On Being Accommodated: The Rhetorical Tactics of Disabled College Writers

By

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Chapter One

Introduction: Debating Access in Higher Education

“Disability studies needs to account for both the negative and positive valences of disability, to resist the negative by advocating for the positive and to resist the positive by acknowledging the negative—while never forgetting that this reason for being is to speak about, for, and with disabled people.” -Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*

“Disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education. Or, let me put it differently: higher education has needed to create a series of versions of “lower education” to justify its work and to ground its exceptionalism, and the physical gates and steps trace a long history of exclusion.” —Jay Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*

In September 2014, as I started working on the prelims questions that would lead to this dissertation, I was invited to participate in a conversation on a radio show hosted by a professor in the communication arts department about trigger warnings and their use in the classroom. I had started drafting an article about the “trigger warning debate” with my fellow Tumblr nerd Sarah Orem and was excited to talk through and share my positions on them. I made it clear to the host that I did not want to debate trigger warnings, because I felt the rhetorical stakes of framing them as debatable was ableist; the host assured me that it would not be a debate, at least in the formal sense, because the other guest they had asked had written a piece criticizing the conversation about trigger warnings as well.[1]

While this conversation was engaging and useful for me as a scholar, it set up a rhetorical dynamic that would become a keystone of this dissertation study: the reframing of disability

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[1] With rhetoricians, it is always a debate!

conversations away from disability. In this conversation, trigger warnings were presented as firm university policy coming from the top down, rather than as forms of grassroot student activism embedded in disability justice and broader response to the culture of sexual violence inherent in higher education. The other guest was not supportive of the use of trigger warnings in college classrooms—she reiterated three separate times that she did not use them, and most of her answers to the questions moved the conversation away from disability despite my efforts to keep that threaded through the interview. Unbeknownst to me, the conversation was transcribed in real time by a friend of the radio show host and used as the basis of a response from a local group of scholars who wrote cultural criticism as a collective. Two tenured faculty responded directly to my claims in responses written below the transcript in a post on their website; neither discussed trigger warnings as a form of disability access. I didn't know that was part of the plan. After the conversation and the subsequent blog post criticizing my stances, I wrote a measured but angry post on my own professional site that sat there as a testament to the conversation but no one personally or digitally engaged with it, as far as I could tell. (I took it down when I went on the job market this year, but it is included as an appendix to this dissertation.) [2]

I start my dissertation with this story because it was a tangible experience of the themes that I would see emerge in my research. It was a formative experience of being asked to speak from expertise, both personal and academic, to an audience unfamiliar with that experience. I was surprised by my interlocutors' resistance to understanding how disabled students might perceive their rejection of trigger warnings. To be clear, this wasn't my first rodeo—as a person with lifelong mental health issues that have deeply affected my experience as a college student and later in graduate school, being told my access practices were unacceptable wasn't new. It

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[2] You can see the interview and responses at the following link: https://www.madmutualdrift.org/trigger-warning/

was, however, the first time I felt like I had been invited to speak from my expertise as a scholar of disability, and as a disabled scholar. The interview was also a strong experience of the slippery, queer middle of what I had previously experienced as the binary of denying or granting disability access. Previously, my personal discussions about disability had resulted in either a positive or negative response, one that I could then recalibrate around and move forward. Here, I felt my experience with disability was both the position I was asked to speak from as an expert, as well as the grounds from which my expertise rendered illogical.

Rhetoric scholars have discussed at length how having a disability, particularly a mental illness, weakens a rhetor's agency by the social commonplaces about how disability affects one's phenomenological and epistemological orientation towards truth. [3] In other words, audiences often treat disabled rhetors, consciously or unconsciously, as if they lack a grasp on reality and truth itself, and thus as if their rhetoric can't be taken in good faith. Knowing and learning that through the practice of the interview I described above lead me to questions I didn't see answers for in our field. How are disabled students understood by instructors? Why is there not a rich accounting for their experience navigating the rhetorical contexts of higher education? And how do they navigate the rhetorical trials thrust upon them by less than sympathetic audiences?

As I moved through prelims and started this project, another major question emerged: How do disabled students experience writing in higher education, and how can we answer that question from their own stories? Disability scholarship in composition and rhetoric has moved in several different directions; to name a few, scholars have sought to show how disability is conceptually woven through classical rhetoric, how the writing and rhetoric of disabled subjects

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[3] See, for example, Catherine Prendergast's discussion of "rhetoricability," Cynthia Lewicki-Wilson's work on rhetoric and facilitated communication, and Melanie Yergeau's discussions of autism and demirhetoric.

are treated as diagnostic rather than agentive, how to support disabled students in the writing classroom, how technical writing can address the needs of disabled audiences, and how higher education relies on disability to maintain its elite status. However, the majority of these perspectives rely solely on archival methods, personal reflection, or theoretical exploration to do their work. To understand the experience of the rhetorical work disabled students do to write in academic contexts, I sought to build a qualitative interview project that centers their voices. As such, this project theorizes about disability rhetorics from a broad, grounded perspective, making an argument about the nature of higher education from those most impacted by its structure.

Another reason I was drawn to ask these questions with qualitative inquiry was to get out of my own head as I learned the answers. Conversations in disability studies tend to focus on the experience of one specific category of disability or modes of communication marked by disability, particularly in composition and rhetoric. For a few examples, Margaret Price's *Mad at School* theorizes about the rhetorics of mental disability in higher education. Sean Zdenek's *Reading Sounds* explores the mode of closed-captioned media and the rhetorical work done by captioners. Melanie Yergeau's *Authoring Autism* provides a profound understanding of how autistic rhetors radically redefine cultural conversations about autism. Taken as a whole, this mosaic of work is invaluable and gives us a deeper understanding of disability rhetoric more broadly. However, I wanted to know if there were shared rhetorical experiences and strategies across different experiences with disability. Given my own alternating bitterness and joy in relation to my own rhetorical experience with disability, it seemed particularly important to listen to competing narratives of disabled embodiment to grasp the commonalities and differences across them. Luckily, I did find some common rhetorical experiences and tactics—more than I expected. I also found fruitful tensions across different embodied experiences with disability—

tensions that deeply affected why or how students chose to identify with disability.

Part of this challenge arises from the difficulty of accounting for how our embodiment affects our cognitive and psychological understanding of the world, and how that accounting impacts rhetoric and communication. Here, I open this can of worms to introduce my working definition of rhetoric for this project. I draw my understanding of rhetoric from Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric,* where he defines rhetoric as "the strategic study of the circulation of power through communication" and explores how the body is "the engine for all communication" (3). To better understand how the body and mind interact, particularly in relation to disability, Margaret Price's work on the bodymind adds necessary context. The term bodymind defines the "imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called 'body' and 'mind'" (1). With this, I engage with Dolmage's definition of rhetoric and suggest it can be expanded to better encompass our understanding of disability rhetoric. To wit: the definition of rhetoric proffered here is *the circulation of power through communications between and across bodyminds*. I want to highlight that power and communication circulate not just between two bodyminds, or even one bodymind teaching 200 bodyminds, but also through the push and pull of bodyminds communicating in the context of an institution.

In this project, the broad argument I make is that disabled college writers are deeply affected by the rhetorics of disability that swirl in institutions of higher education—both structural rhetorics that orient their bodyminds in stark contrast to their non-disabled peers as well as their deeply held personal rhetorical stances about disability. Conversations about disability access in higher education have mostly avoided discussing the ableist ways that academic writing is conceptualized, and they haven't offered accommodation policies and practices that address the unique ways that writing happens and is assessed in higher education.[4] The impact of this lack upon student writers is stark. I also offer a robust consideration of the ways that having a disability strengthens a student writer's rhetorical skills, as the experience of having a disabled bodymind often creates a need for developing a deeply personalized writing process and being able to describe that process in practical as well as metacognitive terms. Of note is the multimodal nature of the writing process of someone with a disabled bodymind, a position that offers the disabled student writer a great deal of knowledge about how the technologies of writing impact writing as an activity. I also consider the productive and troubling tensions between "disabled," "student," and "writer" as identities, tensions that enrich our understandings of rhetorical identification and rhetorical theories of identity more broadly.

Methods: Lessons Learned

Before giving a roadmap for the chapters of this dissertation, I begin with an exploration of the methods and methodologies used to write it. Qualitative researchers on the whole love talking about methods—as well they should. As Smagorinksy discusses, methods should be considered the "conceptual epicenter" of a research project, not an afterthought (369). For me, the process of developing a solid sense of my methods evolved greatly over the course of the project, as ethics, technological constraints, and personal preferences emerged to affect my practice. As the project became more rhetorical, I also needed to employ methods that sussed out the rhetorical tensions present in the data. This section serves as a portrait of that emergence and accounting of how my findings came to exist. I'll start by exploring my data collection and analysis procedures, then offer some important methodological conclusions that I learned

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[4] The conversations that do exist also almost solely address undergraduate writers or faculty members. A sizable population of my interview participants were graduate students, which gave me a bigger picture about how writing worked across those different contexts.

throughout working on this project.

Data Analysis and Collection

The data for this dissertation are part of a research project consisting of 20 interviews exploring how disabled students experience college writing. The research site is at a large Midwestern university with a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Interviews were collected in two stages. First, I gathered six interviews through direct study advertisement and a limited snowball method.[5] Later, to deepen my participant pool, I revised my IRB and recruited participants through a solicitation email sent by the disability services office (DSO) at the university. I was initially reluctant to recruit participants through this channel because I wanted to maintain a balance of participants who had official accommodations from the university and those who did not. However, collaborating with disability services was crucial for collecting across a wide range of disabilities, which was a key concern for this study.

I sought to capture the widest possible range of participants for this study. To do this, I had to let go of some common boundaries used in composition research. Rather than focusing on either graduate or undergraduate student experience, I recruited both groups. This gave me a richer view of student development over time and offered me engaging comparative examples between the two groups. However, the varied experiences made it harder to trace categories of experience. I also chose not to focus on one writing program, such as the university’s first-year composition or courses in the university’s writing-intensive designation. Instead, I chose to recruit participants to talk about their experiences with writing in any classroom or program. This again led to more variety in my data but made it harder to extrapolate conclusions.

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[5] Essentially, I asked participants to pass on a physical and/or digital copy of the study flyer to peers who they thought may want to participate.

I started with questions about students' experiences asking for accommodations from professors for writing assignments and for accessing their classrooms. I revised my interview protocol to include questions directly about the writing process, as my first interviewees extensively explored their writing process in relation to these first questions. As I collected and analyzed data, three research questions arose:

- What kinds of rhetorical knowledge do disabled students learn that helps them access writing classrooms?
- How do disabled students identify with or against disability as an identity, and how do they use that identity in their writing?
- How do disabled students experience the embodiment of writing, and how do the particular contexts of college writing affect that experience?

In terms of coding, I used a combination of open, in-vivo, and versus coding to tease out meaning from the data in my first round (Saldaña 70, 74, 93). My use of versus coding helped me understand the rhetorical dynamics at play, as it revealed and clarified tensions. I then used focused coding to build categories and understand what concepts, experiences, and argument my participants presented across their interviews. Though this is not a grounded theory study, I am influenced by a constructivist approach that builds codes and categories from the data rather than an approach that applies theory to data (Charmaz; Saldaña). This approach helped me to articulate findings in relation to the relevant research in composition studies, such as transfer, while supporting those findings with multiple examples across my data.

At the start of this project, centering the voices of disabled student writers was a central goal. When I proposed this dissertation, no extant qualitative research from students' perspectives about disability existed in composition and rhetoric, and at its completion, little scholarship in that vein has emerged. This is not just a “gap” in the research; given the wide variety of scholarship in composition and rhetoric that focuses on student experiences, it is a huge omission. Adding rich qualitative research about disability from students’ perspectives is an important way we can, as Christina V. Cedillo urges, “move beyond recognition of audience diversity as an abstract concept to teach writing using approaches that engage critical embodiment to contest conditions that create exclusion.” In addition to the context of teaching writing, Cedillo’s statement is particularly resonant for me here because, to me, the lack of qualitative scholarship from the perspective of disabled students posits the audiences of our scholarship and the audiences of our classroom practice as “abstract,” or in this case, where disability is absent. Indeed, my participants felt this frequently, that they were alone in their classroom as the “only” disabled student, or sometimes the *first* disabled students in a course.

An important methods consideration is that the data here narrate only one side of the story. All of my participants explore and unpack complex interactional phenomenon and provide sensitive and often painful stories filled with characters that are good, evil, and everywhere in between. Often, these stories provide unflattering portrayals of teachers and professional staff that my participants worked with, and it can be easy to cast these individuals as villains. To avoid such reduction, I have tried to contextualize how these stories exist within an ableist institution that impacts all teacher-student interactions and amplify the pain caused by explicitly ableist encounters. I write this not to absolve the actors represented in my participants' stories, but to remind the reader that all teachers and administrators are responsible for the way that ableism circulates and plays out in institutional contexts, not just the "bad apples" who hurt their students.

Given that there has been an expanding body of work in composition and rhetoric about disability, I began my study with the aim of learning how disabled students experience college classes with writing. I discovered through my first few interviews that my participants had a complex and frequently negative relationship with the word “disability,” and few openly identified themselves as disabled. As scholars such as Sami Schalk, Jasbir Puar, and Nirmala Erevelles have explored, having access to disability as an identity is often only available to white middle class disabled people. Drawing my participants from a university with a reputation for not supporting students of color further complicated the racial dynamics of identifying as disabled. At the university in question, as well as at many others, disabled students of color face comparably higher barriers of access to higher education to white disabled students and non-disabled students of color. I chose to invite students “who have a disability” to broaden the experience with and relationship to disability among my participants, compared to using phrasing such as “disabled students.” I did not require that participants be registered with the disability resource center (DRC), both to get a broader perspective and to learn how disabled students who don’t interact with campus disability services view those services.

Part of the difficulty and beauty of collecting and interpreting interview data is trying to bridge the difference between how your participants want to be perceived versus the less polished portrait that lurks beneath their words. Some of my participants were acutely aware that I would be completing this task and joked with me about it in the interview. Some participants took advantage of being interviewed to understand their own experience with disability more deeply. Franco described this the most openly:

> When I got the call for interviews, I was like, "Oh man, I can totally spin my life as a disability, and I've never talked about it as a disability before." And so, this is all kind of new to me, and I want to incorporate what I'm learning here into my practice of writing tutoring.

Franco was not the only one to spin her life for me, to reframe her experience from a perspective that she rarely acknowledged but nonetheless deeply influenced her life. Because identifying as disabled was such a fraught process even for those who had come to see that as a constitutive part of their identity that they regularly claimed, one thing I learned from this dissertation is how we all "spin our lives" in relation to disability when it emerges for us.

I asked my participants to explicitly describe how they wanted to talk about their disability, because I wanted to reflect their language even if it created some challenges in comparison during coding. Some of my participants had very explicit desires for how I talked about their disability; others left the language up to me. Asking this question led me to better apprehend the potential impact of my research. Danielle's response made me think; after I asked her what language she wanted me to use, she said, "Definitely maybe say dyslexia and kinda talk about what it is. Because even though I mentioned that it was somewhat like mainstream, I feel like people still don't know." Danielle's response helped me recognize that my participants might see their own participation in my project as a form of advocacy, as a way of furthering knowledge and raising awareness of disability, even when individual conditions seem "mainstream."

While I didn't seek out a multimodal method of collecting data, conducting interviews about experiences with disability meant my participants shared and demonstrated the tools they used to write in our time together. Participants who used a specific system for writing using, say, a laptop and a tablet in tandem, were eager to show me how these systems worked. Memorably, one participant showed me the color-coded to-do list that she had scrawled on her arm in various permanent markers, rolling back her sleeve so that I could see how she was currently prioritizing her academic assignments. A moment from Wolf's interview captures this challenging and fascinating dynamic of interviews about disability:

> …another tool that really helped me with writing is this sheet. This is recommended by the therapist. It's a sheet that you can put a piece of paper on it, and it's not slipping [pulls rubber sheet out of his bag, places it under piece of paper]. So, I can write it down [scribbles on paper] whatever words. I can even write on the bottom, and that's really nice [demonstrates writing on the bottom of the sheet of paper]. So, in comparison without it [demonstrates without sheet]. I use this a lot, basically every time I need to do handwriting, I take it out, and then put it under the blank paper.

Wolf here punctuated moments of his dialogue with gesture and action, and when I transcribed the data, I faced the challenge of recreating this moment from memory and the sound on the tape. My hearing loss further limited my ability to summarize and capture all the moments I had like this, until I learned in the interview process to verbally describe what my participants were doing in the interview. This suggests that future research should consider how video data or verbal-visual descriptions on recordings could be a useful aid when doing interviews engaging with questions of disability.

Chapter 1 Overview

The aim of chapter one is to develop the concept of "accommodation transfer," or the act of gaining rhetorical knowledge needed to write with a disabled bodymind throughout different contexts of college writing. To accomplish accommodation transfer, disabled students *learn what they need to know* to write, as well as *how to communicate* that need with professors. As a brief example, Wolf's experience shows how disability can cause the need to learn new embodied skills to complete writing tasks:

> Before my injury, I did enjoy writing because I could write pretty nice, it looks nice actually.

> But now I don't. It's a pain. It's totally different when I use a nondominant hand to write. Sometimes my hand doesn't listen to me. When you want to write the word, my hand behaves differently. When I want to draw a circle, my hand isn't drawing a circle. It might end up with the square, not like a circle at first. But now it's getting better. At first, it didn't feel good.

When Wolf's hand stopped listening to him, he had to re-train his hand and mind to work together to produce text. For many disabled students, relearning the physical process of writing or how to ameliorate the physical pain caused by writing was an important skill, among others explored in chapter one. Once students know their writing needs, they have to learn rhetorical skills to communicate those needs to instructors who are often unfamiliar with disability or recalcitrant to change their course structures. These two skills occur dynamically; students' needs and desires for their writing process change as they develop as writers and as their writing contexts change from semester to semester.

In addition to physical remediation, accommodation transfer also encompasses the emotional and cognitive aspects of disability and the rhetorical work students do to move through their writing classrooms.[6] Part of accommodation transfer, particularly for students with mental illness, involves learning how to speak for oneself when disability impacts their rhetorical agency. As many scholars in composition and rhetoric have described, being perceived as disabled affects a rhetor's persuasiveness. Ozymandias named this dynamic directly in our interview:

> Like even one of my professors, when I flat out said, I talked about being, you know, having

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[6] Thinking about accommodations as a form of rhetorical work is explored in depth by Annika Konrad in "Reimagining Work: Normative Commonplaces and Their Effects on Accessibility in Workplaces" and in her forthcoming work.

> a disability, she was like I wonder what it would be like to be an academic world and being open about being disabled. You know, when you're publishing papers, when you're putting out things, you know. That people can question you based on your mental illness or whatever. That your reality is compromised. That your word doesn't mean as much. That, you know, were vulnerable because we can't speak up for ourselves.

Thus, accommodation transfer is not just a personal process, but an interactional and rhetorical one that involves negotiating the stigma surrounding disability in the spaces where college writing occurs.

Chapter 2 Overview

In chapter two, I explore how disabled students experience the chronos and kairos of academia. Here, I examine how rhetoric's two conceptions of time—chronos, or clock time, and kairos, or timeliness—impact writing for disabled students. I use three concepts of time from queer theory and disability studies to underpin my analysis of academic time. I use these theoretical conversations to highlight how chronos functions as our felt sense of time. As such, it is deeply felt by disabled writers as they navigate the timing of college writing. I also offer the concept of "chronic constraints" to describe the largely artificial timelines placed on academic writing, such as deadlines; I argue such constraints are meant to mimic a certain timeliness related to capitalist production rather than an actual literacy or rhetorical benefit for student writers. Turning to my data, I identify three key categories that name some of the practices disabled students use to negotiate time and timing for college writing.

First, I explore *dynamic planning*, or the multimodal, cross-platform systems of planning some disabled students use to crip and stretch time as they move through the work of being a student. Next, I describe *strategic avoidance,* the strategic skipping of work tasks or writing process stages to acquire enough time to complete writing tasks. Finally, I examine *manipulating chronic constraints*, which is the particular use of institutional policies like extensions to gain enough quantitative time to complete writing assignments.

Chapter 3 Overview

In Chapter 3, I discuss how writers use disidentification as a rhetorical tactic to negotiate their disability identity in higher education. As students grapple with diagnosis, bureaucratic markers of identity, and their relationships to instructors and classmates, they develop a complicated relationship to disability identity and often use disidentifcation as a tactic for negotiating disability identity. A concept developed by José Esteban Muñoz, disidentification details how rhetors use the intersectional nature of identity to "recycle and rethink encoded meaning" in an effort to benefit the rhetor (31). Alexander and Rhodes note how disidentification is a rhetorical practice, describing it as "the ways in which one situates oneself both within and against the various discourses through which we are called to identify." Examining how disabled student writers use disidentification enriches our understanding of their experience with disability identity.

Conclusion Overview

I conclude my dissertation with consideration of mentoring as an important practice for supporting disabled student writers. Drawn directly from my participants' answers to the question of how instructors could best support them, this chapter outlines how mentors can approach their work with students critically in ways that push back against the ableist structures of academia. Mentorship is less discussed in our conversations about teaching writing in relation to models of instruction that are not one-on-one, but mentorship does have a deep impact on the success of disabled student writers. I describe how my participants outline a model of critical mentorship. This is a model of mentorship aware of the facilitation of difference, the flow of power in higher education, and the impact of both disability and being a student on a writer's bodymind.

Chapter Two

Learning Keywords: Accommodation Transfer as a Rhetorical Skill

Introduction

When Abigail began experiencing symptoms related to autonomic dysfunction, her understanding of her body shifted in relation to both health and writing. Abigail's chronic illness emerged as she started college, and it took a long time for her to learn how to manage it. Abigail measured the impact of her chronic illness against her completion of academic writing tasks. As she describes, "There were a lot of times where I was like, 'I can't write this right now. Maybe it's because of the antidepressant I'm on, which I may or may not need because they're trying to figure out what's wrong with me. But also, I'm not sleeping right now, so I can't turn this in.'" For Abigail, the bodily experience of figuring out her chronic illness merged with her experience of navigating college writing. As she learned how to write in academic contexts, she also learned what writing process worked best with her disabled body and how to ask for the accommodations she needed to complete academic writing tasks. Along the way, we will also study how disabled students navigate the chronotopic lamination that surrounds academic writing, enriching our understanding of the relationship between the materials and institutions that frame writing in relation to the bodymind.

Abigail's intertwined experience illustrates how disabled college students negotiate both having a disability and writing in college. In the interviews with disabled college writers I have collected, my participants discussed the challenge of this negotiation. Having a disability in college requires learning specific rhetorical skills connected to broader transferrable writing and rhetorical knowledge. I call this process accommodation transfer, or learning to transfer the rhetorical skills and knowledge needed to get accommodations for writing in academic settings.

Accommodation transfer describes the process of learning how to get accommodations for college writing by using key writing and rhetorical skills gained through, as one participant described it, “a lot of trial and error.” Influenced by experiences across classrooms, disabled students learn how to ask for accommodations while also adapting writing skills across academic contexts. Accommodations are rhetorical, meaning that because of the structured inaccessibility of higher education, students have to argue for accommodations in higher education classrooms. In this chapter, I will consider how disabled students learn how to adapt their writing processes and argue for their accessibility needs around writing through a process of transferring rhetorical knowledge across contexts.

Defining the Relationship Between Transfer and Accommodation

To begin to address this inquiry, I will ground this project in the current research about transfer in writing studies and interrogate the concept of accommodation. Pairing accommodation with transfer as a term has a similar purpose to how "writing" is paired with transfer in our field. Across different studies of writing transfer, putting the two terms together allowed for scholars to explore not only which writing knowledge or skills move between contexts, but also how that movement occurs and the best way to teach it. For accommodation transfer, my focus is on identifying the skills needed to access classrooms across contexts for disabled college students as well as examining how students claimed they learned those skills.

Drawn from educational psychology, transfer in its simplest definition is the process of students using and applying knowledge across different contexts, for either positive or negative gain of knowledge in a new context (Perkins and Salomon 22). Initially, writing studies scholars sought to understand whether writing skills could be transferred from composition classrooms to other academic contexts. Studies of the application of transfer to writing instruction have laid the groundwork for exploring what types of curricula, genres, and modes of instruction support students’ transfer of writing knowledge (Moore). Conversations about transfer in composition have broadened to consider how student identity, social contexts, and extracurricular experiences shape writing transfer. For instance, key pieces in transfer research explore how transfer employs the remix of new and old knowledge to approach new tasks, how transfer is shaped by social contexts, and how knowledge built outside of the classroom plays a key role in writing transfer (Yancey et. al.; Reiff and Bawarshi; Clark and Hernandez). Writing transfer scholarship has also sought to understand how students’ identities and experiences shape their ability to transfer writing knowledge. For example, Corinne Hinton shows how veterans transfer the embodied institutional knowledge of their military experience into their college writing contexts, which “complicate[s] the novice-to-expert paradigm as an approach to writer development in first-year composition.” Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells have also begun to explore how student dispositions, such as self-efficacy, purportedly help or hinder writing transfer.

Defining accommodation transfer follows the path of this research by exploring the institutional constraints that affect the transfer of writing knowledge for disabled students. The research focused on writing transfer, identity, and student experience also asks us to consider how institutional structures and extracurricular experiences shape writing transfer. What drew me in particular to the concept of accommodation transfer was how it functioned as a form of writing and rhetorical education learned outside of the formal structure of the classroom—and frequently without aid from any mentor. While disabled students are given tools from disability services, they often still learn the most rhetorically effective ways to get accommodations for their writing assignments on their own, through trial and error.

This chapter explores the knowledge about accommodations disabled students develop and transfer alongside writing knowledge. Many disabled students develop and apply transferable rhetorical knowledge to access college writing tasks through interactions with instructors, disability documentation, and the connection between disability and identity. Disabled students transfer accommodation knowledge in two key ways: learning how to meet the needs of their bodyminds while writing and learning rhetorical knowledge for getting accommodations for writing assignments (Price, “The Bodymind Problem”). These two methods emerged as subcodes in my qualitative inquiry, bringing together a great deal of the rhetorical work that students did to create environments where they could write academically. The transfer of accommodation knowledge helps us understand how complex rhetorical knowledge not directly related to writing tasks is part of the larger project of transferring writing knowledge across contexts.

As mentioned in my introduction, I draw the concept “bodymind” from Margaret Price’s exploration of the term. Price describes the bodymind as “the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called ‘body’ and ‘mind.’” (269) With its roots in trauma theory, the term “bodymind” is more than a placeholder for “body and mind,” but instead an effort to name the material phenomenon of how the body and the mind affect one another together. Describing her use of the term, Price explains:

> According to this approach, because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other—that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two—it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term (269).

I use the term “bodymind” in this project to draw attention to the “imbricated” relationship between the body and mind while writing, a relationship made particularly visible when discussing writing processes with disabled writers. The concept of bodymind is useful as well when thinking about accommodation transfer, as it captures the ways that disabled students experienced their bodies and minds together as learners, trying to work through the shifts in their bodyminds without being able to clearly isolate a cognitive or bodily condition that affected their learning. Thinking about how the body and mind work together, or even cause tensions with one another, helps us understand the simultaneity of the cognitive and physical actions that make up writing and literate activity, which becomes particularly important to understand when considering the writing processes of disabled students.

Because disabled students must create compelling arguments for their accommodations, this project draws on transfer research that explores how transfer functions rhetorically. As Rebecca Nowacek describes, the transfer of writing knowledge is a rhetorical act of recontextualization (Nowacek 19). Understanding transfer rhetorically helps us see how transfer involves reconstructing knowledge in different environments and through different affective attunements (Nowacek 25, 26). For accommodation transfer, disabled students break apart different skills they have learned to approach writing and negotiate their instructors' affective relationships with disability when requesting accommodations. Explorations of how students transfer genre-related knowledge help us see how students use prior genre knowledge across different contexts (Reiff and Bawarshi 313). Disabled students test and take up many different genres when asking for accommodations, such as writing emails to instructors and different approaches to communicating verbally with instructors that I will explore later in the chapter.

Accommodation transfer includes learning rhetorical skills to gain accommodation in part because a person's status as disabled impacts their rhetorical agency. In composition and rhetoric, the focus on the impact of disability on one's rhetorical agency has focused primarily on mental and emotional disabilities. Catherine Prendergast, speaking about her advocacy and allyship for a friend with schizophrenia, notes that "to be disabled mentally is to be disabled rhetorically," or in fairly simple terms, that people choose to not listen to your speech or read your writing *as rhetorical,* as rooted in a logical argument, when you are mentally ill (202). In *Authoring Autism*, Melanie Yergeau frames the term "demi-rhetoricity" as a "strategy" used to deny autistic people rhetorical agency:

> As a construct, demi-rhetoricity enables clinicians to claim the best of both worlds when they respond to autistic disclosures: (1) they can argue that autistic people are not autistic enough to make claims about autism; and (2) they can likewise argue that autistic people are too autistic to make claims about autism (32).

Demi-rhetoricity is similar to the rhetorical challenge many of the students I talked with faced. Their experience with disability meant they were either too disabled to be college students in the eyes of their instructors and fellow students, or not disabled enough to warrant accommodations. Sam, for example, was told point-blank by a biology professor that he could not enroll in her class because he was blind—the instructor saw him as "too disabled" to complete the lab portion of the class. Because Rose often chose not to disclose early in the class, they had to frequently over-disclose their symptoms to seem "disabled enough" for intervention when their symptoms flared up.[7]

Importantly, the findings of this dissertation extend a similar experience with demi-rhetoricity across many different kinds of experiences of disability, particularly in the context of higher education. While physically disabled students may not have their writing and rhetoric questioned due to their mental state, they may face similar challenges with the reduction of their

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[7] Rose uses they/them pronouns.

rhetorical agency because of doubt that they can complete tasks at the same pace as their classmates. The force of demi-rhetoricity is also influenced by what Dolmage describes in *Disability Rhetoric* as “disability drift,” a myth about disability whereby “physical disabilities are equated with mental disabilities and vice versa” that shapes the rhetorical encounters of those with physical disabilities (36). In other words, the nature of disability broadly creates a rhetorical environment where disabled rhetors’ claims are doubted, particularly claims about the needs of their own bodyminds.[8]

Accommodation transfer draws upon transfer research exploring the different domains of knowledge writers develop as they become skilled writers. In Anne Beaufort’s model of the knowledge that expert writers draw upon to compose, five overlapping domains of knowledge interact: writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and discourse community knowledge (Beaufort 45). Disabled students’ experience with these knowledge paradigms often requires rhetorical intervention within the discourse community of the university. Gaining knowledge in these five domains requires disabled students to move away from normative forms of these knowledges and use their embodied knowledge to negotiate with academic audiences for their writing. To return to the example I opened with, Abigail had to quickly test and acquire new knowledge about the writing process, rhetorical knowledge, and norms of the discourse community as her chronic illness emerged. She had learned about the “right” process—drafting, revising, and finalizing a draft—but couldn’t anticipate when she might need more time with one of those steps. Through this process, she squared her old knowledge about the “right” writing process with new knowledge about what process fit for her. Because the needs of her process changed to one that did not fit the norms of

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[8] For an engaging popular example of this phenomenon, see the Twitter hashtag “#abledsareweird”.

an academic discourse community, she had to learn rhetorical knowledge to communicate her accessibility needs with instructors. These rhetorical skills had to be sensitive not only to her needs, which would change over time, but to the different rhetorical contexts of classes across the curriculum.

