

THE ABLEIST OTHERING OF DISABILITY IN THE CLASSROOM: AN EXPERIENTIAL  
INVESTIGATION OF ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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## **Abstract**

Due to a rising interest for degrees in higher education, more students with disabilities have enrolled in the university system. Still, accessibility issues on campuses suggest institutions are not meeting the needs of students in the classroom or through curricula. This study examines current academic adjustments and the lived experiences of students with disabilities in order to understand the ableist Othering phenomenon in higher education. Qualitative research methods have been commonly used to investigate the “disabled voice”; however, triangulation of such methodologies has been criticized for reinforcing Otherness. This study used a phenomenological design implementing rhetorical agency for disabled students to answer open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews about their lived experiences. Consequently, such interviews created a platform for social change. The author also reflects on his own lived experiences as a deaf student in higher education. Findings include major themes such as a percolation of institutional hegemony, a re-appropriation of stigma through “voice,” and a call for inclusive strategies. Results indicate disabled students experience discrimination likely due to organizational tension in their university institution. Further, this study elaborates on proposed policy changes to college classrooms on large university campuses. Contributions of this study lie in implications for the future of qualitative inquiry, including how current research practices could undergo methodological reinvention to examine the ableist Othering phenomenon.

*Keywords:* accessibility; disability; triangulation; ableist Othering; rhetorical agency

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## **Dedication**

For Richard, Ruth, and Rick:

This is in memory of you.

For all the voices who feel silenced:

You will be heard.

## Chapter 1 - Rationale

“Every way of knowing, seeing, or naming is also a way of *not* knowing, *not* seeing, or *not* naming” — Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion*

Due to a rising interest in obtaining degrees in higher education, more students with learning, mental, neurological, and/or physical disabilities are enrolling in the university system. For example, “the percentage of post-secondary students with learning disabilities ranges from Jarrow’s (1987) estimate of 35% of the student population to Rothstein’s (2006) more accepted estimate of one in every 11 college students” (Quinlan, Bates, & Angell, 2012, p. 224). This influx is based on the desire for students with disabilities to pursue degrees alongside their nondisabled peers: to obtain meaningful training, careers, employment, and to feel a sense of community with a larger populace (Konur, 2006; Stage & Milne, 1996). Yet, even though students with disabilities form a *heterogeneous* group, they are often viewed in terms of “homogeneity,” or labeled as a collective body of individuals unable to learn specific academic skills required for career-oriented tasks despite having average or even above average intelligence and ability (Stage & Milne, 1996, p. 426). This “inability” stigma, labeling students with disabilities via “handicapping” linguistics (Hahn, 1983), has spread into a larger problem: universities failing to properly attend to students’ individual needs, despite how the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, the 2004 Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), and the 2008 Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADA) have all required federally funded institutions of higher education to provide appropriate accommodations for disabled students (Townsend, 2006).

Previous studies have addressed issues of “appropriate accommodations” for disabled

students (e.g., Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004; Ineson & Morris, 2006; Konur, 2006; Scott, 1994; Stage & Milne, 1996). Jung's (2001) thesis and Kraus's (2008) dissertation exemplify the growing body of works examining the silenced voices of the disabled student population in higher education. What is more, as higher education transitions into a technological age and curricula, the need to study how the policies of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the 2004 IDEA, and the 2008 ADA have shifted to adjust for students is crucial (e.g., Burgstahler, 2006; Carr, 2010; Foley, 2007; Jelfs & Richardson, 2010; Konur, 2007; Moisey, 2004; Richardson, 2009; Tandy & Meacham, 2009). Despite how several studies have taken initiatives to examine *academic adjustments* in a university setting—including “course or program modifications, extension of assignment due dates, alternate testing procedures, as well as access to adaptive technology and structural modifications to buildings (e.g., ramps)” (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006, p. 195)—to facilitate access for students with disabilities, little research has examined the lived experiences of the disabled student adapting to the college classroom (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012), *or* has offered solutions to the dissolution of “inability” rhetoric that governs the lives of disabled students in higher education.

Allen (2004) noted how students with disabilities continue to endure discriminatory treatment by those who are nondisabled—where interactions create “feelings of uneasiness, stereotypes, and biases” (p. 159). The stigmatic rhetoricity around “disability” extends into higher education through accessibility and adaptations in the classroom, yielding an insidious form of discrimination known as *academic ableism*—the favoring of the abled-body individual over the disabled-body student, who is often viewed as inferior or “a burden” to the university classroom (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Although those with administrative powers seek to provide appropriate accommodations for the student, Bach (2005) argues that when

organizational tensions arise from bureaucratic expansion in a university, a hegemonic, discriminatory process (known as *Othering*) commences. That is, students with disabilities are not only subjected to overt (and recognizable) forms of ableism, but are also subconsciously differentiated from the “normal” academic population because they are ontologically viewed as “abnormal.” This binary around what is (and what is not) considered a “socially acceptable” body image has long been historicized and has driven cultural and social rhetorics (Ernst, 2006). To put it another way, at a level of obliviousness, individuals in higher education “Other” the body of a student with a disability by ignoring (at least temporarily) the consciousness of their corporeality and Being—grouping students with disabilities into a category of objects—viewing them through the normal/abnormal binary as subhuman, flawed, or freak shows rather than as persons with identities that deserve equal standing with the nondisabled Self (Wendell, 1996, p. 86). Essentially, the actions and rhetorics of nondisabled individuals reflect a deep-seated, cultural (and societal) ideology that manifests a problem in the college classroom.

This particularly intricate, and seemingly interminable, combination yields a phenomenon known as *ableist Othering*. This discriminatory form dictates that disabled students may be given only the necessary academic adjustments to “get by” in the classroom and not the full array of accommodations needed to have an equitable opportunity in college classrooms with nondisabled peers (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Storey, 2007). Federal educational institutions face the pressure of adjusting to an increasing enrollment of disabled students; as such, institutional forces interplay to re-instill the ideology that the disabled individual belongs to a marginalized out-group (Konur, 2006; Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). The potentiality for this power imbalance calls attention to a lingering effect: as disabled populations grow on campuses (see Quinlan et al., 2012), universities could further marginalize the voices of students by not recognizing (or being

aware of) how the help that is given to students (albeit “reasonable”) may not be through the most correct means and may actually hinder a student’s learning opportunities in the college classroom (Switzer, 2003b). Thus, this study investigates the ableist Othering phenomenon.

The sociological phenomenon of the Other is one that continues to intrigue scholars as a plausible explanation for communicative discord between individuals, especially for those belonging to minority groups (like the disabled population) (Fine & Asch, 1988). Obviously, the rhetoricity of the Other is nothing novel to communication scholarship. A term coined in Edward Said’s (1978) work, *Orientalism*, to apply to those depicted as “backward, degenerate, and inferior to the mainstream Western standard” (Winslow, 2010, p. 259), the Other has primarily infiltrated qualitative social science and proliferated in critical studies to explain the underlying hegemonic processes of objectifying and stereotyping certain groups of people through caricatures of their actual lifestyles and lived experiences (Brummett, 2008). Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) note that examining the Other through critical analysis has given researchers the ability “to give voice to people who were previously ignored or were the object of distorted conceptions” (p. 299). However, regarding disabled people, “the current presentation of ‘disability’ in universities fosters the notion that disability is an individual... ‘problem’; that the ‘disabled voice’ is absent from the curriculum; that disabled people are objectified as a result; [and] that there is a lack of critical analysis” (Barnes, 1999, p. 567). As such, critical theory and qualitative inquiry are needed to recognize and liberate voices (i.e., the “disabled voice”) from stereotyping and discrimination in a normative society.

Currently, common methods of critical analysis for investigating and rupturing the hegemony of the Other have included personal narratives, reflexivity, and dialogue (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). These methods allow researchers to give “voice” to the Other by

pinpointing and unveiling hegemony where it is most invisible and saturated. Here, critical theory becomes the key for providing a space for inventing rhetoric of the oppressed and silenced: it dissimilates those who are deemed as Others into unique Selves, absent of demoralization and the possibility for objectification. At a very ontological level, the equality of Being materializes from the space between Self and Other.

Albeit idealistic for transforming communication around the Other sociologically, one problem that surfaced in scholarship (when abiding by such “liberating” methods of critical analysis to de-marginalize the disabled-Other) is the possibility of contradictory writing in scholarship that re-inscribes subjugation and dehumanization. Michelle Fine (1994) notes “much of qualitative research has reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the Other” (p. 130), emphasizing how researchers self-consciously “work the hyphen” (e.g., of a Self-Other binary), carrying no voice, body, race, class, or gender and no interests as they produce texts to presumably paint the Other from “nowhere” (p. 138). In other words, because of the inclination to view disability as a homogenous mass, colonizing writing is likely since researchers can tilt toward writing strategies that could reproduce Othering on, despite, or even “for” a text by generalizing the qualitative data gained from investigating the lived experiences of the subjugated body to some uniform simplification of a phenomenon (like ableist Othering) (Fine, 1994). Since disability is a subjective, socially derived concept (Brown, 2001), if critical scholars are not careful about how they postulate phenomena, the narrative, reflexive, or dialogic methods can backfire and re-inscribe marginalization.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of students with disabilities in the college classroom and the reasonableness of accessibility in curriculum in regards to their individual needs. That is, it explores these students’ perceptions and lived experiences regarding

these factors in order to understand how they could be Othered in higher education. Specifically, this study draws upon the critical disability paradigm (Denhart, 2008; Hibbs & Pothier, 2006) to examine how organizational tension in higher educational institutions disperses discriminatory acts onto students with disabilities in the classroom (e.g., lack of wheelchair ramps in small classrooms, lack of appropriate audiovisual aid for the hearing and/or visually-disabled, unadjusted examination formats, unmodified settings in the classroom, and so on) (Konur, 2006), and to investigate if any communication barriers arise in interpersonal interactions with nondisabled peers and teachers due to that organizational tension (Hurt & Gonzalez, 1988).

This study also interpolates the ableist Othering phenomenon as a theoretical framework. Bach (2005) identifies this hegemonic and systemic process as an *organizational irrationality*—“a form of disenfranchising, discounting, or marginalizing [a] person” (p. 259). It is because of this organizational irrationality in a university setting that misconceptions and stigmas about “disability” perpetuate, further demoralizing the disabled student population. By integrating this framework into a space that works to surface a silenced rhetoric of the disabled-Other through critical analysis, not only is it possible to re-conceptualize the disabled-Other (particularly, the stigma surrounding disability identity, corporeality, and Being), but it also allows for a re-examination of current qualitative techniques used in critical disability scholarship in order to avoid writing the Other through a contradiction-filled, colonizing discourse (Fine, 1994).

As seen in disability education studies (see Fuller et al., 2004)<sup>1</sup>, this study proposes interview procedures to empathize with the perceptions and lived experiences of students with

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller et al. (2004) examined 173 students in the U.K. post-secondary education system, combining survey and questionnaire methods to gain detailed comments about how students perceived teaching, learning, and assessment of the college classroom. Findings reported 44% of disabled students experienced barriers to learning in the classroom, despite having asked for personal accommodations.

disabilities in the college classroom. Methodologically, to investigate how ableist Othering affects students with disabilities in higher education, this study adopts phenomenology. The phenomenological approach has long integrated critical lens into interview procedures to construct a space that emancipates the “disabled voice” (e.g., see Paterson & Hughes, 1999); thus, this study employs components of phenomenology by implementing rhetorical agency.

While phenomenologists from Husserl to Levinas have long examined the Self-Other bifurcation by focusing on connections between subject and object in order to resist opposition (Cooper, 2011), few approaches have been successful seguing away from this dyad and empowering the Other as part of the Self. The dyad remains to further objectify and reduce the humanity of the Other in social discourse, to conceive it as a passive part of Self, unable to be free from subjugation. *Rhetorical agency*, on the other hand, detaches from subject (the Self) to “[occupy] the agentic intersection of the semiotic and the material through a rhetorical performance” (Herndl & Licona, 2007, p. 141), opening a space for the Other to be responsive to acts of subjugation and to *actively* liberate itself from hegemony through social action. In other words, this study examines the concept of rhetorical agency by tapping into phenomenology to allow for disabled voices to carry persuasive influence. Particularly, rhetorical agency is used with Dinkins’s (2005) “Socratic-hermeneutic interpre-viewing,” which primarily focuses on dialogic and reflexive exchange (rather than narrative) in interviewing to empower the “disabled voice.” That is, by adapting interview procedures to generate a dialogic platform for students with disabilities, scholars can critically “re-see” the students’ role in the college classroom, their voices, and their actions as a means of instigating social change—one with practical contributions to the sociological reconceptualization of disability and to the rhetorical re-linguaging of administrative policies to better fit the needs of students.

Yet, several questions have been raised about how rhetorical agency is used in the methods triangulation of phenomenology: how does examining ableist Othering through rhetorical agency change the validity of disabled voices? Also, while rhetorical agency moves to validate disabled voices *individually* (by liberating the Other), how does it help phenomenology to facilitate and validate “voice” *culturally* (and infer conclusions about the lived experiences of students with disabilities *on a macroscopic scale* to arrive at some understanding of the reality of academic ableism)? Is rhetorical agency enough to justify critical analysis in disability research? (Brown, 2001). This project functions under the working assumption that rhetorical agency can potentially enhance qualitative methods to emancipate “voice” and to avoid Otherness in writing, but to a certain degree. So, drawing upon assumptions about institutional ableist Othering, this study operates as a space to understand the potency of rhetorical agency in constructing disability identity for students in higher education. It seeks to emancipate the disabled-Other in society and in scholarly writing by generating a platform that uses rhetorical agency to paint the Other as an active part of Self, carrying a voice that could be *empirically* usable to show the percolation of this cultural phenomenon and the need for its disruption.

In sum, the knowledge regarding the disabled student’s role in the college classroom, the potential implication of the ableist Othering phenomenon on academic adjustments in higher education, and the degree to which rhetorical agency has the power to emancipate marginalized individuals all propel an examination of (and search for) an appropriate type of methodology to validate disabled voices in the public’s eye.

To be candid for a moment: As a researcher, I recognize the thirdness of this chapter’s writing style. As a participant who is also in this study, the format of this chapter has situated me as part of the disabled-Other, even with my interruption of the first-person voice. Yet, such a

deficit model speaks more to the scholar who views reality objectively. This project resides in a paradox between Self and Other, subjective and objective, agency and structure, freedom and circumscription: No matter how I choose to write about the disabled-Other and the methodologies used for emancipation, I recognize there is no escape from potential colonization. Still, the very paradox lingering over this study encapsulates an interesting musing: perhaps the space between first- and third- persona is where reinvention is most feasible. A methodology to challenge (but not necessarily eradicate) Otherness could lie in the intersection of critical theory and other unexplored techniques, and in the hyphen of the Self-Other duality. I recognize that the problems I addressed in this chapter will be problems that may again surface in this study. But it is about walking the line in this thesis between objectivity and subjectivity that elicits an opportunity for me to finally tackle a problem that has long needed resolution.

That said, this investigation calls for research questions to learn about and address these aforementioned issues. Such answers will likely contribute to research in critical disability studies, initiating social change to efface Otherness, not only in academia, but also in culture, and to abolish stigmatic rhetorics and perceptions surrounding the meaning of “disability.” As such, this study proposes the following, formalized research question:

RQ1: How does the college classroom perpetuate ableist Othering for the disabled student?

RQ2: How does rhetorical agency of the “disabled voice” minimize ableist Othering in the classroom?

RQ3: How do disabled students use self-identification and disclosure to conceptualize additional ways of inclusion and accessibility?

To outline the disabled students’ experiences, this thesis proceeds in four parts:

Chapter two turns to previous research on the theoretical frameworks and methodological procedures in this study to obtain appropriate answers to the research questions. Chapter two describes relevant literature on the historicity of disability stigmatization and the problem

regarding accessibility in higher education. It also explores the components of the ableist Othering phenomenon in academia to justify methodology needed to understand the repercussions of discrimination on disabled students. Finally, chapter two turns to an in-depth discussion of the potency of rhetorical agency, and how it is used with disabled voices for liberation against hegemonic processes.

Chapter three outlines the critical methodology of phenomenology—or rather, components of Socratic-hermeneutic interpre-viewing (Dinkins, 2005)—entwined with rhetorical agency to facilitate “voice” emancipation. Chapter three details the steps needed to construct a dialogic and reflexive platform for the agentic interplay of disabled voices to rhetorically liberate the disabled-Other in academia. What is more, it addresses both strengths and weaknesses of triangulation (Denzin, 1970/1978) in this methodology to suggest how potential changes are needed to the symbolic structure of rhetorical agency—and to the strategies used in methods triangulation (Patton, 1999)—such that critical analysis can carry the validity of the “disabled voice” to a larger cultural scale.

Chapter four narrates the themes emerging from critical analysis of the silenced voices of the disabled student population in higher education, generating answers to the research questions. In addition, chapter four seeks to open a space for the rhetorical reinvention of “disability” and for the validation of a large-scale problem in academia through the coalescing of multiple disability identities.

Chapter five addresses implications concerning how the disabled student is subjected to discriminatory organizational hegemony in the college classroom. Chapter five discusses, from data analysis, what policy suggestions and solutions (if any) can be implemented on an administrative and personal level in academia (i.e., what the voices of students propose as policy

changes to the college classroom on large university campuses). Additionally, this chapter addresses what the potential changes to the symbolic structure of rhetorical agency look like, and how such re-structuration can be used to challenge stigmatic social rhetoric and to re-construct disability identity. In turn, it highlights limitations of this study, especially if current qualitative methods are used to project the findings to a cultural scale. As such, chapter five ends with contributions for the future of qualitative research, calling for methodological reinvention in critical theory—one that potentially stems from anthropology, semiology, rhetoric, and theoretical mathematics—to study the ableist Othering phenomenon from a critical *cultural* analysis. It pushes to integrate individual qualitative data gained from the use of rhetorical agency in this study to cultivate validation of academic ableism on an infrastructural scale.

This thesis offers a cross-disciplinary outlook that moves away from the rose-colored lens scholars have used for decades to study Othering (Flick, 1992). That is, to view phenomena through both subjective and social knowledge requires the integration of a “many-sided kaleidoscope”—or rather, a radical shift in conceptualization and an attack of the ableist Othering problem from a lens that may never have been “seen” before (Flick, 1992, p. 47). It is only through investigating the lived experiences of students with disabilities that scholars can move away from tunnel visions (i.e., their worldviews) and excavate a new way of seeing that offers resistance to ableist Othering in Western culture (Burke, 1970), and potentially free those in the disabled population from the margins of silence.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

To study the experiential lives of students with disabilities is nothing new. But Amanda Kraus's (2008) dissertation puts it best: "literature pertaining to students with physical disabilities in higher education is scarce [and] literature that discusses the concept of disability identity is virtually nonexistent" (p. 27). To study the constructs of disability identity in post-secondary education arises an examination of an area of untapped research, and propagates several questions about this investigation.

This chapter explores literature pertaining to Kraus's concerns and proceeds in three parts. The first section discusses "disability" as a construct and addresses how academic accommodations in higher education influence the dimensions of disability identity. The second section tackles Othering in regards to disability. What is more, this section addresses a clearer delineation of this hegemonic process by discussing ableism in the context of higher education. The third and final section of this literature review highlights rhetorical agency and how students with disabilities can tap into its power to create and facilitate a voice for liberation from marginalization. Each section aims to shed light on the various dimensions of the pressing issue of ableist Othering in disability studies.

### **Accessibility in Higher Education**

When the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) were signed into law, the intention was to provide students with disabilities a "free and appropriate public education" (Titsworth, 1999, p. 171). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights further established Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in *higher* education (Stage & Milne, 1996; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2011). But the integration of those who

identified as “disabled” into mainstream classrooms due to these national policies has exposed challenges in the educational and political spheres. Disability scholar Harlan Hahn (1983) attested how the word “disability” seemingly accumulated negative health-related connotations such as “handicapped, crippled, and invalid” in public parlance (p. 37), seeping into the written administrative policies of public education. In turn, such negative biomedical connotations of disability have generated perceptions and attitudes that shape relationships in the classroom, which has pressing problems (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). It spurred the attention of educators, who inquired about the likelihood of these perceptions turning into discriminatory acts that fashion communication barriers to hinder straightforward interaction between the disabled and nondisabled (Daniels, Panico, & Sudholt, 2011). Specifically, more and more students with disabilities acclimating themselves into the public classroom began to see misunderstandings rise in teacher/student and peer/peer interactions (Hurt & Gonzalez, 1988). While strides have been made to amend the national policies to extinguish discriminatory language and acts in the public classroom (with revisions to the 2004 IDEA Improvement Act and the 2008 ADA Amendments Act), the U.S. Department of Education’s delineation of “disability” only led to dissension in policy-making and furthered public prejudice (Townsend, 2006; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2011).

These national “disability” policies have shaped an organizational discourse with unique stipulations in post-secondary education, resulting in few college students with disabilities attending universities over the past several decades. To clarify, this study addresses “disability” as outlined by these aforementioned national policies (Section 3 of the 2008 ADA Amendments Act, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, and Section 612 of the 2004 IDEA) to show the inconsistency in defining the term and the resulting discrimination against college students with

disabilities because of it. For example, Titsworth (1999) defined “disability” as a label that identifies individuals who meet one or more of the following criteria<sup>2</sup>:

Mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments [such as stuttering], visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments or specific learning disabilities [such as dyslexia], and who by reason thereof, need special education and related services. (p. 171)

While this definition does highlight many physical constructs of disability based on the U.S. Department of Education, “the dominating concepts, definitions, and images of disability have [historically] mostly been created and produced by non-disabled people” (Reinikainen, 2006, p. 196). Most definitions of “disability” are constructed out of the Old Paradigm—a medical model that defines “disability” in terms of deficits that keep individuals with disabilities from carrying out daily functions and activities (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 30). While ideology throughout the past several years has shifted to a multi-faceted, overarching Disability Paradigm (e.g., social constructionist version, social model, oppressed minority, post-modern version, human variation version, etcetera), a critical problem that lingers *in writing* about disability is the charge that nondisabled researchers have taken Old Paradigm ideology and imposed it in the *language* of their scholarship (e.g., juxtaposing disability with disease, illness, or injuries) (Switzer, 2003a), continuing objectification of *the disabled body* through rhetoric that equates “disability” to “inability” (Pfeiffer, 2001). It thus poses a question: how then do we define the term “disability” when cultural institutions (driven by an outmoded, “abled” paradigm) dictate the social and rhetorical constructions of such a definition?

Since “disability” aligns with both “inferiority” and “minority” in public discourse (Hahn, 1983), it is not the intention of the present study to further marginalize the body of a

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<sup>2</sup> Under the IDEA of 2004, students ages 3 through 21 are eligible for special education and related services based on this criteria.

person with a disability through “able-constructed” rhetoric or to create lexical ambiguity (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1995; Rose, 1995). However, for the purposes of creating an inventive space for linguistic re-construction in later chapters, this study constructs the definition of “disability” around critical disability theory’s foundational ideas. While any definition of disability “must deal with diverse impairments, various cultural implications, and varying social settings in which a barrier to one person with a disability is of little consequence to another” (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 40), this study offers a narrow scope for understanding disability to allow for reinvention.

But first, “disability” should be defined through what it does *not* mean such that any reader of this text does not assume characteristics of the disabled body such that hegemony around the term is re-inscribed. Pfeiffer (2001) describes five criteria:

(1) Disability is not a tragedy; (2) disability does not mean dependency; (3) disability does not mean a loss of potential, productivity, social contribution, value, capability, ability, and the like; (4) disability is a natural part of...everyone’s life; and (5) there is as much variation among people with disabilities as among people in general. (p. 44)

In other words, people with disabilities are “not courageous, noble, and brave any more than any one else...not poor unless they are unemployed...not ignorant [due to] so-called special education...and do not have to be with ‘their own kind’” (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 45). To define disability by what it is *not* opens space to define disability by what it actually is.

Disability theory stems from interdisciplinary fields and offers a framework to form a conceptual understanding of “disability” such that it does not progress sub-humanity, marginalization, or sociological differences. Three ideas lie at the root of disability theory: (1) disability is social constructed; (2) disability is part of normal human variation; and (3) disability requires “voice” to deconstruct what it does and does not mean to the individual (Denhart, 2008).

First, “disability” can be defined through the product of social interaction (McDermott &

Varenne, 1999). That is, a socially constructed meaning of disability is based around political and institutional forces that start through interpersonal discourse, and it is through dismantling such forces that allows for changes in values, attitudes, and assumptions of disability (McDermott & Varenne, 1997). Björnsdóttir (2010) articulates that the conceptual construction of “disability” should be re-appropriated and rhetoricized around socially constructed identity to encompass the experiences of human living. Björnsdóttir implemented inclusive life history research to challenge “the usefulness of the intellectual disability label [by examining] how the participants resist the label by telling stories of competence and abilities” (para. 1). The method used here emphasized “active participation of people with disabilities in the research process (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003) and [encompassed] both participatory (Chappell, 2000) and emancipatory research practices (Barnes, 2003)” (Björnsdóttir, 2010, para. 6). While the participatory narratives and emancipatory voices worked to reject the label of “intellectually disabled,” participants still encountered many incidences where rejection was ineffectual and resorted to “passing as normal” to fit into society’s reflection of a competent body (para. 45). Life history research is just one means of focusing on the social identity formation for disabled individuals as a means to dismantle normative ideology and to construct identities that are not shaped by dominant cultural institutions (see, e.g., Broun and Heshusius, 2004).

Second, disability is part of normal human variation. Scotch and Schriener (1997) argue that people with disabilities suffered discrimination not because of shared group characteristics, but because of the way in which people *viewed and reacted* to them. The normalized, mainstream view of disability has always defined “people with...disabilities based on their inabilities and limitations...with the focus on individual impairment, [which] can restrict people’s identity formation (Hughes, 2002; Hughes, et al., 2005)” (Björnsdóttir, 2010, para.11).

“Impairment does introduce complexity into [people’s] lives.... [But] an approach based on the notion of this complex variation would help understand disability and resolve problems” (Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 40). With human variation adapting to a more flexible (and global) social system, disability seen as a negative can begin to disappear from public consciousness. Since the “act of labeling... could be recognized as an expression of the non-disabled or professional habitus, which reproduces the hierarchical distinctions between non-disabled people and people with disabilities” (Björnsdóttir, 2010, para. 11), a more universal design based around human variation would lessen discrepancies in resource allocation and allow for a more ambiguous understanding of the human body.

Lastly, “voice” is necessary to deconstruct disability for what it is and what it is not in order to authentically understand its use in research (Denhart, 2008; Higgins, 1992). In other words, “voice” can have two functions here: first, for a disabled researcher, voice allows for the open proclamation of personal labels of disability in writing, creating a space where the researcher and participant can work to build a platform against hegemonic institutions (Denhart, 2008). In the case of a nondisabled researcher, voice allows for the construction of multiple views of what it means to be disabled—which then allows researcher and participant to gain a mutual understanding of “disability” by using voice to challenge hegemony. Secondly, for a participant, voice can work hand-in-hand with agency to create a platform for social action, initiating a space for the reinvention of identity (Kerschbaum, 2014). Research participants can choose to define “disability” through the socially normative definition, an ambiguous personal connotation, or no connection to the label whatsoever. By doing so, “disability” is rhetorically and ontologically negotiated, potentially rejected as a diagnosis, and then reified as a phenomenological embodiment of Self. A later section in this chapter will focus more on the

strengths and weaknesses of “voice” when challenging hegemony.

However an individual chooses to define “disability,” the problems stemming from linguistic abstruseness permeate societal institutions. In particular, the educational sphere has seen the consequences of ambiguous (and stigmatic) rhetoric. The subsequent challenges are seen in defining student accessibility needs in the classroom. According to the 2004 IDEA, the 2008 ADA, and the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, school districts and/or post-secondary educational institutions “must identify an individual’s needs and provide any regular or special education and related aids and services necessary to meet those needs as well as it is meeting the needs of students without disabilities” (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2011, para. 8). It was the intention of the modified national policies (the 2004 IDEA and the 2008 ADA) to clarify what consisted of necessary academic accommodations (e.g., Individual Education Programs—IEPs—in special education classrooms). Other examples of such personal adjustments include:

Arranging for priority registration; reducing a course load; substituting one course for another; providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, extended time for testing, and, if telephones are provided in dorm rooms, a TTY [teletypewriter] in [the] dorm room; and equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition, or other adaptive software or hardware. (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2011, para. 16)

On the contrary, educators in the university system misunderstand the term “reasonable” and how it applies to accessibility needs for students with disabilities (Switzer, 2003b). Kraus (2008) argues: “the majority of services in place [in higher education]...seek only to provide immediate solutions to issues of access or ADA compliance” (p. 12). Educators in the post-secondary system have yet to fully recognize how students with disabilities experience accommodations (or lack thereof) in the college classroom. Even if individual needs are met, the classroom experiences of students with disabilities still may not match with the learning experience of their nondisabled peers in terms of equity.

The discrepancies in defining “accessibility” seen in post-secondary education contexts are due to the long-running Old Paradigm mentality. National policies approach a “one-size-fits-all” mentality, “treating disabled students like everyone else instead of focusing on their individualized needs” (Townsend, 2006, p. 230). The lack of diversity in conceptualizing academic accommodations negates the uniqueness of lived experiences of students with disabilities, again fitting them to a homogeneous mass. As such, understanding lived experiences through this “lowest common denominator” accommodation process begs scrutiny.

Several studies (e.g., Fuller et al., 2004; Holloway, 2001; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Jung, 2001; Konur, 2006; Kraus, 2008; Sachs & Schreuer, 2011) have answered the call through qualitative questionnaire methods and/or quantitative surveys. Yet, few have addressed the lived experiences of students with disabilities from a critical or rhetorical approach. Koro-Ljungberg (2004) details several critical techniques that can be used to examine lived experiences through an empowered/disempowered lens: researchers who use these methods “acknowledge that power is circulating everywhere and effectively exercised within discursive fields” (p. 608) and shift focus to study Othering processes that work to colonize individuals. Critical ethnography (which emphasizes meaning in critical conversations aimed to promote change) (see, e.g., Segall, 2001), feminist ethnography (which uses life histories and stories to negotiate gender in a larger culture) (see, e.g., Visweswaran, 1997), and deconstructive ethnography (which displaces prevailing social binaries to irrupt linguistic webs of power in educational practices) (see, e.g., Spivak, 1997) each incorporate a more interpretative stance than the conventional ethnography in order to advocate for the oppressed. However, Koro-Ljungberg (2004) warns that such techniques could run the risk of oversimplification if researchers are not mindful of how they use partial representations of selves and voices in data analysis: these tools can threaten coexistence in a

critical space by “re-inscribing critique and multiple cultural illustrations” (p. 612), painting the Other from “nowhere” (Fine, 1994). Critical field research can further Otherness when translated into the academy because of how it writes about and addresses lived experiences in culture.

The fact remains “there has not been any recent study exploring the teaching and learning aspects [addressing accessibility] from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective (Hurst, 1996)” (Konur, 2006, p. 352). Thus, while the aforementioned critical techniques can be useful, little is known about how students with disabilities navigate the classroom when accessibility is defined by power structures. It is through *how to talk* about academic accommodations in the college classroom (i.e., examining the metadiscourse—see Foucault (1969/1972)—of accessibility through a critical *and* rhetorical sense) that opens a space for understanding the lived experiences of students with disabilities and how those voices can offer changes to educational policy and public parlance.

Several additional methods have been used as means of highlighting the voices of disabled students in the college classroom, the most common of which that offer the most cognitively-progressive results in scholarship and practical applicability for social change are narrative inquiry, reflexivity, and dialogic discourse. Koro-Ljungberg’s (2007) navigates the lived experiences of disabled students in the classroom through narrative inquiry to show an inequitable education system (despite the use of academic accommodations) and to understand the implications of narrative to social change. Koro-Ljungberg focuses on the learned understanding of how democratic pedagogical practices and research training in higher education can occur, taking a critical standpoint to examine “the social purposes [in higher education] and the ways in which [the] practices might serve or undermine [the] social and political values [of the academic institution]” (p. 736). Here, a narrative approach “builds on the differences...by

revising, in collaboration with students, the curriculum and classroom activities from semester to semester and class to class” to change classroom dynamics and allow for more equality between students, regardless of ability (p. 738). The co-construction of the narratives from all students regarding their learning experiences is able to shape the power structures of the classroom in such a way that learning differences (such as Otherness) between students become finite, conscious, and easily removable from the classroom and enhance understanding toward the disabled student population in the college classroom (Koro-Ljungberg, 2007).

Similarly, reflexivity and dialogic discourse offer a means of constructing a rhetorical approach for social change in the college classroom for students with disabilities. Unlike the narrative approach that fleshes out a series of happenstances (and memories) in the classroom, the power of voice transcends the ephemeral moments of the classroom to instigate transformation on a grander scale (institutionally and systemically). For example, Denhart (2008) demonstrates how voice offers a space to self-define how she is labeled as an individual with a learning disability (LD). She is able to construct a view that challenges normalized social assumptions of dyslexia by writing about her personal lived experiences through reflexivity. In addition, in order to form an interpersonal connection with her participants, Denhart disclosed her experiences with dyslexia through dialogue *prior to* interviews to facilitate discussion on defining disability that would lead to social change. As such, the present study delves further into the critical techniques of reflexivity and dialogue used here to explore the dimensions of and to understand the strengths and limitations of “voice” when it acts as a rhetorical function for challenging hegemony—ultimately, hoping to construct a better comprehension of the power of “voice” in research and in discursive spaces.

The coupling of reflexivity and dialogic discourse with voice has been previously

extrapolated to understand the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the college classroom in a more rhetorical sense. Stage and Milne (1996) used ethnographic techniques “to learn [about] individual students’ interpretations of their educational experiences” (Stage & Milne, 1996, p. 430). The semi-structured interviews were used to collect descriptive data regarding the experiences of students with learning disabilities in the college classroom, and then adopt that data into potential findings that could rectify accessibility policy. The open-ended questions in the interviews included topics ranging from: “(a) a general description of the students’ college experiences; (b) students’ experiences with faculty, peers, and tutors; (c) students’ comparison of himself or herself to others; (d) strategies the student employed in his or her studies; and (e) perceptions of current classroom accommodations” (Stage & Milne, 1996, p. 431). The authors’ study drew upon critical tools of reflexivity and dialogue to show how the label of “disabled” impacted academic performance and caused frustrations in the college classroom with peers and teachers (p. 436). Here, voice as a rhetorical function operates to progress social change. That is, the findings propelled this study to make use of voice (and the tools that augment its potency in discourse) for changes in policy writing.

