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Living Communication Pedagogy: Instructors with Visible Disabilities

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LIVING COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY: UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS WITH VISIBLE DISABILITIES

by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Bryan Crow, Ph. D.

In this paper, I argue that critical communication pedagogy, as a discipline, can benefit from an inclusion of instructors with visible disabilities in its literature and analysis. In particular, I employ my experiences as a teaching assistant with a visible disability to situate my own embodied knowledge as a way of understanding, in concert with literature reviews of critical communication pedagogy and instructors with visible disabilities. I also interview instructors with visible disabilities about their experiences to argue for our inclusion in critical communication pedagogy.

Keywords: *disability studies, critical communication pedagogy, identities*

DEDICATION

To all instructors with visible disabilities who embrace their disabled body in the classroom as a humanizing epistemological space.

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Introduction

Identity has long been a central topic for Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP) scholars. Some identities are rendered less visible than others, although they all hold consequences for those who occupy them. Identity has been used throughout history as a means to include based on similarities and exclude because of perceived differences. Furthermore, identities impact the way students experience the classroom setting--often simultaneously as a site of empowerment and oppression.

In the last decade, CCP research has situated the disabled body as a site worthy of humanizing critique. Some scholars resist how the disabled body is traditionally controlled and disciplined within the classroom space (Anderson, 2006; Erevelles, 2000). However, even with these noteworthy improvements in scholarship and research there is only a small amount of literature regarding the experiences of professors with visible disabilities navigating their identities as university instructors. I aim to start filling this gap in my research. I section off the word (dis) in my writing to point to the consequential and materialistic impacts of language. I argue that CCP is an ideal theoretical framework in which to understand and celebrate the unique experiences that instructors with visible disabilities bring to the college classroom. I further argue for the inclusion of instructors with disabilities in critical cultural communication scholarship. The paper is guided by two research questions:

1) Does one's disability impact their teaching? If so, how?
2) What are the benefits and disadvantages of openly discussing one's visible disability with one's students?

First, I locate my interests in studying instructors with visible disabilities in my own body by processing through key experiences that have shaped my identities as an educator. I offer a

literature review of instructor identity negotiation, drawing from literature that focuses on instructors with disabilities. Next, I introduce CCP and Crip Theory as ample frameworks to theorize ability identities in the classroom. Then, in the methods section I describe the interview protocol used in the study. In the Analysis section, I further bring the literature review, interviews, and CCP in conversation with each other to forefront how CCP can be enriched by including accounts of the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities. I conclude by offering future directions and limitations of the study.

Autobiographical Reflections

As students entered Morris Library's room 724 on the first day, I saw many of what I perceived as double takes. I imagine that some of these physical reactions were a result of my body not fitting their assumptions of what they have been socialized to believe an instructor should look like, perhaps sparking a pedagogy of interruption (Warren & Toyosaki, 2012). Furthermore, it is my interpretation that perhaps the perceived anxiety that my students may have experienced led them to consider having a professor with a visible disability a limit-situation (Freire, 2000). Freire conceptualizes a limit-situation as an event or series of events where one is faced with a circumstance they have never dealt with before and that can create uncomfortable emotions. I feel that the reality of having a teacher with a visible disability likely felt different to many of my students, since ableism pervasively impacts the institution of school. On the first day, I painfully realized how true my preconceived notions of how ableism impacted schools were.

At the beginning of our first class period, I welcomed my students to the course and marked that having a teacher with a visible (dis)ability likely felt different to them. Many students stared at me, and did not offer many verbal responses during the class period. I interpret

that they looked shell-shocked. I am sure their absent verbal responses could have been a result of several factors; however, I imagine the presence of my (dis) abled female body in the role of official instructor played an important role. Thus, my (dis) abled female body functioned as a limit-situation from the first day. However as Freire (1994) discusses, a great hope can emerge throughout the process of teaching in a critical pedagogy classroom when students begin to realize that their bodies matter in the classroom.

After the first day, I experienced many positive moments with my students. For instance, I initially found great joy by using my own body to cultivate students' understanding of the implications of the critical cultural communication paradigm. At the very beginning of the semester, I felt hesitant to make myself vulnerable in front of my students. However, during our discussion on identities and perception I felt that sharing my own personal experiences of the links between identity and communication sparked my students' understanding of how identities, power, privilege, and communication intersect (Linton, 1998). I believe that making myself somewhat vulnerable further created space for students to share their own stories of how privilege and marginalization impacted their lives. Moreover, I think personal vulnerability on my part assisted students in fostering links between knowledge and experience in higher education (Anderson, 2006; Freire, 2000; hooks, 2013; McArthur, 2013).

However, there have been a few instances where I've felt a lack of respect, which I partially attribute to the politics attached to my female (dis)abled body. For example, during the second week I had a class period where I perceived myself as not having control of the class. Students kept interrupting each other and did not participate in the activities I had planned for them. The period culminated with a group of males leaving the room before I had dismissed class. During spring semester of 2016, students continued to disrupt the classroom environment

during their classmates' speeches by talking to each other instead of listening. This occurred after we had spent time discussing what it meant to be a respectful audience member. Therefore, I began to ask myself at least a few questions. Do the ways that students have directly challenged my authority stem from sexist and ableist ideologies? Do they think that since they had a female professor with a (dis)ability they can do whatever they want without consequences? Do they think that they don't need to respect me, because I am incapable of teaching them?

Furthermore, I ponder if some of the resistance I have experienced is a result of trying to foster a dialogical classroom instead of a "traditional," banking-model classroom. When students interrupted each other consistently although I had encouraged them to listen to each other while talking, I wondered if my students were truly used to having discussions with their fellow students about course material. My guess was they were not exposed as much to the discussion-oriented classroom that is essential to learning from a critical pedagogy perspective.