With these concepts in mind, we can understand the two processes that constitute accommodation transfer. Disabled students learn what writing processes work best for them, often in contrast to the common narrative of the “correct” writing process. In particular, learning this writing process involves repurposing skills learned from past writing instruction and exploring spaces and technologies for writing. After learning what process works best for them, many disabled students learn rhetorical skills for communicating their needs with instructors—often in terms of accommodations sanctioned by the university. These two processes occur non-linearly. In other words, disabled students engage with the transfer of accommodation knowledge related to writing by moving between testing and exploring the writing process knowledge and rhetorical knowledge to access writing in college classrooms. Because institutionally-sanctioned accommodations rarely address the structures of the writing classroom or the nature of writing assignments, even students with documented disabilities must learn how to argue for accommodations in classrooms where writing is the primary means of assessment (Dolmage, "Mapping Composition"). Even with the guidance of disability services, it takes experimentation and time to know what type and degree of modification one needs to write.

Instead of another term like “access,” my choice to use the term “accommodation” in this article is intentional. First, many of my participants used the term “accommodation” to describe their needs and their interactions with their professors. Not all participants did this consistently, though some did use it very consistently in surprising ways. Jen, who was the most critical of the institutional structure of accommodations at the university, spoke almost exclusively of her negotiations with professors as “accommodations.” I changed my protocol after a few interviews because I thought that my use of the term encouraged interviewees to respond in kind. Even after changing my protocol to be more open-ended, interviewees tended to talk about their experiences in terms of “accommodation” unless they had been exposed to conversations about access or universal design in education.

When working with the category that would become “accommodation transfer,” I considered using the term “access transfer” because I initially felt that access captured the embodied and spatial elements of the rhetorical skills that disabled students learn. In disability studies, there are important differences between the terms “accommodation” and “access,” and these differences also played into my choice to use the term “accommodation” for this concept. As Tanya Titchkosky explains in her foundational book *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning*, access is “a complex form of perception that organizes socio-political relations between people in social space” (Titchkosky 131). Access is a phenomenological orientation, exploring how bodies interact in spaces that are not built for them physically, socially, or intellectually. However, as I grappled with naming the category that arose from my rounds of coding, I realized that my participants were describing the rhetorical knowledge they needed to navigate the structured relationship to classroom access formed by institutional literacies surrounding disability.

Specifically, they were talking about “accommodations,” which picks up on interpretations of access that dominate higher education. At the large Midwestern university where I collected my interviews, the disability services office approves students to receive institutional accommodations through a process of providing documentation of disability from medical professionals. Institutional accommodations include working with advisors sensitive to particular experiences with disability, referrals to campus services, and a laminated letter to share with instructors providing accommodation guidance.[9] The laminated letter, called a VISA or Verified Individualized Services and Accommodation form, provides a checklist of accommodations that the student can request from instructors.[10] This letter had an intense rhetorical impact on how students described their needs, whether or not they had formal accommodations from the university. Indeed, while few students discussed how VISAs related to their identity as students in the body of interviews analyzed for this dissertation, the rhetorical force behind framing accommodations as a visa into the classroom struck me with its metaphorical connection to immigration. In short, the writers I interviewed frequently framed their language in response to the institutional system for providing classroom accommodations, even if they themselves did not use that system. Such framing is consistent with other studies that explore the influence of documentation on rhetorical and literacy-based self-expression, such as Kate Vieira's work on the impact of documentation on immigrants in the United States (Vieira, *American by Paper* and "Undocumented in a Documentary Society"). Students' use of the language of the institution is also similar to how medicalized discourse can influence disability discourse; Drew Holladay, for example, explores how psychiatric technical writing used for diagnosis permeates how those with mental illness talk about themselves and their

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[9] It is important to note that while all college have institutional forces that address the needs of disabled student, the way that these sites rhetorically construct disability and interface with students can be drastically different. From personal undergraduate experience, I attended a tiny liberal arts college where disability services were managed by one person on a more case-by-case basis. A broader exploration of how disability services offices rhetorically construct disability, access, and accommodation would greatly benefit our field.

[10] At the time of writing this dissertation, the disability services office moved to a different model of delivering accommodation information to faculty—an electronic interface where professors downloaded students' institutional accommodation form. The office had moved away from the term VISA to describe this form, changing the name to a "Faculty Notification Letter" or FNL for short.

experiences.

Accommodations, as other scholars such as Jay Dolmage have described, function as an addition or modification of a broader course design rather than a transformation of the educational environment (Dolmage, "Mapping Composition"). Disabled college writers are forced to learn rhetorical skills to manage accommodations because they will experience many writing-focused classrooms not designed for disabled experiences. As Barber-Henley and Hamel describe, writing teachers should be concerned with how the current systems of accommodations at most institutions of higher educations are

- "Product-oriented," meaning that they are "designed to modify the final outcome" of a project rather than to reconceptualize the project (526)
- "Top-down," or designated by a federal mandate with less attention to individual needs (526)
- Not oriented towards writing because they do not "explicitly accommodate for the writing process" necessary to complete college writing tasks (526)
- "Student-initiated," meaning that they require the student to describe their needs in terms of federal mandates rather than impacting overall course or program design (527).

Current structures of accommodations in higher education require that students learn rhetorical skills to address the gap between their experiences and needs to flourish as writers with the structures of both the writing classroom and institutional accommodations. Describing the knowledge disabled students learn and transfer as "accommodation knowledge" thus felt most appropriate.[11]

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[11] In *Academic Ableism*, Dolmage claims Barber-Henley and Hamel did not disclose their affiliation with the

Learning What You Need: Bridging the Bodymind and the Writing Process

Introduction

Neil: I was going to ask about things you find challenging about writing, but I think a better way to get into that would be to talk about what your writing process is like, and what you do and how that works for you.

Sam: It's something. It's in development.

Neil: Mine is too.

Sam: I think everyone's is too, through their whole life if they're a writer.

The students I interviewed described an important developmental process for writing in college: *adapting the writing process to their needs*. This concept, which represents one of the categories that arose from my data analysis, entails the task of learning what kind of writing process suits a disabled writer's needs. As Beaufort highlights, writing process knowledge is one of the important domains that students must master to become expert writers. For disabled students, learning a writing process that works often requires going against typical narratives of a successful process. Some of my participants needed to use different tools to write across various stages to complete assignments; some would write on whiteboards, compose by hand, or write in programs like Scrivener in order to break up the different cognitive processes writing draws upon. For others, learning a writing process required negotiating the pain caused by writing or

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Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center. The SALT Center offers a paid alternative tutoring service for students with learning disabilities and has been critiqued by many disability scholars, including Dolmage, for being a pay-for-play accommodation that privileges disabled students with disposable wealth. I could not verify that Barber-Henley and Hamel were affiliated with SALT at the time of writing this dissertation, and their criticisms of accommodations are useful. However, further writing I do on this will need to explore how arguments against accommodations that are not connected to disability justice can be holstered to support neoliberal models of self-advocacy that hurt many disabled students.

letting go of work that feels incomplete. Some needed to learn how to manage the risk of injury that writing can cause to our bodyminds, or directly harm their bodyminds in order to write. Adapting a writing process is imbricated with transfer, as my participants described how they learned skills across different contexts that made their way into their writing processes. In other words, disabled students described needing to learn over time the best writing process for themselves in order to describe what they need to instructors. When discussing her process for asking for accommodations, Abigail put it briefly: “it was newer, and I didn’t have a sense of what I actually need.”

Writers learned how to modify their bodies and the relationship between their bodies and environments in order to write productively in ways that directly related to their disabilities. Similarly to Stacey Pigg’s findings that “public social places like coffeehouses and social learning spaces offer a temporary place to dwell and locate writing, which is a need experienced by composers who work and learn with smartphones, laptops, and tablets,” disabled writers shape and create spaces that reflect the adaptations of their bodyminds and writing technologies (251-252). While this process is similar to how many writers come to find a process that works well for them, disabled writers often have to negotiate specifically with the needs of their disabled bodyminds. Franco described the need to find a noise that would help facilitate her thinking that could keep her engaged but also not distract her—the perfect noise for her was her partner playing video games. Ana described how diabetes interrupted her writing process, requiring her to switch between bodily maintenance and the “flow” of writing: “[D]iabetes interrupts a lot of things. It interrupts the writing process because I have to be eating or insulating, which is what I call it…Giving myself insulin. So, that's something interrupts--if what I'm doing that day is writing, that will interrupt the writing because I have to be monitoring it.”

In addition to dealing with interruptions, writers often needed to chemically modify their bodies in order to write. For example, Abigail learned over time to eat foods that would raise her blood pressure to help her write: “I used to do shots of soy sauce [before writing] because when I was first diagnosed and it was really bad, I was told that sodium would be really good for me. It still is--if I'm feeling really awful and I need to wake up, then eating something salty works.” These different examples of bodily and spatial modification to prepare for writing reveal how learning about the embodiment of writing is crucial to developing a successful writing process for disabled college students.

To illustrate what happens when students learn what they need to know about their bodyminds in order to write, I will offer one representative case: an older return-to-college student named Sam with low vision who developed his own method of composing with an iPad. Sam’s story shows us how disabled students often begin from a point of bodymind failure or misfit as they learn how to write in academic contexts; rather than composing happening as a “fluid chain” as described by Prior and Shipka, the process of learning what you need as a disabled writer often works like a broken chain.[12]

Dealing with the Broken Chain

Part of learning what you need to know to write is also learning and embracing the relationship of your bodymind to the processes that constitute writing. Many scholars in composition and rhetoric have explored how writers build environments and mold writing processes that nestle into contours of their lives and homes. Paul Prior and Jody Shipka describe this process as “chronotopic lamination,” or “the dispersed, fluid chains of places, times, people,

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[12] For a deeper exploration of misfitting, see Elisabeth Miller’s work in “Literate Misfitting: Disability Theory and a Sociomaterial Approach to Literacy.”

and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action along with the ways multiple activity footings are held and managed.” For disabled students, learning what parts of the “fluid chain” of chronotopic lamination work best for them to complete tasks require experience and experimentation. One key difference for disabled student writers is that their writing process involves choices, technologies, times, and spaces that may be in direct conflict with their desired writing process. Rather than a process that has changed over time to "fit" the writer, many disabled students have to embrace a process by necessity rather than by choice in order to write in academic contexts. This subtle shift complicates common narratives about the writing process (and teaching the writing process) in composition studies.

Prior and Shipka begin to explore how constraints, as well as choices and preferences, affect their arrangement of their writing process. They hint at how one writer in their study managed chronic pain frequently caused by academic writing when describing her work station arrangement: “Among the material conditions she described was the fact that both her computers used two keyboards, one of which was set at her feet so that she could hit the space bar and the backspace key with her toes and thus relieve stress on her hands and wrists”. In this example, the arrangement of the writer's writing space is affected not only by preferences she has developed over time, but also the pain that she experiences while writing for long periods of time. Many of the writers I interviewed had similar relationships with the spaces and technologies they used for writing. All of the blind and visually impaired students I interviewed, for instance, had jury-rigged their own systems for reading and writing academic texts using tablets, multiple large monitors, and other typically expensive equipment paid for out of pocket to complete writing tasks. These systems did not always fit the desires that these writers had for how they would like to experience their process. Simone, for example, lamented that she couldn't read outside unless she invested in a new Kindle; as she put it, "I'd also like to be able to read outside…But I can't. Unless, I mean, I should try one of the new Kindles. But I cannot read the iPad or my laptop outside." As I'll explore in this chapter, we need a robust understanding of how concepts like chronotopic lamination, which explore the embodied, networked nature of writing, intersect with the realities of the embodiment of disability. Indeed, the metaphor of motion used to describe chronotopic lamination—the "fluid chain" of actions and actors that constitute the practice of literacy—begins to break down in complex and compelling ways when we understand how disabled writers experience the writing process. In many cases, what breaks the chain for disabled academic writers are their unsympathetic audiences of instructors who demand inaccessible formats for writing assignments. To explore the formation and breakdown of the "fluid chain" in relation to the concept of "learning what you need," we'll explore Sam's story. Through this, I intend to show how students transfer writing and accommodation knowledge as they practice chronotopic lamination.

To do this connecting work, I want to extend the metaphor of Prior and Shipka's "fluid chain" to a different kind of chain: a bike chain. We might think of the writing process that students learn to write in college as a bike chain that is an essential piece of a system meant to produce forward motion. Without a chain, you won't get very far, but you don't think about it very often. Many students never need to think about their bike chain; some students have expensive bikes that they can store in climate-controlled environments, others don't need to ride their bike all that often (though they find their chain rusted out when they do). Chains require maintenance that often is contradictory in nature; you need to lube your chain all the time, but you also need to wipe all the lube off of your chain unless you want it to get grimy, for example. Chains stretch with use and start to catch on the gears, grinding them down. Disabled students might be particularly aware of how their chain is starting to stretch, how it is noisily misaligned, how it skips gears, or how it snapped once in the middle of traffic.

Sam's description of his writing process reveals both how writers move within the fluid chain of actions that produce texts as well as how our bodyminds can gunk up and break the chain. In particular, he described the tension between the content of his writing, and the "condition of the content," meaning the small spelling and style errors he sometimes made in his writing due to his low vision. Sam, a blind return-to-college student in his senior year of college, developed a writing process that flowed between multiple computers and devices but that got stuck on the minutia required of academic texts. Sam was in his mid-60s and had learned how to use mobile and laptop technology to accomplish most of his reading and writing tasks. As he described:

> I write on an iPad, and that way I can hold it much closer. I mean, I've got a MacBook and I've got a larger iPad. I've got a 12.9 inch one that I use for writing a lot. And I've got a keyboard for that. But a lot of times I can hold it so much closer I just use the virtual keyboard. My major problem isn't so much the writing. I had a lot of people take off for the typos and stuff…It's not the content so much, it's the condition of the content. I mean I can't see over a whole page. I'm working with parts of a page.

Sam was a self-assured writer who demonstrated confidence in the quality of his ideas in academic writing, but he struggled with the formatting and style constraints of academic writing across disciplines. He learned this system of moving between his iPad and other ways to produce text over time and in relation to the constraints of finding and reading research materials for his papers in political science, history, and English courses. His experience echoes Hensley-Owens' reflection on how composing with voice-to-text reveals that "the affordances and constraints of writing technologies…are not always equally balanced—the slightest shift in physical capability heavily weights the constraints side of the equation.” With Sam, his use of technology allowed him to quickly compose academic texts but did not allow him to polish his academic writing in the way expected of many instructors. In terms of chronotopic lamination, Sam had to account for the role of unsympathetic readers intent on breaking the fluid chain of his writing. Working with “parts of a page,” he often could not see or distinguish between different sizes of font or find smaller errors in his writing. Additionally, his use of autocorrect and predictive text software meant sometimes he selected the wrong word when he was working quickly.

Like a curious cyclist who has started collecting bikes to break them down, Sam created his method of writing from scratch, transferring knowledge he had about methods of composing on an iPad in part because he had not learned other methods of composing for people who are blind or have low vision earlier in life, as a return to college student and as a person who lost vision later in life. While the disability services office supported the development of his composing process, they also did not play a large role in helping him create it:

> The method I use, this iPad thing, is something I developed because my visual disability occurred late in life. I didn't, I always say I didn't have the luxury of working, having someone working with me throughout elementary and secondary school where I developed some other methods…So the method I developed, and [disability services] worked with me on, they use with some other people now.

Significantly, in addition to learning what he needed to write for himself, Sam’s use of voice-to-speech alongside writing on an iPad that he could hold close to his eyes became a composing process that the disability services office advocated for other blind and visually impaired students. Sam was proud of developing out a strategy for approaching writing, but he was also frustrated that he had to create a method from scratch rather than finding models from his instructors, the Writing Center, or the DRC. His experience shows us how writers often learn what they need to know about the writing process on their own, without direct instruction or mentorship centered on the experience of writing with a disability.

Despite Sam finding success with a composition method for writing academic papers, he faced many challenges from professors with tough standards for style and grammar. One semester, a professor stuck a stick in his chain. As he finished his college career, he encountered one professor in particular who was unwilling to compromise or accommodate Sam with regards to his writing.

> …in the fall of last year, I had a seminar class, and 40% of the grade was a paper. I had real problems with the professor on it. Every time I went in with a subject thing, he rejected it. So I wrote a paper, and he didn't accept it. He flunked me. I didn't...people said I should appeal it, but I didn't do anything about it.

Sam struggled with this professor, who he felt was rejecting his work because of the “condition of his content” rather than engaging with his assignments at all. For weeks, he tried to figure out on his own how to meet the needs of this professor in relation to the composing method he had developed to accomplish academic writing. However, Sam reached an impasse with this professor, who had created an elaborate set of requirements around citations that was incompatible with Sam’s writing process.

For Sam, the solution to this issue was to seek the help of a collaborator, specifically an ally in the Writing Center through an ongoing appointment offered through a referral from the disability services center. Working with an ongoing tutor allowed Sam to approach the difficult work of interpreting his professor’s feedback interdependently, reminding us of Sieber’s claim that interdependence is an important value that disability brings to interpersonal relationships (54). Sam’s work with a writing center tutor also pushed against the common framework of writing as an independent, individual task. Sam was referred to the Writing Center from disability services:

> So, I went to [disability services] about [this professor’s papers and getting failing grades]. I said, "You know, this is freaking ridiculous. I never missed a class, I participated all the time. I did everything." And my counselor who, you know, he's helped me get through, but it seems almost like he's got to be forced to do something for me, he gave me the recommendation to the [disability services] person in the Writing Center, which I didn't I know about. So, I've worked with that person since then. It would, my whole return to school would have been totally different if I would have had someone like that to work with. I probably wouldn't have been dependent upon them at this point.

Though Sam enjoyed working with Travis, his tutor at the Writing Center, he was unhappy that he had learned about the service so late in his college career, as he felt he could have written more independently if he had been introduced to it earlier. Travis provided many different kinds of support for Sam, from emotional support to discussing higher order concerns to helping him proofread his drafts.

As Sam described:

> Sam: [The professor] said, "Do this, and do that." He gave me a B on it because, um, he just didn't like the way it was written. The format that, I should have assumed what the material was. So apparently I was documenting it too much. So, the last six-page paper I did the opposite. And then he wanted it the other way! And I said to Travis, "Do you remember what this guy said on this one? I threw it out!" He said, "I would take that and throw them both in

> the trash with a grain of salt." I said I would take them out because I'd probably want to keep them.
>
> Neil: That's funny. I'm trying to picture Travis doing that.
>
> Sam: I mean, he...I was spending two hours a week pretty much with him.
>
> Neil: Were you all working on--was Travis doing writing--were you doing proofreading? How was y'all's...
>
> Sam: Uhhh, I would go to [Travis] a lot of times and say, "You know, I'm not exactly sure how I should write then." And he would help me come up with an outline. And I would write it and we would go over it the second time around, we'd look at the draft. I mean, that's what it got down to because the guy was so anal about what was written.

Sam's relationship with Travis shows the important role that humor and emotional support played in his writing process as he learned to interpret the mixed feedback he received from his history professor, whose ad-hoc citation style and philosophy about using sources proved challenging not just cognitively but also in relation to Sam's needs around writing with vision loss. This example also shows how Sam took advantage of a referral system through the DRC to bend the Writing Center's rules about limits to ongoing appointments; at the university in question, writing center visits are limited to one hour of instruction per week and 10 hours over the course of the semester. Because such programs frame disabled students as needing more time than their peers, and thus as "problems" for time-strapped writing programs like some busy writing centers, Sam's story here reminds us of Rebecca Babcock's work on writing center services for D/deaf students, where she emphasizes the significant role that programmatic collaboration between disability services and writing centers can play to support disabled students. As we will explore in Chapter 2, the writing process for many disabled students requires bending the limits of time often placed upon assignments and services offered to support writers. Sam’s work with Travis also shows how collaboration can help support disabled students with multiple stages of the process; Travis helped Sam not only conceptualize his drafts but provided detailed proofreading work.[13]

Common discourses of academic writing and how professors interpret them are another weak link in the “fluid chain” that Sam had to learn to negotiate as a writer. As a senior and as a student with prior experience in college, Sam had figured out citation methods in other disciplines and how to approach them with his method of writing. But for one history professor, Sam’s need to write in an interpreted version of Chicago style caused him issues not only because it was a new discourse, but also because it was a highly spatially oriented form of citation:

> Sam: Everything, virtually everything I did was APA except for English Comp. And to do Chicago footnotes is really difficult. And then I put those into my computer after I've written the paper, and it's really hard for me to see the little box that it's in.
>
> Neil: And it's meant to be a really small font.
>
> Sam: And it is. I mean, so I can blow it up and stuff, I mean when I write a paper on an iPad, I write it in 24 sized font, and then I go and reduce it. Sometimes it screws so I reduce it to 12-point and then put the paragraphs, etc. And sometimes things get screwed up and I can't see them…This guy would prefer rather than using a footnote, he didn't want long quotations obviously because it made the paper long. People were treating it, using a huge portion of the six pages as quotations. He wanted quotations within the paragraph, within the sentence,

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[13] A common conception about writing center work is to avoid or lower the emphasis on proofreading within sessions. We might take from this example that for students with disability—and indeed, many other groups of students-might need more support around proofreading and that avoiding a focus on lower order concerns might be a disservice to these groups.

> rather than a footnote. I mean, which, if we worked on it in class, we could you know maybe figure out what he wanted.

Sam continued to describe how writing for this professor required for him to disclose not only his disability but his specific writing method to his professor, who was unsympathetic and continued to deduct points for citation method errors, even though the professor was asking for a modification of Chicago in order to control how students were using quotations to lengthen their paper. In terms of learning what he needed to know, Sam's experience shows that even with his prior knowledge of himself as a writer and his fully cooked writing process, dynamics in the chain of actions that surround completing academic tasks requires constant interpersonal negotiation. This action is particularly important as disabled academic writers move across disciplines and need to learn to modify their style yet again to meet the rhetorical demands of different disciplines.

Sam's story reveals to us how the fluid chain of chronotopic lamination interacts with the process disabled writers experience of "learning what they need to know" about the writing process. In Sam's case, as well consistently across other examples in my data, we see how technologies of writing and genre constraints like citation styles constrain disabled academic writers, in ways that require adaptation. We saw how disabled student writers like Sam are often learning how to adapt their process on their own, even when they are tapped into various kinds of mentorship and writing instruction at the university. We also saw how instructors themselves play a rhetorical role in shaping disabled students' writing processes, often constraining them further through inaccessible assignment design. As disabled students learn how to modify their own process and adapt it across context, they also learn how to ask for what they need from instructors, which we will explore next.

Learning Keywords: The Rhetorical Skills Disabled Students Develop Across Writing Contexts

Introduction

Ethan: It's like you're coming to them, you're covered under the accommodation plan, you're doing what you're supposed to, but the professors will start like digging a little bit deeper trying to figure out why you have that accommodation plan. Because, like, when they interact with me, like most people may not realize I have a disability. So, when I request accommodations there are like prying at me like, "Well you seem fine. So why exactly do you need this accommodation?"

Alongside adapting their writing process, disabled college writers draw upon two key rhetorical skills to argue for the accommodations they need for writing. These rhetorical skills reflect Dolmage's concept of metis—a "cunning and adaptive intelligence…characterized by sideways and backwards movement," a stance disabled rhetors must so frequently take ("Disability Rhetoric," 5). By this, I mean disabled students frequently have to adapt to the perspectives of each individual instructors' perception—or lack thereof—of disability. This process is similar to the task disabled student writers experience when applying for college when writing admissions essays, as Amy Vidali discusses; the decision to disclose in those essays is rhetorical in the sense that it is "influenced by the larger cultural and discursive imperatives that surround both admissions essays and disability" (616). First, disabled students learn how to assess their instructor's relationship to accommodations. My participants described a wide range of instructor responses to their needs, from positive to extremely negative. Some instructors mentored students through their first efforts to articulate their access needs for writing assignments; others saw requests for accommodations as a burden or even a power play. As such, disabled students use a variety of means to anticipate how their instructors will respond to their requests. This rhetorical knowledge is developed over time and through experience with many different writing contexts. Secondly, disabled students test genres and formats for their accommodation requests, learning what formats (e.g., email, speaking in person), what kinds of voice, and what kinds of vocabulary result in the most success when asking for accommodations.

Assessing Instructors' Stances

A particularly important rhetorical skill honed over taking many different writing-intensive courses is learning how to read the syllabus rhetorically to understand the instructor’s conceptualization of disability. Two important gauges that disabled students use to assess the willingness of a professor to provide accommodations occur on the syllabus are the accessibility statements and course policies. The language that professors use in sections of the syllabus describing policies for disabled students affects how students approach discussing accommodations. Ozymandias dealt with a professor whose syllabus statement described disabled students as “challenged students.” As he noted, “That kind of rubbed me the wrong way. It was challenged or something just as offensive. I was just like, "Really?" And that was like really stressful.” Understandably, outdated, and offensive language signals how conversations about accommodations will go and shade the rhetorical approaches students use as they ask for what they need. Omitting a statement about disability also signaled potential negative interactions with instructors. Rose noted that when they didn’t see a syllabus statement gesturing towards meeting the needs of disabled students, they felt “a little bit wary” and that it “shows a certain lack of awareness when teachers don't put that in.”

Course policies and their interplay with an accessibility statement also affect how students approach accommodation talks. Jen noted that “[T]he two indicators for me when the professor is like ‘I don't accept late assignment ever ever ever’ or they have a no laptop policy.

Those two things are usually like we're going to have a hard time communicating with each other.” While Jen did not describe needing to have a laptop in class as a central access need for her as a writer, she viewed this particular policy as representative of a lack of openness towards accommodations due to her experiences in classrooms with strict laptop policies. Jen continued with a description of how she reads and interprets syllabi:

> First, I'll get the syllabus and open it to see what's your late assignment policy and what's your policy on assistive technology. I can usually gauge from there. But then I'll also be like, “Do you have the very basic copied and pasted disability statement? How do you talk about it?”

Important to note here is how Jen reads the syllabus rhetorically to understand how the instructor conceptualizes both disability and the task of working with disabled students. She uses this to decide first whether to stay in the course and second how she will approach asking for extensions if she needs them. Such reading was particularly important for Jen as a student without formal institutional accommodations, as she needed to decide how to best tailor her requests without the supporting rhetorical force of the university disability services program.

Students also assessed how professors used their syllabi during discussions about accommodations to evaluate how well an instructor understood their needs as disabled students. Demonstrating knowledge about the type and quantity of work over the whole semester was a positive signal for Dean. As he noted:

> I've had two professors also sit down and go through the syllabi with me. And they were like, this is how much writing we do, I don't know exactly know what the essay topic might be. Or the group projects what we’re going to do for that, but just to give you a heads up that this is when this is an there will be writing involved. So, if there's any issues, please come talk to

> me, email me.

At this moment, Dean recasts positive conversations he’s had with instructors about his disability using the syllabus as a guideline for the quantity and type of work Dean might need more time to complete, along with other accommodations. Similarly, instructors inviting Dean to further discuss his needs in different formats (in person or email) encouraged him to be honest with them.[14]

Students with mental illnesses discussed reading into course policies that shaped behavioral norms as part of their approach to talking with professors—particularly if those norms were assessed for a grade. For instance, Shade discussed how participation scores often relied upon talking in large-group discussion, which largely privileged “extroverted” students:

> Shade: A lot of classes will say, you need to be an extrovert to get a good grade in this class. So, you know structuring it if you can't participate in a certain way, we can help you participate in another way and you can still get full credit. I've noticed that a lot of Gender and Women's Studies classes are like that and not a lot of other classes.
>
> Neil: Do they like specifically say you should be extroverted?
>
> Shade: No, it's the expectations they talk about or put in the syllabus. Like, make sure you talk a lot in class. Even in my Girlhood and Disability class, she's like, "Ok, we're going to grade ourselves for participation. We're gonna brainstorm what an A would look like, what a B would look like." And for all the A things, it's like, very extroverted qualities. Like, try to make conversation outside of class with your classmates. Make sure to reply to your classmates, make sure to make your own conversation. I know for me back in middle school

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[14] As I will explore in chapter 2, helping student navigate the timeline of writing assignments can be particularly useful for providing access to the classroom.

> and high school, those are things I wouldn't have been able to do. And then, the professor brought up, "Well, not everyone can do this, so if you can't do this, let me know and we'll figure something else out."

Here, Shade identifies how the behavioral trait of extroversion—something she does not have because of her personality and her anxiety disorder—is highly valued when professors and students alike conceptualize participation.[15] Shade seeks out how participation is articulated to help her determine how and if she will intervene with professors in terms of her anxiety. Importantly here, in addition to identifying the communication of this value on syllabi, Shade also looks to practices like participatory design to assess her professor's stance. The professor in the course in question helps mitigate her concerns by verbalizing that not everyone can access the norms of participation the students are developing and invites communication to discuss alternatives with her. Shade also hints here at another trend: students' expectations about their instructor's willingness to provide accommodations based on their discipline. Rose likewise expected that professors in the Gender and Women's Studies Department would accommodate disabilities because of their commitment to social justice. As they noted, "Honestly if I have a teacher in gender and women's studies who's not understanding when I'm like, "I'm having a mental health crisis," I'm like, "Cool, I'm never taking your class again."

Rhetorically reading the interactions on the first day of class was also an important rhetorical skill that many of my interviewees described. Assessing how firmly the instructor would enforce policies provides more information on how to ask for accommodations—or whether it is worth asking for them at all. Jen, for example, practiced rhetorically reading first

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[15] See Margaret Price's *Mad at School* for a sustained discussion about participation policies and their relationship to disability.

day interactions with the same professor mentioned above:

> …Going through the syllabus, [the professor] was talking about assistive technology in the sense of, "I don't allow laptops. I don't allow cell phones. And they used the phrase, "Unless you have a very compelling disability-related reason." And I was like, "Right. Right. Right. Please tell me more about what you believe compelling is."… [If] you don't want people to use laptops because it's distracting or something, you should still have a policy that's like, "You can use your laptop" and you set some loose parameters around like, "But only if you sit in the front or only if you sit in the back."

Here, Jen demonstrates how the rhetorical skill of assessing classroom interactions yields essential information about accommodations. First, Jen reads the professor's claim that technology use is only allowed for students with a "very compelling disability-related reason" as a stance for which she will need to disclose her disability when needing a different kind of accessibility request unrelated to technology. By describing technology as "assistive" and measuring the professor's response to a student about the policy, she determines the difficulty she might face when asking for extensions for her writing. Though the interaction is not related to disability, Jen extrapolates the professor's philosophy towards course modifications. Jen frames accommodations as a "compromise," and from this interaction gleans that the professor's affective stance towards accommodation is uncompromising. Jen also shows knowledge of other courses where she has done similar assessment work at the beginning of the course, citing offering "loose parameters" about technology use as inviting a more co-constructive view of the classroom.

Communicating with Professors: Tone, Genre, and Vocabulary

Tone

In addition to learning how to assess their professor’s probable stance to accommodation requests, many disabled students adopt an effective tone and vocabulary for these requests over time. As Stephanie Kerschbaum has explained, written disclosures of disability require disabled writers to co-construct the meaning of disability with their audiences, performing “a negotiation in which individuals do not have full control over their own identity” (60, “On Rhetorical Agency”). Disability services policy research suggests that disability services professionals teach their clients “awareness of non-verbal presentation as well as verbal presentation,” and how “body cues and postures can affect their overall presentation” (Lynch and Gussel 355). As such, genre, tone, and vocabulary have to be carefully considered. Abigail described her first attempts at asking for accommodations as ineffective because they confused her instructors:

> I remember there was one professor…that I was telling, 'I have this stupid chronic illness.' And she was like, 'Well, not stupid, inconvenient I’m sure!' Then I realized I didn’t need to downplay it and kind of make a joke. My instinct is to downplay it and be like, ‘It’s no big deal. I’m just going to miss some classes. Maybe a lot. I’ll email you, whatever. I’ll probably be fine. I might need extensions on everything! But I’ll probably be fine, because this class seems interesting and I’m totally fine, except here’s my documentation that I’m not!’ And that is not really effective because then the instructor is confused and doesn’t know what’s going on...Like, even when I come to class, I’m not necessarily totally present. I might be really dizzy and out of it. How would [my professor] know that?

