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THE INTERSECTION OF RACISM AND ABLEISM IN DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The websites of disability resource centers at six universities are used in a discourse analysis to forefront ways in which the Whiteness of disability is upheld. The main research question, built using a DisCrit (Disability/Critical Race theory) lens, is: how do the institutional discourses of disability resource centers reproduce or challenge particular identities for college students with disabilities? The research sub-question explored in this dissertation that built off of this wider scope is: how are the politics of intersectionality addressed in such discourses? Then, in the second analysis chapter, two more analytical categories are discussed that were generated from my discourse analysis: problematizing disability as only a social construct and the politics of naming disability support services offices. Overall, this dissertation aims to generate conversations about how race and disability are constructed via the discourses presented on the university websites and the potential consequences of such presentations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Racism and ableism, both separately and together, impact university students of color with disabilities by making them a target of micro-aggressions, limiting the opportunities to read literature written by people who share their experiences, and decreasing their access to faculty role models who share similar identities (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013). While scholars in education, communication, and disability studies have examined racism and ableism, the intersection of these two positionalities has not been given sustained attention and, furthermore, the voices of some of the people who are most impacted by these forms of oppression have not been studied in-depth. For instance, in education research, the focus has been primarily on the intersection of racism and ableism in K-12 educational contexts, with less attention given to the post-secondary level and how such institutional services are advertised via websites.

In the field of critical intercultural communication, some scholars have examined racism (Ahmed, 2012; Fryberg & Martinez, 2014; & Niles & Gordon, 2011) and ableism (Anderson, 2006 & Mossman, 2005) as two forms of oppression that are articulated through communicative practices. However, the literature on the intersection of racism and ableism continues to be underdeveloped in scholarship (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013). In Disability Studies, scholars generally conduct thorough research on disability but often overlook how race impacts the identity constructions of disability and vice-versa (Connor, Annamma & Ferri, 2015).

Therefore, a central problem addressed in this research is this lack of consideration to the intersection of race and disability in disability resource centers on university campuses, for as Bell (2013) has noted, disability is often viewed just from a

White perspective. In this sense, the research here seeks to contribute to the further de-Whitening of disability resource offices and their procedures. Disability resources offices are often a space that is often rhetorically and discursively positioned as a resource to all students with disabilities. Whiteness is defined within the contours of this study as both physical and performative, meaning while Whiteness may be able to be read on one's body, it is also very subjective. Furthermore, Whiteness extends beyond the physical body; Whiteness is created by White bodies and can be constituted and performed by bodies that are not read as White. It also extends into respectability politics (Warren, 2001 & Alexander, 2004).

Goals and Research Questions

The research for this dissertation hopefully will lead to more constructive and reflexive dialogues about intersectional politics, and to more research initiatives on the specific experiences of students of color with disabilities. More specifically, this research focuses on the institutional setting of disability resource centers in a college campus via the content of university disability resource centers websites. This is to explore how these services may be promoted as a key resource for all students with disabilities, without taking into account how various identity markers, such as race, play a role in students access to these services and the quality of their social and academic experiences on campus.

The focus is on discrimination and bias based on what people can see to point to the complexity of aesthetic renderings and readings, although disability and race cannot always be visibly seen (Hunter, 2007) & (O'Shea, 2016). Based off of the research goals, a central argument is that access to such services functions very politically, meaning all

people with disabilities do not have the same access to such services. The institutional setting is important not only in influencing access to material resources and services but also in shaping processes of identities construction. The research questions that developed from these gaps in the literature are:

1. How do the institutional discourses of disability resource centers reproduce or challenge particular identities for college students with disabilities? Institutional discourses are defined here as both institutional policies and everyday communicative interactions that frame how identities (e.g. race and disability) are constructed and resisted (Benwell &Stokoe, 2006).

   Some sub-questions that emerged from this larger inquiry are:

   a. How are the politics of intersectionality addressed in such discourses?
   b. How do the discourses construct notions of authenticity?
   c. How do the discourses center ideologies of Whiteness?

To respond to the research questions, discourse analysis and Critical Race Theory/DisCrit methodologies are utilized to examine how the communicative aspects of language are significant, value-laden representations of systemic power and power struggles in particular social contexts (Shome, 2013). Discourse analysis refers to the study of how social groups are portrayed via mediums, such as texts and pictures (Van Dijk, 1995; Coulthard, 2014 & Grue, 2020). Such an endeavor will help in exploring how the discourse produced in the setting of a disability resource center in a college campus via their websites may reproduce or challenge the tendencies to construct a monolithic identity for the disability community and disregard how intersectional identities make the experience of disability malleable. The resulting analytical categories created during the

research are listed in Table 1 along with where to access further information on them in this dissertation.

Table 1

Analytical Categories of the Research and Where to Find Them

Analytical Categories	Location
Ableist and racial power differentials between staff and students	Pgs. 43-48
Disability as purely a medical construction	Pgs. 48-59
Problematizing disability as only a social construct	Pgs. 63-68
The politics of naming disability support services offices	Pgs. 68-81

Significance of Research

An interest peaked in studying the intersection of disability and race peaked during a research project that focused on the intersection of racism and ableism in higher education generally. For that project, some participants were interviewed who discussed how they felt that the disability resource centers at various universities they had attended weren't particularly concerned about addressing comments and actions made by staff that indicated that students of color did not belong and were not welcomed in disability resource centers.

In a sense, the overall consensus of research participants was that their identities as a person of color with a disability was more often called into question and connoted as defiance rather than disability. To say it another way, people of color were more likely than their White peers to have their disability status questioned and/or looked over by

institutional disability support staff. These comments brought to the surface very important questions about disability, race, and notions of authenticity. An analysis of race and disability through the lens of intersectionality and Whiteness contributes to the understanding of these dynamics.

Intersectionality, as studied theoretically through the lens of Disability Studies, has often embraced the study of interlocking identities of disability and gender (Hall, 2011). However, the intersection of race and disability still does not receive the attention it deserves within critical research endeavors (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2015). Hence, scholars began to address education inequalities through the DisCrit lens. At the same time, there have been few articles published specifically focused on how race/racism plays a role in students' access to services within the context of disability resource centers on university campuses. Therefore, this project illuminates a gap in understanding by looking at how racial ideologies operate within disability resource centers that impact the experience of students of color.

Study Overview

In the next section, the philosophical paradigms that inform this approach to research are covered, and theoretical frameworks are offered, along with a review of relevant literature. In these, the landscape of intersectional and critical intercultural communication and disability research is assessed and critiqued by incorporating an overview of theories, such as Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and DisCrit as they hold much import and relevance to this study. In the literature review, I focus on research that provides insight into the intersections of race and disability in educational settings and also how previous studies of Disability Support Services websites in regard

to the intersection of race and disability have been conducted. Lastly, I describe my research design and discuss how my positionalities as a researcher play multiple roles in this work.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, the main theoretical lenses informing this study and their relevance to the project are discussed. This study is broadly situated within a critical intercultural communication paradigm, which broadly focuses on how systemic power, privilege, and oppression functions in everyday communicative acts and larger systems, such as education, and how notions of intersectionality play out in institutional settings (Nakayama & Halualani, 2011).