In an attempt to work towards a reflexive pedagogy, I gave my students the space to anonymously hand in note cards including feedback about the course so far at mid-semester. I gained helpful suggestions of how to alter my pedagogical style in the future. However, I was again reminded of the inferiority of my body in a teacher role. I offered students two prompting questions: what did they enjoy about the class and what parts did they feel could be improved? I received useful suggestions that I imagine are typical for first-time instructors, regarding organization of content and classroom interactions. However, one of the comments I received seemed to be directly tied to my disabled, female body in the instructor role, which I understood after reading Freire that unfortunately this type of result shows the traditional depoliticizing of schools, in an attempt to mask forms of oppression. One student wrote that "I was too political

and talked about issues of gender and ability too much." I briefly analyze this statement later in my paper.

The journey of developing more salient and nuanced pedagogical practices of course occurs over time, as Freire (1985) has taught me that teaching is not a destination but a journey. The goal of a critical educator is not perfection. The emphasis is on continued learning and heightened reflexivity. However, the process of developing such practices happens differently for each professor. As educators in CMST 101, our bodies are necessitated in our reflections on teaching and scholarship. As a woman with a disability, I knew my body would be read in distinct ways by my students, specifically regarding my credibility as an instructor.

While there have been moments where I think my students have questioned my legitimacy as a result of my body, I have experienced times where I can center my body to explicate abstract concepts (Linton, 1998; Muhs, 2012). People with disabilities have endured relentless resistance to their identities in academic spaces, as students and in academic leadership roles. Their academic capabilities have been questioned, and they have been dismissed as being too angry and/or too political for humanizing inclusion in scholarship. My credibility has been questioned before I even have a chance to speak based on "monstrous" meanings attached to my gender and ability identities (Calafell, 2015).

Critical Communication Pedagogy

In their 2007 publication *Critical Communication Pedagogy*, Fassett & Warren articulate key commitments of Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP). CCP is a theoretical framework that was formally born out of instructional communication literature, such as Jo Sprague's 1992 article, "Expanding the Research Agenda for Instructional Communication: Raising Unmasked Questions." Sprague (1992) called for a merge of critical pedagogy and communication theories

to better understand how the educational system functions as a value-laden socializing mechanism. In addition, CCP scholars explore the co-continuative nature of knowledge production processes, positioning each member of a classroom community as an instructor and student.

Fassett & Warren offer commitments of CCP, such as "culture as central to communication, not additive, an embrace of pedagogy and research as praxis, and dialogue as both metaphor and method" (pp. 52-54). These assertions have the possibility to shape one's classroom as instructors work to recognize the identities of students and themselves in humanizing ways. Therefore, the commitment to CCP recommended by Fassett & Warren (2007), "culture is central to communication pedagogy, not additive," becomes a foundational part of the development of a humanizing environment for both students and formal instructors. Culture cannot and should not be stacked on top of CCP as a separate entity, because it is intertwined within the very fabric that holds it together. Since culture and one's identities impact the way one can be realistically be treated in the classroom, an examination of culture in CCP becomes essential (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Freire, 1985).

Cultures, as identified by Fassett & Warren (2007), are ideological contexts in which meanings of who belongs in education and who doesn't are continuously negotiated and resisted through everyday interactions in the classroom. In CCP, school is not an objective site; rather, students are taught about themselves and who they have the possibility to become through exclusion of people similar to themselves from the curriculum and from a limited number of role models in instructor positions who are like themselves (Erevelles, 2000; Fassett & Warren, 2007). While critical cultural studies and CCP scholars have, in recent years, theorized about the meanings of negotiating marginalized identities, ability remains largely

absent from academic consideration (Anderson, 2006; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). Therefore, this study will extend the meaning of culture as outlined in critical cultural communication and CCP literature by focusing on the identity negotiation of instructors with visible disabilities in the classroom.

CCP also includes "an embrace of pedagogy and research as praxis" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 52). As such, CCP functions as both an academic theory and an everyday method. One of the strengths of CCP is its de-centering of traditional classroom practices where students are relegated to the roles of "empty vessels" and passive consumers of knowledge (Freire, 1985). In a classroom that embraces CCP as a method, its theoretical foundations become materially significant, as they influence the ways students experience the classroom. Students have the opportunity to become co-producers of knowledge, which resists a student-teacher dichotomy and offers the space for agentic control over one's own learning. In addition, a focus on praxis as knowledge can offer students and instructors the opportunity to bring their own embodied experiences to the classroom, as they learn about the intersubjective nature of knowledge.

Fassett & Warren (2007) assert that dialogue functions both as metaphor and method, further drawing a central connection between academic theories and one's everyday experiences. Critical Communication Pedagogy and Critical Cultural Communication scholars discuss dialogue in the classroom space as an ideal form of communication (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Giroux, 1997). While such conversations hold significance in terms of establishing what characteristics a dialogue consists of, it is not enough (Pensoneau-Conway, 2012). To impact the lives of students and instructors in a humanizing manner, a commitment to dialogue needs to be temporally located in the bodies of all participants in a classroom community who are willing to embrace open/transparent communication. To say it another way, paying lip service to dialogue

in a classroom space won't be effective, but embodying its commitments to reflexive communication will.

Critical Communication Pedagogy scholarship offers a fitting arena to theorize about the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities with its focus on the intersubjective nature of knowledge. However, as stated earlier, instructors with visible disabilities remain largely absent from CCP literature. Thus, the impetus of this project developed: arguing for the place of instructors with visible disabilities in CCP scholarship. A focus on visible disabilities is made specifically, because in the research that has been published, scholars argue that a very specific form of embodied pedagogy manifests from instructors with visible disabilities. Now, the published work on instructors with visible disabilities is briefly described as it frames understanding of the unique pedagogy arising from teaching with a visible disability (Anderson, 2006; Hayashi & May, 2011).

Teaching with a Disability

Hayashi & May (2011) asked students via a survey if they had experiences with an instructor who had a visible disability, and if they did, what were their perceptions of them? While the responses of students who had experiences with instructors who had a visible disability were few, those students all stated that they now held positive perceptions of people with disabilities. On the other hand, when a student had not had an instructor with a visible disability, they were more likely to hold negative perceptions of people with disabilities in general, including low intelligence and laziness (Hayashi & May, 2011). Such a finding holds much significance, because it shows that when given the opportunity, people with disabilities can succeed in a position of power within the classroom in general and, as applied to the current study, specifically within the university classroom.

