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“Access Fatigue: Public Rhetorical Pedagogy of Disability in Everyday Life”

Time: 35-40 mins

Materials:

Outline of talk (12-point and 16-point font)

Slides (in folder w/ audio file)

Transcript of audio

Materials available in electronic format at annikakonrad.com/presentations

Thank you

Project Background

- How public audiences engage disability
- DS and Rhet Studies – access from rhetorical perspective
- Aim: structures of habit – more inclusive
- First-person accounts – BVI
- Building cultures that place access at center of rhetorical situation

[SLIDE]

Presentation Map

- My story – intro to access
- Book project - Access fatigue
- Future research

[SLIDE]

What is access?

- What access means to you
- What do you think of when you think of access?
- Resources and tools – wheelchair ramp, braille signage, disabled parking
- All important – but static
- Moving people to do things differently
- Active, collaborative, lived experience

Transition: story about my experience as legally blind person

[SLIDE]

As an example, I'll start by describing some of the steps I took to gain access to this space.

Before going on the market, no idea

- No structure to gain information
- Asked many people, conflicting responses, advised against altogether
- List of things I would need

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- Envisioned different scenarios, some familiar
- invent alternative ways of organizing myself and others around tasks and tools in space and time
- choices about tone and style
- informational, instructional, inviting
- wanted people to be comfortable, have information

Why I describe this

- not to complain
- everyday life with disability is rhetorical
- unique - requires moving people to do things differently
 - often more collaboratively, or organize ourselves differently
- range of complex rhetorical moves
 - illuminate habits of daily living
 - so ingrained they go unnoticed and unexamined – become commonplace
- type of rhetorical work that no one formally learns

[SLIDE]

Access Orientation

Transition: Before moving on, orient you toward access in this context.

- for practical purposes
- what it looks like to collaboratively create access.
- Two levels: 1) what access looks like for me and 2) what access looks like for you.

For me, asked for volunteers to help with the following tasks:

- moderate the discussion
- media

And here are some ways you can participate in access for me:

- state your name
- eye contact – not as much as you'd expect here or in passing
- look down more - iPad
- ask questions!

Although I don't know exactly what access looks like for you, here are some ways I've facilitated access for a variety of participants in this context:

- scripts
- also online
- image descriptions
- an example, if I were to describe the following image, [SLIDE], I would say, "This is an image of a striped cat with an aggressively inquisitive look on her face. Her ears are turned back in an alarming way, and her head is cocked so as to suggest, "Don't mess!"
- clarity and ease of understanding
- use the space as you need

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- communicate with me about any access needs, volume

What access orientation calls us to question

- discuss access with my students
- returning to the question of access again and again
- space for students – own access needs
 - collaborative and independently explore what access means for...

Transition: in that same spirit...

[SLIDE] QUESTION

How do these access moves call us to question normative ways of being, moving, doing, and relating that orient us toward...

Tools

Technologies

Tasks

Responsibility

Autonomy

Authority

Independence

Embodiment

Literate Practices

Transition:

- will engage this question through research > access fatigue

[SLIDE]

RESEARCH

BOOK OVERVIEW AND CASE STUDY: ACCESS FATIGUE

- Began with a community writing project
- Since 2014, published over 100 narratives on “The Outlook From Here”

[SLIDE], which you can find at theoutlookfromhere.wordpress.com.

[image description] On this slide is a screenshot of the blog’s home page that shows a cloudy blue banner at the top with the title of the blog on it and the subtitle “stories about blindness and visual impairment,” a menu bar that reads “about,” “share your story” and “who we are.” There is also a teaser for a story called “Mower Power,” and next to it is an image of a woman moving the grass.

- range of topics - hiking, hunting, running, fishing, cooking, dating, voting, learning, working, and traveling
- range of contexts in which people encounter rhetorical situations
- introduce you to research question, audio narrative
 - originally written for blog and later produced for Wisconsin Public Radio
- While you listen (3.5 mins), think about the following – love to hear your thoughts

[SLIDE]

Questions for Listening

- What normative ways of being, moving, doing, and relating contribute to the isolation bubble?
- How does the potential for dependency contribute to the isolation bubble?
- What rhetorical strategies is the speaker called to deploy to invite engagement?