Semiotics and Disability Studies

While CRT and DisCrit provide an overall view of how racism and ableism operate, semiotics, specifically for this project, helps build understandings of language as power laden. Furthermore, semiotics and disability research make contributions to how identities are understood through the significance of language. The overall purpose here is to map out what a Disability Studies approach brings to semiotics and vice-versa. This section begins with a brief orientation to semiotics before describing in detail how disability research exemplifies the importance of semiotics. Additionally, justification is provided for why discourse analysis is used in this project generally and how it helps advance the specific goals in particular.

Semiotics is often described as the general structure of language use. Even more significantly, a semiotics approach demands that scholars focus on the power that specific words, word development, and word changes have to uphold certain ideologies (Noth, 1990). In terms of critical disability research, Rogers & Swadener (2001) challenge semiotic and disability researchers to focus on categories of difference, such as disability, as both linguistically arbitrary and materially significant. To say it another way, while

language itself does not create categories and hierarchies of difference, the meanings assigned to these words through social semiotic practices (e.g., institutional policies and everyday rhetoric) point to the importance of studying semiotics and disability together.

The Work of Volosinov and Saussure

In general, to theorize about the intersection of semiotics and disability importance lies in drawing from the key work of at least two philosophers: Volosinov (1986) and Saussure (2016). These two linguists approach the study of language in ways that hold significance in understanding the structure of language with regards to Disability Studies. First, Volosinov (1986) approaches the study of language from a perspective of Marxism. Specifically, Volosinov (1986) asserts that language and ideologies cannot be separated from each other. To say it another way, language does not function as an objective, naturalized mode of communication; rather it is embedded with ideologies; for instance, about how people with disabilities are referred to in everyday discourses. Additionally, Saussure (2016), as a linguist, asserts that attention must be paid to the distinctions between abstract and actual speech. While they are connected, they are not the same.

The purpose of this project is to answer the general research question of: how is race/ism embedded into disability resource centers both in their official policies and practices as represented on their websites? In order to begin to unravel this complex question, a semiotics perspective helps in many ways, within the realm of the work by Volisinov and Saussure. For example, Volosinov's perspectives helps in explaining how the words and images used on a disability resource center website are not objective, but actually point to ideologies of who belongs in the disability community and who doesn't.

DisCrit, Black Feminist Thought, and Intersectionality

From a critical perspective, this work is positioned in alignment with the theorizing on Disability/Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and intersectionality to elucidate the research problem. In this section, intersectionality is first discussed. Then, the influence of Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory (CRT) and their focus on intersectionality is traced, as key to the formulation of DisCrit as a field. Intersectionality as defined by Crenshaw (1995) refers to the interlocking of multiple identities that create very specific and contextual experiences at the intersection of privilege and marginalization. Second, the tenets of DisCrit are discussed and how they inform the research purposes and design. Lastly, semiotics is discussed as another theoretical approach that further enables a discussion of the importance of the language used on Disability Support Services websites.

Intersectionality, a central construct in this research, holds many important applications for the continued expansion of critical approaches in the field of Disability Studies. (Naples, et al). Building off of Crenshaw's (1995) rendering of intersectionality, I define intersectionality here as: the interweaving of experiences of multiple identity factors which are informed by institutional practices and the resulting material consequences. More specifically, as argued by critical scholars in Disability/Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) studies, the complexity and politics of intersectionality are needed in the field of Disability Studies to shift common understandings of disability from a singular identity to an identity that overlaps communicatively with other points of identity to create unique experiences for each person with a disability, such as race (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2015). In other words, a person cannot and should not be understood as only a

person with a disability. While of course this identity holds important ontological, epistemological, and axiological implications for how an individual makes sense of the environments around them, individuals always function from multiple identity standpoints at the intersections of power, privilege, and oppression, which is how Crenshaw (1995) went on to explain the importance of intersectional research.

Historically, at the backbone of intersectional research is the work of Black Feminist Thought theories as those proposed by Crenshaw (1995); Hancock (2016); Collins (2015); and the work of Critical Race theorists like Delgado and Stefancic (2013). The understanding of the contributions of these theories is central to the development of DisCrit as an approach to the study of disability, race, and intersectionality. Crenshaw's (1995) theory of intersectionality, which states that identities do not exist in isolation; rather they function together to create one's experiences at the intersection of marginalization holds great significance to my research, because it illuminates the urgency to theorize disability with other identities (including race).

When race is not included in the study of disability, such research is not as complete as it can and should be. In their research, Collins & Bilge's (2016) conceptualization of intersectionality is useful here since it specifically points to both the necessity and complexity of intersectional analyses. It states:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given

> society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other… People use intersectionality as an analytical tool to solve problems that they or others around them face.

CRT has taken root in the last three decades. Derrick Bell at Harvard Law School in the 1970's is largely known as the founder of Critical Race Theory. He saw a need within the legal realm for a language to address how advancements towards equality that were made during the Civil Rights Movement were actually being rolled back and often used to benefit White people at the expense of people of color. Thus, CRT was developed to counter the hegemonic narrative of the legal system's neutrality and, instead, center the legal system as an ideological tool. This understanding is built on a notion of intersectionality to explicate how one's complex identity positions intersect within institutionalized systems like the legal system to produce unequal material consequences. While CRT began in the legal area, it has grown to be much more interdisciplinary and is being applied in many fields, including sociology and critical intercultural communication (Hancock, 2016).

Through the years when CRT was being developed, scholars such as Connor, Ferri, and Annamma (2015) & Harry & Klingner (2014) found the need to develop subfields like Disability/Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) to deepen the understanding of intersectionality. Hancock (2016) also marked the historical development of Black Feminist Thought and CRT as central to the emergence of DisCrit. Additionally, McCall (2005) located DisCrit's understandings of intersectionality as an outgrowth of non-traditional feminist ontologies and epistemologies.

In general, CRT scholars center race as an identity that impacts both micro-level experiences and macro-level structures and outcomes. DisCrit scholars pointed out the urgency to expand on CRT's core commitments to intersectional analysis. DisCrit theories have been advanced largely in the last decade by a group of interdisciplinary scholars from sociology and education who began their DisCrit journey by penning an article published in the *Review of Research in Education* during 2013. Based on discussions generated by that article, Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2015) realized that DisCrit necessitated much more nuance and exploration than a singular article could provide. This realization lead to the publication of the book, *DisCrit-Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education.* The book highlighted how race and ability function in tandem to impact one's experiences in general and one's life outcomes in particular, such as in education.

In this sense, while DisCrit built on CRT and Black Feminist Thought as key sources, it pointed out gaps in such theorizing. As Bailey and Mobley (2018) have argued, Black Feminist Thought scholarship has generally dismissed how disability impacts Black feminist practices, specifically in terms of resisting the politics of inclusion and exclusion within the Black community (e.g., the dismissal of Black disability ontologies and epistemologies). As stated earlier, the presence of race/ism in Disability Studies is often overlooked. According to Bailey and Mobley (2018), a similar/different statement can be made in terms of race: that race-based scholarship and activism does not account for, analyze, and interrogate the intersection of race and disability often enough.

To start to fill this gap, DisCrit scholars have argued that Whiteness that has been embedded in Disability Studies since its inception (Annamma, 2018; Connor, Annamma & Ferri, 2015); Morris (2015) & Bell (2011). Ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of the core of disability studies has largely viewed disability as a monolithic (White) identity (Connor, Annamma & Ferri, 2015). For Bell (2011), it is the lack of nuanced attention to the experiences of people of color with disabilities what has led him to observe that Disability Studies can be more accurately referred to as "White Disability Studies." As a means of resistance to this historical pattern, Connor, Ferri & Annamma (2015) have argued that race and disability need to be studied together, not to elevate either of those identities over one another, but rather to show how disability and race function parallel to each other to create very particular experiences for people of color with disabilities.

