

A photograph of a dormitory room with red lighting. The room contains metal bunk beds. One person is lying on the floor in the foreground, and another person is lying on the top bunk of the beds in the background. The floor is wooden, and there are some lights visible along the edge of the bunk beds.

TRAUMA- INFORMED PEDAGOGY

*Addressing Gender-Based
Violence in the Classroom*

EDITED BY JOCELYN E. MARSHALL
AND CANDACE SKIBBA

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

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Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Classroom

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To survivors of gender-based violence
and
feminist educators and mentors
To bell hooks (1952–2021)*

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Acknowledgments

The work in this field has never been richer, the future of our field never more imperiled.

–Carla Kaplan, *Signs* vol. 46 no. 4 (Summer 2021)

As first seeds of this project began with a conference panel, sincere gratitude goes to Sarah Goldbort for inviting Jocelyn to co-organize the initial discussion on “Cultivating a Consent Culture: Teaching Rhetoric, Writing, and Sexual Violence,” which took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as part of the 2018 Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) Annual Meeting. This collaboration occurred in part due to previous success with a co-organized roundtable discussion on “Feminist Pedagogy as Inclusivity: Teaching for Social and Emotional Justice” at the 2017 NeMLA meeting. We see this timeline as indicative of the strength behind continued collaborative feminist interventions, especially when they lead to work both inside and outside the academy. Thank you, Sarah, for the initial push to address gender-based violence in diverse ways.

We are also in gratitude to all contributors of this collection, many of whom have persevered through several challenges throughout the last few years. Organizing anything during the pandemic was (and still is) not easy, and it was a pleasure to continue to review drafts and learn from everyone as ideas and thinking evolved. Their work has unquestionably made us both better writers, thinkers, teachers, and community members. We hope readers are able to glean similar insights and moments of joy.

The conversations we had in other contexts during the writing and editing process were often inspired by fleeting moments of affirmation. It might have been another conference or a meeting with colleagues, but the conviction with which we derived the energy to complete this project would not have been possible without these numerous interlocutors.

Similarly, we thank each other for our shared commitment to this project in spite of many hurdles. Having no previous experience working together, the odds were not necessarily in our favor; yet, the dedication we each brought to the various tasks formed a rhythmic cadence, having one of us often seamlessly taking up the next step for the other as needed, which quickly formed a stable and secure bond vital to practicing the trauma-informed feminist approaches we aim to uphold in the classroom and beyond. This writing comes from a very personal

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space for all of us, and working through that delicate dance of personal and professional was possible via the mutual vulnerability and support that we provided one another. It is clear this experience and the resulting new understandings will inform future individual work and collaborations.

Last, we thank our publisher for the flexible support and much creative freedom throughout the past two years. This final manuscript is much different than the previously proposed collection, and that is largely due to the space Emerald Publishing provided to experiment with and grow new ideas and opportunities.

Introduction

Jocelyn E. Marshall and Candace Skibba

Abstract

This edited volume brings feminist theory, critical pedagogy, and trauma theory in conversation with one another in order to analyze how gender-based violence is being discussed in educational settings. Lines of inquiry include how and why this topic is being carried out, suggestions for the future, as well as recognition and respect for the emotional toll embedded within these important conversations. In the introduction to the volume, the editors lay the foundation for understanding how the genres and topics communicate with one another to contextualize learning as intellectual, emotional, reciprocal, and ever-changing.

Keywords: Trauma; intersectionality; gender-based violence; affect; content warning; visual expression; poetry; interview

“We recognize that violence is woven throughout the fabric of all social structures and that this violence is experienced differently according to cultural, racial, sexual, class, ethnic, age and national identity...Within the intersection of gender, violence, and power exists one of the keys to understanding oppression and resistance”.

–*Heresies* vol. 2 no. 2 (Summer 1978)

“...the idea that everyone does not experience and interpret injury in the same way has utility in exploring the diverse responses needed for various feminist interventions”.

–Rebecca Wanzo, *differences* vol. 30 no. 1 (May 2019)

This book project began before the coronavirus pandemic, but its relationship to trauma is inseparable from the living conditions within which it was finalized. “Trauma” now seems to be a kind of buzzword, a matter-of-fact state, a daily (re) occurrence. With this collection and its particular focus on gender-based violence,

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, 1–7

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however, we seek to maintain the severity and urgency of this term and field of study within the context of patriarchal oppression, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination and violence. The 2021 World Health Organization's report maintains that intimate partner violence is the most widespread form of violence against women globally, with nearly one-third of all women-identifying people having been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence at least once since the age of 15 years (2021, pp. viii, xvi). We know additional factors such as race, queerness, and class are tied to even higher numbers, and we also know that during the pandemic-induced quarantine, cases of assault and abuse also rose. Though the contributions to this collection were not drafted with this awareness, the need for such a resource remains high, and we anticipate this will be one of many volumes to come as additional knowledge is gathered and shared.

