts and histories she explored were the ones made available to her.

The importance of this anecdote is twofold: the exclusive nature of history and knowledge — *who* can access it — is coupled with the erasure of narratives and identities — *what* is accessible. When Howe says, "Behind the facade of Harvard University is a scaffold and a regicide. Under the ivy and civility there is the instinct for murder, erasure, and authoritarianism" ("Interview," Foster 176-7), she is making it clear that nothing is as it seems. The honorable image of the institution conceals the violence that occurs to ensure authority. Furthermore, the denial and rejection of knowledge is a violent act against marginalized voices — the voices that do not fit into the patriarchal standards of

public spheres, particularly academia and politics. This contention, which is consistently present in Howe's writing, establishes Howe's work as relevant to the field of rhetoric, a scholarly realm in which her writing has not yet been explored.[1]

This move — reading literature through a rhetorical lens — is uncommon, but not unheard of. Some rhetoricians traverse into the study of literature, as well as vice versa, although it is few. Sharon J. Kirsch's book, *Gertrude Stein and the Reinvention of Rhetoric*, argues for the ways Stein's work has impacted the field of rhetoric. Kirsch offers possible reasons why the field may have overlooked Stein; among them is the contentious relationship between the rhetorical and literary disciplines. Kirsch positions Stein in an interdisciplinary role, reminding readers that "literary studies" is, in fact, a part of "English studies." She writes, "Stein complicates any clear distinctions between rhetoric and poetry, between speaking and writing, between what we say and how we say it" (18). In a way, then, Kirsch is arguing against the divide of the fields of rhetoric and literature.

As the title of Kirsch's book implies, the emphasis on the rhetorical canon of invention is at the forefront of her analysis (rather than the canons of arrangement, style, memory, or delivery). For Stein, writing requires a constant engaging with questions, "refusing to settle or stop, even when a word is placed on the page or in a sentence, grammar, history, or theory" (18). Meanings of the words on Stein's pages can be and are elusive for both speaker and audience. Communication between poet and reader is then

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[1] Although this essay does utilize investigations by Rachel Tzvia Back, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Megan Williams, and Marjorie Perloff, these writers still approach Howe's work through a strict literary lens with some reference to historical context. This essay pushes the analysis of the poetry to more fully understand Howe's political and cultural importance as a rhetorical figure.

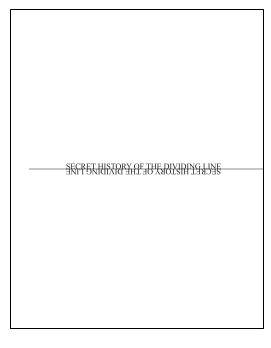"a kairotic poetics of invention, continually responsive to the situation at hand" (18). Thus, as Kirsch argues, Stein challenges rhetoric as a logical persuasive model in which the speaker seeks to change the minds of the audience. Instead, Stein invites readers to discover and create meaning along with the words on the page, challenging the traditional modes of composition and communication.

In a similar way, this essay aims to position Howe as an interdisciplinary writer who bridges the divide between literature and rhetoric. While Kirsch emphasizes Stein's invocation of invention, I argue Howe's rhetorical concentration is on the canon of arrangement, influencing the ordering and structure of her texts. Howe organizes texts to reflect the social and political constraints of history, particularly to bring attention to the voices of marginalized identities.

Howe's works, poetry and prose alike, construct and cross boundaries. These boundaries are not only a critical theme, but also a textual manifestation that create an integrative rhetorical intervention through literature. Howe's arrangement of words on the page is dedicated largely to blank spaces, as Lynn Keller observes in the introduction to her 1995 interview with Howe: "Absence is a thematic preoccupation as well, particularly in Howe's concern with voices that have been silenced, figures who have been erased" ("Interview," Keller 1). In many poems, Howe emphasizes the blank space around the words by placing words sideways, upside down, and with varying spaces between the fragments and lines of text. Even in Howe's earliest poems, such as *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (henceforth to be called *Secret History*), the text arranged so that the words are not in the traditional top to bottom, left to right format in traditional lyric poetry.

In Figure 1 (next page), "SECRET HISTORY OF THE DIVIDING LINE" is both right side up and inverted. The reader must make a choice: should the page be flipped in order to read the inverted line normally? Or should the page be kept in the same position to read the inverted line upside down? Either way, the space around the words has unprecedented importance. Normalized reading practices and page structure mandates the margins at the top and left indicate the beginning of text, and the margins at the bottom and right indicate the end of text. However, in this arrangement, the white space on the page is at once top *and* bottom, start *and* finish. The interchangeable function of the blank space is more than a background for the

SECRET HISTORY OF THE DIVIDING LINE

Figure 1. Reproduction of page 94 in *Frame Structures.*

words on the page; instead, it is a pivotal factor in how a reader interacts with the text. The blank space and the text are balanced in the communicative act. This arrangement is a reminder that just because something is not centered does not mean it is not there: "In relation to relief not to be treated as hollow and negative" (Howe, *Frame Structures* 5). In this line of prose, Howe is referring to a relief sculpture, in which the three-dimensional qualities are created not by raising the surface, but rather by lowering the background.

Likewise, I argue Susan Howe's writing highlights the relief techniques of history, as her "writing has been haunted and inspired by a series of texts" (Howe, "Encloser" 45). While men have written many of the texts she employs, she arranges and

rearranges the language into poetry guided by gaps and spaces.[2] In doing so, Howe emphasizes that which is on the outside of established boundaries. She brings awareness to the suppressed voices. The silences of her writing bridge the divide between literature and rhetoric by allowing readers the opportunities to engage with language and narratives in new ways, while also bringing attention to the voices and identities in the margins.

II. Feminist Rhetorical Theory and the Canon of Arrangement

Defining Howe as a rhetorician occurs in the scope of contemporary feminist rhetorical theory, which has "begun to explicate the ways in which standard theories of rhetoric embody patriarchal perspectives" (Foss and Griffin 2). These perspectives are grounded in concerns related to Howe and her work, particularly the ideas of the boundary and the conquest. The boundary and the conquest serve as a type of rhetorical commonplace when exploring Howe's interventions.[3] These commonplaces rely on the traditions of rhetoric, while also challenging them to be subversive and political.

In the essay "Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism," the authors (Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford) simultaneously evoke and strain the commonplace of "boundary." They separate their essay into sections based on rhetorical canons as "familiar guides" for exploring the margins — unexplored and neglected areas — of rhetorical tradition (409). Additionally, though, each section shows how one canon

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[2] Two major source texts for *Secret History* are *Touched by Fire: The Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. 1861-1864*, edited by Howe's father, and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. Both texts are part of a masculine and patriarchal tradition, and their rearrangement will be analyzed in later sections of this essay.

[3] The two frameworks used in this essay, "Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism" (Ede, Glenn, Lunsford) and "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric" (Foss and Griffin), investigate the boundary and the conquest separately; however, "Border Crossings" does briefly cite Foss and Griffin. This relationship will be explored later in the essay when considering Howe's work as rhetorical acts. The relationship between these two frameworks, and how Howe contributes to them, is explored in more detail in the article-length version of this essay.

overlaps with the next, taking on the task to "inhabit and unsettle the conventionally understood borders between rhetoric and feminism" (408). Like much of Susan Howe's contemporary work that solicits a patriarchal literary framework to investigate power structures, "Border Crossings" emphasizes the ways the separate disciplines of feminism and rhetoric interact through the concurrent calling forth and subversion of traditional maneuvers.

Not all contemporary feminist rhetorical theory inhabits traditional tenets, such as the canons, to challenge the patriarchal program. This is evident in "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric" (Foss and Griffin). Invitational rhetoric overturns rhetoric as it is traditionally equated with persuasion: "Embedded in efforts to change others is a desire for control and domination, for the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other" (Foss and Griffin 3). The rhetoric as persuasion model is ultimately formed with a patriarchal bias; the ability to change audience's minds rests in the ability to assert dominance in skill and knowledge, indicative of patriarchal "values of change, competition, and domination" (4). This dominance is grounded in the conquest, and the authors look to Sally Miller Gearheart's "The Womanization of Rhetoric" for guidance: "We conquered trees and converted them into a house … We conquered rivers and streams and converted them into lakes … We tramped with our conquering spaceboots on the fine ancient dust of the Moon …" (196). Traditional history is composed of stories of the winners and the imperious. Similarly, Susan Howe focuses on this winning and conquering as part of her poetic program: "If history is a record of survivors, Poetry shelters other voices" (Howe, "Encloser" 180).

Exclusion then becomes a tool for historical narratives, emphasizing what dominance has to offer, rather than what has to be erased.

The rhetoric as invitation model proposed by Foss and Griffin does not fully reject the need for persuasion or change. Instead, "Change occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas" (6). Invitational rhetoric allows space for multiple and diverse voices — particularly the voices of the marginalized, which have been denied acceptance and acknowledgement in the public sphere — that can create value and meaning through communicative acts between rhetor and audience. This mode of discourse offers an alternative to a traditionally linear arrangement: "As rhetors and audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be compared in a process of discovery and questioning that may lead to the transformation for themselves and others" (6). Invitational rhetoric thus rejects communicative value based on conquest and dominance, and instead emphasizes mutual understanding and discovery based on feminist conditions of equality, freedom, and interdependency.

III. Fragments Reveal Historical Silences

Susan Howe's interest in undermining the conquest tradition of historical narratives is evident in how she utilizes others' texts in her work. She undoubtedly inherited her father's passion for history — a passion that came out in his edited collection of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s letters and documents: *Touched by Fire: The Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. 1861-1864. Secret History* is composed of fragments and excerpts lifted from *Touched by Fire*. Rachel Tzvia Back discusses these references at length in her book *Led by Language: The Poetry*

and Poetics of Susan Howe. Back points readers toward a moment in the poem that

shows Howe's use of not only fragments from the letters, but also the epistolary form:

> Dear Parents
>
> A thousand lovely thoughts this sunny morning.
> At all events I have tried and have decided
>
> nothing especial
>
> except a new line of earthworks
> in the rear of the old ones. (*FS* 120)

As Back's meticulous research shows, these lines have been lifted from various letters of

Holmes, Jr. written between June 5 and June 11, 1864. By taking each of these fragments

from entire letters and placing them in this new verse form, Howe reclaims a masculine

text to create new meaning and experience. "At all events I have tried and have decided"

alerts readers that something of great important is about to be revealed about this

soldier's decisions during the Civil War. However, the divergent drop of "nothing

especial" leaves readers wondering if the speaker is hiding something (Back 27).

Back writes, "The speaker seems to have censored himself in midsentence, and

the reader must read as much meaning into the space between the lines" (27). This

fragmentation of lines lifted from a more solid epistolary narrative, as well as the

intermittent rhythm of the lines, works against "the rhetorical drive toward closure" (Ede

et al. 418). "I have tried and I have decided" is the masculine working toward a

declaration. The full letter reveals that Holmes, Jr. had decided to leave the service in the

midst of the Civil War, no doubt an unsatisfactory move in the eyes of the Union Army

and Holmes, Jr.'s father back home. Back writes that this deletion shows that "a text of

debate and struggle is converted into a report of the routine holding of the line" (28).

