Interview Practices as Accessibility: The Academic Job Market

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Abstract: This piece examines the Writing Studies job market from a perspective not addressed in previous literature: accessibility. I draw on work in the field of disability studies to argue that accessibility does not only affect those people who identify as having a disability; rather, it is a concept that speaks to how well *all* candidates are able to participate in the procedures and expectations for a tenure-track job search. Focusing on interview formats, this article ultimately argues for more generous interview practices that take into account the various ways in which candidates might be disadvantaged by rigid structures.

In searching for an academic position, candidates in Writing Studies prepare for an arduous process that demands mobility between a variety of physical and virtual locations. In using the term *mobility*, I draw on Jay Dolmage's definition of access as a way to move, emphasizing how the job market represents an important location of accessibility: where institutional practices are (not) designed to facilitate the movement of scholars from one job to another ("Mapping"). The job market today demands technological savvy on the part of both candidates and committees, reaches beyond the traditional face-to-face interview format, and plays out according to an unpredictable timeline. While practices for conducting effective job searches have been addressed on the local level and increasingly, field-wide (Dadas; Mendenhall), we in Writing Studies have not paid enough attention to the role of accessibility in the current job search climate. With institutions' increasing shift toward more technology-dependent interview methods, search committee members need to consider accessibility not merely as a way of being more inclusive, but more importantly, as a gesture toward establishing more generous practices that would benefit all candidates. Using interview data gathered from job seekers and search committee members in Writing Studies, I offer suggestions for how job search practices might be re-imagined to best meet all candidates' needs.

Throughout this piece I challenge the notion that common best practices for the job market adequately address accessibility. In short, I seek to challenge some of the norms of the job search—interviews in particular—by using disability as a frame. The pitfalls of the interview genre are not reserved, however, for candidates who identify as non-normative in some respect. We should remain attentive to Brueggemann et al's claim that changes intended to address disability often benefit all people. With this notion in mind, in this piece I do not distinguish between people who identify as having a disability and those who do not. I point to Adrienne Asch's work to reinforce why: "Instead of discussing which kinds of people have impairments or disabilities and which people do not, instead of saying that some members of society are disabled and others are not, we should consider which people cannot perform which activities in given environments and question how to modify the environments so they are not disabling" (23). I consider the environment of the interview as one that can be rendered more or less "disabling," depending on how it is structured. Poorly designed environments can work against all people, not just those who identify as having a disability. My work here, then, asks: How might both committees and candidates benefit when we think of job searches in terms of disability, access, and generosity instead of whether candidates meet particular norms?

Before discussing the results of my study, I first offer a description of my methodology; I then include a review of scholarship about the interview as a research method from both Writing Studies and Sociology. Using the concept of *kairotic* spaces as a theoretical frame, I share the results of my own participant interviews. Finally, I offer recommendations for re-imagining job interviews based on the results of my data.

Methodology

The origins of this piece stem from a study that I conducted about the tenure-track job market, published in *College Composition and Communication* in 2013. In that study, I interviewed 57 scholars who had either gone on the job market or sat on a hiring committee between 2005 and 2010 in order to trace how the job market experience had evolved during that time. Not surprisingly, many participants addressed their interview experiences, with some people commenting on how they felt excluded/discriminated against by particular procedures. With this current piece, I follow that thread of accessibility and disability-related discriminatory practices more thoroughly, organizing my interview questions around the specific topics that I already saw emerging: choice of modality and advance interview questions. In essence, I allowed the interview data from my previous job market project to form my research questions for this project. I also collected additional data: I asked for a follow-up interview with five of the original participants (four candidates and one search committee member), all of whom specifically addressed accessibility in their interviews. I then recruited an additional 20 participants, via a Writing Studies listserv and personal invitations. I decided to seek out additional participants because I believed my existing data set to be too limited with respect to issues of accessibility; additionally, I wanted to include the perspectives of scholars in the field who specifically focus on accessibility and disability studies. Of the total 25 participants, 16 spoke from the perspective of a former candidate, 3 from the perspective of a search committee member, and 6 were able to draw on experiences in both positions. Participants were given a choice between a phone interview and a Skype interview. I asked participants who spoke from the candidate position 10 questions; I asked participants who spoke from the interviewer position 11 questions, with the extra question pertaining to the policies of their institution's Equal Opportunity Office (see Appendix). I did not deviate from the interview questions, and I tape-recorded all responses with permission from the participants. Once I gathered the new interview data, I placed those transcripts alongside the transcripts from the previous study's interviews and relied on grounded theory to guide me toward the themes that tended to recur across responses. To protect their identities, participants have been given a pseudonym in print. All have been shown a copy of the text for their approval prior to publication.

The interview as method

With this article, I build on the rich tradition of scholarship about interviews in Writing Studies, which has largely focused on the interview in the context of qualitative research projects. While interviewing for a job represents a notably different scenario, this scholarship on research-based interviews nonetheless offers insight into power dynamics and ethical considerations. One of the earliest pieces in Writing Studies on this topic, Lee Odell, Dixie Goswami, and Anne Herrington's 1983 article, "The Discourse-Based Interview: A Procedure for Exploring the Tacit Knowledge of Writers in Nonacademic Settings," argues for the interview as a useful method for learning about the tacit knowledge that writers enact in the process of composing. In discussing the selection of topics for an interview, Odell et al acknowledge that a finished writing product may offer little clue as to which parts of the final draft occupied the most extensive deliberation by the writer. As a result, they conclude that an interview is necessary for gaining this information and that "perhaps the writer should identify at least some of the matters to be discussed in the interview" (228-229). With this recommendation, the authors acknowledge the co-constructed nature of interviews, thus moving away from notions of neutral exchanges whereby an interviewer, with the right set of questions, can extract answers from the interviewee. This important insight suggests that in the early years of our discipline scholars recognized how the unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee shapes the data obtained from this method.