With this mind, this study investigates how “disability” identity is individually constructed and how the misconstrued interpretations around the term affect issues of accessibility in higher education classrooms. Together, this study uses these concepts to examine RQ3: how students conceptualize potential changes and what consequences to disability and accommodation policy ensue through self-identification and disclosure.

### **Ableist Othering in the Classroom**

The theoretical framework for this study is unique. It is a co-creation between Othering and academic ableism. Both are needed to understand the unique discrimination and societal

stigmatization of corporeality. As such, this section of the chapter addresses how the disabled-Other was conceptually created and how that evolved into the perpetuation of ableism in an academic setting.

### ***The Creation of the Disabled-Other***

It was the rise of the European traditions in social sciences (e.g., Marxism, hermeneutics, structuralism, phenomenology, existentialism, and critical theory of the Frankfurt school) in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that spurred the philosophical construction of the constitutive Other. The term spawned from several bodies of literature to denote a different-from-the-norm Self—a mystified Self separate from one’s own identity, reduced to an object by a hegemonic subject (Levinas, 1961/1969). The Other happens by reducing a Self to thirdness.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was among the first to study the Other as a constituent in Self-consciousness. Hegel (1977) sought to understand the standpoints of individuals through intersubjective play—noting that “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it exists for an-Other” (p. 178). Here, *intersubjectivity* becomes known as the interrelationship between Self and Other with language acting as a medium and tether (Yushan & Hongjing, 2013). Hegel begins his account on “the development of intersubjectivity and freedom by imagining what a lone subject might look like, a subject which is constrained by its physical needs only and which lives only according to its desires and needs” (Bird-Pollan, 2012, p. 243). For Hegel, this subject particularly manifests itself through Self-consciousness, dependent upon Otherness because the Self feeds on these desires and needs, “creating a concealed force that seeks destruction: the Other” (Geniušas, 2008, p. 32). This realization that the Self is dependent on the Other constitutes “the necessity for the dialectic of desire to lead to the dialectic of *recognition*” (Geniušas, 2008, p. 33, emphasis in original). The recognition of a unique Self can

only come through an opposing Other, but it cannot exist without an external contrast.

Yet the construction of this dialectic was linked to views of power and hierarchy. Edmund Husserl's description of the intersubjectivity in the Self-Other dichotomy contained distinctions and objectivities, which ultimately led to studying this dyad through phenomenology (Moran, 2000). Husserl thought the Other should appear more as a unique phenomenon, a distinct consciousness separate from the Self-consciousness, rather than be studied empirically as connected with the Self (Geniušas, 2008; Moran, 2000). The obscurity of the line between Self and Other took a sudden shift in philosophical thought with phenomenology, which was due, in part, to Hegel's portrayal of the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage—where Self-consciousness becomes free through recognizing the Other as mutually part of the Self, abandoning the initial hypothesis where the Other was doomed inessential and destructive (Geniušas, 2008). Hegel identified this “depiction of slave-master relationships and the reciprocal, but not necessarily equal, power between them” as a process known as *Othering* (Jackson & Hogg, 2010, p. 519). Othering plays on a power-distancing component with those viewed as “different” in social interactions. In this hegemonic process, the Other is perceived negatively and is less admired or respected than the Self; this can be done through direct communication (such as a slur) or through unspoken disdain (such as social avoidance) (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). The Self-Other binary transcends into a power-distancing dyad with severe consequences for interrelationships.

Othering extends beyond interpersonal dialogue to a collective group space, complicating the way it governs social attitude and actions. Jackson and Hogg (2010) explain: “Othering is rooted in...in-group favoritism and out-group bias. In-group favoritism suggests a person deemed similar...to the [Self] will be treated well or better than a dissimilar person and will receive some favoritism in interactions” (p. 520). These clear delineations instigated the

development of Othering rhetoric across scholarship to articulate the multiplicative and subconscious discriminatory patterns in a larger Western cultural context. Said (1978) was first to remark the dissimilarity between Self and Other in culture, where the Self begins to envelop a cultural group of Normality (those that follow the norm of what is traditionally socially acceptable) and the Other is confined to a lesser, sub-cultural group of Abnormality (those that seem backward, degenerate, or deviating from the norm). By viewing the Other in a grander scheme, those part of the “abnormal” group are objectified or treated as lacking emotions, incapable of reflective thought, and reduced to stereotypes (Stewart & Logan, 1993). Now equipped with a culturally constructed definition, the Self-Other binary takes on what eventually becomes hegemony in the making: where an individual deeming another person as Other decides that person’s identity is different because they do not follow conventions.

Feminist scholar bell hooks furthers this notion of how Othering in a cultural space is constructed to reinforce a social reality regulated by status quo (Winslow, 2010). hooks criticizes much of the Othering process in this context, discussing in many of her works how Western culture often “partakes in and then consumes ‘Othered’ cultural products, practices, and values without a second thought as to what discriminatory patterns were occurring with this consumption” (Jackson & Hogg, 2010, p. 519). In fact, viewing the Other in a sub-human way as “a cipher, or non-person (Bullis & Bach, 1996)” (Bach, 2005, p. 259) has been used to refer to groups that have historically been marginalized in society. It is here the discourse of Othering becomes an exertion of heinous, subconscious, and invisible power over cultural groups considered different-from-the-norm. That is, the Othering of “abnormal” groups occurs without anyone of-the-norm mindfully recognizing that the process is occurring because it has become commonplace to view someone “different” in a negative way.

One group that has had a long history of negative silence due to marginalization through cultural Othering is the disabled (Fitzgerald, 1999). Richards (2008) is one scholar that highlights how Othering in disability studies is often over-shadowed, and that attention to the Othering of disability is critical to ending the different forms of discrimination that occur. Richards notes “people with disabilities or illnesses are often reduced to the status of malfunctioning bodies and viewed as lacking capacity to put forward their point of view” (p. 1719). For those with a disability, that disability frequently plays a subjugating role in their lives. “This is not simply because of the impact of the impairment itself (the organic disability), but also because of the way in which society responds to disability (the social view of disability)” (Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 269). The way contemporary culture and society defines disability through negative perceptions dictate the creation of a *disabled-Other*: an Other with a double negative entendre, constructed by the Self’s view of what it means to have an ability, and constrained by what society views as a body that does or does not “fit the norm.” Susan Wendell’s (1996) work, *The Rejected Body*, explains how the disabled-Other equates to sub-humanity by nondisabled individuals who view themselves as the “paradigm of humanity” (p. 60). To view the Other through the body and its abilities is “to ignore...the consciousness that is embodied there and to fail to concern oneself with her/his subjective bodily experience” (Wendell, 1996, p. 86). Those with disabilities are viewed as incapable of owning their bodies, and are then objectified and neglected a chance to share their bodily experiences because of negative perceptions.

The disabled-Other has been studied through several important bodies of literature, all making strides to shed light on the perpetual forms of discrimination created by Othering disability. One example of how endless and powerful ableist Othering can be is seen through Simpson’s (2011) work, *Othering Intellectual Disability*, where the author elaborates on the

Othering of Idiocy and Mental Retardation—the last frontier in disability research where the challenge for “the idiot” to surpass normative institutions (and constructs) is nearly impossible. Without voice, or a platform for agency, those who are viewed as disabled struggle to eradicate Othering in its most divesting form (Simpson, 2011). Consequently, it becomes the goal of the researcher to offer a space for agency and voice, but Simpson articulates “the role of the academic (and professional) in challenging Otherness and creating more ethical and reciprocal relationships with people with disabilities is bearing in mind that to talk of the Other is not to talk of *subjects*, but is instead to talk about *subjectivities* and *subjectification*” (p. 553, emphasis in original). While Simpson accentuates the use of qualitative methodologies when studying the Other, he argues these deem ineffective in completely eliminating Othering discourse of Idiocy (because of the subtle cultural nuances when constructing the disabled-Other). Instead, Simpson proposes a unique method, one built through empiricism, because “models based on quantitative variance reduce or eliminate the Otherness of intellectual disability” (p. 542). With this mind, the present study works to consider how methodology can be adjusted appropriately to reduce Othering, but not necessarily eliminate it, in an empirical reality.

But before suggesting an exploration of methodological approaches outside of phenomenology—a strict qualitative instrument—to uncover and diminish Othering, the Self-Other dyad must undergo reconceptualization. That is, Emmanuel Levinas states “...personal attentiveness to the Other is not always the answer” (as cited in Arnett, 2012, p. 150). That is:

It is not ultimately dialogue that opens the door to the Other, but the Other who commands us to attend to an ethical call, a height of [Self] that is called forth by the Other. This shift from the leaning to the Other in dialogue, to the Other commanding us is an exemplar of Levinas’s work; he de-privileges a given idea or insight in order to render it more powerful. (Arnett, 2012, p. 150)

It is the job of the Other to rhetorically facilitate change in the Self by calling forth its objectifying cognizance, and it is the job of the Self to be open to change when perceiving the Other in order to reduce objectification. To do so, a space must be open for rhetorical reinvention. What Levinas (1961/1969) argues is the basis for creating the said space: instead of knowing the Other as an *object*, it is better to view it as *subject*. Or rather, not just as subject, but also as a “co-subject of the constitution of the world as a common nature” (Geniušas, 2008, p. 34). In theory, instead of viewing the dyad as two opposing parts meshed together, the Self-Other should be uniformly constructed to minimize dichotomy—a sort of Self-Other *unitary*. Richards (2008) iterates “subject-object dualism is more effective if it is not collapsed, but rather allowed to permute and develop, both sides seen as interdependent parts” (p. 1725). In practice, methodologies to efface Othering should change by opening the hegemonic process (often driven by object-ness of thought) to co-subjectification and the interdependent play of Self-consciousness. Hence, the present study suggests the integration of an agentic concept into phenomenology to move Self and Other from a space of opposition to a space of accordance.

Thus far, this review of literatures has addressed several qualitative methods to study disability and accessibility through lived experiences. Still, this historicity of Othering incites a curiosity as to how voices and the multiplicative interpretations of those viewed as Others can ever escape objectification. If scholarly writing potentially re-instills marginality (Fine, 1994), how would an agentic concept help (or not help) shift Self and Other to a space of coexistence? Examining the case of the disabled-Other through a critical analysis addresses this concern.

### ***The Perpetuation of Ableism in Academia***

The disability rights movement of the early 1970s addressed several social grievances, including the denial of any public education and the segregation of children with disabilities

from their nondisabled peers in the mainstream classroom (Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund [DREDF], 2014). With the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) and the special education process allowed for free, appropriate public education (FAPE) of children with disabilities in least restrictive environments (LRE), a condition still regulated by the 2004 IDEA (DREDF, 2014). Still, disability rights activists and disability studies scholars have continued to challenge discriminatory acts against individuals with disabilities. The connotative stigmatization of “disability” as “handicapped, crippled, and invalid” (Hahn, 1983, p. 37) generated reactions “of pity, helplessness, distrust, uneasiness, and even fear” in the eyes of the public (Percy, 2001, p. 232). As a result, disability scholars coined the “prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors toward persons with a disability” as *ableism* (Wolbring, 2012, p. 78). A concept well misunderstood (Wolbring, 2008), Rauscher and McClintock (1996) specify the definition, describing ableism as:

A pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities.... Deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory abilities... fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable. (p. 198)

Ableism is the favoring of certain abilities (seeing them as essential) by juxtaposing disabilities with inferiority (Linton, 1998; Wolbring, 2012). However, ableism is not limited to discourse around the abilities of the body. Historically, it has been used by various social groups tooling the concept for rhetorical and sociological transgression by justifying an “elevated level of rights and status in relation to other groups” (Wolbring, 2008, p. 253). In particular, ableism plays to the differentiation between social groups, assigning abled bodies to Normality and disability to Abnormality. Ableism carries the belief that not having a disability is a superior state of Being,

that it is better to perform daily tasks in the way of nondisabled individuals, and that a person with a disability should be fixed, excluded, or denied accommodations (Storey, 2007; Wolbring, 2008). The coining of this term legitimized the marginalization of disability and established a movement for civil rights to tackle subtle forms of segregation.

Despite efforts of the disability rights movement to form public policy that reduce discriminatory acts, ableism deeply rooted its process in subtle disguises, encompassing several distinctive ideologies and preferences beyond the abled body. Essentially, over time, ableism has appeared as racism, sexism, casteism, ageism, and speciesism, to name a few (Wolbring, 2008). Campbell (2008) examines “attitudes and barriers that contribute to the subordination of people with disabilities in society” (p. 151) by extrapolating critical race theory to reveal ableism in culture. By suggesting ableism is not aberrant but ingrained and woven into the seams of American life and culture much like racism, producing dominant power structures, Campbell (2009) delineated *internalized ableism* as language and context in social policy that operates under rhetorical messages to oppress disability, much like how white privileging in certain rhetorical messages plays to racial divide. Internalized ableism marginalizes the disabled body through rhetorical acts by a society pressured to integrate disability into mainstream culture.

In particular, the pervasiveness of internalized ableism has been heavily scrutinized in the education system. National policies like the 1990 ADA, 1997 IDEA, and the modified 2008 ADA and 2004 IDEA reek of internalized ableism, furthering discriminatory treatment against students with disabilities (Beratan, 2006). Beratan outlines how “IDEA 2004 embeds unintentional discrimination within the policies, structures, and practices of the educational system” (para. 1). Through an analysis using critical race theory, Beratan “[deconstructed] the ways in which meanings of disability embedded within IDEA actively construct disabled

students' marginalized positioning within schools" (para. 14). By scrutinizing one of the original principles in the 1997 IDEA ("Children with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate"), the analysis revealed how the loose interpretation of the clause "to the maximum extent appropriate" attaches constraints to the educational environment for students with disabilities, who must find a way to fit into the classroom given their specific educational needs (para. 22). The hidden internalized ableism in these national policies establishes an inconspicuous hierarchy in education: academic ableism. Essentially, students with disabilities who cannot reasonably fit into the existing public system are then *segregated* to special education classrooms—a condition the disability rights movement has long sought to end since the 1970s.

While the special education classrooms may be beneficial to and fit the needs of *some* students, the inclination for students with disabilities to earn the same degree of educational opportunities as their nondisabled peers has spurred polemics over the interpretation of a "free, appropriate public education." Previous studies have examined this definition in regards to communication barriers perceived by the participation of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Rose, 1995). Students with disabilities have reported communication in the classroom is challenging and often leads to the construction of barriers (Marchetti, Foster, Long, & Stinson, 2011). McCain and Anita (2005) sought to examine these communication barriers and the participation of the deaf/hard-of-hearing student in the co-enrolled classroom. Through a Classroom Participation Questionnaire, results indicated no significant differences were seen between disabled and nondisabled students on participation and social skills (McCain and Anita, 2005, p. 30), *but* when examining communication apprehension (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1994; Hurt & Gonzalez, 1988), deaf/hard-of-hearing students reported higher

levels of situational anxiety than their nondisabled peers when engaging hearing individuals with American Sign Language (ASL), which caused hesitation in dialogue and interaction.

This apprehension in communication expels differences between disabled and nondisabled individuals, perpetuating barriers that have become commonplace in the public classroom. Such barriers in communication are the results of negative attitudes and ideologies toward disabilities—an indication that ableism is the culprit of these barriers (Stinson, Liu, Saur, & Long, 1996). Law, Petrenchik, King, and Hurley (2007) substantiate the effect of ableism in constructing communication barriers by examining the participation and accommodations of elementary-school-aged students with physical disabilities. The authors note how attitudinal factors and a lack of social support (i.e., through bullying, social segregation, or marginalization) strengthen the potency of environmental barriers in the school system. In particular, Law et al. remark how “institutional-level barriers may include exclusionary policies and programming, the absence or inaccessibility of needed resources and information, and barriers resulting from socio-economic disparities” (p. 1637). After analyzing 427 parent-child pairs using a 25-item questionnaire to assess perceived environmental barriers, results of the study indicated a lack of availability for programs and services to allow for equitable opportunities for students with physical disabilities to participate in school or community settings. This suggests that, although disabled students are likely to participate in educational/classroom activities, when barriers are perceived to exist, negative perceptions and attitudes will begin to surface, and consequently, nondisabled individuals could resort to discriminatory acts (e.g., slurs, social avoidance, denial of individual needs, etc.) based on stereotypes of disability (Humphries & Humphries, 2011).

The cultivation of negative attitudes and perceptions creating communication barriers in the public classroom between disabled and nondisabled individuals is not only the result of overt

forms of internalized ableism, but also a systemic (often imperceptible) form of Othering. Bach's (2005) work, *Organizational Tension of Othering*, describes how hegemonic power structures pervade the administrative role of post-secondary education, exuding Otherness through a trickle-down effect. By examining 57 personal narratives of individuals whose research proposals were either accepted or dismissed by institutional review boards (IRBs) on university campuses, Bach discovered the uneasiness researchers experienced when submitting to a "faceless" committee. Researchers felt the communication styles of the nameless faceless committee members were arbitrary, contradictory, and hypercritical (p. 260); thus, the narratives reflected the Othering process, where researchers felt "marginalized, put-down, and otherwise disregarded by IRBs" (p. 259). The Othering process viewed here is a result of relational and bureaucratic tension, where "in any bureaucratic system, the more powerful are in a position to 'Other' those who are either in the minority or the most vulnerable, connected to or depend upon the bureaucracy for their organizational survival" (p. 259). Bureaucratic control in higher education manifests into a process of hegemony that varies in several forms, but mostly takes on an *organizational irrationality*—where irony, paradox, and contradiction comprise a social hierarchy in academia, and those in power feed on dominance through irrational bureaucratic choices. In other words, because of organizational irrationality in a university setting (based on irrational bureaucratic control and on impersonal communication styles of individuals in higher-up positions), a post-secondary institution feeds Othering to *multiple* populations and not just researchers. This includes the disabled student population where individuals in administrative roles obviously use misconceptions and stigmas of "disability" to perpetuate marginalization in the college classroom. This, in turn, objectifies those with a disability as—in terms of what

Stewart and Logan (1993) identify as—interchangeable parts, lacking emotions, incapable of reflective thought (see Bullis and Bach, 1996).

Since academic accessibility is a function of the institutional responsibility on behalf of disability services on college campuses, organizational irrationality also helps to expound the percolation of Othering in the co-enrolled classroom, which can inevitably lead to acts of ableism. That is, when the rise of a disabled student population on campus situates post-secondary institutions in a position to make academic accommodations that go against bureaucratic policy, Othering becomes a byproduct of the classroom experience. As such, this creates a particularly narrowed form of internalized, organizational hegemony, which the present study hopes to address in full: *ableist Othering*. This particularly intricate, and rather irrepressible, form of Othering dictates how disabled students are *supposedly* treated in the college classroom. In other words, higher education gives students *only* the necessary academic adjustments to “get by” in the classroom (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Storey, 2007), resulting in an inequitable opportunity in college classrooms and a reinforcement of stigmatization of disability by nondisabled individuals (Wolbring, 2012). By addressing ableist Othering in the higher education institution, it is the hope that academic ableism will be reduced as well.

Thus, through expounding the origins of Othering and ableism, and how these concepts stem from bureaucratic tension and negative attitudes toward disability in public education institutions, this study intends to use phenomenology to answer RQ1 by investigating the relationship between the ableist Othering phenomenon and the perceptions and lived experiences of the disabled student.

## The Rhetorical Agency of the “Disabled Voice”

Philosophers and scholars have debated the subject-object dyad for decades and have explored many hypothetical “re-thinkings” of this predicament (Cooper, 2011). Not until the rhetorical turn<sup>3</sup> around the 1960s did subject-ness take a back seat to identity construction and did agency move to the frontline of inquiry (Turnbull, 2004). Studying the emergence of agency from this rhetorical turn (Simons, 1990) reveals how agency that uses persuasive appeals came into existence, and how it can be the key to reducing cultural Othering.

Before the rhetorical turn, the subject has been viewed as inescapably intertwined with the object/Other (Cooper, 2011), and, as such, the power dynamics in this binary has always been in favor of the subject. To view the subject-object in this way instigates (and continues) the Othering phenomenon. But the introduction of an agent that exceeds the subject, magically weaving the discourses in the space where subject and object come together to co-construct reality, changed the way the dyad was viewed. Rhetoricians coined individual agency as the process “through which [individuals] create meanings through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived consequences of their actions” (Cooper, 2011, p. 420). Essentially, agency allows for the subject to actively enter into discourse and change dominant social structures. Herndl and Licona (2007) further explain how rhetorical agency is not just a feature of individuals/subjects, but is also a conjunction of social and subject *relations*, and an intersection of semiotics, *kairos*, and material. For the subject to enter into discourse to disrupt deep-seated institutional structures, it must adopt an agent function that inter-crosses these elements through a rhetorical performance, which ultimately opens a space

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Simons (1990) coined the “rhetorical turn” as a new movement in the 1960s, after the “paradigms debate”, that offered scholars a way to look within and across disciplines by shifting their attention from methods of “proof” to the heuristic methods of debate and discussion—the art of rhetoric—to examine how discourse is shaped by tropes and figures, by the naming and framing of issues, and by the need to adapt arguments to ends, audiences, and circumstances.

for the possibility of social action (Herndl & Licona, p. 141). This power challenges dyadic thinking and works for a more solidified Self-Other unitary.

One consequence of the agent function when the subject undergoes a rhetorical performance, however, is identity construction. Once situated in humanist views, rhetorical agency has evolved from the inception of the rhetorical situation—even past poststructuralist theories of the subject—to become a means of “giving voice to both a culture and individuals within that culture that have been previously (and to some extent still are) subjugated to silence” (Waite, 2007, p. v). Rhetorical agency lies not in the Self, but in *identity*, or how the Self thinks it is *perceived* by Others (Ball, 1972). Even more so, rhetorical agency lies in the multiple complexities of collective Selves (Waite, 2007). As such, identification emerges through the interaction of Self and Other, rhetor and audience, reader and text, to transcend misunderstandings and to create actions of change. To do this, the Self must engage in “webs of interlocution” (Taylor, 1989, p. 36), using language and interaction to define “identity.” By using discourse, rhetorical agency becomes a tool of new identification for the Self and collective Selves (in a similar cultural group), awakening humanity (Turnbull, 2004). By examining the discursive roles of the agent function (in a performative space), Otherness can begin to recede in place of a new Self-identity (one constructed through rhetorical agency).

The power of rhetorical agency to awaken humanity and Self-identification—absent of sub-humanity and Otherness—lies, particularly, in the iteration of the rhetorical “voice.” Watts (2001) offers clarification into the ambiguity surrounding this concept. Watts notes how “voice” has long been researched in critical, cultural, social, and feminist theory as a relational phenomenon occurring in discourse, but rhetorical “voice” takes on many meanings for different scholars. Watts regards the “voice” of the subject as an ontologically-constructed concept since it

asserts truth and announces the body's presence before it begins to "talk" itself into an understanding of how the Self relates to the Other (p. 181). As such, "voice" is not reducible to the subject's agency and instead takes on ethical and emotional dimensions. Otherness is often attached to "voice"; so, scholars are frequently concerned with "confronting, deconstructing, and interrogating a dominant language system that denies difference and, thus, mutes 'voice'" (p. 183), or views it as oppressed. Discourse constructs such language and, as such, rhetoricians will often link "voice" of the subject to rhetorical agency (Watts, 2001).

Arguably, narrative inquiry emerges as the primary method of rhetorical agency "that allows for a public hearing of the Other's 'voice'" (Watts, 2001, p. 183). Narrative entails a depiction in which a person makes sense of their lives and their experiences (Watts, 2001). Even personal narratives are valuable sites of "rhetorical inquiry," (Quackenbush, 2008, p. 8) especially since the voice of the spoken subject has become the voice of the marginalized, silenced Other in a larger culture. Public storytelling interrupts symbolic languages that instill dominant institutions (Watts, 2001), challenging Otherness through rhetorical power.

On the contrary, this conceptualization of narrative inquiry as a tool for the public emancipation of the Other begs an important question: what about the *speechless* subject? How does narrative inquiry as a transformative tool account for "voiceless" Others? Ashby (2011) answers the call by addressing the problematic tendency of "voice," especially in regards to disability research. For individuals with disabilities that are constrained by the *physiological* voice (i.e., those with variations of autism, mental, intellectual, or speech disabilities), narrative inquiry becomes a defective vehicle for rhetorical agency. While historically narrative has been a clear choice for challenging Otherness (Watts, 2001), the case of the disabled-Other requires an agent function rhetorically reinvented to not only empower voice, but also "voicelessness." Since

agency cannot be seized, claimed, possessed, or assumed (Herndl & Licona, 2007), the “voiceless” disabled-Other demands a rhetorical platform built along dialogic discourse and reflexivity since narrative cannot necessarily unfold through a public “hearing.” What is more, because rhetorical agency is ever-shifting in time (Prendergast, 2014), this platform adopts more of a real-time kairotic space, which Kerschbaum (2014) argues is an important characteristic for asynchronous forms of communication, for naming and claiming disability, and for constructing identity in the absence of voice. That is, the *body* of the disabled-Other can use a reflexive and dialogic platform to facilitate evanescent power in public settings when voice fails to speak.

The “disabled voice” requires scholarly attention since variations of it exist across cultural contexts, and misunderstanding disabled voices can perpetuate public rhetorics working to instill (and reinforce) ableist institutions and Otherness. Jones (2007) notes how a gap exists in critical disability research. Even those scholars who have addressed disabled voices in their works struggle to resist re-instilling ableist Othering in writing (Ashby, 2011). That is, tension occurs when trying to describe the body or capture embodied experiences in textual format in such a way so as not to further sub-humanity (i.e., using word choices like “impaired,” “retarded,” “limited,” “challenged,” “handicapped,” and so on) (Quackenbush, 2008). Unfortunately, examining the “disabled voice” requires a back-and-forth volley of cultural and sociological imagination to invent methods of resisting the category of the Other (Quackenbush, 2008). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) was one of few scholars to first elucidate this issue through her theory of the freak show, which addresses the rhetorics of invalidity and containment used in public discourse to carry the Self-Other binary. Both the body and voice of disability have long been viewed as “freakery”—where a public display of disability is viewed as spectacle, showcasing physical differences between spectators and performer, eclipsing

humanity of the disabled body and voice through constraints of a rhetorical platform (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 61). Disability has been a “mute figure of Otherness,” (p. 61) enveloping and obliterating humanity.

Yet, the rhetorical platform, when operating in a space that allows transformation, can be freeing for disability (from Otherness). Nicole Quackenbush’s (2008) book, *Bodies in Culture, Culture in Bodies*, demonstrates how a rhetorical platform could “defreak” the disabled body through (1) constructing Self-identification absent of Otherness, (2) naming and claiming disability, and (3) challenging the ableist onlookers’ views of corporeality and representations of abnormalcy (p. 115). To do this, the rhetorical platform requires the reader, audience, or Self part of a dominant “normal” culture to engage in *rhetorical listening*, which Krista Ratcliffe (1999) defines as the “commitment and care to similarity and differences, to cultural logics, and to ethically responsible actions” between Self and Other (p. 203). It is trust in those reading and listening to disabled voices—whether in writing or in public exchange—to willfully and mindfully reshape his/her own views of oppressive representations and institutions. This goes beyond naïveté and embraces “strategic idealism” (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 161). Meaning, through a platform facilitating rhetorical agency, dialogue and reflexivity can reverse the mechanisms of Otherness and allow for individuals with disabilities to reclaim humanity.

In the context of the present study, a platform of rhetorical agency is key to resisting the ableist Othering of the disabled student’s voice in post-secondary education. Several studies have been done on the voices of students with disabilities, including research on students with intellectual disabilities (Beart, Hardy, & Buchan, 2005; Hall, 2013), learning disabilities (Denhart, 2008), autism spectrum disorders (Simpson, Mundschenk, & Heflin, 2011), deafness/hard-of-hearing (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1994; Booth-Butterfield &

Booth-Butterfield, 1995; Byrnes, 2011; Hole, 2007; Rose, 1995), and opinions regarding accommodation policies (Quinlan et al., 2012). But few studies rarely take into account ableist institutions at play in college campuses (Ashby, 2011; Byrnes & Rickards, 2011), or examine how voice is used as an agent function of rhetorical power against ableist Othering. Watson (2002) interviewed several individuals with physical disabilities, and discovered a significant theme had emerged regarding agency and resistance in the construction of an identity absent of the Other. Here, “voice” comprises the power of agency to construct a new identity for disability—one that is absent of individualized ideas of impairment and of dominant cultural views. Watson explains that for disablement (of dominant structures) to occur, agency must not only challenge Self-fallacies of “disability,” but cultural ones as well—especially since internalized ableism is a root cause to a perpetuation of Othering of the disabled population.

Student voices offer particularly unique ways to challenge the fallacies of disability and to work against ableist institutions disseminating Otherness. Peters (2010) notes how, in an academic context, the disabled student’s voice provides “an interstice for re-examining some central tenets...of disability” (p. 592). The way disability is constructed as an identity for students intersperses across power, temporality, inclusivity, place, and academic expectations (p. 592). By examining learning-disabled (LD) in *secondary* education, Peters argues that the lived experiences of disabled students are far more stressful and disorganized because of the constant juggling act to forge and to disclose identity in social relationships. The risk of stigmatization and Othering by peers and teachers forces a student to teeter between disclosure and secrecy of his/her disability, ultimately making the experiences in academia frustrating. On a positive note, when an outcry of the “disabled voice” occurs, disability is re-examined. Peters explains:

[Student] voices provide a powerful heterodoxy, or counterpoint, to the root paradigm of disability as innate individual deficiency inherent in special education policies and

practices. Specifically, heterodoxy of student voice provides two key notions for re-examining disability identity from sociological imagination: resistance and resilience. The notions also stand in opposition to traditional views of disability as stigma and social construction, creating an interstice for change. (p. 599)

Heterodoxy allows for social progression in the lives of those labeled as “disabled,” and it is through voice that the rhetorical actions occur. First, heterodoxy of voice provides a means of *resisting* stigma of exclusion and deficit thinking. Peters explains that, by naming injustices and “calling out” ableist acts, disabled students can formulate several practical recommendations for changes in policy, which ultimately, when circulated, become normative. Additionally, the second form of heterodoxy, *resilience*, “directly problematizes the unequal distribution of knowledge and power” (p. 600). By challenging societal-level oppression and stigma, students endure a process necessary to change the ways institutions, like a school, prolong injustices. In essence, “resilience demands attention, not only to removing barriers such as the policies and practices that require students to juggle their images, but to empowering and enabling student agency” (p. 600). By examining disabled voices in *post-secondary* education, the present study seeks to determine whether similar results of heterodoxy can occur for the college-level disabled student to disrupt ableist institutions in the university setting (Peters, 2010).

As for the “voiceless” disabled student, heterodoxy must shift to a more flexible form of sociological imagination beyond resistance and resilience (Peters, 2010). Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson (2003) examined individuals with mental disabilities with no spoken/written language. She notes how certain disabled people, such as those with speech or mental disabilities, struggle to gain social suasion since rhetoric’s traditional emphasis focuses on the spoken/written language of a rhetor to confirm the existence of a fixed Self. Without language, rhetoricity for disability becomes depleted and nonexistent; and so, rhetorical agency for that individual is lost. Instead, Lewiecki-Wilson argues *mediated rhetoricity*, achieved through facilitated

communication, can achieve rhetorical agency “by developing language along a continuum and in collaboration with another person” (p. 161). Lewiecki-Wilson explains:

Mediated rhetoricity requires [an] advocate to attend closely to the disabled person’s embodied, nonverbal performances and preferences of daily living, and then to carefully and ethically co-construct narratives and arguments from the perspective of the disabled person for the purpose of enhancing his or her daily life. Such arguments and narratives (for certain care preferences, for example), constructed in the name of the disabled person, are social and persuasive acts that help constitute the disabled person’s subjectivity and agency. (p. 162)

In the classroom, through the use of (sign language) interpreters, communication keyboards, teletypewriters, transliterators, and other devices, for example, students with communicative disabilities can achieve rhetorical agency through mediated rhetoricity. While mediated rhetoric “probably would provoke as much anxiety as facilitated communication [does] for disciplines concerned with autonomy, objectivity, and validity” (Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003, p. 162), and possibly even further colonize the disabled-Other (by suggesting a student is dependent on his/her facilitator to communicate), the “voiceless” Other does become an empowered Self—one that functions to challenge individual and societal fallacies of “disability” and to transcend the Self-Other dyad.

Before examining how the disabled student can use rhetorical agency in the college classroom, the present study addresses one remaining issue: the writing of the reflexive, personal voice and the dialogic discourse of the student voice. Even if students with disabilities engaged in an agent function to construct identity and to challenge dominant institutions, writing about the rhetorical agency of the disabled-Other could lead to further colonization and tokenism. Ashby (2011), Fine (1994), Garland-Thomson (1997), Lewiecki-Wilson (2003), Quackenbush (2008), and numerous other scholars warn against the contradiction-filled notion of qualitative text to write about the Other without facilitating subjectivity and body. Instead, the disabled-

Other remains seen as an object of research (i.e., as a participant rather than a co-subject), grouped into a homogenous mass, where the dialogic discourse of disabled voices is continually written as subjugated to the researcher and his/her own work. Regardless of the rhetorical power of agency, writing scholarship to avoid Otherness is still problematic.

