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Introduction to Special Issue: Online Education and the Return to Normal

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On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. In response, colleges and universities across the world were forced to shutter their doors, demanding a move to emergency online education. For many instructors this was the first time they had taught virtually or used a learning management system. What followed was a nearly universal discourse from students, parents, instructors, administrators, and the media that virtual education was a failure and students were suffering since it was impossible to provide the same level of education found in the face-to-face classroom. Since that time, we have collectively seen many successes and failures in our online classrooms; however, for the many instructors who spent significant time and effort in creating robust, creative, and student focused virtual classrooms and content, the seeming taken-for-granted perception that online education was a failure flew in contrast to our experiences.

At my university, California Polytechnic State University, I served on the College of Liberal Arts' Online Education Task Force. As part of this task force, we took seriously what online education would look like as universities began to "return to normal." While we found that biases about the quality of online education persist, we also heard resoundingly positive feedback from faculty and students regarding the ability of online education to reach underserved and marginalized students. Moreover, we argued online education provides students with technology and communication skills that translate well to their careers. With regard to asynchronous classes (those seemingly most reviled), students are able to self-pace, rewatch/relisten to course material, and check background information, all of which give students a sense ownership and control over their education. Without question, those of us who place questions of power, inequality, and justice at the center of our teaching have come to recognize the revolutionary potential of online education for students, including those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with children or other caretaking responsibilities, and disabled students.

Today, two years after the world shut down, most colleges and universities have returned to campus. The attitude that things are back to "normal" seems to permeate, yet many recognize the "new normal" may actually necessitate emergency moves to online education in times of future pandemics or natural disasters. This special issue of *Feminist Pedagogy* questions how our pandemic online teaching experiences can carry into the future and the "new normal." This issue features Original Teaching Activities and Critical Commentaries that reflect on successes and failures with online course design; asynchronous online course content, activities, and assignments that center feminist pedagogy; and how to address marginalization and inequality in the online classroom. Importantly, while each submission centers online education, the activities and lessons learned can also be carried into our face-to-face courses.

In this issue, Batsheva R. Guy and Nancy Roger's, "Photovoice in an Online Psychology of Gender Course," describes their experiences incorporating Photovoice into an online undergraduate Psychology course. Asking students to upload photos of "gendered spaces," the authors explain, resulted in students' ability to engage more deeply with course themes. Scott Grether's, "The Pink Tax," introduces students to the concept of the pink tax while asking them to see how this form of gender inequality plays out in the "real world" by exploring product pricing in stores such as Walmart and Target. Both Original Teaching Activities have students

investigate the ways in which gender inequality exists in seemingly non-political spaces and can be applied to synchronous and asynchronous classes across a range of disciplines.

In "Regard(less) as a Feminist Pedagogical Practice," Kelly W. Guyotte, Stephanie Anne Shelton, and Kelsey H. Guy narrate regard(less) as a feminist practice, highlighting the importance of showing students our vulnerability as a form of empathy and support. April Jones and Stephanie Anne Shelton similarly touch on a pedagogy of tenderness in the face of "dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism." Centering a commitment to humanity in academic, their article, "A Transgressive Pedagogy of Tenderness in Hybrid Education," details how students showed self-reflectivity through a student led focus group on the pros and cons of Zoom meetings. Finally, in their piece, "Pivoting Feminist Praxis: From Writing Collective to Pandemic Pedagogies," Sabine LeBel, Lauren Cruikshank, and Casey Burkholder consider how to model ethics of care – seemingly once so reliant on face-to-face interaction – via mediated screens and asynchronous communication.

Together, this collection of Original Teaching Activities and Critical Commentaries highlights the ways COVID-19 and the switch to online teaching was, in fact, not a failure but instead an opportunity for inclusivity and social change.