For Abigail, part of the process of accepting what she needed went hand in hand with the tone she used to request accommodations. Downplaying the amount and types of accommodations she might need, but also might not need, did not increase her access to the classroom and often confused her instructors. Over time, Abigail learned to develop a way of talking about her needs that used a serious tone to both convince and inform her instructors of what she needs to access the classroom and writing assignments.

Vocabularies of Disclosure

In addition to tone, developing an effective vocabulary to describe and disclose the experience of being disabled to an unfamiliar audience is an important rhetorical skill that disabled students learn over time. When asking for accommodations from professors, disabled students have to balance finding language that will move the instructor to act while still maintaining a sense that the student can complete the task. Abigail described this as a process of developing "keywords" to talk about her disability, as this portion of our interview shows:

> At first, I was saying, 'I have a heart condition.' Because I felt...then I realized I don't have to be that specific. But I was like, 'Well, no one knows what autonomic dysfunction is, but if I say heart condition, then they'll know it's serious and they'll have to believe me and give me these accommodations!'...What are the keywords that I have to say?

As Abigail went back and forth with the ways of describing her disability to her professors, she learned the costs and benefits of particular ways of framing her needs. Describing her chronic illness as a "heart condition," rather than its diagnostic name, gave her requests a seriousness that her instructors could recognize while still divulging less detail about her body. Abigail’s framework of “keywords” highlights the importance of developing a vocabulary to talk about personal experiences with a relative stranger, frequently within the first few days of interacting with them, in order to get what you need to access the space.

Part of the confusion caused by integrating formal accommodations with communication is that they are designed to maintain student privacy and thus do not describe the experience of a disabled student’s bodymind. Since a self-understanding of this experience is so crucial for developing a writing process, this gap creates some rhetorical challenges. Kristen described this challenge as she reflected on talking about her instructor about her migraine:

> The VISA doesn't really give a diagnosis, it doesn't say anything about it. So, if I relay any of the information to them, it's out of my own choosing. I think because it's not a learning disability per se then they can't, they don't, they really can't they may not be able to totally understand what's going on. So sometimes, like I did, I said I'm sorry, I've got a migraine and I can't function today. I don't think he quite understood it. Because the migraine to one person means something totally different than what it does to me.

Here, Kristen points to how the VISA is not a diagnostic tool, but instead a suggestion for how instructors should approach working with their students. Without additional information, students have to choose how they talk about their experience with their disabled bodyminds. Part of this challenge, if a student does choose to disclose, is the incompatibility of how an instructor might understand the particular experience of a disability with how the student experiences it. Dean related this phenomenon to the process students go through in developing their vocabulary in his interview: “two people might have the same disability, but it might affect them in very different ways. If it's a new disability for one, they're still trying to learn their personal coping methods.”

Learning a seemingly simple task like asking for an extension becomes more complex when it includes disability disclosure.. In addition to developing keywords, some students find that the political impact of their disclosure and the writing that surrounds it are important considerations for them. Ana, for example, described how her process of disclosing had changed over her academic career:

> Neil: How do you tend to go about asking for what you need?

> Ana: That has changed over time. I think earlier in my graduate career, I didn’t explain specifically why I was asking for an extension or anything when I missed class. I found that I was intentionally, recently, I’m very explicit about the reason...these are things I hold as values. So, I’ve written emails to professors saying, ‘Hey, sorry, I’m going to be late to class. I slept very poorly because of hypoglycemia. I’ll be there whenever, I’ll make up.” When before, I probably wouldn’t have said, “This is why.” It’s not because I don’t think they’d be forgiving otherwise, it’s because it’s important that they know it’s part of my life and maybe a part of other people’s lives.

Ana articulates several important points here. First, she shows how her process of communicating for the sake of disability solidarity involved developing her own perspective and values over time, not just her rhetorical skills. Thus, students’ personal values (which shift and change as they develop) influence accommodation transfer.[16] More so, Ana chooses to disclose in detail when asking for what she needs even after she assesses that a professor would have a positive stance towards accommodating her (“It’s not because I don’t think they’d be forgiving otherwise”). Through her communication with professors, she seeks not only to meet her needs, but also to orient professors towards an understanding of disabled students as an important, ongoing presence in the classroom.

Rose also discussed another tactic that several students described—choosing how much to reveal to professors based on the urgency of their needs. Rose would sometimes share more about their disability when they needed more time as a deadline approached:

> I try to ask them ahead of time. If I don't really ask them ahead of time, hm, sometimes like,

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[16] Chapter three explores in depth how experiences with disability often cause students to perform rhetorical identification and disidentification as they move through different classroom settings; the development of political values around disability is complex, difficult, and effects student learning.

> sometimes if I've gotten myself in a pickle, I'll get a little more personal with it and let them know what's happening versus being more vague which, I'll basically be like, "Hey, I'm having a lot of trouble with my mental health, final times is really challenging for me, I didn't really use my time well, and can I get an extra day or two." And, yeah, most teachers are fairly understanding about that.

Similar to Jen's choices about whether to write a personal or more formal email when asking for accommodations, Rose shows how revealing more about one's disability and personal circumstances can be a rhetorical choice to yield better results. Rose scales this choice based on their needs and how close the deadline is for their work. By choosing to admit fault—" I didn't really use my time well"—Rose heads off professor's potential protests to their request.

Disabled students, particularly those at the intersections of other marginalized identities, draw upon their full range of experiences to also assess how they fit into classrooms, and thus how they can approach teachers with their accommodation requests. Franco, for example, discussed frankly how her experiences as an Asian-American student affected her position towards her disability:

> Race feels like a bigger disability to me than like my actual mental disabilities, because it's so much more obvious…I'm not afraid to talk in class, but I'm afraid of sounding like a dumbass, or people rejecting my ideas or just blowing it off, or thinking that I'm dumb without giving it a second. I think that some of that is fueled by an element of race that's present on campus.

Though Franco is describing her experiences of speaking up in class, she illustrates a stance towards race that many of my participants who were students of color described. When discussing how she asked for her accommodation needs, Franco described politely emailing instructors to ask for an extension without mentioning her disability. Being a student of color on a campus where both overt and covert racism shapes uncomfortable classroom dynamics influences how and if students choose to describe their disability to instructors.

Having access to discourses of complaint aids students asking for accommodations. Background knowledge of how institutions treat complaints about compliance and awareness of the power of one’s position affect how students communicate with professors. Jen expressed awareness of how her white privilege and class privilege, along with the hidden nature of her disability and queer identity, framed how she communicated with professors:

> I've only learned how to do that [write emails to professors] and I'm only successful at doing that because I've been groomed to know how to politely negotiate with people due to my upper middle-class background. My parents, my mom, was high up in a company. My dad is not high up in a company, but he is in a unique position where he buys large equipment. So, he's constantly negotiating. Kind of picking up those skills from them...I feel like I might have practiced those skills in high school, but it's too far away now to remember. But just like knowing due to my privilege that there are certain types of phrases of things that I could say, and knowing how people perceive me, a white cis girl, not visibly queer, just needs some help. Knowing that's how people look at me and see me, how professors will interact with me, is something I have definitely used to my advantage. Which at times feels really shitty, and other times it's like all I know how to do because this is what I've been taught to do…Other people are not given that language, given those resources. Also, due to my privilege, knowing if something goes awry, knowing I could file some report or being able to talk to my parents and ask them, "What should I do?" and knowing they would have resources for me. Knowing that if things go awry, knowing that doesn't have to be the last

> step even if I want it to be.

Jen acknowledges that her family background is part of the rhetorical knowledge she transfers into writing emails to her professors. She has had access to knowledge about how negotiation works in corporate contexts, discussing how her father is “constantly negotiating” and pointing to the fact that she knows that her initial negotiating with instructors “doesn’t have to be the last step even if [she wants] it to be.” “Picking up those skills” from her family and potentially using them in high school, she was prepared to do the kind of negotiating writing she would have to do to access classrooms, even without formal accommodations. Even though this access made her feel guilty and though she recognized that “other people are not given that language,” she still feels compelled to use her rhetorical skills to get the accommodations she needs. Jen’s story points to two larger rhetorical problems at play here. First, it highlights how communicating with professors often relies on transferring knowledge about communication that is exclusive to students coming from backgrounds of racial and/or economic privilege. Second, it shows how these negotiations who have learned these skills one way or another to compromise their personal values as they move through these rhetorical negotiations with instructors—nobody wins.

Occasionally, students would rely on describing symptoms of physical illness to cover over their disability-related request, because asking for a professor to bend policies based on illness garnered better results and also kept them from needing to disclose their disability. Some students discussed lying or omitting truth when communicating with professors, and the impulse to lie indicated the complicated nature of developing a relationship with disability. A fear that their disability was not legitimate or that it would label them as a bad and untrustworthy student drove them to lie. This particular trend occurred frequently for students with mental illnesses or invisible disabilities; sometimes, they would lie about having a physical illness to communicate their needs. Rose, for example, talked about what happened when they first asked for an extension on a project from a professor they deeply admired:

> Even though he had already been very understanding and this was my second class of him and I had built a relationship, I definitely felt weird about asking him. And I ended up… At that point I lied, and I emailed him, and I was like hey I have a really bad migraine and it's, it was during finals, and I was like I have a really bad migraine and I had planned this amount of time to finish it, but it ate a day of my time. And what had actually happened was that I was really anxious and overwhelmed by all my classes. And he may or may not have known that my reasoning was a little bit bullshit, but he had had me as a student for a while, and he was like, yes, take an extra day, that's fine. I've gotten better with asking for extensions more ahead of time generally, but yeah that was one of the first ones I remember.

I asked Rose to speak more about why they chose to lie in this interaction, and they responded:

> I think at that point it didn't, like even though I was already seeing a therapist at that point and had been for a year or two, for some reason it didn't feel legitimate to be like, hey, I have depression and anxiety and sometimes they affect my ability to start doing work or complete work. Just in general it affects my life, or whatever, but it didn't feel legitimate for some reason to say that. Because I think of my thought process, it was like I should, I felt as if I had fucked up, and like I felt like if I told him what had happened it basically would've been like hey, I didn't start when I knew I should've. Because I was feeling anxious. And that didn't feel legitimate at that point.

In this example, Rose displaces the true cause of her need for an extension (anxiety exacerbated by finals) to the physical circumstance of having a migraine “eat a day” of their time. Rose recognizes that the professor might know that the communication is untruthful, or “bullshit.” Their choice to lie is rooted both in inexperience with asking for extensions as well as a sense that their experience with anxiety was a legitimate reason to ask for an extension. Later, particularly after Rose got a VISA, they would communicate about extensions and specifically cite their anxiety as part of their need. In this way, part of the rhetorical knowledge that students learn and transfer in their accommodation requests is the self-knowledge that their experiences with disability are valid reasons to ask for accommodations.[17]

Relying on one’s own rhetorical effort without institutional backing can lead students to not receiving needed accommodations, even if they are able to articulate what they need in the context of writing. Dean illustrated this in a story he told:

I was still working on getting a VISA--I don't know what they call it there [Dean’s previous institution]. And so, I had to go up to my English professor be like, writing! I can't do this! You want me to write 3 to 4 pages handwritten in class, by the end of class. I literally cannot do that!

When I asked him to describe in more detail what happened in this interaction, Dean continued:

> I was saying that I have a medical condition where it really hurts me to write. My hands cramp up physically after a certain period of time I cannot write anymore. She was like, well, I'll take that into consideration. Do the best you can. I don't really have time for you to take it in a different place or whatever.

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[17] Several of the students in my study who had a mental illness expressed that they felt they were “taking advantage” of accommodations particularly when asking for extensions—even if they had formal accommodations from the university. We need to ask ourselves why the culture of writing in higher education produces such stakes that students feel like they are cheating when they ask for an extension.

Through the two versions of this story, we see from the first version that Dean clearly and pointedly knows what he can and cannot do (handwritten for extended periods of time) and from the second that he knows how to describe politely and effectively this to his instructors. Like Abigail, he knows that framing his disability using the keyword “medical condition” and briefly describing the effects will help his professors understand his needs while not revealing too much. We also see how he modulates his tone in the interaction, speaking in less emotional and direct terms about his needs, and also masking his slight critique of the instructor’s writing pedagogy (“I literally cannot do that!”). Nonetheless, in this instance, effective tone and vocabulary fail to achieve Dean his needed accommodations.

Documentation lends disabled students a type of institutional legitimacy that can change how professors approach accommodations. Later, Dean described how his interactions at the university he now attended were different than his experience at a branch campus, the one where he had had the negative encounter previously described.

> They are very lenient an understanding that you're not like able-bodied individuals, and that you need more time or just a certain accommodation. You're able to do the work and you're not trying to get out of the work, but you just need an accommodation. They are very nice about it, they don't ask for like anything you don't want to share in terms of what's going on. They see that you have the [DRC] accommodation, they know that the [DRC] has already gone through and look to your medical records. And they know that they're not even technically allowed to ask what is going on. So, they've been very great here and I have been kind of surprised.

At his new campus, Dean enjoyed the legitimacy that formal accommodations offered him. He initially describes stances that signal accommodating teaching practices, such as not asking unnecessary questions about his disability. However, Dean immediately attributes some of these practices to the rhetorical weight of documentation; a VISA communicates that someone has “looked at [his] medical records” and determined that he has a disability that must be accommodated. The VISA also frames his accommodations in the realm of the quasi-legal; professors are reminded by the VISA that they are not “technically” allowed to ask Dean about his disability. Rather than functioning solely as a guideline for best practices, the form that outlines the formal accommodations of the university disability resource office also act as a symbol of support from the institution. The VISA signals that the university has determined that Dean has a “legitimate” disability and that the consequences of not accommodating him fall potentially into the realm of policy or legal non-compliance.

Genre

The genre that students used to communicate also required students to make decisions about rhetorical efficacy in relation to their own needs around communication. Students in my study used several genres to communicate their needs: in-class writing, email, discussions with instructors in person alone or as a group, or a combination of any of the above. Some students chose to never communicate their disability with professors, or to only communicate in writing. This was particularly true for students with mental illnesses in my study, and for students who did not have formal accommodations from the university. Shade, for example, described how she only mentioned her experience of anxiety on first day of class questionnaires:

> Neil: What do you remember about communicating with your professor about your disability in those classes?
>
> Shade: For a lot of those classes (English), I don't really bring it up because they're like, psychosocial disabilities like depression and severe anxiety. Usually, I can't...I don't like get a

> [DRC] VISA or something. I'm also a gender and women's studies major, so they ask if something makes you uncomfortable. So sometimes I'll tell them if something makes me very anxious. But usually, I don't communicate with them about it.
>
> Neil: Ok. Could you tell me a little bit more about...have you ever communicated about being uncomfortable in one of those classes?
>
> Shade: Uh, yeah. It was when they would say "write down if there is anything you want us to know." I never really talked to them face to face about it…Usually on a notecard or a loose piece of paper.

What we can glean from Shade’s choices here is that writing is a critical medium for disclosure for many students with disabilities. Disclosing via writing runs counter to the scripts suggested by disability services professionals, and as such signal resistance to that formalized mode of disclosure. Disclosing via writing also allows students to delay their professor’s reactions to their disability, and also creates a paper trail of disclosure in case needs arise later in the semester.

Like learning which writing process works for you, learning the tone and genres most useful for accessing the writing classroom is a multimodal task involving self-instruction. Emailing instructors involved piecing together different emails to learn how to address their audience. To return to Jen’s example, here’s how she described figuring out how to email her professors to ask for accommodations: “I've used a lot of taking many different email templates from online and smashing them together in a way that is helpful and sounds right to me. That's usually what I'll do when I'm going to lie in a professional manner, to be like, here's some stuff. It's not actually real, but it sounds more legit than what is actually happening with me.” By using online templates created for purposes other than disability, Jen was able to find rhetorically effective methods to communicate about her needs to instructors. She refined these “templates” over time, returning to them each semester to talk about her accommodations needs with new instructors.

Students described learning scripts to use via email as a way to discuss their experience with disability to instructors. In this way, emails were not only mastered in terms of genre conventions but were also used as another tool to assess instructor’s stances towards disability. Sam described:

> I'll write an email. Typically, I'll say "I am enrolled in History 359, which I understand you're teaching. I want you to know I'm a [DRC] student. I am visually and hearing impaired. I'd like to talk to you about my accommodations. I also would like the syllabus, and I'd like to know, I've got to have whatever classroom materials there are converted to a digital format." …So a lot of times now, professors post things on [the learning management software], so I mean if they aren't good about providing that or getting back to me, if I don't have to take the class, I don't…Eventually it got to the point that if I had a choice, I just didn't take...I just signed up for more courses that I was going to take, and I didn't take those from people that didn't seem to be sympathetic or didn't get back to me ahead of time.

Here, Sam demonstrates that he has written an email to his professors so many times that he has a set script in mind that balances his request for accommodations with appeals to his need for these accommodations. He begins by identifying himself as a student with formal accommodations sanctioned by the university, then by describing the specific kind of disabilities he experiences. He then follows with his specific accommodation requests—classroom materials converted to a digital format. The professor’s response to this request—and the timeliness of this response—determines whether Sam will stay in the class. Like Jen, an instructors’ willingness to accommodate students determines whether it is worth taking the class or not. The goal of Sam’s emails, then, is not only to communicate about his disability but to assess an instructor's willingness to accommodate his disability—to assess if they are "sympathetic." Thus, in addition to learning keywords, disabled students learn to weigh the stakes in terms of an instructor's stance towards disability.[18]

Instead of using email in a complex chain of communication about disability needs, some students used email to lessen the anxiety of face-to-face communication about their accessibility needs. Rose did this, though they were aware of the disability service's office push for students to self-advocate and communicate with professors in person first:

> I know that [disability services] says you should meet in person, but like, you never know how the teacher is going to react. So, I often will email the VISA and give an explanation…Usually, I'll say like, you know, this is my [disability services] VISA. Please note the absences, like section, where it says this student should get...there should be accommodations made around excused absences or whatever it says.

Here, Rose notes that they are communicating with professors about their VISA outside of the normative scripts of the disability services office by emailing instead of communicating in person; however, emailing allows Rose to sidestep not knowing how the professor will react to their accommodation request. Emailing also allows Rose to provide an explanatory description for their accommodations, pointing the instructor to the parts of the VISA that are most important to their needs as a student.

Besides discussing accommodations needed at the beginning of the semester, students had to learn how to communicate about emergent needs that developed over the course of the

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[18] The reward for this work is hard to weigh, and it leads some students to avoid disclosure to professors about their disability at all. Shade, for example, simply stated that she never disclosed her disability to professors.

semester. Often, because of the unpredictable nature of these requests, students would use email at the start of these negotiations. However, students sometimes experienced instructor confusion about using a previously negotiated accommodation. Kristen described a moment like this in her literature class:

> I did have to use my letter of flexibility. I was supposed to give a speech…and that morning, well actually was the night before, I had started the migraine and I knew it was coming on…I had emailed him that morning, and I was like, I, I'm sorry, I, we need to figure out when else I can make this up. This is not working for me. And in the email, I said the stress of thinking about this is making it even worse. The anxiety that's just around, like oh my gosh, now I'm missing this, and I have to make it up and... [pauses]. He was trying to tell me, oh you should still come in and it's not to be that bad. And I think that part of him was thinking that it was the anxiety about it that was giving me the migraine, when it was more that, the migraine was already there. And I was having anxiety about, well now I have to change all of this.

Kristen describes how using her letter of flexibility, which she had previously discussed with the instructor, caused a moment of miscommunication. As she struggled to communicate with her instructor the morning of her presentation, she came up against her instructor's lack of knowledge about the nature of migraines; as such, he misattributed the class as the cause of her migraine rather than the incontrovertible presence of the migraine. Even with a structured accommodation formalized by the university, students have to consider how much their instructors understand about their experience when they ask for what they need.

Occasionally, some students would employ rhetorical tactics like gaining group support to ask for what they need. Such tactics help to conceal one's disability and strengthen students' appeals, which may be particularly helpful for students without disability documentation. In these cases, students can also create solidarity among disabled students in a class together. Jen described how she will sometimes arrange a group appeal for a new deadline:

> I think it's also a protective factor when I'm in a classroom with other students who also have disabilities and we can chat about it, like, "Do you think this is a reasonable deadline for this?" "I don't think it is." "Ok well we should both ask about it..." Because the more people you can get to ask about it--or whine about it essentially--the more likely if you can't get the personal accommodation then you can change the class so for everybody it's due next week instead of just you.

Here, Jen sees the value in disclosing her disability to fellow students—in this case, an imagined peer with a disability. She notes how accommodations should benefit everyone, not just one disabled student. Connecting via the criticism of an ableist structure—an unreasonable deadline—provides an opportunity for Jen to potentially form disability solidarity, for her and other students to have a “protective factor.”

When I asked Jen to give me an example of a time where she brought classmates together to change something about the course, she told a slightly different story:

> Neil: Can you think of a specific example where you did something like that?
>
> Jen: Yeah, I think...so this one I wasn't necessarily talking to other students but I was eavesdropping…I was just listening to these students talk. They were saying, "We have so much going on in these classes," because we're the same major. So, I said, "Yeah we do." And they said, "It's not...this paper is due right now but all of our midterms are also this week. We should just ask if she could maybe push it back a bit just to next week. Just because she was thinking of it this way--we'll have all of this due and it will be off of our plates done with it before Thanksgiving break. But it was just like, ok, so every other

> professor is trying to do that." So, they talked to her a little bit, I don't know, they might have talked to her after class, but then the next class period she said, "So a couple of students have brought it to my attention that maybe this schedule for completing this assignment isn't the best for everybody. Is that true for you folks?" And then there was affirmation from the entire room, which I participated in. Then she said, "Ok what I decided to do is change the due date for this assignment, so look at your syllabus, we're going to change this stuff..." So that was due to folks...I don't know if those folks were doing it for...well who knows. From the conversation that I eavesdropped on I don't think they were doing it for disability-related reasons, more like, we just have a ton of course work. *But that still ended up benefiting me.* I think some of those conversations I haven't participated in, but *I've been on the fringes on.* I've been like, "Yeah, you're right, that's not a reasonable deadline." Or "I would love to have more time doing this." So, this tiny plus one to the conversation, yeah, yeah, we shouldn't have to do this. [emphasis mine]

In Jen’s experience, group intervention happens outside of the realm of access, to primarily benefit non-disabled students. Her own participation in this intervention meant being a “tiny plus one” on the “fringes” of the conversation. Nonetheless, she recognized group intervention as something she could harness and shape to meet her own access needs. Importantly, her participation in this intervention still lead to a benefit for all students in the class, not just those with recognizable disabilities.

Even after mastering the genres used to ask for accommodations, the work continues for disabled students. As they continue in their educational pursuits, they often must continue to ask for the same accommodations over and over, even within programs where they establish their presence. They often must mix modes—in particular, in-person conversation and email—to receive the accommodations that they need. Simone explained this process to me:

> For me…the actual initial request isn't very difficult. Like I usually now just say, if I'm going to set up a meeting with someone like a [student] and we need to look at some papers, I'll say, "Hey, I'm just wondering if you'll be using printed copies or electronic copies. I have this visual impairment that makes it so that I can only read things on the screen. So if you're using printed copies, I can show you how to scan them, or if you're using electronic ones just email them to me." So, I usually now, I'm just pretty direct. I'm like, "I have a vision impairment. I need to read things on the screen. Can you do this?" But, so that's not hard. *But the harder part is making that stuff stick.* And not having to ask every single time…I've been here for six years, and I still have to ask a lot of the time. And it, I forget most of the time to be honest, because everything I go to, I'm not going to be like, "Hey, can you do this?" And it just gets annoying to have to ask every time. [Emphasis mine]

Here, Simone demonstrates how even after establishing a presence within a department, she must continually ask for accommodations from her peers, her department, and even undergraduates over whom she holds a leadership position. After learning how to ask for what one needs, disabled students have to continue to negotiate to “make that stuff stick.” Making that stuff stick involves continuing to mix modes and tones for accommodation requests, in an effort to reduce both her own fatigue with having to ask over and over, and to also mitigate the emotional response of those from whom she continues to need to ask for accommodations.

Even after learning what accommodations one needs and how to ask for them across contexts, disabled students have to learn how to challenge the intense ableism that they frequently encounter from professors. While avoiding taking a class is an option sometimes, required classes that fit in a student’s schedule often cannot be avoided. Sam discussed a science class he needed to take to graduate where he had to directly challenge a professor to stay enrolled in the class. Working with a professor who had been added to the class late, he discussed some of the struggles he faced when working with her:

> Sam: I go into the class, and I'm talking to her. She said, "You don't belong in my class."
>
> Neil: Oh, man.
>
> Sam: I just like, at this stage of my career now, I'm even more aggressive. But I said, "You can't tell me that!"
>
> Neil: Yeah, no.
>
> Sam: And the first thing we got to do is learn the microscope. And you think you could make some kind of accommodation on it, but she's not going to. I mean, it ended up working out, but I'm sure she had so many things because she was hired so late in the process, but I mean, she didn't want to deal with me at all.

Here, Sam doesn't have to interpret the professor's stance towards disability. It's clear up front that she does not think he "belongs" in her class. Despite this direct attempt to keep him from enrolling, Sam sternly self-advocates by telling her "You can't tell me that!" Importantly, he identifies that such a strong stance comes from his "stage of [his] career." He both needs the class to finish his degree and has also learned how to advocate for himself and when to push a professor on denying him access to the class. Sam still engages in the emotional work required to negotiate accommodations; he considers the fact that the professor was "hired late," but still pushes for his enrollment and success in the class despite the professor's desire to not work with him.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have defined accommodation transfer in an effort to name the rhetorical work that students learn to do across different academic writing contexts. The two interrelated tasks that comprise this practice—developing a writing process and learning how to communicate accommodation needs related to writing with professors, deeply impacted how students approached academic writing tasks. To conclude, I will turn to some of the implications of this practice for rhetoricians and teachers of writing.

Accommodation transfer asks us to reconsider our narratives about process and what we teach students about the writing process. Because disabled students often need a process that does not match common, linear narratives of writing, we can use their perspectives to reorient how we teach the writing process. Practices like appropriating writing tools for other contexts, learning how to gauge the timing it takes to write, and figuring out how to prepare and maintain bodyminds while writing make me question not just the concept of a fixed, linear process but also the idea that each person has a best process that works for them that writing teachers should help them find.

Accommodation transfer raises questions not just about teaching writing as a process, but also in terms of teaching for transfer. Scholars of writing transfer raise many different models for teaching writing and rhetorical skills that transfer across curricular contexts as well as beyond the college classroom. For example, transfer scholars have argued that composition classrooms should teach the threshold concepts of writing (Adler-Kassner and Wardle), engage writers in communities and academic disciplines that writers participate in (Wardle and Roozen), and to emphasize teaching genres that are commonly used across academic disciplines (Beaufort, “Five Years Later”). The student experiences explored here encourage us to help teach students the rhetorical tools they need to engage with academic writing. For example, teaching students how to write emails to communicate with faculty about the need for extensions could be used to explore not only common rhetorical concepts but also give them some ways to examine their choices when communicating with faculty about their needs.

Teaching the informal communications that students need to accomplish to get accommodations for their writing has a deep influence on how they will experience college. As Christina V. Cedillo has found, the relationships mediated by writing in higher education serve as an informal pedagogy that teaches students, for better or worse, what orientations, moves, and displays of identity are expected (“What Does It Mean to Move?”). The repercussions of teacher-student interactions characterized by a disregard for their embodied identities inform their experiences long after they leave the classroom. Students who are members of minoritized groups can grow to believe themselves that they are inadequate writers, perhaps even inadequate human beings, when they fail to acculturate successfully to discursive expectations.

As such, the consequences of not teaching both formal and informal discourse around accommodation is that disabled students may feel as if they are always behind, always missing a piece of the conversation, and ultimately inadequate students. I found that even among the participants who had on their own learned the “best” ways to navigate instructor interactions felt that the process of learning these rhetorical skills on their own hindered seeing themselves as “fitting in” at college. In other words, teaching the communication and writing skills students need to navigate college is a shared responsibility that all college teachers should engage in. For first-year composition instructors and other teachers who work with newer students, the responsibility is compounded.

Disabled students' experiences with accommodation transfer urge us to contextualize the social and cognitive dimensions of writing transfer as well. As explored earlier, transfer scholars have begun to explore the role that contexts like identity and personality play in transferring writing knowledge. Driscoll and Wells (2012), for example, outline several "dispositions" that they claim determine engagement in transfer and have a positive or negative impact on learning. While calling for more research about dispositions, the thrust of Driscoll and Wells's article involves encouraging "good" dispositions and helping students with "bad" dispositions change their approach to writing. Scholarship in this vein needs to question why students have "good" or "bad" dispositions towards writing and learning about writing and further question the social structures that orient them towards a particular mindset towards writing.[19]

Accommodation transfer also reveals how time affects student experiences and success with writing. As I will explore in my next chapter, disabled students navigate both rhetorical dimensions of timing--kairos and chronos--as they write in academic contexts. Disability functions in part through how the bodymind moves through time. It is understood as "chronic" rather than temporary, and formulates disabled subjects as "malingering," or refusing to die or revert to a non-impaired state (Siebers). In academic contexts, as we see with the experiences described above, disability can mean feeling out of sync or too deeply affected by the negative impact of the rhythm of semesters. As such, academic structures like extensions and incompletes are more than just stopgaps for many disabled students—they are essential tools for writing well and completing coursework.

Accommodation transfer also helps us understand how identity plays a role in transfer. For disabled students, the identities of "disabled person" and "student/writer," which are often but not always at odds, must be negotiated regularly throughout their academic careers. For some, like Kirill, writing is a profound way for hir to access identifying as a student. For others, like Jen, writing is a barrier to understanding herself as a successful student. These identities

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[19] Indeed, Driscoll and Wells call for such an approach in a follow-up article in 2016.

should be understood intersectionally and should be put in context with conversations about rhetorical identification. These are my goals for the third chapter of this dissertation.

Learning keywords and genres to ask for what you need can interplay with assessing an instructor's stance; like the relationship between learning what you need to know and learning keywords, these processes can cycle and relate to each other. Jen, for example, described how her process for asking for accommodations began to incorporate assessing her instructors' stances towards disability. She said, "I think at first I didn't know I could do it. It started with the professionally lying: the very professional excuses for why I was not able to complete an assignment for a variety of reasons, sincere apologies, signed my name. It started with that, and then conglomerating different email templates to make it sound very professional and legit." Here, Jen is describing moving from not knowing she could ask professors for accommodations to building a personal email template that she used to "professionally lie" to get what she needed. Since Jen does not have formal accommodations from the university, asking for what she needs can be particularly challenging. Later, as she grew more confident asking for what she needed, she incorporated assessing her instructor's stances through their responses to her email to ask for what she needed:

> Then it progressed into being like, "Ok, I am going to take a risk and ask the professor for an extension for the real reason I need an extension, and then see how it goes." From then on out it's been feeling out the vibe of the professor and being like, "Can I trust this person to take me seriously? Take my disability seriously? Or am I just going to have to grin and bear it, like trying something out that's bullshit, and lie about why it's terrible." Something like that, I don't know. I think that's basically how it's progressed.

By feeling out the "vibe" of the professor, Jen determines whether she lies or not to professors about her needs. Jen is not resigned to not getting accommodations if the professor doesn't take her seriously; she has learned she can "professionally lie" to circumvent not getting what she needs for her writing. Importantly, she articulates how assessing her instructor's stance was an important moment of transferring this specific rhetorical skill as she grew more confident in describing her needs to faculty.