Twenty years later in "Chronotopic Lamination," Paul Prior and Jody Shipka conducted interviews to gain an understanding of their participants' writing spaces, ultimately emphasizing cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)'s usefulness for "understanding the varied vectors of social forces that bear on writing" (231). In their methodology section, they describe how they followed a structured protocol of having participants draw the spaces where they composed. Shipka and Prior then followed up with specific questions about the drawings and writers' relationship to the composing process. Their methodological approach accounts for partiality of information gleaned from interviews, as they designed a multi-faceted procedure for data-gathering. They argue that "the combinations of texts, talk, and drawings, of participants' accounts and our perceptions, supports a triangulated analysis of these writing processes" (185). In using triangulation, Shipka and Prior acknowledge that while structured interviews help establish reliable data, they should be combined with other methods to yield a more complete picture of participants' experiences.

While Writing Studies has theorized the interview as a research method for decades, work in Sociology also proves useful for the purposes of the job market context. Near the outset of their chapter "The Interview," Andrea Fontana and James Frey ask, "If the interview cannot be a neutral tool (and we will see that it never really was), why not turn it into a walking stick to help some people get on their feet?" (695). Through their comprehensive articulation of interview strategies, Fontana and Frey highlight how contemporary interviewers—even in structured interview scenarios, as job interviews often are—should remain highly-attuned to power dynamics and seek to disrupt hierarchies. They argue that feminist influences on interview practices include the understanding that gender, race, age, gender expression, and ability shape how an interview unfolds (712) and that interviewers must take care to

mitigate the attending power differentials. Even in formal interviews, they claim that

> Those who are advocates of structured interviewing are not unaware that the interview is a social interaction context and that it is influenced by that context. Good interviewers recognize this fact and are sensitive to how interaction can influence response....interviewers must be aware of respondent differences and must be able to make the proper adjustments called for by unanticipated developments (703).

Fontana and Frey's explicit call for interviewers to "make the proper adjustments" argues for a kind of flexibility that we do not often associate with job interviews. It is not difficult to extrapolate how job candidates are influenced by the same forces described by Fontana and Frey. Using this information that they have synthesized from a research context, we can better understand the need for search committees to remain flexible and attentive to the needs of job candidates.

These three articles can inform our thinking about job interviews through their respective arguments that interviews are partial, hierarchical, and rife with power dynamics that do not tilt in favor of the candidate. While we might consider the request for written materials to be a way of compensating for the partiality of interviews, consider how often we make assumptions about, for example, the quality of someone's teaching based on the social dynamics that surface during the interview. The temptation is to make a complete judgment about pedagogy based on an entirely different scenario. While the interview genre itself implies a hierarchy—the interviewee is ultimately seeking something from the interviewers—there are ways to disrupt this dynamic and downplay the "vetting" aspect of the interaction. Depending on the ages, genders, races, and abilities of the interviewers and interviewees, additional layers of power dynamics come into play. We can only begin to mitigate these dynamics by discussing them, an approach that I undertook by instigating this research study.

The interview as *kairotic* space

While the interview is a mainstay of the hiring process in academe and beyond, the circumstances surrounding the academic job interview make it an especially complex circumstance. In-person interviews (at MLA or elsewhere) often require significant travel and expense on the part of both the candidates and committee. Since the financial crash of 2008, more schools have moved to a phone or video-based format for their interviews, requiring that candidates gain a technological and generic savvy about the ways in which these kinds of interviews differ from a face-to-face format. The interview itself, whether virtual or in-person, serves as an example of what Margaret Price calls a *kairotic* space, or "less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged" ("Space"). By drawing on this definition I do not mean to imply that interviews are not formal, or that we do not take note of them. Rather, the interview as a genre and as a moment in time is rarely interrogated in academe. We take for granted that the interview exists as an inevitability of the hiring process—and in particular, we devote little attention to thinking about who might be privileged and who might be excluded by this practice.

Price's notion of the *kairotic* space calls attention to how the nature of these spaces often prevents them from being easily accessible. Specifically, she highlights the key criteria for these spaces as being the "real- time unfolding of events"; "impromptu communication required or encouraged"; "participants are tele/present"; there is a "strong social element"; and there are "high stakes" ("Space"). All of these criteria describe the job interview, emphasizing that much more influences the success of a candidate in that moment than simply how conversant she was in her scholarship or teaching. *Kairotic* spaces, then, can exclude those individuals who do not meet the norm in some respect (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and/or disability). For example, the expectation of a strong social element in an interview may be difficult for a candidate to achieve because perhaps she is the only person of color in the room; because social adeptness is shaped by cultural background, one's background might limit her capacity to send/receive the social cues that reflect a white, middle-to-upper class background (which is the default expectation). Or perhaps a candidate cannot discern whether her work on queer online communities is being received well on the phone; or a candidate who needs more down/crip time appears flustered during the interview because of her busy day at MLA. All of these hypothetical situations are heavily influenced by the unspoken expectations for the *kairotic* space—so much so, in fact, that the candidate's chances of getting the job may be compromised.