The American Council on Education (2005) introduces the statistic that only 3.9 percent of instructors teaching in U.S. American post-secondary educational institutions identify as having a visible disability when 1 in 5 people in the U.S. general population identify as having a visible disability. This statistic shows a clear underrepresentation of instructors with visible disabilities in relation to the population of people with disabilities in the U.S. at large. Anderson (2006) further details the unique perspective that instructors with visible disabilities bring to the classroom. The disabled body is positioned as a rich site of humanizing knowledge that the students can learn from about the nuances of power, privilege, and oppression. This in itself is significant, since historically, disabled bodies have been discursively viewed as a defect. Furthermore, instructors with visible disabilities represent the power of theory as embodiment. Theories should not merely exist in the academy, but they can also be applied within everyday life in meaningful ways (Anderson, 2006; Giroux, 1997). This realization can greatly empower students to reach their academic potential, as they come to understand their lived experiences as intertwined with academic knowledge.

Additionally, Anderson (2006) details the unique perspective that instructors with visible disabilities bring to the classroom. The disabled body is positioned as a rich site of knowledge that the students can learn from about the nuances of power, privilege, and oppression. This in itself is significant, since historically disabled bodies have been discursively viewed as a defect. Furthermore, professors with visible disabilities represent the power of theory as embodiment. Theories don't merely exist in the academy, but they can also be applied within everyday life in meaningful ways (Anderson, 2006). This realization can greatly empower students to reach their academic potential. The aforementioned articles provide a meaningful lens by which to view the pedagogy of instructors with visible disabilities in the classroom. However, I think a key

component is missing: the voices of instructors with visible disabilities themselves. This study aims to begin filling this gap by interviewing instructors with visible disabilities about their experiences in the classroom at SIUC and nationwide.

Culture and Disability in Formal Pedagogical Spaces

Culture, as shown by the first commitment of CCP, cannot be stacked on top of critical communication pedagogy as a separate entity; rather, it is intertwined in the very fabric that holds it together. Culture and communication pedagogy cannot be separated, nor should they be. CCP calls for a recognition of the multiplicity of cultures that people bring to learning processes. Historically, disability has been ignored as a culture and viewed solely within medical terms (Anderson, 2006; Charlton, 1998; Erevelles, 2000; Ferris, 1994). However, such a medical rendering of disability has relegated people with disabilities to the margins of society, arguably making it more difficult for them to access careers in university teaching.

Disability culture, in the last few decades, has received increased recognition, although not enough. In such a model, disability is no longer seen as a defect; instead, it is seen as a humanizing and positive aspect of a person's identities (Fleischer & Zames, 2001). A discussion of the intersection of CCP and disability culture is essential for my study. A classroom cannot embrace CCP without an analysis of the identities that instructors culturally bring to the classroom (Anderson, 2006). CCP requires analysis of the identities that instructors bring to teaching to forefront the politics of embodiment in the classroom (Anderson, 2006).

Fassett & Warren's (2007) assertion that "critical communication pedagogy educators embrace a focus on concrete, mundane communication practices as constitutive of larger social structural systems" (p. 54) captures the significance of lived experiences, in addition to the disciplinary knowledge instructors with visible disabilities bring to the learning environment. A

classroom that embraces Critical Communication Pedagogy sees the classroom as not a neutral site, but a space in which many differences are navigated and learned from in the process. Exemplifying a needed merge of disability culture and CCP, Erevelles (2000) points to the size and setup of the desks as just one example of how the bodies of students are supposed to be docile, conforming bodies instead of bodies that negotiate a variety of valuable lived experiences (Anderson 2006; Freedman & Stoddard, 2003; Pelias, 2004; Tremain, 2015). In a classroom environment that embraces CCP, the classroom is viewed as a value-laden environment in which people learn to value certain bodily characteristics over others. For example, from personal experiences, the doorways and the space inside of classrooms are not inclusively constructed. They are quite narrow, which assumes that people who occupy those environments will not need any forms of equipment to assist them physically, such as wheelchairs.

IDEA and ADA

Before the last couple of decades, people with disabilities faced many obstacles when trying to obtain access to an inclusive education and holding faculty positions. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) opened the doors for increased educational opportunities for students with disabilities. These acts are important to include in this report. Without both laws, instructors with visible disabilities would likely not be in the positions of power they have gained today.

The IDEA was signed into law in 1975 (originally The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) as one of the first civil rights laws that recognized people with disabilities as a minority group that is deserving of rights (Charlton, 1998; Fleischer & Zames, 2001). The law centers on students with disabilities who are between the ages of 3 and 21, making it mandatory for elementary and high schools to offer an education for students with disabilities that is in the

"least restrictive environment" possible (Charlton, 1998; Fleischer & Zames, 2001). While the IDEA does not directly impact the access that instructors with visible disabilities have to positions of power within colleges and universities, from my experiences, the access the IDEA granted me by way of mainstream education opportunities nurtured my academic potential. The IDEA functioned to establish educational systems that are accessible to students with disabilities in preschool, elementary, and high school. Institutions of learning were now required to test students with disabilities and devise a program that the teachers thought was best in the environment they deemed least restrictive. While this situation was and is very problematic in terms of reliance on high-stakes testing and a lack of agency of students, it started the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream schools (NCD.gov, 2009).

Jonathan Mooney's experiences of attending public elementary and high schools before and after the passage of the IDEA shows how much the law meant to his access to more equal schooling. *The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal* (Mooney, 2008) recounts his experiences as a student who was diagnosed with cognitive disabilities and relegated to special education classrooms as a youth growing up in U.S. America until his parents legally fought for him to receive a mainstream high school education. The short bus functions culturally as a derogatory symbol of students with disabilities. As an adult, he rented a short bus, with the goal of traveling across the country and talking with families and children about their oppressive experiences in the special education system.