Erasing Holmes Jr.'s intentions and replacing them with the surrender to an authority undergirds Howe's poetic program of non-closure and subordination.

However, the erasure serves a more rhetorical function beyond the decision between conflict and complacency. In a previous letter home, Holmes Jr. wrote to his father, "… if it is true that we [the northern states] represent civilization … we may be sure, and will stand a better chance in their proper province—peace" (qtd. in Back 26). For this soldier and many like him, the audacious violence of the war did not represent the causes for which they were fighting. Holmes Jr. had decided that his life was not to be sacrificed in the war. However, when Howe inserts "nothing especial," she breaks the narrative — a conquering has occurred. Instead of revealing that he believed his life was worth more than the violence on the battlefield, the poem portrays a man who has succumbed to the pressures of submission in the Union Army. While an initial quick reading of this section of *Secret History* gives the sense that the soldier is "holding the line," Howe's censoring of the text asks whose life is valued in the rhetoric of control and persuasion. This man has decided something, but that decision is taken away. His authority is revoked in the middle of his sentence, by both his obligation to the Union Army and Howe's arrangement. She ultimately undermines the masculine authoritative text while reminding readers that not everyone has the option of deciding their future or their role in historical narratives.

This moment of *Secret History* is, at its core, a suspicious and fragmentary arrangement that reminds readers that language can be and is deceptive. Furthermore, this deception indicates the important need to take into account excluded voices and identities. Howe says, "I think a lot of my work is about breaking free: starting free and

being captured and breaking free again and being captured again ("Interview," Foster 166). The indeterminacy of Howe's work presents an alternative arrangement that recognizes the value of rhetorical non-closure. This portion of *Secret History* shows an author of a letter — a soldier, or any other person who must decide what is right for his or her own life — who has decided that it is right to withdraw from the violence. However, at the last moment, that decision is overridden by the nature of war; victory may be in the next moves, so disengagement may prevent reaching the ultimate goal.

While Sally Miller Gearhart defines the conquest model of rhetoric, she also describes the conversion model: "In the conquest model we invade or violate. In the conversion model we work very hard not simply to conquer but to get every assurance that our conquest of the victim is really giving her what she wants" (196). The very nature of subjection is dependent on the belief that the victim, or the audience, cannot make decisions independently. Instead, they must be convinced of the need for their capturing. When the poem's lines progress from "At all events I have tried and have decided" to "nothing especial," readers are reminded that the space between the lines holds a history of erased voices — decisions have been made *for* them, not *by* them — to ensure the awareness of one narrative instead of another. Therefore, she uses a disjointed revision of a masculine text based on the Civil War to bring attention to the gaps and spaces in which the marginalized exist. The space between the lines asks readers to question the role of the silenced in the whole structure of dominance, a structure that causes the very war and violence this speaker is in. The erasure of the speaker's decision, and the replacement with that which authority figures in this soldier's life would prefer, pushes the question past the dialectic question of conflict versus complacency. It does not

seek a final answer. Instead, it asks what happens when decisions are made for people rather than hearing their voices. How has the power of subordination persuaded people to retreat not from the violence they are subjected to, but from that which they believe is right? Who and what is in the silences of language and history?

In raising these questions, Howe asks readers to contemplate feminine voices. As "Border Crossings" explains, "Women have sought to include the intuitive and paralogical … as valuable sources of knowledge" (412-3). Including intuitive knowledge inside the boundaries of "valuable" challenges the distinctions between the public and the private, "arguing that knowledge based in the personal" be "accepted as important and significant" (412). While much of *Secret History* is composed from the texts of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., the ways in which Howe reconstructs the masculine language is based on the intuitive — the knowledge that comes from lived experience and deepest emotion and instinct. This is evident when the speaker, seemingly at the last minute, does not reveal that which has been decided; something has silenced the speaker. This indeterminate disruption of the male voice is representative of both the authority that silences it and the other identities it suppresses.

While Howe uses her arrangement of these epistolary fragments to raise consciousness of the potential voices and choices that have been silenced, the breaking apart and reordering of a text seems to contradict one of the components of invitational rhetoric's commitment to equality: "[the rhetor] builds on and extends the work of others rather than tearing their ideas apart in an effort to establish the superiority of her own" (Foss and Griffin 8). This is further complicated by Rachel Blau DuPlessis' exposition of *Secret History*: it "makes fruitful a subtle play between determinate meaning and

indeterminacy: a woman—a person mainly gendered female—writing 'feminine'

discourses, knowing and rewriting 'masculine' discourses, in the name of a feminist and

critical cultural project …" (DuPlessis). However, the rewriting of the masculine is not an

assumption of power, reflective of the rhetoric as persuasion model.[4] Instead, as Megan

Williams asserts, Howe aims to "[lead] the reader to assume consciousness of the

erasures and choices that are inherent in any attempt to narrativize history" (131). The

arrangement of the fragmented narrative does not seek to provide an alternative

authoritative history; it is not meant to convince the audience that history is wrong.

Instead, it offers "the perspective the story represents" (Foss and Griffin 7), and it

questions the patriarchal biases and structures inherent in historical records. Howe does

not present poetry to guide readers through a narrative, but rather puts in motion a

movement toward the dialectic right or wrong version. Howe's poems are a paralogic

questioning of the story as it currently stands.

For Howe, then, arrangement is highly rhetorical and even revolutionary. Ede,

Glenn, and Lunsford explain the ways rhetoric and feminism can intersect to destabilize

the conquest model of rhetoric, subverting "standards of unity and coherence, standards

that rely on linearity and closure" that "rest on a logic that is thoroughly masculine"

(418). They use American literary figures such as Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson

as illustrations of women writers who "loosen the 'straitjacket' of agonistic aims and

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[4] On numerous occasions, Susan Howe has refuted any label of feminism and the discipline itself: "I am troubled by some feminist criticism because in its stridency it is only another bias. And in a strange sense it's still a male bias. Instead of questioning the idea of power itself, many women want to assume power" ("Interview," Foster 169-70). Howe's resistance, while justly rooted in the concern of yet another disciplinary isolation, does not adequately reflect recent feminist thinkers. Jean Bethke Elshtain asserts that the "project of human speech...must move beyond a view of language as simply or inexorably 'power over' " (605). And invitational rhetoric does not pull its feminist stance through domination of one over the other, but rather "the grounding of its assumptions in feminist principles and theories" of inclusion and respect of multiple voices and perspectives (Foss and Griffin 5).

patterns of discourse" (417). In doing so, they begin to bring attention to the ways in which literature and rhetoric merge. Furthermore, they focus on the ways in which conventional modes of discourse impose power relationships and struggles. The American women writers Ede et al. discuss, such as Fuller, Dickinson, and Morrison, stand on the boundaries — a place they, as women, are already inhabiting. Furthermore, they use their position to generate a new power through language outside the linear praxis of arrangement. Like these American literary foremothers, Howe occupies a similar position on the boundaries, and the boundary itself is a commonplace in her arrangement. I will now turn to consideration of how the commonplace of boundaries can also — perhaps paradoxically — be a rhetorical move to invite understanding.

IV. Establishing Boundaries While Inviting Understanding

Much of Howe's work, arranged as chaotic and nonlinear, jeopardizes the conventions of discourse. This can be troublesome in invitational rhetoric because "When audience members feel their sense of order is threatened or challenged, they are more likely to cling to familiar ways of thinking and to be less open to understanding the perspectives of others" (Foss and Griffin 11). Disrupting the normative arrangement and patterns of language can create a seemingly unsafe and hostile environment. *Secret History* is no exception in Howe's oeuvre, and it is clear from the beginning:

> mark   mar   ha   forest   1   a   boundary   manic   a   land   a
> tract   indicate   position   2   record   bunting   interval
> free   also   event   starting   the   slightly   position   of
> O   about   both   or   don't   something   INDICATION   Americ
> (*FS* 89)

While the poem is directly dedicated to her father and her son on the third page of the poem — "*for Mark my father, and Mark my son*" (*FS* 91) — the real dedication to

these two men in her life appears in that rectangle at the beginning. "Mark" is, of course, the name of Howe's father and her son, as well as many generations of Howe men. However, "Mark" can also mean a boundary. Rachel Tzvia Back's research shows that Howe is using the personal to make a political statement concerning who or what is inside or outside the established boundaries of the public sphere. The fragments presented in the centralized rectangle are not random, but rather procedural in using the entry for "mark" in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*: "Howe has lifted the left-margin words and word pieces from this entry, skipping lines at will, then doubling back to the right margin in order to create her text" (Back 21). Howe is using the personal, a family name, to make a very political statement; she is extracting the words on the margins of the authoritative dictionary and placing them in the center. Furthermore, "The authority of a dictionary entry is subverted by Howe's alternative reading strategy *down* the page instead of across, resulting in an alertness to the subjectivity of cultural marks and markings" (Back 21). One moment in the verse Back does not consider in her analysis, however, is the cutting off of "America" in the last line: "Americ." The boundaries set forth on the page are impenetrable. It is more important that the words remain in the rectangle than the words receive full presentation and acknowledgement. By arranging the words in this rectangle, readers must ask: What is outside the boundary of this rectangle? And how does the conspicuously erased "a" invite readers to acknowledge and consider the erasure of voices?

 The cutting off of the final vowel of "America" tells readers that Howe's fragmented extraction and positioning of that which is on the margins not only subverts normative reading practices, but also challenges how knowledge is determined to fit in or

out of the standards set forth by institutions. Marjorie Perloff claims there is "no Howe poem that is directly autobiographical or personal" (520). While Perloff maintains that Howe's work is highly emotive, she acknowledges "its emotive contours depend upon the collisions (and sometimes it may be, collusions) of three codes — the historical, the mythic, the linguistic — all three, it should be added, as informed by an urgent, if highly individual, feminist perspective" (520). Her dedication of *Secret History* is both personal, a poem dedicated to men in her life, and political. She places her poetry and herself between the generations of Howe men. The abrupt ending of the word "America" is a violent reminder that the history of this nation has erased, subjugated, and marginalized women's voices as mere placeholders between the narratives of men.