Jen recognized the emotional and professional cost of manipulating her instructors as she managed her accommodations. She often had to compromise the kind of relationship she wanted to have with instructors in order to succeed academically in her classes. As she described:

> I'm going to make it really hard for you [an unaccommodating professor] to say no, as opposed to a professor that I do trust. To them, I'll send an email that says, "Hey. I'm having a really hard time. I can't do this. Let's negotiate a better schedule for me, please, if you can." They're both received equally well, but they feel different. The one where I feel like I'm professionally lying, I feel like I've put people in checkmate where it's like, "You have to give me this." The other one is like, "Ok, I'm going to try to build a relationship more and tell you the truth about what's going on." And based on how you receive it, it's going to be interesting for our professional relationship.

Jen recognizes how she can use appeals to emotions in her communications with professors at the beginning of the semester over email, based on her assessment of their openness to accommodations and the amount of trust she feels with these instructors. She had to compromise her values to access classrooms where professors would not accept her accommodation needs, putting professors "in checkmate" rather than negotiating from a foundation on trust that could then lead to mentorship.

Chapter Three

Navigating the Chronic Constrains of Academic Writing

Introduction

"Late essays—written assignment handed in (often slipped surreptitiously under your office door or into your office mailbox) after their due date—can be another problem, but only if you allow them to be. State in your syllabus that you will not accept late essays: 'No late assignments. Period.'"

-*The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing, Seventh Edition* (2014)

Academic writing is all about time and space. When designing assignments, instructors crunch two important temporal and spatial variables: the length of the project and the due date. For multimodal writing assignments, the spatial dimensions are often fragmented or exploded—but even these assignments are often accompanied by traditionally written reflective essays, such as Shipka's Statement of Goals and Choices. These boundaries of time and space related to academic writing can be thought of as "chronic constraints," or the arbitrary boundaries of time that surround academic writing for students. Determined by professors and programs, departments and deans, these temporal boundaries function to discipline students into a specific understanding of how time, timing, and writing work—one that privileges instructors and the institution, not the student. And while the temporal boundaries of academic writing require navigating kairos, they also force students to reckon with chronos.

In the epigraph to this chapter, we see a glimpse of how timing is conceptualized to writing instructors. Students slip late essays (turned in by hard copy) "surreptitiously" under office doors of befuddled professors. A firm line on the syllabus will solve this problem: "No late assignments. Period." In this description, problem students seeking feedback on their late work are thwarted by the boundaries of the deadline and the syllabus. The image presented here is one many disabled students have seen themselves in, and their experiences help us understand how the chronic constraints of academic writing unnecessarily burden them with the task of negotiating these constraints.

Navigating the kairos and chronos of a writing classroom is an important writing task that disabled students learn how to accomplish, often primarily without the guidance of teachers or mentors (see Chapter 1). They contend with the ways that the kairotic nature of higher education affects them materially, through assessments that include evaluation of participation. The kairos of academic writing also affects students educationally, in that their writing instruction relies on kairos as a primary paradigm for rhetorical education. At the same time, their bodyminds work with and against the chronos that structures classrooms in higher education. Chronos, an underexamined concept in rhetorical studies, has a deep impact on the nature of contemporary writing instruction. Writing in college relies not just on the "right time" for a rhetorical argument or writing a timely argument (i.e., kairos) but also on writing within a constructed timeframe reliant on the institutional structuring of students' time (i.e., chronos). Thus, particularly for disabled students, the "chronic constraints" of academic writing deeply shape writers' experiences with and relationship to academic writing.

Kairos, Chronos, Queer Time, and Crip Time

To frame the findings from my data for this chapter, I will first explore chronos and kairos from the perspective of three fields: composition and rhetoric, queer theory, and disability studies. Queer theory gives us helpful tools for understanding the relationship between chronos and kairos, in particular by showing us how kairos can operate *through* chronos via the making and breaking of acceptable timelines for living a life. Scholarly work about time, especially crip time, in disability studies extends the more kairotic conversations about time through a deeper engagement of how chronos works upon the disabled bodymind. The concept of crip time, explored primarily through personal writing at this point in the literature about disability, deeply emphasizes how disability makes the everyday passage of time (chronos) function in crooked ways. Finally, examining how composition and rhetoric has discussed kairos, largely without directly taking up chronos, helps us pinpoint how conversations about timing rarely account for the embodied, literal passage of time.

Time and Temporality in Queer Theory

In queer theory, conceptions of time are attuned to the social and political patterns that undergird how time is spent and what counts as an acceptable use of time. Jack Halberstam, writing in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, notes that queerness functions as “an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” that defy a heteronormative norm (2). In light of the AIDS epidemic and other structural forms of violence aimed at queer and trans bodies, the “horizons of possibility” shift in relation to the time a queer and/or trans person can live a life and the spaces they inhabit (3). Building on Halberstam, Lee Edelman and Elizabeth Freeman develop two concepts that help elucidate how disabled students experience the kairos and chronos of academic writing. Edelman’s resistance to “reproductive futurism” gives us a terminology for understanding how the university uses time and timing to reproduce its own social order. Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity, on the other hand, reveals how students may experience their own felt patterns of time in dissonance with broader cultural norms.

In his polemic *No Future*, Edelman reckons with the role that “reproductive futurism” plays in shaping not only our politics but our understandings of ourselves and the purpose of our lives. Edelman extends Halberstam's work on queer temporality to articulate how time works symbolically to shape a cultural order that renders queer life and queer practices illogical. Describing queer people as "held in thrall of a future continually deferred by time itself," he argues that reproductive futurism is a "Ponzi scheme" that

> generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not towards the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition—or to assure a logic of resemblance (more precisely: a logic of metaphoricity) in the service of representation and, by extension, of desire (Edelman 30, 4, 60).

Here, the passage of time, or the movement of chronos, is laden with cultural meaning that orients queer people against time's progression. Edelman identifies the logic of chronos as reproductive in the sense that the effort of heteronormative time is to reproduce a social order for the benefit of a figural child whose role is to perpetuate the same, stagnant order. For rhetoricians who might find less use in his psychoanalytic readings of Hitchcock films, his broader unspooling shows how heterosexuality reproduces itself by chronically suppressing the political effort and life patterns of queer people, limiting their rhetorical and political agency. Reproductive futurism underpins how institutions use and understand time, revealing how institutions form and maintain time-based order. Timeframes like semesters, tenure clocks, and tracking time to degree are chronos-based measures bent on reproducing the order of the university. Legacy-based admissions and the university's cultural support of students marrying and having children (who in turn may be encouraged to attend the same university) can be seen as part of this institution reproductive futurity.[20]

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[20] In *Academic Ableism*, Dolmage points out the "Miami Merger," a cultural practice where the university celebrates

In addition to institutional ways of shaping time, queer theory's treatment of time can help us understand how individuals experience time. According to Elizabeth Freeman, queer time "generates a discontinuous history of its own," alternatives to the normalizing narratives that shape the making of history (xi). Freeman describes how time "binds a socius" by the way "human energy is collated so that it sustains itself" (3). This binding is a process that Freeman calls *chrononormativity*, or "the use of time to organize human bodies towards maximum productivity" (3). Chrononormativity shapes how we move through life and orients us towards heterosexual reproduction and the pursuit of capital.[21] For my efforts, I am interested in the role of *chronos* in Freeman's term. The binding of time that frames chrononormativity is rendered on a *chronic* scale. Freeman highlights how "state-sponsored timelines" for acquiring documentation at birth, death, and when one becomes a worker is part of the script for a chrononormative life.

For students in my study, chrononormativity deeply impacted their lives as students. Disabled students' experience with time did not square with the intensely chrononormative nature of college life. The chronic constraints of academic writing sought to orient their work to a chrononormative timeline. For example, as mentioned in chapter one, Jen discussed how her class intervened with their instructor as a group to push their paper deadline till after Thanksgiving: "Just because she was thinking of it this way--we'll have all of this due and it will be off of our plates done with it before Thanksgiving break. But it was just like, ok, so every other professor is trying to do that." Since the academic calendar at the university where I collected interviews structures a fall semester with no break except for a short Thanksgiving

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students who meet and marry at Miami University follows a eugenics logic of encouraging the reproduction of students "positively selected" to attend the university.

[21] Orientation as a phenomenological quality is treated elegantly by Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology*, but her work deals more with the experience of space rather than time.

break, instructors often place due dates before that break with the idea that students will return home to spend time with their families and thus shouldn't be working. Variations on this pattern exist across institutions of higher education, imbricating our semester structure with cultural values rooted in colonialism, nationalism, and centered on the model of the reproductive heterosexual family.[22]

Having a disability can also shift one's perspective of the right time to complete milestones or whether such milestones can be accomplished at all. Disability affected how my participants understood their relationship to reproductive futurity and the logical, heteronormative frameworks of chronos that dominate our culture. Many of my participants were on such a trajectory or intended to be. But some, like Ozymandias, saw their trajectory very differently:

> It's also the idea that people kind of view things--they expect to get a house, to have a family, and to have kids and a car. And I don't know if that will ever happen for me. I'm just, I don't know. I'm trying to be zen about things, and I'm trying to like--but when you've been told your whole life that there's something wrong with you, whether it was based on your race and then your disability, then it's kind of a hard delusion to break out of. I've never like--it's hard for me to maintain, it's hard for me to understand people.

For Ozymandias, his recognition that he may not follow the trajectory many able-bodied and white people followed or wanted to follow made it difficult for him to connect with peers. He was frustrated at their own desire to stay on this set path while at the same time felt some anxiety

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[22] I'm providing here only two examples of how queer theorists conceptualize time, and a deeper treatment is warranted in future revisions. Freeman's conversation is rooted in other predecessors and contemporaneous writers such as Jack Halberstam's thorough outlining of queer time and queer place: temporalities and geographies that resist and reject heteronormative life patterns. Dana Luciano's discussion of *chronobiopolitics*, or the "sexual arrangement of the time of life" (9, *Arranging Grief*), also influence Freeman and my own understanding of queer temporality.

about his own lack of access to it.

Time and Temporality in Disability Studies

Scholars in disability studies have built upon work in queer crip theories to develop the concept of "crip time." Alison Kafer shapes the concept of "crip time" by drawing upon conversations in queer theory about futurity and queer time to explore how time and temporality relate to disabled identity and embodiment. Kafer shows how "temporal categories are already commonly used in formation of disability," noting how "one aspect of cripping time might simply be to map the extent to which we conceptualize disability in temporal terms" (25). For example, terms like "chronic," "intermittent," and "relapsing recurring" adjectivally describe many of the diagnoses that surround disability. Simi Linton makes similar claims about the double meaning of "patient," noting that "a 'good' patient is one who does not challenge the authority of the practitioner or institution and who complies with the regime set out by the expert, in other words, a patient patient" (29). However, Kafer expands how we might use crip time's broader conceptual meaning, in particular by connecting it to temporal flexibility:

> Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of "how long things take" are based on very particular minds and bodies. We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need "more" time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds. (27)

In rhetorical terms, Kafer's concept of crip time helps us bring our conceptions of chronos and kairos together. Kafer’s crip time argues for creating kairotic opportunities for the flourishing of disabled lives—she urges that we bend the clock, that we make time for disabled people to contribute their perspectives and politics to the world. Many conceptions of queer time focus less on the way that time directly affects the experience of a bodymind. While crip time gives us a more granular way to understand time on several scales; chronos in crip time is not just bending your schedule to meet the needs of your bodymind; it is also about the everyday challenge disabled people face of having enough time to get daily tasks done with bodyminds that need more time to complete basic tasks, or with bodyminds that may unexpectedly become incapacitated. In terms of writing, crip time's relationship to chronos reminds us how writing time is felt by our bodyminds, and how writing occurs through a process of transforming thought into physical inscription over a period of time. Writing can be a key trace for understanding how crip time functions on a chronic scale.

Many disability scholars have written about their felt sense of crip time as they move through the world, identifying how the connection between the bodymind and time—both as chronos and kairos—are embodied and deeply felt. Writing about “six ways of looking at crip time,” Ellen Samuels notes how:

> [d]isability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals, and abrupt endings. Some of us contend with the impairments of old age while still young; some of us are treated like children no matter how old we get.

Samuels’s conception of time extends the kairotic concept of queer time—where normative life stages are sidelined or rejected—and deepens this temporal theory with an understanding of how disabled bodies feel chronic time. Disabled people experience the passage of time in ways that are crucially different from able bodyminds and other disabled people; chronos seems to and sometimes literally can stop and start and disconnections between the brain and body can make the passage of time culturally irrelevant for many disabled people. Writing can relieve or exacerbate this felt sense of chronic time. Petra Kuppers writes about how for “many disabled writers, writing in crip time becomes a sanctuary,” a way to sit with and feel and find pleasure in the pain of disability (29). For this to occur, Kuppers identifies that sharing and communicating about the ways disabled bodies move through chronic time, embracing interdependence, is essential.

In composition studies, crip time emerges as one way of framing how we understand the relationship to time and the teaching of writing. As Tara Wood describes in her 2018 CCC article “Cripping Time,” taking crip time seriously in composition and rhetoric “should be regarded as a generative epistemological shift in writing studies pedagogy” that offers a “starting point for some creative and access-centered pedagogical imagining” (273). Through a qualitative analysis of disabled student writers in college, Wood explores similar experiences with timing and writing that I observed. For example, Wood notes that disabled students “might not benefit from composing in a restricted time frame in the same way that other students might” because of their qualitatively different experience of time (264). To build on this, I will examine how paying attention to the chronos of writing and writing instruction affects many disabled students as they negotiate writing tasks in college in the body of this chapter.

Kairos, Chronos, and Chronic Constraints

In rhetorical studies, discussions of kairos take up the idea that there is a “right time” for rhetorical action. As such, kairos is a particularly useful rhetorical concept for exploring how disabled students experience time in academic environments. Kinneavy drew upon kairos's broad roots in classical rhetoric to succinctly define it as "the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something" (58). Shannon Walters notes that in "[kairos's] first uses in Homer and Hesiod, the concept of kairos is nearly synonymous with "disability," indicating places of bodily vulnerability and impairment that are penetrable tactilely" (153). Disabled students frequently struggle with shaping the right kairotic moment to ask for what they need from faculty as they fit the timing of their writing process to the rigid timelines that surround most academic writing. The pedagogical dimensions of kairos come into relief when we consider how disabled students navigate the kairos of academia.

In *Rhetorical Touch*, Shannon Walters considers the deep ties between disability, embodiment, and kairos. She notes that considerations of kairos in classical Greek medicine, particularly the work of Hippocrates, tie kairos to "tactile practices" and the work of medical intervention on the body (154). Associated with "penetration, weight, and porousness," kairos in classical rhetoric often reinforced negative correlations between weakness, vulnerability, and disability. For my purposes, Walter's work tying kairos to touch emphasizes the multisensory and multimodal methods disabled students use to navigate the chronic constraints of academic writing.

The concept of kairotic space, developed by Margaret Price, draws attention to how kairos can shape academic spaces like classrooms and conferences. The concept of kairotic space allows us to pair the "right timing" dimension of kairos with the social phenomenon that dominates academic life. For Price, a kairotic space is "characterized by all or most of these criteria:

1. Real-time unfolding of events

2. Impromptu communication that is required or encouraged
3. In-person contact
4. A strong social element
5. High stakes." (61)

All classrooms rely on students accomplishing complex, time-oriented rhetorical tasks; additionally, writing classrooms often rely on assessment criteria that highlight the kairotic elements of the classroom space. For example, writing classrooms assess student's in-class written and verbal participation, proper performances of peer review both verbally and in written form, and physical presence. Understanding how writing classrooms function as kairotic spaces can help us further comprehend the rhetorical phenomenon by which many students come to understand their bodyminds as disabled. Writing bodyminds respond to the social systems around them, and in a charged social space such as classrooms, people with disabled bodyminds often have negative experiences with some of the social tasks that constitute classroom practices.

These considerations of kairos and kairotic space help us understand how disabled students experience the high-stakes interpersonal communication that constitutes academic life. However, a deeper understanding of the interaction between chronos, academic writing, and disability would add to our conversations about temporality in composition and rhetoric. Chronos is an underexplored concept in relation to timing and rhetoric. Few scholars have critically engaged with the role that chronos plays in shaping rhetorical intervention; it remains taken for granted. But the unrelenting flow of time and the embodied experience of the progression of time is an important dynamic for disabled writers. For writing classrooms, in particular, chronos is a framework that shapes how students experience the class. Students have to mesh writing tasks, which often take much longer to complete, with time-sensitive educational tasks like exams. Because instructors cannot know what other classes students are taking, they tend to stack deadlines around the same time, making negotiating due dates (either in terms of completion or in terms of renegotiating due dates) a familiar task. As Jen described, “Professors lose sight of that, where it's like, yes you assigned these five papers but so did my other three or four courses that I'm taking.” Writing classrooms also have to work with institutional frames for time, specifically semester, quarter, and trimester systems. Instructors’ and students’ felt sense of time changes when time becomes compressed; chronos helps us understand the breathless feeling of teaching or taking a summer writing course that compresses 16 weeks of instruction into eight. Chronos also affects access to support for writing. A packed writing center schedule or an instructor working a job outside of her appointment limits the quantifiable amount of time a student can take to seek outside help for writing instruction. While all classes are affected by the chronos that frames them, writing classes are particularly dependent on the longer amount of time it takes for students to complete major writing assignments.

Peeples et. al.’s exploration of the development of a professional writing and rhetoric certificate at Elon University reveals the interplay between chronos and kairos. Analogizing how chronos and kairos represent the relationship between the strategic and tactical stances writing program administrators must take, they first outline how the administrative time under which writing programs focus is a chronos-oriented sense of time:

> When discussing administrative action and practice, *chronos* dominates. Five-year plans, personnel reviews, course offerings, matriculation and graduation, cycles of assessment, re-accreditation: all refer to time as quantifiable, measurable, and linear. Such time marks and measures administrative work, like the development of curricular programs. (CITE 59)

Kairos, on the other hand, related more to tactical choices made by department administration that shape program identity and remind "us to value not only formalized places and discussions but also undefined spaces and informal conversations" (61). To extrapolate these understandings of chronos and kairos to student experiences with writing, we can map how students experience the implementation of department and curricular design as their experience with chronos, and value their tactics for moving through those design choices as kairos.

A rich discussion of the interplay between chronos and kairos occurs in *The Everyday Writing Center* (Geller et.al.). Discussing "fungible time" and "epochal time" in writing center work, the writers explore how the boundaries of time in writing center sessions and narratives about the "right" time in the writing process that students should visit the writing center occlude the realities of how students experience time. Noting the difference between the "pre-determined amount of time" that constitutes a semester in relation to the "distinct rhythm to the semester that we feel and our students feel," Geller et. al. find that writing center work moves between the kairotic and chronic frameworks of writing. They encourage writing center professionals to embrace a relationship with time that acknowledges the concrete nature of time in a scheduled framework (time in terms of chronos, of which there is often never enough) while addressing that the "right time" for writers to come in might be hours before a paper is due; thus, the "best" kairos for writing center work might occur on the "worst" chronos for academic writing, according to narratives about "good" writing.

In literature from higher education policy that discusses how disability services should serve their clients, disability accommodations are framed strictly on a "right" and "wrong" chronos. Lynch and Gussel, for instance, discuss how students should be guided to always ask for their accommodation needs at the beginning of the semester:

> For example, if a student discloses a disability and makes requests for accommodations the

> day before an exam (i.e., poor timing), the disclosure is stressful and accommodations are more difficult to arrange. If, on the other hand, the student approaches the instructor before the first class session to voice concerns and propose potential strategies, then accommodations can be arranged in an organized, thorough manner with sufficient time to implement them (353).

In this passage, the student is the active subject who makes the choice to ask for what they need on the right or wrong timeline; the consequence is that "accommodations" will either be "more difficult to arrange" or "arranged in an organized, thorough manner with sufficient time to implement them." "Requests for accommodations the day before an exam" are clarified in a brief phrase to be "poor timing." Lynch and Gussel urge disability services professionals to coach their clients to disclose their needs to faculty at the beginning of the semester, unless an emergency arises. "To facilitate timely disclosure," they recommend, "the student and counselor could set a deadline…by which time the student must have disclosed disability-related needs to instructors."

The "right" and "wrong" times to discuss disability permeates how students think about their discussions of disability with professors. Rose, for example, jokingly discussed how they rarely disclosed disability on the timeline recommended by the Disability Services office:

> Now that I have my [VISA], you know, you're supposed to give it to your teachers at the beginning of the semester. I'm getting better at that but often what happens is I don't end up giving it to a teacher until I get into trouble. And then I like, by the way! I have this VISA, sorry I missed three classes. Which isn't the best way to do it, and I'm trying to, again, get better at that.

Rose shows how they often do not disclose their disability in a "timely" manner, instead often discussing their accessibility needs with professors when they “get into trouble” with course policies like attendance. The framework of having a “right” time to disclose means that Rose feels guilty for not following that timeline; they express how they are “trying to, again, get better at that.”

The interplay between kairos and chronos that deeply affects disabled student writers is structured by the time constraints that frame college classrooms. In response to this time-based framework, writing instructors construct what I call “chronic constraints” to frame academic writing—boundaries on academic writing that are largely artificial, following the patterns of academic calendars rather than the more flexible deadlines available to writers in many workplaces and the everyday writing students do outside of the academy. These constraints are institutional and are meant to shape how (and when) students experience higher education. We, as instructors within institutions, set time boundaries on our assignments and punish writers who break those boundaries. We orient students towards a time-based process of drafting, peer review, revision, and completion. As we saw in the epigraph I used to open this chapter, deadlines function as a mode of instructor control, and unruly students who turn assignments late will only be a problem “if you allow them to be.”

The chronic constraints of writing in college are invested in necessitating multitasking and prioritizing time, which requires students to learn “time management” skills to succeed in college. Academic writing, particularly for undergrads, occurs on tight timelines that are oriented around the boundaries of academic calendars, which frequently forces students to juggle multiple writing projects alongside exams with high stakes. In her work describing how first-year composition functions as a middle-class enterprise, Lynn Z. Bloom discusses how the valuing of the efficiency of time in the writing process is an undergirding principle of most first-year composition instruction, part of a series of principles that seek to inculcate college students with middle-class values. As she writes, “[T]he advice on the writing process that pervaded the 1980s-including much of my own-was concerned with enabling student writers to attain an efficient, and therefore by definition effective, writing process” (663). Navigating and negotiating these timeframes is both a complex pedagogical complex that disabled students in particular must learn how to navigate frequently without direct instruction (see Chapter 1) as well as a rhetorical force that structures disability for certain bodyminds.

For my participants, their conception of the time it takes them to write belied a fraught relationship with the chronic constraints of academic writing. Most of my participants were deeply aware of how they were different than their peers in terms of the time it took them to complete academic writing tasks. Many described the time it took them to write or the *timeline* on which they wrote as the “biggest flaw” in their writing process or “what I’m worst at” as a writer. Students often negotiated their need for more time by balancing it against time they might spend on other tasks, often with regret. Danielle discussed how she needed more time to complete academic tasks, noting she needed “at least twice the amount of time as my friend that's in the class, but I just have always lived with having to spend more time on stuff. So I just realized how to deal with that.” Some were able to articulate how their bodyminds experienced the timing of writing; for example, Ozymandias described how his writing process was similar to his peers though he was more keenly aware of how the time it takes to write affected him:

> I write in short bursts. So, I can write a lot in 20 minutes, and then nothing for four hours. I don't know how I get things done in time. It's kind of surprising. I think everyone is just like me, where they get distracted but they say, 'Oh I'm busy all day because I have to write a paper.' Where I don't feel that way. I'm like, I'm busy for an hour and a half today, because

> I've got to write a paper. But I'm going to spread it over seven hours.

Because of his experience with disability, Ozymandias is aware of the cognitive rest his brain needs and then tendency for him to be distracted as he writes; he knows how his bodymind stretches writing tasks across hours.

Participants struggled not only with the overall amount of time it took them to write or their felt sense of their time spent writing. They also resisted how the writing process itself functioned as a chronic constraint. The writing process as it is taught in higher education (and frequently in elementary and secondary education in the United States) is framed as a structured series of events bound on a tight timeline—in particular, the five-step process. Franco especially balked at this particular chronic framework for writing:

> I'm all for rejecting the five-step process…they all label things that happen in any writing process, but I don't like the way they're labeled. So, like, my prewriting process, it consists of me venting a lot, sitting a lot, I usually start as soon as I get a paper prompt, I start thinking about it and that functions as my pre-prewriting step. And it's very extensive--I will think about it for days and days and days and sort of not stop thinking about it.

Importantly, Franco articulates and identifies the time and mental energy she spends thinking about her papers as part of her process—a "pre-prewriting step." As an experienced writer, she knows how to adapt knowledge and terms she is taught to her own specifications. Still, she expresses frustration with how the steps of the process are arranged and "labeled," noting how the chronic frameworks of the writing process keep instructors from understanding the work she is doing as "writing."

I am intentionally using the term "chronic" for its dual meaning here—an adjectival form of chronos as well as, as the OED puts it, its meaning of "Of diseases, etc.: Lasting a long time, long-continued, lingering, inveterate; opposed to acute." While the bodymind is certainly involved in the performance of kairos in rhetoric, disability's connection to "lingering" embodied conditions that affect your experience of your bodymind and the world adds value to "chronic" as a term to describe how time works for, upon, and against disabled academic writers. As a term, "chronic" also helps us understand how chronic time is felt time—the passage of time on and through the bodymind which marks the progress of a life.

For rhetorical scholars in composition and rhetoric, the timeline by which writing unfolds its rhetorical effect merits a deeper study of how chronos and kairos interact. Our field is uniquely positioned to examine how chronos works upon rhetoric, given that writing emerges both along a linear timeline and on the "in real time" motion of kairos. This is particularly true for academic writing, where chronic boundaries like deadlines intersect with urging from instructors to write a "timely" argument that engages with contemporary issues. The relationship between kairos, chronos, and education more broadly are also central concerns that underpin many of our focal points in composition studies. The study of writing transfer, for example, questions how transfer works in fits and starts, both across the years that students spend in college and in the kairotic moments of connections between and during writing assignments. Discussions abound in writing program administration literature about how many classes—and thus how much time—students should take studying composition. Thus, beyond its connection to disability, thinking through kairos and chronos together is a move that needs to be made in rhetorical studies, one that those of us engaged in rhetorical studies through the lens of writing are particularly poised to make.

Additionally, thinking about kairos and chronos together is particularly important for those invested in understanding how time is experienced by the bodymind. Because our bodies are moving inexorably forward in time, in ways that our minds do and don't perceive, we need to think both kairotically and chronically to understand how time works on the bodymind. In terms of higher education, thinking with both kairos and chronos can help us questions how college positions certain bodyminds in particular ways, as well as how narratives of the "right" way to do college align with life patterns that are inherently white, wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, and cisgendered.

As an example, we might think of how narratives about "time to degree" for graduate students permeate discourse about higher education. In *Finish Your Dissertation Once and For All!*, weekly "action plans" outline how a fictional graduate student named Beth planned out her daily tasks, shown below:

> Tuesday, July 12
> 6:00-8:00 am. Exercise and shower.
> 8:00-9:00 am. Breakfast and commute to work.
> 9:00-5:00 pm. Work.
> 5:00 pm. Meet Sarah for coffee.
> 7:00-7:30 pm. Call 2 potential study participants to schedule for the week after vacation.
> 7:30-10:00 pm. Dinner and read chapter 1 of litigation book.
> Email update to Alison. (60)

Such narratives about planning as a means towards success reveal an understanding about the life patterns of students that don't often match how students (graduate or otherwise) experience time.[23] In particular, students with disabilities might not be able to wake up at 6:00 am and keep

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[23] As a side note, *Finish your Dissertation Once and For All!* frames itself as a text aiding graduate students to move through the "psychological barriers" of writing a dissertation, which pathologizes graduate students who are struggling to finish their dissertations.

working all day till after 10:00 pm. Students of color, students who are parents, and working-class students might have chunks titled “work” that are not at all related to their academic pursuits. Our discussions of time in higher education discourse are often underpinned with the understanding that there’s enough time to finish your academic work if you are working hard enough to find the time. Time is presented as both kairotic, i.e. flexible enough to find the right amount of it, as well as chronic, i.e., a set pattern from which one should never deviate. The interchange between these concepts of time often leaves disabled students and other marginalized students in the lurch.

To bring an understanding of kairos and the chronic constraints of academic writing together, I’ll explore several categories that emerged from my data in relation to kairos and chronos. First, we’ll look at “dynamic planning,” a writing and organizing practice that some disabled students used to shape their felt sense of time and sometimes to maximize “functioning time” (an in-vivo code related to the quantifiable amount of time one has to work before pain or disability takes over). Next, we’ll examine “strategic avoidance,” a strategy some disabled students used to prioritize the myriad tasks they had to complete as college students. Finally, I’ll discuss “manipulating chronic constraints,” or the practice of manipulating institutional deadlines through rhetorical action, sometimes through taking advantage of institutional pathways to do so, and sometimes not.

Dynamic Planning, Strategic Avoidance, and Manipulating Chronic Constraints

Dynamic Planning

For some of the writers in my study, negotiating and resisting the tensions between the chronic constraints of academic writing and the experience of their disabled bodyminds centered in a practice I call “dynamic planning.” Dynamic planning constitutes the way that disabled writers find the needed time to complete writing tasks through an aesthetic, multimodal form of writing that surrounds the tasks of academic writing. Using tools like digital calendars, planners, and journals, dynamic planning takes place across different platforms, molding itself into writers' lives as part of the chronotopic lamination of their process. Like accommodation transfer, dynamic planning is a rhetorical practice that happens alongside academic writing. I chose the term "dynamic" as part of the code in my analysis because it calls to mind how planning works as a force to produce motion for disabled writers, motivating them via the segmentation of time via a cross-platform mode of writing. Dynamic planning shows how relationships between the objects of planners, calendars, assignments, and bodyminds form the connected experience of academic writing. Dynamic planning functions in opposition to or as a resistance to the effects of chronic constraints. Additionally, dynamic planning sometimes aided my participants in allocating "functioning time." Dynamic planning creates an artifact that shows the impact of squaring chrononormativity with crip time; the practices of dynamic planning create a trace of the irresolvable tension between having a disabled bodymind and facing the chronic constraints of academic writing.

Some disabled writers need quantitatively more time to complete writing tasks. Needing more time to draft or to build feedback in from several readers could lead to the need for a more intensive planning method. Sam, for example, built into his writing process time for his writing center tutor to meet with him each week for two hours. Ethan explained how his writing process impacted how he spent his time each week, and differed greatly from his peers:

> I just work on a much different schedule than the rest of the students. So, like I work usually, usually like two to three weeks ahead of the rest of the students because I need that like I need that time to be able to schedule meeting with the writing center or to meet with the

> professor and whatnot. So like it makes it more stressful because like again I'm working with a much more expanded schedule and especially with multiple classes. So, it just takes quite a bit of planning.

Here, we see how Ethan creates a schedule that exceeds the chronic constraints that surround him. By knowing his writing process, he navigates how much more time he will need. However, even with his well-tested method, dynamic planning does not reduce the stress he faces when balancing schoolwork, writing, other classes, and his job.