While Writing Studies as a field celebrates diverse communication styles and traditions within its scholarship, in high-stakes scenarios such as job interviews or conference presentations, normative expectations persist. These expectations—that candidates will maintain eye contact, or presenters will speak extemporaneously with ease, or that people will adhere to Standard American English at all times—represent unspoken cultural assumptions about what effective communication looks like. Many of these assumptions reflect white, middle-to-upper class cultural codes, setting up a scenario in which a candidate may be penalized for not "effectively" communicating, when in fact

she simply does not reflect normative expectations. In their call to "center" disability more fully when it comes to interview practices, Stephanie Kerschbaum and Margaret Price argue that "interview methodology texts typically imagine a normative interview context, assuming that interviews will proceed aurally/orally and thus that the data recorded will primarily involve spoken speech, often making comments about interviews having a 'normal flow' or being 'like a conversation'" (99). Additionally, while decades' worth of educational research has shown that a range of learning styles (oriented around various modalities) and intelligences (i.e. verbal, kinesthetic, emotional) exist, search committees often place a high value on "fluency" or *facilitas,* when, in fact, some scholars articulate their thoughts better in writing than they do in speech. These criteria, which often remain uninterrogated within the context of search committees, also have an unclear relationship to a candidate's teaching or scholastic abilities. In the *kairotic* space of the interview, a high-pressure situation rife with expectations about communicative style and cues, candidates who do not reflect normative expectations can be penalized for reasons other than their capacity as teachers or scholars or colleagues.

With this study, I extend Price's concept by exploring generosity's role within *kairotic* spaces. The concept of generosity has previously been taken up within disability studies; Jay Dolmage lists "generous interpretation" as one of several methods for resisting normativity:

> I situate the most generous interpretation not as a simple way to read all texts and all bodies as inherently good, but as a heuristic for responding to negative portrayals of disability, at least temporarily, by considering the 'good intentions' that may have inspired them...we must also, as part of a rhetorical process of understanding one another, take the time to, at least temporarily, try on generous interpretations of cultural texts" (*Disability* 144-145).

While Dolmage addresses generosity within an interpretive framework,{1} I view generosity as a rhetorical stance that assumes an interlocutor is approaching a situation with honesty, preparedness, and genuine interest (unless proven otherwise). Within the context of a job interview, a stance of generosity would mean assuming that all candidates have something valuable to offer a school, even if their interview is adversely affected by nervousness or anxiety or other factors. Should a candidate make a request of the committee prior to the interview, such a request would not be seen as a lack of rigor or discipline. In particular, the strong social element of *kairotic* spaces means that sometimes an attempt at humor by a candidate or a casual comment may fall flat; committees can choose to *read* these instances generously and *react* generously by not holding relatively inconsequential moments against a candidate who is trying to negotiate a high-stakes situation. In short, occupying the position of more privilege within a *kairotic* space—as search committees do—offers an opportunity to be generous in how we interact with candidates and interpret their actions.

Generosity within the *kairotic* space of the job interview would also require a shift in mindset away from the idea that it is the *candidate's* responsibility to adjust to whatever conditions a committee puts in place. Instead, we might see our work as re-examining what we do as interview committees so that we can offer better circumstances for all candidates. As Melanie Yergeau argues,

> Whether in our scholarship or our departmental meetings, the discourse on disability and access often takes shape, linguistically speaking, as **accommodation**. As someone who receives accommodations, I do not take up this argument lightly, nor do I suggest that people and institutions should dispense with accommodations altogether. Rather, I am suggesting that our institutional conceptions of accommodation are predicated on problemed bodies and spaces rather than problemed infrastructures and practices ("Reason").

Committees tend to structure their practices so that a default model exists; if "problemed" bodies need to participate, then the onus rests on those candidates to figure out how they can fit the model. As Yergeau points out, accommodations remain important. But the onus should not be on candidates to request accommodations or accommodate to problematic structures; it should be on the committees who hire new colleagues to make our interview practices as generous as possible.

In speaking to this same issue, one of my research participants offered a suggestion for how committees might more ethically negotiate accommodations. Speaking from a candidate's perspective, participant Evan Spencer argues that a third-party contact needs to be communicated to all candidates when it comes time for interviews so that candidates do not have to make requests of the search committee:

> There needs to be somebody—a neutral person—whether they're in the Office of Disability Services or

wherever, who you could just say to the candidate, "This is who you contact. It's no one on our hiring committee, no one in our department, not a secretary or an administrator." Just like a third party who you go to and that's who arranges all your access needs. This is probably a person you'd work with if you came here and got the job, to set up your teaching. But that should be the way that it's done. That would be the way to ensure that they're not being judged for whatever they ask for.

Having a third-party option as Spencer describes would alleviate the notion, real or perceived, that a candidate who requested accommodations was creating more work for a committee. This practice would also demonstrate the kind of flexible infrastructure that Yergeau argues for. A committee, even at this early stage, would be communicating that they acknowledge the interview procedure may not look the same for all candidates, and that they have already put practices in place to help achieve that flexibility.

With these core principles of access, accommodation, and generosity in mind, in the following sections, I focus on two primary considerations regarding job market interviews: whether candidates were offered a choice in the modality and medium of the interview (e.g., phone, video, MLA) and whether candidates were given the interview questions ahead of time. I focus on these two areas because, in response to my interview questions, participants communicated strong feelings about both topics. The related issue of which interview format participants prefer only receives cursory treatment in this article, considering that the factors in this preference are highly personalized, and that the shifting economics and timeline of the job market continue to exert a strong influence on which format schools choose.