Howe, again, invites readers to consider that which is outside the boundary: what is in the space outside of center? Who is in the silence? How does something or someone inhabit the borderlands to question the power of language and discourse? In the examination of American literary figures, Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford delineate the ways Margaret Fuller, working against the boundaries, unsettles the rhetorical canon of arrangement in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. They draw on Annette Kolodny's critical exploration of the ways "Fuller's use of a conversational and collaborative structural pattern" — which has been used to depreciate her place in the American literary canon — as not a "failure at winning a traditional argument," but a success in inviting readers to respect the value in equal communicative practices (417-8). This notion of conquest and winning as the marker for rhetorical value is implicit in Howe's remarks on violence and power at the center of the American landscape and identity:

> Why are we such a violent nation? Why do we have such contempt for
> powerlessness? I feel compelled in my work to go back, not to the Hittites but to

the invasion or settling, or whatever current practice calls it, of *this* place. I am trying to understand what went wrong when the first Europeans stepped on shore here…. Isn't it bitterly ironic that many of them were fleeing the devastation caused by enclosure laws in Britain, and the first thing they did here was to put up fences? ("Interview," Foster 164)

Howe points out the cycles of authority and marginalization in this ironic boundary making. If escape from oppression is founded in the same traditional power structures, there is no change in the operation; instead, there is only a new system of violence in which different identities are excluded from the public sphere. Ede et al. argue this is also true for the conquest model as rhetorical practice. If rhetors continue to follow the traditional models, there will only be new forms of power rather than an intrinsic questioning of power structures.

While Howe does subvert the "sense of order" in the above example, it is not to "threaten" the audience (Foss and Griffin 11). Instead, it is to both invoke and challenge the dominating boundaries and power structures, creating a more inclusive rhetorical mode. She arranges the words on the page in a normative linear rectangle, evoking physical and intellectual borders of tradition; however, her disruptive language and non-linear logic takes away familiarity and it does, in a way, render audiences powerless. However, this is not to cause a grasping back the comfortable. Instead, it creates a moment when no one — neither speaker nor listener — has more authority than the other. Even though Howe has some poetic control in establishing a procedure, this block of text is still formed largely by the layout of the dictionary. The language leads both writer and audience as it appears on the page. However, as she appears to defer to the authoritative text, she arranges the words in unconventional ways. This disruption serves "to liberate the reader from the limitations of normative reading procedures and to subvert the possibility of a passive reception of the work" (Back 3), creating an equal platform. She

is using an invitational rhetoric to "transform an oppressive system precisely because it does not engage that system on its own terms" (Foss and Griffin 17). By employing this mode, Howe invites rhetor and audience alike to examine how and why boundaries are set, as well as how and why voices are marginalized and erased.

As Ede et al. explain in their own meditation on arrangement in "Border Crossings": "Learning to look anew at discourse that does not follow conventional patterns, that does not pursue a master narrative of subjection, can yield major insights for rhetoricians and theorists of rhetoric" (418). While feminist rhetoricians affirm the erasure of marginalized voices, they've mostly looked at the exclusion historically. Very few have taken into account the ways poetry can extend their work.[5] Howe's rejection of conventional patterns and subversion of master narratives work toward an understanding of the rhetorical relationships between power and language. The exclusionary nature of history (the boundary) and the erasure of voices throughout history (the conquest) are commonplaces at the center of Howe's writing, manifested in the arrangement of the language on the page. Thus, the ways in which Howe's work "looks anew" beyond "conventional patterns" is through the disruption of traditional arrangement in her writing. Though these moves with arrangement can sometimes seem contradictory to feminist principles, I argue that Howe enacts invitational rhetoric by affirming the erased through a revolutionary power relationship between rhetor and audience.

V. Conclusion

One of Susan Howe's first experiences of intellectual and cultural boundaries was in the library of Harvard — an experience that possibly set in motion a writing career dedicated to the awareness of lost and erased voices. By raising audiences' consciousness

to understanding how and why narratives and language practices have been privileged, Howe surpasses the literary labels and becomes a feminist rhetorical figure. Moreover, her poetry calls forth patriarchal texts and normative structures, while subverting both in the arrangement on the page. The rhetorical canon of arrangement, dedicated to the order of speech to ensure persuasion, is unsettled on each page of Howe's poetry. She disrupts the conquest model of masculine writing through epistolary fragments; she destabilizes the boundaries of normative reading practices through the disruption of words. In subverting these conventional patterns of language, she evokes feminist rhetorical practices to question the power structures that have erased the voices of women throughout history.

Susan Howe's rhetorical interventions activate the canon of arrangement, sometimes in contradictory ways, but always to reveal power structures in language. The arrangement of her language reveals these power structures through physical gaps and spaces on the page. This is, as she has said, crucial to her ways of showing how history is fabricated: "History may be a record written by winners, but don't forget Nixon taped himself for posterity. If you are a woman, archives hold perpetual ironies. Because the gaps and silences are where you find yourself" ("Interview," Foster 158). Search and discovery of erased stories and voices then becomes embodied in Howe's poetry. While she arranges words in unconventional ways on the page, she asks readers to distinguish the differences between the markings and the silences — to challenge who and what determines that which is elevated and that which is lowered. In questioning these textual structures on the page, both Howe and her audience consider the identities jeopardized in historical narratives.

Chapter 2
**Disabling the Writing Process: A Study of Disability Studies and Feminist
Rhetorical Theory in First-Year Writing**

I. Introduction and Argument

In "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin challenge the linear and persuasive modes of communication, emphasizing the importance of feminist principles of equality, freedom, and interdependency. Additionally, Foss and Griffin define invitational rhetoric as dynamic and varied. They write, "As rhetors and audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be compared in a process of discovery and questioning that may lead to the transformation for themselves and others" (6). This openness is reflected in feminist composition pedagogy, which is "a hopeful practice that envisions learning spaces as sites where more just social reflections can begin to take root" (Micciche 129).

This feminist rhetorical framework extends into my teaching practices, as I believe the writing process is much like the "process of discovery and questioning" — social, reflective, and recursive. However, while the theory of invitational rhetoric is committed to interdependency and equality, it is not without struggle: "In invitational rhetoric, there may be a wrenching loose of ideas as assumptions and positions are questioned as a result of an interaction, a process that may be uncomfortable" (6). This communicative practice does not exist without disagreement; however, the act of understanding that disagreements are not failures but moments of growth is where change and progress occurs.

In many ways, then, invitational rhetoric is messy and chaotic. It does not rely on forward-only movement. Instead, it requires thinking and moving in new and unexpected ways. Similarly, Jay Dolmage's delineation of mētis in *Disability Rhetoric* asks readers to "view...the body and embodied thinking as being *double and divergent*...characterized by sideways and backward movement" (5). Thinking about the ways that both the body and writing can move and develop in new and unexpected ways, I make connections to how process can be challenged in the classroom.

Both feminist rhetorical theories and disability studies provide a platform to challenge the standardized approach to writing. This chapter looks at how traditional composition pedagogy — emphasizing the linear process of invention, drafting, and revising — reflects academic and societal norms. The normative approach to language and the writing process often stresses the idea of choice-making; writing is a series of decisions and, once those decisions are made, the writer is one step closer to the final draft. This thinking may seem practical for receiving a final draft from a student. However, this approach undergirds the pedagogical goal of product rather than process. It denies the fact that writing and thinking is naturally a recursive, messy, and chaotic process. Invention, drafting, and revising can happen at any moment in the writing process, even overlapping at times. I propose that emphasizing discourse as nonlinear and chaotic, through the lens of gender and disability in course content and pedagogical concepts, provides an arena in which writers can learn the standards of academic writing, while also learning how the writing process can be individualized and productively divergent.[5] In this research, I considered questions such as: What assumptions do students

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[5] The standards I attempt to question in this essay are based on prevalent assumptions about what academic writing is (such as teaching traditionally argumentative research writing).

bring with them to an academic writing course? How are those assumptions confirmed and/or overturned in first-year writing? How can integrating DS and GS in both course content and teaching practices require students to think and write in new ways? How does enacting nonlinear writing practices affect students' conceptualization of writing?

Throughout this chapter, I explore each of these questions as an attempt to move from theoretical discussions to inclusive pedagogical practices. Margaret Price, a professor of English and expert in disability studies, spoke of questions she has concerning DS and access at the sixteenth Biennial Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Conference. I share Price's concern when she says, "I perceive a gap between the people who discuss access and exhort accessible practices and the number of people who actually do this in everyday life or in everyday academic practice" (276). This chapter attempts to close that gap. While the first chapter explored the ways a nonlinear approach is manifested in contemporary poetry, this chapter investigates the ways the principles of DS and GS can play out in the writing classroom. Ultimately, I am moving from abstract discussions of feminist and disability studies theories of rhetoric to a more practical integration of such theories into writing processes and pedagogical practices. Although research demonstrates that the writing process is recursive, composing is often still enacted as a standard movement through prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. As Price claims, though, the difference between theory in composition books and practice in the classroom is still drastically different. In contrast, I invite students to disrupt their writing in ways that reflect a rejection of norms. Furthermore, the students in my classes started to appreciate the more invitational aspects of thinking and communicating — they found that inquiry and discomfort was generative and positive.

Methodology

This study was conducted over the summer and fall of 2015 in two sections of first-year writing. The summer class was small — 8 students — and the fall class was average — 19 students. I do not separate the quantitative and discursive data by semester, but rather have the students' responses presented together. Because students were able to opt out of the study and/or not respond to survey questions, the numbers of respondents are nominally inconsistent. The data I am presenting here is taken from anonymous quantitative and discursive surveys, as well as writing samples, from approximately 23 students. The majority of students were freshmen; some were sophomore and juniors, and one was a senior. Some student writing, such as final reflective statements, was named due to how those students turned in the assignment. However, full anonymity is preserved here. In discursive responses, I have chosen to keep the students' responses mostly as they are. There is some spelling standardization; omissions for brevity or clarity are marked with ellipses.

The university has a standardized syllabus for all first-year writing courses with 4 large essays due throughout the semester. I had taught from this syllabus my first semester in the classroom; however, inspired by an Introduction to Disability Studies (DS) course in the fall of 2014, I wanted to integrate the concepts and principles of DS. Additionally, because I had done an extensive research project on the intersections of DS and Gender Studies (GS) for that introduction course, I saw potential for how that intersectionality could work toward re-conceptualizing the writing process for composition students.

I was inspired by the ways both DS and GS work against norms, so I built a version of the syllabus that integrated readings from the fields of DS and GS. Students read, watch, discuss, and write about disability and gender in multiple contexts. Some examples of these sources include David Sedaris's "Go Carolina," Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," and a segment of the *Examined Life* documentary featuring Sunaura Taylor and Judith Butler. Additionally, I also wanted to put theories of DS and GS into practice in the writing classroom. Therefore, I ask students to move through a selection of DS and GS readings, assignment sequences, and workshops that require them to progress through writing processes in unexpected ways. For example, I have students complete an Amputation Revision Activity for their first major essay (to be further explored in the fourth section of this chapter, "Chaos in the Classroom: Draft Amputation Revision Activity"). Implementing these sequences, workshops and activities work toward not only providing ways for students explore various aspects of writing, but also furthering the discussions about the concepts and principles of DS and GS.

The data and analysis I present here explicates tensions I observed in students' conceptualization of the writing process before and after my class, as well as the ways the students became more comfortable with discomfort in their writing and thinking. Ultimately, students started to grasp the idea that nonlinear and chaotic writing can be and is individualized, flexible, and productively divergent.