To combat this, researchers have contemplated the reflexivity of disability in writing. Turnbull (2004) explains how "reflexivity is entirely positive for rhetoric since it grounds philosophy in problematicity by affirming problematicity in its very practice" (p. 213). That is, reflexivity poses questions about the foundation of sociological ontology; that is, in the case of disability, it allows scholars to see the interplay between Self and Other and to question the power-relation of the dyad. Kerschbaum (2014) entertains the thought of why a researcher with a disability should (or should not) publicly disclose his/her disability identity through reflexivity. Kerschbaum explains that "claiming a particular disability identity requires not only that speakers and writers assert it in interactional space but also that other interlocutors and audiences acknowledge that identity" (p. 62). For disclosure to work in academic writing (and for it to transform the Self-Other binary into an unitary), reflexivity and dialogic discourse must call upon the listener or reader of the text to engage in cognitive re-thinking, much like rhetorical listening coined by Ratcliffe (1999). Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) coined a similar term—simultaneity—through his discussion on the power of dialogue. This Self-Other unitary is achievable when someone who is considered part of the "normal" population rhetorically listens to a person considered "abnormal" or "marginalized." The intent is for the abled person to transform his/her own predisposed attitudes and beliefs by being open-minded and empathizing with someone who is disabled (Ratcliffe, 1999). Still, Boswell (2001) writes that reflexivity places the disabled-Other in a position to embrace the paradox of "loss" and reconstruct

disability as a catalyst for positive change (p. 47). Writing helps to rhetorically negotiate how reader and text, subject and object, rhetor and audience interplay to form a coexisting reality and ultimately “un-think” privileging and power-distancing relations.

While reflexivity and disclosure of disability happen in many contexts, the classroom acts as a rhetorical platform for disabled students (Kerschbaum, 2014) and conjures heterodox power. As such, scholars can negotiate how the classroom (even in post-secondary education) and the disabled student create an inventive space for individual agency. Classrooms act as kairotic spaces “that open up channels of ‘perturbation and response’ between individuals and their...written acts of disclosure...[shaping] individuals’ (always-changing) awareness and self-reflexivity about how their choices are consequential not just for their readers but also for themselves” (Kerschbaum, 2014, p. 69). In other words, the classroom is a place where agency turns into rhetorical agency. Through writing and facilitating voice, the researcher and participant can use the classroom to become co-subjective and reduce Otherness.

Since the classroom acts as a rhetorical platform for occurrences of disability disclosures and reflexivities to generate a complex interplay between rhetorical performance and social change (Kerschbaum, 2014), this study strives to answer RQ2 by investigating disabled voices in the college classroom and how they function to challenge (and minimize) the ableist Othering phenomenon in post-secondary institutions.

The next chapter outlines a critical methodology used for facilitating a platform for the rhetorical agency of the “disabled voice.” It details the steps to construct a platform for the agentic interplay of voices to rhetorically liberate the disabled-Other in academia. It addresses both strengths and weaknesses of reflexivity and dialogic discourse as key components for constructing a method for emancipating the disabled-Other through the tooling of “voice.”

## Chapter 3 - Method

To examine how ableist Othering affects the lived experiences of students with disabilities in higher education, this study adopts a phenomenological methodology. Specifically, to investigate how the lived experiences of students *in the college classroom* construct an agentic space to emancipate the “disabled voice” and to reinvent identity while in a culturally, repressive university system, this study turns to components of phenomenology to understand the rhetorical functionality of dialogic discourse and reflexivity. Simply put, the methodology used in this study explores how interview procedures prompt the construction of a platform for rhetorical acts of social change.

This chapter outlines the steps to construct a platform for the agentic interplay of voices such that the disabled-Other could eventually be rhetorically liberated in the higher-educational setting. The chapter starts by setting up a naturalistic design; then, it segues into the role of the researcher when analyzing disabled voices; next, it justifies dialogic discourse and reflexivity as tools to study ableist Othering; afterwards, it explains the procedures to co-construct the rhetorical agency of the students; and, finally, it addresses this method’s triangulation strategy.

Limitations are also addressed in this chapter because of the large scope of issues in the triangulation of qualitative methods, which is perhaps one reason colonizing the Other in writing is so likely. While this study uses a critical analysis, how scholars write about voices speaking against the ableist Othering phenomenon, and how readers (or how the public) rhetorically listens to the agency of these voices in the study’s findings must be discussed (Ratcliffe, 1999). By doing so, it potentially opens doors to re-seeing methodologies in critical theory, and it begs further scrutiny into what techniques are needed to carry the validity of voice to a larger cultural scale in order to challenge academic ableism.

## **A Design for Rhetorical Agency**

In order to understand how ableist Othering affects the personal and cultural construction of “disability” and self-identity, this study uses phenomenological concepts to understand how students with disabilities create a sense of rhetorical agency to counter Otherness in the classroom. Kraus (2008) and Denhart (2008) both employ a phenomenological methodology to understand the way students with disabilities identify themselves while situated in a dominant cultural context. Since Othering extends from the phenomenological traditions of Edmund Husserl (Craig, 2007), investigating the lived experiences of college students with disabilities through aspects of phenomenology will elucidate the ableist Othering process in higher education. Focusing on an individual lived experience showcases the Self-consciousness (or the stream of consciousness) of a disabled student, which in turn opposes Otherness by invigorating the Self with agency (Moustakas, 1994). For the emergence of rhetorical agency, however, the lived experience must be examined in an alternative way—one that neither rejects or ignores phenomenological tradition, nor necessarily follows it unquestioningly (Dinkins, 2005).

With phenomenology, the focus is on investigating how multiple participants in a study interpret the world and construct common meaning through personal understanding (Creswell, 2013; Hopwood, 2004). Traditionally, phenomenological interviews call forth long narratives of a single person or a select few individuals, “[aiming] to identify the qualitatively different ways in which different people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena” (Richardson, 1999, p. 53). It is an empirically based approach that “[reduces] individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of [a] universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). That is, lived experiences accumulate to describe an “object” of the larger reality of human understanding (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). On the contrary, in order to allow a narrative to unfold naturally, few interruptions or little conversation (dialogue) takes place, which inhibits

immediate reflection for either researcher or participant. That reflection is needed to probe into the beliefs and thoughts of a respondent, which are used to shape an understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Dinkins, 2005).

As such, the design of this study builds on phenomenological interview components that emphasize dialogue and reflection to gain a deeper understanding of the stream of consciousness. Specifically, the design for rhetorical agency begins with a salute to Dinkins's (2005) *Socratic-hermeneutic interpre-view* "in which researcher and co-inquirer (the research participant) engage in a dialogue that evolves through questions and responses that encourage researcher and co-inquirer to reflect together on the concepts that are emerging and taking shape within the interview itself" (p. 3). Dinkins explains that lived experiences are often so "immediate, elusive, and complex that it is difficult for any description to capture its essence (van Manen, 1997)" (p. 4); therefore, questioning through dialogue captures the ephemerality of lived experiences and, in turn, co-constructs an understanding of phenomenon that is reflective of true human reality. The present study *partially* adopts this interview concept to build rhetorical agency.

Yet, regarding rhetorical agency, a design that incorporates phenomenology must also consider more heterodox methodological modifications to propagate a platform for voice empowerment. Coole (2005) describes the problem of retaining rhetorical agency in a phenomenological interview. For Coole, for a rhetorical platform to evolve, phenomenology must recognize a spectrum of agentic capacities: from a pre-personal, corporeal agent to a transpersonal, intersubjective agent requiring a new social ontology (p. 128). She explains how this is accomplished, drawing on French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *hyper-dialectics* and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's *reflexive sociology*, stating that:

It means engaging critically in a constant back-and-forth between (first person) lived experience and (third person) objective accounts...while also experimenting with

concepts that emerge from the changing world. This approach has the advantage of avoiding the logical contradiction inherent in philosophies that both deny and practice critical agency, without taking agency for granted as an ontological given. Instead, it tracks and emulates the hazardous appearing of agency in genesis: in Merleau-Ponty's elegant phrase, it 'steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xiii). (p. 128)

Essentially, through discursive and reflexive tools, but *only* in the presence of a kairotic space that captures an ever-changing social reality (making these tools hyper-dialectical and reflexively-sociological), phenomenology can create a platform for voice empowerment, and facilitate transcendence between reader and text, subject and object, rhetor and audience.

Furthermore, by considering agentic capacities, the rhetoric of a design incorporating phenomenology changes to a lens of the phenomenon that retains agentic power. Paley (2005) criticizes much of the way phenomenological approaches are currently used by researchers, particularly the way researchers use the *bracketing* method of data analysis—where a researcher sets aside all preconceived experiences to best understand the experience of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Paley's concern is: "How, exactly, is it supposed to work? The matter [to most phenomenologists] is desperately unclear" (p. 110).

Understandably, bracketing situates the agent as intertwined and bounded to the subject, which in turn distances the agent to an *objectified* product of abstraction in a phenomenological study's rhetoric and findings (Paley, 2005). Thus, it contradicts the very purpose of rhetorical agency.

Instead, incorporating a kairotic element—understanding that phenomena changes over time and cannot be reduced through common themes— means that a universal essence would highlight only the agencies of those participants chosen for the research study, and in turn make the phenomenon only generalizable to the experiences of those agents who were involved (Paley, 2005, p. 108). In other words, since agentic capacities vary in scope (especially regarding the body and identity of disability), phenomenology's rhetoric will not form a general understanding

of Othering to students of disabilities beyond those who participated in the research. However, if transpersonal agencies are captured through phenomenological data analysis (i.e., those students who embrace a collective group definition of “identity” to challenge dominant structures), then *kairos* creates an intersubjective rhetorical platform (Coole, 2005). Essentially, if disabled students’ construction of meaning (over time) demonstrates an intersubjective rhetorical agency, then a collective life understanding and larger human essence of ableist Othering will unfold and transcend the scope of the study (Coole, 2005). “The agency-subject bond is loosened here because individuals will not necessarily become (full or exemplary) agents” (Coole, 2005, p. 126) and instead become *co-agents* experiencing a like phenomenon. To incorporate a kairotic spatial element into a phenomenological design (and to use bracketing in this unique way), positionality (which clarifies a researcher’s preconceptions) and researcher reflexivity (which embraces preconceived experiences) should be established and discussed—helping to evolve agentic interplay (Coole, 2005; Kraus, 2008).

### **Researcher Positionality and “Voice”**

Because this study’s design must include *kairos* to evolve a rhetorical platform for the varying agentic capacities of college students with disabilities, positionality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and researcher reflexivity (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005) must be discussed to understand how intersubjectivity unfolds. At this point, my writing style will switch back to include first-person voice for agentic purposes.

The positionality (role) of the researcher is key to any phenomenological design. Even more so, for this study’s design, this concept adds a dimension to rhetorical platforms to validate the intersubjectivity of disabled students’ voices to a larger audience. Positionality is where “the researcher [must] state his or her assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation and

then bracket or suspend these preconceptions in order to fully understand the experience of the subject and not impose an a priori hypothesis on the experience' (Bruyn, 1966)" (Kraus, 2008, p. 62). On the contrary, my role as a researcher is to prepare a kairotic space for the "imaginative variation" of the agents (i.e., to facilitate the development of individual agentic capacities that emancipate voices from Otherness) (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, instead of suspending my preconceptions completely, I recognize the degree of my own bias and supplement that to develop an understanding of my own transpersonal agency with student voices (Denhart, 2008). Ultimately, comparing and contrasting my own lived experiences of disability with those of disabled students in higher education garners a co-constructive understanding of how current accessibility and how interactions with nondisabled individuals in the college classroom do or do not perpetuate the ableist Othering phenomenon.

I address this bias through reflection. Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) note that to write against Othering in academia, personal stories, reflexivity, and dialogue can all be intertwined to pluralize the multiplicative voices of the silenced Others, working the dyadic hyphen between Self and Other (by addressing the barriers between dominant and marginalized). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explain how *reflexivity*—"the process of engaging in mutual recognition of, and adaptation with, Others" (p. 72)—dispels objectivity, taking the gathered lived experiences of a phenomenon being studied and seeks to discover how multi-voices co-construct reality. For this study, I coin my reflexivity as a unique *autophenomenography*. It draws on autoethnographic research to invigorate agency, facilitating voice and resisting ableist Othering rather than dehumanizing my-Self as a researcher (Grant & Zeeman, 2012), and it draws on phenomenographic research—phenomenology and ethnography—to "identify qualitatively different ways in which...people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various

[aspects] of phenomena” in relation to my own (Richardson, 1999, p. 53).

I use these unique elements for my reflexivity to justify my transpersonal agency. Autoethnography allows me to display how I am a unique individual agent, but am also part of a collective cultural context: it documents the details of my lived experience in light of varying voices (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richards, 2008). Phenomenography helps interweave my voice into “a central important [essence], because it represents a qualitative change from one conception concerning some particular aspect of reality to another” (Richardson, 1999, p. 53). As such, this study includes my personal experiences as a student with a hearing disability to catalyze rhetorical emancipation for varying self-agencies from ableist Othering.

When I was seven, a speech pathologist pulled me aside to inform me that I was hard-of-hearing (only 60 to 70% out of each ear) and had a speech impediment. I did not know it at the time, but subtle forms of internalized ableism—such as audism and oralism (see Cherney, 1999)—were working to marginalize me at such an early age. My elementary school years were deeply devoted to pathology sessions “to fix” my R’s and W’s. In the third grade, I received my first set of hearing aids. While helpful, the adjustment was difficult because I felt self-conscious and embarrassed around my nondisabled peers. Eventually I adapted to the hearing aids and modified my listening skills to include lip-reading for daily lessons in the mainstream classroom.

But I felt ableist structures most at work during my college years. Despite having attended a small private liberal arts college where the college classroom size was at most 20 students, I still struggled to adjust. For example, imagine taking a Spanish class completely in Spanish or a Calculus class where the teacher primarily faced the chalkboard. It is seemingly harmless. But since it took years to develop lip-reading (and in just English), I learned my college freshman year that skill was next to useless. While I did ask my teachers directly for an

adjustment (to translate into English or to have me switch seats when explaining a complex math concept), I felt the burden to adjust to the classroom was mostly my responsibility.

Even when I competed in extracurricular collegiate forensics to work on my articulation, I noticed this burden of responsibility substantially, and that there was a lack of cognizance towards a student's speaking ability. Several times I received written remarks from judges (most of whom were academic professionals) saying, "you slur your words too much—fix your articulation" or "you should practice sounding out [a certain word] *this* way." Not until I explicitly disclosed my disability and speech impediment history to the activity through speaking performances was I able to reduce my own feelings of Otherness. Still, despite my disclosure and demands for adjustments, I continued to receive comments that made me feel "different." Whether in the activity or in the classroom, many individuals could not understand my interstitial identity: I walked the demarcation line between Hearing and Deaf cultures (see Cherney, 1999; Humphries & Humphries, 2011) since I was not "Deaf" enough (I only had a novice understanding of sign language and did not access campus disability services) and I could still partially hear and relied on lip-reading.

The purpose of my reflexive voice here is to demonstrate my assumptions of the ableist Othering phenomenon. Essentially, self-disclosure here permits the use of the phenomenological bracketing technique in a unique way (one that suspends bias *partially* and creates a kairotic space for other, varying agencies to feed to a larger life understanding and larger human essence of ableist Othering) (Coole, 2005). As a hard-of-hearing student, articulating how I formed my disability identity through experiences in the classroom, what strategies I used to make academic adjustments, and how I perceived my peers and teachers all help to establish an agentic platform and credibility for this study since I can now intertwine my own understanding of the

phenomenon with the lived experiences of students interviewed for research. Using my autophenomenography, I add transpersonal agency to those voices being interviewed, inductively creating a theoretical supposition about the processes in the college classroom. By reflecting on how my agency intertwines (or fails to intertwine) with the agentic capacities of my respondents, I can socially-construct a collective disability identity and use that to understand how it challenges (or does not challenge) internalized ableist structures in higher education.

Lastly, it is my hopes—when writing on these varying agentic capacities—that data analysis will sustain enough power for findings to stimulate rhetorical listening to a reader of this text (Ratcliffe, 1999), and help culturally minimize Othering by constitutively weaving the shared experiences of multiple voices to reify a conscious and perceivable comprehension of academic ableism. That is, by writing rhetorical agency into consciousness, this study’s findings should garner further discussion on the reconceptualization of “disability”—particularly in regards to how an iteration of voices can modify classroom policies for accommodations.

### **The Phenomenological Interview Tool**

To evolve a platform for agentic capacities—and to facilitate emancipation for disabled voices through Socratic-hermeneutic interpre-viewing—this study crafts an interview tool that rhetorically invents a kairotic space. First, I draw on Haydon-Laurel and Wilson’s (2011) Internalized-Other Interview for hyper-dialectical exchange. Conceptualized as a practice for increasing empathy, creating dialogue, and breaking co-cultural communication barriers, “the Internalized-Other Interview asks the person [being interviewed] to speak of their experience of another’s experience or of a part of themselves or an emotion. The person being interviewed is interviewed as if they were this Other” (p. 25). Through internal Othering, the interview process invites attention to the voices of and the positions occupied by interviewees, permitting

movement from speaking solely from an individualized “I” position to a collective first person (such as “we”) or an attached third person (such as “they—including myself”). Doing this, hegemony inherently attached to Othering deteriorates and allows for an intercrossing of understanding to dissipate barriers (Haydon-Laurelut & Wilson, 2011). In this study, the Internalized-Other Interview tool will be modified through set open-ended questions (see Appendix C) and through questions that arise during the semi-structured interview. Students will be asked to speak about their personal experiences and then speak about their “best guess” of how others with a ‘like’ disability would experience the college classroom. This Internalized-Other will turn into a Self-Other position, creating a space to facilitate rhetorical agency for hyper-dialectic discourse.

Secondly, for reflexive sociology, I draw on Creswell (2009) and Stage and Milne (1996), coupling critical theory and naturalistic inquiry to scrutinize how students with disabilities not only reflexively think about their positions in a changing social reality, but also think about their positions in light of a cultural Other (Marshall, 2012). Essentially, the interview tool should incorporate forms of sociological imagination. Specifically, for displays of resistance and resilience, the Internalized-Other Interview used in my study comprises of open-ended questions asking students for critical reflection of their perspectives and experiences over time (Stage & Milne, 1996). Also, it implements participant observation to allow for a richer access to disability identity (Ashby, 2011) and “to offer a very concrete, very pragmatic, vindication of the possibility of a full sociological objectivation” of the phenomenon and of the agent’s relation to that phenomenon (Wacquant, 1989, p. 33). In other words, “[participant] observation rather focuses on practices and interactions at a specific moment [*kairos*] and thus adds a new perspective” (Flick, 2014, p. 187). It allows for a re-evaluation of disability stigmatization.

The semi-structured interview procedure also includes open-ended questions on topics ranging from: “(a) a general description of the students’ college experiences; (b) students’ experiences with faculty, peers, and tutors; (c) students’ comparison of himself or herself to others; (d) strategies the student employed in his or her studies; and (e) perceptions of current classroom accommodations” (Stage & Milne, 1996, p. 431). Furthermore, the tool I use includes ethnographic notes regarding body language, facial expressions, and eye gaze of the participants during the interview. Finally, the tool asks that participants reflect on statements made after the interviews and descriptions of the body to fully capture—in the rhetoric of the findings—each individual’s agentic capacities.

## **Participants**

### ***The Pilot Study***

I initially conducted this study at a large Mid-Atlantic university with a diverse disabled student population approximately 11 months before collecting data for a larger study. After receiving human subjects approval (IRB exempt project #8716), I engaged in convenience sampling to gather four students for interviewing. I recruited these participants through personal networking, whether via the classroom or through peer groups. Participants included two male and two female college-aged students (two undergraduate seniors and two graduates, respectively). Three majors were represented: two in communication studies, one in environmental science, and one in geography. Because disability is a vast experience (Kraus, 2008), and because I wanted to understand how varying types of disabilities experienced (or did not experience) the ableist Othering phenomenon, the pilot study included four disability categories: blindness, temporary limited mobility, dyslexia, and multiple sclerosis (MS).

Findings of the pilot study revealed several issues regarding the methodological procedures for the experiential investigation of ableist Othering. For starters, convenience sampling, while saving me time and effort, highlighted weaknesses in the credibility of the interview protocol (Creswell, 2013). The representation of disabilities varied distinctly here because of the small sample size; therefore, data triangulation (see, e.g., Denzin, 1989) in regards to how individuals of *one specific type* of disability experienced or perceived ableist Othering was nonexistent. Meaning, for example, I could not account for similarities and differences between two dyslexic individuals and how they experienced the college classroom because I only had one. Additionally, the original interview protocol did not consider varying agentic capacities or reflexive sociology. As such, much of the rhetoric of the pilot study re-inscribed Otherness of the participants' disability identity. In light of these limitations, changes were made to the sampling procedure and interview protocol before instigating data collection for a larger study. Because these changes do not affect the data collected from the pilot study, information from these four participants were used during data analysis in the larger study (to determine if, or how, the ableist Othering phenomenon transcends multiple campuses).

### ***The Present Study***

I conducted a larger version of the pilot study at a large Mid-Western university with a semi-diverse disabled student population (the university campus included a high volume of war veterans and military personnel with PTSD, ADD/ADHD, depression, and so on). After receiving human subjects approval (IRB exempt project #7053), I engaged in non-random/purposeful sampling (see, e.g., Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). I chose elements of criterion and critical case sampling to add to convenience sampling from the pilot study. Creswell (2013) explains that criterion sampling “works well when all individuals studied represent people who

have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 155) and critical case sampling “permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases” (p. 158). Both sampling techniques increase the likelihood of collecting pertinent data to study the ableist Othering phenomenon and enhance the quality of information gathered from personal networking.

Because I wanted to capture how various disabilities (and degrees of disability) perceived accessibility (or lack thereof) in the college classroom, and because I wanted to facilitate more transpersonal agencies that work to weave a student’s disability identity in with a collective cultural context, I included participants who are college-aged (i.e., undergraduate and graduate students over 18-years-old) and who self-identified under one (or more) of the following disability categories<sup>4</sup>: behavioral (e.g., ADHD/ADD), developmental and/or intellectual (e.g., autism), emotional (e.g., PTSD), hearing (e.g., deafness, hard-of-hearing, etc.), learning (e.g., dyslexia), mental and/or cognitive (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, information processing, etc.), multiple (e.g., deaf-blindness), mobility and/or orthopedic (e.g., wheelchair use), neurological (e.g., MS, cerebral palsy, etc.), physiological (e.g., endometriosis, hypersomnia, etc.), speech and/or language (e.g., stuttering), and visual (e.g., blindness, color disparity, etc.).<sup>5</sup> While this list is not extensive, the varying categories create a heterogeneous sample, and show how disability is socially constructed and difficult to place into any one category.

I distributed information through voluntary contact using the (Disability) Student Access Center LISTSERV, with material suggesting the opportunity to voice opinions about the university-classroom experience (see Appendix D). I recruited participants via email or through verbal contact. The recommended amount of subjects when using phenomenology is 3 to 10

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<sup>4</sup> IDEA of 2004 defines 13 similar categories for students to be eligible for related services and “free appropriate public education.”

<sup>5</sup> Participants chose how they defined their “disability”—whether it is defined through a socially normative definition, an ambiguous personal connotation, or no label whatsoever.

subjects (Dukes, 1984); so, I gathered 19 participants for interviewing. Combined with participant data from the pilot study, the present study includes 23 interviews.

### **Data Collection**

All participants engaged in long, audiotaped, face-to-face semi-structured interviews ranging in length from 20 to 40 minutes with an average interview length of 28 minutes for a total of 644 minutes—10 hours and 44 minutes—of digitally recorded material. Overall, transcribed data totaled 195 single-spaced pages of text. The semi-structured interviews ensure a rich collection of information and flexibility in addressing emergent themes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For the purposes of understanding the varying degrees of agentic capacities of the students in this study, participants chose whether to include their real name or a pseudonym in the transcription.

After signing a written informed consent form or (in the case of some participants needing assistance reading and/or understanding the form, or in writing a signature) orally waiving their consent (see Appendix A), each participant was briefed on the interview protocol (see Appendix B). Participants were then asked a subset of 10-15 questions drawn from a set of 20 open-ended questions in an interview guide (see Appendix C), based on the aforementioned interview tool that amalgamates elements of Creswell (2009), Haydon-Laurelut and Wilson (2011), and Stage and Milne (1996). Not every respondent was asked all the questions on the interview guide, and other questions not included in the guide were raised during the interview process for further explanation of the established questions (Stage & Milne, 1996).

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### ***Phenomenological Data Analysis***

After transcribing the interviews, I coded every transcript based on the three steps of phenomenological data analysis: phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning (Kakulu, Byrne, & Viitanan, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

First, phenomenological reduction: I started by reading through the interview transcripts and grouping answers based on similar questions and based on similar disabilities and experiences (Kraus, 2008). I then extracted “significant statements” across these answers using a process known as *horizontalization* to explain how each student perceives the classroom experience in regards to the ableist Othering phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). In other words, each interviewee’s statements were equally valued in the construction of a broad understanding of this phenomenon. Statements here included perceptions of interactions with faculty, peers, and tutors, and perceptions of current classroom accommodations. Clusters of meanings were then developed from these statements into common categories or themes. These themes are explicated in the next subsection to further analyze the data (Kraus, 2008).

Next, with these statements and themes, I engaged in imaginative variation: I developed a textural and structural description of meanings (what the participants experienced) and essences (how the participants experienced) (Creswell, 2013). Essentially, this step of the analysis is used to facilitate the development of an individual’s agency (Kakulu et al., 2009). Writing the detailed ethnographic notes of the context, setting, behavior, body language, facial expressions, eye gaze, and emotions of the participants into the analysis then builds a rhetorical platform to encapsulate the varying agentic capacities at play.

Finally, with the textural and structural descriptions, I generated a synthesis of meaning: I wrote a composite description that integrates the textures and structures of participant data to construct the essence of the ableist Othering phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Kakulu et al., 2009). This portion of the analysis couples the lived experiences of the participants with my personal understanding of the phenomenon (Kraus, 2008), moving to a collective culture identity used to understand the relationship between ableist Othering and the college classroom. Ultimately, this description should persuade the reader to come away from a study feeling, “I understand better what it is like for someone [with a disability] to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

### *Coding Schemes*

After horizontalization of the answers to each participant’s interview questions, I clustered statements into more specific coding schemes. Coding is based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks driving this study: ableist Othering, voice emancipation, disability identity, and classroom accessibility. These frameworks create unique perspectives from the standpoint of the student’s lived experience.

To explore these perspectives on disability in the college classroom, I turned to Hutcheon and Wolbring’s (2012) study to code for physical, social, and emotional barriers experienced by students with disabilities. The study draws on institutional ableism as an analytical tool to “uncover processes of meaning-making by individuals viewed as active social agents who construct their own realities” (p. 40), addressing the impact of the post-secondary education system on the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Essentially, Hutcheon and Wolbring recruited eight students with “ability-diverse” needs to demonstrate how there is “a continued need for critical examination of higher education policy and its capacity to address differences in ability” (p. 39). A thematic network analysis of textual data generated five themes from the

multiplicative voices of the students to explain the interactive body-self-social framework of the college classroom: (1) hegemonic voice, (2) voice of the body, (3) voice of silence, (4) voice of assertion, and (5) voice of change (p. 42). These five themes help to contextualize significant statements in the transcripts coding data through the theoretical and conceptual frameworks driving this project (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012).

Open coding schemes were also employed through the data analysis. Transcriptions were also coded for positive and negative experiences in the classroom, instances of discriminatory actions or comments regarding disability, any feelings of ostracism or silencing of voice, perceived privileging of the abled body, and suggestions of potential modifications to policy. Because these open coding schemes are based off my positionality and lived experience, themes from these schemes emerged after the initial coding schemes to avoid the influence of my bias.

## **Triangulation of Data**

### ***Methodological Rigor***

To verify the coding schemes, this study employs the triangulation method “to limit biases and put forth strong data and findings” (Kraus, 2008, p. 91). “This process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Since Brown (2001) explains triangulation “needs to be adopted by the disability field as a key criterion for the conversion of research conclusions into policy and practice” (p. 146), using this strategy here adds to the facilitation of disabled voices in a larger context.

Verification of this study’s internal data analysis incorporates *data triangulation* or the “triangulation of sources”—an examination of data consistency by deriving different phases of fieldwork, different points of respondent validation, and different accounts from participants (Patton, 1999, p. 1193). More specifically, *technique triangulation* and *reflexive triangulation*

will be used for the diverse agentic capacities of the data. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explain technique triangulation as a comparison of data produced by different techniques “to the extent that these techniques involve different kinds of validity threat” and reflexive triangulation as “an attempt to relate different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of analysis” (p. 198). Essentially, data triangulation is implemented here for internal security: to determine if the responses of one student are synonymous to that of another student with like disabilities and/or experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These two types of triangulation amalgamate a level of authenticity for a design involving rhetorical agency and components of phenomenology.

For data triangulation, different techniques were used to check for the naturalistic axioms—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—to guard against bias in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995).

### ***Credibility***

For credibility—the extent to which participants’ multiple constructions of reality are accurately described and identified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—I engaged in two techniques: (1) member checking and (2) negative case analysis.

After completing analysis, interviewees were asked to assist in checking the coded responses for accuracy of facts and emotions from the lived experiences. This technique of member checking (Denhart, 2008; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) maintains communication with and connection to respondents after interviewing. Students were able to analyze their own experiences, and they voiced concerns or incorporated new ideas into their responses (Kraus, 2008). By “taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to

the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252), this approach created an internal check of the research process.

Additionally, negative case analysis (Denhart, 2008; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided internal consistency by showcasing evidence of any informant that directly refutes my developing coding schemes and interpretations to them (Luborsky, 1993). Creswell (2013) explains this approach “provides a [more] realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study” (p. 251). For example, some students voicing more positive experiences in the college classroom are less likely to experience discriminatory acts or feelings of ostracism and silencing—providing a counter-example to overt ableist Othering.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability—the extent to which research findings are applicable in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—was supported through thorough documentation of coding techniques (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012) and through a diverse sampling of disability experiences. Here, sample size connects multiple experiences and crosschecks comments (Seidman, 1998), creating intersubjective connectivity to a larger cultural context. Creswell (2013) recommends using thick descriptions of experiences to make findings transferable between researcher and participants—ultimately, allowing readers to make decisions about the external consistency of the research.

Peer debriefing—the probing of researcher bias, the challenging of meanings, and clarifying of interpretations (Denhart, 2008; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Kraus, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Richardson, 1999)—also provided an external check of the research. Here, by engaging in dialogues with others outside of the research on my “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study”

(Creswell, 2013, p. 251), I not only checked internal consistency (credibility), but I also stimulated an external projection of my findings for application to multiple contexts.

### ***Dependability***

Creswell (2013) explains “one [should seek] dependability [rather than reliability] that the results will be subject to change” (p. 246). Because rhetorical agency requires *kairos*, spacing the time between interviews of participants shows a shift in how the phenomenon is perceived (Kraus, 2008). Persistent observation (see, e.g., Creswell, 2013) also captured the authenticity of emotions and bodily reactions of the student *in the moment*.

### ***Confirmability***

Rather than objectivity, the aforementioned use of positionality and researcher reflexivity adds to confirmability—or the extent to which intersubjective agreement is reached to minimize the researcher’s judgments and bias (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995)—in the research process. Since researcher reflexivity (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Denhart, 2008) and positionality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this study adopts an autophenomenographic approach, triangulation must be addressed in terms of autoethnography and phenomenography. First, Esping (2010) argues “triangulation in autoethnography can only be achieved progressively through the distributed efforts of several autoethnographies detailing similar experiences” (p. 212). Likewise, triangulation in phenomenography is sought through iterative comparing and contrasting of voices and counter-voices detailing phenomena (Richardson, 1999). By interweaving my voice with the voices and accounts of other students with disabilities, I minimized personal bias and judgments regarding the ableist Othering phenomenon.

### ***Limitations of Triangulation***

Before turning to analysis and findings of the interview data, I must address the

limitations of triangulation for a design using rhetorical agency.

Because of the problematic tendency of “working the hyphen” in writing (Fine, 1994), qualitative inquiry comes under fire for its credibility and ethicality, especially when investigating disability identity. Not surprisingly, “qualitative methods have historically been criticized for its inability to present valid findings (Creswell, 2003, p. 179)” (Kraus, 2008, p. 91). At the heart of much controversy are doubts about the nature of critical analysis and the use of triangulation in qualitative findings (Patton, 1999). Initially, Denzin (1970/1978) conceptualized *triangulation* in the 1970s as a strategy for validating results obtained with individual methods; it aims to enrich and to complete knowledge, “transgressing the (always limited) epistemological potential of the individual method” (Flick, 2014, p. 183). In essence, the primary problems regarding triangulation stem from opposing ideas about epistemology in research.

In particular, since qualitative inquiry values fluidity over the linearity of quantification (and, thus, is often seen as a “soft science”) (Brown, 2001), much of the controversy stems around the need to substantiate data with relative perspectives rather than absolute truth (Patton, 1999). Brown (2001) contends the use of triangulation for the objectivity and replicability of a study undermines the paradigm used in disability studies research, which may then have adverse consequences when constructing identity for persons with disabilities. The pressures for a critical scholar to use triangulation could fragment identity and could have “serious ethical implications as results are translated to policy” (Brown, 2001, p. 163).

Since this method relies on rhetorical agency to examine how college students with disabilities experience ableist Othering, an issue of validity and authenticity comes into question (because the potency of the rhetorical agent lives in an ever-changing, and fleeting, kairoitic space). Patton (1999) explains, “[while] statistical analysis follows formulas and

rules...qualitative analysis [on the other hand] is a creative process, [and depends] on the insights and conceptual capabilities of the analyst” (p. 1189). Thus, because of the dimensions of creativity and flexibility in this design, I present criticisms of this method’s paradox to facilitate a platform for rhetorical agency and to diminish the transferability and confirmability of the “disabled voice” into practice—opening discussion to the symbolic changes to rhetorical agency.

One concern of this design is the transferability of voice to a larger cultural scale.

Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto (2009) discuss the role of the phenomenological personal interview in cultural analysis. The authors problematize this methodological tool, arguing:

The underlying research paradigm, *existential-phenomenology*, is not necessarily adequate for cultural analysis because it focuses attention primarily on the individual and the first-person experience. Such a paradigmatic perspective is problematic because it tends to sustain a view of human agency that is highly individualistic and thus fails to account for the cultural complexity of social action. (p. 329)

Essentially, a design incorporating phenomenology runs “the risk of guiding researchers to place too much emphasis on personal independence and role of the individuals in social life” (p. 330) and fails to consider how these roles play to the cultural complexity of social action. The Internalized-Other Interview may analytically focus on the interweaving of hyper-dialectic discourse and reflexive sociology to facilitate rhetorical agency, but it nevertheless focuses solely on the individual agent. It leaves questions “about the culturally constituted nature of experience and social reality aside” (p. 335), and does not open an empirical reality to cultural interpretations of a phenomenon (such as ableist Othering). This prevents adequate critical analysis of the inner workings of discursive power since voice cannot be macroscopically scaled.