Among my participants, Kristen had the most elaborate method of planning to help her negotiate the many facets of her life. As a return-to-college student and veteran with PTSD and chronic migraines, she had to deeply structure her life to accomplish her goals. Kristen had to balance work, assignments in college, doctors' appointments, and life with her fiancé on a daily basis. Her physical symptoms deeply affected her ability to complete work and academic tasks, and required extensive daily management, which she described:

> I have to go through so many things in a day. There's taking care of myself and eating the right foods. If I eat something wrong, there's a really good chance that I, within the next couple of hours will start a migraine. And people don't understand that. I like, no I can't just eat normal foods. [Laughs] I can't just walk in somewhere and grab a whole bunch of food and eat it. I have to, I have to be precise about it. And if I'm not… You know. So there's a whole bunch of these little things that you have to do throughout the day, and if you skip too many of them, stress starts to build. I can all of a sudden start feeling… You can start feeling the fog in your head, and you're like, "okay, this is not going to be pretty." And you try to do as much as you can to lengthen out your what I call functioning time before anything sets in. And then after that, it's like, nothing gets done.

Kristen's quantified sense of "functioning time" shows us how chronos is an important understanding of time for disabled students. Kristen didn't just need a concept of the "right time" to complete tasks—she needed to manage and stretch out literal hours of time every day to manage her symptoms. When she felt a migraine coming on, she needed to prioritize the "functioning time" she had left before its onset. Entering into functioning time, Kristen needed to crip time to accomplish tasks, which was no small feat. Such tight scheduling required her to develop a system of dynamic planning for her to accomplish her academic goals. Kristen's conception of "functioning time" reveals how chrononormativity works in relation to the experience of being a disabled student writer: Kristen creates a self-awareness of the quantitative amount of time she has available to her to work, which she holds in contrast to time where she cannot work due to the impacts of her disability.[24]

Kristen's dynamic planning starts each semester with the creation of a "consolidated syllabus," where she brings all the chronic constraints of her semester together in one document. As she describes:

> I take all of the syllabi and I make a consolidated syllabus. So, every due date, what's due, when, and I also have a date in there for when was it assigned or when is it available to start working on. And then, this is all in an Excel spreadsheet, and this includes things like reading, papers, anything else. And then I'll go through and once I'm done with it, I'll check it off that I did it. I'll put it--I'll actually highlight it so that it's green so that I know that I did it. It's really odd! I have Google Calendar on my phone when I use, I put all of my classes in, any doctor's appointments, anything. I also see anything, any of my fiancé's stuff that's going

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[24] This is similar to a popular concept of time in some disability communities: spoon theory. Spoon theory is a metaphorical conception of available energy spent on everyday tasks and work. Christine Misandero's writing about spoon theory is available here: https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/

> on since we share calendars.

This method of semester organization allows Kristen a visualization of concentrated due dates, which gives her the ability to plan ahead as well as when to expect when stress might mount. It is multisensory and multimodal, blending different technologies. She juggles not only her own multiple schedules, but also her fiancé's.[25] The consolidated syllabus lays out the "right" time that Kristen is expected to complete her tasks; thinking of Freeman's chrononormativity, her consolidated syllabus maps out the institutional expectations upon her time and its relationship to national and cultural timelines like holidays.

After describing her consolidated syllabus, Kristen revealed the next phase of her dynamic planning process to me.

> Kristen: Then, it--so then I take all of that, and then I'll do this--I'll only look at about a week out. And I sit down with my planner, and... [laughs] …And then I have this [noise of pulling planner out of backpack--loud thunk] So then I have this!
>
> Neil: Nice.
>
> Kristen: So, then this comes out, and I'll only do a week at a time, because otherwise there's just way too much. And I'll go through and I'll put like, ok, here's work, here I'm lifting, this is office hours, this is class. Put everything that I have to do next to it.

At this point in our interview, Kristen flipped open the planner to show me. It was a Day Designer with a floral-patterned cover which she had arranged as if out of habit with her case of Staedtler pens at the ready. The Day Designer, for Kristen, was a way for her to move in crip time, to bend time around what her bodymind needed—and to take pleasure in this bending.

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[25] In future research, I am eager to explore the gendered dynamics of dynamic planning, particularly a pattern I've noticed (but not followed up on) that women in heterosexual relationships tend to plan not only for themselves, but also for their children and sometimes for their husbands.

What was most striking to me about this moment in our interview was that the aesthetic of Kristen’s planner ran counter to the one I saw on the surface of our interactions in the interview. Floral, full of color, meticulously organized, reflective of her past experiences as well as her future plans—it was a beautiful technology that helped her access academic life. Similar to Cydney Alexis’s recent research about how Moleskine notebooks function as material objects that cement identity as a writer, Kristen’s lovely planner and detailed reflective system represented materially the hard work she had to do to access identifying as a student (33). Kristen's assertion that “there is way too much” for her to plan down to such detail in the planner reveals the quality of the chronic constraints of academic work: the emotional work and cost of juggling multiple schedules. For Kristen and many writers, this leads to the necessity for a multimodal planning system that can scale to certain magnitudes of chronos. Kristen's consolidated syllabus encompasses a semester's worth of tasks; her Google calendar contains weeks and months of events that she can move through quickly. However, her planner contains the integration and breakdown of both her tasks and schedule – which become so complex and also so variable she could only look at one week at a time. The chronic constraints of academic writing and work take up not only time themselves to complete – they take a great deal of time and writing to manage.[26] Chrononormativity centers a hyper-productive student who can easily find the time and energy to work through multiple, internetworked timelines of work.

Kristen’s detailed record through dynamic planning breaks down and segments writing into manageable, specific tasks that she can complete in the time that she can find for school

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[26] Throughout the interviews, I was continually struck by how my participants would share their writing technologies with me, and how they often carried their important writing tools with them everywhere. Some other objects that I was shown: a rubber sheet that stabilized notebooks and laptops for a student who had lost use of his dominant arm; headphones and earplugs for dulling ambient noise; countless notebooks and specific pens; iPads and other portable technology; and SmartPens loaned from the Disability Services Office.

work. For some writers, dynamic planning involves breaking down the steps of their writing process, estimating the time needed to complete those steps, then finding the time to complete those tasks. This work should be valued as writing in its own right. Kristen walked me through what happens after she opens her consolidated syllabus and planner together:

> So, everything is color coded. Everything, everything that happens during the day has a color that goes to it. So, then I can sit and go, Ok, um, I've got reading for a class. I've a quiz that was due that same morning for that class. I need to go home after we're done here and review the lecture, make sure I've got everything done on my notes. So, this just goes by the week. And I can look at that, the consolidated syllabus, and go ok, this is what's coming up. I'm going to start putting it in my to-do list now. In two weeks I have a paper due, and she's assigning it on this day, so that day I'll be like ok here, I might write down something saying, "Review the assigned paper." Maybe the next day it would be "Consolidate all the bibliographies" or "Look over your notes on the readings that are going to help you do this." So, everything has like a, I'll try and put a little task. And then I might start putting that in, into my schedule as well. Next week I've got it in there as I have certain times that I need to start writing. So that's kind of how I schedule it.

For Kristen, dynamic planning blends writing with other academic and personal tasks, helping her balance the multiple chronic constraints of academic life. Color coding helps her visualize the different types of tasks she has to complete. She previews upcoming tasks to try to take advantage of her functioning time. Most importantly, her dynamic planning schedules but also records the work that she does; as a reflective writing practice, planning is not only an adjunct to her process, but a crucial step that creates a reflective document about her life at the same time.

In Kristen’s example, we see how dynamic planning can help students manage the inaccessible chrononormative constraints of academic time which center the experience of a bodymind with enough time and energy to complete complicated work tasks. However, dynamic planning can also be a strategy for accessing the writing process. Kirill described developing a similar process of dynamic planning, but for hir, dynamic planning was less about managing functioning time and more about creating access to the cognitive work of writing. Ze explained that "To do the whole process. Like thinking and planning, drafting, processing…I can't do it in long bursts. Like there are people who can write in one sitting. I can never do that." Describing hir experience with first year writing, ze noted:

> I would schedule out in detail a calendar of what I was going to do on what day to make the deadline. And I would start on the first day and read the assignment. Like day one, read the assignment. And then like two days to let it process and think about what I want to write about. And then like down to the hour. Like, "I'm going to take two hours to draft today, two hours tomorrow." Hopefully in the timespan I've given myself to draft I'll have something. So, I would schedule it down to a lot of detail and at that point, I didn't know that was diagnosed for anything. So, I didn't know that that was interacting with how I do executive function. That's what that was. I needed to write out basically a to do list of "write the first paragraph," "write the second paragraph" because I'm getting lost and confused otherwise.

This practice is similar to breaking down the time it takes to complete steps to writing a paper, but instead of serving the purpose of managing functioning time, it reveals the amount and type of cognitive work needed to produce a paper. Kirill's practice shows the assumptions of time within common narratives of the writing process and how the embodied experience of disability can encourage cripping the writing process to complete writing tasks.

In addition to accessing the task of writing, dynamic planning is sometimes used as a strategy for navigating the rhetorical work of gaining formal accommodations. Kirill used dynamic planning to work through the struggle to get a VISA. As Ze shared, “I thought about registering with the [Disability Resource] Center as soon as I got here two years ago. But I just looked at the website and what it takes to become a client and I got so overwhelmed that I put it down for six months. I refused to look at it again.” Eventually, Kirill needed to get accommodations to complete hir prelims exams. To accomplish this, Kirill used the same strategy for planning as ze used for papers: “I did the scheduling thing--I printed off the page, highlighted the different steps, wrote out a schedule [laughs], like call my psychiatrist who I had for a medication issue already on file.” Kirill uses dynamic planning as a tool to negotiate the emotional labor of accessing accommodations. The chrononormativity of time is part of the script of the DRC website, with its overwhelming insistence on following a series of steep steps to become a “client.” Accessing formal accommodations in this format assumes that students are productive enough to manage both the workload of their courses and the labor of collecting documentation and preparing to demonstrate their need. Moving from “refusing” to interact with the website to printing out the page and breaking down each task, Kirill resists the thread of chrononormativity that weaves its way through the disability resource office website, materially remediating the webpage to break down this barrier.

In connection to queer and crip time, dynamic planning reveals the double-sided coin of chronos and kairos. For disabled writers navigating functioning time, we see how invention typically conceived of as kairotic must be framed in relation to the chronic constraints that bind it. Dynamic planning becomes one way to crip time by rendering what is seen as kairotic as chronic. Dynamic planning also indicates a futurity-oriented relationship to time; it not only tracks what emerges, but it also creates a narrative of progress towards a goal meant to be completed. Dynamic planning accomplishes this by revealing the chronic limits of time, and by aiding disabled students in conceptualizing the components of challenging tasks. Often contained in elaborately decorated written documents, the traces of dynamic planning reveal the work of cripping time.

Strategic Avoidance

Another strategy for navigating the chronic constraints of academic writing my participants described was the strategic avoidance of academic tasks. Rather than thinking of this as a maladaptive strategy of mitigating writing anxiety by procrastination, I saw that my participants were instead making strategic choices by either skipping tasks or parts of the writing process to complete their academic writing tasks, often still receiving a positive assessment on their writing. Sometimes, avoiding tasks was a part of dynamic planning; sometimes, strategic avoidance happened more in the moment. Strategic avoidance responds to the chrononormativity of academic writing by resisting the narratives of the “right steps” a writer should take to complete writing tasks. Cripping the process of writing crips time by mixing up, removing, and revising the approach to writing in relation to time that renders it more accessible to some disabled students.

Some participants, particularly those with mental illnesses, used strategic avoidance to manage the stress and emotional toll of college. Shade discussed how having “breakdowns” was part of the college experience among the students she spent time with. When I asked her to describe what she meant by a breakdown, she said:

> I think it's awful that people have mental breakdowns and that's just a norm of college life. And then, when you have really bad anxiety and you have these breakdowns, it's not easy to bounce back from…It's feeling so anxious and all the stress just builds up to the point where

> you can't deal with it anymore and you just start crying. And you don't know what to do, you just cry.

These breakdowns were a common part of college culture, and non-disabled students did not necessarily associate them with disability or mental illness. I asked Shade to describe how other students perceived these breakdowns as part of college culture:

> Neil: So that's an experience that pretty common for all college students, like here?
>
> Shade: Yeah, a lot of people will say, "Yeah, I had my first breakdown of the semester" or something. They might not identify as someone with anxiety or depression. But it's becoming increasingly common for people to develop bad anxiety in college.

As such, Shade saw the increase of "breakdowns" as part of a broader epidemic of mental health issues in college. For non-disabled students, these breakdowns were easier to recover from and lasted less frequently.

For Shade, however, a breakdown could lead to her missing several days or a week of class:

> And usually there's a week where it makes me so sick I can't even go to class. And I mean, for a lot of students they will have a breakdown at that time. But for me it will last like a week where I can't even get out of bed, I'm just like stuck.

As result, Shade had to learn how to both recover from a breakdown and make up the extra work that she missed when breakdowns affected her more acutely than her peers. Her experience with her bodymind had similar consequences to Kristen's need to manage "functioning time," as she would have to catch up in addition to completing ongoing work after a breakdown.

To avoid breakdowns, Shade relied on strategic avoidance of coursework to allay the anxiety that she experienced. Rather than embracing a work schedule that caused harm to her bodymind, she looked for ways to reduce her workload but still achieve high grades. As she described:

> The piling on of work from so many classes. It's really hard as an English major, because I have to read like three novels a week or something. I was putting too much expectations on myself and I finally realized it was impossible. It's ok if I don't get everything done. Especially around exam time, when everything starts piling on, my anxiety can't take it.

Shade learned strategies for strategically avoiding completing academic tasks in order to navigate the stress of college life. Because course work tended to “pile on” and because as an English major she might be assigned an “impossible” amount of work each week, she had to allow herself to let go of tasks to get through each semester.

For writing, Shade also strategically avoided writing multiple drafts of her paper, instead choosing to write mostly right before her deadlines. By writing right before the due date, she could conserve energy, in particular because having others critique her work exacerbated her anxiety.

> Neil: When do you find yourself writing papers?
>
> Shade: Usually it's the night before the paper is due! My problem is that I write paper the night before they're due--I get stressed out about it and I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to fail!" but then I always get a really good grade on it, so I never learn! So, the night before it's due, or a day before the night it's due, I'll open my Pages document on my laptop…I usually I just write it all in one sitting very fast…But it's generally a very quick and easy process for me.

Shade described writing papers the night before they were due as “my problem,” but it was clear that she had developed this method over time to navigate the stress and anxiety of writing in college—with good results in the form of good grades and the process being “quick and easy.” In some ways, Shade may not have been able to articulate the different steps of the process in which she had engaged, like Franco’s description of the “pre-prewriting” she did to think through her papers for days before beginning a draft. For Shade, strategic avoidance of drafting was not a flaw, or not only a flaw, in her writing process. It was a way for her to circumvent the stress caused by the chronic constraints of academic writing and resist the chrononormative expectations of her academic work.

Jen similarly used strategic avoidance of writing drafts to approach her papers, in a way that blended with dynamic planning. As a busy student working a job in college, Jen had a very structured schedule organized with a wide array of digital tools, including Google Calendar, Google Keep, and different schedules she made for herself in Google Drive (”I bought the extra storage thing, I have 100 gigs of extra storage, because it's so useful to me”). However, she deprioritized drafting and saw this as a negative aspect of her writing process:

> If I have two weeks to work on something and I worked on it a little bit every day, that would make sense, but it's very much like, Monday I'm going to spend four hours on this. Thursday before it's due, I'm going to spend another four hours, and then on the day it’s due, I'm going to spend six. That kind of thing. So, time management is bogus and not a thing for me. I think it's like, it's definitely a vicious circle because I'm definitely rewarded for my writing style even though it's not a very productive or consistent way to produce writing, where it's just like, I can churn out a paper in six hours and turn it in, and then get an A. Ok. I didn't try very hard on that, I won't try again next time because there are no consequences for me not doing that. It's a self-reinforcing system of me not working on something consistently for reasonable amounts of time instead of working on them in huge chunks of time being very stressed. I don't like that, I don't feel that it's healthy, but it's all I've ever done. So, whatever.

When I coded this segment using versus coding, I was struck at all the tensions present. After describing a schedule where she would spend certain hours on different days of the week working on a paper, Jen stated that “time management is bogus.” Jen pitted a “right writing process” against her “wrong writing process,” identifying the right process as one where she would write “a little bit every day” and be more “productive or consistent.” To gesture back to Bloom, Jen articulates a writing process that orients the writer towards middle-class, white ways of valuing the work of writing. These values about writing show how narratives about the “right” process permeate academic writing culture, to the point where a person with a highly successful method feels that it is incorrect. Jen also demonstrates a conflict between herself and an academic institution that rewards her writing habits; she sees this as a “self-reinforcing system” that encourages her to keep working the way that she does. Rather than blaming Jen, chronic constraints can help us see how narratives about the “right” writing process contrast with the realities of academic work. When juggling multiple writing and work tasks, it becomes impossible for Jen and others to avoid a writing process that strategically avoids drafting.

For some students, learning how to reframe strategic avoidance and to focus on the thinking behind their writing became a way for them to invest in their projects and write better work. By reframing strategic avoidance, I mean that some students performed parts of the writing process that we would typically see on paper mentally or in other modes. Rose discussed how they did this for a project they cared about deeply:

> I am a very slow writer. But I'm also a person who generally cannot do things unless I have an approaching deadline [laughs]. So that's a thing. This last semester, in [professor's] class, our final project was to write a manifesto. And this was one of the first projects that I felt like I gave myself enough time for. I started writing it ahead of time and thinking about it. And

> even if I hadn't started writing yet, I was mulling ideas for a long time. And giving myself that time, I ended up writing up a thing that I was proud of. I think it was one of the first things that I've written in my undergrad that I was like, wow this is a good piece of writing, and I'm also invested in the topic. So yeah, realizing that giving myself the time, and it's not even giving myself tons more time to write, but I think starting it and having some of the ideas sort of stewing, and just having the time to continue the sort of conceptualizing it and thinking about is almost what's most helpful. Um, versus avoiding thinking about, continuing to avoid thinking about it, and then at the last minute being like, I guess I have to think about it! It's not super effective.

Rose identifies an important temporal tension: that they need more time to write but respond primarily to looming deadlines. For Rose, the strategic avoidance of drafting rather than the total avoidance of working on an assignment assisted them in writing a meaningful paper, their first "good piece of writing." By valuing the work of thinking that they did for the assignment, "not even giving myself tons more time to write," Rose was able to create a piece of academic writing that was very meaningful to them.[27] In this sense, Rose crips their timelines in ways that resist chrononormativity by uncoupling some of the labor of writing from the production of text, in a different timeframe than what is generally accepted as the "right" timeline for academic writing projects.

What might it mean to encourage students to explore and refine their process, to embrace their methods of strategic avoidance? How could we reconfigure or restructure writing assignments so that they allow for students to push against or work with these strategies as they

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[27] Eodice et. al.'s *Meaningful Writing Project* provides an excellent exploration into how and why students find certain projects meaningful to them. Here, Rose demonstrates one key tenet—that students are more likely to find writing projects meaningful when they have a deep investment in the topic.

see fit? We might, for example, teach multiple timelines for completing writing tasks that students would use to adapt their process from semester to semester, or from assignment to assignment. We could also encourage students to value the time they spend on projects outside of the production of texts, encouraging them to see the thinking they do about writing as part of their process. Doing this work would assist disabled student writers as they crip the chrononormative timelines of academic writing. A shift in the focus could help students like Shade and Jen articulate how they manage time as part of a wide variety of tools to approach the completion of academic writing tasks. My hope is that students like Shade and Jen could embrace academic writing, rather than seeing themselves as rulebreakers who are gaming the system--and thus are not “doing it right.”

Aligned with my own desire to crip the chrononormativity of academic writing, I don’t offer these different strategies I’ve observed as a value judgment on how writing work *should* be done by student writers. Dynamic planning is not “better” than strategic avoidance, and neither method is more effective than the other. Indeed, Kristen used strategic avoidance occasionally; Jen likewise was an extensive planner. As part of my broader conversation begun in chapter one about accommodation transfer, we should see these simply as skills and strategies students use to negotiate the chronic constraints of academic writing. Valuing planning and time management as the sole or best “solutions” to the chronic constraints of academic learning tasks is a problem, because it fails to account for two sticky wickets about time in higher education. First, as described in my literature review and in the experiences outlined above, chronos and kairos interrelate in ways that obscure their relationship and chronos is notoriously experienced out of sync for many students, but particularly students with disabilities. Second, frequently there just isn’t enough time to complete academic writing tasks; no amount of time management can bring back time lost due to a migraine, or account for the unaccountable amount of thinking one might have to do to know what they want to write for a paper. As such, disabled students often need to deploy a third strategy: manipulating the chronic constraints of academic writing.

Manipulating Chronic Constraints

Manipulating chronic constraints—and the systems that create them—was a third category that emerged from my research. Manipulating chronic constraints means changing the timeline for a writing project, though it encompasses more than just asking for an extension. Manipulating chronic constraints is a rhetorical tactic that frequently (but not always) uses course policies or institutional policies in creative ways to get more time, or more flexible time, to complete projects. Sometimes, they point to the ways that disabled students “malinger,” in the sense of the term as presented by Tobin Siebers, by which I mean they refuse to neatly fold into the timelines preferred by the university, sticking around in an instructor’s or advisor’s periphery while they complete work. Manipulating the chronic constraints of the university was a necessity for almost all of my participants at one time or another, but a few did it consistently enough that it became a major strategy for them accomplishing college writing tasks. Manipulating chronic constraints reveals disabled students’ experiences the university’s reproductive futurity—in conversation, students rely on crip ways of navigating university structures to accomplish their goals. Manipulating chronic constraints often emerged in the actions of acquiring extensions for academic work or negotiating incompletes.

Manipulating chronic constrains is necessary because structures like deadlines can affect how students approach their writing, sometimes thwarting their efforts to produce their best work. In this way, the problem of chronos is not only not having *enough* time, but also the added pressure of approaching writing under duress. Sometimes, more flexible deadlines mean that disabled students are able to finish their work in a timelier manner. Ozymandias described how strict deadlines affected him in this way:

> …every small thing I have to go back and change, I have to go back and fix it, till a certain point where I'm like, I'm sending it, I'm done. But it's like those kinds of things, I need that extra time because my problems are triggered by stress. So, I can't be stressed out and I can't be pressured. So, if there's like a floating due date, I'm actually more likely to get things done near or on time. If there's like a solid due date, then I'm like, it's just too much. If it's floating, I can get it, I could do it on time, there's no pressure. I don't freak out on the small things.

In Ozymandias's example, deadlines increase or cause stress, which for some students who need to avoid stress can lessen their access to writing assignments. For Ozymandias and for many of his peers, strictness around deadlines actually causes some students to be less able to complete work in a specific timeframe. Deadlines, then, point to both chrononormativity at work in the timing of academic writing—the "right" way students are supposed to approach a project, with the assumption of a specific process at their heart. They also call to mind reproductive futurity, in that they gesture towards the production of a disciplined student who is accustomed to completing writing tasks in a complex temporal matrix and making timely progress towards their degree.

Some formal accommodations involved manipulating the chronic constraints of the university; for example, registering with disability studies can allow students to maintain full-time student status while taking fewer credit hours than what is considered full-time. Kristen used this accommodation in order to access college. As she described:

> I am a junior, I'll probably spend a little bit more time in my senior year because I now kind of moved from being considered full time, which is 12 credits a semester, to more like six,

> eight, maybe 10. So, yeah, it's gonna take me a little bit longer than I originally thought of, but as long as I can just get it done, I'm good.

Kristen noted that being able to take fewer credit hours was the primary reason she had decided to get formal accommodations; her dynamic planning strategies helped her maximize her time, but she still needed more time than she was allotted to accomplish all the tasks required of her as a student, particularly since she also had a job outside of her role as a student. Using these tools allows some students relief from the intense messages delivered by the university in the spirit of reproductive futurity about how quickly students should move through the university and graduate.

For many students, manipulating chronic constraints was the only type of accommodation they actively sought for writing classrooms. For writers without formal accommodations, it might be the only type of accessibility measure they needed or desired around their writing. For example, Franco described asking for extensions as “the most kind of accommodations that I’ve sought out” and had developed a time-tested strategy for getting extensions. As she describes:

> There's not actually a trick to it though, you literally just ask, and they're like, "Oh. Sure." So that's been nice. So, I've, I don't know, it's never been something where I've approached my professors and was like, "So, I struggle to write quickly." It's been like, "Hey I didn't have time to get this done!" Because, um, if I can say it like that, it seems much easier than trying to, like, introduce this whole part of my life that is just going to make somebody else anxious into the conversation.

For Franco, manipulating chronic constraints allowed her to conceal her disability to her professors, and allowed her to do some emotional management with regards to her professor’s relationship to disability, a concern we saw highlighted in chapter one. Articulating her needs as a simple mismatch between the time allotted for the assignment and the timeframe for the assignment was rhetorically effective for her. While it occluded her request as one related to disability, she still strongly identified asking of extensions as related to accommodations. Manipulating the constraint without revealing her disability allowed her to maintain her instructors' vision of her as a chrononormative student and allowed her to sidestep some of the emotional labor of negotiating disability disclosure (see chapter one).

However, even though Franco chose not to disclose, manipulating chronic constraints affected how professors perceived her. The assumptions professors made about Franco relate to how she no longer fit the mold of the kind of student the university sought to reproduce. These effects are part of the rhetorical burden disabled students have to take on and negotiate when they manipulate chronic constraints. Franco, for example, felt that professors thought she was a careless student. As she described:

> I think one thing I would potentially want an instructor to know is that I do indeed give a shit about writing. A lot of people I think take my distance from the assignment, because, I don't know, I guess a lot of professors don't perceive that I'm working on things because I don't have anything to show when I'm thinking about it a lot.

For Franco, both her writing process, which often required her to start drafts after thinking about them for a long time, and her practice of manipulating chronic constraints changed her relationship with her professors in a way that made her unhappy. Extensions and taking a long time to write made it seem she was "taking her distance" from the assignment because she did not a visible writing product, "anything to show." These became rhetorical stances she had to respond to when working with professors for her writing assignment. She had to negotiate a system of reproductive futurity that couples the work of writing with the production of text.

Manipulating chronic constraints tended to stick to some students almost as a form of identity. Franco and Ana, for example, wryly identified themselves in terms of their needs for extensions on their writing projects. Ana, who noted she had “almost every semester had taken at least one incomplete,” described herself as “a chronic abuser of the incomplete.” After asking her to describe the process by which she asked for extensions, Franco joked, “I kind of call myself the Queen of Extensions, because I’m awesome at getting them.” Since these moments are self-deprecating jokes, I see them as revealing some of the friction between an idealized timeline, process, and experience as a student in relation to the realities of the needs of their writing process as disabled students. The habits around writing that Ana and Franco have developed, and that has worked for them as they move through their academic careers, do not match the processes that they have been taught are needed to be a successful student, revealing the model of reproductive futurity that shapes messages sent about the ideal student.

Some students use their formal accommodations from the university in creative ways to manipulate chronic constraints. Rose, for example, noted that they used their VISA in the “wrong way” to get the accommodations that they needed:

> Now that I have my [VISA], you know, you're supposed to give it to your teachers at the beginning of the semester. I'm getting better at that but often what happens is I don't end up giving it to a teacher until I get into trouble. And then I like, by the way! I have this VISA, sorry I missed three classes. Which isn’t the best way to do it, and I'm trying to, again, get better at that.

In this example, Rose acknowledges that they are breaking from the narrative scripted by the DRC for accessing accommodations. For a longer treatment of this, see Chapter 1. Noting they are “supposed to” give professors a VISA on the first day of class and that they are “getting better at" revealing their disability on the right timeline, there are still times that Rose chooses not to disclose unless necessary, then following up with their institutional support. When they are "getting into trouble" with course policies, specifically absences, that affect their success as a student, Rose turns to manipulating that chronic constraint using the VISA against its own scripted purpose. While Rose is trying to move away from this action, manipulating the chronic constraint allows Rose to conceal their disability or try to meet their needs in other ways if they desire.

Conclusion

As we have explored in this chapter, disabled student writers develop rhetorical and writing strategies to address the chronic constraints of academic writing. These strategies reveal resistance to the chrononormativity of academia—the pressure to maximize working time placed upon students, staff, and faculty. Disabled students also use strategies to resist the reproductive futurity of the university, which seeks to produce normative students who can support the social, academic, and financial structure of the university through their success as students and alumni. These practices give us a sense of practical ways that disabled people crip time to exist and resist in ableist institutional structures.

Theoretical considerations of time in cultural studies and in composition and rhetoric can help us understand how disabled students experience time and timing in academic writing environments. Concepts from queer theory concerning temporality, such as chrononormativity and reproductive futurity, help us understand how institutions of higher education seek to reproduce normative students through standardized timelines and through assumptions about the cultural experience of time. In disability studies, discussions about crip time provide a vocabulary for how disabled students experience and change their relationships to time and temporality. Composition and rhetoric literature on chronos and kairos help us understand how these conversations are relevant to the experience of the writing classroom.

As students negotiate the chronic constraints of academic writing, they use complex, multimodal writing tools to crip time and accomplish goals. Through the practice I called "dynamic planning," we see how these writing strategies scale time in diverse ways, aestheticize and personalize the writing used to manage time, and create a record of the efforts that students take. The recording of this effort leaves a trace that helps disabled students see themselves as part of the university, and as accomplished writers moving through unfair barriers to their progress. In addition to time management, some disabled writers used dynamic planning to segment and deconstruct the stages of the writing process, challenging narratives of a "right" or "wrong" way to approach the different developmental stages of a writing project.

Disabled students often "break the rules" of the writing process to accomplish their goals, often with costs to their sense of success as writers. When the chronic constraints of academic writing confront the unpredictable needs of the disabled bodymind, disabled students sometimes need to compress the time they need to complete a project. They may strategize their process, rerouting or omitting parts of the writing process that they have been taught to accomplish their goals. In this chapter, I identified and explored the strategies of strategic avoidance and manipulating chronic constraints. Strategizing process may look to professors like a student is avoiding essential parts of an assignment, but these strategies can be advantageous or necessary to students as they work to complete an academic writing task. However, the students who discussed these strategies with me noted that they came with a cost to their own sense of themselves as writers—they often felt like they were writing the "wrong" way, even when their strategizing led them to academic writing success in terms of their grades.

Chronic constraints deeply affect student identity. They shape how, and if, students identify as “good” or “bad” writers, or as writers at all. They also affect how students experience their identity as students, and their perception of how they fit into the institution. Disabled students often need to manipulate chronic constraints, such as getting extensions for projects or getting an incomplete to finish work for a course. Manipulating these constraints requires deep rhetorical knowledge of how to ask for what you need from professors as well as how to navigate the bureaucracy of the institution. Manipulating chronic constraints may be the only accommodations a student will ask for, particularly regarding writing; it may also involve a creative use of formal accommodations to fit the needs of the writer. Disabled students felt that manipulating chronic constraints marked them negatively to professors, sending the message that they were careless or unmanageable students. As we will explore in the following chapter, how disabled students are perceived in the classroom creates a deep impact on their success at academic writing.

Chapter Four

"Mostly I haven't identified with the label of disabled:" Disidentification and Disability Identity

Introduction

In a portion of our interview where Ozymandias discussed his relationship with his parents, he paused and spoke very seriously about what happened after he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder as he completed his master's degree at an Ivy league university: "You know, when you get that diagnosis, when you get a diagnosis of bipolar, it's manageable. When they upgrade it to schizoaffective, it's like, that's institutionalizable. So, the fact that I'm doing two Ph.D.s at an R1 university [in a top-ranked program], you know? … I'm in the number one program in the country and my medical history suggested I should be in an institution." At this moment in my data collection, I sat with the implications of what Ozymandias had said. Prior to his aside, I had somewhat struggled to understand how the students I had interviewed had or had not embraced their disability as a formative part of their identity. I was surprised how few had any kind of positive associations with disability as an identity, even though I knew from my own perspective that disability ensures a challenging experience with higher education. At this moment, however, I saw it clearly: claiming disability as an identity, taking pride in your disability, and using it as a position from which to act and speak, allowing your disabled embodiment to be an important part of who you are, could not only threaten your access to higher education but put you in another "institution" altogether.

