

Divergent Process: Consideration of Accommodation Failures and Lacking Accountability

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Author Note

This paper represents the author's reflections on the following rubric, simplified from the full text found within our online course platform:

- Overall experience of being in a group
- What developmental stage do you think the group is in?
- How has your understanding of your social location developed?
- What do you imagine you could do to influence a shift in group facilitation?
- What do you imagine might be your experience within this group process as facilitator?

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In speaking to my own social location within the TWT class of '25 cohort, and the utter failures exhibited by this group in various efforts (with some even described as support) with regard to marginalized members, I'll begin with a quote from Sirkin & Stalk (1990):

Together, managers and mill workers learned to take the initiative not just for identifying problems but also for developing better processes for fixing problems and improving products. Their approach did not depend on key senior executives taking charge and telling people what to do. Instead, the entire organization learned how to learn.

Indeed, this example from the world of business originated around the time I was coming of age in a world at odds with my own embodied oddity. It reflects much of the same rhetoric of shared responsibility and bearing the weight of progress within a facilitated container as that found in MatrixWorks (Meredith & Rome, 2017), which some of us read throughout our first term together. I bit into both messages, hook, line, and sinker ... to my own detriment.

I consciously used my undergraduate studies as a time set a side for learning how to learn. I was unique among my peers at the time in this regard. They were seeking satisfaction near the bottom of a bottle, between the sheets, or in obtaining credentials useful for cultivating an income stream, above all else. I engaged with classes from nationally ranked Business and Music schools in a wide variety of arts on my way to a degree focused on vocal music, with a secondary focus on information systems. It was such a foreign planet that I found myself inhabiting that they may as well have been shouting "Human rights be damned, as long as I get mine!" at every single house party (or alternative campus gathering) endured over the entire course of my 5-year degree program. All that said, my experience in groups continues to be ruled by sensory impacts very seldom acknowledged as valid, and even less often held with care.

I wouldn't place this cohort outside of Storming on the model offered in the writing prompt provided. To wit, I would defend the position that we have direct experience with how "[Storming] can become destructive to the team and will lower motivation if allowed to get out of control" (Wikipedia, 2018), given our member attrition rate and witness of widely held consideration of abandonment from those who remain. I also hold witness to the presence of intense reactivity from positions of power. I am of the opinion that the first loop in Sirkin & Stalk (1990), *Fix-As-Fail*, is where we reside, not just as a team, but as an institution. We see personal, microsystem, and macrosystem dysfunction abounding and find ourselves encouraged simply to sit with the discomfort of in vivo social injustice and human rights violations. What I wouldn't give at this point for a sign of embracing the second loop, *Prevention!* *Root Cause Analysis* and subsequent *Anticipation* loops seem like far off mystical realms from within this swamp of insolence and abdication of responsibility that I find myself slogging through daily.

Understanding of my location within the cohort hasn't seen the addition of *new* lessons, per se, over the course of this first year together. The entirely disappointing, at times terrifying, even enraging, reality of life as usual in the good ol' U.S.ofA. is fully reflected within this group via ableism aplenty, and within the institution via bypassing and coddling of abusers. My role within the group, similarly to time in senior roles in my prior career, has varied with emergent need and represented skill in every location fulfilled (during those times I had any spoons left over after compromising for others' comfort). The only shifts I find myself noting at present have been minimal and largely irrelevant to growth of the larger organism, in that development of insular subgroups has continued as expected. My needs have continually been left out of consideration, much less shared conversation. Without paying disability tax, I'm simply absent.

Neuroqueer Naropa, a recently registered S.U.N. group, is my offering for what I believe needs to be happening to affect change toward the end of *actually* inclusive practice in our cohort, across programs, throughout Boulder, and beyond. It is the fruition of work over several years to prepare for challenges known as likely to be faced while holding space for peers seeking reparation, healing, community, education, or the support necessary to step into activism.

Grounded in liberation theory, with a foundation of inclusion by default, continually hybrid access models feature throughout the year. We are already meeting weekly in person, including video conferencing, with an incredibly diverse advising council (given the densely cis/het/white candidate population). This mileage marker is an outward manifestation of my response to the calls that continue from neurodivergent community for authentic representation in counseling and clinical research regarding therapeutic practices, as well as in public spaces in general.