As communicated through a range of genres, the pieces consider three key questions: How do we teach about gender-based violence? How do we discuss traumatic experiences without perpetuating harm? And how do we care for ourselves and each other in ways that support sustainable healing, growth, and well-being? Contributors address these questions by speaking from various backgrounds in higher education, curation, art, and creative writing – presenting multiple approaches to pedagogical decisions, theoretical underpinnings, and individual and collective actions. As Angela Y. Davis reminds us, “Violence is one of those words that is a powerful ideological conductor, one whose meaning constantly mutates.” (2000) The collection aims to address gender-based violence in a multitude of ways, responding to a range of needs, and to showcase several approaches to feminist and trauma-informed pedagogies. This consideration for radical feminisms alongside trauma studies has involved drawing from the scholarship and activism of such thinkers as Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Cathy Caruth, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde.

The contributions have been divided into three sections: “Chaotic Spaces, Kairotic Classrooms”; “Reclaiming & (Re)Presenting: Pleasure, Pain, and Power”; and “Affect & Empathy: Stretching Across Bodies and Disciplines, Languages and Nations.” With the first, we consider traditional US Western classroom dynamics, contemporary feminist movements, and the imbrication of popular culture. In an attempt to address a range of readers and fields, the traditional classroom space is recontextualized in the second section with black feminist pleasure, exhibition design addressing gender-based violence, and indigenous feminist artistic practice. The final section highlights the affective dimensions of trauma-informed pedagogies that complicate understandings of healing and learning. Though a collection that seeks to address the interests and needs of various educators is bound to have some theoretical gaps, these three sections address some of the most routine questions in discussions of trauma-related topics and gender-based violence, such as: How can we navigate conversations of consent? How do we bring issues of gender-based violence into seemingly unrelated fields or topics of study? And how can we address the emotional and mental impact of traumatic experience in ways that do not retraumatize ourselves and others?

You will find that the genres included in this collection veer from a standard academic publication. Poetry is infused throughout the collection as are various interviews – one of which provides insight into the artistic process as it relates to feminism and pedagogy. This combination is in support of our entire ethos of breaking down preconceived notions of what is considered ‘intellectual’ and ‘serious’ scholarship. While we dialogue with established pedagogical theories and definitions of key terms, we highlight the lived experience of our authors, artists, and ourselves as ‘evidence’ enough. In the process of collecting and editing these pieces, it has become clear to us that more collections of this sort are necessary in order to continue the process of pushing boundaries, sharing vulnerability, and questioning authority.

Meaghan Ford’s poem “Disasterology” opens the first section by referencing the gender-based violence inherent in the college classroom in which discrimination comes in the form of objectification, hypersexualization, and hierarchy, to name just a few. Should we find the need to include content warnings, this would be the place to include them. However, we have purposefully chosen to forgo them. This decision is not to be insensitive, nor outwardly brazen. Rather, we see it necessary to recognize that through difficult and challenging texts comes growth, through recognition and advocacy of one’s own limitations comes social justice. It is simply not enough to include a content warnings such that we, as editors and writers, are protected from possibly ameliorating pain and difficulty to our audience. This is a box that we have chosen not to check so as to serve as an example of how trauma-informed pedagogy goes beyond protectionism and box-checking. It is truly an invitation to vulnerability.

Following this line of thought, Kellie Jean Sharp’s piece demonstrates a clear analogy between the ways in which the vulnerability necessary in a sexual experience that is consensual is akin to that of teaching research and writing. “However, the values of informed consent clearly connect to the values of ethical research and authorship. Ethical sex based on informed consent requires a respect for autonomy, understanding boundaries, clearly informing others, understanding what another expects of us; these are also all required for ethical writing and scholarship.” Sharp outlines practical measures that she has implemented in her classes to create an environment of community consent and awareness.

Candace Skibba’s essay continues this line of thinking through the content of the chapter as well as the form in which it is written. Instead of a content warning, the chapter opens with a series of inquiries that prime the reader. This is meant to invite the audience to actively participate in the reading and thought process, to respect their own reactions as valid and necessary, thereby facilitating empowerment. The chapter then combines commentary on a finite teaching situation, which is contextualized within Skibba’s experience teaching over the course of many years, with self-reflection on emotional intelligence and vulnerability – a combination that creates a sense of openness and understanding, which Sharp so clearly outlines.