Mooney graduated from an Ivy League university. This very action functions as a method of resisting the rhetoric of "normalcy" within everyday educational discourse. I put "normalcy" in quotes here to indicate that the idea of normalcy is very socially constructed in educational systems. It is also important to note that this social construction has significant material

consequences for students in the U.S. American educational system, such as Mooney, who don't fit the standard of normal.

Michel Foucault challenges the limited confines to the ways society, specifically in this case U.S American educational institutions, constructs normalcy. He writes:

> The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements (as cited in Mooney, 2008, p. xxi).

This quote shows the importance of Mooney's work. Throughout *The Short Bus: A Journey beyond Normal*, he situates the school system as a policing societal mechanism. People in power, such as teachers, dictate implicitly and/or explicitly what types of knowledge are deemed credible. Further, teachers and authority figures have the power to police the bodies that are embraced in their classroom, shoving bodies to the margins that don't fit an idealistic view of the normal student. As a result of the teachers' socially-sanctioned power they can either embrace difference, or as experienced by Mooney, approach difference through a medical lens, which refers to disability as a defect that must be fixed. Mooney was deemed a broken student who needed to be controlled and fixed. I will briefly address the harmful policing of Mooney's body while he was growing up.

Mooney, who graduated from Brown University with a degree in literature, was labeled by medical institutions during his childhood as a person with severe cognitive deficits. School administrators and teachers routinely put him in special education classrooms, and his ways of learning though his body were often labeled as wrong. He was consistently told by his teachers

"to try to be normal today" (p. 7). However, his parents always encouraged him to resist the labels forced upon his body. Moreover, they instilled a confidence in Mooney that the educational system itself was flawed, not him. His parents, perhaps without knowing it, were embracing critical communication pedagogy by interrogating the flaws of the educational system, instead of communicatively defining their son for his educational "failures" via their everyday humanizing interactions with Mooney and with the resistance they cast on the school system. I put failure in quotes to question by which measures Mooney failed in school, critiquing the ideological underpinnings of success and failure in academia.

CCP calls for an "embrace of pedagogy and research as praxis" and "dialogue as both metaphor and method for our relationships with others" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 54). Traditionally the personal is seen as non-academic (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Instructors with visible disabilities have the opportunity, if they choose, to refute this claim of the personal as non-academic by offering "knowledge through their bodies" (Anderson, 2006). This positioning of their bodies as sites of knowledge shows that pedagogy and research goes beyond academia, and exists in bodies that have been and are marginalized. Additionally, the commitment "dialogue as both metaphor and method for our relationships with others" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 55) will be useful when exploring how and/or if a disability influences the instructor's pedagogical practices. Do they utilize dialogue as a method to speak with students about their disabilities? That is what this study seeks to find out.

Crip Theory

Crip Theory developed in the 2000s as a way for people with disabilities to speak back to the mainstream able-bodied culture that tried to define them as different or a cultural Other (McRuer, 2006). The theory largely was spearheaded to focus on disability and queer identities, but connections have been made to racial identities as well (Hall, 2011). Crip Theory points to the connections between sexuality and ability identities within neoliberal capitalism (Hall, 2011; McRuer, 2006). Ideologies of sexuality and ability are embedded in economic structures, although popular culture often frames U.S. American society as free for all (McRuer, 2006). It also views ability as a performed identity, not to disregard its material impacts on the physical body, but rather as a means for pointing to systemic structures that hierarchically rank ability/disability.

Crip Theory holds much significance for studying the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities. According to Ferris (1994), people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States. They are often more disenfranchised by the barriers in architecture and attitudes than by the physical differences themselves (Ferris, 1994). The importance of Crip Theory lies in its humanization of disability. For one of the first times, people with disabilities were treated as a group with social rights, rather than damaged people to be fixed. Crip Theory holds much importance for studying the ways instructors with visible disabilities navigate their identities. Its theoretical foundations lend itself to a centering of the body as a humanizing epistemological site in the classroom

The idea of a disability culture sprang from Crip theorists. Disability culture represented a distinct turn in the discourse that often surrounded disability. Traditionally, disability was viewed in the United States as a defect, a flaw to one's identities that needed to be fixed or

covered up. When looked at from a critical cultural perspective, disability becomes an identity in need of celebration. About 20 years before Crip culture was embraced by the disability community, a similar movement sprouted up that is referred to as "Nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 1998; Garland-Thomson, 2011; Linton, 1998). This movement raised awareness about the need for agentic control by people with disabilities. They were tired of people who identify as able-bodied advocating on their behalf, and they wanted to assert their own voices.

The "Nothing about us without us" movement identified the impacts of disability from many angles, including the economic injustices people with disabilities experience in obtaining employment. Therefore, I believe it is a fair assertion to say that the "Nothing about us without us" movement paved the way for people with disabilities to access the academy, and now, to some extent, faculty positions. This time period marked one of the first historic moments when people with disabilities were able to mark their own experiences and claim that they struggled against systemic oppressions. Such a moment marked the start of a critical shift in attitudes, as the larger public began to understand people with disabilities as a minority group in their own right and not simply people in need of medical attention. Our bodies had the possibility of being seen as humanizing spaces, and even can be viewed as bodies of knowledge (Anderson, 2006; Charlton, 1998; Fleischer & Zames, 2001).

Method

I received Human Subjects approval from Southern Illinois University on May 2, 2016 to conduct interviews. The approval was granted given the stipulation that I use aliases for the instructors interviewed. First, I emailed an instructor I know at SIU who has a visible disability to see if he would be willing to participate in my research. He agreed for me to interview him and for me to use his answers in my study. Also, since all of the correspondence has been limited

to email, all of the instructors didn't end up answering the questions in as much detail as I would like.

The interviews were conducted online, unless the instructor taught at SIUC, which made it easier to meet in person. Each interview was recorded, with the consent of each interviewee. Online interviews were recorded on Skype using the Supertintin Skype Video Recorder. The in-person interviews were recorded in person using iTalk, an iPod recording device. After each interview, I transcribed the conversations, listening to each interview five times for accuracy (See Appendix A).