II. Getting (More) Comfortable with Uncomfortable Topics

The first introductions to topics concerning disability and gender occur early on in the course. Students read Jay Dolmage's "Mapping Composition" and Janet Holmes'

"Women Talk Too Much" within the first two weeks. Dolmage explores the ways universities make learning and composition difficult for students with disabilities; Holmes investigates the myth that "women talk too much" and describes the ways that communication is policed by the social constructions of gender. While both of these readings offer students a point from which to consider their own literacy development (for example, I ask students to consider both how they have experienced the steep steps metaphor Dolmage lays out in his article and how students' communicative practices have been regulated and possibly relegated in ways Holmes describes) the students are also asked to think and write about disability and gender in ways that engage these topics and issues directly.
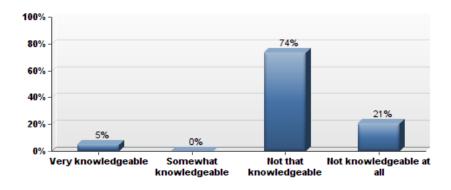
At the beginning of class — even before reading Dolmage or Holmes — the students responded to two survey questions about their more literal knowledge of Disability Studies and comfort with the topic of disability. One question asked for ranking, while the other asked for a discursive explanation for the ranking. The two subsections below explicate and analyze the data from those survey questions.

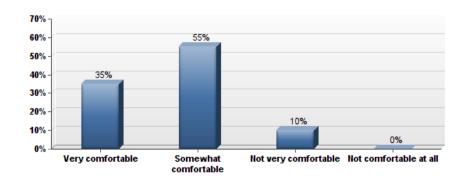### *Survey Results for Knowledge Of and Comfort With Disability Studies*

The data in these first two charts indicates that the majority of students came into the class with very little knowledge on the field of Disability Studies or the topic of disability; however, regardless of knowledge base, the majority of students still felt comfortable discussing or writing about the topic. In the following analysis of the quantitative and discursive data, I'll look at how the students indicated quite a bit of discomfort in talking about or writing about disability. Furthermore, although the quantitative data show little change in the levels of comfort, the discursive data show

how complex the feelings of comfort in topics concerning disability can be. In most students' responses, it becomes apparent that it is not a binary that comfort is good and discomfort is bad. Instead, the discomfort most students felt actually shows a growing critical awareness.

How much knowledge do you currently have of Disability Studies as an academic field of inquiry?

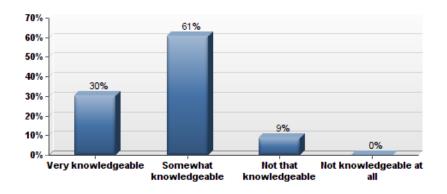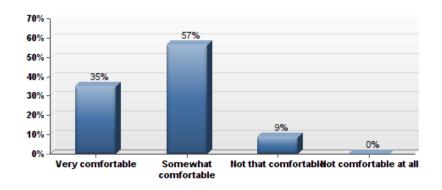**How comfortable are you talking or writing about disability?**

The students were asked to respond to the same questions at the end of the course, after we read multiple essays and articles, as well as watched various videos and discussed the topic of disability in regard to higher education, literacy development, and social construction of identity. The two charts on the following page show that data.

END OF COURSE: How much knowledge do you currently have of Disability Studies as an academic field of inquiry?

END OF COURSE: How comfortable are you talking or writing about disability?

This data shows that almost all students considered themselves knowledgeable on the topic of disability and some major aspects of Disability Studies. However, surprisingly, their comfort level remains almost the same (only a 2% increase), which was surprising to me. I had assumed that an increase in knowledge would inherently lead to an increase in comfort with discussing and writing about the topics because we are often more likely to write and speak about "what we know."

So, what does it mean when students gain knowledge about particular topics, but do not experience major gains in comfort when talking or writing about those topics? In many ways, disability is an uncomfortable topic to discuss. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular

Photography" explores the ways audiences look — literally look — at disability as an objectifying act. However, she touches upon some of the more fundamental reasons people tend to avoid the topic disability. One is that "staring at disability is considered illicit looking" (57). From a young age, we are taught that to look or stare at a disabled person is to be rude or against custom. This inappropriateness can easily transfer to the other communicative acts, making it unacceptable to publicly discuss disability and the disabled body. Additionally, and perhaps more latent, people tend to avoid disability because "We fear, deify, disavow, avoid, abstract, revere, conceal, and reconstruct disability — perhaps because it is one of the most universal, fundamental of human experiences" (57). While those who identify as non-disabled might consider the disabled body as the "Other," disability is something everyone can and most likely will experience in their lifetime.

Therefore, to speak about disability or to stare at disability may require us to think of "ourselves as disabled," which "is an image fraught with a tangle of anxiety, distance, and identification" (57). To speak or write about disability, then, can be an inherently uncomfortable task — a task that, no matter how much information you have in front of you, may never become easier. But these conversations are necessary to fulfill one of the reasons DS exists in the humanities — to theorize our own experiences and to understand the varied experiences of those around us.

Fear of Saying the "Wrong" Thing: "I don't want to say something stupid or offensive"

This ongoing discomfort with disability is reflected in the students' discursive responses to questions about clarifying their ranking of comfort (or lack thereof). Students who indicated any level of discomfort provided insight to why they felt that

way. Many said that the discomfort is difficult to overcome for fear of saying the wrong

thing, offending someone, or sounding unintelligent, pointing directly to Garland-

Thomson's statement on the unseemly act of staring. Student discursive responses reflect

these ideas:

- "I feel more comfortable writing about disability because I have time to google facts and sound smart. Speaking about disability makes me hesitant because I don't want to say something stupid or offensive. With writing, you have time to perfect what you're trying to say."

- "I think I understand what disability is, but I don't feel very comfortable talking about it because I don't think I know everything about the disabled."

Both of these responses say something about the relationship to disability — it is

something they both distance themselves from. Furthermore, these students consider

disability something that can be described by "facts," possibly statistics, medical

histories, etc. to make sure they sound not only smart, but also proper.

The Problem of Speaking for Others: "it is hard to voice an opinion on the topic when I

do not have a disability"

Additionally, some find it inappropriate to discuss these things if they don't identify as

disabled:

- "I've never really experienced any sort of disability, but I do know more about the attitudes surrounding the disabled. It's a matter of credibility and authority in the end. You won't find me making speeches on disability unless I become a paraplegic one day."

- "I am somewhat comfortable with talking or writing about disability, because it is hard to voice an opinion on the topic when I do not have a disability."

These responses, while indicating discomfort, speak to a major tenet of DS. These

students are concerned with authority; however, while some believe this authority can

come in the form of facts (as seen above), these two particular students seem to be

privileging authority based more on personal experiences. In a way, these students seem

to be closer to adopting a DS perspective that the voices of the disabled should be

centered.

Too Close for Comfort: "I have a family member who is mentally disabled"

Others felt uncomfortable because of a close connection to disability:

- "Most of the time, I'm cool with talking and writing about disability, but
  there are sometimes when I feel awkward and scared. I especially feel this
  way sometimes because I have a family member who is mentally
  disabled."

While this student offered some insight to the connection to disability, this student does

not indicate if the discomfort was specific to the classroom, public spaces, home, or some

of each (i.e. the student is uncomfortable with others talking or writing about something

so close to their experiences; the student is uncomfortable talking or writing about

disability because of how the public generally views their disabled family member; or the

student is uncomfortable talking or writing about disability because the family considers

it inappropriate). The importance of this response can indicate a couple of possibilities

depending on the connection between the discomfort and the family member. On one

hand, the response might remind audiences that sensitivity should be taken into

consideration when discussing these perspectives. Interpreted a bit differently, it could

highlight for instructors that some students will be more resistant to discussing these

perspectives because there is some fraught relationship with disability. Either way, this

student's response reminds teachers that a close connection to a topic or identity does not

mean a student will automatically appreciate its presence in the classroom in an uncomplicated way. While writing teachers often assume that students want to talk and write about that which they are closest to, engaging with a topic like disability in the writing classroom shows that this assumption can, at times, be off-base.

While some students indicated that, no matter what, they were still fully resistant to talking about or writing about disability, most students indicated a willingness to take part in the conversations. The most common discursive response to the question on comfort with disability indicated that, although their comfort level did not increase, they were more open to discussing and writing about the topic, and they desired more knowledge on the topic. In other words, they became more comfortable with being uncomfortable because they believe the conversations to be important and interesting:

- "It's a tough topic to talk about, but I've never really had a problem talking about it."

- "I am somewhat comfortable writing about disability because of the fact that it is an important topic. I know some people with disabilities, physical and mental, and I feel like it needs to be portrayed in the correct light."

- "Eh, the personal aspect definitely causes me to shy away from speaking about it sometimes. By the same token, I realize that talking about these issues is a very beneficial thing so I try and participate in the discussions that exist, at least to some extent."

- "I feel the conversation is worth having."

- "I know enough about disability to write, but I would love to learn more."

- "I have strong opinions about disability but I feel that having information to back me up is the hardest part."
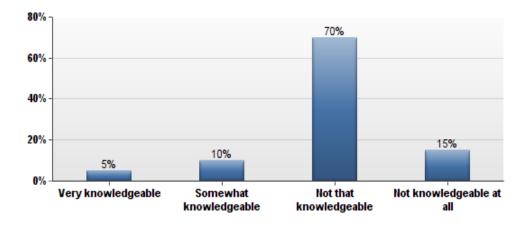
I had assumed that students' comfort with discussing and writing about the topic would increase as their knowledge increased; as shown above, the quantitative data

shows otherwise. However, the discursive responses show tensions that speak to the complexities in learning about and discussing disability. As noted, disability is inherently difficult to discuss, and bringing it into a course can be problematic, as Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and Sharon L. Snyder assert: "because disability is a highly stigmatized identity, it is sometimes imagined as inappropriate or too private for classroom analysis...discussing disability in other than the expected ways can lead to confusion, guilt, defensiveness, backlash, and silencing" (11). While these emotions are loosely represented in the responses and lack of increase in comfort, the students show development toward critical and reflective thinking about not only why they feel uncomfortable, but also why they feel like it is an important topic to discuss.

Survey Results for Knowledge Of and Comfort With Gender Studies

Much like the survey questions regarding Disability Studies, the data in these charts indicates that the majority of students came into the class with little knowledge on the field of Gender Studies or the topic of gender:

How much knowledge do you currently have of Gender Studies as an academic field of inquiry?
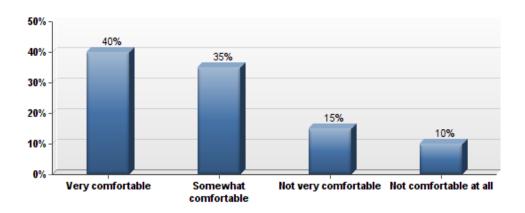

However, regardless of knowledge base, the majority of students still felt comfortable discussing or writing about the topic. It is interesting to note here, as well, that these

students indicated that, they are already indicating that gender is more uncomfortable to talk or write about. While the beginning survey question regarding disability did not yield any results in the "Not comfortable at all" ranking, 10% of students indicate discomfort with gender in the following graph.