Choice of modality and medium

In discussing their experiences with interviews, many candidates expressed a preference for one format over another. Candidates who preferred video conferencing highlighted familiar limitations of the phone: the inability to judge committee members' reactions; not knowing which committee member was speaking; and experiencing awkward pauses between questions. Those who preferred the phone cited the higher technological learning curve of video conferencing, and the tendency of some committees to engage in distracting behavior such as passing a laptop around. Additionally, several candidate participants stated that they preferred face-to-face interviews, but that the stressful atmosphere of the MLA convention mitigated the benefits of being in the same room with the committee.

Given that each format carries its own limitations, we should more seriously consider giving candidates a *choice* in the medium and modalities by which they are interviewed. In my twenty-five interviews, I asked participants whether they gave/were given a choice in interview format; only two candidates and one committee member responded that they had. Within a qualitative research context, Kerschbaum and Price rightly point out that

> During recruitment, researchers may declare their intent to conduct interviews in a particular modality (such as the telephone) without considering its (in)accessibility for participants. Within the many interactions that constitute research and teaching activities, unexpected ways of moving may be ignored or dismissed, or even pathologized or overemphasized (104).

While the issue of choice for job interview candidates may at first present as one of professional courtesy, several of my participants emphasized broader implications. One concern, voiced by Bhadrakorn Bhaisajaya (who participated as both a candidate and a committee member), speaks to how assumptions about access can impede a candidate's ability to perform well. According to Bhaisajaya,

> If I could determine the interview format, I would definitely want to give a candidate a choice because I feel that when you predetermine the medium for a candidate, you are making a lot of assumptions about access, about abilities, about resources...when you're imposing—and I use the word "impose" deliberately—a medium upon a candidate, you might sometimes hinder the candidate from being at their best.

Bhaisajaya's perspective highlights several assumptions that underlie the "imposing" of an interview format on a candidate. First, he alludes to the able-bodied assumption that all candidates have the physical capacity to interact with committee members in prescribed ways. If, for example, a deaf candidate has been asked to participate in a phone interview, she must signal to the committee that she requires accommodations, thereby bypassing her legal right to *not* disclose her disability. Additionally, Bhaisajaya points out that candidates' access to resources varies widely; asking a candidate to participate in a video-based interview may pose difficulty if she shares a campus office with other people, or if her home internet connection is too slow to accommodate software such as Skype.

While access, in its various iterations, may limit a candidate's use of one modality or medium, all candidates would benefit from being given a preference for a phone or video interview. The option to grant candidates a choice in their interview medium/modality recalls Odell et al's argument that because of the co-constructed nature of interviews, interviewers should find a way to give interviewees greater decision-making capacity. Even in cases that are not prohibitive, asking a candidate to participate in an interview in a format that she does not prefer—for any reason—limits the possibility for her to perform at her best. While some committee members may view the imposition of a format as a rite of passage (i.e., if the candidate wants the job, she will rise to the occasion), we might instead adopt a perspective of generosity: what can *we* do as committee members to assure that equitable conditions are in place? Along these lines, Bhaisajaya advocates giving candidates a choice between formats when we invite them for an interview. He suggests, "I really wish people would ask the question and pose it like this: 'What is the [modal] channel that will help you be at your best?' It's a win-win for both parties...You want the candidates to be at their best." Bhaisajaya's perspective reinforces Price's call for a design of *kairotic* spaces that includes all participants from the beginning of the interview process: "We are talking about participatory design and interdependence. We are talking about including disabled people...in co-production from the outset. We do not need help participating. We need ethical infrastructures" ("Space"). While job candidates have little agency in designing aspects of their job market experiences, one area in which they *can* be co-designers—at least to a degree—is the modality and medium of the interview.

Because a candidate most likely will perform better in the modality and medium that she chooses, search committees would benefit from this practice as well. When candidates have been given a say in the structure of their interview experience, they will likely grant a better interview. By "better interviews," I am imagining an interaction between a candidate and a search committee in which the candidate offers a thorough picture of her scholastic and pedagogical approaches; gives insight into how she might contribute to that particular department; receives an opportunity to ask questions of the committee. When this kind of productive exchange happens, committees come away with a good sense of who that candidate would be as a colleague, helping their capacity to make a well-informed decision. Committees have a lot to lose in the search process as well, considering the significant amount of time and money that any search entails. Positioning candidates to grant a better interview means gaining a more complete picture of who are the best scholars to invite to a particular campus.

Unfortunately, committees sometimes work against their own self-interest and display a reluctance to allow candidates a choice in their interview format, evidencing a theoretical disjuncture: a central argument of computers and writing scholarship over the past 20 years has involved the benefits of teaching students how to compose in multiple modalities. Embedded in that core argument is the need for students to recognize the affordances of one modality over another in any rhetorical context. If we are urging our students to be sensitive to the benefits and drawbacks of various modal channels, then why are we not applying that strategy to our job searches? Participant Amy Morrison addressed this disjuncture by wondering why a field that has historically celebrated the primacy of alphabetic text eschews it in the context of interviews:

> Sometimes I think that [text] is really discounted as an option because you're not hearing a person or you're not seeing a person so they somehow think that you can't get the flavor, I guess, of a candidate. But some people *need* to use text. That is the most accessible option....It's fascinating to me just because we are in departments where we're so concerned with texts that they somehow don't think that's the most life-like option to give to people.