I contacted *Marcus (*name changed for privacy purposes) to add his narrative to my research. I believe that without stories of the unique perspective professors with disabilities bring to CCP, my research would remain disconnected from everyday life and experiences. Furthermore, the critical paradigm necessitates that our research merges theory and praxis (Piller, 2011). The critical paradigm of cultural communication embraces an intersubjective approach to epistemology, in which multiple ways of knowing are not only tolerated but embraced. This commitment of the critical paradigm is significant to incorporating the voices of instructors with visible disabilities into research, since instructors with visible disabilities bring their disciplinary knowledge and specific embodied knowledge that can't be felt in the same way by any other minority group (Anderson, 2006; Erevelles, 2000; Ferris, 1994).

I met *Marcus when he spoke to my CMST 101 students during Library Instruction Day. He explained to my students that he has Tourette's syndrome, which causes his facial muscles to move uncontrollably while he is speaking. I think that the openness he displayed with my students about his disability would make him an excellent addition to my study. He made a point when he was speaking that is relevant to this study of instructors with visible disabilities. He

started his presentation by introducing himself as a person with a disability, and then followed that up with stating he held a 3.9 GPA in his Master's Degree program. Of course I cannot say for sure, but I wonder if he felt that he had to establish credibility in this way because he has a visible disability. Literature on instructors with visible disabilities points to the unfortunate reality that they are often faced with additional pressure, due to the routine relegation of people with disabilities as incompetent (Anderson, 2006; Erevelles, 2000; Ferris, 1994: Mossman, 2002).

Analysis

The identities of instructors with visible disabilities hold much importance in terms of developing a unique and inclusive pedagogy. Critical Communication Pedagogy is a fitting discipline to embrace and learn from the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities. The themes I identified in my interview transcripts are: (1) an overall perceived reaction of surprise from students when they first saw their instructor with a visible disability; (2) lack of physical access to the teaching environment; (3) some attempts from instructors to hide their disability from their students; and (4) the ways that instructors choose to approach the merging of their disability and orientation to pedagogy, which largely depends on the academic discipline they are in.

1. There is an overall perceived reaction of surprise from students when they first saw their instructor with a visible disability. Anderson (2006) speaks to the low percentage of instructors that have visible disabilities. Regarding finding #1, some of the research participants believe that this low percentage of instructors with visible disabilities increases the frequency and intensity of student reactions when they discover their instructor does not have the abled body that has always been automatically associated with the instructor role (Anderson, 2006;

Mossman, 2002). As *Thomas, an instructor with a visible disability, noted when I interviewed him, his biggest challenges are usually on the first day of each new semester. "Students often look surprised when I come in to start class in my wheelchair." This quote holds significance, because it points to the politics of instructor identities in the classroom. Why are students so surprised when a person in a wheelchair enters the classroom? The work of disability studies scholars point to the likely main reasons, although it is impossible to know with certainty without interviewing students. I did not do this, because it was outside the scope of the current project.

The disabled body, throughout history, has been characterized as a body of shame and deficit–a body that could never measure up to the standard of an abled body. The medical model of disability has been the catalyst of this line of thinking. From a medical model perspective, a disability is an identity marker that marks an individual as unhealthy, and a disability needs to be fixed (Charlton, 1998; Erevelles, 2000; Ferris, 1994; Fleischer & Zames, 2001; Mossman, 2002). The medical model still impacts the lives of people with disabilities today. Therefore, the students who saw *Thomas on the day he started class likely felt surprised that a person who is generally viewed in society at large as sick could hold a position of power in the classroom.

I experienced a similar event to Thomas's on the day that I first started class as an instructor. As soon as many of my students saw me roll up to the podium in my wheelchair, they stared at me with looks of surprise across their faces. I had a hard time getting my students to participate in any discussion or activity that morning: they mostly stared at me silently while I talked. Now, I know many instructors get similar reactions from students and they don't have a visible disability. However, I sensed a great deal of discomfort that I have rarely experienced on a first day of class before as a student I could feel the tension; it was palpable. Reflecting on that class now, I can best describe my students' reactions as ones of culture shock. They entered the

course that day likely expecting the instructor to have a certain physical ability level. When that illusion was shattered at the sight of me sitting in a motorized wheelchair, it seemed to me that they were completely shell-shocked and did not know how to act in this new situation.

2. There is a lack of physical access to the teaching environment. Not only do instructors with visible disabilities encounter resistance from students, making it physically into the classroom can pose challenges as well. The ADA has made buildings more physically accessible for people with disabilities by requiring that federal and state buildings comply with standards for the width of doorways so wheelchairs can maneuver through. However, many buildings are not made accessible if the institution proves the investment is too costly (Accessibility Report, 2016).

I believe that this loophole needs to be eliminated. How can a price really be put on giving someone access to a post-secondary educational environment? In addition, from my experiences it often feels very troubling to realize that while disability studies has gained momentum in becoming a respected academic field of inquiry, the bodies of people with disabilities are often not accommodated in the college setting. Our ideas are welcomed in certain settings, but our bodies are not (Anderson, 2006; Ferris, 1994; Erevelles, 2000). I, along with some of my interview participants in this study, have experienced obstacles in terms of physically accessing our classrooms. I can say from experience that it felt horrifying to me as a young instructor to have my students see me struggle to access the front of the classroom. I realize differently now, but at those times I would feel so embarrassed. I felt that my struggles to access the classroom made me look frazzled and unprepared, even before class began. Of course I realize now that my ability to access the classroom has no bearing on my ability to teach the

content of the course. However, during the beginning of my time as instructor, struggling to enter the classroom made my anxiety increase.

In addition, *Keith, an instructor with a visible disability at the University of Denver, described his struggle to gain access to his teaching environment during his interview. Keith explained:

> Many of the classrooms at the university I teach at are not accessible for people with disabilities, especially for teachers who have to manage all aspects of the classroom environment. Therefore, I have often had to take my students outside to have class. This has definitely been an arrangement that has its pros and cons. Some students seem to have an easier time engaging with the course material in an outdoor environment. However, others seem distracted by it. In addition, during one semester a student complained regularly that they thought it was unfair they were expected to learn outside a classroom. However, I used this time to explain the reasons behind us moving our classroom. I also used this moment as an entry point to a discussion on how classroom setups are political–they are arranged to accommodate certain body types and not others (Keith, personal interview, 2016).