The design here also presents a rhetorical and textual shortcoming, challenging confirmability. Regardless of how a researcher intertwines positionality and reflexivity into research, the method of bracketing still represents “a crude, and entirely misconceived, gesture

towards objectivity” (Paley, 2005, p. 106). This presents what Hammersley (1989) notes as the “dilemma of qualitative research,” arguing naturalistic approaches like phenomenology encounter a basic problem to reconcile the “subjective” and the “objective”; currently, there is no way to capture subjective factors that meet the objective requirements of science (p. 4). The necessity to objectivate the rhetorical agent through these techniques, in turn, colonizes discourse of the disabled-Other in text, unheeding Fine’s (1994) warning to avoid “working the hyphen” of the subject-object (or agent-structure) dyad. Positionality and reflexivity do not entitle researchers to “lay claim to anything resembling ‘objectivity’, or generalizability, or ‘reality’, or theoretical abstraction” (Paley, 2005, p. 106) and are “not concerned with the workings of an ‘external world’” (Paley, 2005, p. 107). As such, when it is up “for the reader to decide if the study is believable” (Koch, 1996, p. 175), the phenomenological components in the design of the present study loses the potency to engage audiences in rhetorical listening because the text potentially re-inscribes Otherness when trying to objectivate qualitative data.

Given these limitations of triangulation, it demonstrates that symbolic changes to rhetorical agency are needed in order to validate disabled voices in a cultural context and in an empirical reality. Therefore, after critical analysis of the qualitative data, I propose an alternative path to study the ableist Othering phenomenon—one that taps into a new lens of rhetorical reinvention. Essentially, by shifting my way of “seeing” critical theory used here in this methodology, an alternative path will not only surface a silenced rhetoric of the disabled-Other, but it will also address the issues of validating disabled voices such that transferability and confirmability (i.e., external validity) can be strengthened.

The following chapter highlights answers to the present study’s research questions. Based on an analysis of research questions in the pilot study, several key themes emerge for ableist

Othering and disability disclosure through self-identification. With the addition of the kairotic spatial element in the interviews, findings also display a unique interstice for the interplay between Self and Other, and the generation of a rhetorical platform for agency to emerge.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter discusses several findings and sub-findings of ableist Othering, rhetorical agency, and inclusion of academic adjustments. Interview quotations of students are used not only to add justification to a deleterious phenomenon, but also are used to provide a reader with a better sense of a disabled student’s experience in the college classroom. Each disabled student’s chosen transcription identifier (whether it be a pseudonym or a real name) are used to answer the research questions and narrate his/her experiences and agency. Participants were asked to use pseudonyms for the interview transcriptions to preserve privacy and confidentiality. Nonetheless, some participants advocated for use of their real names for the purpose of voice emancipation and stereotype diminution. Additionally, while “disability” has always been constructed by normative ideology of what it means to be “nondisabled,” this study draws on the critical disability paradigm and chooses to focus on how individuals self-define their corporeality through human variation so as not to culturally-bind identity to any known hegemonic institution. Table 4.1 presents demographic data of the 24 participants (myself included).

**Table 4.1 Demographic Data on the Participants**

Participant	M/F	Age (Years)	Major	Status	Disability <sup>6</sup>
Justin*	M	21	Public Relations & Communication	Junior	Blindness
DW*	F	67	Environmental Science & Policy	Graduate	Temporary Limited Mobility with Knee Tendons
Scotty*	M	22	Geography	Senior	Dyslexia
Elisabeth*	F	31	Communication	Graduate	Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
EMS	F	19	Business & Marketing Management	Freshman	Dyslexia/ADHD
Jennifer	F	23	Psychology & Women’s Studies	Senior	Fibromyalgia, Endometriosis, Hypoglycemia, Arthritis
Samuel	M	26	Business	Freshman	Color Disparity/Vision

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<sup>6</sup> Description of disability is based on the participant’s self-identification.

Ashley S	F	31	Apparel & Textile Designs	Senior	Hypersomnia/Sleep Disorder
Richard	M	43	Fisheries & Wildlife Biology	Sophomore	ADD
Dillon	M	21	Communication Sciences & Disorders	Junior	ADHD/PTSD
CW	F	35	Life Science	Senior	ADHD/Depression/Anxiety
Jen	F	32	Biology	Freshman	Depression/PTSD
JNG	M	21	Master of Business Administration	Graduate	Cerebral Palsy
NMF	F	22	Family Studies	Junior	Dyslexia
Charles	M	18	Music	Freshman	Visual Impairment
Corinth	F	21	Agronomy/Plant Science/Biotech	Junior	Dysgraphia
Gerald	M	26	Management Information Systems	Sophomore-Junior	PTSD, anxiety, partially deaf and blind, traumatic brain injury
Christa	F	28	Mechanical Engineering	Senior (nontraditional)	Severe ADD
Charlie G	F	23	Kinesiology/Pre-Physical Therapy	5 <sup>th</sup> -Yr. Senior	ADHD/Vision
Rachel L	F	18	Biology/Pre-medicine	Freshman	Type 1 diabetes
Rosalyn B	F	22	Microbiology & Psychology	Junior	Immuno-compromised Kidney
MCBRM	M	23	Business & Biology	Junior	Spastic Quadro-paralysis
ZM	M	20	Physics & Computer Information Science	Sophomore	Asperger's
Corey	M	25	Mathematics & Communication Studies	Graduate	Hard-of-hearing

\*Note: Justin, DW, Scotty, and Elisabeth are participants of the pilot study conducted at the Mid-Atlantic university.

To determine if and how the ableist Othering phenomenon pervades the structures of higher-educational institutions, and to efface marginal hegemony in academia if it does exist, the voices of disabled students must be intertextually layered into writing. To avoid colonizing in writing as Fine (1994) forewarns, I will interweave my own personal experience on deafness with the multiple voices from the interviews. By doing so, I position my-Self with the disabled-Other (i.e., I situate my disability identity with the silenced voices of other individuals and their identities) to constitutively construct writing that produces transpersonal, intersubjective agency (or rather, an agency that transcends the bounds of this study and calls for social action of

listeners) (Coole, 2005). Findings include major themes that emerged after conducting interviews and serve to answer the research questions of this study.

### **Analysis of Research Question 1**

The first research question asked, “How does the college classroom perpetuate ableist Othering for the disabled student?” The shared experiences of the participants suggest that the ableist Othering phenomenon is experienced both overtly and covertly. In other words, all disabled students interviewed for the present study perceived and experienced forms of ableist Othering in the college classroom and on the university campus, but some were more aware of the phenomenal repercussions than others. Students who were *directly* aware of the phenomenon and how it influenced the college environment primarily experienced hegemony through their social interactions: a re-inscribed perceptual discrimination of visible and invisible disabilities. Contrarily, some students felt no direct repercussion of the phenomenon. However, ableist Othering *indirectly* influences the student—without his/her awareness—more so through institutional propagation of hegemony in the form of ineffectual academic accommodations and excessive documentation.

#### ***Re-inscribed Perceptual Discrimination***

Students’ reactions to the general college classroom experience varied across interviews ranging from positive to negative, but one theme remained consistent: participants *perceived* themselves as “different” from their teachers, peers, and classmates based on social interactions. The consensus was that nondisabled individuals on campus reinforced stereotypes based on cultural stigma either through direct language (verbal comments) or unspoken disdain (nonverbal behaviors) (see Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Some had a few incidences to none; others had several. In turn, the perceived comments and behaviors generated feelings of dejection, frustration, anger,

and exclusion for students. Interestingly, students experienced stereotyping differently depending on whether the disability was visible or invisible. I will examine each case.

### ***Visible Disability***

Three participants (Justin, JNG, and Charles) had a physical disability that can be classified as “visible”—the disability was noticeable to the public gaze through physical characteristics. Besides reporting what can only be described as “the look,” these students with a visible disability shared common uncomfortable and awkward experiences with their teachers, peers, and classmates because of a lack of understanding on how to approach or interact with someone with a physically noticeable disability. Answers to question 6 (“Do you have any concerns about working with a teacher or peer in the classroom on an issue that addresses your disability?”), question 7 (“Have you ever received a comment, whether written or oral, from a teacher or peer you felt was discriminatory toward your disability?”), question 8 (“Do you feel you receive different treatment from your teacher(s) because of your disability?”) and question 9 (“What, if any, concerns do you have about how teachers or peers respond to your disability when working on class or group projects?”) of the interview guide demonstrate the perceptual discrimination of visible disabilities.

Justin, an undergraduate junior majoring in public relations and communication, notes these perceived stereotypes. After going blind from diabetes in 2003, he sought out eye training methods to overcome obstacles such as computers and traveling, learning how to use Braille in the process. His goal is to obtain a position in public relations, working for a nonprofit organization or alongside people with disabilities to advocate for public education on blindness. Justin explains, “the biggest problem...is the public’s stereotypical view of blindness, and the lack of education they have about what blind person can and can’t do. Apparently the

stereotypical view you see in movies...[is] a lot of blind people needing help.” Justin has defied these perceptions with his outspoken demeanor. He notes: “A lot of blind people are quiet and keep to themselves...I do whatever the opposite is. You might think ‘Oh, I don’t want to ask for help’, but if I’m lost I’m going to ask ‘could you point me in the right direction?’”

Charles, a freshman majoring in music, also attests to the perceived societal view and treatment of individuals with a visual disability like blindness. Charles became blind after a brain tumor crushed his optical nerve when he was five years old, but he explains that he still sees “light and shadows, and occasionally, [depending] on the lighting, colors.” He defies the “living-in-total-darkness” societal stereotype, yet explains, “there’s been really good experiences where the teachers have been really accommodating...but there have been occasions where a teacher has been, I think, a little bit nervous.” Charles explains his jovial attitude and his tendency to break the tension with ‘blind jokes’ is hit or miss with the teachers: often times the teacher is unsure whether to laugh or not. Further, when asked if there is a tone in the way they speak to him when he tells jokes, Charles answers, “Yeah, absolutely. You can hear it sometimes...a hushed tone, like, ‘Oh my goodness, you’re blind; I have to treat you like you’re less.’ Then they eventually figure it out, and then there’s other teachers...they just kind of roll with it.” Peers and classmates, unfortunately, share the same uneasiness around Charles: “They’re scared to approach me because they really don’t know what to expect from me; they’ve never experienced it, and it makes it a little hard for us to communicate with each other.” These perceptual stereotypes and uncomfortable interactions fuel attitudes and behaviors where nondisabled individuals treat those students with blindness in a sympathetic manner, viewing them as fragile or needing help. Charles explains: “I’ve got my cane and people know that I’m blind...[but] a lot of people get stuck staring at my cane, because they’re like, ‘Oh man, he’s blind!’”

Similarly, when returning to Justin's case, he adds: "Some people look at it more as sympathy. A lot of help is offered. Sometimes a little too much: people want to do too much or grab your arm, [and] try to walk you across the crosswalk. 'I appreciate it, but I know how to cross the street.'" The ability to see or not (in Justin and Charles's cases) is Othered in the college classroom by societal ideology that views blind individuals needing help across a crosswalk or needing a cane to walk, despite how both Justin and Charles have overcome adversity by challenging perceptions. True, some individuals eventually disintegrate their perceptual stereotypes and become more comfortable with blindness—but these statements suggest that Othering initially instigates ableist assumptions about the body. Those attitudes will then either remain deeply seated in ideology and strengthen communication barriers, or will transform through empathy and allow open communication to unfold.

The sympathetic mannerisms and perceptions of fragility and "needing help" are not just limited to students with a visual disability like blindness. JNG, a graduate student pursuing an MBA, describes the same effect. JNG has lived with spastic cerebral palsy, which he explains as "all my limbs are affected and I have high muscle tone which causes spasms. It was caused by a brain injury at birth, which weakened signals to my kidneys, which is why I can't walk." JNG uses a motorized wheelchair and service dog for assistance; the noticeable characteristics of his disability fuel a sense of discomfort for his teachers, peers, and classmates. He explains, "There are some professors that try to be overly helpful.... Just constantly asking if anything's wrong...on a class-by-class basis.... It annoys me because it just makes me feel like the work I've done to get to this point hasn't been known in other people's eyes." Likewise, when asked question 9 and 10 ("Have you had any concerns communicating with fellow classmates about your disability?") of the interview guide, my conversation with JNG unfolds as such:

JNG: For me personally, if I'm doing a group project I often feel like I'm not contributing...usually because I can't write or... physically participate....

Me: Do you ever feel that you have trouble connecting with your peers?

JNG: Oh yeah.... There's not a lot of opportunities for social interaction.... So [in] the classroom, I often feel uncomfortable communicating because I don't feel like I have a lot of social knowledge to be on the same level as my peers.

Me: Do you ever feel that you get a look or a comment from your peers?

JNG: Oh yeah.... The first time somebody meets me the instant reaction is that I have some sort of mental disability and so they talk to me as such.... They don't have a lot of experience [with] disabilities like mine, which are only physical. The only way they know how to interact is as if I had some mental disability.

A societal misunderstanding leads to a misclassification of physical disabilities; in turn, this leads to behaviors that are off-putting for students with physical disabilities. Justin, Charles, and JNG experience the ableist Othering phenomenon because they perceive nondisabled individuals (at least in their interactions) relying on societal stereotypes as guidance for behavior. This leads to perceptual discrimination of visible disabilities.

### ***Invisible Disability***

Unlike visible disabilities, the classroom experiences of students with *invisible* disabilities are far more discouraging. The majority of the participants reported a notable commonality: nondisabled individuals perceived their disabilities as non-legitimate or “not real” because they were not discernible on the surface of the body. The magnitude of disbelief by nondisabled individuals leads to behaviors and verbal remarks that can only be based off of perceptual discrimination and a cultural stigma of what it means to have a disability.

The case is different for each type of disability. However, many participants reported having disabilities in multiple categories. As such, because invisible disabilities are so systemic and varied, I will report findings of perceptual discrimination based on personal experiences and/or shared experiences of a disability.

When answering question 4 (“Could you explain the extent of your disability?”) of the interview guide, three students detail the dimensions of dyslexia and describe how it comes across in their schoolwork. NMF, a junior family studies major, explains, “It affects almost everything I do when it comes to school: how I learn, how I read, how I write papers, [and] how I take tests....”; EMS, a freshman in business and marketing management, adds, “I was tested for dyslexia and...in third grade. I didn’t find out I was ADHD until this past year. My dyslexia isn’t considered very severe.... The combination with the dyslexia was what made it more severe.... You see it more in my writing and my math”; and Scotty, a senior majoring in geography, says, “there are a few tricks I use nowadays that I hadn’t learned back then: looking at my thumbs for ‘b’s’ and ‘d’s’ and ‘i before e except after c’.... I can use English pretty well, but when it comes to the fundamental basics I guessed I learned to walk before I could crawl...I have horrible spelling and, when just writing by hand, my grammar is shockingly bad.”

But when asked questions about how teachers, peers, and classmates perceived dyslexia, these students responded: “It used to be that I was just lazy.... When I was younger, there were a few teachers [who] would fail me solely based on an inability to do a relatively small part of the class.... There were some teachers that saw it as a bigger problem than I did” (Scotty) or “[Teachers] thought it was just me not studying and being lazy where in actuality I would study probably twice as long as most students.... It is actually interesting telling people that I’m dyslexic.... I’ve had teachers actually tell me that dyslexia doesn’t exist” (EMS). Having dyslexia viewed as “it does not exist/does not matter” and being called “lazy” appears as a common theme for these students. NMF exemplifies this perception by elaborating on one incident when she received an off-putting reaction:

It was just in the smaller groups, sometimes I don’t understand a question and then I ask [the teacher] to ask it in a different way...that’s when he made me feel really dumb.... I

was sitting in a classroom of about 20 people...it was in biology. Reading the book only helps me so much—I need someone to sit there and explain it to me a little bit more in depth. I asked a question about, I think it was part of the digestive system.... I'd never really took a class on any of that before. [He] was like, "Well everybody should know that." I had told him I was dyslexic and he was just like, it didn't matter.

While it is a recognized learning disability, nondisabled individuals still delegitimize dyslexia since it is not physically noticeable nor is it as severe as physical disabilities that may limit daily functions other than just inside the classroom (Denhart, 2008). Scotty, during his first few years in the college classroom, had difficulty with spelling and grammar. He notes how he had to take several spelling tests in high school, which was a frustrating experience for him. One teacher even pulled him aside and said, "Look. You need to straighten up and fly right. Most of the other stuff you are doing is fine, but I will fail you for [poor spelling]." Although he viewed this with a "nothing-I-can-do-about-it" attitude, the disparity between professors' perceptions presents a clear power-distancing hierarchy in the classroom. The hierarchal privileges of the teaching staff highlight a form of discrimination: not all teachers provide appropriate accommodations for the student. In Scotty's case, only one professor was helpful while the majority of others were not.

Corinth, a junior in agronomy and plant science, shares this frustration with a less common version of dyslexia—a writing disability known as dysgraphia. Because of the throbbing in her hands from motor dysgraphia (a muscular disorder that affects her writing over a long duration of time), Corinth has relied on an iPad with a detachable keyboard (and note takers) to assist in her learning experiences. However, her motor dysgraphia and spatial dysgraphia (a mental disorder that affects her spelling, where she often confuses letters, inserts random capital letters, or writes lowercase b's and d's backwards) have received similar reactions by teachers and classmates. The most common remarks, according to Corinth, are "oh you are just making that up; that is not a real thing" or "oh, you are just lazy and you don't want

to write.” But what most people don’t understand is that the feeling of motor dysgraphia is like “stabbing [the] hand with multiple knives”—the pain is very realistic and aggravating. Our conversation continues with a recollection of a negative experience in a science lab.

Corinth: I took a science class that required a lab. [I had] kind of an older professor and he was one of the people who did not think that this was a real thing, even with all my paperwork, and he refused to let me type up my lab manuals. So all of my labs were extremely short, [and] were very difficult to read. Part of motor dysgraphia is having illegible handwriting. Because he could not read it...he gave me a zero for the entire lab, which made me fail the course.

Me: Did you feel discouraged at times?

Corinth: I did, because I had worked really hard in that class.... When I did put in all this work to try and do it the way that [my professor] wanted, I still got zero because it wasn’t good enough.... [He] thought I was just being lazy. I have gotten that reaction from several teachers before—that this is not a real thing.

These themes of laziness and “the disability is not real” pervade other invisible disabilities, too—mostly for behavioral, mental, and emotional disabilities such as ADD/ADHD, PTSD, and depression. Six participants (Richard, Christa, Charlie G, Dillon, Jen, and Gerald) approached me to be interviewed, each having a disability identity that ranged across these categories. One theme remained consistent: vexation over the reactions and perceptions of teachers and classmates because they believed these disabilities should not be taken seriously.

Richard: Essentially all [my] life [I was told], “You’re an idiot. You’re stupid. Why can’t you do this [or] do that?”... “Why can’t you do what they’re doing?”

Christa: [Teachers] usually think [ADD] is a joke. I’ve been told—especially with engineering—I have directly been told to my face that it is a crutch to use any kind of assistance.... I’ve been kind of persecuted against it.

Charlie G: [That] one [joke] about the [ADHD] meds...everyone is just like... “Oh, I would love to have extra time on tests and stuff!” I’m like: “Yeah, but you don’t understand...I need the meds to be close to normal!” I need extra time to put thoughts into everything and it’s frustrating.

Dillon: You know, a lot of people don’t believe in ADD [or PTSD].... I can tell people get a little frustrated with me because I don’t do well in meeting settings because I’m... trying to pay attention to everything people are saying.... A lot of people are like, “Kid, you’re nuts.”

Jen: [It's] very hard for me to concentrate [with depression and PTSD].... My memory is not very well; so, I find it difficult sometimes to listen to the professor talk.... I find it very hard to trust younger kids...there's a disconnect with my life experience and theirs.... I feel like they'll judge me.

Gerald: [My] teachers have been phenomenal...[they] actually help me.... [But] I had to...explain to them, "I'm sorry I am being a nuisance.... I have to sit in the back: I am partially blind and partially deaf."

After listening to these testimonies in the interview process, I felt emotionally charged with anger and sympathy for these students who speak about how their disabilities were either "a joke" or "a crutch" or how they were seen as "a nuisance" or "nuts." While the experiences of these students have ranged from being positive to extremely negative, the societal ideology and view of ADD/ADHD, PTSD, anxiety, and depression as an imaginary condition of the body delegitimizes and "Others" the student.

This stigmatizing epidemic on campus is not limited to only the few aforementioned disability categories; in fact, the perceptual problem pervades into disabilities that are far more systemic and physically affect the body (neurological, physiological, visual, and hearing).

Elisabeth, a graduate communication major who was diagnosed with MS when she was eighteen, explains how societal perceptions have affected her. She perceives her medical disease as a disability and explains how perceptions from professors often take on two extremes: either they react overanxiously with "Whoa! She could experience paralysis!" or they withdraw and ask quietly, "Well, what do I need to do? [Are] you even going to be able to finish this class?" Elisabeth elaborates how "some people are more open and willing to engage in the conversation about the actual ailments of the disease...[but] some people just want to know what they can do and back away from it because it confuses them." The stigma around MS makes it difficult for

Elisabeth to then push past these perceptions and justify her disability so that she can receive academic adjustments in the college classroom.

[When] I was younger...I had to...make the case [to committees] for why I needed extra time or why I should be allowed to finish [a] class and that was very frustrating for me.... I [would] lay (sic) in bed at night and write these letters to officials stating my case for this or that anticipating how I would word something if something bad happened.... I [would] lay at night thinking how can I make them listen to me and how can I make them understand that these [ailments] are real even when...they can't see it?

This time in her life was very emotional and stressful for Elisabeth; she felt that she “didn’t have any credibility” because other people thought she was making excuses. Elisabeth was met with resistance because of the stigma of a disability that could not be seen.

Rosalyn B, a junior double majoring in microbiology and psychology, echoes Elisabeth’s sentiments about how societal stereotypes place the onus on the student to “prove” an invisible physical disability. After having a kidney transplant at sixteen, Rosalyn B has had medication that has compromised her immune system. In between dialysis and patiently waiting for a kidney transplant, Rosalyn B has had several frustrating moments with teachers.

I have had a couple teachers where they have given me D’s or F’s because of my disability.... I had one teacher, in particular, [who] told me that I was unclean in her culture and that honestly if I couldn’t dedicate the time, even through my disability, then I wasn’t worth it to be in her class. After the class ended, she told me to never come back, otherwise I would get a D or an F in her class. I remember once I had a really big doctor’s appointment—that day was going to decide a lot of things for me. She told me that I would get a zero no matter what my health circumstances were.

From Rosalyn B’s particular testimony, it is clear how nondisabled professors can resort to stereotypical and cultural perceptions of disability (as well as resort to derogatory rhetoric such as “unclean”—or rather, “sickly” and “diseased”) to re-inscribe and (potentially) engage in discriminatory acts. Rosalyn B explains that group projects are not much better: “I’ve had people that just count me down on grades [when] I’m gone.... I just feel like...people don’t believe you.... There is no empathy on the side of the other person, I feel like.” Once again, the theme of

a “crutch” appeared during her interview. Rosalyn B feels that there is a lack of education and awareness about invisible disabilities since, during her time using a disability tag in parking spaces she “had people put nails under [her] tires...had people put dog poop on [her] car...[and] had people claim that [she] wasn’t really disabled.” Bach (2005) notes hegemonic Othering occurs when someone considered “normal” retreats to language and actions such as those displayed in Rosalyn B’s interview to create feelings of disenfranchisement or discouragement for abnormality. Ableist Othering in the classroom and college campus is alive and pernicious: The phenomenon directly affects students with disabilities in some way (even if the student’s experience has been an overall positive one). The perceptions, attitudes, and actions of the nondisabled population remain ideologically ingrained in ableist institutional structures.

My hearing aids may be visible tools, but they are often hidden or remain *invisible* to those who are “normal.” When I face commentary from peers in the classroom who unknowingly say, “What are you, deaf?” or “Did you hear me?” I point to my ears to show them my hearing aids. Still, they forget at times to wait until I have them turned on before engaging in a conversation with me. Ableist Othering occurs directly through re-inscribed perceptual discrimination because of the misunderstanding of what it means to have a disability and to what degree that disability is visible to the public eye.

### ***Institutional Propagation of Hegemony***

Besides the discriminatory perceptions of nondisabled teachers, peers, and classmates, students experienced ableist Othering through institutional and administrative red tape. Bach (2005) explains that bureaucratic expansion leads to organizational irrationality, which, in turn, can produce hegemony that affects a student’s learning experience. This institutional dissemination of hegemony appeared in two forms across interviews: (1) students were either

given ineffectual academic accommodations (or a lack thereof) in the college classroom, or (2) they were obligated to show proof of their disability through excessive medical documentation.

### ***Ineffectual Academic Accommodations***

For some participants, ableist Othering is not a direct consequence of social interactions; therefore, feelings of disenfranchisement do not occur for some. Yet, Said (1978) articulates how this hegemonic process still precipitates marginalization through other invisible (and subtler) means: ableist Othering for all participants occurs through academic accommodations that do not help the student succeed in the classroom or through a lack of assistance because of red tape.

For example, Samuel, a twenty-six-year-old former military freshman in business, has a combination of hereditary retinal dystrophy, Stargardt disease, color deficiency, extreme light sensitivity, and depth perception that accumulate into a vision disability requiring some adjustments in the classroom. He explains, “I see color, but not the way people see it. It’s not as brilliant. It’s like people see in HD graphics. I see in 1970’s TV. I also have Stargardt, which is basically like a...[blue] translucent dot.... It makes it hard to read. I still have to see through my peripheral vision.” A lot of the classes for Samuel do not have access to computers or policy restrictions on electronics (i.e., no Internet access during class allowed)—as such, taking notes becomes difficult for Samuel. Additionally, he does not enjoy being put on the spotlight to read during class because he feels “like a second grader when [reading] aloud.” When asked if he confronts teachers about these issues, Samuel explains how he presents accommodation letters to his teachers, but most of them don’t understand the difficulty with his peripheral vision because he can see. “They don’t understand what the blue dot looks like.... They don’t understand the color deficiency. So if they have multiple colors on the screen and they are trying to point at it

with a laser pointer, I can't see it." This problem exacerbates when Samuel takes tests and exams. He articulates:

My biggest problem with tests has been colored paper. If there's a white version, it's not a big deal, but if it's a color, then it makes it really hard to see the letters especially if they're darker colors [like purple].... They'll [also] try to fit [the tests] on a small sheet of paper...so the words will be really, really small and I guarantee if try to read through peripheral vision it's not easy to read especially tiny letters.

While Samuel does get some appropriate accommodations to assist his learning (e.g., a large-lettered test version, audio books, lecture notes before class time), he does say in larger classes teachers become irritated and "don't really do much about [the accommodations]." Ableist Othering occurs because teachers are not mindfully helping (or they forget to accommodate for) disabled students like Samuel in the classroom. Individual needs are placed on the "back burner" so that professors can teach to the lowest common denominator.

Another major nuisance that appeared across interviews for many of the students was testing accommodations. CW, a senior in life science with ADHD, depression, and anxiety, had a particularly frustrating situation with a newer professor when trying to access preferential sitting in the classroom and when scheduling an exam on a designated testing night. CW explains how she followed protocol by handing her teacher student accommodation letters, but she still felt like she was burdening the teacher. "I had given her notice several days ahead...that I wasn't going to be able to attend the exam [because of another class].... She said, 'well, you shouldn't have signed up for that other class; this is a designated testing time....'" CW explains how the situation made her feel uncomfortable; she wanted to remind her, "You know...technically I have the right to do X, Y, or Z." CW even offered to come in prior to the testing time that same day and take the exam. Still, the new teacher did not concede. Ultimately, it boiled down to CW having to go to the dean of her college, which added extra stress on her academics.

Justin, a student on the Mid-Atlantic University campus, complements this notion explaining how he has taken several tests for different classes at his respective campus disability services. Yet, when teachers submit tests late to the disability services office, scheduling becomes a hassle for Justin. “[The Office of Disability Services] doesn’t have a place to fit you in because of the other students who are taking tests.... I took a Spanish class here [once]. I knew that learning a foreign language is challenging, but Spanish...is a very visual class.... So, I asked ODS’s help and it’s been a constant problem.” Once again, much like in CW’s case, the testing accommodations, meant to help disabled students, causes more harm than good.

This lack of mindfulness for a disabled student’s individual needs and for appropriate adjustments is seen especially in JNG’s case (cerebral palsy) as he navigates the buildings on campus to get to his classroom. While he has had some people act, he says, “extremely pleasant” toward helping him in the classroom, JNG has had the most trouble with elevators breaking down to the point where he couldn’t get to class and with having tight quarters such that he could not maneuver his chair inside the classroom. Eventually the Student Access Center moved his class, but it was an initial inconvenience for JNG, especially with the tight quarters. With the addition of elevators breaking down, navigation becomes a nuisance for JNG. Individuals in administration are not always mindful of accessibility issues such as wayfinding (i.e., an disabled individual’s navigation of architectural space and buildings through the use of signage, ramps, elevators, etc.)—especially when assigning classes disabled students may take to “hard-to-access” classrooms on campus (Powell & Ben-Moshe, 2009). Campus infrastructure is ineffectually adjusted for disabled students like JNG who use wheelchairs.

Additionally, while post-secondary administration has made strides to modify classrooms with technology (e.g., online classes, PowerPoint presentations, software to access reading

material electronically, and so on), students still have accessibility issues. For example, JNG and Rosalyn B explain when answering question 12 (“How is the classroom technology—PowerPoints, YouTube videos, electronic resources, etcetera—accommodating (or not accommodating) to your individual needs?”) from the interview guide:

JNG: In one incident, I was in an [introductory] computer science class that I had to take. [The software] was set up to where you had a problem and you had to go through the right steps to solve that problem within the program, but every wrong click that you made counted against you. There were some motions with the mouse that I couldn't physically do so I kept getting those problems wrong. [The teacher] didn't really understand where I [was] coming from.

Rosalyn B: Occasionally, if I am way in the back and I'm having a bad vision day due to dialysis, it's really hard to take notes, especially when teachers are like “Here's the slide!” and “If the people in the back can't see, I need you to move up front and look at it and write it down.” The idea of standing in front of the class and taking notes because you can't see five rows back is really frustrating, which is when I really [would] like my teachers to post the PowerPoints online.

For these two students, the accessibility issues with technology do not directly create discrimination; however, participants like JNG and Rosalyn B *indirectly* experience ableist Othering when teachers do not mindfully adjust accommodations for disabled students, which, in turn, hinders their learning experiences.

What is more, when students interact with disability services<sup>7</sup>, the faculty in administrative roles there (e.g., disability counselors, accessibility coordinators, managers of testing or technology, policy compliance officers, learning specialists, and so on) only exacerbates this problem. This is the case for DW, a graduate environmental science and policy major with temporary limited mobility in the knees. DW first learned about her mobility issues only a year before the pilot study. The sciatic nerve pain in her left knee makes it difficult for her to travel or climb stairs and inclines without a cane. While she (as well as the Office of Disability

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<sup>7</sup> For the Mid-Atlantic university, disability services is called the Office of Disability Services (ODS); for the Mid-Western university, disability services is called the Student Access Center (SAC)

Services) does not view her knee conditions as a disability because of its temporary status, it is important to note her mobility has arguably created set backs in the college classroom for her. DW explains, “I do find that when I’m sitting at a desk or table—and there are limited spaces—it is much more beneficial for me to sit on the end, then I’m not disrupting anybody. That has been somewhat unnoticed. And so I become very abrasive and ask, ‘Would you be so kind to allow me to sit here so I don’t disrupt you on either side?’ But sometimes it is unconscious. If you are not sitting in a wheelchair, [it is] different since I’m hobbling.” She adds that the smaller classrooms feel cramped, and that if she were in a wheelchair, it would be a huge issue. Seeing as how this issue affects her learning, and how the Office of Disability Services does not perceive her mobility as a disability, it is clear the ableist Othering phenomenon occurs through ineffectual accommodations provided by faculty and administration.

While major differences exist between disability services on the two campuses (i.e., the Student Access Center—SAC—of the Mid-Western university was more positively received by disabled students), organizational irrationality (i.e., the discriminatory confusion that arises from bureaucratic red tape) still takes a toll on the student (Bach, 2005). Ableist Othering disseminates in a manner that indirectly discriminates the disabled student by not providing academic accommodations that best meet the needs of the individual.

### ***Excessive documentation***

When disability services (or teachers) fail to recognize a student’s disability, another pressing issue arises: the need for documentation or a medical exam as proof of a condition. That is, in order to obtain academic adjustments by disability services or by professors, the university system requires students to send out letters for verification. This excessive need for proof perpetuates ableist Othering because disabled students must show they have an “impairment that

substantially limits a major life activity” to receive help (Switzer, 2003a). It is not enough to take the word of a student who has a disability. This is due to the working assumption that everyone is “abled” until proven otherwise (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). In national disability policies, the “substantial limitation” rhetoric means “an individual is assessed in terms of the severity of the limitation and the length of time it restricts a major life activity” (Switzer, 2003a, p. 169). Yet, nondisabled students are placed in no such position to do the same for their bodies.

Jennifer, a double major in psychology and woman studies, exemplifies this problem when she narrates her initial frustration with SAC. With a range of diagnoses from hypoglycemia, arthritis, and fibromyalgia to a rare case of endometriosis (i.e., a condition resulting from the appearance of endometrial tissue outside the uterus that, when thickened during the menstrual cycle, causes severe pelvic pain), administrative officials, nevertheless, repudiated Jennifer’s disability and accessibility issues. She clarifies, “when I first walked through the door, [they] looked at me like ‘No, you’re in the wrong place. You’re not supposed to be here.’ It took a while before it really started clicking with them. But the minute that it clicked—and I had to be a little assertive and advocate for myself—and I got the paperwork from my doctors, they’ve been amazing ever since.” The Student Access Center even helped her survive sitting through a three-hour class (with her fibromyalgia, her muscles tense up and freeze in place) by giving her a big comfy chair. Jennifer’s testimony demonstrates that it is possible to disintegrate ableist attitudes and perceptual stereotypes once individuals become more comfortable with disability. However, in this particular case, the attitudes (for faculty in SAC) only transformed *after* Jennifer provided medical documentation for her endometriosis—which is an excessive demand. Ableist attitudes such as these in disability services reinforce communication barriers between student and faculty. Despite the helpful efforts of disability

services, such initial dubiety by faculty in SAC regarding Jennifer's invisible disability keeps disabled students from accessing accommodations for the classroom, perpetuating marginality.