The fact that none of my participants mentioned alphabetic text being used in their interviews (for example, in the form of candidates being handed/sent questions in the interview) helps illustrate how thoroughly the field has bought into the idea that particular modal channels fit particular aspects of the job search. Price, in her discussion of *kairotic* spaces, broaches the same issue, arguing that if the reason why we exclude text in an interview is because we are demanding a more immediate kind of presence, then "we should be straightforward about that—and we should be able to explain why" ("Space"). Candidate participant Bhaisajaya was more pointed in his criticism of the field as whole, arguing, "We talk about multimodality, we talk about universal design, we talk about giving people multiple pathways to construct meaning, but then when it comes to this ultimate test, we put all those things away and we predetermine the modes for them." For Bhaisajaya, who recently sat on a search committee, there exists a pointed disjuncture between Writing Studies' theoretical use of concepts such as universal design and multimodality and its interview practices. By demanding that candidates interact in an interview via the modality that the committee selects, we are ignoring decades of scholarship that has shown how effective speakers demonstrate rhetorical savvy by choosing their modalities of communication.

From a logistical point of view, offering candidates a choice among modalities and media can create complications, though not to a limiting degree. Most candidates who addressed the notion of choice mentioned the phone and

video-based conferencing as the two likely options. One committee member participant, however, described how her university offered interviewees a choice between attending MLA and participating in a Skype interview. According to Nazir Huntington, his university has implemented this practice for two years, previously conducting the Skype interviews a month before MLA. Because they found that this practice made it too difficult to compare candidates, the following year, they switched to a system where they interviewed Skype candidates while at MLA: "We scheduled them as a time block during our regular time at MLA while we were in a hotel room sitting around a laptop, talking to the person in their office...we wanted the conditions to be as similar as possible in terms of the timing." Huntington stated that the entire committee discussed their interview options at length, ultimately deciding on this format because "We were very sensitive about the costs [of attending MLA]." Another committee member participant, Katherine Sanchez, stated that her committee offered candidates a Skype interview if, for any reason, they stated they would not be attending MLA. In their deliberations, Sanchez stated that they agreed on this arrangement in order to be sensitive about the cost of attending MLA, as well as the fact that some committee members believed that Writing Studies as a discipline is not adequately recognized by MLA.

These two instances that Huntington and Sanchez describe indicate that some committees are not only recognizing the value in offering candidates a choice, but also that they are doing so in response to our field's traditional venue for interviews: MLA. This development holds significant value, as it acknowledges that MLA can be prohibitive for some candidates, both in terms of finances and in terms of the physical endurance required of MLA attendees. As Morrison attested, we have to be alert to "the accessibility of hotel rooms at MLA...and people's expectations about what kind of bodies are going to enter the space." While some scholars may resist providing modal options because they privilege in-person communication over virtual, search committees should be cognizant of the challenges that accompany an in-person meeting for candidates. Additionally, some candidates, if given the choice between phone and video interview, may choose the phone because of the affordances of not being seen (and the attendant judgments that accompany appearance). While it requires some additional coordination on the part of committees (i.e., scheduling a location that offers both quality phone and video interview capabilities, creating a plan for tech support during the interviews), offering multiple interview options can create a more expansive and ethical environment for interacting with candidates.

Being serious about offering candidates a choice in how they are interviewed also requires that committees also commit themselves to educating administrators and other figures about the difference between equality and equity. In particular, committee members may have to work against a common constraint that many Equal Opportunity Offices establish: the need to interview all candidates the same way, in the name of "equality." This viewpoint reflects a normate perspective—one that implies that everyone has an equal chance of success when all conditions are the same. As Dolmage explains, "The term *normate* designates the subject position of the supposedly (temporarily) able-bodied individual. The word also converts the idea of normalcy into an active process—norms *are* but they also *act*: we live in a culture in which norms are enforced, a normative society" ("Disability" 23). Stipulations by Equal Opportunity Offices such as the one described above only reinforce normative cultural expectations, ignoring the possibility that particular modalities and mediums may automatically advantage some people over others. Bhaisajaya, who served on a committee that had frequent communication with his university's EOO, claims that such measures may actually create the opposite intended effect:

> The irony here is that the office is called the Office of Equal Opportunity, but because they have these standards and regulations and procedures for uniformity, the idea of uniformity itself sometimes becomes oppressive and creates disadvantages for candidates...people say you have to treat everybody the same, but then my question is where are you getting your standard and idea for sameness?

We must be alert to normative constructions and dialogue with the institutional bodies that reinforce them. The frequent invisibility of normativity requires that we ask who might be excluded by the principle of sameness, and how we might mitigate such exclusions.

Speaking extemporaneously

Distributing questions to candidates ahead of time—or offering a loose agenda for the interview—represents another measure to consider when it comes to establishing more generous and accessible interview practices. When asked about this approach, six candidate participants and two committee member participants stated that they had received/given the interview questions in advance. All of the candidates who experienced this practice said that it helped them perform better in the interview. Candidate participant Kai Schmid claimed that knowing the questions (or approximate questions) allowed her mitigate her nervousness and think more deeply about her answers: "They

should be questions that you're already prepared for anyway, but it just gives you an idea to have given it a little bit of thought and not have to be totally on your feet. Because you're so nervous in that situation anyway that it makes it more difficult to think on your feet." Similarly, when asked what effect knowing the answers ahead of time had on him, candidate participant Evan Spencer concurred that being able to manage anxiety allowed for potentially better answers: "I think the main thing was just manage anxiety. I knew that that was the one I could really prepare for. So I probably performed better, but also I could section it off in its own little column of less anxiety and not worry about it." Helping candidates manage anxiety can benefit both the candidates and the committee, given that candidates may give more thoughtful answers and offer a better picture of what they might actually do in the job. Candidate participant Morrison made a similar point, arguing the committee is actually more savvy when they distribute the questions or a rough agenda ahead of time: "Knowing that, okay, this is going to be a 25-minute conversation in which they wanted to address all of these things helped me do my job better as an interviewee and it helped them do their job better as interviewers." Understanding how the interview time will be portioned out can help candidates strategically plan the scope of their answers, opening up opportunities for more productive discussion.