Clearly, Keith's lack of access to his teaching environment is problematic, specifically from a CCP perspective. CCP scholars work to embrace "culture as central to communication, not additive" (Fassett & Warren, 2007). If culture functions as a key part of communication, what messages are possibly being sent to instructors with visible disabilities and students by the inaccessibility of teaching environments? Of course, the most accurate way to find an answer to this question would have been by including it in my interviews. However, I also feel that disability studies literature and my own experiences as an instructor also clearly point to the

likely answer. Since the medical model of disability is still largely a part of the discourses surrounding disability, the inaccessibility of classrooms may send the message that instructors with visible disabilities do not belong in academic positions of power, because something is wrong with their bodies. In addition, if students feel this way about their instructor, they are more likely to disrespect their instructor by undermining their authority, according to Anderson (2006), Freedman & Stoddard (2003), and Hayashi & May (2011).

Not only was this evident in the literature on instructors with visible disabilities, but in my own experiences as an instructor as well. During my second semester of teaching as a Master's student, I again gave everyone in my class the opportunity to share their opinions on how our class was going by offering them a few prompting questions: What aspects of this course and my teaching do you enjoy, and what aspects of this course and my teaching can be improved? Similarly to the first semester when I asked students the same questions, most of the responses included helpful suggestions on how to improve my teaching. However, one of the responses again made me painfully realize that my physical body was often equated with my capabilities as an instructor. One student wrote, "I will never see you as any kind of authority figure because of your disability."

When I read this comment, my face immediately grew hot and red. I closed my eyes and tried to breathe regularly while emotional pain racked my body. I kept thinking over and over in my head, what did I do to cause this person's thinking? I immediately thought back to the many times I had struggled to access and maneuver in the classrooms I was teaching in because of limited space and narrow doors. I then thought, did my struggles to enter, exit, and move around the classrooms send the message to my students that I was weak, incompetent, and unworthy of being their instructor? Of course, I soon realized that if students were participating in this line of

thinking they were likely missing out on learning opportunities in the class. However, the lack of access I had to my teaching environment spoke to and with disability studies literature and other instructors with visible disabilities that I interviewed. I feel it is important to note that I understand other factors can and do impact the ways students construct their instructors' level of competency. However, the students' outright admission that they did not respect my authority because of my disability makes it evident that my visible disability decreased my authority in the classroom from their perspective. I am sure that not being able to navigate the classroom with ease did not help the perceptions this student held of me.

3. Some instructors with visible disabilities try to hide their disabilities. When *Catherine was asked if the number of instructors with disabilities should increase she answered: "No, I do not think the number should increase, because it is impossible to hide a visible disability even though I desperately want to hide it" (Catherine, personal interview, 2016).

*Catherine's response sadly speaks to an academic culture that largely still views disability as a deficit to hide, especially when one is in a position of power. Anderson (2006) said part of the reason he felt compelled to connect the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities with critical communication pedagogy is to attempt to distance instructors with visible disabilities from the medical model that still permeates discussion on disability towards a pedagogy based on inclusivity and recognition of the politics of an instructor's body. In addition, during her interview *Tara, a professor of Animal Science from Colorado State University, showed a desire to separate her disability from her teaching, and to work on hiding her disability. *Tara said that her disability does not impact her teaching, but the part of her response that I feel speaks most directly to the trend of instructors with visible disabilities trying to hide their

disabilities is when she stated that she does not think her pedagogy should be impacted by her disability.

*Tara's answer speaks to an idea that still largely exists in traditional education: one's body and identities should completely be removed from their research and teaching to maintain objective point of views (Frey & Palmer, 2014). In contrast, from a CCP perspective, the politics of bodies and identities always matter in the classroom. Furthermore, generally CCP and Critical Intercultural Communication scholars believe that it is not possible nor is it desirable to hide one's identities in the classroom (Ahmed, 2012; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Ferris, 1994). According to these scholars, such attempts increase the impacts of oppression by not having dialogue about it and creating an illusion that equality exists, and any situations of inequality are a personal issue. As such, education moves further away from a critical consciousness instead of closer.

4. The ways instructors choose to approach the merging of their disability and orientation to pedagogy largely depends on their academic discipline. For example, *Thomas said his strategy of being upfront with the students about his disability seemed to work for him and his classes. As a professor of sociology, he participates in a field that likely has more of a focus on how identities influence education than a hard sciences class would. This is not to say that one field is more important than the other; rather, it points to an important contextual factor that impacts how instructors with disabilities navigate their disability identity in the classroom. Similar to *Thomas, *Keith, who is an instructor of communication studies, openly includes his disability in his pedagogical decisions as well. Keith often has to teach his classes outside, because the classrooms at his university are inaccessible for instructors who use wheelchairs. Students often ask questions about the unconventional learning environment, and he uses these

moments as an opportunity to expose the nuances of power, privilege, and oppression. He openly talks with students about the classrooms being inaccessible and what messages this can communicate to students and instructors using those spaces. Communication Studies, from a critical perspective, focuses on the power structures that underlie communication (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Frey & Palmer, 2014).

In contrast, I discovered that instructors who did not partake in academic disciplines that focused on the politics of identities were less likely to include their disability in their pedagogy and were more likely to try to distance their pedagogy and disability from each other. For example, *Rebecca stated:

I have chosen to not enact pedagogy through my body. I want to abide by the material within the animal science discipline that I am responsible for teaching my students. I am not necessarily opposed to positioning my disabled body as knowledge; however, I am not sure if I could find the link with my disciplinary field. (*Rebecca, personal interview, 2016).