In the final piece of this section, Elizabeth Johnston Ambrose suggests that analyzing certain texts that might naturally come with a trigger warning or be

deemed part of the cancel culture provide a rich experience for students. By embarking on this investigation into the rhetoric of the cancel culture as shown through the songs of (and exchanges between) Rihanna and Eminem, she highlights the need for our work as instructors to step outside of the canon. She states, “How do we, instructors in classrooms largely populated by Gen Z’ers, help our students to navigate the narratives they confront daily in social media and their broader public lives?” She goes on to posit, “I believe that engaging our students in instructor-facilitated discussion of ‘Love the Way You Lie’ as both rhetorical discourse and cultural artifact can equip students with the critical vocabulary and analytical skills to disrupt the narratives that continue to sustain and promote gender-based violence.” Though not included in the traditional learning objectives of a course, Johnston Ambrose maintains that the discursive space of popular culture, at times more “real” for our students than the actual shared physical space of the classroom, must also be included in attempts to eradicate gender-based violence.

Ann Pleiss Morris’ chapter returns to the concept of space as shared in Sharp’s piece. She opens by describing a very poignant moment in which Morris finds herself outside of the university setting being recognized and called upon by a student in the very public and charged atmosphere of the 2017 Women’s March in Madison, Wisconsin. The course that she was to teach that semester celebrated women’s voices – albeit those from a different century and different country. What began as a seemingly traditional literary journey provoked very contemporary conversation and relevant intellectual growth. By connecting the reading to campus events, the unfolding new presidency, and translating that work into their own writing, Morris led her students to step outside of the canon, embrace “rogue” writing, and collaboratively create their own literary periodical. Commitment to collaborative work as part of a methodology to address trauma narratives in a safe way upends hierarchical classroom dynamics and decenters instructor positioning. This invites multiple perspectives and layered reflections, which allows for students to take responsibility and hold leadership roles in keeping each other accountable for anti-misogynist and anti-racist thinking. In the end, through a trauma-informed pedagogy, Morris empowers students, which prompted them “to treasure their own narratives in a time where the stories of women and marginalized people seemed again (or perhaps as always) endangered.”

The second section in the collection steps away from what would be considered ‘traditional’ institutions of learning to consider trauma-informed and feminist pedagogies more broadly – addressing collaborative settings, exhibition spaces, and art-making. This section invites the reader to engage beyond theory and the written-word, embracing the wide-ranging visceral and affective impacts of visual art and culture.

As we see in the poetry of Ford that opens this section, the physical remnants of gender-based violence might dissipate, but the lingering trauma remains. In the initial chapter, Gabrielle Civil ponders what might be done to counter trauma, while recognizing its power and sustainability. There is no suggestion that the pain be erased, nor that the trauma ‘solved.’ Rather, the emphasis in Civil’s approach is multisensory, encouraging embodiment. She shares that she and her

students “were suffused in profound anxiety, illness, suffering, and death. This was clearly not the best condition to explore pleasure – or trauma-informed pedagogy – and yet, our need for this was even greater than before.” Civil speaks directly to us, the readers, and thereby invites a collective understanding of learning, knowledge building, and care. And she does so through her own reflection of the process of teaching – modeling self-reflection and emotional intelligence in her writing and methodology.

The next chapter is self-reflective as well in that it is an interview with curator Monika Fabijanska, who recounts the experience of putting together the first survey on rape in contemporary women’s art in the United States. Fabijanska intersperses her own writing throughout the interview in a sort of metatextual manner that allows for layers of understanding that go beyond the exhibit itself. Similar to Civil, we are allowed behind the scenes into the process rather than focusing solely on the final product. In fact, it could be suggested that this, in and of itself, is a trauma-informed method. By describing the process of creating rapport and connection with the artists as well as recognizing the importance of the space of the exhibit, Fabijanska demonstrates her own vulnerability. She points out that this process-oriented work was of importance to her as the show wasn’t simply about a sensationalized provocation. Rather, it was about understanding, for, in her words, “Understanding – especially standpoints that may not be our own – provides safety.”