[image description] On this slide is a picture of the narrator, Kathie Schneider, hosting a community workshop called “Blindness 101.” Kathie is walking with her yellow lab guide dog Luna, alongside two other people, one of whom is holding a white cane and wearing a blindfold. They are all wearing winter jackets because they are in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

- Volunteer will pass out transcript
- Starts with, “I don’t think much about being blind, I just am, and always have been so since birth.”

[PLAY AUDIO]

- Several rhetorical encounters
 - Sure she wants to sign the book
 - Seated in a pew by herself
 - Purchases gourds at farmers market
- Ideas about who a blind person is, capacities, discomfort about the potential for dependency
- Speculates about why people might not sit next to her
 - Wonder if they might have to help
- They retreat and leave the burden of rhetorical invitation with Kathie
- Decisions about how to respond
 - Snarky reply
 - Teach people
 - Wear a sign that says “I don’t often bite?”

Research Questions

- Use writing to speak back to rhetorical situations
- Designed study that investigates nature of rhetorical experiences

[SLIDE]

- In what ways is living with a disability experienced as rhetorical activity?
- What ideas, discourses, and ways of relating create and constrain rhetorical situations for individuals with disabilities?
- What are the lived consequences of the rhetorical demands of living with a disability?

My book...

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- three case studies of contexts in which participants perform *everyday rhetorical labor of disability*
- in the context of employment, information access, and social life.

Theoretical Grounding

[SLIDE]

- DS/RS – disability has been theorized as many rhetorical dimensions:
 - Stephanie Kerschbaum’s work on disclosure – both speaker and audience need to recognize disability as identity – as opposed to deficit
 - Margaret Price’s work on kairotic spaces – shows us how power relationships structure spaces of academic life that have high expectations for spontaneity, but go unnoticed by those who move through those spaces with ease
 - Brenda Brueggemann’s work on passing shows us how the rhetorical work of disability is an art
 - Jay Dolmage’s work on access as “a way to move” and *métis* calls our attention to access as an embodied, cunning rhetorical act
 - Neil Simpkins’ work on accommodations transfer shows us how students transfer rhetorical knowledge about access across contexts
- deserve to be understood as fraught processes, rather than mere expectations

[SLIDE]

- But to date, distinct events and exigencies, higher education.
- gesture toward the repetitive nature and high demands
- none from an everyday perspective
- interdependence has long been an attractive theoretical answer
- have no structure of habit for interdependent relationality in everyday life

What I contribute [could cut this]

- rhetorical theories of access as everyday experience > normative habits that need to change
- everyday rhetorical labor of disability – overarching
 - identify and explain the real material, social, and emotional consequences
- I call this rhetorical work a “labor” – involves a value-exchange
- participants use rhetoric to gain access to something, whether a material or immaterial thing
- repetitive, recursive demand, “a feedback loop,” > *access fatigue*
 - more about in a moment

Population

First, to give you some context for the population I’ve been working with...

[SLIDE]

- 1 in 5 people in the U.S. is living with a disability
- 10 million are blind or visually impaired

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- includes a wide spectrum of blindness, ranging from remaining usable vision to complete blindness.
- “people who are blind and visually impaired,” I am referring to this wide spectrum.
- estimated unemployment rates ranging from 50-70%.
- other barriers
 - access to assistive technologies, literacy, and transportation, as well as social and emotional isolation.

Methods

Transition: observations about community writers’ constant encounters with rhetorical situations in various contexts,

- designed a method
 - elicits experience across contexts
 - development over a lifetime
- a rhetorical life history interview tool
- semi-structured interviews with 22 blind and visually impaired individuals, one parent of a blind child, and two blindness professionals, one of whom is also visually impaired.
- ages 21 to 72.
- a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006)

Transition: which led me to the following theoretical contributions.

[SLIDE]

Contributions/Argument

- critical, creative, and community writing > performs and deconstructs
- three original concepts
 - access fatigue
 - normative commonplaces
 - a rhetorical pedagogy of interdependence.
- Access fatigue as a method for identifying normative habits and structures
- Normative commonplaces
 - Workplaces – normative workplace commonplaces
 - Widely held beliefs about work and working bodies – shape interactions around access
 - Lost opportunities to employment
 - Information access
 - Technological commonplaces
 - Forego access to literacy
 - Teach non-normative ways of thinking
 - Humanness, agency, social responsibility, and community
 - propose a structure of interdependent relationality
 - used to teach and learn habits
- lived consequences of logics of individual responsibility for justice

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- warning sign for other logics, endurance for participation of non-normative bodies in public space is limited

Case Study

Transition: access fatigue as case study of larger concepts

I theorize access fatigue through four defining features.