Even with the appropriate documentation, students still face adversity with disability services and professors in order to obtain academic adjustments. Because of the degree of societal disbelief toward invisible disabilities, some teachers and faculty members were uncooperative and rejected the medical verification, or handed out ineffectual academic adjustments that did not help the disabled student with their learning experiences in the classroom. Six students—Elisabeth, Gerald, Christa, and Rosalyn B, along with MCRBM, a junior business and biology double major who has spastic quadroparesis (a form of multiple sclerosis that is possibly caused by oxygen deprivation at birth), and ZM, a sophomore in physics and computer information science with Asperger's syndrome (who tended to do extremely repetitive motor motions, would make "weird little verbal ticks," or would have trouble making eye contact)—each share their experiences and frustrations.

Elisabeth: It's really important that students have documentation through disability services.... [But] they will say [*mockingly*], "Okay, well, when you need accommodations, we will write the department a letter." And I'm like, "I don't need anything right now, but I might." [They say] "If you need accommodations next Tuesday, then write it up and we will say she's meeting with somebody to come and write [her] notes." My symptoms are not that way.

Gerald: Nine times out of ten [my teachers] will take my word for it. [But] one of them...I was like "I don't feel comfortable in this classroom trying to take a test." He was like, "Absolutely, I just need you to please give me some type of documentation." So, I was like, "That is absolutely fine, I can understand that," because then anybody can come up and [say] "Oh! I have a disability!"

Christa: The [Student] Access Center...[gives] us all the [medical] documentation and we hand those to the professors. They are not technically allowed to ask questions, but they usually try to pry anyway.... [They] are reading through it and...they kind of look at me strange because I'm not in a wheel chair [and] I don't have vision problems...they are just curious what it actually could be.

Rosalyn B: I had administration that, when I went into kidney failure when I was

sixteen...called me the next day and said “Prove it! Prove that you have a disability, we want all your medical records, we want you to show that you are actually disabled and that we have to make accommodations for you.”

MCBRM: [Once I sent] the doctor’s notes to [my teacher] and they said “We can’t accept this; it’s late anyway, go contact [SAC].” That was decently annoying [since] I had to go through an intermediary to inform my professor...that I really am sick.... I look really healthy. So, not believing me has happened probably three times; just not accepting the doctor’s notes happened once.

ZM: [SAC] just ask for documentation that shows an official proof of my diagnoses.... Then it is up to the student to go to the professors [with letters] and arrange...[when] they will take their test over at the [Student] Access Center. Most of the professors I’ve met are extremely lenient, they just sign the form and say go ahead, pick whatever date works for you. There was only one case I can think of, but his only requirement was that I take the test on the same day.

The onus of verification is placed on the disabled student. Until documentation is provided, teachers and faculty resort to a “do not look sick” societal norm. That is, the ableist Othering phenomenon is at play and prevents students with disabilities from receiving appropriate academic adjustments to help in the classroom unless medical proof is shown. The university perpetuates a discriminatory hegemony that (for some students) can be deleterious to them when aiming for a degree in higher education.

## **Analysis of Research Question 2**

The second research question asked, “How does rhetorical agency of the ‘disabled voice’ minimize ableist Othering in the classroom?” The semi-structured interview process opened a space for students to voice opinions about the college classroom experience and their take on how peers and faculty perceived their disabilities. In turn, a platform evolved for students where they could use rhetorical agency to challenge perceptions and create a larger understanding. Agentic capacities ranged across interviews. Some students were very taciturn in the interview and displayed pre-personal, corporeal agencies (i.e., a student would talk about his/her own disability, but in very reserved way). Other students were on the opposite side of the agentic

spectrum and used transpersonal, intersubjective agencies (i.e., a student was an outspoken advocate for his/her own disability as well as the disabilities of others) (Coole, 2005). From a first-person-only narrative account to a back-and-forth, first-to-third person objective account, rhetorical agency of the “disabled voice” minimizes ableist Othering through (1) constructing an agentic coexistence (or Self-Other unitary) and by (2) re-appropriating the “inability” stigma.

### ***Constructing an Agentic Coexistence***

The semi-structured interview process captures *kairos* (the ephemerality) of rhetorical agency (Kerschbaum, 2014). In turn, this builds a platform where students can use discursive and reflexive tools for social change. Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) remark how the combination of these methods helps to unveil hegemony where it is most concealed. With *kairos* added, these tools transform into hyper-dialectics and reflexive sociology (Coole, 2005)—which allows for listeners of disabled voices to mindfully empathize with the feelings of students that arise in their interviews. This ultimately creates a metadiscourse (Foucault, 1969/1972) that builds mutual understanding between the agent (the student) and societal structures (the public audience).

Some students in the present study recognize how the college classroom perpetuates hegemony over disabilities, and how their voices defy the demarcation of the Self-Other binary. In other words, students discern that hegemony occurs on campus, but know that they can erase it from their lives by using the interview process as an opportunity to educate listeners about their disabilities. Through voice emancipation, students create a sense of renewed identity that challenges the position of the disabled-Other placed on them by nondisabled individuals using societal stereotypes. By recognizing their marginalized position, disabled students situate their empowered Self-agency with the restrictive disabled-Other label into a space where the two coexist simultaneously—a unitary. Because these interviews are ephemeral, Krista Ratcliffe’s

(1999) rhetorical listening can only occur by writing about the varying agentic capacities of the students. So, encapsulating the feelings of students through text for readers sets in motion change such that agentic coexistence transpires and solvency arises for the issues in higher education.

The interview process for Rosalyn B and Christa reveals a sense of renewed identity and intersubjective agentic construction between the Self and the Other (see Coole, 2005). Rosalyn B uses self-advocacy as a means of pushing past communicative barriers and educating the public. Christa recognizes that many of her friends share her experiences about ADD and anxiety; as such, her agency shifts to a collective Self that challenges the disabled-Other position.

Rosalyn B: In my first two years of college, I ended up with a 1.85 GPA. [SAC] assumed it was all me and not the teachers or administration thinking this person is disabled.... I've brought myself back up to a 3.1 GPA.... I kind of took my disability into my own hands and I started telling the teachers, "If you need information from doctors, I can tell you." I was really in charge of my own life and my own education, telling people what was going on.

Christa: I have a few friends that are ADHD...but ten times more hyper, and same way as me, they understand every single same struggle when it comes to tests, when it comes to anything like that. Every struggle is real, literally identical to mine, so it is like we are living the same life. But the other ones that do not have those issues [are] probably very similar to people who do not understand it. I think anxiety...can be a big issue with studying and learning.

Rosalyn B and Christa use transpersonal agency to open a larger dialogue and to challenge societal perceptions. They view their voices as part of other Selves who share the same experiences (whether it be via a similar disability or all degrees in general). Their voices co-create a space where Selves that share similar experiences can build a collective Self to challenge hegemony. By taking advocacy into her own hands, Rosalyn B is able to educate listeners about the struggles she faces with an immuno-compromised kidney. She uses rhetorical agency to break down communication barriers and overcome adversity. Christa also constructs a renewed identity for her ADD—not just to voice the frustrations she has experienced, but also to show

how her incidences coalesce with other students who have ADD or ADHD. Recognizing hegemony can be challenged through voicing their opinions allows rhetorical agency to work the space between the Self-Other binary and minimize the Othering process.

Rachel L takes more of a middle ground on the agentic spectrum: her agency is personalized since she has not met other students on campus with her disability type, but she still believes in using her voice and narrative to educate others. As a freshman biology and pre-med major, Rachel L has lived with type 1 diabetes for twelve years. She used the interview process to self-reflect on her life experiences with the disease and how they have accumulated to her college incidences. This turns into an opportunity for her to create a larger dialogue with listeners. Rachel L was diagnosed at age six and had all the classic signs: was thirsty, visited the restroom frequently, and had headaches. After checking with a doctor, she was admitted to the ER because her blood sugar level neared 800 on a scale of 80 to 200—well above the range for what was normal. Having endured such a traumatic childhood experience, Rachel L describes how diabetes has become a part of her lifestyle: “It kind of is like breathing; I hardly think about it.” She wakes up each morning and checks her blood sugar right away because it will be the best reading after fasting for several hours. Rachel L checks her blood sugar four to five times a day and has a pump that gives her a slow drip of insulin throughout the day. She explains, “If I didn’t have any insulin my blood sugar would go high. Anytime I eat or anytime my blood sugar gets high for some reason I just give an extra dose of insulin.” Her voice works alongside her narrative to generate a platform where agency can create a deeper understanding about diabetes.

When I asked Rachel L if she knew any other people on campus with type 1 diabetes, she shook her head. “Since I’ve moved here, I honestly don’t think I’ve met one diabetic here. That’s another thing that makes me feel left out is that nobody quite understands this...it’s hard to get

the point across.” As such, Rachel L uses her rhetorical agency through social action to educate people on the differences between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Rachel L clarifies: “To me, it’s important for people to know what’s going on.... I am always open to answering questions...[and] always open to talking about it. But I do know that there are some people that don’t like to.... My main thing is to raise awareness and educate people on diabetes and how it affects people, because a lot of times it’s not taken as seriously as it should be.” Rachel L uses her agency to detail diabetes in full—such is the case with many of the participants. Agency here is used rhetorically to raise awareness for teachers and peers about disabilities and of what potential circumstances could arise in classroom and to persuade a change in their actions in the case of an emergency (see Herndl & Licona, 2007). Rachel L aspires to go to medical school and specialize in endocrinology and other areas of diabetic research. Rhetorical agency here minimizes ableist Othering by creating a reflexive sociology—Rachel L uses self-reflection as a means of bridging knowledge to a larger audience and for imploring coexistence.

On the other end of the agentic spectrum is the pre-personalized, corporeal agent (see Coole, 2005). Students with this type of agency are more reticent with disclosure of their disability. The persistent perceptual discrimination of individuals with disabilities by those who are nondisabled tramples the power of voice here. In turn, students who exhibit a pre-personalized, corporeal agency rely on the interview process for more reflexivity than dialogue. As such, in order for this type of rhetorical agency to challenge and minimize ableist Othering, a transpersonal, intersubjective agent should step in and assist in creating a platform for a larger conversation. Co-agency would then work to challenge a phenomenon.

Elisabeth notes in the interview her fear of disclosing MS to her peers and professors. I asked Elisabeth if I could use information from the interview as means of educating others about her condition. Our conversation commences as follows:

Me: If more people knew about your disability, do you think that would help you see it more as “this is my identity” and “this who I am”? Or do you think it would have an opposite effect, where you would become more private?

Elisabeth: I should be okay with telling people it is not a big deal.... I have been examining more why I’m still private, and whether that is something society has instilled in me.... I’m not ashamed of [MS]. I’m just afraid that if everyone knew then I would have to see it in their faces or their reactions all the time and see a reflection of it.... Everyone’s reaction in the first five years of my disease was so awful that I have these protective mechanisms.

Me: There were awful reactions when you were younger? Could you explain?

Elisabeth: When I was diagnosed my neurologist said I wasn’t going to finish high school and that I would be in a wheelchair within five years.... All the school officials from high school into college basically had written me off because “she is never going to get through....” A lot of people pushed me away the more that they knew. I think that’s what got me feeling this way.

Here, fear of discrimination regulates how Self-agency juxtaposes the disabled-Other; when agency remains in solitude, the power of the Other shadows the Self, re-inscribes hegemony, and becomes pervasive (Coole, 2005). The Self-Other binary is re-inscribed, but with even more power distancing. Elisabeth’s agency is more constrained; she recognizes her-Self is being Othered, but instead of empowering her voice to challenge these views, she remains in a position of lesser power.

Many participants in this study share Elisabeth’s fear. During the earlier years of my undergraduate career, I too viewed my disability identity much like Elisabeth’s: I was ashamed of my deafness, knew I would face discriminatory remarks on a daily basis if I self-disclosed, and I feared social rejection. I chose not to speak against hegemony because I did not want negative public reactions (the most common of which I have experienced are sneers). But after speaking about my life experiences with deafness to a large audience of my peers and academic

colleagues, I began to use my voice as an emancipatory tool. Soon my agency shifted to take on a construct much like Rosalyn B's or Christa's—where I was an outspoken advocate, calling out discriminatory acts. I knew my deafness was not a weakness, but a way to create a larger conversation with those unaware of how deafness affects everyday situations. My transpersonal agency allows me to help any student in this study whose agency is more restrained by societal pressures (see Coole, 2005). By coalescing my reflexive voice with a pre-personalized, corporeal agency much like Elisabeth's, a reflexive sociology forms (through co-agency), creating either a sense of empowerment for that student. This in turn minimizes ableist Othering in the classroom for those still finding a way to become more comfortable with self-disclosure of their identities.

### ***Re-appropriating the “Inability” Stigma***

Regardless of the varying agentic capacities, students used the interview process as a rhetorical platform to retaliate against the societal stigma “disability is a weakness.” Spanning across several participant interviews, this theme means to say students perceived “disability does not equal inability,” and rightfully expressed that view to challenge stereotypes. When asked question 1 (“What are some ways that you have overcome adversity in the classroom?”) of the interview guide, students used agency and *kairos* to showcase their strengths and how their daily actions and routines are the same as a nondisabled individual.

Ashley S is a senior in apparel and textile designs who lives with hypersomnia and severe restless leg syndrome. When she participated in a sleep study, researchers discovered Ashley S was not really sleeping when asleep, which affected her during waking hours. She was then prescribed medication (some have affected her more negatively than others) so that during the day she can function for eight to nine hours. Ashley S explains, “I can go places. I can drive safely. I can take my kids places. I can help make dinner and do normal things...but the payoff is

that I also can't sleep at night [on] the days that I take that medicine. I may only get five hours at night and the next day I have like very little memory." The hypersomnia affects her learning because she cannot sit through long lectures; even her notes are illegible or incoherent after a long class period, despite the help of medication.

Yet, in spite of being told her disability is "not real" or "a valid thing," Ashley S challenges stigma. She uses a Livescribe smartpen to help her take notes during class; whenever, she falls asleep, the pen sound records the lecture so that she can return to the material at any time. What is more, Ashley S has worked with clients all over the country as a contract designer working from a studio in her home in case she ever did fall asleep. She even won a competition in North Carolina with an assignment in which she earned a D—only because it was turned in late. Ashley S describes the class in which she earned this poor grade: "[It was] a computer type of class where you sit at a computer for three hours, follow along the lecture, and then you have projects.... An in-class assignment is hit or miss. That day I might be good, I might have had a good week or so with my medication, and I might be functioning really well and remembering everything and being on task...but that one class...I've taken it twice." Ashley S explains how she has taken a similar (yet shorter) class in a different department and received an A that reflected her dexterity and skills accurately. Still, Ashley S says, "I can't graduate in May, even though I'm done with my program because they want me to take this class again, only in spring...[for] a third time.... My life is on hold, and I probably won't pass it next time either." Ashley S obviously excels in the classroom and in the workforce. Yet, because a class attendance policy does not accommodate to her hypersomnia, she is forced to repeat the class every year until she receives a passing grade. Ashley S has even approached disability services and submitted a formal petition against the department to change the policy, but to no avail. She

challenges the “inability” stigma by re-appropriating failure in the classroom to an inflexible policy and not her own abilities.

Furthermore, because of the misconceptions and misunderstandings toward disabilities, students use agency to bridge knowledge into the minds of listeners who are unaware of the degree and scope of a disability. For example, Ashley S voices how a sleeping disorder can be severe enough to cause limitations to everyday tasks. She uses agency to redefine what it means to have a “sleeping disability”; her words act as an educational tool for spreading awareness and understanding. In this way, agency rhetorically challenges ideology and minimizes ableist Othering since the misconceptions are based in the “inability” stigma. Similarly, ZM takes an initiative to challenge stereotypes of Asperger’s Syndrome. ZM explains he has difficulty understanding sarcasm and has had trouble socializing when he was younger; however, he overcomes adversity by pursuing a research career in cosmology or astrophysics while maintaining a 3.75 cumulative GPA. He elaborates, “[Some people] would act surprised, ‘Oh, I had no idea you had autism!’ I would say certainly, ‘It’s a spectrum; no two people are exactly the same.’ There are a lot of [autistic] people who are so bad that they can’t even speak and it’s all just really different. . . .” Rhetorical agency opens a space in the interview process for students, like ZM, to elucidate on and to show the spectrum and variation of their disabilities.

The disabled body does not always conform to a societal perception; therefore, in the opinions of the participants in this study, societal perceptions should not be used to further stereotyping and stigmatization. Several students counteract this by showing their tenacity and academic merit in the college classroom.

Justin: I make sure to send out an email [to teachers] introducing myself, and my blindness, and bring it to their attention before class starts. . . . We talk about accommodations that might be needed. I need electronic formats that are emailed. I have screen-reading software. . . I try to do everything myself.

Elisabeth: I work much harder. I stride to be independent and competent.... I always felt I had to prove myself.... There were certain professors where I could be honest and not be judged and just say, "I'm exhausted." I would not say that to every professor.... I don't want them to think I am not being tough enough.

EMS: I'm not the most organized person and I have to write everything down. But...I can remember weird facts for some reason. Or public speaking—I'm very good at speaking.... It's just understanding where I'm going to fall short and taking the steps to help myself.... I have areas that I'm better at than some people.

Samuel: It's just letting [teachers] know that...there's different types of vision problems...it's not just a black and white thing. You can't just look at it as "You can see" or "You're blind." I can see well enough to function.... But I can't function at the same speed because [of] reading problems.

Richard: I do get distracted relatively easy.... I really only found out that I did have ADD probably about maybe five years ago, so I'm still trying to come to grips with it, trying to get over all those things that I know aren't right. You're not stupid. You're not an idiot, it's just you...pick [things] up slower or faster.

CW: I want to go to medical school. I don't disclose my disability because I feel that it will be looked at negatively.... [But] just because you suffer from something doesn't mean that you're not going to be able to handle stress.... I try [to] be very perseverant. I really don't want to give up; I'm absolutely going to finish.

NMF: I want to be a teacher so I can help [kids] overcome what I went through when I was younger.... It may take me longer to understand things, but I know I can do it. "Oh, so you read backwards?" No, I don't read backwards. "Oh, so this is what—" No! I think people do need to be more educated about it.

Christa: I wouldn't say I am a perfectionist, that's not really something common with ADD.... I am very meticulous...if I am going to study really hard for a class [then] I am going to expect to at least get the knowledge, learn from it, and [get] a grade that reflects it....

Charlie G: I'm kind of a determined person. I mean, yes, [ADHD] gets me at some points. [But] I [have been] really involved with the Student Access Center; I've done student forums and sat in classes where people could ask us. We shared our stories [and] our experiences with ADHD.... I'm really open to doing that.

Statements such as "I try to do everything myself" (Justin), "I work much harder [and] I stride to be independent and competent" (Elisabeth), "I have areas that I'm better at than some people" (EMS), "I try [to] be very perseverant...I'm absolutely going to finish" (CW), and "I am very

meticulous...[I] study really hard” (Christa) are just a few examples of the drive to overcoming adversity in the classroom and to challenge the “inability” stigma. It is apparent that societal perceptions create hegemony by defining “disability” to mean “inability”—but this is obviously inaccurate according to the students interviewed for this study. Here Othering takes on its most crippling manifestation by shrouding what it means to have a disability, which is simply another part of identity construction. The rhetorical agency of a disabled voice potentially eradicates Othering by re-appropriating stigma.

I first learned about my hearing disability when I was seven-years-old. Since then, I have had to learn to make adjustments in life and in the classroom. My challenge has always been to maintain a status as a successful student and contributing member of the community. I cannot hear people without hearing aids and I cannot understand what someone is saying without lip-reading. The classroom was always my most arduous setting since it has forced me to take notes and glance away from the teacher, losing fragments of the teacher’s lecture. But much like these students’ testimonies, I have compelled myself to work hard in the classroom and learn different and creative ways to communicate. I learned sign language so I could share my disability with others. I received a 4.0 GPA in mathematics and in my overall college career. And now, as a teacher, I face the challenge of adapting my teaching style to help students who I have trouble hearing in class. My experience reinforces this notion that rhetorical agency not only partitions disability away from societal stigma for a disabled voice, but also that rhetorical agency effaces discriminatory ableist Othering. Through the collective sharing of experiences and voices, rhetorical agency opens a space for a larger dialogue and reflexivity with society.

### **Analysis of Research Question 3**

The third research question asked, “How do disabled students use self-identification and

disclosure to conceptualize additional ways of inclusion and accessibility?” While the interview process was an opportunity to show the dissemination of ableist Othering phenomenon and how it can potentially be expunged by rhetorical agency, students recognize that such issues only remain in the realm of dialogue and reflection unless social action occurs. Students believe that social change must occur not only through themselves but also through their listeners (and the readers of this text). As such, by disclosing their disability identities, students made suggestions on ways to stimulate inclusion and institutional changes to accessibility to meet the individual needs of the disabled student in the classroom and on campus. Two primary themes can be extrapolated from the interview data: Students feel that inclusion and accessibility changes can be made through (1) infrastructural transparency and (2) educating awareness and sensitivity.

### *Infrastructural Transparency*

Disability disclosure shows that the learning experience in the classroom can be overwhelming for some students. Those with behavioral and learning disabilities do not always work at the same pace as nondisabled peers. For example, Denhart (2008) noted how students with dyslexia not only require more “brain lactate” for reading tasks, but also require longer periods of time in the classroom (p. 485). Similarly, emotional, developmental, or psychiatric/mental disabilities can create learning barriers that affect the pace of the classroom curricula (Belch, 2011; Wolf, 2001). As such, when answer question 11 (“How can your teachers better accommodate to your needs?”) and question 13 (“How can the school administration better provide classroom and/or curriculum accommodations to your individual needs?”) of the interview guide, some students conceptualized inclusive strategies and changes should be made to course curricula and pedagogy (e.g., attendance, grading, etc.).

EMS: I think there needs to be...I mean I get that...an A paper’s an A paper and a B paper looks like a B paper. But the thing is a lot of the times when I write the

papers I might hit the main points, but I'm not writing in the style that [my teachers] like because I write how I speak... I'd rather they grade on content.

Me: [Do you sometimes] need things to go at a little slower pace?

Richard: Or just [over] again, reiterate... Or maybe just explained slightly different. Nothing too dramatically [such that it will] change how professors teach but just...everybody learns differently. I know I think a lot different than everybody else does.

Samuel: What has worked so far...is if [the professors] give me the notes ahead of time which I know a lot of teachers don't like because they feel like the students won't show up. I'm not that kind of student. I'm going to show up... But it helps a lot if I have those notes because I can have my wife read them to me prior to class. Again, the slides—instead of doing handwriting—help.

The students feel that adaptations must be made to curricula, class policies, and pedagogies such that teachers and faculty empathize for their disabilities and struggles. Teachers and faculty must recognize that students with disabilities cannot be grouped en masse and be expected to learn and adapt to a normative pedagogy in higher education. Inclusion is improbable without empathy acting as a key to social change.

The individual needs of the disabled student should also not only be met in the classroom, but campus-wide, which can be done through changes to the architecture and infrastructure of buildings at higher education institutions. Under Title 3 of the ADA, “all new construction and modification must be accessible to individuals with disabilities” (U.S. Dept. of Ed, 2011). In other words, if a university receives federal funding, they must comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. Dept. of Ed, 2011). However, the most pressing concern for disabled students becomes how to effectively move around in the more dated buildings. This is a particularly common issue that appears across the interviews of students with physical disabilities such as (but not limited to) mobility or vision.

Justin notes the challenges moving from building to building on campus. For the student with a severe vision disability (such as blindness), social settings such as study halls or dining

room areas become stressful and difficult to navigate. Wayfinding is an accessibility issue that must be addressed such that administration can implement inclusive strategies (Powell & Ben-Moshe, 2009). Justin remarks, “I normally avoid the heavily populated areas on campus. You bump into people and that is uncomfortable for them and for me.” But such navigation around campus can actually be more challenging to the student than the college classroom: “Being on a large campus, traveling is hard for most blind people.... Getting from one side to the other is more work than the actual academic side of the university.” I asked Justin if there were any ways that the university could make his classes more accessible to him. In our conversation, the idea of collecting all classes into one building would make Justin’s life half as challenging since “you would spend more time learning the material in class than you would getting to class.” From Justin’s perspective, administration could make modifications in class scheduling such that classes were in closer proximity.

JNG and Jennifer both agree with the issues of distance on large campuses; however, their reaction to having classes clustered closer together was mixed. “I would say [the campus] needs to do more on...making sure the elevators work. Some of the elevators in these buildings are old and need to be replaced.... [Asking] classrooms to be switched around...is unfair to both the professors and the class” (JNG); “I feel like it would be nice. But at the same time I kind of worry that...if they did that for students with disabilities, [they] would be ostracized.... [There are] so many different departments. We’re spread out. We’re in every department. We’re all over the place.... I don’t know if that would make it better or worse” (Jennifer). The traveling distance is a nuisance and (can be) a hazard for students affected by a mobile disability. But from JNG and Jennifer’s perspective, making such modifications (such as clustering classrooms) could further disseminate ableist Othering. Still, administration must address issues such as

wayfinding. In JNG's case, architects did ask him to conduct a disability assessment on the newly designed recreational center on campus; in Jennifer's case, online classes would help her stay on schedule on the days were her fibromyalgia or endometriosis is flaring.

It is apparent on the two campuses used for this study (the Mid-Atlantic and Mid-Western university) that classes for a department are scattered across buildings. The experiences of the disabled student highlight a need for administrative changes in all universities to fit the needs of the individual. Students with mobility or physical issues (whether visible or invisible) need accessible buildings with inclines and elevators, and need to have localized classes.

DW echoes the travel and navigation concerns of students with disabilities. DW argues, that while Justin may think the university has done a great job with making sidewalks accessible (on the Mid-Atlantic campus), mobility issues still arise for her: “[There are] a lot of hills; a lot of steps. It's getting to the nearest elevator that would allow me to get from one floor to the next. You end up having difficulty climbing up and going down hills.... [I] can't do the blacktops.” The landscaping of a campus is one factor not taken into account. The Mid-Western campus does not face this problem because of the flat landscape. This is not the case for a university (like the Mid-Atlantic campus of the pilot study) that might be situated in a place with varying terrain. Architectural restructuring would allow for more leveled surfaces on the campus and changes in administrative policy.

Additionally, modifications for disability policy in higher education can also be derived. The perception of what it means to have a “disability” arguably prevents the individual needs of the student from being fulfilled. Because invisible disabilities are not taken as seriously as visible disabilities, ableist Othering occurs. In DW's case, her struggle with mobility suggests disability policy on campus and across departments needs to change—otherwise, exclusion becomes an

inevitable repercussion. DW dismisses acquiring a disability placard for campus parking on the grounds that ODS does not view her temporary knee issues as a “disability.”

Me: Do you think parking is an issue for you?

DW: Depends on where I have to be on campus. If I have to park at [one end of campus] for example and then come all the way down [to the other end], then yes it would be a real inconvenience for me. When parking comes very stressed here, having a place to park in the handicap [zone] would have been easy.

Me: What recommendations would you make for administration...to help with your individual needs?

DW: Well, I would literally have to go to [ODS] and I have not done that. I think it's my stubbornness and they think my disability is only temporary.

Because of societal perceptions, disability services rely heavily on the rhetoric of policy to drive decision-making about accommodations. Since invisible disabilities do not fall into one of the 13 standard categories of the 2004 IDEA, obstinate attitudes (i.e., those attitudes that adhere to the precise language of policy) generate exclusive actions. Rosalyn B, for example, constantly grapples with disability services and scheduling dialysis appointments, suggesting that attitudes also need to change. She explains, “With [disability] services, I think they could probably do a little better with being extra personal, especially for invisible disabilities.... I feel like they really don't know how to handle it and they kind of schlep it off [to the side].” Her view regarding how those in disability services perceive invisible disabilities exemplifies an attitudinal and communicative barrier. Here, ableist Othering surfaces on a larger institutional scale: the Office of Disability Services and the Student Access Center do not recognize DW's temporary knee issues or Rosalyn B's immune-compromised kidney problems because are deemed as “not real,” which places them in a marginalized position. The experiences of the students in this study suggest a re-examination of the definition of disability and accommodations on college campuses and in higher education is needed. Furthermore, the ineffectual accommodations implicate a

restructuring of policy (and attitudes) in disability services to better meet the needs of the individual student and not the societal stereotype of what it means to have a “real” disability.

### ***Emergency Preparedness***

From broken elevators to hazardous terrain, one minor concern materialized from student interviews: the disabled student’s experience in the college classroom and on campus suggests a need for administrative modifications to policies regarding emergency-situation preparation. Risk/emergency management in universities remains a pressing issue for students with disabilities (Lundquist & Shackelford, 2011). Many legal and ethical considerations must be considered; however, it remains the sole duty of campuses to ensure that all their students (including those with disabilities) remain safe in emergency circumstances (e.g., tornado/hurricane warnings, fires, campus shootings, and so on).

DW notes this need for changes when posed with the question “What would happen if the campus was in an emergency situation, such as a fire drill?” Her response suggests concern for the safety of students with mobility issues.

I would probably freak out a little bit... If there is an emergency, all the elevators shut down... [Even considering someone else who has mobility, true mobility, [issues] that require the use of a chair, [EMS] would have no idea how to get them down those stairs. For me, it might take me a while to get down, taking them one at a time. I wouldn’t be able to run down the stairs. That would be impossible.

The lack of concise guidelines to evacuate a disabled student is a dire concern. Current policy suggests leaving the student in a wheelchair in the classroom until EMS arrives (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2012). However, this protocol is a form of ableist Othering: the safety of a nondisabled student comes ahead of those with physical disabilities. This implies modifications are needed to avoid this: DW comments, “[It] would require a total restructuring of everything. [But], how would you do that? You can’t just rebuild the steps or the stairs. You can have a pathway that

goes outside from the fourth floor.... I don't know how you would do that. You would have to totally redesign [everything]." The restructuring of the campus is costly. Changes to class scheduling, on the other hand, to meet the individual needs of the disabled student may be more practical for risk management. Yet, issues of ableist Othering may still arise as JNG and Jennifer pointed out in their interviews—clustering classes for disabled students in local area on campus may potentially create even more dangerous emergency situations. Making modifications to accommodation policies for better emergency-action plans on campus is a concern that needs addressing—one that many students in the interviews were unsure of how to solve.

Additionally, students believe that there is a potential hazard in the classroom: teachers and faculty may not be well equipped to assist a disabled student in an emergency situation. Elisabeth recalls a similar situation after fainting in the classroom from an acute MS attack. The professor controlled the situation and allowed for her peers to escort her out of the classroom so as not to draw attention to Elisabeth. While this professor was mindful of the situation, emergency situations can happen to a disabled student at anytime. It is a concern if teachers are not knowledgeable on how to handle an emergency.

Rachel L also attests to this possibility. When she was in the fifth grade, Rachel L had experienced a seizure after eating dinner at her father's house. She blacked out after her blood sugar had plummeted below 40, which sent her to the hospital. Rachel L describes how her eyes rolled back into her head and her hands had clenched during the seizure. She explains: "I know it is traumatic.... Diabetes doesn't just affect me, it affects my family too and because they see that, they see when I have a seizure, they see when I pass out from low blood sugars. My mom has seen that several times...." This scenario, she warns, is likely in the college classroom, and could have just as dire consequences for the professor. "I do let my teachers know if something

were ever to happen in class, then at least they know what is going on, so they can either do it themselves [if] they know what to do—like get me juice or something—or if they don't know then they can contact somebody and get someone who knows what to do.” Rachel L does not foresee a possible issue if teachers were trained for scenarios like these. But the case is more pressing for teachers and faculty who are not. A need for policy modifications to emergency planning to better fit the individual needs and safety of disabled students highlights how the current university system “Others” the disabled student body by not addressing these concerns. By conceptualizing new strategies, the students of this study offer a way to instigate changes in emergency management such that inclusion can occur.

### *Educating Awareness and Sensitivity*

Through self-identification and disability disclosure in the interviews, students conceptualized ways of modifying curricula such that disabled voices are not only heard, but are also embedded into the minds of those who rhetorically listen. In other words, the interview process was a way for students to suggest solvency to the issues on campus, which could be primarily be done through educating awareness of the scope of disabilities. This would not necessarily lead to inclusion on campus in its entirety—but it will create a ground for coexistence between disabled and nondisabled where sensitivity to struggles and frustrations is more likely. Questions 15 (“What are some ways that the university can better prepare faculty/staff for the individual needs of the disabled student population on campus?”) and 16 (“What are some ways that the university can better educate students about the disabled student population on campus?”) of the interview guide opened space for strategies of inclusion.

EMS: The amount of people that go “Oh! So, you switch numbers?” or “Oh! You read backwards?” kind of amazes me even at the college level.... You know, I do have strengths.... But not understanding what those are makes it difficult.... I think it would benefit everyone if there's some sort of just basic understanding

especially when I have to collaborate with people.

Samuel: Most people when they think of blind they think of either you see or you don't see or it's blurry or it's not blurry. But that's not always how vision works. Like with me everything's clear. But it's not the same kind of clear.... So trying to educate them on the fact that vision isn't just "See! It's blurry!" or "[I] don't see...." Really it's just comes down to letting [people] know.

Rachel L: [There] is a lot that people can learn about diabetes and especially type 1 diabetes versus type 2 diabetes.... [There] have been times when I tell people, "Hey, I'm a type 1 diabetic"... and they are "Oh? You're not fat! Why are you diabetic?" That is more related to type 2. I feel like education of diabetes is something that needs to be more widely known, in my personal view.