Ozymandias's comment frames some of the risks and rewards of understanding oneself as disabled and using that as a stance from which to do rhetorical identification. For disabled students, speaking from the position of disability or seeing oneself as disabled provides a wide community with a broad range of strategies for moving through higher education. A rising community of disability studies scholars has led some students to understand their experience with disability as a rhetorical and political position from which to affect change. With disability's tendency to weave itself throughout other experiences of identity, as well as its use as a constitutive element of exclusion (Dolmage "Disability Rhetoric," Erevelles, "Crippin' Jim Crow"), disability is a dynamic but tricky stance upon which to build an identity. Institutions seek diverse student bodies but are largely unwilling to commit to creating spaces where diverse student *bodyminds* thrive. Stephanie Kerschbaum and Sara Ahmed have described how universities profit off of this orientation; Ahmed notes how diversity work is creating the work of continually being up against a "brick wall;" the goal is not to move or tear down the wall, but for institutions to show that someone is pushing against it ("On Being Included"). For students in particular, having a disability reveals how identities interact with institutions—specifically, how marginalized identities are simultaneously excluded, commodified, and circumscribed by universities.

This chapter interrogates the complicated ways that students oriented their personal identities in regard to disability. I did not set out in my project to document this particular phenomenon, but it bubbled up around the edges of all the collected data. Without being directly asked, almost everyone spoke to how disability changed how they understood themselves and their role at the university. I was struck by a particular tension—many participants actively discarded disability as an identity "label," but went beyond seeking to meet only their personal accommodation needs from classroom to classroom. Very frequently, they articulated a "future disabled student" that they wanted their professors to consider, and often shaped their own personal interventions with this future student in mind.[28] A sizable category of students in this

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[28] This speaks to need for politics of futurity in the disability community—a concept that Alison Kafer elaborates on

study spoke about how their formative interactions with the university and the institutional structures that govern access to classrooms, interactions that deeply shaped how and if they identified as disabled. Remarkably, several students also discussed how their emergent identification with disability shaped how they imagined audiences for their academic writing.

The complicated ways that students described their identification —or lack thereof—with disability builds complexity into common models of how we understand identity in rhetorical studies; they also show us how identity interacts with systems of literacy that form the backbone of institutions of higher education. To address the complexity of how students use the concept of identity and perform rhetorical identification, I will bring a key term from queer theory to bear on Burke's theory of rhetorical identification: José Esteban Muñoz's framework of disidentification. I draw upon Muñoz's concept of disidentification because it most accurately encapsulates the rhetorical work I saw my participants engaging with across many theories of understanding identity and identification across the humanities and in rhetorical studies. Disidentification is useful for understanding the ways that disabled students develop a careful, detached, but engaged relationship to disability that helps them navigate the bureaucratic and relational challenges of being a disabled student. I show how disidentification pertains to broader theories of rhetorical identification by acting as a rhetorical tactic of developing a detached understanding of one's disabled bodymind in relation to an institutional structure built on its exclusion.

This chapter will first explore how disabled students develop or respond to the call to embody a disability identity. I do this to begin to grasp how disabled students understand the disability identity that they use for disidentification or rhetorical identification. Drawing upon

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in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*.

theories about disability identity from disability studies, I will interrogate three key ways disabled students relate to a disability identity: interacting with a diagnosis, making choices about navigating the bureaucratic structure of accommodations, and enduring classroom interactions. The second section of this chapter will explore how students use disidentification as a rhetorical tactic to make space for themselves at the university as well as affect change. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by showing how disidentification as a tactic does important work to dismantle ableism in higher education.

Developing A Disability Identity in Higher Education (Or Not)

Ana: Mostly I haven't identified with the label of disabled. That's possibly changing for political reasons.

Before I explore how disabled student writers perform rhetorical disidentification in more depth, it is necessary to explore how students do or do not use a disability identity, particularly with regards to their relationship to higher education. This groundwork is necessary to understand the rhetorical environment where my participants performed disidentification and will also reveal some of the reasons why it is not necessary to identify with disability to do rhetorical disidentification *about* one's experience having a disabled bodymind.

A major factor in resisting or rejecting disability as an identity is disability's fraught relationship with institutions of higher education. In *Academic Ableism*, Dolmage described disability's relationship to higher education as such: "Disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education. Or, let me put it differently: higher education has needed to create a series of versions of "lower education" to justify its work and to ground its exceptionalism, and the physical gates and steps trace a long history of exclusion" (3). Disability as a category of identity has historically and structurally been framed as an identity that precludes attending college. As Dolmage points out here, other institutions—in particular, prisons and asylums—function as counterspaces to higher education where disabled people are warehoused.[29] Thinking back to Ozymandias's claims at the beginning of the chapter, we can see the legacy of these divisions in how disabled college students currently experience higher education. Understanding how institutions frame disability shows how students are discouraged from identifying as disabled, even within the context of seeking disability accommodations.

Having a disability can deeply impact how or if a person sees themselves as a student, or as a writer. Negotiating the impact of having a disability on writing can cause conflicts that impact if a student thinks she should even be in college. For example, Danielle, who has dyslexia, describe to me how deeply her experience with dyslexia impacted how she saw herself in relationship to education. Because she struggled to read and write, she questioned her intelligence and presence in higher education. As she described:

> My sister's a really incredible writer. Um, my aunt is a really great writer as well and so like I've always considered... not like stupid, because stupid is such a hard word, but it's like I've always felt lesser because I couldn't do that. And so even now I'll always question my intelligence. I'm like, people are always like yelling at me. They're like, Danielle, you're so smart, like stop doing this. But it's like, it's like my, I feel like everybody kind of has that like one trait that they're like always very nervous about. And so, like mine is like my intelligence just because of that. And like I've always been afraid like when I'm texting someone that I don't know very well, I'll like reread the text over and over again and make sure that is English because like I'll get back a text, "This kind of makes no sense." and I'm going to feel

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[29] See also Liat Ben-Moshe's work on disability and incarceration. Additionally, Zosha Stuckey's work provides an important counterhistory, showing how one New York state asylum used writing instruction to empower the people who were incarcerated there (which was an anomaly).

> like, oh my gosh, Danielle, you could've just read that one more time and noticed that you put an exclamation point just like right in the middle of a sentence.

At this moment, the performance of intelligence is presented as a counter to a disability identity. Comparing herself to her sister and aunt who do not have dyslexia, Danielle reveals her anxiety about her inclusion in educational institutions. Her difficulty with reading and writing cause her to question her intelligence, highlighting how the *performance and communication of intelligence* are as central to success in education as “raw” intelligence. Danielle also sees smartness or intelligence as a mechanism that includes or excludes her from higher education, noting that the perception of herself as intelligent is the “one trait” she is “very nervous” about. Being read as unintelligent because of her dyslexia even bleeds into her everyday communication such as texting friends, causing her to read even small pieces of writing over and over.

Building on Danielle’s example, I will explain three main categories emerged as I explored my participants’ responses to identify with or against disability. First, my participants described how the concept and label of *diagnosis* affected their relationship to disability as an identity. Next, many participants described how *the bureaucratic barriers of institutional accommodations* influenced whether they identified with disability or not. Finally, *classroom encounters* were largely influential in shaping whether my participants “came out” and claimed a disability identity, often within a broader intersectional framework of identity.

Diagnosis

The language of diagnosis is an important rhetorical artifact that many disabled students use as they negotiate their relationship to disability. Diagnosis functions as a technical language framed by the medical industry, but its influence extends into social and educational systems as well. Diagnostic criteria, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), are deeply rhetorical and change with the discursive shifts of professional medical organizations. For example, Bradley Lewis describes how the DSM III moved towards a criteria-based model for determining a diagnosis that sought to standardize mental illness diagnosis, in response to a "reliability problem" in the field of psychiatry. This move, however, foreclosed other methods that medical professionals could use to describe and diagnose mental illnesses (Lewis 97-98).[30] Drew Holladay has framed how diagnosis works as a "tactical technical communication" that disabled people use to navigate both their personal experiences and experiences with institutions. Describing how writers in online spaces use the language of diagnosis, he argues:

> Writers in online mental health discussion forums take up and transform the clinical, descriptive language of medical documents to more accurately reflect their own experiences of difference. At the intersection of medical discourse, popular science, and personal narrative, these tactical technical communicators reveal the ways in which the biomedical language of mainstream psychiatry inflects individuals' descriptions of mental and social experience. The practices of writers in these forums provide significant insight into the circulation of scientific knowledge in everyday contexts, especially in the rhetorical moves writers make to construct their ideas and create identifications between users.

Similarly, students used their relationship to diagnosis across different experiences of disability to understand disability as an identity, and how disability related to higher education. Generally, diagnosis provided a vocabulary that students can use to understand the experience of their

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[30] Importantly, Lewis asks why there is only one diagnostic frame, and encourages the reader to imagine a framework not rooted in natural science: "Rather than a natural science frame, why not choose a phenomenological frame? Why not a feminist frame, or a disability studies frame[?]…In the end, the choice of model or frame depends not on science but on the perspectives and values of the person and persons involved" (108).

bodyminds and to share that experience with instructors (see Chapter 1). However, the successful use of diagnosis as a way to understand and explain one's disability identity relied on the diagnosis being understood by the student as well as the audience.

The language of diagnosis can also offer disabled people a route towards identifying as disabled. Finding the words to describe the experience of being disabled can be immensely powerful. Diagnoses, however, don't afford a total integration of one's experience. Danielle, who has dyslexia, noted that because many people knew something about her diagnosis that "people know what it is and so it's not like I'm really dealing with something new." Franco described how finding a diagnosis gave her a new way to understand her experience. After being diagnosed with anxiety and ADHD, she found that those labels gave her a vocabulary to talk about and understand why her bodymind functioned the way that it did. As she described.:

> But thinking back to freshman year, I never had a label to put on any of the weird feelings that I felt since I was a child! (laughs)…even now that it has a label, I'm not sure that I can separate my experiences and to move it and to know whether or not my experience was influenced by this, like, part of my identity, or whether or not I would have had that similar experience regardless.

For Franco, getting a diagnosis that helped her better understand her mental health needs aided her in developing a relationship to disability, and thus a disability identity. She saw her diagnosis as a label that gave her a vocabulary for talking about the experiences of her bodymind. At the same time, it did not change how she understood her past—she wasn't clear if having a label for her experience would change her experiences with anxiety and ADHD in the past.

The usefulness of diagnosis is relational, and the understanding and expertise of others can deeply affect if diagnosis is useful as a category of identity. As a technical language, diagnosis requires that both the audience and the speaker understand its meaning. Simone, who has a rare condition affecting her eyesight, noted that because her diagnosis was uncommon she had difficulty discussing it with her accommodation specialist: “They were weirdly skeptical that...it seemed like they didn't understand what I could see and what I couldn't see.” Abigail, who struggled greatly to understand what was happening to her bodymind prior to diagnosis, was relieved when she was given a diagnosis to understand her chronic illness. However, the contextual understanding of her diagnosis deeply affected her experience as a student. She compared her previous institution, a large private college in the Northeast, with her experience at the institution where interviews were collected; as she described:

> A lot of students here—well, not a lot—a lot of students compared to elsewhere in the world have POTS, which is a form of autonomic dysfunction. So, the person I worked with at [the disability services office] knew exactly what to do with me, which was amazing because no one at [my last institution] knew what it was. Even when I went to the health center with a weird chest pain, they were like, “Who told you had that? Like, really? Go back to your dorm, drink some Gatorade.” So that’s really awesome here.

For Abigail, having a critical mass of students with a similar diagnosis at her second institution improved her experience because the disability services office understood what her diagnosis meant and how it would change her experience as a student. Because of their knowledge of a similar condition, those who worked at the disability services office “knew exactly what to do with [her.]” In comparison, at her former institution, even the workers at the health center did not know what her diagnosis was or did not believe that she truly had her condition, doubting her identification with her diagnosis. This led to an unsustainable environment where she struggled to succeed.

Disability identity’s relationship to diagnosis is culturally and historically contextual. For some of my participants, their relationship to other forms of identity complicated understanding themselves as disabled. Their family’s relationship to disability changed how they perceived their own identification with disability. For instance, Franco’s father was a doctor, and thus she was able to access quality mental health care outside of the university health services back at home. Ana’s mother also struggled with chronic illness, and as such, she gained a great deal of expertise of working with the medical industrial complex around her diagnosis. Ozymandias wryly noted how his parents’ background shaped how they understood his mental illness:

> My parents grew up upper middle-class Indian, but upper-middle-class Indian and the 1960s was like utter poverty here…My dad grew up wealthy-ish for India at the time. My mom came from a wealthy background, but she didn't grow up wealthy. There are so many people in our family and with the inheritance, they didn't spread the wealth. But yeah so, what was I thinking, he didn't understand depression, you know? Because what's happiness? The idea of happiness wasn't something that existed in their mind. You're supposed to do A, B, and C.

When Ozymandias was younger, his parents grappled to understand his depression symptoms because of their cultural context, and he thus did not see disability as part of his identity then. While his description of his family’s cultural context is flippant, it shows how disability is contextual to one’s class and racial privilege, as well as relational to cultural norms.

Certain diagnoses hold stronger rhetorical force and can change how one identifies with or against disability, as well as how others identify one as disabled. Early in college, Ozymandias sought treatment for his depression and did not tell his parents. However, a later diagnosis of bipolar disorder changed how he related to disability and how his parents understood his bodymind. Diagnosis became a way for Ozymandias’s parents to see him as disabled and become more involved in his care and treatment. As he described, "So my parents, for depression my dad didn't understand, and I never told him about the antidepressants. But when I got diagnosed as bipolar it was like a 180-degree flip. My dad researched--he knew that that was something that was not right, you know? …My parents were very supportive, and they still are very supportive, and they take a lot of, they take care of me emotionally and financially in many ways." We see how one diagnosis over another caused Ozymandias's father to have a "180-degree flip" around how he understood Ozymandias as disabled. His family bridged their cultural contexts with this new diagnosis and saw how their child needed more emotional and financial support to thrive.

Ozymandias's story points to another complication some disabled people face around the relationship between disability identity and diagnosis—working with multiple diagnoses. Particularly for people with mental and/or chronic illnesses, diagnoses can cloud rather than clarify and understanding of what is going on with one's bodymind. As Ozymandias grew older, he gathered more diagnoses, to the point where he found them comical:

> I've been diagnosed with everything. Let's see if I have to go in order, it started off with depression, then bipolar, then schizoaffective then schizophrenia, anxiety--and I'm not even sure what that is--and ADHD, ADD. It's one of those things where I think that I'm like, I'm kind of like a New York mural. People put graffiti on me, each psychiatrist. Because I've never had a psychiatrist for more than a year, each person likes to put their own tag on me. So, it's hard for me to describe what I am, because I can't be all of these things!

Here, Ozymandias points to how both a linear emergence of his mental illness—moving from depression to more "serious" diagnoses. This trajectory is complicated by his lack of access to a psychiatrist; each doctor wants to "put their own tag" on the "New York mural" of his medical records and also his identity. Many of these diagnoses are contradictory or can’t all exist together, which makes it hard for Ozymandias to “claim” one specific diagnosis as a form of identity—he “can’t be all of these things!” The struggle to find a diagnosis that “fits” can make it incredibly complicated to use diagnosis as a way to build a disability identity.

The Bureaucratic Barriers of Institutional Accommodations

Accommodations provided by the university exist in a bureaucratic framework that sorts students based on a perception of how strongly their experience with disability affects their performance as a student. In the United States, federal law requires that colleges and universities “take actions that can be characterized as reasonable accommodations,” but “they are not required to take affirmative action, make fundamental alternations in the nature of programs, or experience undue financial and administrative burden” (Lynch and Gussel 355). For a student to be guaranteed accommodations, they must work with the institutional disability services office, as the university is not required to accommodate a student unless he or she goes through this process (Lynch and Gussel). As discussed in chapter one, many students choose to intervene in their own education without using disability services; however, they cannot be assured that they will receive a necessary accommodation without moving through the interface of disability services.

Disability services offices serve important and necessary functions for disabled students, particularly around navigating other bureaucracies of the university such as degree requirements. Kirill, Danielle, and Sam all discussed the importance of working with the disability services office to fill general education requirements in accessible ways. Danielle discussed, for example, how she used disability services to transfer her high school language requirements to college. Having attended a high school with a curriculum specifically designed to teach students with language-based learning disabilities, Danielle had three semesters of two different languages as she entered college. She was deeply concerned about taking a language in college in a classroom environment that did not center the needs of students with dyslexia. As she told me, “I had to take three semesters of language here, which I can't even picture myself doing that…[inaudible] like, to me the hardest thing, like language class I went to, I did one day of Latin and I cried afterwards. I couldn't imagine Spanish 3, like it would not work out.” After working with disability services, she fulfilled her language requirements through a combination of accepting her previous credits and taking a literature in translation class.

Though disability services offices serve an essential function, their presence and method of determining who can receive services affect how some students identify with or against disability. Some students who chose not to use disability services saw the bureaucratic structures of disability services as roadblocks to both accessing the classroom and understanding themselves as disabled. Using disability services, to some students, meant performing a disability identity that conflicted with being a successful student. As Franco described when I asked her why she had chosen not to use disability services:

> I've looked at the [disability services office] website before. It gives you a little information about getting a VISA but it doesn't do a lot too, it's not really accessible to those who have these sort of issues and it makes it seem like it has to be a catastrophic part of your life in order for you to benefit or qualify for those services. And so, there was always the worry that because I have a 3.7 that they were going to be like, "Why do you need this?"…I don't know, it's hard to navigate that because I feel like a lot of people would not see my disabilities as disabilities.

For Franco, the interface of the website and the assessment she made regarding her ability to access the services indicates a particular rhetorical relationship to identity that many disabled students must navigate because of the institutional relationship to access: being “disabled enough.” Because in this institutional context, disability services signals that they only serve clients if they are not reaching their full potential, many students feel pressured to not seek their services if they are doing well academically.

Besides how students saw their relationship to disability identity through interfacing with disability services, the bureaucratic nature of disability accommodations in higher education also creates a culture where professors reflect an excluding structure around accommodations that require students to perform a disability identity connected to suspicion and deficit. Some instructors feel they should not provide any accommodation measures unless those requests come from disability services. At the university where the data was collected, instructors are not required to provide accommodations unless students have formal accommodations from the university. However, they are also allowed to provide accommodations based on how they see fit no matter a students’ status. This creates a dynamic where a disabled student who asks for what they needs is encouraged to be labeled by the institution as disabled, whether or not they desires to do so. Simone, for example, took a long time to self-identify as disabled, even when she was actively seeking access measures in her college career. Because she wasn’t a disability services client, she frequently faced challenges accessing classroom spaces. She described a scenario that shook her as a sophomore:

> So, when I first came to college, I knew that I had a degenerative visual disease, but I had zero relationship to it. It hadn't really, it had impacted my life…I signed up for a literature class because I thought I was going to be an English major, and it was one of those large lecture lit classes, intro lit classes. On the first day, I was like, "Uh oh. I can't read the slides."

> So, I was like, "Well, this is a simple fix. I'll just ask the professor if she can send me the slide beforehand and I'll just follow along on my laptop." So, I went up there, and I asked her, and I told her, I don't remember what I exactly said, and she said, "Oh. I can't do that unless you have a [Disability Services] VISA." And I was like, "What's that?" And she was like, "Oh, just go to the [Disability Services] Center. It's for disabled students." And I was like, "WHAT? What is that? I don't like that. I don't want to do that." I don't even know if I looked it up or if I had any more information. But instead what I did was drop the class.

Deeply affected by this experience, Simone described how this interaction made her feel as if she was deceiving her professor: “It felt like, uh, one of those moves when the teacher wants to be sure the student isn't lying in order to not be, not have to come to lecture. I felt like she thought I was lying, like I was trying to cheat or something.” Simone's experience with the barriers to institutional access first show how identity is implicated in accessibility requests. Occurring when Simone had “zero relationship” to her disability, this moment was formative for Simone in understanding the implications of claiming or being labeled with a disability identity. The interaction with the professor taught her that asking for a “simple fix” related to her disability would frame her as a duplicitous and lazy student. While Simone made a fairly simple request to her instructor, the instructor was unwilling to meet the request without her taking on the identity of being a disability services client, and by extension, identifying as disabled. Her instructor was indeed not legally obligated to provide slides without a VISA. Simone did not find other means to take the class or “work around” her access needs or her reluctance to be seen as disabled; instead, she dropped the class. Her experience also shows us one of the emotional consequences of a bureaucratic structure of access that forces students to identify themselves as disabled to receive accessibility measures. Rhetorical interventions around access that are not sanctioned by the university can leave some disabled students as feeling distrusted and as if they are “trying to cheat.”

Ethan noted that the system of accommodation marked him as a student who should not be at the university to some professors. Accommodations, for these instructors, were an institutional structure that “cheated” the whole system of higher education, meant to exclude “weaker” students from the opportunities afforded by a college education. As Ethan described:

> I've had professors that have the mindset the college is not for everyone. And you know like that like, that some of the professors you know use like the crude example of like, like someone needs to be a janitor. Like somebody needs to do like general labor jobs. Like not everyone is cut out for college. It's like, it's a system to basically like, the most academically successful students that have the most potential are the ones that are supposed to get a college education. So it's like they don't feel college is for everyone. So, it's like sometimes I almost get like that, that sense from them. It's like because college is competitive, so they want you to compete with everyone on the same level playing field and like without accommodation. So, like if you fail without accommodation, then you just like fail in the competition with everyone else because you're not meant to be in college. So, it's like, so like that's interesting! [Laughs]

Ethan’s description shows the impacts of bureaucratic rhetoric of higher education that are built on the foundations of ableism. First, the instructors Ethan describes see higher education as only for the “most academically successful” students, regardless of their own goals and uninformed by the evidence of inequality baked into educational systems. By arguing that college moves bodies out of the pipeline for “general labor” jobs, these instructors unwittingly reproduce the idea that disabled students should only be looking for the kinds of jobs that might be the most inaccessible to them. Evoking the metaphor of the “level playing field,” these instructors use the very metaphor that forms the foundation of the bureaucratic system of disability accommodations against itself.

Formal accommodations script a performance of disability identity that can be inflexible. This inflexibility pressures students to disclose more than they want to about their experience with their bodyminds, as well as emotionally navigate the lowered expectations of their professors. Kristen explained how one professor seemed to not understand how her need for extended time could vary:

> I finished within the allotted time, not with the extra time. And I finished pretty quickly. One, I knew everything, I have studied really hard for it. And I handed him back the exam, and he was like, “You're already done?” I was like, “Yeah!” Then he was like, “Well, you don't need extra time.” And that to me was like, you obviously don't get this. You didn't quite understand it. Maybe you didn't read the VISA all the way. Maybe you didn't read the letter of flexibility all the way through…It's just, yeah, sorry, it gets frustrating sometimes. (Laughs) Without giving you the whole sob story, I don't know how else, I don't know how to tell you, I don't know how to relay that information.

In this encounter, Kristen shows how finishing a test early negates her disability status to a professor. Not needing all the allotted extra time on one test that she had studied very hard for ran counter to the professor’s understanding of disability identity; she did not seem “disabled enough” to him to receive accommodations. She expresses frustration at how the professor did not read the paperwork she had worked to attain, and how she felt she would have to reveal more about herself to get accommodations from this professor in the future.

Some professors respond to the bureaucratic environment of accommodations in higher education by recreating the rhetorical force of bureaucracy for students who do not register for accommodations with disability services. Anxious about students' accommodations requests, their response encourages distrust, forces students to "prove" their disability, and mounts paperwork as a barrier to access. These moves deeply influence how disabled students understand disability identity, particularly at a moment where their disability identity might be emergent. Rose described such an experience when they first asked for an accommodation around attendance. At the time, Rose did not have formal accommodations from the university, and the professor had no specific disability policies in her syllabus. As Rose said, "I didn't realize that if you miss over the amount of excused absences it's not only that your absence grade goes down, it's that your entire grade in the class goes down a full letter grade." Rose had an emotional exchange with the professor, where they cried from the amount of pressure they were facing at the end of the semester and because they had "been really depressed and having a hard time coming to class."

Rose's professor was willing to accommodate Rose—but only if they created an institutionally sanctioned paper trail to stand in for formal accommodations. As Rose said:

> She was like, okay, well I need a note from your doctor. I was like, okay, I can do that. And she was like, but I don't want this to be a personal thing, I don't want to seem like I'm giving you a personal favor. So, what I need you to do is have your doctor send it to a dean, and have the dean send it to me…it was clear that she was making this decision, and I don't know if it happened before and she had a student do this. But this is not anywhere a rule that you need to have the dean send it to you and then it's more official.

Rose's professor makes an ad-hoc decision to thwart Rose's access request by creating more paperwork roadblocks. These roadblocks mirrored the process that Rose would need to take to get formal accommodations from the university’s disability service office: getting a diagnosis from a doctor, then having a university official “approve” the paperwork and authorize a conversation about accommodations between the student and the professor. Rather than seeming like she was giving Rose a “personal favor” after being moved by Rose’s rhetorical efforts to receive more leniency on absences, the professor relied on her position of power to create a false paperwork channel that mirrored the vetting process of disability services.

Rose complied. They described how they “managed to get an appointment with my therapist within five days, which was kind of miraculous.” After that, Rose went to the dean and said, “Hey, my therapist is going to send you a letter in my teacher just wants you to send that letter. And they were like okay cool, so we’ll receive and we’ll just forward it to her. So literally they were being a middle person.” Rose identifies that the dean’s office recognized their role as a “middle person,” using the language of management to discuss the process of providing documentation for their disability to this professor. Rose reflected on how that experience felt:

> Having to self-advocate, share really more than I wanted with this teacher-- because she was not, like the whole thing made me feel kind of yucky. Also, when I told her, she was like oh I wish I could give you a hug! But it would be inappropriate! And I was like, you're so weird. Get me out of here! I do not want to hug from you, thanks!

Rose’s experience shows us how “certifying” one’s disability and being forced to perform a disability identity can create negative consequences for disabled students. In a bureaucratic system that functions on a blend of medical documentation and rhetorical self-advocacy from the student, professors have the power to reroute their emotional reactions to students’ disclosures of disability through intricate systems of power. In Rose’s case, the channeling of this institutional power forced them to work hard to acquire documentation and reveal far more than they desired to about their disability, as well as endure the inappropriate emotional reactions of the professor to their disclosure. Though this is a particularly tense example, Rose’s story shows us how professors have the power to create hoops through which disabled students have to jump even if they attempt to circumvent the formal accommodations system.

Classroom Encounters

In addition to professor’s expectations about disability identity that were deeply rooted in the bureaucratic structure of institutional accommodations, disabled students also found their classroom interactions with fellow students as influential in their decision to claim or hide a disability identity. Other marginalized identities held by students also influenced their identification with or against disability. Several participants indicated that their classmates’ hostility towards disability discourse and insensitivity to disability led them to conceal their disability. Conversely, classrooms that discussed disability, particularly disability studies classrooms, provided a powerful space for students to explore and claim a disability identity.

Classroom Interactions

For some disabled students, revealing a disability identity would lead to classmates asking prurient questions about their experience. Kristen, for example, found it difficult to share her disabled experience because her fellow students neither understood her disability or her experience as a veteran. As she describes:

> So, I was in the military for several years…That in of itself complicates things. But. So, I came back [to class after absences], and if you would say, "Oh my God I just had the worst migraine ever. It was like four days long." They'd be like, what the heck are you talking about? What is wrong with you? So I'd say, "Well I was in the military and, you know, things happened." They'd be like, “What things happened? Tell me more about this! Did you kill??”

> My favorite line - did you kill anyone? I'm like, oh my gosh, stop talking. Stop talking. They just want to know everything and anything.

For Kristen, opening up to her classmates about why she missed class—a migraine that lasted several days—lead to a line of questioning that alienated her. Her classmates could not comprehend having a migraine that lasted for four days, and thus needed to know “what was wrong” with her. After she described how “things happened” in the military, mainly that she experienced a traumatic brain injury, students took that opportunity to ask her inappropriate questions not related to her disability. Moments like this would lead to Kristen changing how she related to students. She stated, “Sometimes I like, I have to set the boundaries and that I'm, and that I'm not friendly. So sometimes I feel like I would want to control the discussion which is also very hard.” She felt that these encounters signaled that students didn’t see her as a fellow student, but as an anomaly that they could tell a story about later: “When it's genuine I want to get to know you as a person and I want to get to know you as a human being because maybe you want more interactions after this, there's that. But when it's just, they don't really care about you, but they just want to hear a story…They don't really care about me as a human being per se.” Kristen only felt comfortable sharing her experience with both her disability and her experience as a veteran with students who wanted to develop a personal relationship with her, which was incredibly rare.

Experiences with other forms of marginalization, such as racism, affected how and if students explored and took up a disability identity. For some, experiences with racism and the pressure of discussing racism as a person of color exacerbated or even caused their negative experiences with disability. When I collected my interview with Franco, the university in question had recently struggled with overt displays of racism before the 2016 presidential election, including racist graffiti and an arrest of a Black student in class. Shortly before our interview, campus activists had held a die-in in the undergraduate library. Franco discussed feeling stuck between a rock and hard place in relation to race and disability:

> So like race feels like a bigger "disability" to me than like my actual mental disabilities, because it's so much more obvious. And I think, and I'm like not sure how that's had an effect on my mental health, or if race is like one of the reasons for me having always had anxiety…Especially this year. It's been so tough...so as an anxious individual, I'm not afraid to talk in class but I'm afraid of sounding like a dumbass. Or people, like, rejecting my ideas or just blowing it off, or thinking that I'm dumb without giving it a second. And so, I think that some of that is fueled by the sort of like, uh, element of race that's present on campus.

Franco expresses a double bind here: being taken less seriously in discussions of race, which exacerbated her anxiety to the point she saw her race as having a bigger negative impact on her classroom experience. Negative experiences related to disability are a chicken and egg problem for her; it is difficult for her to untangle what anxiety is caused by her experience with racism versus her pre-existing anxiety in interpersonal interactions. Because for her race was a visible identity while her disability was invisible, she found it even harder to pinpoint the causality to her negative experiences.

This encounter was all the more complicated because she was unsure how her voice as an Asian student fit into the conversation centered on anti-Black racism on campus:

> Especially because, as a minority I'm very sympathetic towards all of the activism that happens but I also feel as an Asian student very silenced. Because I have some qualms with the ways that people are trying to address a lot of the situations, and it's hard for me because, like I have this conversation with people all the time that I want to express the ways that I've

> been thinking about these issues, but I am anxious about it because there's a really big risk of being accused of being racist or me being accused of not knowing what I'm talking about or just jumping on the bandwagon. And so that's been something that's been very frustrating…I sort of feel like I don't have a voice with the social issues on campus, because so many people assume I'm an international student and so my voice doesn't matter.

Here, Franco moves away from talking about her disability to focus on her complicated position as a non-Black student of color in predominantly white classrooms at an institution where increasing incidents of anti-Black racism were occurring. She neither agreed with the tactics that many student activists were taking to address the campus climate, nor supported a lack of response to the incidents that occurred. Between "being accused of being racist or me being accused of not knowing what [she's] talking about" by other students of color or "just jumping on the bandwagon" by white students, Franco's anxiety was deeply exacerbated.[31] Such an experience challenged her ability to claim disability as an identity as well, as it risked her further being marginalized in classroom spaces and campus conversations. Working through her identities of both race and disability was an additional challenge to her as a student. As she concluded, "There's like all of these different complicated things that make me feel like kind of unable to navigate this whole ivory tower."