To further explicate the simultaneous importance and messiness of intersectionality, sociology scholar, McCall (2005) employed some important concepts to underline the simultaneous usefulness and messiness of intersectional research: intracategorical and anticategorical intersectionality. Intracategorical intersectionality examines the differences within specific groups, while anticategorical intersectionality dismisses the importance of such classifications at all (McCall, 2005). In the realm of intersectionality research, the intracategorical definition of intersectionality is particularly useful for this study. It calls for the unraveling of differences within one social group. In this sense, Hancock's (2016) rendering of intracategorical intersectionality plays an important role here in terms of working to move Disability Studies scholars past the idea of disability as an identity in isolation.

DisCrit Research Agenda

DisCrit, similar/different to CRT, includes several tenets that shape its theoretical foundations (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2015). For the purpose of studying how ideologies of Whiteness function in disability resource centers offices through their websites, the following tenets are highlighted: race/disability are often viewed as neutral; racism/ableism as everyday practices; and counter storytelling. The main difference between CRT and DisCrit is that DisCrit focuses very specifically on the intersection of race and disability both theoretically and methodologically.

Race/Disability as Neutral

The tenet of race/disability as neutral focuses on how race/disability often function together in ideologically driven and interrelated ways that are perceived as neutral. This commitment can be best compared to CRT's tenet of colorblindness. However, it is significant to note that DisCrit scholars center the politics of naming here, because they argue that the name/label of "colorblindness" is situated within ideologies of ableism. Blindness is used to describe the idea of not knowing, which wrongly equates it with the physical state of blindness. The ways in which race and ableism operate as neutral holds a key piece to discussing minority underrepresentation and racism in university disability resource centers, as shown in through their online presence.

Racism/Ableism as Everyday

Racism/ableism as an everyday practice is also closely related to the intersectionality of racism/ableism but provides a key theoretical implication for this study by itself. This tenet centers how racism/ableism are deeply embedded in mainstream institutions and systemic practices that often proclaim liberal values and anti-

discriminatory discourses. In the U.S. context, racism and ableism have become "the natural order of things" (Connor, Annamma & Ferri, 2015). It points to the idea that while race and disability often function together in various U.S. contexts, the Whiteness in Disability Studies is rarely regarded as an important issue that deserves critical evaluation and action. In particular, these articulations exemplify how the presence of race/ism often becomes naturalized in disability resource offices.

The understanding of racism/ableism as everyday practice can also demonstrate how these forms of oppression often go unrecognized and are not interrogated by authority figures, such as teachers or administrators of disability support offices, who might take them as the natural social order. There are ways that Disability Support Services offices have tried to resist the notion of racism/ableism as everyday practice, but it's argued here that not enough has been done. However, an example of a post-secondary institution that has tried to resist racism/ableism as an everyday practice is Carleton College. The Disability Support Services office leads a group called the Program for the Education and Enrichment Relational Skills (PEERS) (Gilbertson, May 16th, 2020). It aims to help students form friendships, and participants also receive one-on-one coaching on social issues. The participating students do not need a professional diagnosis to participate (Gilbertson, May 16th, 2020). From a DisCrit perspective this is very significant, since students of color statistically have less financial access to getting such diagnoses (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015).

In this section, I have explored my theoretical groundings of this dissertation. I began by exploring semiotics and key scholars in that field whose work assisted in developing this study. Then, I discussed the theoretical backbones of this study: Intersectionality and DisCrit. Now, I will summarize how Disability Studies, Whiteness, and place and space literature further grounded this study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In this section, the models of disability are discussed fist. Then, the scholarly articles that are instrumental for the understanding the DisCrit framework and provide useful models for further research within the educational setting are summarized. In addition, scholarship from the field of critical intercultural communication and sociology of education is discussed to highlight disability intersectional perspectives. Then, key articles are summarized that have been helpful in engaging with the websites of disability resource centers on university campuses.

Models of Disability

In general, the historic and current manifestations of disability are understood through four lenses: medical, social, economic, and political. Traditionally, disability functions in the United States via a medical model lens, which undermines one's personhood and views them as broken objects that need to be fixed to fit into a society that routinely privileges the abled body (Berger & Lorenz, 2016 & McRuer, 2006). The medical model functions pervasively in a U.S. context to limit the access that people with disabilities have to humanizing spaces, such as in education and employment. However, from a critical and intercultural communication perspective, disability is centered as an identity deserving of humanizing consideration and celebration, from the perspective of a social model of disability (Berger & Lorenz, 2016 & McRuer, 2006).

Economic Model of Disability

On the other hand, the economic model of disability focuses on the intersection between disability and economics: specifically focusing on real and/or perceived limitations in employment opportunities, labor, and productivity (Retief & Letšosa,

2018). In terms of disability and work, Rose's (2017) book, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of disability, 1840's to 1930's*, provides groundbreaking insight on disability and further utilizes the economic model of disability.

Rose (2017) describes disability as not inherent; rather a condition that has emerged under specific economic structures. Furthermore, Rose (2017) describes how in the 1840's to 1930 the idea of work has held very different semiotic-related consequences as it does today. In this aforementioned time period, the idea of work was also very much infused with the idea of family and familial ties and belonging. Much work was allocated within the family setting by taking care of their land and growing their own food, etc. Therefore, people with disabilities generally found their own ways to contribute to family life and disability was usually not viewed as a "problem." I put "problem" in quotes here to emphasize that the articulation of "problem" in terms of discussing disability relies on a medically and economically based rendering of disability. In such a setting where the idea of work relied much more on the familial structure, the word "disability" did not hold the same power and meanings from a semiotics perspective.

However, with a rise of capitalist-oriented endeavors, the semiotic meanings of work began to shift. Now the connotations of "work" were very different. Instead of "work" being centered on the family within approximately the time period described above, "work" became more attached to ideologies of independence, financial security, and ownership (Nielsen, 2014). Work now demanded the ability to engage in physical labor by oneself and to own land that would ultimately provide security to one's family. In order to work, one had to have the ability to manage their own land independently. Such a rendering of work also became tied to ideas of citizenship and more specifically to

who could qualify as a "competent" citizen and who could not (Nielsen, 2014). In this time period and arguably now, in some ways, in order to be a citizen one needed to have the ability to work independently and support themselves (Nielsen, 2014). This discussion here of how the idea of "work" has shaped particular understandings of the semiotic construction of disability over time, leads well into a discussion of Barnes's & Mercer's (2005) publication on Disability, Work, and Welfare and how these articulations of "work" apply to my research.

Barnes & Mercer (2005) discuss how more of a focus on capitalism and independence (both physically and financially) has framed people with disabilities as "incompetent citizens" as coined by Nielsen (2014). Capitalist endeavors have essentially left many people with disabilities out of the workforce for various reasons and has led to them being constrained by programs and services that were supposed to "help" them. Help is in quotes here to center the semiotic significance of rendering people with disabilities as individuals who need help and how such a definition leads to further molding people with disabilities into "incompetent citizens" (Nielsen, 2014).