Since Rebecca's field of study did not include a discussion of identity politics, she did not discuss her disability. Instead, she held to the idea that it is best to hide her disability from her students. Similarly, Catherine, a professor in mood disorders, thought one's disability should be hidden if at all possible. Since, in her opinion, the study of mood disorders does not relate exactly to the politics of one's body, she saw the mention of her visible disability as a conversation to avoid as she would be viewed as less competent by her students (*Catherine, personal interview, 2016).

Limitations and Conclusion

This research can benefit from future analysis of ability at the intersections of other identities, such as gender and race. Such additions can enrich the study of identities by making

the research more nuanced and reflexive of both the privileged and marginalized identities that researchers hold. Social justice and identity scholar Frances Kendall (2006) reminds her readers that identities never function as a singular entity, but intertwine in unique and important ways that need to be explored.

Furthermore, the study can benefit from more participants, in addition to follow-up interviews with the original participants. While the instructors who were interviewed offered valuable insight into if and how their disability impacts their pedagogical practices, the interviewing pool needs more participants and longer interviews in order to tease out patterns, themes, and implications of those themes. To accomplish this, more specific coding practices need to be developed to qualitatively asses the data I collect.

My central goals for this paper were to interview instructors with visible disabilities and argue for their inclusion in CCP scholarship. During the autobiographical section, I reflected on my own experiences of teaching with a visible disability as a Graduate Assistant to locate teaching with a visible disability as an experience I have had. In the literature review, texts available on instructors with visible disabilities were summarized. In the theory section, CCP's origination and theoretical commitments were outlined. Then, the origins of Crip Theory were summarized as it provides a meaningful lens to understand the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities as a humanizing means of resistance to ableist-informed pedagogies. Additionally, the limitations and future directions of the study were described.

Instructors with visible disabilities do not offer a problematic body within the realm of CCP; they offer a body of possibility (Anderson, 2006). With CCP's embrace of the teacher's body as meaningful and consequential, instructors with visible disabilities can provide a humanizing centering of the embodied knowledge they bring to the classroom. Identity has a

long and consequential trajectory within intercultural communication and in critical communication pedagogy research (Pensoneau-Conway, 2012). The disabled body has been situated as a powerful site of knowledge in critical communication pedagogy, but recognition of the disabled body largely stops with the critique of students (Anderson, 2006; Erevelles, 2000; Mossman, 2002). It is time to include instructors with visible disabilities in conversations about CCP at the intersection of their privileged and marginalized identities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Interview Questions and Answers

Interviews completed prior to Research Report during a Critical Communication Pedagogy seminar course in spring, 2015. IRB Human Subjects Approval was granted in February, 2015.

Participant 1: *Thomas, Director of Research of Sociology, Cambridge University.

Q1: What is the biggest challenge you have faced in terms of navigating your disability in the classroom?

A1: The biggest challenges are usually on the first day of each new semester. Students often look surprised when I come in to start class in my wheelchair.

Q2: Given this challenge, how do you navigate your identity as an instructor with a visible disability?

A2: It helps to be open about my identity as a person with a disability to make my students more comfortable with my body in a classroom space. I share information with the class as a collective about my disability on the first day, and it is usually not an issue after that.

Participant 2: *Rebecca, professor of animal science at Colorado State University

Q1: What is the biggest challenge you have faced in terms of navigating your disability at the university as an instructor?

A1: The greatest challenges I have experienced are with the campus Disability Support Services (DSS) office. The office has had a lot of experiences with providing accommodations for students with disabilities. However, they never had a situation where the instructor needed accommodations. While a struggle initially, we have been able to work together to meet both my needs and my students' needs by applying the same accommodations to students to myself as a

faculty member.

Q2: Do your experiences as a person with a disability influence your pedagogical practices?

A2: I have chosen to not enact pedagogy through my body. I want to abide by the material within the animal science discipline that I am responsible for teaching my students. I am not necessarily opposed to positioning my disabled body as knowledge; however, I am not sure if I could find the link with my disciplinary field.

Participant 3: *Catherine, inaugural Dolio Family Professor in Mood Disorders at the John Hopkins University School of Medicine

Q1: What is the biggest challenge you have faced in terms of navigating your disability in the classroom?

A1: Students look very surprised that they have an instructor with a visible disability. They usually say I am the first and the only teacher they have had with a visible disability.

Q2: Should the number of the instructors with visible disabilities increase? If so, how?

A2: No, I do not think the number should increase, because it is impossible to hide a visible disability even though I desperately want to hide it. Because I would be seen as as less competent.

APPENDIX B

Interviews completed during research report process

Participant 1: Interview with *Marcus, Librarian

Q1. Please describe your disability. This information will be used in an effort to represent a variety of disabilities in this study, and by no means is meant to limit the definition of disability to a medical model.

A1. Tourette's syndrome. My case is light-to-moderately severe: while I suffer from facial and vocal tics, as well as heightened anxiety, I do not experience the learning difficulties or obsessive-compulsivity that often comes with Tourette's. In some ways, Tourette's has yielded academic advantages. For example, my anxiety drives me to complete projects immediately after they are assigned. Procrastination makes me feel discomfort, and I avoid it. The anxiety itself isn't pleasant, but its product—timely completion of work—is a nice side effect. Sleep is critical for me. If I'm short on sleep, my academic performance declines dramatically, and I run into things.

Q2. Does your disability impact your teaching? If so, how?

A2. Yes. My facial and vocal tics can be distracting to students, and they can crop up at inopportune times. Sometimes, thankfully not often, I stutter, which can be catastrophic at the beginning of a lecture. Some students are understandably concerned that my tics are the result of a drug habit, or that they reflect something intellectually wrong with me. In both cases, my authority and reliability are called into question.

Q3. Do your experiences as a person with a disability influence your pedagogical practices? If so, how?

A3. Yes. Anxiety increases my symptoms, so I tend to make plans. The better I have a lecture or lesson planned out, the less likely I am to experience severe tics. In many cases, I will write out and partially—or entirely—memorize everything I want to say during class.

Q4. Do you discuss your disability openly with students? If so, how?