How classmates responded to disability discourse, meaning common cultural practices that signal disability access particularly in classroom spaces, deeply impacted how students saw their disability identity. When other students trivialized disability discourse, disabled students found it harder to identify with disability in classroom spaces. Shade, for example, discussed

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[31] This was a challenging moment for me in my data collection, as I strongly supported the activism that students of color were doing at the time and strongly believed in their right to disrupt the status quo of the campus's day-to-day experience.

how students would make fun of the concept of trigger warnings in her classes, saying, “A lot of my gender and women's studies classes, they usually give disclaimers like trigger warnings. I don't like calling them that. A lot of people are like, ‘Oh, I'm triggered by this!’ and they don't really mean it. Something like it's a picture of a cat, and they're like, ‘Oh I'm triggered because I'm a dog lover!’” Here, Shade is so put off by her classmates’ trivializing trigger warnings that she no longer likes “calling them that.” As a linguistic marker of disability access, particularly associated with mental illness, trigger warnings are rhetorically connected with disability and are part of a broader conversations about disability access in the classroom.[32] When other students made light of disability discourse, students were dissuaded from publicly identifying with disability.

In addition to being flippant about disability discourse, disabled students were discouraged from identifying with disability in classroom contexts where other students uncritically treated the realities of disability. When other students trivialized the experience of disability, disabled students predictably felt separated from the classroom community. Shade discussed an example of how students in her classroom made light of suicide:

> Neil: Do you have any negative memories with regards to your experience with anxiety and depression in classroom situations?
>
> Shade: Yeah...yeah. Um, ah, in a lot of classes, we have talked about like suicide and stuff. The way people talk about it, I feel like they don't respect it almost. Like, and they talk about it indifferently and it made me really upset and I had to leave class both those times…They were talking about it, and they were just like, "Oh this person committed..." just so flippantly,

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[32] For a broader discussion about the rhetorical nature of trigger warnings, see my article with Sarah Orem and Kendall Gerdes’s “Trauma, Trigger Warnings, and the Rhetoric of Sensitivity.”

> and it...I feel like people don't take it seriously enough. I mean, I had suicidal ideologies, I never tried or anything, but it's still cut pretty deep.
>
> Neil: Yeah.
>
> Shade: And so, the main negative things are I had to leave class because I couldn't be around it anymore.

Shade identifies here how students in her class disregarded how serious suicidality was for some of their fellow students. By talking “flippantly” about suicide by using terminology like “committed” suicide, her classmates demonstrated that they felt no one in the classroom could potentially also manage suicidality. [33] Her professor’s lack of intervention in this instance is also telling. The result for her was needing to physically exit the classroom space, losing out on class discussion and the chance to participate in a conversation directly relevant to her experience.

At this juncture it is important to note that the opposite of dismissing or demeaning disability in classroom spaces is not necessarily disability advocacy from fellow students. While none of my participants discussed a negative encounter where students tokenized disability or advocated for disability in a way that perpetuated ableism, such an experience could have similarly deleterious effects for disabled students. Using archival analysis, Allison Hitt has described how a group of fraternity brothers at Syracuse between 1967-1975 worked to support a disabled fraternity brother in ways that both “challenged stereotypes about fraternity life” and “bounced between disparate identities that threatened the value of their work” (337). Throughout a campaign advocating for architectural change at Syracuse that directly reflected one fraternity brother’s accessibility needs, the fraternity “positioned [their brother] as a poster child” and not

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[33] A linguistic shift mental health advocates commonly work towards is saying “died by suicide” rather than “committed suicide.”

engaging with other disabled students at the university or a political stance towards disability more broadly (340). For non-disabled students to support their disabled peers and create an environment for them to access disability as an identity, the broader context of disability at the institution needs to be addressed.

Additionally, personal advocacy can create a situation that is awkward for the disabled student, changing the environment of the classroom. The awkwardness of being identified as disabled can cut both ways for disabled students: other students create shame around disability and then frame disclosure as a problem. Danielle illustrated this in relation to a game she was playing with her Mock Trial team:

> They asked you a question and you have to write down your answer and then people compare answers. And so, I wrote down "Will's protein powder" for my group. Protein powder. And I spelled protein wrong. And uh, people were like, oh, and also you can't see who wrote it. They're like anonymous. And so, someone was so they're all like, oh my gosh, who spelled protein wrong? And I was literally just like, "Ulp!" [indistinct] like could I was just like, so I was just like, so like, like embarrassed and someone was like, who did it? and I was like, [raises hand] and then one of the boys on my team was like, it's because she's dyslexic! Which was so not trying to like be mean about it. But then everybody's just like, you can't say that. And I was like, well now you're making it seem more like, like dyslexia is a problem you can't say now! And like it was just like I was like, I just want to not be here right now, like time move forward faster.

Danielle’s peers make fun of their anonymous fellow student for a simple misspelling, making Danielle uncomfortably aware of her mistake. In the intervening moments, a peer explains her error as being about her dyslexia, which is followed by a student exclaiming “You can’t say that!" The rhetorical dynamics of disability identity and its relationship to interactions with fellow students shown here reveals how students are pressured to not claim their disability or be identified by their disability while at the same time they are penalized for writing or speaking in ways that are affected by disability.

Disability Studies Classes

While classroom cultures affected how disabled students experienced disability identity, the content of the course could strongly shape how they identified with disability. The impact of disability studies upon students' sense of disability identity may be rooted in the purpose of disability studies as a field. As Simi Linton has described, "Disability studies has arisen in the past twenty years to focus an organized critique on the constricted, inadequate, and inaccurate conceptualizations of disability that have dominated academic inquiry. Above all, the critique includes a challenge to the notion that disability is primarily a medical category" (2). In short, disability studies courses can challenge negative assumptions about disability and show how disability functions as a social category. Taking disability studies classes had a strong impact on several students and gave them a language to talk about disability identity in new ways. Shade, Abigail, and Simone all discussed how taking a disability studies class affected whether they identified as disabled or not. For Shade, taking a disability studies class reached her in ways that disability services did not:

> Neil: Has not being a [disability services] client affected the way that you talk about your disability at all to professors?
>
> Shade: No, because I... I have never really considered it a disability, like only recently I realized that, "Oh, some people do call these kind of things disabilities." Really recently I've been only thinking about it as I've been taking my Girlhood and Disability class and she's

> been like, "Yeah, there's psychosocial disabilities that include this and this!" And I was like, "Well, these things do limit my life a lot." So... but since I never really considered it a disability before, I felt like, I didn't feel like, you know, hurt or anyway or not. Because I didn't even know what the [disability services] center was. It was never presented to me.

Though Shade had experienced anxiety that deeply affected her life since high school and had acutely shaped her college experience, she never saw this as a disability. Because she had not connected the experience of her bodymind with disability, she had never seen herself as a potential client for the disability services office. However, taking a class in disability studies showed her how “these things do limit [her] life a lot,” and gave her a vocabulary to think of her experience of her bodymind as a disability.

For Simone, who was deeply resistant to identifying as disabled throughout her undergraduate career, taking a disability studies class in graduate school similarly gave her a perspective that shaped her identity as disabled. Unlike Shade, taking a disability studies class helped her see beyond the limits her disabled embodiment brought to her life. As Simone said:

> Going into grad school, I was like, "Why would I study disability? I'm here to study writing." You know? I had no idea that it really had any connection. But at the same time, I should really take [this class] because people say it's good and I've got this visual thing and I don't think I'm disabled but...[laughs] And then I took it and I was like, "Oh my god, I think I have a disability!"

After Simone’s self-revelation, it took her time to shape her response to the content of the class:

> And so, I was pretty quiet in that class because I was having a lot of identification with the material, but [the professor] knew I was visually impaired because I'd told her for access purposes. And I think she was like, kinda like the whole time, "Why isn't this girl talking

> about anything?" You know, people were very personal and relating things to their experience. But I just couldn't do it at that point.

While Simone had this transformative experience in a disability studies class, the emergence of her own disability identity took time. Access to the discourse of disability studies allowed her to square the experience of her bodymind with her other identities, but also changed how she performed being a student in this classroom context.

As we explored in the last section, disability identity is a powerful force in higher education classrooms shaped by the medical discourse of diagnosis, the bureaucratic system of accommodations in higher education, and social and interpersonal interactions. Disabled students often find claiming a disability identity challenging, because it is so often correlated with being a less successful student and can cause deeply wounding experiences with exclusion and marginalization. Unlike other forms of identity, it is also rare that students experience a pleasurable or reframed understanding of disability identity outside the context of disability studies courses.[34] These formulations of disability identity shape how and if students do rhetorical identification around disability, and also lead to students using disidentification to find ways to move in college.

Disability Identity in the Classroom: Disidentification as a Tactic

Disability has a complicated role as an identity category. As many disability scholars have observed, the fact that disabled people do not share a typified experience of a bodymind presents challenges for a shared sense of identity (Siebers, Walters). Thinking intersectionally, *who* gets to claim a disabled identity is fraught. Nirmala Erevelles has extensively explored how

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[34] The role of pleasure in identity formation—and the lack of pleasure often available to disability identity—is a concept that will require much deeper inquiry in future projects. Shannon Walters explores this concept in *Rhetorical Touch*, noting that the pleasure of touch allows disabled rhetors a way to break through the limited emotional rhetorics they are afforded.

in American K-12 education, students of color tend to be tracked into behavioral disability diagnoses, while white students with similar behavioral patterns tend to be given learning disability diagnoses ("Crippin' Jim Crow"). In *The Right to Maim*, Jasbir Puar has written at length about how access to disability as an identity is a particular white, Western phenomenon and that state structures create debility to strategically control and disenfranchise populations through bodily harm. Even within disability studies, the politics around how to talk about disability as an identity have created rifts and shifts over time. An initial goal of disability studies was to move away from a medical model of disability, whereby disability is rooted in an individualized medical diagnosis. Disability studies scholars sought a move towards a social model of disability, where disability exists because of the social construction of environments and systems.[35] Currently, many disability scholars seek to intervene with new models that account for the social construction of disability alongside the material challenges to disability as an identity (Kafer, "Feminist, Crip Queer," Schalk, "Bodyminds Reimagined").

For instance, Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* seeks to build a "political/relational model" of disability. Here, the "problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being" (6). Thus, "social change and political transformation" rather than medical intervention become a way to dismantle ableism. Her model also departs from the social model of disability by dispensing with the "distinction between impairment and disability" (7). For Kafer, "impairment refers to any physical or mental limitation, while disability signals the social exclusions based on and social meanings attached to that impairment" (7). This shift in the perspective highlights a central challenge in building a

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[35] See, for example, Simi Linton's *Claiming Disability*.

disability identity—disabled subjects may desire a sense of disability identity while not desiring the continued decline of their bodymind or an increase in pain.

Jose Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification can help us understand the tension at play in the work of disability studies scholars and in the lives of the students who participated in my project. While framed outside of the vocabulary of rhetorical studies, disidentification is a deeply rhetorical phenomenon, “descriptive of a survival strategy,” for people who experience intersecting forms of marginalization. Detailing the contemporary art of queer and trans people of color, Muñoz explores how they recycle cultural objects imbued with “powerful energy” meant to destroy them (39). Disidentification acknowledges both the pleasure and the potential for destruction caused by recasting a “problematic object,” and describes how to “[work] to retain the problematic object and tap into the energies that are produced by the contradictions and ambivalences” (71).

As a term, there are several valences of Muñoz’s concept of disidentification that have helped me understand how my participants relate to identity and identification. First, Muñoz notes how disidentification “happens on the level of both production and reception” (72). If we extend disidentification into a rhetorical act, this means it influences how rhetors address audiences, as well as how audiences can receive an address. Second, Muñoz connects disidentification to particular stylistic modes, such as humor; as he describes, “comedic disidentification accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (119). For my purposes, this relates to the use of tone and vocabulary used to access the classroom in chapter one, but I will explore some additional modes in this chapter; in particular, the mode of provoking discomfort.

Finally, Muñoz's concept of *disidentity* helped frame my participants' complicated sense of self in relation to disability. Drawing on a reading of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's deeply personal but aesthetically disconnected art, Muñoz describes disidentity as a "distanced and nuanced rendering of the self" that "functions as a counterpublicity that provides pictures of possible future relations to power" (178).[36] Disidentity is a recognition of your "impersonal self" or the way your bodymind is viewed and used rhetorically by others. I propose that, at least among my participants, their disability identity functions as a disidentity—in this case, an identity that they are painfully aware of the rhetorical consequences of claiming. Disability detaches and separates them from the community of students at the university. The position of disidentity induces a highly rhetorical understanding of identity and identification.

As such, disabled students sometimes practice disidentification as a rhetorical tactic with their professors and classmates as they move through university life. Their experience of disidentity in relation to disability leads to a rhetorical act that puts Muñoz's framework of disidentification in relief with the broader practice of rhetorical identification. Disidentification is a tactic used by disabled students to progress in a university that negates and invalidates the experience of a disabled bodymind. Using disidentification in this way involves a detached understanding of the consequences of your bodymind being in the space of the university; it is about your choice to, in Dolmage's term, enter through the back door but perhaps letting that door slam loudly. It involves an awareness of how your presence is a practice of "not lining up" (Muñoz 86). Thinking about disidentification in conversation with rhetorical identification, disidentification dispenses with consubstantiality as a goal of rhetorical exchange, though it is

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[36] One of Gonzalez-Torres' most iconic works is "Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), where a pile of brightly-colored candies is piled in a gallery in the weight of Gonzalez-Torres's boyfriend who died from AIDS. The audience is encouraged to take pieces of candy, and the gallery replaces the candy once it is depleted.

not necessarily combative; it takes for granted that identification will often not happen but forges ahead. Disidentification also dispenses with the necessity of having a deep connection to an identity position from which you intervene, in this case disability. This dispensing has consequences for how, when, and if disabled people access disability as an identity.

While disidentification is in some ways related to rhetorical identification, I cannot simply replace of Burke's concept of "identification" with Muñoz's "disidentification." Indeed, many students I interviewed eagerly practiced rhetorical identification as well as disidentification. Such a tactic is necessary for one to justify their presence as a disabled student in a college classroom. One pattern I saw was for students to use their own bodyminds as learning tools in a classroom space in an attempt to show their classmates how they were consubstantial with each other. By consubstantiality, I mean Burke's conclusion that in order to bridge the innate differences we share by nature of being separate beings, rhetors find ways to bridge the "ambiguities of substance" and be both "joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with one another" (21). Sharing the same goal of learning difficult content, they offered their personal experiences with disability; in many cases, they narrativized their own bodyminds in the pursuit of shared consubstantiality around a learning task. Ana, Abigail, Dean and Ozymandias all discussed examples of this; Dean's was particularly illustrative:

> Often times in my psychology or sociology courses more personal kind of classes, and also in biology, especially when talking about nerves and how it interacts with muscles, I can bring up firsthand how they interact with each other! (Laughs) And when one goes wrong the others go wrong. So, I'll often point to myself as an example, this is what happens when the nerves go good, and this is what happens when they don't!

Dean used his body to teach his classmates about the function of nerves, pointing directly to his body to do so. His instruction was not only to connect students with the experience of his disability, but the functional aspects of his disabled embodiment. He could show how his bodymind was distinct from others in the class but how they shared the same learning goals, allowing him to use rhetorical identification in the communicative challenge of occupying the classroom as a disabled student.

Disidentification as a rhetorical tactic differs in terms of motives and goals from rhetorical identification. Rather than grounded in finding consubstantiality, of revealing a foundational shared sense of human experience that justifies shared rhetorical goals and shared access to a space, disidentification takes up the goals of survival to shift a relationship to a "problematic object"—in this case, the problematic object is the acquisition of higher education. Disidentification takes advantage of the "contradictions and ambivalences" that are inherent in how the bureaucratic structures of higher education treat disability and disabled students. It is not invested in building a shared ground around understanding a shared experience of the bodymind; in fact, disidentification functions to show how disabled bodyminds are distinct and perhaps contradictory to the arrangement of an institution.

As an example, Ana performed disidentification in the face of her professor's effort to ignore the realities of her bodymind's needs in the classroom space. As she described:

> A lot of professors have expressed surprise when I've told them I'm diabetic. Like, it took a lot of people years to discover that I was. I haven't known what to do with that information. I think I've made a point more recently about being public about checking my blood sugar. In part, because I think it's good for people to see what would otherwise be an invisible, chronic illness...I remember one time with a professor I had had many times before, we had worked

> very closely together, I was having a low during a meeting and I said, "Excuse me, I'm going to check my blood sugar." And she had NO IDEA that I was diabetic, which is fine, but I was also surprised because it's also such a central part of my life. So, I think that's something I've been kind of amazed--that is, how...I don't mean this in a pejorative way, but how unobservant the professors have been about what's going on with me, when to me it's very obvious.

Ana articulates how testing her blood sugar has become more than just the maintenance of her bodymind in academic spaces. She recognizes that it is a rhetorical intervention, that “it’s good for people to see” a student testing their blood sugar, to grow both comfortable with and observant of this practice as something that might happen in a classroom. But rather than just being a benign intervention, Ana’s blood sugar testing becomes disidentification because it responds to the pressure that her chronic illness remains invisible *even when it was constantly visible* to faculty members she worked closely with. Ana recognizes how her access to higher education is contingent on interacting with professors and institutional structures that want to turn away (literally, in some cases) from the reality of her needs. Using disidentification as a tactic, she shifts toward making the maintenance of her bodymind *more* visible rather than try to lessen the impact of these practices.

How Disabled Students Do Disidentification

In this section, I will explore how students use disidentification as a rhetorical tactic to move through the university. Three key ways that students perform disidentification with disability identity arose from my data. First, students sometimes used other forms of identity to bridge conversations about disability and disability identity with professors and fellow students.[37] By using other identities that they felt more comfortable disclosing, they were able to stand apart from disability identity, rendering it a “disidentity” in Muñoz’s terms. Disabled students also used disidentification to challenge assumptions about disability in the classroom. Some disabled students strategically used anger and dismay to shape classroom conversations about disability, in ways that highlighted how their disability identity set them apart. Finally, some disabled students used disidentification to integrate the experience with a disabled bodymind into their experiences with ableism in higher education.

Disabled students sometimes perform disidentification by using other kinds of identities to advocate for other students with disabilities and to connect with them as disabled students, but through a different shared identity. This method of disidentification is particularly useful in navigating the stigma associated with being a disabled student within the institution. Kristen used it to gently encourage a fellow student to seek out the disability student services office:

> Now I think I've told one person in my class who… That I have a VISA. And we've kind of talked about it. He was also a vet and so, I kind of said well this is how it's helped and this is how it hasn't. Nothing too big or memorable as of now…We're in the statistics class together and we had just had her first midterm. He had really struggled with it. And I was like, well, have you tried doing these other things? I've kind of gotten good at... Like I bring earplugs to all of my classes! (laughs). So, I was asking him all these things, like hey, have you tried this? Have you tried this? And of course, I…I was upstairs in the [disability services] room. And then he said I think that might be something that I need to do.

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[37] The concept of bridging is also notably related to transfer. Perkins and Salomon suggest that bridging can be a pedagogical technique where teachers “point out explicitly the more general principles behind particular skills or knowledge” to encourage learning transfer (”Teaching for Transfer” 28-29). Some of the participants in my study were bridging the accommodation knowledge they had gathered for other students who they recognized as having a disability.

Kristen recognized and named that her fellow classmate was a veteran, then used her knowledge of how that experience affected her own bodymind to consider how she could help this student around disability access. She does not mention disability at all in this interaction, allowing the VISA to stand in for a disability identity. She does not even mention the VISA at first. Instead of sharing with classmates that she had a VISA, particularly in light of their prurient interest in her being a veteran, Kristen only shared her disability accommodations with a fellow veteran to show how they could aid in his experience of the classroom. By sharing her own strategies for managing combat-induced PTSD and other mental health needs, such as bringing earplugs to exams, Kristen further connects with her peer, helping to teach him skills that might be of use for him. At the end of their conversation, Kristen notes her absence from the testing environment as she was in another room. Her peer notes that "that might be something I need to do." This connection via their shared veteran status, which stands in as a proxy for disability identity, allows them to connect and do rhetorical identification around disability while maintaining a detached distance from disability.

For some students, bridging a disability identity with other identities highlighted the challenges of embodying a disability identity. From an intersectional perspective, disability became more difficult to discuss as a part of the different elements of their identity. Abigail, for instance, described how coming out as disabled was more difficult than coming out as queer:

> It's like a kind of coming out, which is interesting because first I had to deal with that coming out [as disabled] and then coming out as queer. Which was way easier! It's way easier to be like, "Oh my god, Kristen Stewart is so hot" than "Oh by the way, I have this heart thing and I can't come to your fourth-floor walk-up." Now I kind of don't say anything unless it's relevant.

Abigail highlights how revealing a queer identity with friends can be a way to connect around a shared pleasure—crushing on a celebrity. Meanwhile, revealing a disability to peers emphasizes what Abigail can't share with friends, such as inaccessible home spaces.

Even with the challenges of claiming a disability identity, Abigail used disidentification with disability identity to explore intersectionality with fellow classmates. As she explained:

> I was in GWS [Gender and Women's Studies] 102 …there was a day where we were talking about intersectionality in discussion. The TA…she handed out cards of different identities that were all mixed up. We had someone with a gender, a race, a class, whether they were able-bodied or what disability they had. That was fun, and I sort of talked to my group about it. Because I think our person was bisexual and had an invisible illness. So, I was like, "Hey, so those are both invisible and it's really hard to have those two invisible things. Sometimes it's hard and sometimes it's beneficial, but it is still hard—just so everyone knows." But unless it's relevant I just don't say anything.

Here, Abigail intentionally does not reveal her disability to her classmates—or her queer identity, for that matter—but speaks to the challenges of having invisible identities. Abigail highlights the intentionality of her rhetorical effort here by stating at the end that "unless it's relevant, I just don't say anything." By speaking from her perspective but not revealing her disability, she uses disidentification to help herself and her classmates better understand intersectional identity without risking revealing too much about herself.

As described in the previous section, students also use their own experience with their bodyminds as a learning tool for their classmates. Sometimes this functions as rhetorical identification, while other times it is a form of disidentification. When trying to share the experience of identity with others, sometimes disabled students use their disability identity to challenge assumptions about disability in the classroom. Importantly, this form of disidentification happened most frequently in classrooms where disabled students felt supported by the professor. Shade gives us one example:

> Shade: In certain classes, especially like the Girlhood and Disability class I'm in now. We bring in objects to present. Someone brought in a t-shirt and it said, "Stressed, depressed, but well-dressed." I was saying, "Oh well, I have depression and severe anxiety, so this shirt is really bad for me, I don't like this." I use it to provoke discussion or to talk from example.
>
> Neil: What does that feel like, to sort of talk about it?
>
> Shade: It feels a bit alienating. When I talk about it, it feels like a lot of people are looking at me. Like, "Oh that's weird, I've never thought about it before." I had a lot of trouble my sophomore year riding the bus because I was really anxious about it, so I couldn't get around to class easily. So, when I tell people I couldn't ride the bus because I was scared, they were like, "Oh, really? That happens to people?" It feels kind of othering. But I feel like it's good for people to broaden their horizons.

Here, Shade shows us how she makes conscious, deliberate choices to reveal her experience with depression and anxiety to produce a certain rhetorical effect on her classmates. Specifically, she provokes their discomfort in an effort to challenge their perceptions about disability. Shade describes these moments as “alienating” and “othering” because she is putting herself on display as someone whose bodymind requires breaking some of the basic norms about college life, such as riding the bus. Her goal is not to connect with her fellow students, but to “broaden their horizons.” She gets no personal benefit to sharing her experience with students in these cases—these “provoking” moments are meant to rupture her classmates’ comfort with their own experience of being a college student. Her efforts here fall under disidentification because she is aware of how her rhetorical tactic will separate her from her classmates, but she decides the choice is worth it—for their sake as much as hers.

As teachers, some of my participants found it important to be "out" about their disability as a form of disidentification with the broader structures of academia. They not only saw themselves as examples for disabled students to follow, they also pushed against the narrative many disabled students encounter of being "the first" disabled student in a given educational context by using their experiences with their bodymind to empathize with students. Ozymandias said, "I tell them how to use [the disability resource office.] And like, who to go to advocate. And I nag them all the time, because I'm understanding about it, but I know that other professors might not be." Here, Ozymandias shares his own hard-earned knowledge about navigating disability resources on campus and the rhetorical force of that documentation for his students who may have a disability. He acknowledges that while he is "understanding," he works in a context with colleagues who might reject students' needs around disability. He continued by saying, "I kind of nag them a lot about it, *and I make it clear that I am one too*. And I don't think, I think my ADD is pretty freaking obvious, so it's something I don't necessarily need to hide" (emphasis mine). Ozymandias makes sure that his students know about his disability not only because he sees it as obvious, but because his presence as a graduate student instructor is an important counter to the narratives his students receive about what levels of education disabled students can attain. While visibility is a personal choice, and as we have discussed the cost of claiming disability can be immense, Ozymandias's choice to disclose shows us a powerful way that disabled instructors and faculty can also perform disidentification with the academic structures they find themselves within.

Understanding how disability works in an intersectional context also shows how disabled students can approach another angle into disidentification as a tactic.[38] Seeing how other communities understand disability and using that as a stance to ground expectations helps some disabled students navigate higher education. Rose, for example, talked about how over the past few years, they had "just become generally a more confident person," and that they had been "getting more involved with the queer community, while also building my confidence as a student or academic." The space of the queer community gave them a different perspective from which to understand how disability functioned in higher education. As Rose puts it:

> The queer community when it comes to mental health shit is just like more better about it! When it comes to disability stuff. I mean like, not across the board, but like, the queer communities that I'm in and the people who are in those communities generally have an awareness of like disability and mental health. And like honestly all the queer people I know have mental health challenges, so it's something that I feel comfortable talking about. So I feel like largely that has made me feel comfortable talking about it. Because it's like, when I talk to someone about mental health and they clearly seem uncomfortable, I mean, I don't push somebody. But it's like, I don't get embarrassed anymore when someone else feels uncomfortable because it's important to me that this be something that I can talk about with people in my life. So, if you're not comfortable with it, you need to get comfortable or there's always going to be a barrier to how close I can be with you.

Rose articulates how participating in an identity-based community that was more accepting of mental illness, and where mental illness and disability was more present, gave them the confidence needed to confront others in different spaces. While they don't "push anybody,"

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[38] I draw my understandings of intersectionality from scholars such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Audre Lorde. See Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" for the origins of the term.

being part of a community with more prevalence of mental illness helped them understand how important acceptance of mental illness is for them with regards to building other kinds of relationships. Rose's description shows us how disidentification can be used to build confidence and strength as a rhetor to move through spaces where disability is marginal, and how access to a supportive community can aid with moving through an unsupportive community.

Disabled students also used disidentification to frame a disability identity as a position from which to critique institutional structures of ableism. In other words, some participants harnessed a disability identity to understand that their experience with institutional ableism was the source of their struggles, rather than being a "bad student." After discussing their job at the gender and sexuality campus center, where they counseled other students struggling with mental health issues, Rose developed such a position toward their own experience with institutional accommodations and negotiating access needs:

> Try not to be mean to yourself…because you feel like you're getting special treatment, or something…it's not special, it's like. I don't know. So much of the...the way that a lot of standard education is set up is really fucking challenging and stressful. And college students, we're not sleeping properly and like all these different things. And you know, it's not actually working that great for a ton of people. So, you saying that you need certain things isn't you being unreasonable. It's you like asking for what is going to make you succeed.

Rose makes clear that asking for what you need is "not special" and that higher education is "not actually working that great for a ton of people." This stance employs disidentification in that Rose is able to see how their self-advocacy both sets them apart from the imagined norm (a student population not struggling with the ableist structures of higher education) and brings to the forefront a potential unimagined norm (a student population where many students struggle).

As such, Rose’s perspective and persistence become a form of critique against the ableist structures that constitute the institution.

Conclusion: Writing and Disidentification

To conclude, I want to explore how writing plays a role in disability identity and disidentification for some disabled students. For some, writing was an important way to access the classroom. The identity of “writer” was another way for them to envision themselves as part of the college community. Others saw practices like peer review as a prominent place to do disidentification work to support fellow writers. Finally, for one participant, writing was a way to envision a disabled audience for their academic work—a powerful stance that writes disabled students into the work of the academy.

For several students, including Kirill and Ozymandias, writing was an important way that they processed information and made sense of their work in higher education. The act of writing provided order to their thoughts, and their skill at writing helped them see how they fit into academic life. Ozymandias discussed this in depth:

> And now with Adderall, I do focus, but before I would inadvertently absorb things without even realizing it. I would just sit there thinking, I'm a fucking moron, I don't remember anything, I don't know what I'm doing. And that's how I got the idea, let me just write down whatever comes to my mind. And the more I write down, it's like, okay this has to do with the class. And then I look at books, and then just write down random quotes from the books. So sometimes it's just writing down random quotes from books versus writing words I remember from class. And I started kind of realizing okay maybe I'm not a dumb as I thought I was. Maybe I was like, when I thought I was goofing off somehow osmosis was happening. And I started kind of creating and building from that.

For Ozymandias, writing “randomly” helped him see how he was learning a great deal through “osmosis” and building a base of knowledge that justified his role in higher education. Writing allowed him to see that he wasn’t a “moron,” but instead putting together a puzzle of knowledge as he advanced through graduate school. Writing not only helped him see patterns in his knowledge but provided a record of what he was learning.

Writing allowed Kirill to combine an emergent identity as autistic with hir identity as a student. Bridging these identities is crucial, given how disability is rhetorically and conceptually framed as a barrier to being an effective writer and rhetor (Yergeau, Prendergast). Kirill shared how not knowing that ze as disabled shaped the first semesters of college:

> I spent the first two years there totally undiagnosed and totally unmedicated for anything. And like I did well in school, but I think part of that is because of the way that my brain is structured different from neurotypical folks. Like writing is one of the best ways for me to process, like input material and output something that can be graded. So that worked for me. But I also was struggling with time management, depression, and anxiety…that distracted me from being able to focus on the writing I was doing.

Kirill's upbringing in a Southern conservative Christian family had emphasized self-reliance, and not until college did Kirill begin to understand hirself as autistic. Additionally, as described in another part of the interview, Kirill’s emergent queer and transgender identity complicated how ze understood hirself in relation to other students. As Kirill grew as a writer, ze learned vocabulary for both writing tasks and disability, which helped hir articulate learning goals as a writer:

> I was doing that intensive writing seminar in my first year of undergrad, I would schedule out in detail a calendar of what I was going to do on what day to make the deadline. And I would

> start on the first day and read the assignment. Like day one, read the assignment.…So I would schedule it down to a lot of detail and at that point, I didn't know that was diagnosed for anything. So, I didn't know that that was interacting with how I do executive function. That's what that was.

As Kirill learned through trial and error the skills ze would need to excel at college writing tasks, ze also learned vocabularies to describe hir relationship to hir bodymind and learned how to talk about the effect autism had on hir writing process. Coming to understand yourself as disabled while learning how to write in college can influence the process of understanding one's disability identity.

Providing feedback for writing from a disabled perspective was an important tactic of disidentification many disabled students used. Several students felt it was important to challenge the ableist assumptions of their classmates in peer review, sometimes revealing their experiences with disability and sometimes not. Franco shared how she once provided support and backup for another writer with a disability in her creative writing class who was exploring disability identity in their writing:

> A person in my creative nonfiction workshop was doing a piece about their own experiences of depression, and they were using humor. And people in the class kind of went at this, at the author, saying, "You don't get to write about it, like this is trivializing the experience of depression." So, at like at that moment, I raised my hand and said, "Just because it doesn't match up with how you think this should be represented, I don't think we as peers in this class have the authority to tell someone that they're trivializing their own experience."