Specifically, Nielsen (2014) lays out a few key issues that impact the ability of people with disabilities to work and as such meet the "competent citizen" standard: welfare and disability services and accommodations in the workplace. In terms of welfare and disability services, Nielsen (2014) explains how a capitalist economic system, has essentially been devised to keep people with disabilities poor and as receivers of welfare. As Nielsen (2014) explains, people with disabilities have been largely regarded in the capitalist system as "incompetent workers" (Nielsen, 2014). While ableism and other intersecting biases and oppressions certainly reinforce such an idea, the "incompetent

workers" label again points to the power within the structure of language. Also, Nielsen (2014) discusses how very specific language is used in the workplace to describe disabilities.

Nielsen (2014) discusses how much of the common rhetoric of describing the intersection of disability and the workplace situates disability as a barrier to becoming "a competent worker." In particular, Nielsen (2014) describes how the structure of the language written into the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), such as "accommodation" and "reasonable accommodation in the workplace" functions to uphold certain perceptions about people with disabilities: as "entitled" and "too much or excessive." However, there is not analyses extended to disability and race here, which is expanded upon in this dissertation. While students at post-secondary institutions may not necessarily be labeled as "workers," they do face disabling, and in some cases, racial generalizations, as shown in this study of disability resource centers websites (Ahmed, 2012; Dolmage 2013).

Whiteness and Racism in Disability Research: The Critique of Intersectional Research in Education

Part of the inspiration for my project from the ethnographic work of Delpit (2006). While Delpit's (2006) work in *Other People's Children* focused on how race/ism plays a role in shaping in one's education experiences, there are important implications to draw from it in terms of the intersection of race and ability in education, as well. In the Introduction, she shares the story of Anthony, an elementary school student of color who lives in subsidized housing and has been labeled in the classroom as having behavior, language, and learning problems. Delpit (2006) is called in to observe him, given her

professional background in education. During the observations, she notices that Anthony receives mostly negative feedback throughout the day, as typical child behaviors (e.g. talking out of turn) are racialized by people with institutional power (e.g. teachers, administrators) (Delpit, 2006). While her work is situated in an elementary school setting, it helps to lay sound groundwork for this research by suggesting how markers of disability are racialized in U.S. education systems. Delpit (2006) defines racialization as the social processes by which the dominant groups (e.g. White, able bodied) attach socially significant labels to non-dominant groups (e.g. people of color with disabilities). However, before I begin to discuss scholarship that focuses on the intersection of race and disability, importance lies in giving an overview of disability studies as an academic field.

Disability Studies Overview

Disability Studies began as a way for people with disabilities to speak back to the mainstream able-bodied culture that rendered them as different and deficient. 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. Additionally, Disability Studies holds much significance for studying additional intersections of identity (e.g. race). The importance of Disability Studies 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, which functions as the very backbone that sparked disability advocacy in the first place.

Moreover, the importance of a disability culture functions as a core commitment of Disability Studies scholars (McRuer, 2006). The idea of disability culture represents a

key shift in disability discourses. Traditionally, disability is rendered in the United States as undermining one's personhood and viewing them as broken objects that need to be fixed to fit into a U.S. society that routinely privileges the abled body (Berger & Lorenz, 2016 & McRuer, 2006). The medical model functions pervasively in a U.S. context to limit the access that people with disabilities have to humanizing spaces, such as in education and employment. However, from a critical and intercultural communication perspective, disability is centered as an identity deserving of academic consideration and humanizing celebration.

White Disability Studies: Alternative Epistemologies in Educational Settings

More directly in line with my project, Dunhamn et al. (2013) focused on the importance of developing a Black Disability Studies Pedagogy. In their article about the National Black Disability Studies Coalition, they address pedagogy and learning but not necessarily in the traditional sense. They argue that pedagogy and learning cannot be reduced to an academically based endeavor; they stress the importance of recognizing the significance of honoring embodied knowledge, specifically from bodies who have often been discounted via the medical models of disability and race as being inferior, broken, and ill. Dunhamn et al. (2013) offer an important intersectional vantage point from which to examine disability and race.

As stated earlier, the absence of intersectional race and ability critique is often termed "White Disability Studies" (Davis, 2016). The notion of "White Disability Studies," seems to be a useful space to at least briefly critique some of the past research on disability in education and how it has neglected to include race as an important intersecting identity with disability. For example, Hehir (2007) discusses how education

can be improved to offer greater access to students with learning disabilities, so they can meet their full potential. Access is discussed here as both formal accommodations, such as access to notes and informal critical consciousness raising, including honest and open dialogues about disability in the curriculum. However, any discussion of race remains absent. Hehir (2007) merely writes about the access that people with learning disabilities deserve, which of course holds importance but is far from describing the entire landscape of learning disabilities in education. Hehir (2007) ignored questions such as: who has the privilege of being marked as a person with a learning disability and who doesn't? This work exemplified the kind of gap that inspired this dissertation research.

Also, importance lies in noting here that people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, it is surprising that the amount of literature on disability intersectional politics remains limited. Furthermore, in order to begin to unravel the complex intersection between racism and ableism, Blanchett's (2010) article in *Disability Studies Quarterly* also holds much significance for this project.

First, it feels important to mention that the journal is key to understanding the significance of the article. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, in conversations with scholars at conferences, has often been critiqued for furthering the Whitening the field of Disability Studies by not including enough intersectional work on race and disability. In her article, Blanchett (2010) pointed out that the label "learning disability" is far from holding any kind of objectivity or neutrality. She argued that, instead, learning disabilities was created as a label to further separate people with disabilities by race and class. According to Blanchett (2010), the category of learning disability was essentially created to "protect"

White students with disabilities from being placed in special education classrooms. One of the reasons that Blanchett (2010) gave for students with disabilities wanting to be "protected" from special education classrooms is because of the overrepresentation of students of color in them.

Next, Blanchett's work relates to the concept of White fragility as proposed by Robin DeAngelo & Michael Eric Dyson (2018), as learning disabilities function as a way to keep White students with disabilities in a "sanitary" environment away from people of color. These types of institutional practices are illustrative of the messy intersectional politics of race and class in education. "Protected" and "sanitary" are in quotation marks here to draw attention to the racial implications of Whiteness.

Blanchett (2010) also raised further critiques of the racism and classism inherent in the learning disability label. Most importantly for my purposes here is one of her points: the politics of labeling. First, Blanchett (2010) centered the material consequences of labeling a student as mentally retarded/mentally disabled or with a learning disability. A student who is labeled as mentally retarded/mentally disabled is seen as deficient, from McRuer's (2006) medical model of disability perspective. Therefore, such students are often framed as people who need to be fixed and disciplined, which often leads to placement in special education classrooms. In opposition, the learning disability label connotes to educators that one can learn as expected with accommodations. This holds significance, because as a result of these labels students of color with disabilities are far more often read as defiant and incapable than their White peers (Blanchett, 2010). Such background holds importance to this study. It points to the complex intersection of race

and ability in educational spaces, which will be more specifically explored in this dissertation, via analysis of disability resource centers websites.

Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015) built on Blanchett's (2010) discussion of the material consequences of labeling practices by asserting that these labels impact school discipline outcomes as well, which, in turn, impacts who enters the school-prison pipeline. For example, she states through her research that she found how students with disabilities who engage in the same offenses (e.g. hitting, pushing, and talking back to teachers) are disciplined in unequal ways based on their disability, gender, and race. The idea of goodness is often deployed when discussing how White, male students with disabilities may act out, but overall are then still rhetorically situated as good people/students who happen to have a disability that causes then to act in a certain way. However, as stated earlier, this is often not the case for students of color with disabilities.