While the artistic output was not the focus of Fabijanska’s chapter, the images of Julia Rose Sutherland’s art installation provide visual stimuli and, perhaps, a cognitive shift for our brains. This mindful switch in how we “read” this text as opposed to the previous one is purposeful and trauma-informed. The extremely powerful images of “Npuinu (ên-pu-i-nu) Corpse” are combined with the artists’ own reflective description as well as an interview carried out with Jocelyn E. Marshall. Like Fabijanska, Sutherland places importance on the care with which her work is being developed. She establishes emotional connections with the folks who provided their bodies as models for her work. Through that process, the artist recognizes her position of power, while also identifying and working through the possible corporeal trauma that the artistic process would render. In her own explanation of the feminist process, she maintains: “There’s vulnerability in this process, but also there needs to be respect and everyone needs to feel safe and seen and have the conversations that make them comfortable to be in this position, you know.” Perhaps that process comes with both pain and pleasure, as suggested by Civil. The effects are validated and recognized, but also cared for and compensated.

In the third and final section of the collection, we return to the traditional setting of the classroom in tandem with local and global challenges that come in and out of the learning space. Opening with a third poem by Ford, we are reminded of the vital dynamism between vulnerability and resistance concomitant to the affective labor involved with trauma-informed work. This powerful artistry is meant to prime readers for the rigorous scholarship of Sarita Canon, who reminds us the significant role storytelling plays in better understanding ourselves and others.

You will notice that even in the analysis of the artistic pieces included in the previous section, the thread that connects all of our work is the story. What draws us together as humans is our ability and propensity to make sense of our worlds through the act of creating a narrative. Narratives will vary due to cultural nuance, language choice, structure, and argumentation, but stories will always be personal. Through the creation and communication of a story, we intend to connect. Trauma-informed pedagogy, as devised by Canon, encourages students to act as witnesses to one another – thereby empowering their story. This method does not force agreement, nor compliance. Rather, Canon’s way of facilitating intellectual and emotional growth is by encouraging students to take part in the process of reading, listening, and writing so as to create a community of care. Recognizing the weight of this process forms part of Canon’s method. It is important to point out the challenges involved in facilitating this type of class. If one is to be true to their own pedagogy, they must also care for themselves. Let this be a reminder to all of us that our most radical acts as instructors may be setting our own boundaries – as long as we do so with mutual understanding and respect. The shared experience that Canon prioritizes is reflective of the experiences that the writers of this volume have shared – in particular its editors. As Canon explains: “By building solidarity around shared experiences, women can better understand each other and, ultimately, think through how social and political change might be enacted.” In some ways, all of us in this collection are sharing our experiences in order to enact social and political change *through our pedagogies*. In our own writing and editing processes, solidarity and sharing experiences are akin to mutual vulnerability. Some of the chapters include references to personal trauma. Others to the vulnerability of teaching against the grain. In all instances, as authors and colleagues, we have empowered one another through flexible deadlines, mindful editing and feedback, virtual meeting sessions, and a sincere ethos that has kept in mind that the process of writing this collected volume is, in many ways, just as valuable as the finished result. This has all been carried out within a framework that is devoid of standard hierarchical egotism so often imbued in higher education.

Engaging with the weight of the interconnected dynamics of the classroom, Jocelyn E. Marshall’s chapter draws from Audre Lorde’s “The Uses of Anger” to consider how empathy may be cultivated as a soft skill for stronger interpersonal relationships. Speaking closely with Canon, Marshall highlights the need for mutual vulnerability between instructor and student. By braiding queer feminisms with interdisciplinary approaches, the trauma-informed pedagogy upholds radical empathy as the linchpin to Lorde’s advocacy of articulating anger with precision, listening intensely, gaining new insight, and enacting change.

With the final chapter in this collection, Tiffany Cone takes us from the traditional North American higher education setting to an independent university for women in Bangladesh. Cone’s students typically come from countries where conflict is constant, and schooling that prioritizes critical thinking through which to confront the conflict is rarely offered to women. Cone invites us to think through the institutional barriers and envision modes of compassionate connection.

Whether an educator, workshop facilitator, artist, curator, or otherwise, we hope this collection offers ideas for dynamic approaches to lessons, activities, and projects related to trauma and gender-based violence. As the five principles of trauma-informed care are typically considered to be safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment, we invite you to review each contribution for their various engagements with these tenets and models they seem to offer. We then encourage trying some out, finetuning others, inventing a few more, and sharing new insights. Trauma-informed work is collaborative work, and it is ongoing. Here, we plant some initial seeds inspired by the work of many thinkers with anticipation of supporting ourselves and our communities in even more robust and endearing ways.

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