Reflecting on interview practices such as providing questions ahead of time to candidates may also surface questions about how Writing Studies students are prepared for the job market. In particular, two participants critiqued how the interview process privileges the rhetorical canon of memory (in addition to the cognitive capacity needed for such memory), with one participant contrasting that practice with his graduate school training. In reflecting on how he appreciated getting his interview questions ahead of time from one school, Bhaisajaya explained,

> Throughout grad school we're taught to revise, right? We're taught to take time on our papers, we're taught to think through our answers. And that's what we've been doing for like the past 5 years...Pretty much everything we do is paper-driven. Even the comprehensive exam gives you a week to think through your ideas. But then when we have to apply for a job...Everything is back to oral delivery and memory. And sometimes I don't think that's fair because we haven't been cultivating that for five years and then in your last year you have to make this huge switch. And that was difficult for me at first because I realized that's not how I have been trained to think. I've been trained to think on paper.

While Bhaisajaya's characterization of graduate school does not mention the kind of practice in delivery and memory that comes from participation in seminars and conference presentations, the primacy of text unarguably remains central to many of our graduate experiences. Given this kind of preparation, why do we eschew text-based communication in an interview format? Is an answer considered to be less authentic if a candidate has had a week to think about it and write about it? If we, in fact, highly value the ability for job candidates to perform in a memory-driven way, then we might reflect on how well we prepare graduate students for this expectation throughout their doctoral studies. For committee member participant Michela Brogley, who has served on two search committees at the same institution, interview formats that downplay the reliance on memory are preferable: "Anything that can mitigate the sense of having to perform in a very sudden, memory driven, sort of socially-charming way, anything that can mitigate that particular kind of performance is a great idea." In addition to her critique of the privileging of memory, Brogley surfaces concerns about the performative aspects of interviews, and how they become tied to social adeptness. This adeptness may prove especially challenging for some candidates—both candidates who may identify as having disabilities and others who experience social anxiety and/or nervousness. In these cases, we should ask ourselves if we are judging candidates on their abilities as teachers and scholars, or on their ability to perform well in the interview genre (or both).

These considerations broach even larger questions about what we see as the purpose of the interview in the larger scheme of selecting a candidate. Are we using the surprise element of the interview as a way to gauge how well the person does under pressure? Or do we find value in mitigating such pressure? To what end? Three of my participants (two candidates and one committee member) raised similar questions, interrogating the nature of interviews themselves. Candidate participant Schmid wondered, "Are we really trying to get at how well a person thinks under pressure? Or are we trying to get at what they would do in certain scenarios? So I think we have to ask ourselves what is it that we're trying to gauge here and act accordingly." Such questions point to the fraught nature of the interview itself, regardless of modality or medium: a brief, high-pressure meeting influenced by factors beyond academic consideration such as the candidate's clothing choices, weight, age, and accent. Do we assume that a candidate who does not perform well in such a situation would not be a thoughtful researcher or an effective teacher? Put another way, Brogley asked,

> Do we want [the interview] to be a crucible? Some people would certainly say yes, they would say we want to test candidates in a very high-pressure way; that's when you really see people perform as they are. I happen not to agree with that point of view, but I understand that point of view. And yet when I think about, when I try to get my mind around what an alternative practice would be, it's such a huge

question because that practice is so entrenched, it's hard for me to imagine what happen otherwise.

Many of us would concur that a quality candidate could be upended in an interview by a case of anxiety, but we find it hard to imagine how else we might otherwise organize the job search process. A first step toward imagining alternative structures might involve recasting the role of the interview from a vetting process to a dialogue in which the committee learns about a candidate's interesting work. While interviews carry with them connotations of "weeding people out," many of us who have sat on hiring committees can attest that the decisions about whom to invite to campus are often very difficult due to the high quality of candidates. By the time that candidates reach the interview stage, the process can be more about learning who they are as a scholar and teacher. Making this conceptual shift as a committee when discussing the interview process can go a long way in establishing more accessible interview practices because of less focus on whether the candidate adheres to a series of norms.

A more generous interview

Considering the interview as a *kairotic* space illustrates how deeply normativity influences this important interaction between committee and candidate. Normativity exerts itself in relation to disability, as well as myriad other cross-sections of identity. Despite its pervasiveness, it often remains invisible to search committees, embedded in the interview practices that have been rehearsed for decades. By not considering how normative assumptions may influence the course of an interview, we assure that academe's doors will not be fully open to a diverse range of scholars from different backgrounds and ways of experiencing the world. As Robert McRuer argues, "Nondisabled crips need to acknowledge that able-bodied privileges do not magically disappear simply because they are individually refused; the compulsions of compulsory able-bodiedness and the benefits that accrue to nondisabled people within that system are bigger than any individual 's seemingly voluntary refusal of them" (36). We in Writing Studies must acknowledge that by not interrogating privileges within the context of interviews—whether they be related to disability, sexuality, gender, class, race, or other factors—we assure that those privileges continue to accrue to a select group of candidates. Our hiring practices have a trickle-down effect to students, as privileges in part determine the demographics of the field: who gets to be a WPA, who is visible in a position of leadership, who is put in a position to achieve tenure. Homogeneity in terms of race, class, and gender can have especially pernicious effects on marginalized student populations, who may not see their experiences or background reflected in academe, and therefore may assume that it is not a place open to them. For these reasons, we need to name the accepted norms that structure the job market in order to replace them with more accessible practices.