How comfortable are you talking or writing about gender? This includes LGBT issues.[6]

Again, the students were asked to respond to the same questions at the end of the course, after we read multiple essays and articles, as well as watched various videos and discussed the topic of gender in regard to higher education, literacy development, and social construction of identity. The two charts on the following page show that data.

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[6] There is a possibility that including "LGBT issues" has skewed some students' responses. The politicized aspect of this may have taken precedent in the way students answered this question, rather than thinking about all of the ways we read about and discussed gender.

END OF COURSE: How much knowledge do you currently have of Gender Studies as an academic field of inquiry?

80%
65%
60%
40%
20%   17%
13%
4%
0%
Very knowledgeable   Somewhat knowledgeable   Not that knowledgeable   Not knowledgeable at all

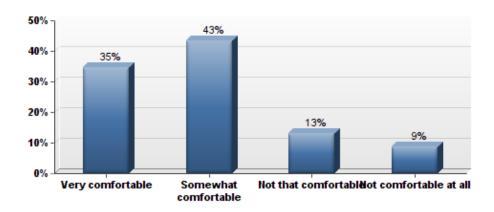**END OF COURSE: How comfortable are you talking or writing about gender? This includes LGBT issues.**

50%
43%
40%   35%
30%
20%
13%
10%   9%
0%
Very comfortable   Somewhat comfortable   Not that comfortable   Not comfortable at all

Students' responses to the topic of gender still show more resistance to discussing and writing about the topic in comparison with disability. While students became more knowledgeable on topics concerning gender (still less than disability), they not only remain at about the same comfort level, the amount of students who were "Very comfortable" actually *decreased*. In discursive responses, students were much more quick to describe discomfort because of personal reasons.

Too Argumentative: "It's hard to express opinions on a topic where people can get easily

offended"

Some students indicated they do not like to talk about gender issues in the

classroom because they find the topic to be too argumentative or controversial.

- "I feel that I have learned quite a bit about it but it is something that I have noticed (usually) sparks arguments. I do not like arguing so it is a topic I try to stay away from unless I have to write or talk about it."

- "I guess I wouldn't be okay with talking about gender because I'd get too emotionally involved to sound intelligent. Plus I don't like talking about things that could be controversial."

- "Again, usually I can talk about this topic, but sometimes it's awkward and uncomfortable. I'm always afraid that I will say something by accident that will offend and hurt someone."

- "The reason I am not that comfortable with talking or writing about gender is because it an uncomfortable topic to talk about! It's hard to express opinions on a topic where people can get easily offended. However, it is easier when it comes to discussing the importance of gender equality."

- "I am fine writing about gender when it comes to male and female. I won't write about   things including the LGBT community because I am not at all comfortable speaking about it."

I have organized these responses to show students' variations from general avoidance of

controversy or arguments to more specific reasons for why they find the topic

uncomfortable. A couple or students said they fear offending others by presenting their

perspectives, while one student specifically said they avoid the topic because of opinions

concerning gender norms and sexuality. Interestingly, one student did mentioned ease in

discussing gender equality. That one student said they were comfortable with discussing

the subject of equality leaves me to question what the class as a whole viewed the

readings and discussions to be about if not equality.

Other responses in comfort ranking range from students' own gender identity, their opinions concerning gender norms and sexuality, and/or because they see gender and sexuality as a more controversial or argumentative topic (the majority of students responded in such ways). The following are samples of these responses:

Too Close for Comfort: "It makes me nervous and anxious to write about something that I'm hiding"

One student mentioned a close personal connection to a non-normative gender experience: "I personally have some gender issues which I conceal from the majority of the world. It makes me nervous and anxious to write about something that I'm hiding from the world personally."

Although the beginning survey offered many choices for gender identification — "male-to-female," "female-to-male transgender," "male," "female," "gender non-conforming," and "prefer not to disclose" — all students chose either "male" or "female." This particular student still identified as either male or female, yet has "some gender issues." Although I am not sure of the issue, the quantitative data do not fully align with the discursive data in this instance. This response is important for two distinct reasons: one, it reminds teachers, again, that a fraught relationship to a topic can lead to resistance to talking and writing about the topic; two, it emphasizes the fact that checkboxes, even if more inclusive than the generalized binary of "male" and "female," still do not provide adequate opportunities for identification in data-collecting scenarios. So, while discomfort in talking or writing about disability came mostly from a feeling of "inadequacy" to discuss the topic — whether it be because of identification as non-disabled or lack of knowledge, the discomfort in talking or writing about gender came

from a resistance to argumentative discussions and/or a resistance to topics of non-normative gender identity and sexuality.

The most interesting finding in this collection of data on students' comfort with and knowledge of gender studies is that students seem to be less comfortable with topics they feel strongly about rather than something they can read, write, speak, or think about from a distance. I had assumed that students would be more willing or excited to think and write about topics they felt strongly about or have been exposed to in other settings; however, most did not want to do so, citing that it's potentially too "controversial," "offensive," and "argumentative."

Intersecting Disability and Gender

The resistance to both disability and gender surprises me. Because I am an educator dedicated to inclusion, I often try to provide various identity perspectives to which students can connect: authors who are male, female, gender non-conforming, gay, straight, Latino, African American, disabled, etc. I assume that students who identify with a marginalized or non-normative group will appreciate a voice integrated into the class materials with which they can connect. Additionally, I assume that students who feel very strongly about a topic will find the class material easy to engage with — maybe not in class discussion for fear of offending, but more through writing. However, that was not the case in this study. Most students felt strongly about gender and sexuality in one way or another, definitely more so than disability, and therefore found it a more difficult topic.

In the responses to the questions on gender, some patterns were similar to the questions on disability. For example, a few felt as though the topic is important and

therefore should be discussed. Included in those responses are students who feel very

strongly about equality in gender issues:

- "I have a really strong opinion about gender and how everyone should be treated equally. I think that the way people view other people is horrible and you should just view everyone as the same."

One student, though, made an important connection to thinking about gender and

disability as intersecting topics:

- "I know more about this now as well….just like with disabilities, people try to look at how people are different and not how we are all the same…"

Both of these responses above point to the intersections of disability and gender as fields

dedicated to equality and openness. These two students started to hint at the purposes of

DS and GS as academic fields of inquiry — to challenge norms and expand our thinking

about identity construction and representation. Furthermore, the second student directly

links issues in gender and disability, emphasizing the importance of knowledge of the

topics as necessary for thinking in more equitable ways.

Again, as an educator dedicated to inclusiveness, it is my goal to create a

classroom space in which students are not only introduced to new topics and new ways of

thinking, but also comfortable within the space and with the communicative practices of

the class. While the students presented in the two previous sections indicate that they felt

as though they were introduced to new topics, their comfort level with the topics and/or

the communicative practices did not increase. If DS and GS are both interested in

equality and openness, and students felt as though they were adequately introduced to the

topics and fields, why do they have such apparently contradictory discursive responses in

comfort rankings? In what ways did learning about topics of disability and gender

encourage new thinking and communicating? What do responses to questions about comfort with topics and with communicating about those topics say about the practices of an educator? How does this provide both inclusive and exclusive communicative practices in the classroom?

The apparent disparities in comfort rankings could speak to my reasoning that invitational rhetoric should be introduced to the writing classroom. Invitational rhetoric's ultimate goal is to "invite the audience to to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" (Foss and Griffin 5). In assigning readings, videos, and discussions to the class on topics such as disability and gender, I present varied identity perspectives and voices that many students have never considered. Students' final reflective responses, separate from the formal surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the course, demonstrate the importance of these new ideas and perspectives in their learning experience.

- "Another important tool I am taking with me from this course is all the information and perspective I gained from the sources we read and discussed throughout the course...You will learn about disability studies, gender studies, conflicts in the classroom and education system, and many other topics that you have probably never really thought about."

- "I learned how to critically think not just about how I write, but also about different subjects like gender studies, disability studies, and education...I learned how those things you talk about in class relate to the real world…"

- "The knowledge that I learned about literacy and gender studies will stick with me."

These students point to not only the importance of learning about new topics, but also how their experiences in the classroom can potentially serve them in the future. All three of them indicate how they see these new perspectives as "tools" or ideas that can be used

outside the classroom. Again, introducing invitational rhetoric to the classroom is effective in developing students' critical awareness, as it emphasizes respect of perspectives that are different from one's own: "In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own" (5). This feels equally important when discussing topics that relate to students' literacy development and aspects of identity that can sometimes feel taboo or controversial, such as disability and gender.

"We didn't always agree every time, which is a good thing": Conflict as Generative

I try to foster an environment in the classroom that opens students up to degrees of agreement and disagreement, but also makes them feel safe. Some students made general comments about the importance of this kind of setting: "...the environment made it more inviting to learn." Some pushed this a bit further, emphasizing that the rhetorical practices of the classroom were inviting and nonhierarchical: "I truly enjoy when we discuss various social issues such as discrimination...I was never discouraged from disagreeing with others (in a civil manner) even with the teacher." And then some directly linked various and differing perspectives as important for learning and understanding the topics discussed in class: "Every one of them [the class discussions] brought some new information to light about the readings and how we each interpreted them...We didn't always agree every time, which is a good thing. If we always agreed with what was said, we would never comprehend the readings as well," as well as "Kairotic spaces give this course life and give every student the opportunity to connect oneself with each lesson...I got to hear different views and opinions on a certain topic,

expanding my overall view and thoughts…" While not all students reflected on the classroom discussions and potential disagreements among classmates, the ones who did appeared to see them as ultimately beneficial to learning. Additionally, students' comments are showing critical awareness of how their own perspectives may have been limited in some way.

These responses seem to undercut the survey data showing that students did not feel comfortable talking about argumentative topics. This contradiction leads me to question, then, why so many students indicated no increase in comfort when discussing disability and gender? And why are the reasons for this discomfort so different for disability and gender? The quantitative and discursive data from the formal survey show that students were more likely to feel uncomfortable writing about and discussing topics of gender because they felt too strongly about them, described them as too argumentative, or saw them as too political. This is important when considering introducing invitational rhetoric to the classroom. Foss and Griffin describe one purpose of invitational rhetoric as the creation of safety in communicative acts; otherwise, "When audience members feel their sense of order is threatened or challenged, they are more likely to cling to familiar ways of thinking and to be less open to understanding the perspectives of others" (11). Because students felt a closer connection to issues of gender, it is possible they felt more like their ways of thinking were challenged and, therefore, felt unsafe. More specifically, this feeling of insecurity is possible in instances when students offered responses to the topics of LGBT issues. Again, I had assumed that students would be more likely to engage with topics they are familiar with, have a connection to, or even know is a current issue to be debated (such as civil rights in the LGBT community), and gender, sexuality,

and equality are major topics of today. One student even indicated how gender is a topic encountered in everyday interactions: "Gender is a topic discussed in many of my classes and also discussed amongst peers because it's a very popular subject." However, the more well-known and current topics were something students seemed to avoid for fear of offending, sounding wrong, or even just because they have opinions they preferred to keep to themselves unless they were responding in anonymity.