[SLIDE]

I argue that access is...

1. A self-performance
2. A value exchange
3. A rhetorical pedagogy
4. An internal-external feedback loop

[SLIDE]

Access is a performance of self: "Getting people comfortable with the fact that I'm comfortable"

- a particular kind of disabled self
- "making it okay" for other people
- Create comfort around unfamiliar relationality
 - Effective for inviting engagement

[SLIDE]

Nadine

- African American, cisgender, lesbian, blind woman in her twenties who uses a white cane
 - "Sometimes I spend more time getting people comfortable with the fact that I'm comfortable."
 - projecting a comfortable affect helps calm people
 - facilitates their participation in access

I've developed this very laid-back demeanor which is just a part of my own personality, whereby I say things like 'Hey, how ya doin'? My name is Nadine, what's your name? Okay, awesome. Um, I'm wondering if you could just give me a little assistance getting here or could you tell me directions on how to get here. Now it's completely fine. What we'll do is I'll just take the back of your arm, okay, just like that, all right, we are good to go, now we're groovin'!' [all said in a very sweet, soft voice]

- accepting the need to comfort others
- being quite good at doing so
- demands for comfortable kind of disabled self > to access fatigue

Transition: which we see in the next example.

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[SLIDE]

Candace

- white, female, cisgender blind guide dog user in her thirties.
 - smiling even in the face of access denials
 - She said, “Anytime I’ve gone in there [a particular grocery store] alone and I’ve asked for a shopper, they’ve given me such attitude about it. It’s just sort of like, ‘We’re busy right now.’”
 - polite disabled self > navigating through the access denial:
 - “I mean I don’t really show them my frustration. I just try to smile but inside I’m at like a hundred degrees.”
 - pressure to remain polite - stop shopping at grocery store
 - real emotional and material consequences
 - For Candace, avoiding a particular grocery store, constraining her options for obtaining food and allowing ableist and normative practices to prevail.

[SLIDE]

Access is a Value Exchange: “How much is this worth?”

- so many rhetorical challenges on a daily basis
- assess the value of each interaction
- weigh the value of access against the amount of rhetorical effort required
- Roberto, a Latinx, cisgender, blind man in his sixties who travels with a guide dog
 - “pick battles” > can’t put all energy toward every barrier
 - Walter, an orientation and mobility instructor
 - “you have to ask yourself, how much is this worth?”

[SLIDE]

Nadine

Nadine has to weigh the rhetorical work of access against other forms of inclusion:

And I sometimes have to figure out which battles to fight. Because I’ll find people who are very helpful to me with certain things related to my disability, with helping me get around, get my food at a buffet, but I also will hear some of those individuals say some things that are just really racially insensitive or just ignorant...And figuring out which one of those things do you deal with. That can be challenging. It’s unfortunate but trying to discern do you challenge and potentially get into an argument or do you ensure that you’re going to get home safely tonight? Which one do you want to deal with today?

- self-performance - sometimes gaining access is not worth it.

[SLIDE]

Access is a Rhetorical Pedagogy: “Can I help you through the line?”

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- can be so repetitive, intending to teach interdependent behaviors that they hope will transfer to future situations
- positive reinforcement of access-oriented behaviors to encourage such behavior in future.
- deliberately thanking people for helping, even when they didn't do the right thing.
 - encourages future participation and avoids exacerbating social isolation.

[SLIDE]

Abigail

- white, cisgender, woman in her sixties who travels with a guide dog.
 - educate her church community – been part of it for a long time
 - has a multi-modal approach
 - long, arduous process:

To keep putting myself in those spots, because I'm on the parish council, people have obviously voted me in, but then at the same point when it comes to a mix and mingle it's ugly for five minutes and then it's all fine. To keep doing those things and know that next time we might get it down to 4.3 minutes or, that's the hard stuff. Because you can educate and you can give them five tips or they can see it in their bulletin or wherever, it's on the Catholic digest for November, but to translate that into, "Can I help you through the line?" That's a long process.