Reimagining our interview practices should involve a consideration of giving candidates a choice in interview medium and modalities, as well as the option of providing the interview questions ahead of time. While these practices are not yet typical in the field, they gesture toward offering candidates better opportunities for thoughtful, compelling exchanges with committees. As a gesture of generosity, we should acknowledge that there are many reasons why a candidate may not "perform" the genre of the interview well. Committee member Brogley suggested that one way of mitigating the pressure might involve interviewing candidates twice, so they do not feel as though everything rides on one moment in time. Based on my previous job market study, two candidates said they experienced multiple interviews for the same school, one occurring via phone and the other at MLA. Multiple opportunities to talk with a committee may be especially effective when the candidate has the ability to choose among multiple options for the interview format. As this possibility suggests, offering options for candidates will require creativity. In discussing the lack of a textual presence in interviews, candidate participant Morrison wondered, "How might the dynamics change [at MLA] if the committee were to print out their questions and hand it to the candidates when they walk in the room, everybody takes a few minutes to look it over, and then have a conversation based on that?" This kind of arrangement might represent one option offered to candidates attending MLA. While some people may view the addition of text as an added stressor, others might be relieved to have the opportunity to review the interview questions, even briefly, before the interview. Being sensitive to candidates' different needs requires that we give them options when possible (and not value one option over another).

The increased incorporation of technology, with phone and video-based interviews, also means that most candidates will have preferences for how to negotiate the limits of these technologies. For example, asking candidates to participate in a Skype interview can carry with it complications that the committee might not anticipate. Two candidate participants mentioned the difficulty in knowing where to look during a Skype interview, given the positioning of laptop cameras in relation to the image of the committee. Candidate participant Schmid recalled,

> If you want to actually look at the people you're talking to, it makes it seem as if you're not looking at
> them because then you're not looking at the camera. I found it incredibly challenging to do Skype
> interviews because I wanted them to think I was looking at them, so I was looking at the little camera. I

could only peripherally see them.

Schmid's experience highlights one of the many technological literacies that candidates must learn in preparation for interviews. Considering that in order to make eye contact, a candidate needs to stare at the camera and not look at the image of the committee members, the visual modality becomes obsolete from the candidate's perspective. Software such as Skype, then, becomes only a way for *committees* to see the *candidate*. Additionally, committee member participant Bhaisajaya remarked that when a candidate his committee interviewed did not look at the camera (and instead focused on the image of the committee on her computer), several members of the committee remarked on how she "should have known better." This scenario illustrates normative expectations, where eye contact represents a signal of effective communication in some cultures. We must be cognizant that some candidates may not feel comfortable with eye contact, or—in the instances described above—technology may interfere with the common practice. Offering candidates choices means that some may opt out of a seemingly more "immediate" form of technology such as video software in favor of more traditional forms such as the phone.

Roadblocks to a more generous interview

In making these recommendations, I am aware of roadblocks to reimagining the interview process. Equal Opportunity Offices (EOO), unfortunately, represent a challenge in instances where they refuse to accommodate any deviation from a uniform procedure for all candidates. While the intent of this mandate reflects the desire for parity, faculty must dialogue with these offices to distinguish between the concepts of equality (sameness) and fairness. Having all candidates undergo the same procedure ignores the fact that all people do not start from the same place or possess the same needs. While the intent stems from good intentions, requiring all candidates to be interviewed according to the same procedure (i.e., phone, video, or in-person interview) discounts the factors that render a particular method inaccessible to some candidates. A disability studies framework allows us to intervene in the one-size-fits-all approach to institutional equity on our campuses. In particular, Dolmage's conceptualization of the term *normate* emphasizes the active role that individual actors play—even those who belong to well-intentioned equal opportunity offices—in maintaining norms. For Dolmage, "The term *normate* designates the subject position of the supposedly (or temporarily) able-bodied individual. The word also converts the idea of normalcy into an active process—norms *are* but they also *act*: we live in a culture in which norms are enforced, a normative society" (23). This enforcement occurs as a constantly-unfolding process by which actors make choices about what a normal body should be able to handle during an interview (simultaneously designating abnormality within this context). For example, prescribing that all candidates must complete a phone interview assumes that anyone who cannot or who prefers not to interview in this way deviates from the norm and thus may experience negative repercussions. Conceiving of normate cultures as a series of processes helps us envision methods of disruption—in this case, educating a campus's EOO if necessary.

Committees themselves might also worry that in giving candidates a choice of interview format, they are creating one more source of anxiety for candidates. An underlying assumption that a "right choice" exists might tempt committees to not "burden" candidates with one more decision to make in a stressful context. If we consider the alternative, however, not offering candidates a say in interview format, we are enacting norms; candidates must adhere to the request unless they provide a reason for why they cannot perform within the norm of expectations. While additional choices to make may seem burdensome, placing candidates in a position where they have to present a committee with a valid reason for diverging from the plan proves more so. Committees might proactively include language in their email/phone invitation to interview that indicates the choice does not imply a correct answer.

Finally, I recognize the limitations of my data, drawn from a relatively small sampling of scholars in the field. My decision to seek out scholars working in disability studies necessarily skewed the data toward criticism of how accessibility is addressed within the job search context. A larger, more representative sampling of participants might yield data that reflects additional concerns about enacting some of the recommendations I make here. Additionally, my small sampling size led to results such as all of my participants who received interview questions ahead of time finding that to be a helpful gesture. I can imagine some participants finding that practice intimidating in itself: a perspective that was not represented in my limited study.