A4. Yes, usually. My disability manifests visibly through facial twitches and odd noises, which, as I said, are both readily confused with drug use or mental impairment. In order for my first encounter with a new group of students to go smoothly, I find that a brief education is helpful. During my self-introduction, I explain that I have Tourette syndrome, often with a joke about my odd behavior, and describe how it affects me, emphasizing that the disorder, while uncomfortable for me, will not have an adverse effect on their education.

Q5. What, if any, accommodations do you receive from an office of Disability Support Services on your campus?

A5. None, nor have I requested any.

Q6. Have you ever taught a student with a visible disability? Tell me about this experience.

A6. Yes, many times. I try to treat them as I would any student. If a disabled student approaches me and expresses a desire to talk about their or my disability, I do, and frankly. I enjoy such students a great deal, as I feel a degree of kinship with them.

Q7. Describe a time (if any) when you have felt marginalized by a student because of your disability.

A7. Long ago, when I first started teaching, I did not talk about my disability with my students, which led to some awkward questions. I did not, however, feel marginalized by those

questions—they seemed like reasonable things to ask about a teacher who is grunting and twitching.

Q8. What other personal information or experiences do you feel are important to share for my project on the politics of identifying as an instructor with a visible disability?

A8: I wouldn't know where to start; I've never put thought into the political aspect.

Participant 2: Interview with *Keith, University of Denver

Q1. Please describe your disability. This information will be used in an effort to represent a variety of disabilities in this study, and by no means is meant to limit the definition of disability to a medical model.

A1: I was in a car accident with some friends when I was 16, and I acquired a spinal cord injury. I spent two months in the hospital and another month in a rehabilitation center to learn how to live with a disability.

Q2. Does your disability impact your teaching? If so, how?

A2. Yes, many of the classrooms at the university I teach at are not accessible for people with disabilities, especially for teachers who have to manage all aspects of the classroom environment. Therefore, I have often had to take my students outside to have class. This has definitely been an arrangement that has its pros and cons. Some students seem to have an easier time engaging with the course material in an outdoor environment. However, others seem distracted by it. In addition, during one semester a student complained regularly that they thought it was unfair they were expected to learn outside a classroom. However, I used this time to explain the reasons behind us moving our classroom. I also used this moment as an entry point to a discussion on how classroom setups are political-they are arranged to accommodate certain body types and not others.

Q3. Do your experiences as a person with a disability influence your pedagogical practices? If so, how?

A3. Yes, being a person with a disability is a part of my identity. As such, my experiences as a person with a disability do influence my pedagogical practices. I feel that I am a more flexible professor because I have had to make accommodations for myself to even teach the class. By flexible I mean that I tend to be spontaneous during my lectures, often veering from my plan for the day if the students seem to need a different approach in a specific moment.

Q4. Do you discuss your disability openly with students? If so, how?

A4. Yes, I discuss it mostly at the beginning of class. Specifically, I let students know that my disability does not change my competency as an instructor. I am just as qualified as my able-bodied colleagues to teach. While discussing how identities are negotiated communicatively, I sometimes include myself in the dialogue. I share as much as I feel comfortable with in each of my classes about the ways people have communicated to me that I do not belong in rigorous academic spaces.

Q5. What, if any, accommodations do you receive from an office of Disability Support Services on your campus?

A5. I do not receive any accommodations. I have requested room changes in the past, so I don't have to teach outside. However, a room change has never been granted due to limited space.

Q6. Have you ever taught a student with a visible disability? Tell me about this experience.

A6. Yes, I have had a few students who use wheelchairs. I try to treat them as any other student, while being attentive to their needs. The students I have had who use wheelchairs seem

comfortable to come talk with me about course content or an issue regarding how people treat them because of their disability. A student came to me once and vented their frustrations about a discrimination claim that they officially filed with the university. However, they felt like their concerns were never taken seriously because of their disability.

Q7. Describe a time (if any) when you have felt marginalized by a student because of your disability.

A7: I feel marginalized by students because of my disability every time they complain about not having class in a traditional classroom. In those moments, I feel like my disability is put front and center in a negative way.

Q8. What other personal information or experiences do you feel are important to share for my project on the politics of identifying as an instructor with a visible disability?

Did not answer this question.

Participant 3: Interview with *Tara, Professor of Animal Sciences at Colorado State University

Q1. Please describe your disability. This information will be used in an effort to represent a variety of disabilities in this study, and by no means is meant to limit the definition of disability to a medical model.

A1. Autism. Fully verbal.

Q2. Does your disability impact your teaching? If so, how?

A2. Visual thinking helps my animal behavior research.

Q3. Do your experiences as a person with a disability influence your pedagogical practices? If so, how?

A3. No, and I do not think they should.

Q4. Do you discuss your disability openly with students? If so, how?

A4: No

Q5. What, if any, accommodations do you receive from an office of Disability Support Services on your campus?

A5: None

Q6. Have you ever taught a student with a visible disability? Tell me about this experience. A6: Wheel chair – Had to switch to an accessible classroom. Blind student changed the drawing assignment to a term paper.

Q7. Describe a time (if any) when you have felt marginalized by a student because of your disability.

A7: Never

Q8. What other personal information or experiences do you feel are important to share for my project on the politics of identifying as an instructor with a visible disability?

A8: Be really good at teaching your class. Make your work top quality.

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER SENT TO N.C.A.

For the research report, I solicited interviews using the National Communication Association's Disability Issues Caucus listserv to send out the following letter:

Hi NCA Disability Issues Caucus members, I am Carrie Mulderink, a second-year Master's student at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, specializing in Critical Cultural Communication. I am completing my thesis on the experiences of instructors with visible disabilities, and making a case for their inclusion in critical communication pedagogy scholarship. I am looking for instructors with visible disabilities who would be willing to speak with me about their experiences of teaching with a visible disability. All interviews would be recorded and transcribed, and excerpts will be used in my final thesis project. Interviews will last about 15-30 minutes. If interested, please contact me at cmulderink@siu.edu or 708-217-1267. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Carrie Mulderink

Southern Illinois University

N.C.A Disability Issues Caucus Student Representative

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