Space and Disability

The critical intercultural communication perspective offers a critique of normative societal systems (e.g education) and centers on how power shapes communication across cultural differences (Shome, 2012). Power is generally defined as constraining forces that impact how one views the world and what kinds of goods, services, and ideas they may have access to (Haulalani, 2013). Culture is defined as a set of shared meaning, symbols, and norms (Croucher, Sommier & Rahmani, 2015). Specifically, critical intercultural communication scholars focus on the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression and how those occur and are resisted at the macro, meso, and micro societal levels through communicative acts situated in particular contexts and spaces. I review here the work of scholars who begin to the capture the significance of theorizations of space for the critical

disability research. Their works leads to meaningful connections and implications for the aforementioned field.

Disability and Place/Space Applications

Within critical disability work, several applications to place and space can be made. Specifically, Foucault (1984) and Harvey (2006) come into play, and as mentioned earlier, Marzorati (2012). Importance lies in dissecting multiple "layers of meanings" in a space such as the Accessibility Resource Center. On the surface (e.g. in mission statements) these centers are advertised as open to benefit all students with disabilities which is one articulation of the center's purposes. However, as my study progresses, I predict that I will find other meanings, such as the Accessibility Resource Center functioning as an exemplar of the Whiteness in disability services. Such a finding also leads to making another connection to Harvey (2006). In particular, Harvey's (2006) understandings of spaces not as absolute helps in arguing that that the Accessibility Resource Center generates various meanings depending on the positionalities of the students who are trying to access their services.

Also, Shome's (2012) articulation of race as both a spatial and international construct holds much import for this dissertation research. First, she establishes that race functions contextually as a social construct (Shome, 2012). Therefore, she moves away from any pre-established renderings of race as biological. In a similar vein, my study also makes this move, from a race and disability perspective. Race/ism and ability (ableism), separately and together, may function to disqualify or tokenize certain bodies (e.g. bodies of color) as not a "typical" client at the disability resource centers. I put typical in quotes there to point to the idea that all disabled bodies are not treated the same. Shome (2012)

further asserts that race now must be understood through a transnational lens - how bodies move across and through borders that challenges any past Black and White understandings of race relations in a U.S. context.

Analyzing Websites via Place and Space Literature

Places and spaces literature impacts the analytical procedures of this project as well. It informed how decisions about data analysis were made, since the analytical strategy illuminates the connections between places and spaces literature and this project. Specifically, space and place literature impact my analytical procedures because it assists me in centering spaces as ideological apparatuses (Orvell & Meikle, 2009). Discourse analysis is used to argue that disability resource centers are centered as White spaces. Specifically, discourse analysis is used in Communication Studies to not only look at the overall meanings of content but also the social contexts in which the content is being used (Eds, Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001). Therefore, it applies to my study of disability resource centers being constructed as White spaces through their websites, because Disability Studies has long been critiqued as White. Next, on the websites, places and spaces literature will again be helpful with looking at specific discourses that are developed by disability resource centers online, which on a larger scale impact who feels welcome to access their services and who doesn't (Marzorati, 2012).

Disability as Spatial

The exploration in this section starts with a discussion of disability spaces in general. McRuer's (2006) main theoretical framing (Crip Theory) can be applied to the study of place/space and specifically to the various research shared in this section. McRuer's (2006) Crip Theory focuses on disability through the lens of a social model

and also as a performative act. McRuer (2006) resists the medical model framing of disability, which views disability as an aspect of one's identity that needs to be fixed.

On the other hand, McRuer (2006) forefronts the social model of disability, which views disability as a U.S. societal issue where people with different bodies are not accommodated. The U.S. is specifically referred to here, because importance lies in realizing that McRuer (2006) writes from a U.S-centered understanding of disability. At the same time, this shift from the medical model to a social model holds significance, because the burden is lessened on the person with a disability to accommodate to an able-bodied world and to conform to able-bodied performances of identities as much as possible. Not only does McRuer (2006) provide an understanding of the important distinctions between a medical and social model, he also discusses the importance of developing "disability spaces." These "disability spaces," according McRuer (2006), can be developed in person and/or digitally to spark feelings of belonging and ideas of resistance.

Examples of places, spaces, education, and activism

Two specific texts have been key here to further articulate the relevance of studying disability from a place/space perspective, and to understand how in many cases the events chronicled in these texts are related to education and activism as well. They are Johnson's and Shaw's (2001) work, *To Ride the Public Buses*, and Mooney's (2008) work, *The Short Bus*. They provide an accounting of the struggle faced by people with disabilities to claim their spaces on cities' public buses by convincing city officials that they had the right to do so. The city officials' argument was that it would be too much trouble and too expensive to install wheelchair lifts, and that people with disabilities

would be happier to rely on more private transportation services anyway. City officials, interestingly, used the "separate but equal" argument here, which has also been used in past civil rights cases to argue that people of color should not share spaces with White people etc. In this specific case, officials argued that people with disabilities should be just as happy to have services that are supposedly equal in quality but only with people who they share physical similarities with (Johnson & Shaw, 2001).

However, the disability community collectively resisted this line of thinking and through their activism created the city buses both as material spaces and sites of resistance. More specifically, they physically blocked the buses movements with their wheelchairs and went to great measures to access the buses, such as assisting each other in crawling up the steps of the buses. While city officials were not particularly happy about this, people with disabilities had made their point: that they had the right to enjoy the same services as able-bodied residents did. Laws were soon passed to give people with disabilities access to the public buses (Johnson & Shaw, 2001). As such, the bus functioned in this case as more than a physical object and as a space of collective resistance by the disability community. The bus was utilized not only to resist a specific issue but also as spaces of activism and self-empowerment in the disability community.

Similarly and differently, in Mooney's (2008) text he focuses on narrating his story of working to gain access for students with disabilities to ride traditional school buses with their peers. Mooney (2008), who grew up isolated in special education classrooms and riding a "short bus," utilized an ethnographic research approach to travel across the country in a "short bus" and to interview students, who much like he had been, were isolated in special education classrooms and relegated to riding a "short bus." This

held particular significance for the time period because it was before the passage of the American with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which protects some of the rights of children and adults with disabilities (Mooney, 2008).

From a place and space perspective, Mooney (2008) worked to redefine the space of the Short Bus, from a space of exclusion and belittlement to a space of inclusion and empowerment. While this narrative focuses on exclusion of students with disabilities at the elementary level and fails to include race and an intersectional critique, his narrative assists my study by further illuminating that spaces (e.g. disability support services offices, online depictions of university disability support services offices) are not only physical; but they are also entrenched with meanings (Harvey 2006). In these cases, buses (and in my project, disability offices) are simultaneously entrenched in meanings of exclusion, activism, and inclusion.