EMS, Samuel, and Rachel L each give accounts to a need for education to their respective disabilities (dyslexia, vision, and diabetes). Self-identity of disability dictates a need for education of not just one disability, but all types. Students are misunderstood and it is because of lack of full understanding for a disability.

Nonetheless, students used disability disclosure and rhetorical agency to suggest tangible ways of achieving awareness and education for disabilities on campus. A few participants offered changes to freshman orientation such that incoming students were aware of their disability rights and what services they could access. NMF explains, "For incoming students I think it's important that you know what you have to do to have your accommodations, because I didn't know.... They need it to be like, 'If you have a disability, go to [SAC]'"; Corinth adds, "For freshmen, there is an introductory thing where they explain accommodations.... [But I wish] it was just mentioned that [dysgraphia] is considered [for] an actual accommodation.... [Test] anxiety was mentioned, dyslexia was mentioned...but dysgraphia was not"; and Dillon comments, "I really wish there were more of a campaign here to let people know that for ADHD you can get extra time on tests with calculator use.... I feel like you could easily have a five-minute presentation during enrollment [saying], 'We help people with wheelchairs to people

with the wheels running on and on in their head....” Together, NMF, Dillon, and Corinth believe more attention should be placed into educating students about disabilities before they begin coursework in college. The cost of such programming is indeterminable, but it could be the difference between success and failure in the classroom for many students with disabilities.

Respondents of this study suggest teachers should also be educated on the wide range of disabilities through sensitivity training. Christa, MCRBM, and Charles are just a few of the students in this study who can elaborate on this inclusion strategy:

Christa: Sensitivity training...is something the individual has to work through...it is something that is personal.... Probably everyone [should take it]...maybe peers as well.... I am not sure—sometimes they are more understanding because they are on your level. They might make jokes, but it is not nearly as offensive as a faculty member making a comment; it is very hard to deal with that.

MCRBM: [Professors should be] able to read a doctor’s note or something like that.... I feel like if I send a doctor’s note to a professor as “this is my reason for why I wasn’t here ever,” I feel like that should be understood as that’s something that is excusable. I really just want more lax rules on the tests [that have] “no makeup time”...that’s pretty much the only issue I’ve ever had.

Charles: There is [sensitivity] training that [teachers] can take.... [It’s] kind of a shaky subject because you learn to teach students with disabilities [who are often] taken out of the classroom and put into a more controlled environment.... I think that it’s a lot more beneficial for the student with the disability to be in the class...[but] a lot of people don’t know how to [deal with that].

According to Christa, MCRBM, and Charles, sensitivity training helps to integrate the disabled student into the college classroom without the potential for backlash or disregard for feelings.

Some students even go further to say that inclusion and accessibility modifications should not rely solely on spreading awareness through sensitivity training. In fact, a few respondents believe institutional changes can be made through courses modified for disabled college students. Jen (PTSD) describes, “it would be a neat idea if...students [could have] disability classes. It’s the same core curriculum, it’s still taught the same, but maybe instead of a 50-minute

section, maybe an hour and a half or two hours [maybe at nighttime]...[set] a little more at our pace.” Essentially, Jen feels smaller classes on the university campus, where a professor can have more one-on-one interaction time with students with individual needs, may be the best route for including disabled students in higher education. It would allow for professors to identify with students on certain learning issues. The classes would cover the same material, but it would not be as overwhelming for the student. Although Jen imagines “it would take a lot of coordination and financial planning,” the smaller class option is still feasible.

Furthermore, open student forums could be yet another option for spreading awareness. Charlie G (ADHD) states: “I think there should be more [forums]—and they are useful.... It’s hard...we’ve done [a student forum before]...it’s just getting those events out and known and for people to come.” Charlie G describes how it gives students an opportunity to be more open about disability disclosure; yet, given current cultural stigma, it may be harder to recruit students for such events. “[At] one point, I encouraged [my roommate] to be more open about [her disability] and she was like ‘No, I don’t want to; I want to hide it, I don’t want people to know....’ I’ve [also] known people...who were so OCD they wouldn’t turn in homework because they didn’t think it was perfect enough, so they lost that grade.” Charlie G feels that an open assembly where students can come ask questions about disability experience would be an effective way to build dialogue and awareness. Her only concern is making such forums more readily available and advertised to the campus community. Without student forums, information—such as that described here about students with obsessive-compulsive disorder—goes unheard and unnoticed by nondisabled teachers and classmates who really need to know about such problems in order to break down communication barriers.

On the contrary, some students are skeptical and recognize that these strategies have

potential for backlash that could reinforce ostracism, exclusion, and discrimination. Christa (ADD), CW (Anxiety/Depression), and Jennifer (Endometriosis/Fibromyalgia) explain:

Me: Do you think that there needs to be a level of education in regards to [ADD]?

Christa: I don't know. I want to say that that would help, but at the same time the more people hear about a topic, the more they think it's just a big, giant joke.... I would like to think...there could be some kind of tolerance or education for the professors since most of the people I have met have ADD or ADHD....

Me: What are some things you think that the university setting or even the individual on the campus could be better educated about?

CW: It would be really nice if there were more resources for the instructor. I would hate to say a mandatory class...because I think...people sort of tune out, or it becomes about "because it's required...." [But] It would be nice to see that they have better access to learning about different disabilities and maybe guidelines on how to approach a student with regards to their disability....

Me: [What are] some ways that there could be education for professors, classmates, or peers to help them better empathize with you?

Jennifer: With professors I definitely think [training] should be mandatory.... "[This] is what we do," "these are the laws," "this is what you can," and "this is what you can't...." [Teachers] are just left on their own to learn about it [which] I think that's part of what contributes to the large amount of variation.... And with peers...I feel like if it's one of those sit down seminars...everybody [will be] angry they have to be there. They're not going to listen; they're going to...skip.

From the disabled students' perspectives, apathy for disability education plays a role in determining whether inclusive strategies are effective. A nondisabled individual cannot rhetorically listen to disabled individuals if the mind and heart are not willingly committed to understanding the frustrations and struggles of disabled voices, and to making an effort to eliminate interactive barriers. As such, through self-identification and disability disclosure, students not only conceptualize inclusive strategies on personal and institutional levels, but also advise inclusive strategies should be careful not to re-inscribe the ableist Othering phenomenon.

I wish I could include more of the voices of these students. As I listened to their disclosures and the battles they faced each day in the college classroom, my heart ached. I felt guilty for being so uneducated myself on the scope and degree of disabilities that exist on

campuses. Through this intertextual synthesis, I hope a reader will come away from this chapter feeling, “I understand better what it is like for someone [with a disability] to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). However, as this chapter points out time again, the ableist Othering phenomenon is relentless: readers may skim this chapter and impassively disregard disabled voices, delegitimizing the validity of experience. Even worse, my synthesis and description of rhetorical agencies and the disabled body here may only deepen the roots of ableist Othering.

As such, the last chapter will address implications and limitations of these findings. In turn, this study outlines a potential alternative path for data analysis to address the concerns of validity and to challenge hegemony. The contributions of this project to communication and disability studies fall into a discussion on the divide between rhetoric and mathematics to arrive at this proposition. The chapter ends with a call for deeper understanding of this alternative theoretical technique, which is not meant to substitute for the findings presented in this thesis, but to be used as a supplementary device in methods triangulation for future studies. It is a final plea so that scholars and readers may begin to engage in a new way of envisioning reality.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

Findings of this study illustrate the likelihood of the ableist Othering phenomenon in the college classroom with aggravating influences on the learning experiences of disabled students. An analysis of RQ1 revealed themes of re-inscribed perceptual discrimination of visible and invisibility disabilities by nondisabled individuals and an institutional dissemination of hegemony through ineffectual accommodations and an excessive need for documentation. Further, an analysis of RQ2 revealed two major ways students use rhetorical agency: to construct a space for coexistence between disabled and nondisabled individuals and to re-appropriate the societal “inability” stigma. Lastly, an analysis of RQ3 revealed two primary ways students conceptualized inclusivity strategies on campus: either through more infrastructural transparency or through more awareness/sensitivity training. The intertwining of phenomenological interviewing and rhetorical agency facilitated a platform of liberation for disabled voices. Through rhetorical agency, students in this study could re-position their Selves away from the disabled-Other and become free from marginalization.

Yet, one noteworthy observation is how little disability policy or societal parlance has changed since *similar* findings were published years ago. In Denhart’s (2008) study, despite how “voice” cuts through stigma and socially created disability-identities, LD participants still refused to ask for accommodations in the classroom out of fear of stigma (similar to findings of RQ1 and RQ2). Likewise, Kraus’s (2008) study discovered how self-identity and disclosure paved a path for students to voice what programs and services were needed to enhance self-advocacy (similar to findings of RQ3). These findings, along with the results of the present study, are indicative of an incessant problem that remains unsolved. From the limitations of this study’s methodological framework, it is apparent ableist Othering transcends the efficacy of

rhetorical agency and remains culturally pervasive. In other words, even with rhetorical agency, the findings of this study's design will unlikely garner changes institutionally (i.e., spur policy changes to post-secondary education) or socially (i.e., persuade a reader to rhetorically listen and rethink attitudes) unless solutions are proposed to challenge hegemonic Othering.

As such, this chapter addresses (1) implications of this research to the college classroom and to the fields of communication and disability studies, (2) limitations of the present study's findings and the symbolic re-structuration of rhetorical agency, and (3) future directions for qualitative research practices to better examine the ableist Othering phenomenon.

### **Implications for Communication and Disability Studies**

Since findings indicate students with disabilities experience discrimination and marginalization likely due to organizational tension in their university institution, this section discusses implications for educational policy reform and for the functionality of rhetorical agency. This section outlines (1) proposed policy changes in the education system for inclusivity and (2) ramifications of the symbolic re-structuration of rhetorical agency to challenge stigma.

#### ***Potential Educational Policy Changes for Inclusivity***

From analyses of RQ1 and RQ3, post-secondary institutions must consider large-scale changes. The institutional percolation of hegemony (through ineffectual accommodations and excessive documentation) regulates the degree to which inclusive strategies (e.g., new architectural designs, emergency management, or sensitivity training) can be implemented on campus. When higher education institutions adhere to national disability policies (e.g., the 2008 ADA, 2004 IDEA, or Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act), campus policy adopts the Old Paradigm view of disability (Pfeiffer, 2001). As mentioned in chapter two, Townsend (2006) explains how, with this paradigm, current national policy approaches education with a "one-size-

fits-all” mentality. As such, bureaucratic red tape and organizational irrationality in university settings cultivate ableist Othering where administrators and faculty unknowingly disseminate the normative view of “treating disabled students like everyone else” (Townsend, 2006, p. 230). While it is true that those who are disabled should be viewed as part of the “normal” population, ignoring the needs of the individual engenders social inequity. When students are placed in a position where their disability is questioned or their safety is jeopardized during an emergency situation, it is clear more focus should go into educational reform ensuring the individual needs of the disabled student are met and feelings of disenfranchisement are minimized. A disregard for administrative changes furthers cultural hegemony and exacerbates harm to both disability rights and the emotional state of a student.

The problem regarding educational reform to meet the individual needs of the disabled college student is so massive that immediate action might be unfeasible. Furthermore, given the findings of this study, the question becomes: what solutions, if any, are plausible and where should reform start? I—as a scholar, educator, and student—admit that the task to make modifications is demanding and uncertain. Yet, through self-identification and disability disclosure of the students in this study, I offer additional inclusive strategies/solutions for (1) policy writing, (2) sensitivity and advocacy training, and (3) spreading public awareness.

### ***Changes to Policy Writing***

On a national scale, reform should begin with who writes disability policy. For starters, educators and policymakers are unaware of their adherence to the hegemonic status quo: they write current policies with ableist rhetoric (Hehir, 2004). On the contrary, the students of the present study easily recognize the fault of the policymakers and their ideologies. Charles, a freshman in music, attests those who are in a position to write policy are ill informed to make

decisions about blindness. “[A] lot of times those education courses were invented by people who have no idea what it’s like, and they don’t take into consideration a lot of the things that they should, and they take into consideration a lot of things that they shouldn’t.” Charles understands one of the many problems students face: Much of what is written about disability is biomedical. As such, “the biomedical conceptualization of disability represented in policy individualizes and shapes the accommodation process...a process based on an assumption that students are non-disabled and are not entitled to accommodation unless they prove otherwise” (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006, p. 196). Current policy language places the onus on the student to initiate and maintain this accommodation process by providing documentation. Still, as many student interviews showed, when in an adversarial position with administrators or educators, efforts to acquire an accommodation may be thwarted if a student is unwilling to disclose a disability out of fear of stigma or of being discredited for claiming to identify as disabled (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). The problem is only aggravated for those with invisible disabilities because they “do not look sick” and are then accused “of faking or imagining their disability” (Switzer, 2003a, p. 172). The disabled-Other is reinforced with a no-win situation.

Policymaking needs to be more sensitive to the variation of disability, or it should be written by those who have experienced the marginality of the disabled-Other in academia. While educators and administrators seem like the best choice, student agency could be the key. In other words, policy writing should incorporate co-subjectification and individualization, where students with disabilities who have been marginalized in the college classroom work with elected officials and educators to rewrite policy rhetoric away from ableist ideology. In other words, “each person is situated within a particular circumstance and dependent on an Other, and the condition of being related to the other to grasp the whole of that circumstance” (Hamilton &

Wills-Toker, 2006, p. 759). The only means of catalyzing a space where Self can begin to empathize with an Other is by having students help write the policy that governs them. For example, Gallaudet University is a private university well known for its advanced education program for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing in the United States. While one option could be to create more institutions like Gallaudet, the variation of disabilities would only sustain categorization and further marginalize students seeking inclusion for rare disabilities (e.g., dysgraphia, endometriosis, and so on). Therefore, an assembly of student representatives with varying agentic capacities and disabilities could be one possibility to tackle the task of co-writing a more universal, individualized, and flexible disability policy for national dissemination.

Additionally, by exposing policymaking to rhetorical co-subjectification, risk/emergency management can be re-operationalized in disability services across higher education institutions to reflect the safety concerns of those with disabilities that affect the time it takes to make it to a safe location (e.g., mobility) or of those who could pose a threat to themselves or others (e.g., emotional/mental trauma). Lundquist and Shackelford (2011) elaborate how university administrators and staff are often confused by the current legal landscape when they are faced with the dilemma of under- versus over-response. As such, by redesigning emergency-action plans to fit individual needs and the possible scenarios disabled students face, disability service providers across university campuses can then take a more proactive approach to risk management planning, assessment, and preparation knowing that policy is written to mitigate legal ambiguity (Lundquist & Shackelford, 2011).

### ***Changes to Sensitivity and Advocacy Training***

On an institutional scale, even with changes to policy writing, the ableist Othering phenomenon will pervade unless strides are made by administrators and educators to engage in

empathizing with disabled voices. In other words, faculty and staff must make mindful changes to campus-wide and classroom policies to reduce ableist Othering in the classroom. The easiest solution for rhetorical listening (i.e., the socially-active changing of attitudes and ideologies to eradicate an “us” versus “them” mentality and to form coexistence between Self and Other) is to operate under the assumption that every student has a disability of some sort until proven otherwise (Ratcliffe, 1999). It would mean to embrace empathy for and trust in students regardless of their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. Unfortunately, as student interviews display, society is still establishing an understanding of equality and an acceptance of disability variation: embracing empathy and trust at an instinctual level is not quite feasible. Still, administrators and faculty need to adapt to an ever-changing social landscape in the disability rights movement. As such, sensitivity training should occur in two ways.

For administrators, staff, and disability service personnel, sensitivity training for disabilities needs to occur through infrastructural transparency by considering accessibility availability and variation. Luckner, Muir, Howell, Sebald, and Young’s (2005) study surveyed 331 professionals, parents, administrators, and university faculty members about their thoughts on the needs for deaf individuals in higher education. Findings indicated the top two priorities are to educate administrators about appropriate services for disabled students because of the limited experience or training in working with such students and how to work within the education system to make policy more flexible (such as reformation and educational renewal) (Luckner et al., 2005). While administrators and faculty may deal with an assortment of students daily, they should be sensitive to the varying degree and amounts of individual needs available if approached by students with disabilities without furthering Otherness.

JNG and Rosalyn B, for example, both explain in their interviews how a lack of empathy and mindfulness of administration created an inconvenience for their learning experiences: either a class was scheduled in an inaccessible classroom and had to be moved (as in JNG's case) or documentation was excessively mandated to verify the student's rights to accommodations (as in Rosalyn B's case). When I approached the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at the Mid-Atlantic University for a sample of students for this research, I was denied twice—even after receiving human subjects approval and explaining to administrators that I too had a disability and that the research was a chance to voice opinions about classroom experiences (see Appendix D). I found it ironic this organization denied disabled students a chance to participate because they believed they did not want to overburden them (ODS, personal communication, April 2013)—a belief assuming disabled students had limitations.

While it would be ideal to eliminate medical documentation as a required proof of disabilities, policy should be re-written around the way documentation is accessed and distributed on campus. Instead of placing the onus on the student to provide letters to educators each semester, a student upon entering the university system should be tested for disabilities and should then provide results to administrators and staff for storage in an online database. Since private testing for disabilities is expensive (NCLD Editors, 2011), the higher education institution should conduct testing—much like in secondary public schools—free of charge to the incoming college student. This database would then be used for class scheduling or accessing documentation for accommodations in the classroom or testing centers. This would mean re-writing the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) for lexical ambiguity, but it would place the onus on *educators* to access information (with permission of the student) to ensure they are designing and teaching course curricula to meet individual needs.

Furthermore, instead of relying on IDEA 2004 for categorizing students by disability for class scheduling or for dining and living arrangements, administration should categorize buildings on campus by the likelihood of accessibility. As several students like Justin (blindness), DW (temporary knee issues), Jennifer (endometriosis), and JNG (cerebral palsy) pointed out, modifying policy this way would reduce problems with wayfinding—and if buildings cannot be accessed or might potentially endanger students in emergency situations, then classes can be moved to another (safer) site, or curricula can be re-designed before the beginning of an academic term to ensure accessibility (i.e., an online class format, the use of telecommunication software for lectures, etc.). Administration should consider other ways of conceptualizing accessibility to displace the burden away from the students to ensure a true “free appropriate public education” (one that offers equitable opportunities for students in the college classroom) (DREDF, 2014).

For educators, sensitivity training needs to occur on a more interpersonal level to break down communication barriers. King, Aguinaga, O’Brien, Young, and Zgnoc (2010) explain how reflective practice strategies in special education (used to demonstrate understanding and application of course content to real-life experiences when teaching) may be a key to bridging interpersonal gaps between educator and disabled student. While reflective practice strategies are explicitly taught in teacher preparation programs to enable professionals to reflect on their own personal practices, King et al. suggests faculty need to employ the same strategies while teaching to ensure that they do not create harm to disabled students. Often educators take notice of disparities in the classroom when teaching students of varying abilities (King et al., 2010). In turn, post-secondary teacher educators have two options when entering a situation with a disabled student: (1) they can either empathize with the student because they too have

experienced hardships in academia (whether it be disability-related or not) or (2) they can resort to processes of ableist Othering and self-isolation versus self-reflection. That said, reflective practice strategies in sensitivity training will not only enlighten educators to the varying degrees and types of disabilities, but will also change the way educators handle an interpersonal situation, such as learning how to engage in open dialogue with the student, how to create appropriate accommodations, how to become more personally attentive to inclusive practices, and how to taking ownership of personal habits to avoid ableist Othering.

As a novice educator, I understand the risk of potential Othering in the classroom. I struggle between positioning my authority to teach the necessary curriculum of a course and opening a space where students can voice opinions and criticisms about coursework and my teaching strategies. But engaging in this reflective practice strategy—positioning the Self in the place of the Other—can eradicate Otherness in the college classroom (Koro-Ljungberg, 2007). Shifting pedagogy to a space where voices can form awareness and understanding for disability creates interpersonal empathy, which counteracts the negative side effects of ableist Othering. Koro-Ljungberg (2007) offers three ways this can be enacted in teaching.

First, educators should have students with disabilities make suggestions and changes to the curriculum that best meet their individual needs. Each student has a voice, but when teachers view the student as part of a sum—teaching to the lowest common denominator rather than to the individual—it creates discrimination since the special needs of a disabled student are pooled with the needs of a nondisabled student and ignored, which is a faulty pedagogy.

Likewise, instead of waiting for the student to approach the teacher, instructors should be mindful that disabilities are visible and invisible and, therefore, should invite students to voice opinions and share stories without mandating disability disclosure or documentation to prove an

accommodation is needed. If students do approach with an intention to create a dialogue on accessibility, educators should rhetorically listen and adjust their pedagogical styles through holism and versatility (Ratcliffe, 1999). For example, Scotty explains how, after approaching professors about his dyslexia, he had one teacher overlook spelling and grammar mistakes and grade based on the ideas produced in his writing. Instructors who place their-Selves into the position of a disabled-Other can sympathize and turn power in the classroom from hierarchal-distancing to equity, which truly levels the playing field for all students regardless of ability.

Finally, (and this should also be the duty of sensitivity training) educators should establish emergency planning for the classroom. The instructor should have a plan of action in the case a student with a disability endures a life-threatening situation (i.e., fire drills, campus shootings, medical emergencies, and so on). However, emergency action plans should be specialized to the disability of the student to avoid potentially furthering ableist Othering. While large class sizes in a university system may thwart instructors from making personal connections with each individual student, not allowing for empathy to invent a space for coexistence or for curricular changes to meet a student's educational needs can consequentially further hegemony in the post-secondary classroom.

### ***Changes for Spreading Public Awareness***

On a personal scale, educating the campus community (and the public) of the variations of disabilities and accessibility needs of the individual would likely reduce (but not eradicate) the ableist Othering phenomenon. Justin (blindness) agrees, pointing out how educating awareness and challenging perceptions can mitigate discriminatory processes. Justin notes in his interview how a simple understanding of what the word "disability" entails will diffuse some of the ableist Othering process: "Just giving [the public] an idea of how their perceptions might be wrong or

what perceptions are right...[can] maybe correct some of the stereotypes [or] frameworks that they already have going on in their minds.” Simple education and open mindedness will allow for more versatility in the classroom and in communities, and can help the disabled student feel more integrated in the education system.

To do this, in diversity planning on campuses, administrators should work closely with disabled students (or student representatives) to create opportunities for educating the student community and for spreading awareness. Creating open forums, campaigns, or adding courses on specific disabilities can be simple ways of spreading knowledge on what it means to have a “disability,” including those where disability may be invisible. Especially during new student orientation, administrators should mandate a segment of time where incoming students are educated on disability sensitivity and on what accessibility options are available. While Jennifer (Endometriosis) points out that mandating such seminars could create aggravation and apathy, adding individual rhetorical agency to the pedagogical design of these tutorials could reshape a nondisabled student’s ideology away from ableism. In other words, I argue peer education could be implemented more; students should be educated by peers with disabilities or by those who volunteer to share their classroom experiences. If Self-agency is, in fact, more effectual on an individual level as findings in the present study demonstrate, it should be ready to rhetorically shape discourse in the campus community.

Charles (visual impairment) exemplifies how a single voice can be crucial for shaping discourse on visual disabilities and for eliminating barriers of misunderstanding. He explains how peers can become “sighted guides” for individuals with visual disabilities. Having a blind person hold on to a peer’s wrist, or having a peer place his/her hand between the shoulder blades while moving through narrow spaces, is just a little technique that Charles says could help not

only bridge understanding, but also eliminate awkward interactions and communication problems. Peer education (or bringing in volunteer student speakers) could stimulate interpersonal conversations between disabled and nondisabled classmates, changing attitudes and perceptions based in ableist stigma.

Still, for peer education to work, and for educators and administrators to rhetorically listen to accessibility needs (Ratcliffe, 1999), it calls for educating students (of all ability types) about their own individual responsibility in the college classroom. Roessler, Brown, and Rumrill (1998) address the need for more self-advocacy training to prep students with disabilities for larger conversations with instructors and administrators regarding academic accommodations. As the present study shows, agentic capacities vary across students—the more pre-personal, corporeal agencies, in particular, fear stigmatization and would primarily engage in disability disclosure in a more intra- or interpersonal setting. Self-advocacy training can help shift these types of agencies to more transpersonal, intersubjective agencies. Sessions would need to cover the basic elements of an accommodation request (e.g., introducing oneself, disclosing disability, explaining the benefits of accommodations, describing how to implement accommodations, obtaining teacher agreement, reviewing the request, and closing by expressing appreciation) and instructional strategies (for educators) to ensure the college classroom enkindles rhetorical agency and individual responsibility (e.g., didactic teaching, modeling, role-playing, and feedback) (Roessler et al., 1998). Coexistence can only occur through a mutual co-creation of empathy and understanding between student/peer, student/teacher, or student/administrator.

### ***A Symbolic Re-structuration of Rhetorical Agency***

From analyses of RQ2 and RQ3, for inclusive strategies to be reified to action-oriented implementation on a societal scale, rhetorical agency should be symbolically restructured for

critical cultural analyses in order to challenge stigmatic rhetorics. The findings of this study show how the “disabled voice” (through a position of agency) diminishes ableist Othering by constructing a space for coexistence and empathy between Self and the disabled-Other, and by re-appropriating perceptions of what it means to have a corporeal strength and weakness. Yet, agency juxtaposes disability disclosure: while disabled students can use semi-structured interviews for liberating the body from Otherness and for suggesting inclusivity options on campus, *outside* the interview process (an intra/interpersonal space) a voice is once again marginalized. Currently, rhetorical agency only awakens the individual Self to perform social change within a kairotic space. That is, it is simply not enough to call on the Self, nor is it enough to call on agency. Social change in a cultural realm requires rhetorical agency—but it very fleeting and spontaneous in the natural world. It does not linger in reality long enough to evoke social action (such as hyper-dialectal exchange and reflexive sociology) for an extended period of time. How then can rhetorical agency be used to create change (such as empathy and coexistence) in the public sphere? A symbolic re-imagining of what it means to have and use rhetorical agency should be considered.

The conditions for this sociological re-imagination of rhetorical agency can only occur through an understanding of how “voice” is further stigmatized through communicative actions or discourse. It happens in the negation of rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 1999). This occurs (1) when individuals in society consciously retain ableist ideology through actions or rhetorics that convey apathy or compassion fatigue (i.e., individuals continue discrimination because they are desensitized to disability issues) (see Forster, 2009), or (2) when individuals subconsciously continue to act or use rhetorical choices in their discourse that display insensitivity despite empathizing with marginalized voices (i.e., individuals continue using ableist stigmas—like

“inability” or “do not look sick”—because they still view disability as homogeneous) (Linton, 1998; Stage & Milne, 1996). In other words, to re-conceptualize agency is to tackle desensitization by reframing disability and to partition homogeneity through a crystallized Other.

### ***Rhetorical Agency by Reframing Disability***

When findings regarding disability issues (such as those of the present study) are continuously reproduced in literature or discussed in public parlance, the rhetorical agency of disabled voices may falter from social indifference or compassion fatigue of those who are nondisabled or advocates of disability rights (Calderbank, 2000; Forster, 2009). Such social indifference and compassion fatigue leads to abusive practices either socially or institutionally since individuals engage in continued ableist actions without conceding personal attitudes and beliefs about treatment of disabled people (Calderbank, 2000). MacFarlane (1994) explains, “despite the rhetoric of empowerment disabled people often face disempowering situations...so their lives go by ignored, continually abused by those with power who exert control” (p. 86). In other words, the power of agency is ineffective when countering set attitudes and beliefs or in influencing views desensitized to disability issues. Rhetorically listening to voices, in this case, falls short of social change.

To combat this social indifference, social issues regarding individuals in marginalized positions should undergo rhetorical reframing. That is, instead of discussing social issues in terms of disability (e.g., disability rights), general parlance should shift discussion of issues in terms of *accessibility*, or corporeality. Specifically, conversations regarding the disabled body should engage in neologisms (i.e., the coining of new words) or in re-delineations (i.e., the redefining of old words). Strategic neologism through rhetorical invention, for example, names and calls into question “*the view* [of ableism] *itself* [which] raises the possibility of altering the

very strands out of which the oppressive institutions are spun” (Cherney, 2011, para. 28, emphasis in original). New words can alter institutional forces that drive stigmatic rhetorics. Likewise, Tracy and Tretheway (2005) explain how “an alternate vocabulary provides opportunities to practice ways of speaking and being that reframe dichotomizing, depoliticizing discourses...in everyday talk and practice” (p. 170). Redefining old words can also shape meaning created by institutional forces into newly imagined conceptualizations. Therefore, shifting the focus of language away from “what it means to have a disability” to “what it means to need an accommodation for everyday living” can dispel desensitization.

Rhetorical agency has the opportunity to weave into existence a way of talking about the body that effectually challenges social stigma without the need for persuading obstinate or apathetic attitudes. Neologisms and re-delineations challenge outmoded beliefs of “disability” by disconnecting “inability” from corporeality. By creating a new word to be used in parlance—or by redefining the old meaning of “disability”—such that “accessibility” becomes the focus of meaning in discussion, then people (regardless of the degree or scope of their abilities) can focus on what fundamental individual needs (or individual rights of the body) are needed to survive everyday hardships. But erasing the line between nondisabled and disabled becomes complicated and does not bode well for scholars in the disability field (Linton, 1998). Gill (1994) explains the difference comes from those whose individual needs do not significantly affect daily life, and when a person does not present himself/herself to the world at large as a person needing an accommodation to lessen the severity of a bodily weakness (p. 46). Current policy is shaped around a clause that defines “substantial limitation” as “one or more major life activities” (Switzer, 2003b); as such, it is difficult to re-shape social stigma discursively unless written or spoken rhetoric challenges the notion of what it means to require an individual need to survive

daily functions. By reframing disability around the multifarious aspects of corporeality—and how some of the body’s characteristics and functions may need assistance—social issues gravitate toward new concepts and potentially new policies and laws.

Likewise, through transpersonal, intersubjective agencies (such as the ones displayed in the present study), a sociological re-imagination of corporeality through neologisms or reframing could instigate social change in micro-cultures and evolve inclusivity strategies for all types of individuals needing accommodations for daily functions. Specifically, inclusivity strategies in the educational domain should be revamped to accommodate students according to their learning experiences, especially since the demands of higher educational institutions have gradually increased for students over the past few generations—so much so that “one-third of U.S. college students had difficulty functioning in the last 12 months due to depression, and almost half said they felt overwhelming anxiety in the last year” (Novotney, 2014). Given these grave statistics, reframing disability through corporeality can catalyze a reverse social contagion to counteract words and actions that are based in ableism (see, e.g., Lochner, 2002). Essentially, using rhetorical agency to reframe disability can turn weaknesses into strengths. Over time, such a counter-function could alter the everyday jargon of macro-cultures (such as subsets of society) to reflect the new way of perceiving the human body—not in terms of disability, but in terms of accessibility or the individual needs required for *every* person for basic survival.

### ***Rhetorical Agency through a Crystallized Other***

When individuals engage in an empathic understanding of disability issues, but preserve ableist ideology and stigmatic rhetorics in their actions and discourses, the re-marginalization of disabled voices can occur, which consequently homogenizes individuals with a disability back into an amorphous mass, or disabled-Other (Fine, 1994; Quackenbush, 2008). The kairotic

spatial element (i.e., the ephemerality) of the interview process is a particular perpetrator of this hegemonic invigoration. Through the co-creation of several voices thematically narrating a ‘like’ experience of a particular disability (e.g., having several students in this study who live with dyslexia attest to the perception of ‘laziness’ by peers and teachers), listeners and/or readers may begin to infer subconsciously that the ‘like’ experience is shared by all individuals of that particular disability (e.g., if a few students say it, then all students with dyslexia must be perceived as ‘lazy’). Individuals who try to empathize with disabled people may re-engage in a psychological categorizing process because the semi-structured interview only creates a rhetorical platform that is short-lived and can singularize a disability type (Coole, 2005). In other words, students using rhetorical agency could easily reinforce an essentialist vision of disability to audiences (e.g., if laziness is a perception for dyslexia, then all students with dyslexia must experience this). In turn, writing the results in a multiplicative way could cause generalizability and stereotyping to reform. So, to counter this, it calls for a psychological shift: viewing the Other as a layering of *corporeal plurality*—meaning, readers and listeners wanting to empathize should focus on the multifarious ways an individual presents his/her body rather than just the disability—in order to create coexistence and a non-essentialist vision of lived experiences.

The best means of accomplishing this psychological overhaul is by identifying a person different from the Self as a crystallized Other. If nondisabled individuals subconsciously continue to turn to ableist ideology to homogenize and objectify disabled individuals, then Otherness need to be fractured and crystallized into layers of characteristics that are under-discussed or unknown. In other words, since Othering (I admit) will always happen regardless of how it is addressed, it may be better to conceptualize the Other not as an object with one characteristic, but as an object with many (each of which the Self may or may not want to know

about, but may be curious to learn). Tracy and Tretheway (2005) first introduce the idea of a “crystallized self” in their work on the real-self↔fake-self dichotomy in organizational contexts. The use of a double arrow here suggests the back-and-forth identity-construction process in the real-self↔fake-self dichotomy. Tracy and Tretheway contend people will routinely talk in terms of either a real or fake self, bouncing between the two halves especially when they encounter a person who holds more power. As such, the dichotomy roots itself in a poststructuralist notion of fragmentation, where facets of identity and Self are seen as “pathologized, considered sick, and in need of work” (p. 172). The “crystallized self,” however, is neither real nor fake, “but [a self] constructed and constrained through various discourses of power “ (p. 175). In other words, Tracy and Tretheway view emotions and identity as multidimensional, complex, and fluctuating. In turn, “conceiving, describing, and acting upon identity as ‘crystallized’ may free those who occupy...marginalized organizational positions” (p. 187). Crystallization empowers identity through a constantly oscillating space between many dimensions—rather than two—of domination and resistance.