This would possibly mean, then, that the students don't see disability as a politicized issue. Because disability issues are not highly represented in mainstream media, students may not have come into the course, or gained the knowledge throughout the course, that disability rights is in fact a political issue. One student offered a response that may provide some insight to the difference: "...it is easier to take a defensive stance for disability, rather than opinions that denounce the importance of disability studies and accommodations." I believe this student is voicing the sentiment that it seems "easier," or maybe even better, to argue for disability rights than against. When faced with issues of gender construction, gender roles, sexuality, etc., students may come to the class with preconceived notions based on religion, family history, and concepts of morality that prevent them from becoming fully open-minded about these topics. However, when faced with issues of accessibility, and awareness of disability as a positive identity category, it seems less likely that a student would have a preconceived notion that leads them to think these are as inappropriate conversations to have.

In the final reflective responses for the class, the majority of students provided some feedback about the fact that the class "opened their mind" or "made them think differently" (without prompting); additionally, many students said that one has to be

"open minded" or willing to "think outside the box" for this class (again, without prompting).

- "This was a step toward learning to think differently and thinking in-depth as a college student."

- "To start, this is a very thought provoking class, more so than any other writing class I have ever had before."

- "I had to be open minded when learning about unfamiliar topics."

- "My ideas about writing have changed in this course. The change has been reflected in my writing by being able to think outside the box and more in-depth."

- "As a writer I came in very narrow minded. I used to be a person that would just write the bare minimum because I didn't like or just wasn't interested in what I was writing...Overall, I have grown to be more open minded and not afraid to think outside the box."

- "I have learned to think outside the box and think deeper. I've never really been challenged to think about a topic or think deeper about the readings until this class. I really struggled at first because it was out of my comfort zone to think so hard on an underlying message or claim that seemed simple."

These responses illustrate one of the important aspects of invitational rhetoric: "In invitational rhetoric, change occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained..." (6). While I try to introduce the class to new perspectives and voices, the students seem to be open to becoming more aware and thinking about them in new and different ways. Readings, videos, lectures, and class discussions all provide opportunities for students to interact in invitational ways. Although many of them indicated lack of comfort in talking and writing about the topics of gender and disability, reflective statements show the importance of this discomfort and

tension. In many reflective responses, students specifically indicated that learning about new topics such as disability, gender, and literacy contributed to this openness and new ways of thinking. Some of these responses have already been listed, but I will repeat them here:

- "Another important tool I am taking with me from this course is all the information and perspective I gained from the sources we read and discussed throughout the course...You will learn about disability studies, gender studies, conflicts in the classroom and education system, and many other topics that you have probably never really thought about."

- "I learned how to critically think not just about how I write, but also about different subjects like gender studies, disability studies, and education...I learned how those things you talk about in class relate to the real world…"

- "The knowledge that I learned about literacy and gender studies will stick with me."

Additionally:

- "After this class, I've learned a lot about literacy. I also did my inquiry project on disability and that project really opened my mind."

- "I have learned a lot about gender and literacy. That will definitely stick with me. I did not know that was as big of an issue. It makes me feel better knowing I am educated on these topics."

Again, these students have been introduced to unfamiliar topics, and they have integrated those new topics into their new thinking and writing practices. So, even though the quantitative data do not show a "success" in making students more comfortable, their comments show that discomfort is a large and important part of grappling with both writing in new contexts, such as academia, and understanding complex social issues.

While the majority of students did not experience an increase in the amount of comfort they had with topics concerning disability and gender, I do believe the students

in this class learned the most essential aspects of DS and GS as fields in the humanities. Without prompting, most students articulated some understanding of the importance of these fields, as well as the importance of discussing and writing about the topics of disability and gender. Developing critical thinking skills is one of the main objectives of many FYC classes, and integrating DS and GS in this particular class seems to have encouraged that development. Many students described an increase in their interest in multiple perspectives, emphasizing the importance of hearing others' voices. In other words, most students started expressing the value of being open-minded and thinking critically as important qualities for being human and communicating.

One unexpected finding in this study is that many students who had personal connections to the topics discussed, or they had strong opinions concerning the topics, were less likely to want to discuss or write about it. In many ways, this complicates the oversimplified thinking that students will gravitate toward certain topics they are close to. Writing instructors often tell students to "write about what you know," but some students made it clear that those topics are too difficult. As a writing instructor, I will have to keep this in mind in the future. Students do not always want to engage with topics of closer personal connection, and providing opportunities to discuss and write about newer and unknown topics may be more beneficial. This is one of the ways I see including DS and GS in the FYC classroom as useful. Intersecting both fields of inquiry provided opportunities for students to interact and engage in new ways. As the data show, if I had only integrated DS or GS, some students would have been less engaged. For example, some students just don't see how disability is a politicized enough issue to warrant in-depth inquiry; likewise, some students saw gender as too argumentative of a topic to fully

engage. With both topics and fields introduced in this FYC class, students were able to gravitate toward one topic or another they saw as significant.

This intersectional approach to first-year writing was useful not only for helping students become more critically aware; the intersectionality was also important in understanding how non-normative approaches to writing can help students navigate the new academic writing contexts of college. In the next section, I will explore how this integration can benefit students' writing practices.

III. Disabling Process and Generative Messiness

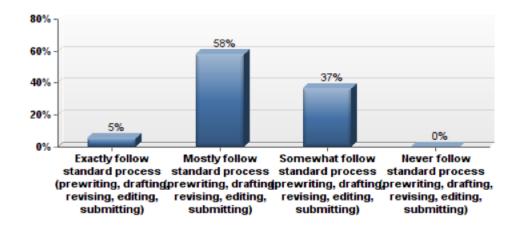***Tensions in Writing Process Pedagogy: Student Experience and Preference***

One of the purposes of integrating DS and GS into this FYC class was to see how course content that emphasizes access, individualization, and flexibility could potentially carry over into student's own conceptions of writing. Because I wanted to integrate DS and GS concepts, it was my goal to disable the writing process. I wanted students to experience non-linear writing processes, as well see how disruptive writing practices can be generative. In other words, I wanted to integrate DS and GS in a way that would help student rethink and conceptualize new ideas about the writing process.

In the beginning survey, students responded to questions about the standard writing process as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, particularly about their experience with and preference for the standard writing process. The two charts on the following page show that data.

As a student, what is the most common approach to writing you have been required to follow in previous classes?

As a student, how do you prefer the writing process?

This qualitative data seems to indicate that students came into this particular class with some knowledge of the standard linear writing process and its stages. Furthermore, the numbers seem to indicate that students are generally comfortable with this linear process as *the* way to write. However, discursive responses show that there is some resistance to the process.

- "I need some guidelines and structure to succeed, but I work more efficiently when I have some flexibility."

- "I believe you have to think before you write...but a rigid process bores me."

- "I feel like you should follow a process but have freedom as well."

These students seem to need some structure, but also need flexibility to be successful writers. Some students were more explicit in the kind of individualization they need.

- "Sometimes I don't have time to do a step so I have to skip it."

- "I feel some stages aren't as needed personally."

- "Sometimes I skip certain parts of the process because it is too much to do."

- "I don't do prewriting generally. I just draft and edit along the way."

- "I prefer to just write the paper with no prewriting and then from there I go through and do a lot of editing and revising."

These students skip particular steps, either because of lack of time or because of a perceived lack of importance. It is important to note that these students see the stages of the process as isolated — that things like prewriting can be cut off from drafting or revising. However, two students mention that they prefer to "draft and edit" or "edit and revise" "along the way." This suggests that some students already view writing not as linear but as overlapping acts that occur at varied times throughout composing. Again, while students have come into this course understanding to what degree they prefer writing, many of them are already expressing some resistance. There is some tension and acknowledgement that the prescribed process doesn't completely work for them. This further reinforced my goal to disrupt writing and provide a messier and more complex alternative to the rigidness they had previously been exposed to in earlier years.

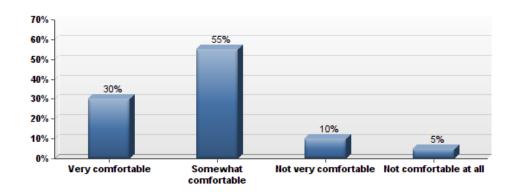### *Intention and Transparency in Disabling the Process*

My intention to "disable" the writing process is undergirded by the DS thinking of

the term "disable(d)" as positive. This is one of the many ways that a DS approach to

composition can be insightful and generative. Moreover, the writing process is not only

bolstered by the intersections of DS and GS, but also grounded in post-process pedagogy.

For decades, scholars in composition have theorized the writing process to focus on the

process rather than the product, reinforcing the concept that learning and thinking occurs

during writing rather than before writing. However, some scholars suggest the field is

now in a state of post-process. So, while I follow the thinking that composition should

work from "the new paradigm" with a "shift from a focus on the *product* of writing to its

process" (Anson 215), I wanted to move away from the one-directional approach of

students moving through the stages of prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. Instead, I

wanted to challenge the linear model and work toward the post-process paradigm, "...a

more sophisticated version that included arrows pointing both forward and backward or

between the stages, which made the circle recursive: a writer can, for example, go back to

brainstorming after realizing there's a serious problem with a draft during the revision

process" (Anson 224). Furthermore, I wanted to emphasize the value of revision. Nancy

Sommers argues for the practice and purpose of revision as not just "a stage that comes

after the completion of a first or second draft" (378), but rather "a sequence of changes in

a composition — changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout

the writing of a work" (380). The continual nature of revision throughout all stages of

composing was important to me as an instructor and engaging in the current dialogues of

process versus post-process pedagogies and the value of chaotic writing practices.

While I aimed to incorporate nonlinear writing practices for my students, I was never entirely transparent in my intentions. I developed sequences, activities, and workshops — as I will explain in section four of this chapter — to disrupt the linear process, but I never explicitly told the students what I was doing. One important teaching moment that often takes place in the first-year writing classroom is the "writing process" lecture — when a writing teacher explains the standard process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. However, because I did not want my students to focus on this linear process, I never explained this to them. Instead, we had class conversations about what happens in various stages of writing, and I asked them to "complete" the steps at different stages of writing each essay. For example, after second or third drafts of an essay, I asked students to go back to prewriting and brainstorming during revision activities.

(Dis)Comfort with Writing Processes

In addition to the questions about students' preferences based upon past experiences, the students were asked a series of questions that invites reflection upon their comfort with the standard writing process.

How comfortable are you with the standard writing process? This means the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

The majority of students expressed a comfort with the standard writing process, which I described as the linear "prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing." When asked to provide a comment on why the students ranked their comfort, many of them provided answers indicative of prior experience as a part of their reason. It became clear that many students had already been introduced to the linear process, and that played into their responses.