While Franco does not report self-identifying as disabled in this context, she could be tapping into her own experiences of feeling "spoken for" and circumscribed in relation to race and disability as explored earlier in the chapter. Here, with a dispassionate stance from her own experience with disability, she firmly defends a peer facing an ableist response to their writing. Franco uses disidentification to make a powerful argument supporting her peer.

A significant way that some of my participants used rhetorical disidentification in their writing was to envision an audience of people with similar needs around disability as their own. Kirill described how ze wrote with such an audience in mind:

> Kirill: The last thing I write is the conclusion, which is like if we're talking to a person who is disabled in a similar way to me, which is difficulty processing input, getting overwhelmed by lots of information, what is the thing that I want hypothetical reader me to take away from this paper. What's the point? Why did I do all this work?
>
> Neil: That's like for every paper?
>
> Kirill: Every paper.

Kirill's approach to writing conclusions creates a space for a disabled audience, envisioning other disabled students as potential readers for hir work. This approach functions as rhetorical disidentification because it shows how Kirill chooses to prioritize a disabled audience over a potentially "academic" audience, one that presumably has different expectations for a conclusion. While the qualities of writing that Kirill identifies are useful moves for writers to make in their conclusions generally (developing a take away), framing this as explicitly related to disability and using Kirill's own experience of hir's needs as a reader challenges the barriers to access that constitute both academia and academic writing.

In this chapter, we have explored how students relate to disability identity and how structures of higher education influence how and if students claim a disability identity. Interactions with technical systems of communication such as diagnosis and the bureaucratic structures of formal accommodations frame students' understanding of disability identity, while classroom interactions challenge students to "come out" or "stay in" of the closet in relation to a disability identity, often with fraught results. The complex relationship disabled students have to disability identity often leads them to using disidentification as a rhetorical tactic to claim their space in the academy and to put pressure on ableist actions and structures within higher education. Writing can be a particularly powerful way that students do disidentification to reshape the culture of higher education.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Listening to Hidden Stories: Towards Critical Mentorship

As we concluded our interview, I asked Wolf to describe one piece of information that he wanted all instructors to know about the experiences of disabled students. He paused, then said:

> There are some hidden stories that I want them to know. If a student looks good by their appearance, like me, I just have this injured hand, but inside their body there might be some tremendous pain, like me. So just by appearance…it might look like I just broke my arm or something. But actually inside, deep inside, there's much more pain. I feel like my right hand is put on a hot pan all the time, it's burning. Sometimes I need to pause a little, refresh myself, and then I can listen again, or write again. Yeah, just put more love and attention into the students with disabilities that might experience really bad things that normal people cannot imagine.

Wolf's response, among the others that help shape the conclusion of this project, modeled a stance towards the experience of disabled student writers that I want writing teachers to practice: critical mentorship. Wolf asks instructors to take the time to look beyond their own assumptions of how a student is experiencing their classroom, their interpersonal interaction, or the task of writing and offer "love and attention" for "students with disabilities that might experience really bad things that normal people cannot imagine." His seemingly simple request powerfully asks instructors to step out of their own perception to understand how a disabled student might experience the contexts of the classroom in ways that are beyond the imagination. To conclude this project, I argue that Wolf and his co-participants argue for an intentional, self-reflective form of mentorship that embraces rhetorically listening to students, building critical awareness of how writing instructors facilitate institutional power, and interrogating narratives about the writing process that circulate in academia that harm disabled students.

In composition and rhetoric, the majority of scholarship about mentorship centers on the relationship between faculty and graduate students, as well as models of support for emerging writing program administrators like Van Hatsima and Ceraso's "horizontal mentorship" (210).[39] Writing center scholarship offers a wide range of models for understanding peer mentorship, some of which engages with support around navigating marginalization in higher education (e.g., Harry Denny's *Facing the Center*). Because many of these models focus on mentorship as a means of dismantling oppression in higher education, they lay the important ground for the mentorship model I propose here. Critical mentorship conceptually adds more discussion to the mentorship relationships that instructors and faculty build with students in their writing classrooms, through one-on-one interactions that occur alongside classroom instruction. This model is in part driven by the side-by-side nature of accommodation transfer and writing transfer, as outlined in chapter two. Critical mentorship can intervene when students experience accommodation transfer alone, helping students to garner the rhetorical skills they need to navigate college writing.

Critical mentorship offers a model of one-on-one support and instruction for student writers that model institutional critique and engages deeply with students on their own terms. Moving away from the programmatic and classroom focus of most work on teaching writing, critical mentorship rejects efficiency and embraces the deepening of relationships that can happen between student and instructor. Arising from the data I collected from students, critical

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[39] I would argue, in line with Van Hatsima and Ceraso, that much of the literature on mentorship or that seeks to provide "distanced mentoring" is too generalizable to be useful for graduate students and early-career faculty, mostly encouraging in them a sense of doom and despair (e.g., Karen Kelsky's *The Professor is In).*

mentorship offers three important positions. First, it involves the practice of awareness of an instructor's position as a wielder of institutional power. Next, critical mentorship acknowledges and works against how ableism and other forms of oppression are built into institutions of higher education. Third, critical mentorship encourages teaching and interrogating patterns of communication that affect disabled students and shape relationships between instructors and disabled student writers.

Critical mentorship involves a rhetorical approach to mentorship but also incorporates an emphasis on praxis and advocacy that extends its rhetorical stance. In other words, critical mentorship requires applying rhetorical analysis to a praxis that works towards justice and dismantling the systems of power that exclude marginalized students. As described in my introduction, the definition of rhetoric offered in this project is "the circulation of power through communications between and across bodyminds." Critical mentorship uses rhetoric to examine how power is distributed through communication across and through the bodyminds of disabled student writers as well as all students and actors at institutions of higher education. Critical mentorship takes these understandings and offers students roadmaps for navigating the institution and also advocates for changes to the system. It also is deeply aware of what Annika Konrad calls "access fatigue" and seeks to shoulder some of the rhetorical work that disabled students do to move through the university.

Before I delve into my findings, I want to speak briefly about the methods framing the conclusion for this project. As discussed in my introduction, I used a series of topics to structure my interviews. First, I asked questions about the students' writing process; next, I asked about their interactions with classmates and professors around writing and disability. However, the final category of questions I asked was intentionally designed to allow my participants to speak back and share their knowledge more broadly within the project. I asked students two fairly simple questions: If they could share one piece of information about what it's like to be a disabled student writer, what would they want every college instructor to know? If they could share one piece of advice or perspective to all disabled college students, what would that piece be?[40]

Methodologically, these questions generated data that felt “pre-coded,” and asking these questions shifted my relationship with interviewees dramatically. Some participants struggled to think of a specific suggestion for either question, while for others, asking these questions revealed that their choice to participate in my project was to create change in college classrooms through sharing their perspectives. For the second group, we might understand their participation and their responses as related to disidentification as outlined in chapter three--the creation of a detached sense of self that they hoped would make a broader cultural change around disability discrimination in higher education. Some of the data from these questions entered into other chapters, but the majority of the responses to these questions were saved for this conclusion.

Awareness of Power

To be a critical mentor, one must be aware of their access to institutional power by developing rhetorical tools that help build one's recognition of power dynamics in an exchange. Many rhetorical tools are currently available to do such work. For instance, implementing Krista Ratcliff's model of rhetorical listening can assist teachers as they navigate their power relationships with students. Ratcliff's consideration of "listening pedagogically" helps teachers in classroom settings enact ethical classroom interactions, but her construction of eavesdropping is

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[40] My interview protocol is available in Appendix Two.

more useful for my aim here with regards to critical mentorship. By eavesdropping, which Ratcliffe defines as “an ethical tactic for resisting the invisibility of a gendered whiteness in scholarly discourses within rhetoric and composition studies,” teachers can better understand the environments that surround them by centering marginalized voices and seeking to understand how they circulate and are taken up in classroom spaces (101). An additional model for cultivating and understanding an awareness of institutional power can also be drawn from Jacqueline Jones Royster’s concept of cross-boundary exchange, which emphasizes "adopting subjectivity as a defining value" of communication (30). Cross-boundary exchange, such as between teacher and student in the practice of critical mentorship, emphasizes not only the spoken and written communication in exchange but also the presence of power in shaping our perceptions of each other. Eavesdropping and cross-boundary exchange are only two examples of many models of rhetorical scholarship that can help mentors critically engage with their institutional power as they relate to students.

For writing teachers, assessment is a crucial part of the one-on-one exchange that happens between students and teachers. Having a critical awareness of power involves having a critical relationship with assessing writing and understanding how to use writing in disciplinary contexts. As a student with dyslexia who would frequently make small grammar and style errors, particularly in short writing turned around quickly meant to assess content knowledge, Danielle argued that “knowing what you’re grading” would help her build relationships with instructors and succeed as a student; she told a story to this effect:

> I had one professor that I, I would like I'd go to her like every single office hours and like I just sit with her through her entire office hours…She's actually my TA and she was like amazing. And like she would read my essay and she would like sometimes *you have to*

> *understand that like you're an art history TA* and like, your, *your job isn't necessarily to grade me on my writing*. Like know what you're grading me on and like that is going to be so much better for both of us…she kind of did grade me on like the, on my writing skills but she would help me with it. So like I knew if I could go to her, all the things I was saying was right, but she would like help me with the editing and then when she graded it she was like, "Oh wow, this is exactly the way I like it because I helped you read this"…Knowing what your grading, like knowing that if you're a comm arts teacher, okay, maybe you're grading on editing, but if your poli sci that's not your, that's not the point and that someone will do really well if you let them do well. (emphasis mine)

Danielle recognizes that it required much more one-on-one work between her and her instructor if the instructor expected her papers to be stylistically and grammatically perfect. While Danielle was grateful for the effort her TA put in, she also notes that her TA's direct instruction resulted in papers that were "exactly the way [the TA] like[d] it" rather than reflective of Danielle's personal style. Danielle notes at the end of this story that professors across disciplines should focus less on grading the style of a writer's work and more on grading content, which will let someone "do really well if you let them do well." In short, Danielle points to an important lesson: instructors should assess what they teach students, and not one what they expect students to know from previous classes. Without a grounding in relationships of power, instructors may not see beyond their own desires for a student's piece of writing in their class. As an alternative, Danielle's instructor could have asked her where she wanted to grow as a writer, what discipline-specific skills she wanted to cultivate and accommodate Danielle's style error patterns by learning from her what kinds of feedback helped her improve her writing more broadly.[41]

What Danielle identifies relates to a broader challenge related to teaching and mentorship—how to teach students tools for better self and peer assessment methods that are flexible and transferrable. Such tools seem particularly important for disabled students, who may struggle to track their progress as writers with the more variable relationships they have with individual instructors. Asao Inoue argues in “Teaching the Rhetoric of Writing Assessment” that handing the reins over to students and deeply involving them in the practice of writing assessment aids them in engaging with the rhetorics of assessment that follow them across different kinds of writing classrooms (49). By structuring composition courses to center on student assessment, Inoue engages with student writers more as a mentor, allowing him to “separate responding from assessment—that is, the practices of reading and having a human response to a text as opposed to reading a text to judge it along particular dimensions (or expectations) for particular purposes and within a particular context” (50). Such shifts can, theoretically, help students learn how and why writing assessment matters as well as give the instructor room to mentor students as they navigate the norms of the university.

Being aware of power also means creating channels for students to provide feedback about the class on multiple scales. For Jen, offering a channel of feedback that had a true impact for students, not just down the road but in the current class she was attending, showed her that a teacher thought critically about access. Offering ways to speak back was one way that Jen noted that critical teachers showed their awareness of power. As she notes:

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[41] Danielle's example here reveals a problem in the model I am proposing. Particularly at large universities like the institution where I collected my data, writing instructors are often caught in their own power relationships to the university. Even in this very basic encounter Danielle describes, she works with her teaching assistant on her writing rather than her professor. In this case, it could be difficult to implement a critical mentorship relationship if all three parties are not on board.

> Basically, all I can think about is those professors that have impacted me and made a difference are the ones that understand that college students are real people that are working, taking so many classes, and have so much family stuff going on. There's so many layers of things to each student. I feel like the professors into teaching for the right reasons, that's something that they keep in mind. But instructors that are just like, "This is a class I'm teaching. You have to fulfill these requirements because x y and z for your degree..." Even if they are making an attempt to see students as people, it's just a very surface level kind of thing. Like, "Wow, I learned your name." Congratu-fucking-lations. The professors, something that I want professors to do is equal out that power relationship and be open, receptive, and willing--like needing feedback all the time from students about the course.

For Jen, teachers who were good mentors saw how students actually experienced higher education and were willing to work with students when difficulties in their lives arose. She felt it important that teachers go beyond the very basic work of seeing students as people (such as learning their names). Jen envisions a relationship where teachers are on the sides of students rather than on the sides of the institution in the relationship between teachers, students, and the university. Importantly, Jen does not tie this to a specific classroom practice, though she mentioned several practices earlier in her interview (such as asking for mid-semester course feedback). What is significant for Jen is that professors have an open stance to listening for feedback about their teaching.

Jen's description of creating channels that ameliorate some of the challenges of institutional power may frustrate some readers. It can feel exhausting to read her unwillingness to extend to her professors what she desires from them, that they also have lives outside of the classroom that impact their work. Certainly, within my own teaching, I have found that soliciting feedback about assignments, classroom structures, and the like sometimes reaches a point of diminishing returns, particularly in an institutional system where students are rarely asked to be cognizant of the mechanism by which they are learning. Indeed, as I mentioned in Chapter 2 with an example from Shade, student feedback and practices can sometimes reproduce academic ableism in ways that the instructor must then reroute, such as when students create classroom participation standards that privilege speaking out loud. But my purpose with Jen's quote here is to highlight that disabled students recognize open stances towards feedback from instructors, and that an open stance itself can invite students to work with instructors around their disability-related access needs. In other words, developing an openness to changing classroom structures and communicating that openness with students is a crucial part of critical mentorship.

Displaying openness and awareness of power is also important in one-on-one interactions between instructors and students that set the tone for their experience of the semester. I want to return to an example I used in chapter one from Dean where he discussed successful interactions with professors around his disability. Again, as he described:

> I've had two professors also sit down and go through the syllabi with me. And they were like, this is how much writing we do, I don't know exactly know what the essay topic might be. Or the group projects what we’re going to do for that, but just to give you a heads up that this is when this is an there will be writing involved. So, if there's any issues, please come talk to me, email me.

I recast this story in the conclusion as a form of critical mentorship that demonstrates how professors can acknowledge their roles, the power vested in them by the institution, and negotiate with students as a form of critical mentorship. First, instructors can make sure to meet with Dean outside of the space of the classroom to discuss the whole course of the semester. While they may not know exactly "what the essay topic may be," they have a sense of when the essay will be assigned and how much work they estimate the writing will take. The professors Dean describes make a point of framing what work is writing and other forms of work in the class. Dean recasts the speech of his professors by presenting this story in a conversational tone and speaking from their perspective. Most importantly, and connected to Jen's claims, they clearly communicate that they are open to discussing Dean's needs with him and helping him meet his needs with the course.

Finally, some students in my study urged that their instructors be aware of the power they bring in the very stances with which they approach discussing accommodations and disability with students. In asking that instructors not "assume the worst of your students," Rose reminds us of how powerful the role of an instructor is for shaping how disabled students experience their relationships with other instructors beside themselves:

> I want teachers to know and respect that these disabilities are legitimate. And also, within that, not always assume the worst of their students. I don't feel like that happens as much anymore, but there have definitely been teachers where I've felt like, and this was before I got a VISA, when I went to talk to them it felt that I was having to prove that it was a real thing and I wasn't just trying to get out of shit or like be lazy. And like I understand that you have a lot of students and there maybe are students who trying to get out of shit and be lazy, but like, why not just assume and believe any student who asks for an accommodation? Believe what they are saying and like worst case scenario someone is learning bad habits and at some point, that's going to catch up with them…Honestly, that might be the main thing for teachers. Believe your students when they tell you that I need more time or please help. And like if you feel like someone is asking for too much, have a conversation with them.

Rose reveals the cost of the rhetorical work disabled students must do in their interactions with professors. The choice of an instructor to take a stance of disbelief may not seem to have major consequences for disabled students, but it frames their needs as an affront to the power the instructor wields over the course. Rose importantly also describes how an open stance allows for instructors to negotiate with students if what they ask for is not possible to grant. Franco expressed a similar frustration, but more directly related to her writing classrooms: "I think one thing I would potentially want an instructor to know is that I do indeed give a shit about writing...one way that might be, one thing that might be useful for people to know is that the processes are different, and I feel like writing instructors should know that, but it's easy to forget that all writers are different." Thus, particularly with relation to understanding students' writing processes, instructors should take open stances and discuss with students what their needs are as they navigate writing in academic writing environments and grow as writers. Negotiation is particularly important as we consider the next habit of critical mentorship--confronting institutional ableism.

Acknowledging Institutional Ableism

The second habit critical mentors should employ is to acknowledge and work against institutional ableism. As the previous work of this dissertation has discussed, higher education is built on a foundation of ableist exclusion, and disabled students are by and large very aware of how they are positioned in relationship to the institution. The disabled student writers in my study largely did not have mentors or teachers helping them navigate the emotional and rhetorical work of being disabled in an ableist institution. Instructors can work against institutional ableism in many ways, but I offer two here briefly: developing resources for writers so that they can try and learn new skills either without or alongside institutional accommodations, and not making assumptions about students' capacities without having a conversation with them.

Writers often need resources for accomplishing writing tasks above and beyond institutional accommodations, as has been explored deeply in this dissertation. One role critical that mentors can play is to curate and share these resources with students. Jen offered a vision for how teachers and peers could aid fellow students, though she did not even see teachers as possible allies for this work:

> As far as advice for disabled students, I wish that there was some sort of comprehensive guide for surviving college without going through [the disability resource office]. Just for folks...I wish I could hand my friends a packet when they are like, "I can't, I can't go to [the DSO]." And then me being like, "Here's a packet of tips and tricks to still negotiate the system effectively, even if you don't have official accommodations." That's something that I would ideally like to see and compiling all those tools and resources--like Write or Die, Hemingway[42], that kind of stuff…part of it is being connected to the right people so you can know about those resources as opposed to being a professor or someone telling you, "Oh this institution will help you." But will it? The difference between that and a friend being like, "I used this and it worked."

Jen signals that she longs for a resource she could access that would provide tools for success with academic writing outside of interacting with the DRC. She notes that getting this advice from peers would be more welcoming to her, but I also argue that instructors who position themselves on the side of students could also fulfill this role. If instructors understand that not all disabled students need or want to work through DRCs but that they still may need intervention

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[42] These are tools Jen used to compose and the online sites that help students compose and edit their work.

and support particularly around writing, then they can perform the critical mentorship that disabled students need to access college. Writing teachers can develop their own deep knowledge of different writing tools and methods for students who need help in shaping their writing process. Thus, critical mentorship also requires both understanding that institutional accommodations are not enough and building trust with students.

Acknowledging institutional ableism requires that instructors understand how disability is not always discernible, and that its effects on students are difficult to trace. In other words, critical mentors should not make assumptions about a student's experience with their bodymind based on interactions and physical appearance alone. Ana, for example, described how she hoped instructors would better understand this:

> [Don't] assume that somebody is doing great because they look like they are doing great. I think something that I do quite effectively is to look fine on the outside as I'm dealing with a low blood sugar episode, which feels really awful! Like, I'm not doing great! But I don't, my body doesn't show it, nor do I have the need to be crying or something to indicate that I'm actually in a situation of distress. So, sometimes I wish I could say, "Hey, just so you know, this is what's happening inside my body right now, and you're not dealing with it, and I am." That's tough. So, assumptions about appearances and their correlation to how well someone is--I would discourage instructors from having.

Here, Ana comments on how instructors should understand how disability can exist outside of a perceptible sense of distress. Ana's claims are important when thinking about the need to acknowledge institutional power, because accommodations are often modeled on the understanding that they help students move through perceptible moments of acute distress in the classroom. Being a critical mentor means being attuned to students' experiences with their bodyminds, and open to hearing and correcting assumptions about those attunements through dialogue with students.

Teaching and Interrogating Our Own Patterns of Communication

Finally, critical mentorship requires that instructors help teach and interrogate our own patterns of communication that maintain ableism in institutions of higher education. As I detailed in chapter one, this might look like teaching students the genres that surround academic writing that allow students room to move, such as emails asking for extensions. However, interrogating communication patterns also means examining how to talk with students one-on-one about their needs around disability. Thinking again about Ratcliffe's tool of eavesdropping, or "standing outside, in an uncomfortable spot, on the border of knowing and not knowing, granting others the inside position, listening to learn," we may understand how critical mentors use this form of listening to allow disabled students their own pathways to disclosing and describing their experiences with disability, and deeply appreciating the work it takes for students to do so (90).[43] The students in this study describe how once such a stance is established, it can be beneficial to learn from students when they provide the opportunity, in ways that can help transmit knowledge across many students. In other words, we can learn from each student what works best for them and how they experience the joy and pain of life in their bodymind as writers. We are then blessed to have the opportunity to build on that knowledge as we work with many kinds of writers across multiple contexts.

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[43] I would be remiss to myself if I didn't mention my deep discomfort on how Ratcliffe relies on trans-exclusionary radical feminists as part of her definitional work in *Rhetorical Listening*, particularly with her concept of eavesdropping. Ratcliffe cites Mary Daly's concept of "gynocentric writing" as one method of unpacking the negative connotation of eavesdropping as connected to gender. Mary Daly's use of gynocentrism to wield power against trans women in particular and to erase the existence of trans men entirely warrants, well, another dissertation.

Balancing on where to probe for more information is a rhetorical challenge critical mentors are not afraid to explore. Dean, for instance, described how professors should be open to talking with students about the needs:

> Professors shouldn't be afraid to ask questions. Because, first thing, if the student is talking to you or with you, you're pretty much one-on-one anyway…If you have a disability and you're scared of people knowing, you're pretty much not gonna go get a VISA anyway. Because that would make it known that you need help. So, if they are putting in the effort to get a VISA, they are willing to and kind of want you to talk to them and asked them questions just so that they feel engaged, and that you actually care about their well-being as well. So don't be afraid to ask what is going on, how are you, how do you deal with X situation or whatever. And also going to the syllabi, saying, this project might have you do this, how would you fair doing that?

Dean models how professors can talk with disabled students about their needs, modeling how the syllabus can be used in this conversation. However, he also notes that professors shouldn’t be afraid to ask questions that signal investment in the student’s well-being more broadly. While he attributes this openness to students who have formal accommodations, assuming they are more open because they have gone through that revealing process, his advice is important for working with all disabled students.

The Power of Critical Mentorship

Critical mentorship can offer disabled students many different benefits as they negotiate the process of college writing. The rhetorical tasks I have explored in this dissertation (transferring rhetorical skills around accommodations, negotiating the timing of academic writing, and reckoning with disability identity) are difficult tasks, and mentors can provide crucial support as students learn these skills. For example, having a mentor who could help with navigating college life, new academic demands, and an emergent understanding of disability was crucial for Kirill, who first described how a faculty mentor helped hir come to terms with disability and academic life:

> I'm so grateful to [my faculty mentor] who is one of the people I talked about earlier who was highly influential, is that she put in the emotional labor to sit down with me in office hours and like talk about how cultural and social structures of how we think about labor and work affect our emotional wellness and ability, which was something I had never thought about before.

Later, Kirill described how this mentor also helped with conventions of academic writing:

> Well, [my faculty mentor] taught me “so what.” Like, “It's really cool that you think this is the most interesting thing in the world.” Which, as an autistic person, I often think that whatever I'm working on is the most interesting thing in the world, why would anyone like not care deeply about this? ... She would always push me to think, “Why are you writing this? What is the importance?” And she often phrased it like, “You, with this piece of labor you're spending hours and hours on are contributing to a conversation. What is the new perspective or information that you're adding to the scholarly conversation?” And that's usually how I'll frame the “so what” conclusion ... So that was really helpful, and I still do that really consciously, not only papers but also grants.

Kirill’s success in academic writing was influenced by hir relationship with a mentor who could help Kirill transfer both necessary knowledge for accommodation alongside academic writing skills. Kirill's mentor helped hir not only learn new writing skills more generally, but also how to use hir position as an autistic person as a place for generating ideas and speaking to new audiences. By being available to talk with Kirill at crucial points in hir academic career, from first-year writing classes then later in hir capstone seminar, Kirill's professor mentored hir through the many different communicative tasks that make up college communication. Discussing with Kirill how to balance intellectual work, "emotional wellness," and life helped Kirill develop a sense of how ze could use hir time, as well as ask for more time when needed. Through this critical mentorship, mentors can aid disabled students as they negotiate the steep steps of higher education and beyond by helping students understand the ableism that constitutes higher education. Such stances can also help instructors understand their own role in these structures—and how to work against them.

Appendix One: Responding to "On Trigger Warnings and the Halberstam Affair: A Panel Discussion"

In August, I participated in a radio show interview with Natalia Cecire and hosted by Karma R. Chávez and Anders Zanichkowsky about trigger warnings post-Halberslam. A few weeks later, *Madison Mutual Drift* published a transcript of the interview, along with two written responses by Dan S. Wang and Brigitte Fielder. I wanted to write some reflections I've had after this experience, so I thought I'd do it here.

One thing I'm learning from this whole experience is that what Catherine Prendergast calls "being disabled rhetorically" happens by refusing to address disability and its rhetorical productions on their own terms. Prendergast describes how having a mental illness affects one's "rhetoricability"--when a rhetor is or is perceived as mentally ill, their rhetoricability is lessened and often negated. I'm struck how in the roundtable I participated in that disability was only tangentially discussed and not brought up in either of the written responses. (This mirrors the *Entropy* roundtable, which was a three-part conversation with disability as the last "part" rather than being woven throughout.) Where disability flickered in these conversations was the resistance to the word "trigger," which was described as a "medicalization" of content warnings. As a trans person and as a disabled person, I have a lot of feelings about my language being medicalized; I'm aware of how "medical" language creeps into my speech and how certain medical scripts have to be memorized for me to navigate the world. On the other hand, the "medicalized" nature of rhetorical moves by people with disabilities is unavoidable, because often it is a language accessible across broad disabled experiences.

Avoiding, minimizing, or refusing to discuss disability and the need for increased accessibility practices for students with mental health issues when talking about trigger warnings leads to several things happening, some of which happened in the conversation in which I participated, which I'll explore below.

1. *Trigger warnings are cast as conflict avoidance rather than an accessibility measure.* In response to our conversation, Dan S. Wang writes that "one effect of trigger warnings on campus is a layering of the classroom with a sanctioned form of conflict avoidance—a value that aligns all too well with bourgeois class interests and performance." As a "defender of trigger warnings," I believe this view of TWs falls into a fairly common misreading of what trigger warnings do, both in the digital communities from which they arose as well how they might be deployed in the classroom. In digital spaces, trigger warnings exist in order to *facilitate deep discussions about conflict,* allowing writers to write very openly about experiences of mental illness, violence, rape, and other topics for both broad and narrow audiences. They are a fairly simple form of metadata that Melanie Yergeau has compared to tagging; perhaps that is why TWs are so common on blogging platforms. They don't work to allow or encourage readers to avoid specific content, but work to know ahead of time what they will be reading. Yergeau has also pointed out that as academics we "tag" our work in lots of ways for both students and colleagues, both in the classroom and out. Trigger warnings ask us to imagine what might be triggering and tag that work accordingly, and not in order for those works to be avoided.

2. *Trigger warnings, and disability in addition, are cast as too expansive.* I've been surprised in how most of the conversations I've had about trigger warnings there's been a huge reluctance to "label" students as disabled by offering trigger warnings in written forms on syllabi. In some ways, this seems to be about seeing disability as a negative, as something that someone would feel uncomfortable being identified with (which, as Tobin Siebers has explored in *Disability Theory*, is not uncommon--disability itself IS expansive, but identifying as disabled isn't). Disability yet again becomes unwieldy, impossible to accommodate; triggers can be smells, after all. It's true that triggers can be nonverbal, or unrelated to the specific trauma at hand, but it's also true that there's a way to find out what might trigger your students without trying to read specific triggering situations onto their experiences. As Andrew Lawlor wrote in a roundtable on trigger warnings:

    > The last time I worked with students who wanted to use trigger warnings, in the Trans*/Queer Writing Group (which was not-for-credit, by the way), one of my clever students created an anonymous collaborative document on the web (http://collabedit.com), so people could anonymously list things for which they wanted warning. We compiled our list, which was fairly short and comprised of pretty common categories (sexual violence, suicide, cutting, etc), and people mostly did offer warnings when they included representations of these subjects in their pieces—which they did! including self-identified survivors, who sometimes wrote pieces which very graphically depicted some of the things on the trigger list. I’m interested in the way the use of trigger warnings in a workshop might allow student writers to write in MORE compelling, more honest, more powerful ways about our world, which includes trauma.

3. *Teachers are not responsible for the disabled*. Though less prevalent in the MMD conversation, this is a line of thought that Sarah and I have considered in the project we're working on. In "Trigger Warnings are Flawed," a group of humanities professors wrote that "Most faculty are not trained to handle traumatic reactions. Although many of us include analyses of the cultural logics and legacies of trauma and/or perpetration in our courses, this expertise does not qualify faculty to offer the professional responses traumatized students may need." There is a strange move that many humanities scholars who have responded to the call for trigger warnings have made, which is a simultaneous resistance to the medicalization of the language of triggers and to the neoliberal and capitalist project of universities as institutions as well as a reliance on medical, academic research on mental illness and trauma to approach how disability should be dealt with in the classroom. Rather than listening to the requests of disabled students, the spectre of the disabled student sits in limbo between being too institutionally oriented and incapable of remaining in the institution at the same time.

There are a lot of questions that still need to be answered about trigger warnings that were brought up in this interview. I believe that a lot of the pushback about trigger warnings comes from professors already doing the work that trigger warnings do in a classroom setting, via verbal framing of potentially triggering content. From what I can sense, TWs seem like a critique of this verbalized practiced. As Brigitte Fielder points out in her response, the conversation about how to teach difficult material has been happening for decades. But what trigger warnings add to the conversation is a specific turn towards the needs of the mentally ill student in the classroom. Trigger warnings are not about (or shouldn't be about) compassion, and to frame them as such reduces accessibility practices to compassion. They may not be the most effective means of developing accessible classroom practices for students with mental illness, but I think it's important that students are asking for TWs to happen. In composition and rhetoric at least, most of our theorizing about how to build accessible classrooms doesn't come from listening to student voices, instead of from building best practices from our own personal experiences with disability.

In the end, I don't want access to be about compassion. I want access to be about reducing the negative effects of disability in my life and my student's lives. To me, it's the same way that having a flexible attendance policy isn't about compassion--it's about how the way that we do classes is often a barrier for students with disabilities. And that's why we have to frame all of this in a conversation about disability in the classroom.

Appendix Two: Interview Protocol

Writing Classes

- Writing classes taken in college
- Writing assignments
- In-class writing
- Classroom interactions

Accommodations

- Experiences with DRC
- Use of VISA
- Other tools provided by DRC
- Interactions with professors around disability
- Interactions with students around disability
- Interactions with other campus resources (Writing Center, peer tutoring, etc.) around disability
- Experiences with negotiating accommodations

Writing Process

- Description of typical writing process
- Tools used to write
- Experiences with writing
- People who help with writing

Visions for Best Practices

- Descriptions of ideal writing classrooms
- Knowledge to share with instructors
- Knowledge to share with disabled student writer

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