The crystallized Other approaches the same lines of reasoning, but assumes non-agency and object-ness are built around characteristics that are multidimensional, yet unknowable. For example, as mentioned in chapter two, the disabled-Other is built around a doubly-disempowering binary where the interiority of the body constructs self-meaning around disability/ability and where the pressures of society constructs a norm around what it means to have a “socially acceptable” abled body. To view the disabled-Other in a crystallized manner means to break the binary: to conceptualize an amorphous Other through unknowable characteristics of corporeality (e.g., a ‘best guess’ of personality traits, accessibility needs, beliefs, attitudes, morals, etc.). Similarly, Baglieri, Valle, Connor, and Gallagher (2011) argue

the disabled body needs to be viewed through a plurality of perspectives since culture has been slowly evolving away from the deficit medical model. By crystallizing, the many negative connotations of “disability” no longer drive the descriptors of an Other; rather, it works in the opposite direction where Otherness would eventually paint in a new meaning for disability. The Other would still juxtapose the Self, except now it is layered and living outside of singularity. In regards to the semi-structured interviews, by shifting the focus of questioning for students around their stories and voices as people with various wants and needs (rather than on their disability), rhetorical agency (when it appears) can generate a vision of corporeality where Otherness is multifarious and layered—absent of severe discriminatory consequences. The constitutive Other becomes a ‘narrowed plurality’ (or ‘broadened singularity’), and discrimination is reduced to acts and rhetorics without severe emotional harm (Baglieri et al., 2011).

One way to re-imagine rhetorical agency through a crystallized Other such that it can be used to evoke changes to social rhetorics and actions is to begin focusing on pedagogical and axiological changes in qualitative research methods—or, on how to rethink personal stories, dialogue, and reflexivity for liberating voice (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Especially for interview processes and writing, incorporating autophenomenography—not just for a researcher, but also for interviewees (Grant & Zeeman, 2012; Richardson, 1999)—may instigate change in the way people think about the Other. While I used this particular device in the present study’s methodology for liberating my voice while also identifying the various ways my experiences differ from others, encouraging interviewees (like Elisabeth, for example) to engage in a similar process of creating reflexivity and dialogue may shift focus away from identity as “this is my disability” to identity as “this is my humanity.” Regardless, a new way of thinking is needed to move Othering away from non-agency and singularity to a constitutive plurality (see Cavarero,

2005). It is the only true means of ensuring the implementation of inclusive strategies for disabled people without severe dissension or social backlash for their individuals needs.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Denhart (2008) noted a considerable limitation of her study “comes from the inability to generalize these findings to the larger population of those labeled with LD” (p. 495). The present study has much strength regarding its internal validity; however, weaknesses can be found in the design for rhetorical agency when validating findings externally. These limitations include the (1) sample size and composition, (2) interview instrumentation and pre-interview protocol, and (3) symbolic re-structuration.

### ***Sample Size and Composition***

The pilot study used the voices of four participants to gauge the existence of the ableist Othering phenomenon in higher education. As such, the current study recruited an additional 19 students to assess the depth of this phenomenon, all of who were registered with the Student Access Center LISTSERV. Most phenomenological studies incorporate a smaller range of participants (anywhere from 3 to 10) to capture the richness of voice and meaningfulness of story (Dukes, 1984). While data triangulation (i.e., the intertextual weaving of disabled voices) demonstrates how students with disabilities can share learning experiences in the college classroom, using a small sample only grasps a fragmented portion of reality. The sample size used here testifies to the multiplicity of lived experiences in the college classroom and surfaces several themes (such as the perceptual discrimination against invisible disabilities) that were not seen fully in the pilot study.

Albeit this study’s attempt to gather a larger sample size to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), the large sample also weakens the richness of synthesized

meaning in the findings. Furthermore, a sample size of  $n \leq 30$  (such as the one used in this study) can be statistically problematic for the verifiability and reification of findings from theory to practice (Kutner, Nachtsheim, Neter, & Li, 2005). As such, the size of sample poses a dichotomous problem for qualitative (and even quantitative) paradigms.

As for sample composition, the present study included many individuals with unique (and unheard of) disabilities. In the sampling process, my knowledge of disability variation broadened upon conversing with students with rarer disabilities (e.g., endometriosis, hypersomnia, dysgraphia, spastic quadroparesis, and immuno-compromised kidneys). It highlights how the categorization used in the 2004 IDEA to define “disability” is outmoded and circumscribed. Furthermore, the accumulation of individuals with more common disabilities (e.g., I had six students with learning disabilities like ADD/ADHD) supplements statistics (see, e.g., Quinlan et al., 2012) and findings (see, e.g., Denhart, 2008) showing how problems of misunderstanding continue to persist. The multiplicity of like lived experiences displays how facets of ableist Othering pervade the college classroom.

On the contrary, it is clear that many mainstream disabilities are underrepresented (e.g., deafness, autism, down syndrome, stuttering, etcetera). Such a range of variation in composition likely opens a doorway to tokenism. Furthermore, because of the current stigma of “invisible disabilities,” some disabilities may be viewed as illnesses or as temporary—that is, some disabilities may not necessarily be seen as a true disability (as defined by the 2004 IDEA). Interviewees also reported no racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic diversity: it would be curious to see how the ableist Othering phenomenon transcends other factors creating marginality and superimposes a layered form of hegemony. Lastly, the composition reflected no disabled students that required facilitated communication and/or assistance to complete the

interview process (e.g., a student who has a communicative disability and needs an interpreter, teletypewriter, transliterator, etc.). The absence of this niche in the sample hinders a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of rhetorical agency to construct a platform for social change and to challenge ableist Othering in the college classroom. This study could benefit from additional enclave sampling procedures—covering multiple disabilities, personalities, and bodies as well as multiple perspectives on a disability identity—to find an appropriate size and composition balancing empirical malleability and textual meaningfulness.

### ***Interview Instrumentation and Pre-Interview Protocol***

In the pilot study, I designed the interview guide intending to grasp at negative learning experiences, despite questions (e.g., question 1, “What are some ways that you have overcome adversity in the classroom?”) asking for positive experiences on campus and in the classroom. I modified the interview guide (see Appendix C) to reflect neutrality for the present study by using the Internalized-Other Interview model (Haydon-Laurelut & Wilson, 2011). I purposefully wanted to reframe questions used in the pilot study in a more neutral way in order to evoke rhetorical agency for respondents and not to suggest I was searching for answers that would appease my research needs. I did not ask all participants the same questions, which catalyzes fresh perspectives and multifaceted interpretations of the ableist Othering phenomenon.

Nevertheless, since the interviews were semi-structured, I could not account for the neutrality of spontaneous questions. Some spontaneous questions also violated phenomenological bracketing/positionality: in hindsight, I recognize that I had asked some questions to a participant based on information that was described to me from previous interviewees who had a similar disability (i.e., when interviewing someone with ADD/ADHD, my extemporaneous questions might have stemmed from knowledge I had gained from previous

interviews with students who have ADD/ADHD without my awareness having done so). Such a violation coincides with Paley's (2005) concern about bracketing: by having preconceived assumptions, it contradicts rhetorical agency's potency by generalizing experience en masse. Essentially, I could have engaged in Othering through semi-structured interviewing.

What is more, if this instrumentation is to be distributed to participants in an electronic fashion for a larger study, answers may or may not be detailed enough (or personalized enough) to provide a clear vision (or capture the rhetorical agency) of a participant's disability identity or learning experience. In turn, such an electronically distributed questionnaire could further Otherness by distancing a researcher from respondents. If this study were to be expanded in a larger scale, instrumentation needs to consider how rhetorical agency is affected through an online format. For a larger study, to avoid Otherness through electronic communication, more researchers would be needed to engage in personal interviews with students on other campuses nationwide. Such researchers would need to be trained for sensitivity and on how to use the instrumentation without furthering the disabled-Other.

Lastly, in addition to the instrumentation, the pre-interview protocol dictated by the Internal Review Board constructs a constraint for rhetorical agency that could further Otherness. Meaning, one line in Appendix B—"Please answer as honestly and as openly as possible, but please refrain from using specific names of other people (such as students, faculty and/or staff), locations, or class titles when describing past incidents"—potentially limits a student's disclosure of vivid emotions and of past negative experiences where discrimination was most salient. This line was absent in pilot testing, but was then added for the present study. Consequently, I've noticed (in some of the 19 additional interviews from the Mid-Western university campus) a hesitancy to fully elaborate on incidences in the college classroom. Because of certain anonymity

restrictions, students were not able to disclose the names of people who have helped or harmed them. Some students remained vague in their descriptions, which kept answers to interview questions shorter. As such, this could affect the “openness” of the rhetorical platform for students. In other words, the restriction in Appendix B could stifle a student’s agency because they had to be mindful of how they talked about others. In Bach’s (2005) terms, this clausal constraint in the interview protocol signifies ableist Othering in an organizational structure since voices cannot incriminate ableist oppressors due to anonymity and confidentiality.

### ***Symbolic Re-structuration***

The purpose of any naturalistic design is to test whether the findings are truthful and adequate representations of multiple realities. Rhetorical agency builds a platform for the possibility of collective social action and change. However, such symbolic re-structuration for rhetorical agency (as proposed earlier in this chapter) can only be done through clear lexical delineations. Rhetoric retains polysemy where words adopt many connotations for an audience (see, e.g., Ceccarelli, 1998). Specifically, aligning rhetoric to a more denotative syntactic assembly (i.e., building a sentence based on words that only have one clear definition) is implausible. It would require rhetors to be socially mindful of what is being said—and that does not exist (and may never exist) in society.

Furthermore, my choice to disclose my deafness to respondents *after* the completion of an interview (contrary to how Denhart, 2008, approached her interview process) limits agency and the power of voice as a rhetorical function for countering hegemony. My intention with rhetorical agency in a semi-structured interview was to move dialogue with a respondent to a space where transpersonal, intersubjective agency could evolve and, inevitably, create hyper-dialectics for a conversation with the public about disability identity and perceptions thereof.

Without my initial disclosure, I noticed some respondents remained in a space with pre-personal, corporeal agency, feeling as if their voices were alone and that others have not had similar experiences (especially for rarer disabilities). If I had disclosed my hearing disability, the respondent and I could compare our like experiences and co-create a *better* platform (i.e., a more open dialog) about perceptions of disability in the college classroom by intertwining our agencies. However, my experience as a student with a hearing disability may be far different from students with other types of disabilities. This limits reflexivity (even if a joint disclosure of disability identity were to occur in an interview process) since experiences may vary. This could further Otherness *between* disabilities. The credibility of reflexivity is then called into question since the degree to which a student experiences the college classroom with his/her respective disability may not represent an accurate representation of the ableist Othering phenomenon when combined with my own understanding, opinions, and story.

### **Future Directions**

Given the limitations of triangulation, and the problematization of colonizing the disabled-Other in scholarly writing, this study considers future directions for qualitative inquiry such that findings can be both transferable and confirmable (externally validated). This chapter ends by discussing (1) a methodological reinvention for critical cultural analysis and (2) its applicability to communication practice.

#### ***A Methodological Reinvention for Critical Cultural Analysis***

For disabled voices to cut through the hegemony of a macro-scale phenomenon, methodology must allow for rhetorical agency to shape cultural discourse. While qualitative methods have since been shown to be effective in usurping Otherness (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012), most fall into a dilemma between subjectivity and objectivity, where they are not

designed to analyze the ways in which those who are Othered reject marginality through heterodoxy (resistance and resilience) (Hammersley, 1989). Phenomenology is currently one of the best tools to examine the dynamics of ableist Othering (Craig, 2007); however, rhetorical agency in the present study's design is individualized and limited in its potency. In turn, the transferability and confirmability of the findings may fall short of social change because "voices" are not rooted in an empirical reality that allows for social action on a cultural level to occur. Meaning, for policymakers to use the findings of this study, they need proof that this phenomenon is culturally problematic.

Hammersley (1989) noted that one means of resolving the "dilemma of qualitative research"—and to give policymakers their proof—could be to redefine science or else redefine the social world and how it can be investigated. Essentially, engaging in a constructionist rethinking can help move voices using rhetorical agency to an empirical reality, especially that on a cultural scale (Richardson, 1999). Several techniques from authors have been pitched: Patton (1999) proposes mixed-methodological triangulation through "combinations of interviews, observation, and document analysis" (p. 1192); Segall (2001) commends the critical ethnography to grasp at cultural understanding and minimize distinction between the "There" of the field work and the "Here" of academic writing (p. 581); Moisander et al. (2009) recommend the integration of a "cultural talk" between interviewer and respondent for the purposeful construction of a collaborative reality (p. 341); and LeVasseur (2003) argues for a new definition to bracketing—one that suspends researcher understanding in a reflective move and cultivates curiosity of social reality. Nevertheless, a clear scarcity of empiricism in these methods hinders efforts to efface ableist Othering (with inclusivity strategies) in a broad sense.

While quantitative methods—like statistics—can intercede to fashion a “proof” of discrimination against those with disabilities for the purpose of political polemics (D. Yetter, personal communication, August, 20, 2013), current quantitative research methods only offer a static representation of an empirical reality and furthers ableist Othering by painting a phenomenal singularity of disabled voices. In fact, statistical analysis comes under pressure to describe the contexts of disability identity, which could have an ethical impact “on the privacy rights of participants in [a] study” (Brown, 2001, p. 162). That is, current social science methods using statistical analysis (e.g., hierarchical linear modeling) can portray the disability identities of participants numerically rather than humanistically, which furthers object-ness.

This problematization calls for a critical re-evaluation of methodological design to address issues of disability. A reinvention of methodology can be accomplished by combining perspectives and methods that aim for two central and different aspects of social representations (Flick, 1992). That is, in Burke’s (1970) terms, “re-seeing” issues of external validity may fall into a theoretical space to surface a silenced rhetoric of the Other—a space that *intermixes* qualitative and quantitative paradigms to work magic on triangulation strategies. Now, this “intermixing” does not necessarily mean “combining qualitative and quantitative research (or mixed methods)” (Flick, 2014, p. 182) to examine the Self-Other dyad or the ableist Othering phenomenon. Rather, it may refer to layering several qualitative methods in a study *or* inventing a completely new methodological technique (Flick, 2014). A shift in paradigmatic lens in critical theory may help validate hegemonic processes like ableist Othering—ultimately, equipping qualitative research with reinvented triangulation strategies.

For the ableist Othering phenomenon to be studied empirically—but in an organic, meaningful way where participants can retain their humanity and not be viewed merely as

“data”—it would require sociological imagination. The initial issues in triangulation strategies have long been deeply rooted in a “paradigms debate” over how best to study and understand the social world (see Patton, 1997). As the field of communication research evolved into a reputable discipline of study in the 1960s, scholars disputed over the ways to see social reality. Since the rise of the Chicago school of sociology in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some scholars gradually shifted views away from a “concentration on survey and experimental research and the preference for quantitative data and statistical analysis” to qualitative analyses since it was “clear [that a] hierarchy of methods...squeezed non-quantitative social science approaches to the margin” (Delia, 1987, p. 71). Still, Glaeser and Dickson (2013) explain that most educators today—like David Yetter (a professor of mathematics)—think of social science research in the quantitative sense. “Quantitative research is used to compare the effectiveness of different instructional practices...[and] provides a means to accumulate...a body of support for research-based practices...for students who have...disabilities” (Glaeser & Dickson, 2013, para. 2). But the overreliance on logical empiricism and the reductionistic tendency of social science researchers to view human behavior—like disabilities—through objective, dualistic binaries was what initially spurred re-evaluation in axiology (Neuman, 1997).

Consequently, a schism etched its way into communication studies in the 1960s, pitting paradigms against each other where qualitative researchers relied heavily on discovering meaning and quantitative scholars relied on statistics and enumeration (Cizek, 1995). In turn, this spawned methods of linguistics, anthropology, phenomenology, rhetorical criticism, and the appropriation of European traditions (e.g., Marxism and the Frankfurt School) to act as substitutes to quantitative research models in social science (Delia, 1987). But with this dissension came issues of substantiating validity of qualitative research findings.

Yet, the schism also flooded the communication field with possibilities for reconstruction and innovation in social science. Critical scholars, “who use poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonial, and indigenous theories, [have called] for a methodological transformation and [have exemplified] various innovative ways of writing that have the potential to resist [the Other]” (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 300). Individuals with a disability have had a long history of negative silence and “a number of feminist scholars...have highlighted the lack of understanding amongst feminists of disability issues” (Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 269). Through critical theory, scholars can toy with reinvention to fix issues of validation, especially for disabled voices in higher education. As such, I will answer the call and propose that future qualitative methods tap into areas of anthropology, semiology, rhetoric, and even theoretical mathematics for methodological retooling and the creation of an alternative path to examine the disabled-Other.

During the same time philosophers were conceptualizing the Self-Other dichotomy (and reifying the disabled-Other), another history was unfolding. While Edmund Husserl constructed phenomenology to examine the constitutive Other, he also grappled with the semantics of Truth and Being in his description of intersubjectivity because of his formal understanding of logic and mathematics (Moran, 2005). In fact, Husserl lambasted many fellow logicians for not focusing on the connection between subjective processes to arrive at an objective understanding of logic and reality. For Husserl, logic and mathematics were very much the building blocks for understanding ontology and the larger vision of reality; together, philosophy and mathematics regulate “the relation of science to critical theory” and “affect as much the idea of science as they do the methodologies of critical thought” (Phillips, 2013, p. 138). Even Husserl’s phenomenology could be subjected to this demarcation between philosophy and mathematics through symbolic construction and rhetoric (Phillips, 2013). However, much of social science

shied away from this because it seemed paradoxical to talk about formal categories in mathematics in conjunction with subjective, sensible objects of Being and everyday rhetoric.

Still, much of the demarcation line between mathematics, ontology, and rhetoric derives further down the timeline of Western thought, going so far back as to come from classic Platonic thinking. Reyes (2014) details how rhetoric and mathematics—viewed by many in the current academy as distant strangers and antithetical to each other—were once entwined in such a way that they could evoke rhetorical action through writing, thinking, and arguing. In fact, Platonic realism and Modernism drive contemporary mathematics to “re-enliven...materiality through semio-rhetorical analysis” (p. 472). In other words, “a semiotic intervention into the space between rhetoric and mathematics that Plato originally opened and that largely remains unexplored today” may be the key to understanding how mathematics plays a role in reifying Othering (p. 476).

In fact, as Rotman (2000) details a semiotic approach for examining Otherness, he explains how math can be viewed as largely deliberative in nature. All it takes is an understanding of how mathematical discourses subjectify those who practice them (Reyes, 2014). Mathematical discourses are also rooted in a Subject v. Agent dichotomy (or rather, an active Self v. passive Other binary). To tackle old problems in a new way, “signs [are used] to marshal [in] previous knowledge (both mathematical and non-mathematical)...to create non-finite thought experiments that the Subject can, via the Agent, test” (Reyes, 2014, p. 477). Mathematics, according to Reyes, is rhetorical at the level of invention of concepts: it uses equations as a means of translating one of two forms of rhetorical action (situational or constitutive) to a more public and political domain for greater understanding. It is through mathematics and semiology in a rhetorical space that the Self and Other can be examined anew.

But when the schism between qualitative and quantitative research bifurcated the communication studies field in the early 1960s, the consequence was not only a partitioning of axiology, but also a division in thought, where mathematics and rhetoric were conceptualized as adversaries (Cizek, 1995; Reyes, 2014). Still, some scholars and philosophers have worked to reunite these ideas. French thinkers such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière have contemplated (and have been criticized for) viewing mathematics as ontology and aesthetics, which they thought could be expressed through the language of axiomatic set theory (Phillips, 2010). Likewise, cultural theorists Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek have drawn on topology as an integral component to describe a rising mathematical turn in socio-cultural theory and anthropology (Lash, 2012). Scholars have strived to bridge mathematics with social science through analyses of not only human behavior, but also of the roles of rhetoric in culture.

Indeed, set theory and topology cultivate a deeper understanding of social and cultural theory, verging on a new field of “cultural topology”—where spatial structures (or “shared social spaces”) are examined for interactions and communicative networks through set theory vocabulary such as point, functions, curves, continuity, and so on (Lury, Parisi, & Terranova, 2012, p. 6). Even Rosenfeld (1969) explains how set theory can be used jointly with rhetorical concepts; he highlights the misinterpreted meanings of Burkean Identification through an exactness of mathematical language. By describing how sets, elements, and intersections can diagram how people’s identities are shared (but remain unique), Rosenfeld redefines “identification” and proposes a shift in the qualitative framing of rhetorical theory. This evolving philosophy serves to function as a “kind of beam that throws a diaphanous light over [current] states of affairs, illuminating otherwise unnoticed relations between elements” (Phillips, 2013, p. 125). This becomes the starting point for generating a path to efface Othering in a social sphere.

Lévi-Strauss (1949/1971) offers an anthropological grounding of how mathematics (in a topological sense) can be funneled into a better understanding of rhetorical suasion and the consequences of such rhetorics on social behavior. Glaeser and Dickson (2013) note how qualitative research is rooted in anthropology: “one task of anthropologists is to observe [a] culture in such depth that they are able to understand the culture from the perspective of the people who live in it and to describe it in rich enough detail for the reader to understand as well” (para. 4). Adhering to this responsibility, Lévi-Strauss (1949/1971) applies the notion of structure to kinship relations; however, he describes “a structure in which elementary (higher-order) relations govern complex patterns of exchange [in discourse]”—using a more quantitative lens (Phillips, 2013, p. 131). Here, an anthropological approach aligns cultural structures with mathematical ones—which, as Jacques Lacan (1953/2006) argues, is due to a relationship between the symbolic signifiers of language and topology. Phillips (2013) clarifies:

How this relates to language...concerns the structure of the signifier itself. The signifier, in its function as an element in the chain of signifiers, produces its meaning...as an otherwise absent and inaccessible unit through the illusion of the isolated thought, the *idea*, to which signifiers had always hitherto been subordinated. No thoughts are in fact isolated...but they are rather to be comprehended in the transformative relations between differential elements on the surface, which approximates the structure of language as proposed by a large diversity of discourses derived from structural linguistics (and it is referred to by Lacan as the Symbolic). (p. 130-131)

Structures are built around the assembly of thoughts and ideas through a sharing of multiple discourses and rhetorics; as such, a web of symbolic-laden ideas orients itself to a mathematical examination because it is layered with correlates invoking a social imaginary (or larger vision of “meaning” for an assumed reality) (Phillips, 2010). Together, semiology and anthropology can commingle with topology and rhetoric to shape an interpretation of particular social behaviors influenced by cultural discourses.

Specifically, the coupling of anthropology and cultural topology can best describe the current state of affairs regarding stigmatic rhetorics around “disability.” Mutua (2001) describes how the cultural construction of disability and accessibility is embedded in semiotics and discourses around corporeality. Identity of the body (as “abled” or “disabled”) is based around an ascription of cultural objects, practices, discourses, and contexts. For example, an individual using a wheelchair is ascribed to “disability” through ramps needed for access to places and buildings. Mutua explains, through Charles Sanders Peirce’s trichotomy of signs, when individuals view the ramp (as a symbol) at the level of thirdness, Otherness begins to root itself in ideologies. “The ramp becomes a symbolic representation of the freedom of movement, convenience, and inclusion...[as well as] confinement, inconvenience, restriction of freedom, and a sense of censored access” (p. 111). Cultural signifiers and markers of accessibility provide an inquiry into the Othering processes of able-bodied people; it opens a discourse of the semiotics of accessibility to better understand the impossibility of an abled individual to relate to people with a disability (Mutua, 2001). The discourse of the semiotics of accessibility is fundamental to the construction of an alternative path rooted in anthropology and cultural topology. Meaning, it is through a scrutiny of how rhetorical devices in everyday language—or the way people communicate with one another about “ability” and “disability” in social settings—create stigma that a theoretical technique for critical cultural analysis can be generated.

Coincidentally, by examining the discursive roles of the agent function (aforementioned in chapter two) and how it rhetorically constructs new disability identity (Herndl & Licona, 2007), a new mathematical technique can be constructed for use in methods triangulation to challenge cultural hegemony (e.g., ableist Othering). Since rhetorical agency evolves from voice, it too can be symbolic. As such, an alternative path would have to take on two purposes: (1) to

show how rhetoric is structured among nondisabled individuals and creates a potential Othering phenomenon that culturally negates disabled voices, and (2) to show how rhetorical agency acts to co-create a collective identity for disabled individuals, but fails because the heterodoxy of voice (resilience and resistance) is too individualized to counter Otherness and generate coexistence between the abled-Self and disabled-Other. While cultural topology and set theory can work to demonstrate such structurations, I contend that one possible alternative path to usurp (the first purpose) and efface (the second purpose) a cultural prevalence of ableist Othering is through tapping into the field of group theory for algebraic structures.

This option may be quite useable for critical scholars if it were to examine the relationship between the rhetorics of nondisabled and disabled people. Ableist Othering (and discrimination) could then be culturally shown to be a one-way street, where the rhetorical agency of disabled voices is ineffectual and powerless. Pinter (1990) draws upon H. C. White's (1963) work, *An Anatomy of Kinship*, to outline an algebraic-anthropological model to show how mathematical permutations could be used to describe kinship systems of primitive societies. The model described here divides an entire population of society into clans (or familial groups) and then examines the social relationships between men, women, and children. I argue that qualitative methodologies that use rhetorical agency can benefit from an anthropological (and quite possibly algebraic) technique that closely scrutinizes the relationship between disabled and nondisabled individuals, particularly through the social rhetorics that govern what it means to be "normal" and "abnormal" (Said, 1978). Algebraic-anthropology could be a potential alternative path for examining how discursive roles (or the sharing of ideas) can construct hegemonic relationships between disabled and nondisabled populations.

This notion of using shared ideas as a basis for algebraic-anthropology modeling is reflected through and supported by Social Contagion Theory. Lochner's (2002) book, *Collective Behavior*, outlines this theory, which "looks at social events and conditions that make crowd behavior possible" (p. 11). The theory was originally designed for understanding the rapid spreading of infections, like plagues or the flu, but evolved into a metaphor for anything that spreads from person to person. Lochner elaborates:

The first modern theory of collective behavior used contagion to describe the transmission of thoughts, ideas, or behavior from one individual to an entire group of people.... [It] is based upon the idea that moods and thoughts become contagious within certain types of crowds. Once infected with these thoughts, behavior becomes irrational or illogical and people do things that they normally would not do. Any individual in the crowd who already has the idea becomes the carrier. Under the right circumstances, other members of the crowd become infected.... As excitement grows, individuals lose their self-consciousness...and cease to think before they act. Once crowd members have reached this condition, any idea or behavior offered by any member of the group is almost certain to receive support from all other members of the group. (pp. 11-12)

For this study, the obvious *contagion* is the infectious idea of what it means to have a "normal" and "perfect" body—one that is able to perform life tasks without severe limitations. This thought of Normality is spread through people and juxtaposes ideas of what it means to have a disabled body, which is situated with Abnormality (Said, 1978; Stewart & Logan, 1993). The irrational behavior that Lochner (2002) describes would be the consequences of Othering—direct communication (such as a slur) or an unspoken disdain through action (such as social avoidance) (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Together, ideas of Normality infect people that agree to this "perfect" image of a functional and capable body, which in turn subconsciously triggers Othering against those who align with ideas of Abnormality instead—creating ableist discrimination. So, Social Contagion Theory could be yet another layer in this algebraic-anthropological technique that provides a scope for scrutinizing how harmful rhetorics are spread.

This algebraic-anthropological technique may very well be the Goliath that qualitative research needs to create cultural change through rhetorical agency. Or rather, this theoretical reinvention could very well be the vehicle to finally make scholars and educators listen to disabled voices. However, it is beyond the scope of this present study to construct such a tool. When I first approached advisors (from both the communication studies and mathematics disciplines) with a potential illustration of a technique—which was deeply rooted in postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postpositivism—I met considerable backlash. Neither advisor was comfortable with the blending of mathematics and rhetoric to stylize a triangulation technique. This is likely indicative that the “paradigms debate” continues to divide scholarship.

This intention of this portion of the discussion is to provide the necessary tools (anthropology, semiology, rhetoric, algebra, and topology) for future scholars and researchers to develop a triangulation technique that bridges the use of quantitative and qualitative paradigms. I have dabbled with some ideas from algebraic group theory in Appendix E, entitled “The Sandbox.” The ideas I toyed with in my appendix work off the assumption that the very rhetoric people use in everyday speech and action can be mathematically retooled through semiology—and the rhetorics that circumscribe disability are well within the realm of scrutiny. Even Patton (1997) describes the “special seductiveness of numbers in modern society, [which] convey a sense of precision and accuracy” that, when discussing the value of methods triangulation, does not mean quantitative *versus* qualitative methods, but instead is a combination of the strengths of each in a multi-methods approach to yield an evaluation that is *pro-meaningful* (p. 1207, emphasis in original). That is, an alternative path (regardless of what tools it uses) should look to mathematical symbolism to translate meaningful language into a structured art. Numbers and variables help to transform the complexity of words and actions into a simple way of

understanding social phenomena like Othering (Phillips, 2013). Therefore, scholars should consider avenues that mix quantitative and qualitative research paradigms for the purpose of externally validating findings to interdisciplinary fields. Still, scholars must be careful not to use alternative paths to further Otherness.

### *Applicability to Communication Practice*

As Appendix E points out, writing an alternative path like algebraic-anthropology for the purpose of externally validating qualitative findings is a daunting task. Many of the assumptions I chose to work with in my sandbox are rooted in postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postpositivism. While critical scholars may latch onto the idea of using mathematical semiology to study power-distancing rhetorics, other scholars in the discipline of communication studies may be hesitant because it taps into belief systems that verge on being too subjective or too idealistic (as is the case I witnessed with *both* my communication studies and mathematics advisor). What is more, if a potential model makes any generalizable assumptions about normative and abnormal ideologies (and irrational behaviors that are a result of a social contagion) to study ableist Othering in a critical cultural analysis, a reinforcement of Otherness could likely occur for individual agencies. I admit that scribbling out the steps of what I thought was a “model” approached a blurring between what is considered normal and not normal, and this placed me in an uncomfortable position as a researcher and a participatory subject.

I also fear few readers would have a firm understanding of both mathematical and rhetorical jargon. The field of communication studies is ill equipped to educate scholars (both new and old) on how to use modeling *outside* of statistics; likewise, mathematicians may be unwillingly to step into a space of postpositivism out of concern that proof construction using rhetoric is bad math. Luckily, Heckelman and Dunn (2003) describe a new learning community

approach that draws on the concept of “Writing Across Curricular Cultures (WAC)” (p. 75). The goal of such an educational approach is to integrate a “grammar of algebra” and “grammar of rhetoric” into the core curriculum of higher education such that students can begin to bridge the space between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Heckelman and Dunn explain how “students have demonstrated that yoking the two disciplines by focusing on models provides a powerful critical instrument they can use to enhance their critical ability across a variety of interdisciplinary contexts” (p. 74). Given these results, perhaps it is the duty of future scholars (and studies) to dabble in this “yoking” of algebra and rhetoric to make the transferability and confirmability of qualitative findings useable to multiple disciplines.

Until scholars are educated in both rhetoric and mathematics, for future research, the implementation of this study on a macro-scale (along with any proposed alternative path) should not be hesitant to incorporate *multiple triangulation* techniques (e.g., coupling of interviewing, surveying, experimental design, and algebraic-anthropology) to understand ableist Othering. That is, “combining theories and methods carefully and purposefully with the intention of adding breath or depth” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p. 33) to analysis can lead to a deeper understanding of hegemonic phenomena. This could mean enlarging sample sizes between 25-50 individuals to better grasp at an empirical reality (i.e., to see how students follow a normal distribution curve) while maintaining a richness of textual inter-splicing to create a collected vision of ableist Othering in higher education (Kutner et al., 2005). For a larger study, statistics can be coupled with algebraic-anthropology (or other alternative paths) such that coded data can be grouped based on treatments of data and then be subjected to ANOVA, multiple regression, or hierarchical linear analyses. If a researcher would like to keep the sample size low (for the sake of a critical analysis), then non-parametric methods such as the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test can be

safely employed<sup>8</sup> since the likelihood of sample size between disability groups vary (i.e.,  $n_1 \neq n_2$ ) and are independent (since the experience of a person with a hearing disability can be different from a person with a learning disability) (Kutner et al., 2005). With the layering of algebraic-anthropology, qualitative transcriptions, and statistical modeling, future findings scrutinizing ableist Othering can hopefully generate a deeper understanding of the disabled college students' learning experiences such that inclusivity strategies can begin to integrate into higher education.

### **Conclusion**

This study lays groundwork for scholars to examine the ableist Othering phenomenon in higher education. Further studies can examine this phenomenon nationwide with the intent to showcase how educational policies should be created or redesigned to better meet the needs of individual students and to not cultivate colonization and stigmatization. Framing this study through qualitative inquiry also proposes a need for studying ableist Othering from a quantitative lens. The methodological invention of algebraic-anthropology (combining discursive rhetoric and semiology) calls for scholarship to return to a way of viewing social science research through joint paradigms. Theory suggests patterns of ableist Othering would emerge from studies of both paradigms; so, future studies should test the verifiability of such an assumption. Such a theoretical assumption also suggests that ableist Othering (and any other type of marginal phenomenon) can be usurped and effaced through a mixed-methodological design.

Furthermore, future studies should analyze the perceptions of nondisabled teachers and peers or examine how educators with disabilities (such as myself) shape the classroom around a larger conversation (if any) between disabled and nondisabled students. Such studies would augment another level of understanding for the ableist Othering phenomenon that was not

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<sup>8</sup> Because the sample size is below a comfortable threshold ( $n \leq 30$ ), it would violate assumptions of statistical normality and would not follow a normal distribution curve (Kutner et al., 2005).

explored in the scope of this study through the lived experiences of disabled students. Examining the perspectives of those who are nondisabled (and what their experiences are when placed in a position with a disabled student) also builds a communicative understanding and breaks down barriers. It can shape a conjecture of how rhetoric is disseminated discursively (ultimately, reshaping the algebraic-anthropological model to consider social interaction). Future scholarship should then propose additional methods of solvency to eradicate this often invisible and disenfranchising process.

The rise of the disabled student population on university campuses signifies the need for more cognizant interactions. Whether it is a student with blindness walking across campus or a student with dyslexia or ADD/ADHD needing time-and-a-half to take an examination, teachers, peers, classmates, and faculty need to be mindful and respectful of the individual needs of students with disabilities (whether “visible” or not). Discrimination in an academic setting (meant to create diversity and to educate awareness and sensitivity for other people and their perspectives) is daunting and intolerable. It is my hope the voices in this study (including my own) can instigate social change (whether attitudinally or behaviorally) for listeners and readers.