- "That is the only way I've been taught to write."

- "Not as much on the prewriting because we never really had to do that in high school, but drafting, revising, and editing are skills that I've been taught in all of my English classes…"

- "I have been doing this process for all four years of high school so I am a little comfortable writing this way."

- "Because I have taken many classes that have made me practice the process repeatedly."

These responses equate practice with comfort, especially because, for some, this method had been repeated in every English class they have taken. Many of the students in my class came into their first academic writing course with some notion that this was the "only way." However, some students associated their lack of comfort with some other writing concern, which I believe to be the reason behind the 5% who said they were "not at all comfortable" (numbered to clarify analysis with comparisons and contrasts):

1. "I just don't feel like a good writer."

2. "I feel like my ideas aren't as good to meet the standard."

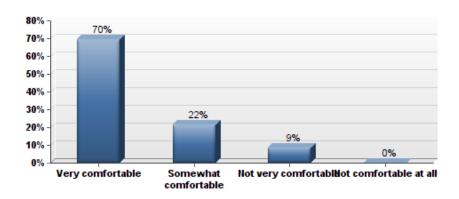3. "I still need to work on revising and editing."

4. "I tend to be a very slow writer. Naturally I want to get my writing perfect the first time which leads to a lot of problems in the standard system of multiple edits."

These responses show what students associate with the writing process, from general quality of perceived writing abilities to specific stages to be perfected and completed. Because student 1 feels like "good writing" or "being a good writer" is something they have not yet accomplished, they are uncomfortable. Students 2 and 3 are identifying "standards" or norms that they somehow don't fit into, whether it be their own thinking and ideas or their ability to accomplish certain tasks such as revising and editing. Student 2 is already equating writing with idea creation, not yet understanding how the writing process, regardless of linear or chaotic nature, can be generative for thinking and communication. Meanwhile, student 3 sees each step as holding a certain kind of value, and sees two particular steps as something they still need to attain. Student 4 expresses a common concern many students have, which is that they want to create a perfect first draft and therefore have difficulty revising and editing multiple drafts. Additionally, students 3 and 4 are connected by the emphasis on revision and editing. So, even at the beginning of the course, the students are holding themselves up against some kind of standard they associate with the linear writing process, as well as identifying specific steps in which they feel they are lacking.

The students were asked to respond to the same question at the end of the class. The chart on the following page shows that data.

END OF COURSE: How comfortable are you with the standard writing process? This means the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

The quantitative data shows that students became much more comfortable with the standard writing process. While the numbers are somewhat disappointing to me — I had hoped the students would express some sort of discomfort with the standardized linear process and show more of an interest in a chaotic writing process — the discursive responses do show less of an awareness of a standard to which the students are holding themselves. Instead, they emphasize process as something they've gotten better at. Furthermore, they are viewing writing and thinking as never-ending, which is important for understanding the importance of a nonlinear approach that doesn't necessarily have a start and finish.

- "Practice practice practice. I have had a lot of practice from the class and now I feel comfortable with my ability to write for college."

- "I got lots of practice and fine tuned my skills throughout and feel very comfortable with the standard writing process."

- "I feel as if my writing ability has improved greatly because of this class, but I still may need more practice, which comes in time."

Each of these students indicate an increase in "practice" as the reason for an increase in comfort. The comments above show that students are already starting to *do* revision more rather than just *know* about revision as a step in the process. Moreover, I am impressed that one student even recognizes that writing as a practice does not end, but rather will continue on throughout their classes. Other discursive responses touch upon additional writing concerns:

- "After this class I feel like I have mastered the writing process. Each process reflects and builds on one another and is very important when writing an essay or any formal writing."

- "I was comfortable with the writing process because I was given a lot of time to write and it wasn't about one specific idea."

These responses indicate an awareness not only that the writing process takes time, but also that the writing process is comprised of steps that don't necessarily have to connect one right after the other. It seems as though writing, for these students at least, became more messy. They became more comfortable with composing based on varying steps and ideas coming together. These students' comments show they are grasping a more nuanced and complex notion of the writing process than the beginning comments and responses show.

Because of these responses — both sets above — I am led to believe that students did not necessarily rank their comfort with the "standardized writing process" but writing in general. This theory could be explained by the fact that I never explicitly told the students my intentions, and they are not thinking about all of it as "process" by just "writing." Additionally, their discursive reflections indicate comfort not with a linear motion through a process, but rather the generative nature of writing practices. Furthermore, I find it compelling that out of all of the responses to this particular question

in both the beginning and ending surveys, only one students ever mentioned a "product": "Writing is not something that is very hard for me and making revisions and editing made it easier for me to get a better final draft." This particular student sees the purpose of the writing process as something to produce a "final draft." This is important for this study because I wanted the students to have an understanding that writing as a process is never finished, and the steps can occur at any time and repeatedly. Very few students through any of the survey responses or final reflective statements ever mentioned a final draft or a final product as being the most important aspect of the writing process. In fact, very few students ever mentioned a final draft or a final product at all in any discursive or reflective responses.

The insignificance of a final product or final draft aligns with the purpose introducing students to less linear models of the writing process. Some students reflected upon the lack of revision in previous writing classes: "In other classes after we turned in an essay we never went back to the essay. We were done with it." And, "In previous courses we just wrote one draft...it was like we just had to do it and get the grade that we got." Other students made insightful connections between processes of writing and thinking, for example, "I have learned that the thinking process never just stops at the first draft. There will always be new thoughts that will eventually change your writing, which makes editing and revising very important." So, while students' experiences in previous classes had been focused on the final draft or final product, many did not feel that to be the case in my course and, rather, saw the "final draft" as just another piece of the recursive practices.

"you're going to mess up": Process and Generative Messiness

This emphasis on the connection between the writing process and the thinking process is even more important when considering my attempts to disable the writing process for my students. Many students said the lack of a strict format allowed more flexibility that resulted in deeper thinking. At the end of the course, I depended on discursive responses in the form of final reflections to show comfort, preference, and changes they saw in their own thinking and writing. For example, "I would say the greatest difference is that I don't need to follow a strict format or even feel like what I am writing has to be related to my end product, that it can just be a brain dump to begin with."

This student, among others, emphasized the importance of either prewriting or the first draft. Students started to understand how the drafting process in general provides the freedom to let their thinking develop over time rather than turning in the first thing they write. One student connected the drafting process and the importance of failure: "My writing process has changed because because I now know that the first draft is meant for mistakes and it helps me to have others read it and give me feedback." This student was not alone in this realization of the importance of struggle in writing. Many students came to appreciate mistakes and failures in the process — not just in drafting, but throughout the entire process:

- "I think the main thing I took from this class is that writing is a process. Which means you're going to mess up, get stuck, you might even start babbling. All that matters is that you progress…"

- "As difficult as this class was...the difficulty only lends itself to how much my writing actually improved (in my opinion)."

- "Writing should not necessarily be a pretty process. Revealing your worst draft isn't the worst thing in the world."

- "I learned not to be afraid of mistakes, but to learn from them to make it better."

- "...even if you come to college unprepared, this class doesn't use it against you. Instead, this class helps teach you how to improve...I grew from being scared that my writing sucked to being excited to talk about it with my teacher because I was proud of what I had written (and proud not because I'm cocky but because I had never had to work so hard and think so critically on an essay before)."

Each of these students are articulating the value of chaos in their writing — plans will change, ideas will evolve, and writing will be bad (at times). However, none of these students perceive this messiness as a bad thing. Instead, as one student reflected, the students see the writing process as a "chance to express themselves without being afraid of being wrong…" Each of them move from a fear of making a mistake to a gratitude for the opportunity to reveal mistakes and progress from them. The last student's reflection points to the implications of my emphasis on messiness and chaos. Although I never fully explained my intentions to the students, this student in particular is able to articulate that this class was a safe space to experiment with trial and error. Furthermore, that helped welcome this student to academic writing despite a feeling of college unpreparedness.

While some students focused on the importance of difficulty and messiness, others students' discursive responses stress the importance of revision and the connection to thinking:

- "I approach revising differently now. I would never really take the time to make changes in my paper that would make things easier to explain. Now I think deeper and explain things more...It was difficult for me to do that before."

- "I approach drafting and revising different than before. I put everything in my mind on paper, just letting all of my ideas out, then once I'm done I back to organize and revise my thoughts."

- "I got a lot better at writing multiple drafts and really spacing out what I was planning to write. Doing this not only made my writing less stressful but also slowed the process down for me making my writing better..."

- "I have learned that the thinking process never just stops at the first draft. There will always be new thoughts that will eventually change your writing, which makes editing and revising very important."

- "I realized that the writing process is never done. Every day we learn different things which causes our thoughts and ideas to change as well...It can and will make the writing more enjoyable…"

- "I used to be the type that did not believe in having multiple rough drafts because I didn't see the point. Now I love being able to hear feedback from others and go back to revise my work to make it better. It helps me be more open-minded..."

These students are starting to align revision with continual thinking, emphasizing how we question and learn through writing. They are grasping the idea that revision is not a step completed after drafting to "fix" problems with the writing. Instead, revision is something that can happen at any time and it can be recursive throughout the entire composition process. This realization that writing and revision can be recursive moves toward an understanding that writing and communicating can be and is chaotic and nonlinear. Furthermore, the last student's response listed here pushes the communicative acts from hearing other's feedback, to how that influences drafting and revising throughout composing, to how all of it promotes deeper thinking.

Thus, connecting thinking to writing, and specifically revising, aligns with the importance of DS and GS in this FYC class, as the normative process many of these students had been exposed to led them to believe that each stage was a task to complete.

However, most students, either through surveys, questionnaires, or final reflections, expressed some new realization that non-normative procedures and previously perceived "bad writing" is actually generative messiness in the larger schemes of communication and critical awareness.

One of the more interesting observations here, to conclude, is that the students' conceptions of writing actually started to mirror the social model of disability. Students came into the class uncomfortable the writing process and writing in general because they defined themselves as "bad" or "unskilled" writers, holding themselves up to a standard or ability to complete certain tasks. Much like the medical model of disability, they believed their writing needed to be "fixed." However, as the final survey responses and reflections show, students came to see the writing process not as mandated and isolated steps to "fix" or "cure" "problems" and "bad writing." Instead, they saw that the process needed to reflect their individualized needs as writers. Furthermore, the messiness and the chaos were important to developing thoughtful compositions. The divergent processes were generative, working toward understanding how "messiness" is part of the identity of the writing, further bolstering the importance of integrating DS and GS as insightful to composition.