Foucault (1984) and Harvey (2006) also both provide useful framings for the links between disability studies and place/space literature. First, Foucault (1984) asserts that within spaces, there are layers of meaning instead of just a singular one. This is not to say that any meaning holds more importance over the other; Foucault necessitates that scholars account for the varying meanings of the same spaces and how these meanings can exist among each other, even if they are in conflict. In applying Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) to this assertion, he argues that the use of "crip" and its meanings depends heavily on contexts (e.g. the spaces one is currently occupying). Historically and still in some spaces, the term is often considered inappropriate and vulgar. However, in the last decade or so, people with disabilities have in a sense reclaimed that term and have discussed what it means to "crip" a space. Generally, "cripping" a space is referred

to as centering not only disability acceptance but disability pride as an embodied endeavor (McRuer, 2006). To use the "short bus" example, presently the term can also conjure activism and empowerment.

In addition, Harvey (2006) argued that the meanings of spaces are deeper than an absolute rendering. The meanings of spaces constantly shift based on contextual factors, such as who is occupying a space and what socio-historical events that have occurred or are occurring at that specific time. Harvey's (2006) assertions on the multiple meanings of spaces are applied here in the discussion of special education classrooms and how they contribute to the racialization of disability. In a sense, special education classrooms, as ideological spaces, have shifted in meanings throughout their time of existence in a U.S. context. Special education classrooms began as a part of inclusive education (Mooney, 2008). For one of the first times, students with disabilities had access to any kind of educational spaces. However, as time went on, that space also became a site of low expectations and racism (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015).

Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015) contend that all people with disabilities are not always singled out in this environment. As stated earlier, while students with disabilities were often able to access the learning disability label, avoid the intellectual disabilities label, and thus be included in "mainstream" classes (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015). On the other hand, students of color with disabilities are more likely to be labeled intellectually disabled and placed in special education classes, which are also often understaffed and underfunded (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015). Therefore, mainstream educational spaces for people with disabilities can be more accurately referred to as "White disability spaces" (Annamma, Connor & Ferri 2015).

More on Communication and Disability

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 (McRuer, 2006). Specifically, the emergence of Crip Theory shifted one of the ways in which macro-level institutions (e.g., universities) generally communicated about disabilities. For one of the first times, people with disabilities were treated as a group with social rights, rather than damaged people to be fixed, which functions as the very backbone that sparked disability advocacy in the first place.

Moreover, the importance of a disability culture functions as a core commitment of Crip Theory scholars (McRuer, 2006). The idea of disability culture represents a key shift in communication disability discourses. Traditionally, disability is rendered in the United States as undermining one's personhood and viewing them as broken objects that need to be fixed to fit into a U.S. society that routinely privileges the abled body (Berger & Lorenz, 2016 & McRuer, 2006). The medical model functions pervasively in a U.S. context to limit the access that people with disabilities have to humanizing spaces, such as in education and employment. However, from a critical and cultural disability perspective, disability is centered as an identity deserving of humanizing consideration and celebration.

Discourse Analyses of Disability Resource Centers Websites

Overall, the articles researched on critiques of disability resource center websites focused on a similar trend: the word disability in such a title actually functions to limit

who may feel that they will benefit from their services (e.g., people of color; people of a lower socioeconomic status). In addition, the medical model is critiqued and the social model emphasized. As such in this section, I review each article individually that informed the backbones of my project.

At Oklahoma State University, the name was changed from Student Disability Services to Access and Accessibility Services hoping to send a message to students that they are there to assist any student with a disability, not just students with more severe and visible disabilities (Oklahoma State University, January 6th, 2020). While this article does not mention race specifically it broadly alludes to the politics of naming and how certain students based on their backgrounds etc. may be less likely to identify with the word "disability" (Oklahoma State University, January 6th, 2020). Also, at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas the name of their office was changed from Disability Services to Disability Resources to aim for greater collaboration from the diverse groups of students they have across campus, realizing that disability does not function as a monolithic identity (Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs Staff, October 1st, 2019).

Similarly and differently, Carleton College in Minnesota surveyed the student body about changing their name from Disability Services to Accessibility Services, and the results came back in favor of leaving the name as Disability Services. (Gilbertson, May 16th, 2020). However, there were also arguments made on both sides: most people have some sort of familiarity with the term making it easier to access the services. As stated in previous articles as well, the term "disability" does not communicate all of the

services that the office aims to provide students, such as services to students with mental health issues or asthma (Gilbertson, May 16th, 2020).

Chapter 4: Methodologies

This research focuses on discourse analyses of the websites of disability resource offices on college campuses across the country with significant minority populations. The goal is to explore how these services may be promoted as a key resource for all students with disabilities while ignoring how various identity markers, such as race, play a role in students of color access to these services. The research incorporates discourse analyses to look at institutional discourses, present on the websites, that illuminates how Whiteness is embedded in the content of the websites. The specific language and pictures function as symbols of how Whiteness is embedded in such offices. Discourse analyses focuses on the power of texts, such as written and visual, to shape and reshape ideologies (Grue, 2011; Grue, 2015 & Linton, 2005). Also, central themes of discourse analysis are used to further interrogate the Whiteness embedded in the discourses on these particular websites: the values, assumptions, and beliefs that are communicated and the intersection of language with cultural contexts.

Of great importance to note here is while this research conceptualized race as what people can see, there is an awareness that the nuances of race and racism extend far beyond what one can see, and there are even complexities within the social construction of race that are deserving of consideration. For example, DisCrit and Critical Race Theory both argue that disability/race function as social constructs with material consequences, and social constructionism of race and disability is utilized throughout this dissertation to examine the impacts of the Whiteness of disability resource center websites (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013 & 2015).

With these goals in mind, the research question guiding this investigation is:

1. How do the institutional discourses of disability support services programs reproduce or challenge dominant narratives of identity for college students with disabilities? Dominant disability narratives refer to how disability is traditionally positioned in discourses, as both monolithic and White (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013, 2015; Annamma, 2018; Bailey & Mobley, 2018; Bell, 2013 & Blanchett, 2010).

   The sub-questions that emerged are:

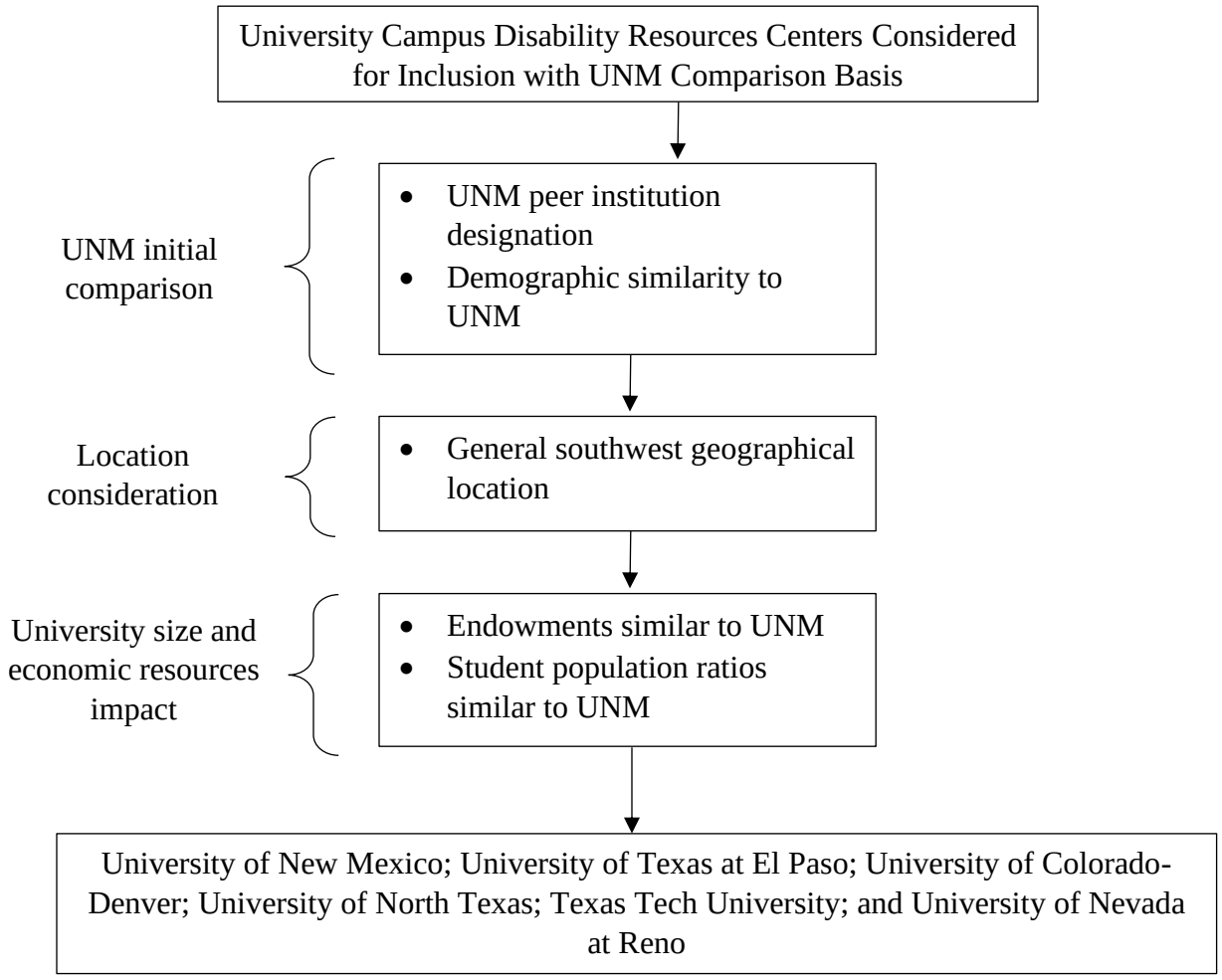
   a. How are the politics of intersectionality visible in such discourse?
   b. How does the discourse construct notions of authenticity?
   c. How does the discourse center Whiteness?

To explore these questions, six university campus disability resource centers were chosen for a discourse analysis to collect and analyze data from six university campus websites, in particular the "About Us" sections of each website and any links provided there that lead to other sections of the websites. The selection process for which university campus disability resource centers to analyze is demonstrated in Figure 1. These specific universities were chosen due to their similarities in demographics to the University of New Mexico and their designations as UNM peer institutions (unm.edu/facts-and-figures, 2021). I further narrowed down my list by utilizing universities with a general southwest geographical location. Lastly, I again narrowed my list by looking at universities with similar endowments and student population ratios as to the University of New Mexico to also consider how university size and economic resources impact access to such services.

The University of New Mexico has an endowment of about $440 million and 25,000 students (unm.edu/facts-and-figures, 2021). Therefore, the university websites I look at are: University of New Mexico; University of Texas at El Paso; University of Colorado-Denver; University of North Texas; Texas Tech University; and University of Nevada at Reno.

Figure 1

Selection Process for Universities used in Discourse Analysis



Researcher's Positionalities

As part of my methodological approach, it is significant to address my positionalities as a researcher and how those inherently impact the research process. This is also relevant to how I will ensure the accuracy or validity of my research. First, I am a PhD candidate. Therefore, as I stated earlier, there is a strong possibility that I will be the person who benefits most from this research, in terms of publication and so forth. While I cannot change that power dynamic completely, there are some strategies I can utilize, as I mentioned earlier, that can assist me in making my research more accessible to various populations. One of the ideas that I mentioned earlier that is also a focus of qualitative researchers, such as Denzin & Lincoln (2011) and Lindolf & Taylor (2011), is to bring the research back to the sites in which it was gathered and try to collectively make it useful for who you are working with. This goal can be worked towards in a number of ways, but I will mention one here: to eventually after further research collectively devise strategies and suggestions for the Accessibility Resource Center to implement in terms of trying to help their employees engage in more critical self-reflexivity when working with students.

The key word in this process is: collectively. As a researcher, there is often a hierarchy created between the researcher and the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As stated earlier, this hierarchy cannot be completely eliminated, but it can be resisted. While one should of course come to such a meeting with their recommendations for the Accessibility Resource Center, the researcher should attempt to both present their research findings and ask the employees at the Accessibility Resource Center to devise

strategies that would work towards more critical consciousness in how they offer services.

Also, I identify as a White woman with a disability. As such, this inherently impacts my research. I do not have the same experiences as people of color with disabilities. It is important for me to not equate my experiences of navigating a disability services office with my experiences, realizing that there likely will be many differences. While this position will impact how I conduct my research, it is important to not only mention this but to reflect on it throughout the research.

Data Collection

Sites of Study

The sites of study are UNM's Accessibility Resources Center (ARC) website and five other universities, which were chosen based on their similar Southwest location and, as already stated, due to their similar endowment to student ratio (UNM Office of Institutional Analytics, 2021). Also, the University of New Mexico's Accessibility Research Center website provides an interesting site for this research, because since 1970 ARC has aimed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (ARC website). They have made the physical spaces on campus more wheelchair-accessible and have helped students with a variety of needs (e.g. Deaf, Blind) access university academics. However, little research exists on the makeup of the student clientele of the office (e.g. race). As articulated via a DisCrit lens by Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015) disability never functions alone but at the intersection of race.

Data Analysis

Coding Procedure: Discourse Analysis

To analyze the discourses produced by ARC and the other five institutions, discourse analysis is utilized, while also paying attention to how these themes may be connected to larger discourses through inductive reasoning. Second, discourse markers such as "we," "us" and words and phrases like "all" and any other linguistic and visual codes may construct people with disabilities as a monolithic group, without attention to other identities, such as race, that impact one's experiences with disability are examined (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2015). In other words, the focus is on how the discourse in the "About Us" sections of the websites relate to notions of intersectionality, authenticity of bodies with disability, and Whiteness. Each "About Us" section on these websites was coded systematically to look for the aforementioned discourse markers and other language decisions that do not present the clientele of such centers as a diverse group.

Discourse markers are defined within discourse analysis as "linking words" or "linking phrases" within discourse (Moder & Martinovic-Zic, 2004). Also, this endeavor can reveal whether the Accessibility Resource Center constructs itself as a "common space" for people with disabilities (Martin Rojo, 2014). Such analysis might identify ways to provide more inclusive and culturally sensitive discourse to counter the Whitening of Disability Studies (Annamma, Connor, and Ferri, 2015). Also, a colleague was asked to look at the same websites using the same guidelines to establish inter-coder reliability.

Analyses Introduction

The following chapters focus on six categories that I coded for after my data collection process that all speak to the intersection of racism and ableism on university websites and assisted me in responding to my research questions of:

1. How do the institutional discourses of disability support services programs reproduce or challenge particular narratives of identity for college students with disabilities?

   The sub-questions that emerged are:

   a. How is intersectionality addressed in such discourse?

   b. How does the discourse construct notions of authenticity?

   c. How does the discourse center Whiteness?