After countless incidences where I have had my individual needs for my hearing disability ignored (whether in the classroom or in social interactions), I urge anyone reading this study to engage in a personal re-evaluation of their views toward “disability.” I am tired of feeling like my needs for my deafness do not matter or are forgotten. And to anyone with a disability: unless we choose to exert our voices for emancipation from discrimination, it is likely that we will lose ourselves to a shroud of an unconscious, invisible, and everlasting silence.

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## **Appendix A - Research Informed Consent Form**

### **The Ableist Othering of Disability in the Classroom: An Experiential Investigation of Academic Adjustments in Higher Education**

#### **RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

The purpose of this research is to examine the role of the disabled student in the college classroom and the accessibility of the course curriculum in regards to the individual needs of the student. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer open-ended questions in a semi-structured, face-to-face interview to discuss your experiences and perceptions of your classroom interactions. All interviews are expected to take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. With your permission, the researchers would also like to audio-record you during your conversation for later transcription and detailed analysis. After completing the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or concerns about the research. Any further questions can be directed to the researchers via email at [creutlinger@k-state.edu](mailto:creutlinger@k-state.edu). After data transcription, you will be contacted to verify the accuracy of facts and emotions from the interview.

#### **RISKS**

There are two (2) minimal risks associated with participation in this project. First, you will experience a small amount of time lost (20-30 minutes) for the interview process with no direct form of compensation. Second, in the interview process you may be asked to recall some experiences that were stressful, uncomfortable, or otherwise unpleasant. Although the researchers do not expect any level of mental harm to occur due to the interview, if you feel at any point the discomfort is detrimental to your health or mental state, you may ask to move to the next question, have the answer stricken from the interview, and/or discontinue your participation at any time.

#### **BENEFITS**

Benefits include voicing opinions about classroom experiences, potentially improving classroom communication and curriculum, and changing policy-making procedures for disability services.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The data in this study will be confidential. All interviews will be conducted in private and will

remain confidential. By choosing to participate, you will be asked to refrain from using specific names of other people (i.e., students, faculty and/or staff), locations, or class titles when describing past incidents. Actual names and other identifiers (i.e., email addresses from initial contact) will not be used in the research data. For coded identifiable data, your real name will not be included from the questionnaire or the consent form. Instead, you may choose a pseudonym and the researcher will use that pseudonym to link the questionnaire information to interpret responses. Coded data will also be reported in aggregate. Identities will remain completely confidential and you will never be asked to put your actual name on the questionnaire unless you choose to do so; you have the option to use your real name instead of a pseudonym. To ensure confidentiality, all research materials and data will be locked away in a secure location on the Kansas State University campus, and materials and data will be kept for three (3) years after the completion of the study.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. There is no monetary or other type of compensation for participation.

## **CONTACT**

This research is being conducted by Corey Jon Reutlinger of the Department of Communication Studies at Kansas State University. He may be reached at 308.746.1815 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The researcher is collecting data under the guidance of his faculty advisor, Dr. Sarah Riforgiate from the Department of Communication Studies, who can be reached at 785.532.6776 or through email at [sriforgi@k-state.edu](mailto:sriforgi@k-state.edu). You may contact the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 785.532.3224 or [comply@k-state.edu](mailto:comply@k-state.edu) if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. This research has been reviewed according to Kansas State University procedures governing your participation in this research.

## **CONSENT**

I have read/understand this form and agree to participate in this study.

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Name (Printed)

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Signature

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Date

## **Appendix B - Interview Introduction**

Hello! My name is Corey Reutlinger. I am working with Dr. Sarah Riforgiate, a professor in the Department of Communication Studies on thesis research. Today, you will be asked a set of questions regarding your lived experiences in the classroom. This interview will take about 20-30 minutes and will be recorded unless you choose not to have it recorded. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can choose to stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the study. Please answer as honestly and as openly as possible, but please refrain from using specific names of other people (such as students, faculty and/or staff), locations, or class titles when describing past incidents. You will first be asked to fill out an informed consent form, and will be asked a few questions concerning your demographic information, as well as any pseudonym you may choose to use for the study. After the study you will be asked by the researcher to clarify and/or evaluate data for verification purposes. Also at this time you may ask the researcher any questions or concerns you may have about the study.

## Appendix C - Interview Guide

**Please choose a *pseudonym*, or another name, for the interview.**

**\*You have the option of using your real name if you choose: \_\_\_\_\_**

Age:	Gender: M <input type="checkbox"/> / F <input type="checkbox"/>	Year in school: Fr. <input type="checkbox"/> So. <input type="checkbox"/> Jr. <input type="checkbox"/> Sr. <input type="checkbox"/> Gr. <input type="checkbox"/>
Major:	Ethnicity:	
Disability:		

### Sample Question Pool

1. What are some ways that you have overcome adversity in the classroom?
2. How many years have you been enrolled in the university system?
3. What are your career goals after college/higher education? Please explain in detail.
4. Could you explain, in detail, the extent of your disability?
5. What accommodations has the school/administration provided for you to help you with your learning in the classroom?
6. Do you have any concerns about working with a teacher or peer in the classroom on an issue that addresses your disability? Please discuss any concern you may have specifically.

7. Have you ever received a comment, whether written or oral, from a teacher or peer you felt was discriminatory toward your disability? If so, please describe specific incidences, and have these incidences ever made you reconsider college education?
8. Do you feel you receive different treatment from your teacher(s) because of your disability? Please describe specific incidences.
9. What, if any, concerns do you have about how teachers or peers respond to your disability when working on class, or group, projects? Please discuss any concern you may have specifically.
10. Have you had any concerns communicating with fellow classmates about your disability? Please discuss any concern you may have specifically.
11. How can your teacher(s) better accommodate to your needs? Please discuss specific ways.
12. How is the classroom technology—PowerPoints, YouTube videos, electronic resources, etcetera—accommodating or not accommodating to your individual needs? Please discuss any concern you may have specifically.
13. How can the school administration better provide classroom and/or curriculum accommodations to your individual needs—more wheelchair accessibility, sign language interpreters, etcetera? Please discuss specific ways.

14. Have you experienced any challenges when learning curriculum? What are some ways that you have overcome challenges in the classroom, if any? Please discuss specific ways.
15. What are some ways that the university can better prepare faculty/staff for the individual needs of the disabled student population on campus? Please discuss specific ways.
16. What are some ways that the university can better educate students about the disabled student population on campus? Please discuss specific ways.
17. What difficulties, if any, have you encountered with the campus meeting your individual needs outside of the campus classroom—dining areas, dorm rooms, parking access, mobility between campuses, campus announcements, etcetera? Please discuss specific ways.
18. What are your feelings in regards to how other students and faculty/staff perceive your disability whether it is positive or negative? Please discuss any concerns specifically.
19. How can the Student Access Center—or disability services—better help you with your individual needs? Please discuss any concerns or methods specifically.
20. What other opinions/concerns/ideas do you have for your role as a disabled student in the college classroom? Can you think of any other information that might be useful on this subject that has not been covered by this questionnaire?

## **Appendix D - Recruitment Script**

Hello! My name is Corey Reutlinger. I am a graduate student pursuing an M.A. in Communication Studies, looking for individuals to interview for my thesis project on the lived experiences of students with disabilities in the college classroom, and how the university is meeting and/or failing to meet the individual needs of the student. I am looking for potential candidates for a study, where participants will partake in semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews from a 20-question interview guide. If you would like to participate, please let me know or contact me at [creutlinger@k-state.edu](mailto:creutlinger@k-state.edu). Thank you.

## Appendix E - “The Sandbox”

Any reader who is daring to venture into the space of this radical idea should heed caution: the path is rudimentary at best, filled with several problems and contradictions, and will draw criticism from both camps, just as I had experienced in its development. This is written to convey my stream of consciousness, and may not make complete sense at times. Yet, I perceive this problem much like quantum theory: there is both an exactness and precision to algebraic structures, yet the relationships between people exist in a never-ending paradox. An exactitude for this path is not my goal: by doing so, I would push the voices of the disabled students in this study further to the margins. Instead, for this algebraic-anthropology technique, I draw upon positivism and postpositivism, and delve into postmodernism and poststructuralism, too.

I also draw upon Pinter’s (1990) adaptation of H. C. White’s (1963) algebraic model of kinship structures and play with several key concepts<sup>9</sup>. Initially, Pinter (1990) uses White’s research more for modeling relationships within a collection, not in between. So, I decide that notion needs to be scrutinized.

According to White (1963), the entire population of the society is divided into clans. But what if every person belongs to one, and only one, of *two* primary clans? I consider this case: A person either belongs to one of the clans  $n_1, n_2, \dots, n_k$  OR belongs to one of the clans  $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_j$  where  $k > j$ . Clans  $n_i$  (where  $i = 1, 2, \dots, k$ ) represent the segment of the entire population that fits to the “norm” of what it means to have a “socially acceptable,” abled body. Clans  $a_m$  (where  $m = 1, 2, \dots, j$ ) represent the segment of the population that does not fit to this “norm”—called the “abnormal.” Specifically, “abnormal” means to represent those that have a “disabled body.”

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<sup>9</sup> Here, I switch my writing style to use the inclusive “we” that is commonly (and formally) used when writing mathematical proofs (Lee, 2012).

Next, let  $N = \{n_1, n_2, \dots, n_k\}$  be the set of all “normal” clans. Let  $A = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_j\}$  be the set of all “abnormal” clans. Let  $S = N \cup A$  be the set of all clans in the entire population of society. The cardinality of  $N$  is strictly greater than  $A$ ,  $|N| > |A|$ , if there exists an injective function, but no *bijjective*<sup>10</sup> function, from  $A$  to  $N$ . Also, note that  $|S| = |N \cup A| = |N| + |A|$  since  $N$  and  $A$  are *disjoint* (some can argue that the demarcation line between Normality and Abnormality is ill-defined).

I then need to show this injective function (truly, it is a surjective function from all elements of  $A$  back to some elements in  $N$ ). If  $|N| > |A|$ , then there exists  $O_D =$  set of Othered individuals (those that feel marginalized or objectified) such that  $|A| = |O_D|$  and  $O_D \subseteq N$  (it could also be “if  $|S| > |A|$ , then there exists  $O_D =$  set of Othered individuals (those that feel discriminated against, marginalized, or objectified) such that  $|A| = |O_D|$  and  $O_D \subseteq S$ ”).

I now need to figure out functions from  $N$  to  $N$  and functions from  $A$  to  $A$ . I ask myself: What would these be? These functions would have to be defined in terms of the relationships between nondisabled and disabled individuals. But are these relationships defined through rhetoric and social behavior? Using whatever these functions turn out to be, let  $G$  be the group of permutations generated on the set  $N$ . That is,  $G$  consists of all possible composites, which can be formed from these functions. Similarly, let  $H$  be the group of permutations generated on the set  $A$ . That is,  $H$  consists of all possible composites, which can be formed from the functions.

Looking at some of the assumptions of anthropological research, I want to use permutations  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  in  $G$  (or  $H$ ) to show a connection between the sets  $N$  and  $A$  (since “every person, in any clan, has a relation in every other clan” and “rules of kinship apply uniformly to

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<sup>10</sup> According to Pinter (1990), a function  $f$  is *bijjective* iff each element in  $A$  has been Othered by exactly one element in  $N$  (p. 58). That is,  $f$  is *bijjective* if it is injective and surjective, or if each abnormal ideology of  $A$  is the direct image of exactly one normative ideology of  $N$ .

all clans”) (Pinter, 1990, p. 79). My goal is to use the permutations generated on the set  $N$  and  $A$  to show that nondisabled individuals “Other” disabled individuals and that the reverse is not possible (since disabled individuals are in a position of lesser power because of cultural stigma). That is, we need to show  $A \subseteq O_D$ , and that some permutation of group  $G$  of the nondisabled individuals in set  $N$  can cause those individuals in  $A$  to belong to the group of Othered individuals. Meaning, define some function  $\varphi : G \rightarrow H$  that maps the process of Othering from the nondisabled group onto the disabled group.

For  $\varphi : G \rightarrow H$  to be an Othering function, each individual in  $N$  can only have Othered exactly one person in  $A$  (this can be done through the permutations on the sets). For this study, to show that  $A \subseteq O_D$ , we need to show that  $f$  is surjective. That is, that everyone in  $A$  must have been Othered by someone in  $N$  (through the permutations in  $G$ ).

If I want to do simpler modeling (and not rely on permutations of  $G$  and  $H$  since those are based off of undefined (and, quite possibly, unknowable functions), I can always define the Othering relation<sup>11</sup>  $f : N \rightarrow A$ , between sets  $N$  and  $A$ , by  $f(n) = a$  iff  $a$  has been Othered by  $n$ .

Then,

- (1)  $f$  is a *function* if and only if (iff) each person in  $N$  has Othered exactly one person in  $A$
- (2) if  $f$  is a function, then  $f$  is *injective* iff each person in  $A$  has been Othered by at most one person in  $N$
- (3) if  $f$  is a function, then  $f$  is *surjective* iff each person in  $A$  has been Othered by at least one person in  $N$
- (4) if  $f$  is a function, then  $A$  is a subset of  $O_D$  ( $A \subseteq O_D$ ) iff  $f$  is surjective.

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<sup>11</sup> A *relation* (in a mathematical sense) means that inputs of the domain  $N$  are mapped to more than one element in the range of  $A$ .

From here, I meet a block in the road. There are several options that can we choose to continue down the alternative path to exploring algebraic-anthropology as a concept. We can choose to define the permutations in  $G$  and  $H$ , and use the permutations to show a homomorphism from  $G$  to  $H$ ; we can choose a more postpositivist perspective and treat  $N$  and  $A$  not as people, but as ideas and beliefs; we can choose to analyze this problem through flow networks and how networks can be transformed into other networks, and the one-to-one correspondence which carries out this transformation is isomorphic; or, we can choose to venture into graph theory.

I've chosen for the latter half of this sandbox to choose the postpositivist option. For this part, I tap into ideas from postmodernism and poststructuralism to make some interesting cases.

To begin, let's assign these ways of talking about "normality" and "abnormality" to specific notation. Let  $n_i$  = the way an idea, thought, belief, or attitude of what it means to have a normative standard (i.e., what it means to have a "normal, abled body") is transmitted or communicated among individuals; let  $a_i$  = the way an idea, thought, belief, or attitude of what it means to have an abnormal standard (i.e., what it means to not have an ideal form, or have a disabled body) is transmitted or communicated among individuals. Note that our rhetorical choices (and the various combinations thereof) determine the multiply distinct ways Normality and Abnormality are communicated in everyday parlance (i.e.,  $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, m$  which count the finite number of ways or rhetorical combinations of normalcy—element  $n$ —or abnormalcy—element  $a$ —that are transmitted to individuals ) (Reyes, 2014). **PROBLEM: These elements are not well-defined since the "ways of communication" are subjective. The subscript definitions are also not well-defined.**

Now let  $N = \{n_1, n_2, n_3, \dots, n_m\}$  be the set of all distinct ways ideologies of Normality are communicated among individuals (i.e., all the ways a "nondisabled, perfect body" can be

communicated through rhetorical choices), and let  $A = \{a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots, a_m\}$  be the set of all distinct ways ideologies of Abnormality are communicated among individuals (i.e., all the ways a “disability” can be defined and communicated through rhetorical choices. Here, Normality and Abnormality can be assigned to how an abled and disabled body is reified and communicated in society (respectively), based on in-group favoritism and out-group bias (Jackson & Hogg, 2010).

**PROBLEM:  $N$  and  $A$  should not have the same number of elements. This is because  $N$  has a majority of the elements where  $A$  does not.**

Our rhetorical choices also construct an operation  $*$  on each set  $N$  and  $A$  such that it transmits (or spreads) an idea from one individual to another (from sender to receiver and vis-à-vis). The operation  $*$  is, I say, defined through the multiplicity of rhetoric ( $n_j * n_k = n_j n_k$  and  $a_j * a_k = a_j a_k$  for the  $j$ th and  $k$ th rhetorical combinations in  $N$  and  $A$ ), and works for every idea (element) in  $N$  and  $A$  (since all ideas about “normality” and “abnormality” can be spread). Furthermore, for every pair of ideas— $(n_1, n_2)$  or  $(a_1, a_2)$ —the operation  $*$  *re-inscribes* Normality or Abnormality via a different rhetorical combination that communicates the same message as the pair of ideas when communicated jointly. That is,  $N$  and  $A$  are closed sets since  $n_1 * n_2 = n_1 n_2$  and  $a_1 * a_2 = a_1 a_2$  belong to  $N$  and  $A$ , respectively (Pinter, 1990, p. 20). Assumptions about what constitutes normal and abnormal are iteratively shaped and re-shaped by rhetorical choices in our discourse—still, we are constantly reifying the same standards regardless of how it is communicated (Verschuere, 2012, p. 18).

As such, these nonempty sets  $N$  and  $A$  with the operation  $*$  are considered *groups* if they satisfy the conditions of (1) being associative, (2) having a neutral element in the set that acts as an identity for every element, and (3) having an inverse for every element in the set (Pinter, 1990, p. 25). If  $N$  and  $A$  do satisfy these conditions, it opens the doors for a deeper understanding

of how contagions are spread between sets of people (at least in a poststructuralist sense), and how structures such as these can also assemble hegemonic power (Verschuere, 2012).

For condition (1), if we take  $n_1, n_2, n_3$  to be any three ways of communicating the “norm” in set  $N$ , then  $*$  is associative iff the three elements satisfy  $(n_1*n_2)*n_3 = n_1*(n_2*n_3)$  (Pinter, 1990, p. 21). The multifarious rhetorical combinations that construct distinct ways to communicate Normality are reshaped and reconstructed through discourse, but still communicate what is normal regardless of how many rhetorics amalgamate to spread such an ideology (Verschuere, 2012). So, we have that:

$$\begin{aligned} (n_1*n_2)*n_3 &= n_1n_2*n_3 \\ &= n_1n_2n_3 \\ &= n_1*n_2n_3 \\ &= n_1*(n_2*n_3) \end{aligned}$$

The operation  $*$  on set  $N$  is associative; similarly, the same notion regarding rhetorical combinations can be used to show associativity on set  $A$  for “abnormality.” **PROBLEM: Associativity here is, in a way, a relabeling. There is no guarantee it is also in the sets.**

Before talking about condition (2), it might be easier to discuss condition (3). For  $N$  and  $A$  to be groups, all elements in the group must have an inverse element. That is, define  $n_i^{-1}$  = the way an idea, thought, belief, or attitude of what it means to have a normative standard (i.e., what it means to have a “normal, abled body”) is *not* transmitted or communicated among individuals. This does not mean to talk about what an imperfect body would look like; rather, it means to engage in a space where the significance of normalcy is *un*-spoken and *un*-done, yet still retains a potency. This path thus far has been ingrained on the assumption that rhetorical choices are key to constructing discourses around Normality (and Abnormality); it has been viewed as a rhetorical situation, where rhetoric exists as the response of an event that invites utterance (see Bitzer, 1968). On the contrary, Biesecker (1989), drawing about Jacques Derrida’s (1968)

concept of *différance*, posits through postmodern conception that the space between elements—what a rhetor says or intends (implicitly or not) and what an audience hears or interprets—is just as important, if not more powerful, to the spreading of hegemony and servility. This space, this *différance*, is the origin of meaning and moves within rhetoric to create signification and to make communication possible, even when nothing is said or done to transmit an idea or thought. That said, this space resides in the set of  $N$  because it still creates a standard of normalcy that is shareable, even if rhetorical combinations are not instigators of creating this space. Rather, here,  $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, m$  for the inverse elements count the finite number of ways—element  $n^{-1}$ —remains in a space of hegemonic potency. Likewise,  $a_i^{-1}$  = the way an idea, thought, belief, or attitude of what it means to have an abnormal standard (i.e., what it means to not have an ideal form, or have a disabled body) is not transmitted or communicated among individuals, building a space for sub-humanity and servility.

With condition (2) satisfied through Derrida's (1968) *différance*, condition (3) posits a neutral element must exist in the set  $N$  or  $A$  (that acts as an identity for every element in the set) in order for  $N$  and  $A$  to be groups. For Normality, by condition (1) and (3), we can define  $\varepsilon_N = n * n^{-1} = n^{-1} * n$  (Pinter, 1990). Specifically,  $\varepsilon_N$  = the way a normative ideology of what it means to have a “perfect, abled body” is communicated (and not communicated through *différance*) among individuals. Likewise, for Abnormality,  $\varepsilon_A$  ( $\varepsilon_A = a * a^{-1} = a^{-1} * a$ ) is the way an ideology of what it means to have a disabled body is communicated (and not communicated through *différance*) among individuals. In anthropological terms, the identity function  $\varepsilon$  in these two sets is the structural principle of that governs the formation of a normative standard (or, for Abnormality, a radical alterity) (Biesecker, 1989, p. 116); it is the inception of *how to* (or how not to) transmit a contagion. The identity element  $\varepsilon_N$  resides in set  $N$  (and  $\varepsilon_A$  resides in set  $A$ )

because ideas cannot be shared (and spaces for sharing cannot exist) without it. Therefore, condition (3) is satisfied. The sets  $N$  and  $A$  with operation  $*$  are groups (Pinter, 1990).

**PROBLEM: The definition of an inverse and identity element here do not necessarily work. It is too heavily based in the realm of suggestion and postmodernity.**

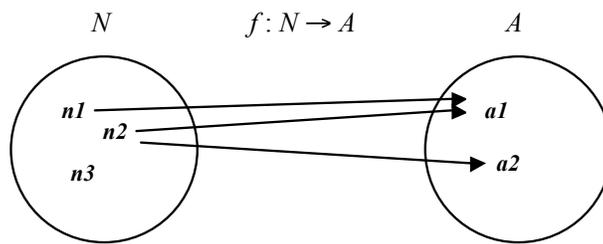
We now arrive at an important part of the path where we can begin to examine the relationship between groups  $N$  and  $A$ . Ultimately, it is the task of this path to show that elements of  $A$  (or even people of  $A$ , if using a positivist lens) are actually placed in a position of servility and alterity. That is, we want to show that elements of  $A$  are Othered by elements of  $N$ ; doing so, the alternative path would reify the presence of a cultural phenomenon like ableist Othering.

Let  $O_D$  = set of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes that are Othered (or those ideologies that are ‘lesser than,’ ‘discriminated against,’ ‘objectified,’ or ‘subverted to the margins’). We must show that the normative ideologies of nondisabled individuals transmit an infectious hegemony (or “Other”) onto the abnormal ideologies shared by disabled individuals, and that the reverse is not true (or rather, we wish to show that culturally stigmatic rhetorical choices situate people with disabilities in a position of lesser power, and that escaping that position is an impossibility). That is, we must show  $A \subseteq O_D$  through some function (or operation between sets) where nondisabled individuals use normative ideologies in  $N$  to situate disabled individuals (those who parallel abnormal ideologies in  $A$ ) to a group of individuals who are Othered.

Let  $f: N \rightarrow A$  be a mapping of the Othering process from the group of Normality to the group of Abnormality. In this case, some notation must be defined before we proceed. The set  $N$  is the *domain* of  $f$ , the set  $A$  is the *codomain* of  $f$ , and the *range* of  $f$  is the subset of  $A$  which consists of “all the images of elements” of  $N$  (Pinter, 1990, p. 57). In a social science sense, Phillips (2013) described domain and codomain as realms of “social and cultural activity” (p.

134). Here, the domain is a realm of social activity where normativity is generated; similarly, the codomain is a realm of social activity where abnormal ideology is circumscribed. There are two particular cases that could occur for this mapping, each of which will be explored: (1)  $f$  is an Othering relation, or (2)  $f$  is an Othering function.

For an Othering relation, Figure E.1 displays such a possibility.



**Figure E.1**

Here,  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  are images of the element  $n_2$  (Pinter, 1990). This possibility can occur in a social setting when one idea about Normality transmits to more than one idea about Abnormality. That is, a nondisabled person with a normative ideology can infect more than one disabled person. Further, discourse and space shared between nondisabled individuals can produce a contagion of normalcy that can infect more than one discourse and space surrounding Abnormality. If this were the case,  $f$  is called an Othering relation.

The proof of this is rather subjective since there is no guarantee that more than one element of  $A$  has been Othered by just one of the elements of  $N$ . Therefore, instead of providing a mathematical proof here, I will use the findings of the present study as a demonstration of the truthfulness of this claim. From the analysis of RQ1, the emergence of the theme of “re-inscribed perceptual discrimination” of visible and invisibility disabilities by nondisabled individuals indicates that some students (but not all) felt ostracized and colonized by professors, classmates, peers, and/or faculty. This means to say that, for some elements of  $A$ , a sense of Othering did not

occur. But for those students who did experience Othering, that hegemony could have stemmed from one source (or one idea of normativity constructed by stigmatic rhetorics); hence, it is an Othering relation. **PROBLEM: In a positivist lens, this would not sit well with quantitative scholars since proof is never subjective. The same may not be true for postpositivism.**

On the contrary,  $f$  also has the possibility of being an Othering function. For  $f$  to be a *function*, the mapping  $f: N \rightarrow A$  must assign each element of  $N$  to exactly one image of the range of  $A$ . That is,  $f$  is an Othering function defined by  $f(n) = a$  iff each element  $n_i$  of  $N$  has Othered exactly one element  $a_i$  in  $A$ . Meaning, the inputs of  $N$  can only be mapped to one output in  $A$  (e.g., from Figure E.1,  $n_2$  would have to go to either  $a_1$  or  $a_2$ , but not both). We can work under the assumption that elements of  $N$  have exactly one output if we assume a rhetorical combination of Normality constructs and circumscribes an irrational array of social behavior (e.g., slurs or social avoidances) that then dictates a particular arrangement of rhetorical choices of Abnormality that contrasts the input. That is, Derrida's (1968) *différance* (in the space between social collections  $N$  and  $A$ ) is at play—the mapping would transform an infectious ideology of normativity into behavior, which then determines specific rhetorical choices that construct how abnormalcy is communicated (whether verbally or nonverbally) in discourse. Williams (1996) postulates this notion through a historical examination of dwarfism, suggesting:

The range of the normal is great...while there exists no range for the abnormal. The normal is, therefore, relative, the abnormal absolute.... It is not in measuring some suspected deviant against an established, absolute norm that the abnormal is derived from the normal; prior to that measurement there must have occurred a comparison of beings of a range of sizes against extremes of large and small, the maximum and the minimum, for the norm to have come into existence. In this way, the abnormal always precedes the normal, making possible the definition of the normal. (p. 111)

In Williams's terms, there is exactitude to Abnormality; normative ideologies are mapped to distinct values in  $A$ . Ravenscroft (2006) amends this, stating that William's binary fails to take

into account abnormalities that slip in and out of sight; as such, there is more of an absolute *distance* “between the ‘normal’ viewer and the ‘abnormal’ subject” (p. 36). Hence, with Derrida’s *différance*, irrational behaviors act as a means of transforming normative ideas into precise ideas about what is constituted as abnormal.

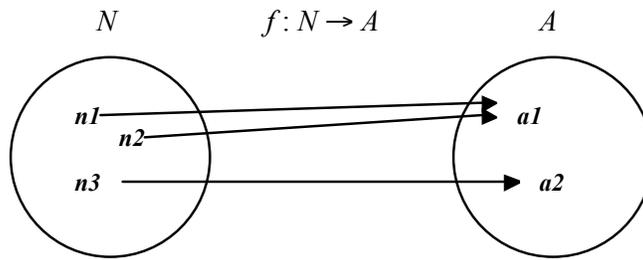
Operating under the assumption that  $f$  is a function, we can also show that all elements in  $A$  are Othered (i.e., that  $A \subseteq O_D$ ). Or rather, with the function  $f$ , we can show that every abnormal ideology in  $A$  must have been Othered by a normative ideology in  $N$ . In terms of this study, to show that disabled individuals (who align with what it means to be abnormal or have an imperfection of the body) have been Othered by nondisabled individuals (who align with what it means to be normal and have a perfect body), we must show that ideas about “ability” create irrational behaviors that then oppress every ideology of what it means to have a “disability.”

To do this, take the case that someone who is disabled experiences discrimination from more than one nondisabled individual. This would mean that a disabled person (as a rhetor for and carrier circumscribed by abnormal ideology) could act as an output for two (or more) nondisabled individuals (or any two carriers of a normative ideology). Following from the definitions outlined earlier for surjectivity, each abnormal ideology in  $A$  has been Othered by at least one normative ideology in  $N$ ) (Pinter, 1990, p. 58).

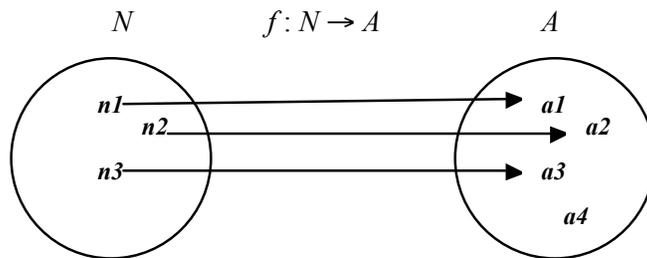
Figure E.2 shows surjectivity while Figure E.3<sup>12</sup> does not.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that Figure E.3 is an *injective* function since each element of  $A$  is the image of no more than (or is the image of at most) one element of  $N$  (Pinter, 1990, p. 57). However, for normative ideology to take on an oppressive role,  $f$  here cannot be injective (since the layering of normative ideologies on abnormal ideologies constitutes hegemony and power structuring).



**Figure E.2**



**Figure E.3**

In Figure E.3, the element  $a_4$  is not the image of any element in  $N$ , so the function is not surjective. Using this property, we wish to show  $A \subseteq O_D$  iff  $f$  is surjective. That is, if we show that every element of  $A$  is an image of  $N$ , then all elements of  $A$  are Othered by  $N$ .

Again, I will tap into a rather subjective approach to proof writing (I sense many mathematicians would roll in their graves hearing my choice) since there is no guarantee that every element of  $A$  has been Othered by an element of  $N$ . However, we can again use the findings of the present study as a demonstration of surjectivity. From the analysis of RQ1, in addition to “re-inscribed perceptual discrimination” of visible and invisibility disabilities by nondisabled individuals, the theme of “institutional propagation of hegemony” through ineffectual accommodations and excessive documentation highlights Othering. This is because an institutional dissemination is comprised of inverse elements in  $N$ —where *différance* dictates the normative ideologies that were not transmitted. The ineffectual accommodations and

excessive documentation are the results of what remains un-spoken and un-done. For those students who did not experience overt discriminatory behaviors firsthand, they nonetheless experienced the subversive power of Othering through *différance*.

What is more, recall that the operation  $*$  on  $N$  is  $n_j * n_k = n_j n_k$  for the  $j$ th and  $k$ th rhetorical combinations. This multiplicative layering of normative ideology, when mapped to an element in  $A$ , begins to circumscribe Abnormality through oppressing rhetorics of what it means to be “normal.” Further, for the elements  $a_j * a_k = a_j a_k$  (for the  $j$ th and  $k$ th rhetorical combinations in  $A$ ) and for the inverse elements  $a_i^{-1}$  (for the  $i$ th space of servility in  $A$ ), students who use transpersonal, intersubjective rhetorical agency or whose alignment to abnormal ideologies places them in a space where they experience more sub-humanity or “voicelessness” (i.e., a pre-personal, corporeal rhetorical agency) endure Othering through a juxtaposing normative ideology. Each rhetor for (or carrier of) abnormal ideology in  $A$  is situated in a position of oppression from at least one normative ideology in  $N$ . Hence, if  $f$  is surjective, then the set  $A$  belongs to the set of Othered individuals. **PROBLEM: Again, proof is never subjective in a positivist lens. Additionally, proof that lies on rhetoric to justify its construction (at least in a positivist sense) is frowned upon in the field.**

A particularly useful property that helps demonstrate the relationship of Othering between sets  $N$  and  $A$  further is the concept of a surjective homomorphism, which I think can be explored in both positivist and postpositivist ways. Pinter (1990) explains that a mapping  $f: N \rightarrow A$  defined by  $f(n) = a$  is a *homomorphism* iff  $f(n_1 * n_2) = f(n_1) * f(n_2)$ , for every  $n_1, n_2$  of  $N$  (p. 137). The proof of this is straightforward.

$$\begin{aligned}
 f(n_1 * n_2) &= f(n_1 n_2) \\
 &= a_1 a_2 \\
 &= a_1 * a_2 \\
 &= f(n_1) * f(n_2)
 \end{aligned}$$

Note it is possible that  $f(n_1n_2) = a_1a_2 = a_k$  (where normative ideologies are layered against a  $k$ th abnormal ideology and is rhetorically circumscribed by other abnormal ideologies). In addition to the surjective property of the Othering function, if there does exist a homomorphism from  $N$  onto  $A$ , then  $A$  is a *homomorphic image* of  $N$ . This particular property in the case that  $f$  is an Othering function (and that all elements of  $A$  are images of at least one element of  $N$ ) speaks volumes about cultural forces. That is, in the case of Othering, this shows how Abnormality is so uniquely tied to Normality that challenging stigmatic rhetorics may be implausible. From findings, using rhetorical agency to construct agentic coexistence between Self and Other or to re-appropriate the societal “inability” stigma may fall flat of social change against cultural phenomena. **PROBLEM: The proof for homomorphism here is, again, a relabeling.**

Lastly, it is important to note that for this algebraic-anthropological alternative path to be applicable to challenging cultural institutions, it must account for the degree of heterodoxy of disabled voices (the resistance and resilience). In the case of Figure E.2,  $f$  is not one-to-one, or injective (Pinter, 1990). That said, if the Othering function  $f$  is not injective, then it cannot have an inverse function,  $f^{-1}$  (Pinter, 1990, p. 61). This means, that if  $f$  maps multiple inputs to a select few outputs, layering normative ideologies against abnormal ideologies, then heterodoxy would have a weakened efficacy against the potentially oppressive nature of normative ideologies. In which case, this technique would fail to validate the “disabled voice” in an empirical reality. Algebraic-anthropology would need to account for resilience and resistance so that an Othering function becomes more injective (and, ultimately, bijective)—thus, creating a Self-Other unitary or agentic coexistence between disabled and nondisabled individuals.