[SLIDE]

Access is an Internal-external feedback loop: "Forget it. I'll just figure it out"

- making one's self vulnerable to audience reactions
- which can stifle rhetorical activity
- an internal-external feedback loop
 - external experiences influence internal sense of self.

[SLIDE]

Lisa

- white, cisgender woman in her fifties who uses a white cane for travel
 - "dynamic loop"
 - a time when her external interactions stifled
 - long day of having a friend guide her around an unfamiliar campus
 - at the end of the day – told friend didn't need help
 - found she had no idea how get back to her dorm – close to tears:

and I remember asking somebody for directions to the south dorms and they're like, 'they're right over,' the infamous 'right over there,' which is so not useful. And at that point I was so undone and so tired and so overwhelmed. The usual thing I would say is, 'Well can you please, can you describe that to me because I don't see where you're pointing.' I couldn't even do it. I was like okay I'll figure it out. I'll go in that general direction. I'll figure it out...I was really aware that the more fatigued I am or

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feeling unconfident or whatever else is going on when I ask for help and someone doesn't give good directions then it's just like, now it's another layer of having to ask and sometimes it's just like forget it. I'll figure it out. ...it's now more exhausting to ask you for more directions than it is to just figure it out.

- harness their internal feelings and responses - way they'll be receptive to. "it's right over there" left Lisa with little rhetorical energy for navigating yet another interaction in the everyday rhetorical labor of disability.

Taken together, these four qualities of the rhetorical work of access demonstrate the social, emotional and materials consequences of logics of individual rhetorical responsibility for access. I argue that access fatigue can result in a form of what I call rhetorical weariness, which speaks to a broader interest in public discourse about growing demands for rhetorical activity from marginalized people.

The concept of diversity fatigue has entered public discourse, as people of color, women, and LGBTQ people have, too, become weary of the rhetorical work of diversity. What access fatigue offers that is unique is a method for identifying normative habits and ways of moving, being, and doing that cause rhetorical weariness to accumulate and prevent the pursuit of access. While all forms of inclusion require moving norms and developing more expansive ways of being, access fatigue specifically attunes us to the energy required for moving others into interdependent ways of being in community.

These four defining features of the rhetorical work of access attune us to the normative behaviors and habits and need to change to support more inclusive public life. These examples demonstrate that we need audiences who...

[SLIDE]

- invite engagement with difference
- embrace unfamiliar relationality
- uptake non-normative ways of being, moving, doing
- practice a notion of agency based on cooperation
- exercise a form of leadership that involves challenging and reimagining norms

[SLIDE]

Future Research

After the publication of my first book, I plan to pursue a second project that explores the applications of a rhetorical pedagogy of interdependence for public, educational, and professional life. My second book will offer frameworks and models for more inclusive structures of human relationality in classrooms, writing programs, and community partnerships.

In composition studies, we have long upheld collaboration as a model for writing instruction, but my future research asks, what does the idea of interdependence offer

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that collaboration does not? What deficit ideas about writing and resources for writing need to be disrupted and reimaged in order for interdependence to become enacted?

[SLIDE]

My next steps for developing a pedagogy of interdependence include investigating normative commonplaces in writing pedagogies and programs. Some commonplaces I suspect I will find include...

- Collaboration
- Engagement
- Talk
- Writing process ideas (revision, outlining, drafting)
- Literacy as visual activity

By interrogating these commonplaces in composition, I aim to build specific models for placing access at the center of all that we do as teachers and leaders.

[SLIDE]

CALL TO ACTION

In closing, I'd like to suggest that we use access as an interpretive lens for all that we do. Access is an act of perception that orients our understandings of who does and does not belong in social space. Sociologist Tanya Titchkosky argues that if we want to fight for access, we need to question the very interpretive relations that make disability recognizable. She says, "everyone participates in making what is noticed and imagined as disability" (56). I ask you, then, to imagine a pre-emptive, proactive, creative, anticipatory, interdependent culture of access in which all individuals participate in the rhetorical processes of challenging deficit discourses and reconfiguring normative relations, regardless of inexperience, discomfort, or ignorance. Instead of allowing our uncertainties or discomfort to result in access denials, we need to assume responsibility for our own interpretive relations so that we can all participate in spaces of living, learning, working, and writing.

[SLIDE] Thank you.

[SLIDE]

Find out more about my work in the following publications...

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