I view this work as directly feeding my purpose in coming to this place, as well as being entirely unreasonable in principle. Epistemic privilege, knowing and holding perspectives unavailable to non-initiates, is richly available to those capable of honoring or holding nonbinary perspectives. This truth abides regardless of effort contributed by those with access to excess power through privilege in social locations lacking intersecting marginalized identities. The truth as known by one tending to both sides of many supposed binaries gets mocked, freely offered wisdom is ignored as demi-rhetorical (Yergeau, 2018). Those in privileged social locations get to walk away unaffected, or choose to engage with one who has only very rarely experienced anything beyond survival mode over the course of years, and then walk away, still mostly unaffected. Allowing for vicarious trauma, given the direct load I've endured and perpetually manage, there is only so much room for excuses rooted in simple discomfort.

It would be awesome to witness a closer balance between those struggling to keep themselves fed, and those traveling during every break from classes. It would be amazing to see repeatedly, and explicitly, stated needs held with care without first having to educate, then convince, then witness zero ownership from privileged social locations, and then exhibit enough pain (but not too much!) for the need to be validated.

I have not, to the best of my knowledge, provided consent for my personal trauma to be grist for another's mill, yet by and large that is exactly how this experiential is playing out from my perspective. Even as far back as September I submitted writing about oversight and abuse that began in August. My personal journal holds these relevant tidbits of interest from near the end of the fall term:

A great blow to my esteem for the program hit home today. Without any trust in basic goodness it would be easy to see this operation as extracting educational value from the marginalized before discarding them.

After one of my peers recently pointed out to me that it has specifically been marginalized people who have been abandoning these programs, the realization landed like a bag of bricks. The inherently ableist cis/het/neuro-normative compliant population, somehow, just doesn't seem to be suffering similarly.... Nor do they seem to validate this suffering among queer peers without moving into saviorism and/or assumptions. Perhaps a deeper inspection of how well marginalization and accommodation is understood is in order...?

When frameworks of practice assume an equitable starting position for all participants they only very rarely, if ever, serve the needs of marginalized participants. Compromise or restoration only make sense if we each begin from mutual access to wellness and goodness (e.g.,

equity vs. equality). I'm not seeing accommodation of difference happening explicitly as a precondition for commencing in any of the required contexts I've attended recently. Also, with most campus event postings coming into my own watchful awareness mere days or hours before so many potential opportunities, and accommodation inquiries often noted on these postings as requiring two weeks lead time to ensure fulfillment, I hope we might all be willing to acknowledge the obvious disconnect from a spirit of service as well as the non-choice presented to disabled would-be participants. This, dear reader, is not what inclusion looks like. It does beg one important question, however.... Is this what mindful disregard looks like?

Knowing, from decades of lived experience, that the ways I continue to be frequently othered are based in bigotry, pseudo-science, and quackery, I hold firm to my primary position within this group as a self-described and self-identified autistic adult. To be mindful of my needs within shared spaces, participants would need to actively maintain awareness of the many faces of oppression, essential differences between the pathology and neurodiversity paradigms, and the well-funded interests working toward eugenic and oppressive aims to force autistic people into ill-fitting models or theories created by those making external observations while ignoring richly detailed (and consistent) autoethnographies that hold messages about just how poorly the prevailing pathology paradigm serves a global autistic community. In this regard, the biomedical foundation of our professional standard of care, the American Psychiatric Association's profit generation tooling also known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (with more recent changes asserting even more dominance in that biased, biologically focused, sociopolitical viewpoint beginning with DSM-5 and DSM-5-TR) expresses opinions, **not** science (Walker, 2019, 2021; Yergeau, 2018). It is most certainly not heeding autistic wisdom!

My imagination for ways to overcome the ongoing impacts of othering within this cohort has run its course. This not being my first rodeo, I've taken up a policy of eschewing contact with those who have failed to take up any of my prior invitations (or, in some cases, their own commitments). I am terrified at the thought of putting my personal safety in the hands of people who speak openly about compromising instead of accommodating. I have no interest in entertaining any further discussion positing that anyone would be expected to center another's preferences in lieu of personal rights. This is a social justice issue, *not* individual praxis!

Were I facilitating the cohort in Group Process I imagine I would be in much the same position I have found while holding myself to be a knowledgeable and experienced participant. That is to say I would bear countertransference manifesting as consistent impatience. I would likely be exhausted after trying to hold a container for those dragging their feet to get messy and engage the work. I would likely frustrate myself seeking potential solutions to observable shortcomings, only to see the way modeled solutions are halfheartedly embraced, or missing the mark. I would likely hold some terror over my potential to cause harm, and grief over harm declared. I imagine the experience would quite closely mirror the work I have already engaged in, and intend to continue throughout this program and a new career, with an aim to neuroqueer all the things! One notable difference would surface immediately: primacy of accommodation.

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