Additional steps toward increased accessibility

In addition to my two main recommendations—allowing candidates a choice in medium/modality and providing interview questions ahead of time—below I offer some additional pieces of advice for search committees who want to establish more accessible interview practices.

Offer visual cues during interviews

The prevalence of video and phone interviews has led to more frequent discussions in the profession about the role of technology in mediating the interview experience. On their website, "Suggestions for Interviews Using Videoconferencing and the Telephone," the Association of Departments of English offers helpful suggestions for search committees particular to video or phone interviews. The organization explicitly addresses the role of accommodations, arguing that "Search committees have a responsibility to comply with regulations and to become informed of possible barriers resulting from the use of videoconferencing or the telephone, as well as technological innovations or other accommodations that may permit persons with disabilities to carry out professional interviews effectively." We should consider this mandate applicable to *all* candidates—that search committees must remain aware of new possibilities for exclusionary behavior that come along with increased technology use for interviews. As the website details, one inherent communicative advantage granted to a search committee in these scenarios is spatial recognition/understanding. Interviewees on the telephone have no understanding of where/how committee members are located in space, while video interviewees experience a distorted perspective of space. For this reason, providing candidates with visual cues such as detailing where the committee is seated and who is speaking can help orient the interviewee. For video interviews, careful placement of the camera can help avoid candidates feeling uncomfortable, as can happen when one committee member at a time passes around a laptop camera, or the camera is placed at the end of a long table with committee members peering at a distance. Practices such as these need to be shared in official channels to help establish a more in-depth understanding of the role of technology in forming impressions of candidates.

Initiate a discussion about equity vs. equality on your campus

While "equality" is often held up as an ideal to strive for when it comes to the treatment of job candidates, Equal Opportunity Offices in particular need to distinguish between equality (sameness) and equity (fairness). Treating all candidates the same, when they are not all starting from the same place due to a variety of factors, does not constitute fairness. Engaging in conversations about this principle represents a first step in altering unproductive institutional practices such as requirements that all candidates be interviewed in the same format.

Position interviews as a learning process instead of a vetting process

When serving on a search committee, propose establishing a stance of generosity where you approach the interviews as an opportunity to learn a lot about new scholarship and pedagogical approaches in your field. During this learning process, the committee will arrive at insights about which candidates would best suit the needs of the department. This change in attitude can leave committee members more open to the various perspectives and backgrounds that candidates will represent. In turn, candidates will likely finish the interview with the sense that their ideas have been taken seriously and respectfully, even if they do not progress to the next round.

Our willingness to talk as a field about accessibility in the context of interviews will have significant bearing on who will join the ranks of our field. Are we committed to welcoming a diverse range of perspectives and backgrounds? Are we willing to put into action our theorizing about multimodality and normativity and ability in the context of job searches? In working through these questions on a local and national level, the concept of *kairotic* spaces, including the principle of generosity, can help frame our discussions. In fact, these concepts can apply to interviews in other contexts, such as research projects. As previous scholarship in qualitative research methods has shown, the partiality and hierarchical nature of interviews demands that we work to disrupt dynamics that can unfairly represent interviewees. What disability studies brings to this discussion is robust thinking about how norms operate and exclude along many cross-sections of identity and privilege. Efforts to disrupt these normative practices can positively affect *all* participants—in this case, job candidates with a lot at stake in their interviews. These efforts will shape Writing Studies for years to come by influencing who we will call to be a part of it.

Appendix: Interview Questions

For committee members:

1. In what approximate years did you serve on a hiring committee?

2. About how many candidates did you interview?

3. Did you give candidates a choice in how you would interview them (phone, Skype, MLA), or did you decide to interview all candidates in the same medium? Why?

4. Why did you choose the medium that you did? Was this an issue that you discussed in depth as a committee?

5. Were you ultimately satisfied with the interview medium you chose? Anything that you would have done differently?

6. Would you be opposed to giving candidates options for how they would be interviewed and having them choose the format that makes them the most comfortable? What are some benefits or drawbacks that you could anticipate with that approach?

7. How might each interview method exclude/work against some candidates? Is there any way to mitigate that potential?

8. To your knowledge, does your Equal Opportunity Office mandate that you interview all candidates in the same way?

9. Did you distribute the interview questions ahead of time to candidates? Why? If not, would you be opposed to doing so in the future?

10. (If you conducted a phone interview), did you describe to candidates who was in the room before you began asking questions?

11. As a field, how might we conduct more accessible interviews?—by that, I mean establishing more generous practices that would benefit all candidates and allow them to perform at their best in an interview.

For candidates:

1. In what years did you go on the job market?

2. With about how many schools did you interview?

3. What interview formats have you experienced? (e.g., phone, MLA, Skype).

4. At any schools were you given a choice in how you would be interviewed?

5. Would you prefer to be given a choice in interview medium, or would you like to be told by the committee how they will interview you?

6. What interview format do you prefer, and why?

7. How might each interview format exclude/work against some candidates? Is there any way to mitigate that potential?

8. Did you ever receive interview questions ahead of time? How would/did that approach affect your answers and interactions with the committee?

9. On your phone interviews, did the committee explain to you who was in the room before they asked questions?

10. As a field, how might we conduct more accessible interviews?—by that, I mean establishing more generous practices that would benefit all candidates and allow them to perform at their best in an interview.

Notes

1. Peter Elbow's (1973) "believing game" might also be seen as a gesture of generosity in which we try to bear out a writer's line of thinking before adopting a more critical perspective (the "doubting game"). (Return to text.)

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