IV. Chaos in the Classroom: Draft Amputation Revision Activity

The ways in which this disabled writing process shows up in my classroom is most prominent the amputation revision activity. The purpose of this revision is threefold and based upon a pattern I noticed in student writing (a pattern which I and all writers are guilty of at one time or another): students are reluctant to delete *anything* from their writing. When asked to consider the removal of even a sentence, let alone an entire

paragraph or more, most students either thought it was a sign that the writing was "bad" or shuddered at the possibility of rewriting or rethinking something they thought was sufficient the first time. So, first and foremost, I wanted to challenge students to become more comfortable with removing ideas, sentences, and paragraphs, regardless of how important they thought the initial writing was. Second, I wanted to fully integrate DS questioning of what it means to be "normal" into the nonlinear writing practices of the classroom; I believed thinking about revision as a type of amputation and prosthesis could provide that opportunity. And third, I wanted students to have another point of departure for thinking about disability as a positive identity category — something we had explored in various readings and videos throughout the course.[7]

This activity produced a variety of student responses — mostly frustration, anger, and reluctance. However, most students, although aggravated, came to appreciate the value of the revision activity. That activity and student responses are outlined here.

The first major essay the students write in this FYC class is the Implicit Claims Analysis essay. After reading Mike Rose's book *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*, the students write an essay in which they identify an implicit claim built up throughout the book. Additionally, students have to analyze how Rose uses evidence to develop the implicit claim. The essay prompt lends itself well to discussing the normative 5-paragraph organization (introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, concluding paragraph) with students. I usually take about one-half of a class to discuss organization and structure, and we discuss previous experiences with the 5-paragraph set-up. Then, I explain to them

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[7] As this section continues, I will emphasize the ways that disability is not just useful as a metaphor for writing, but how integrating DS to composition leads to understanding how disability is positive and generative.

how that organization could lend itself to this essay with some expansion and modification. For example, I encourage them to pick out three major pieces of evidence to take up the body paragraphs, but instead of one body paragraph for each summary and analysis of the evidence, they can take up however many paragraphs they feel necessary before moving on to the next piece of evidence. So, in some ways I am drawing upon past experiences with writing, but using it as a scaffold to push them to think more about academic writing. The students go through the entire process with this organization in mind, each draft getting stronger and stronger in the analysis in three pieces of evidence.

Students are asked to turn in three drafts of this essay throughout the process: first, second, and final. However, unbeknownst to students, the "final" draft is just one more draft in the process. The day they believe they are turning in the "final" draft, I begin class by discussing some more tenets of DS and GS, thinking about how society normalizes bodies — how a body "should" look and function. Furthermore, I ask them to consider the ways that non-normative bodies function in smart and strong ways. I ask them to consider previous readings and further the discussion about disability not as a tragedy, but rather as a way of functioning positively outside of "normal." One of the main concepts we discuss during the first part of this particular class meeting is mêtis, explained by Jay Dolmage in *Disability Rhetoric*:

> *Mêtis* is the rhetorical concept of cunning and adaptive intelligence...Unlike the forward march of logic, *mêtis* is characterized by sideways and backward movement…Importantly, *mêtis,* seemingly in all of these manifestations, has been allied with non-normative or extraordinary bodies. This is in part why *mêtis* has been denigrated or ignored – but is also why reclaiming *mêtis* is so important... (Dolmage, "Interview").[8]

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[8] Although I was initially introduced to the term in Dolmage's book *Disability Rhetoric*, I have provided a quote from an interview for clarity and conciseness.

Then, after this discussion, students are provided an in-class writing prompt:

> "What 3 body parts/senses are **the most important to you** (that could be removed, but you could still live)? ***Please keep it appropriate for school. Then, rank them in order (1 being most important), and give a brief explanation why they are so important, e.g. my right arm is important because I am right-handed, and I would have to relearn how to do the most basic everyday tasks with my left hand."

Then, the students are asked to consider a possible amputation:

> "What if #3 was removed? What are all of the ways your body would still function? How would other body parts need to become stronger to compensate for the loss?"

At this point in the class, students are often very confused. They ask a lot of questions about the purpose of this writing. But I start to make connections between the body, mêtis, and their writing. I start to ask questions, such as "How do amputations of the body require mêtis? How might similar removals affect our writing?"

Most students are able to pick up on where I am going with this activity. And many of them start to sound fearful and ask things like, "Are you going to make us take stuff out of our paper?" It is then that I provide a revision activity handout (Appendix). I *do* ask them to "take stuff out" of their essays, based upon their ranking of evidence. Much like their ranking of body parts, I ask them to identify and remove the weakest piece of evidence from the essay. All summary, analysis, and any mentions in the introduction and conclusion must be removed. Then, the students must make up for the removal in some way — they have to push their critical thinking to further analyze what remains. The students are not allowed to provide any new evidence. Instead, they must go back to brainstorming for the two pieces of evidence that are there, drafting up new paragraphs, and revising what is left. This means that students are not only challenged to undergo the daunting task of deleting words they've worked so hard to write, but also

invited to see how the 5-paragraph essay might not be the best option for academic and analytical writing they've come to expect.

Many leave class mumbling curse words under their breath and/or asking if they did hear me correctly that they have to remove entire paragraphs they have worked so hard to perfect. However, to ease fears, as well as to emphasize the connections to DS and GS, I remind students repeatedly, *this is not a tragedy*; *it's OK to go outside what you think is normal; this can ge good and generative.*

When students return the following class, they complete a peer review with both the "final" draft and the "revised/amputated" draft. With a peer, students decide which essay is stronger and, therefore, which one will be turned in for grading (although all drafts are turned in as a portfolio). Almost all students determine the revised amputated draft is the strongest, albeit begrudgingly. When asked to reflect upon why they chose the revised draft, students provided many reasons:

- "When I removed one of my main points, I felt that the paper was more concise and fit well together."

- "The revised draft, despite it lacking an element I wanted to have, was a more cohesive paper."

- "In the revised, I cut out a lot of the examples and strengthened the point I was trying to make….Before, it was 7 pages of examples all haphazardly thrown together, now it's 5 pages of still a of of examples, but hopefully deeper analysis."

- "I like my revised essay better because I believe that I took out the things that didn't fully support my claims well enough."

These students, amongst many others, show a similar emphasis on the clarity, coherence, and conciseness of their writing. They started to grasp the value in letting go of writing and ideas they thought were important, but not actually needed. Even when given the

opportunity to anonymously complain and express anger, many of them — even if they

do articulate frustration — find the exercise to be worthwhile and important for their

development as writers and thinkers. Most importantly, like the last student's response

above, many saw an important connection between their struggle with the amputation and

the development of their thinking.

This connection is emphasized in the following students' responses:

- "When it [the activity] first came around I was very confused and sort of mad since I had just written so much and now I had to get rid of it… But it was very interesting and surprising to me. I think it was a very cool idea to do it looking back."

- "This [the activity] was helpful because it forced me to analyze my other evidence deeper. This activity was also difficult because I felt that all the evidence in my essay was equally important and I didn't think I should remove any of them. But, after deciding which one to remove, I think my paper was stronger."

- "This was probably the most frustrating assignment I have ever been given. It wasn't that it was terribly hard...it was the fact that an entire section I had worked so hard on suddenly didn't matter anymore. It was extremely stressful, but it turned out that my revised version was even better than my original. This assignment showed me that not matter how much you have already written...there is always room to dig deeper into what you are writing...As much as I hated it at the time, this assignment turned out to be a good thing for my writing."

- "...there was just so much information that I overwhelmed myself. I guess this is why I was extremely happy we did the amputation activity, which by the way sounds gruesome but was actually not. I have a tendency to write too much...the amputation activity forced me to cut out a section, and after I cut out the section, it made my point more clear and made everything flow better."

- "I found myself restrained in my paper due to the length, not only that but not wanting to overexert myself writing extensively in various subjects. This activity allowed me to push my critical thinking skills deeper into my

subjects, creating a more engaging paper had the amputation not been
enacted."

These responses convey not only the grievances of writing as a whole (such as "not
wanting to overexert myself writing extensively on various subjects"), but also the
annoyances of revising and removing things writers work so hard to create. However, all
of these students saw the value of revising and removing ideas, sentences, paragraphs,
etc. Without the removed parts, students could not only still make their point, but create a
stronger essay by "disabling" what they believed to be their final draft. The discomfort
that students felt while undertaking this activity once again shows how conflict, tension,
and even possibly some pain can improve writing practices.

V. Conclusion

Much of the data presented and analyzed here points to one repeating point:
students became more comfortable with discomfort in topics presented in class, as well as
communicative practices, reinforcing the divergence of DS and GS. Although this is a
pilot study, these students do seem to share in the resistance of academic norms.
Furthermore, that resistance and discomfort seems to be generative as they learn new
writing practices for academic careers.

However, because this is a pilot study, the number of students analyzed here is
small. Continuing this study in a larger context could show how this discomfort may or
may not continue in any class with integrated DS and GS principles and concepts. A
larger study could also show if that discomfort was equally generative for thinking and
writing processes in different levels and types of composition classes. Additionally,
thinking about the ways that this approach to writing aligns with Universal Design for

Learning provides ample opportunities to further join DS principles with composition classes. Answering these questions can only lead to a more extensive understanding of how composition instructors can create inclusive and inviting classrooms for diverse student populations.

Appendix

Draft Amputation Revision Activity

The concept of Mêtis: "*Mêtis* is the rhetorical concept of cunning and adaptive intelligence. *Mêtis* demands...a view of the body and embodied thinking as being *double and divergent*. Unlike the forward march of logic, *mêtis* is characterized by sideways and backward movement… *Mêtis* has always been a big deal, and across cultures and eras. Importantly, *mêtis,* seemingly in all of these manifestations, has been allied with non-normative or extraordinary bodies. This is in part why *mêtis* has been denigrated or ignored – but is also why reclaiming *mêtis* is so important..." (Dolmage, "Interview").

INSTRUCTIONS:
- Print out at least one additional copy of DRAFT 3 (so you have two copies total)
- Identify your top 3 ideas/pieces of evidence in the current draft of your implicit claims analysis essay.
- On one copy of your draft, highlight all of #3 (including ways it shows up in the introduction and conclusion).
- Remove it.
- Revise your essay to compensate for the loss. **ONLY RULE:** You **CANNOT** add any more evidence in the form of stories from *Lives on the Boundary*.
  - You need to keep the length *about* the same (so, if you take out two paragraphs, about two new paragraphs need to be in the new revision, either through full paragraphs or sentences added here and there). **Focus more on analyzing what is already there, not adding more summary!**
- Make sure all drafts are labeled so I know which draft is which. You should have:
  - Draft 1
  - Draft 2
  - Draft 3 (both copies, one clean, one marked up)
  - Revised and/or amputated draft
- Bring EVERYTHING back next class — all prewriting, drafts, conference notes, etc.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:
- What is in the removed part that is absolutely necessary for other parts (especially the claim) to make sense?
  - What ideas are implicit (and/or explicit), needing to be analyzed?
  - How do we recreate those ideas and talk about them with the evidence that is left?

- What questions are raised in the sections left? How can we make this analysis stronger?
- How does the introduction and conclusion need to be revised to make sure everything still lines up OK?

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