Chapter 5 covers: Ableist (and racial) power differentials between staff and students; disability as purely a medical construction; and lack of intersectional critique. Chapter 6 discusses: politics of naming disability support offices and problematizing disability as only a social construct.

Ableist (and racial) power differentials between staff and students refers to how power differentials between staff and students are further magnified when race and ability is considered and how the websites construct the generic (White) student with a disability. Furthermore, disability as purely a medical construction discusses how disability is traditionally framed within everyday discourses as a deficit and how that interrelates with understandings of race. Next, lack of intersectional critique centers on the problems of how disability is traditionally viewed in everyday discourses and through a Disability Studies lens as a monolithic identity. In Chapter 6, the politics of naming disability support offices assists in discussing how the ways in which these offices are

named connects back to the Whitening of disability. To wrap up the analyses, problematizing disability as only a social construct is briefly discussed. Importance lies in stating "briefly" here, because problematizing disability as a social construct can easily function as its own dissertation topic.

Discourse analysis is utilized to see how these themes may be connected to institutional discourses of Whiteness and disability. Second, discourse markers such as "we," "us" and words and phrases like "all" and any other linguistic and visual codes that may construct people with disabilities as a monolithic group are analyzed from the "About Us" sections from the disability resource center websites (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2015). In other words, the focus is on how the discourse relates notions of intersectionality, authenticity of bodies with disability, and Whiteness. Discourse markers are defined within discourse analysis as "linking words" or "linking phrases" within discourse (Moder & Martinovic-Zic, 2004).

Chapter 5: Analyses Part 1

Ableist (and Racial) Power Differentials Between Staff and Students

Ableist and racial power differentials between staff and students refer to the politics of disability identification and a general mistrust of people with disabilities and/or people of color as a group, based off the work on the intersection of racism and ableism in education by Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015).

Overall, my research found that a troubling dichotomy often exists between staff and students: the responsibility of disability identification is squarely put on the student, without considering any racial and/or economic implications of this, which I discuss with greater detail later in this analysis section. Discourse analysis informs my first analytical claim, because without the understanding of discourse as both ideologically driven and consequential, this claim would have been unlikely to surface.

On the website of the Accessibility Resource Center at the University of New Mexico it states: "Students are responsible for self-identification" (Fig. 1), and a responsibility of the office is "verifying disabilities and the need for accommodations (ARC website, 2021). Such a statement highlights and shows the ableist dichotomy between staff and students in distinct ways. First, using the language of "responsible" in describing how the students need to provide self-identification of a disability connotes that students who have a disability but can't provide the documents to prove it, are somehow acting irresponsibly when there are multiple other factors at play here (e.g race, class). This is not to say that students with disabilities should not learn to advocate for their own needs; however, it does point to the messiness of disability intersectionality politics in terms of the agency students may/may not have in self-advocacy for a

disability, specifically in terms of students of color with disabilities (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015).

Importance lies in bringing forth a general point of contention found specifically on the University of New Mexico's Accessibility Resource Center website and Texas Tech's Disability Student Services website: any mention of the faculty possibly needing services is only found in the temporary disability category (e.g. broken limb, surgery). Therefore, it can be inferred that there is a departmental assumption of any faculty member not having a permanent disability. It is not rhetorically constructed here as a possibility.

This does raise important questions about the implicit expectations of faculty members' able-bodied status. According to Anderson (2006), only about three percent of U.S. professors identify as having a visible disability. While race statistics could not be found, it would be interesting to further explore this in future research and find out how Whiteness may also impact this statistic: how many professors with a visible disability of this three percent identify as White?

Similarly, at the University of Nevada-Reno, their Disability Resource Centers' website includes one mention in their "About Us" section on their website that is supposed to lead to information for faculty. However, this category only consists of two items: captioning assistance and a guide on how to make web content accessible for students (Fig. 1). While these areas hold importance, again, the assumption that faculty will not be the receiver of disability service seems to rhetorically position the Disability Resource clientele as only students. As the University of New Mexico's Accessibility Resource Center did as well, any acknowledgement of or reflection on the "Whiteness of

disability" (Bell, 2011) remains absent for both instructors and students on the "About Us" sections of the websites. As such, the bodies of students (and possibly faculty) with disability discursively are positioned as White in these discourses.

Additionally, in the "about the disability resource center" section for the Disability Resource Center at the University of Nevada-Reno, it states one of their goals as providing "equal access to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from university programs." However, the "who" as far as the students are concerned, is largely absent from this articulation of the beneficiaries of their services, again defaulting to situate students with disabilities as a monolithic group with similar needs, experiences, etc. Also, the use of the term" equal access" leaves important questions about what equal access actually means. According to Johnson and Shaw (2001), the usage of "equal access" may actually point to a disregard for how various populations of people have less access to public institutions.

The general trend of ableist power differentials between staff and students also appeared on disability resource websites at other universities, such as Texas Tech University, which was termed "the most comprehensive student disability support office in the nation" on their website (Texas Tech University, Disability Resource Center website). The medicalization of disability on such websites was also present here, but it will be looked at later in this analysis section. In the part of the website that discusses policies for attendance and disability it states that the question will be raised: "does the student have a documented disability that directly affects their ability to attend class on a regular basis?" (Texas Tech University, Disability Resource website).

The problem lies also in the office's response to this inquiry: that the Student Disability Services office will make the determination if accommodation will be granted. There, of course, needs to be some sort of screening process to make sure accommodations are used for their intended purposes; however, from a critical intercultural communication perspective such a process would be more effective if it was more co-constituted by faculty and students. In the aforementioned statement, the language use positions the staff as exerting full control over the accommodation process, determining who will and who will not receive an accommodation.

Such ableist power differentials also hold racial implications at the intersection of racism and ableism. According to past research, students of color with disabilities often face more doubt and scrutiny over their communicative claims of disability as compared to White students with disabilities (Harry, Klingner & Cramer, 2007 & Annamma, 2018). Therefore, the language use on this website speaks to not only an ableist power differential and a racial one as well. Racial power differentials and ableism power differentials are defined in this study as differences in one's power and privilege based on their intersectional race and disability identity social locations. As Noth (1990) argues, such language usage that creates categories of difference is linguistically arbitrary but materially significant.

Since students of color often face more scrutiny and doubt over their requests for accommodations, such power differentials are further magnified for students of color with disabilities who are trying to access accommodations at the university level ((Harry, Klingner & Cramer, 2007; Annamma, 2018 & Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2013 & 2015). In the article, "Gender, Disability, and Intersectionality" Naples, Mauldin, &

Dillaway (2019) claim that disability scholars have a deep commitment to intersectionality but based on my research this is not always the case.

Disability support offices at the University of Nevada-Reno and University of Nevada-Las Vegas serve as useful examples to show how ableist and racial power differentials between staff and students' function. In the "About" section of the Disability Resource Center at the University of Nevada-Reno, it states that the office provides "equal access to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from university programs." (University of Nevada-Reno Disability Resource Center, 2021). In addition, on the Disability Resource Center's page at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas in the "About Us" section it states that students who need services should: "Schedule an intake meeting with the specialist indicated in the acceptance email" (University of Nevada-Las Vegas Disability Resource Center, 2021).

First, the use of "equal access" on the University of Nevada-Reno's website implies that students with disabilities will have the same and equal experiences in terms of accessibility. However, Johnson & Shaw (2001), while not considering race, explore the idea that such inclusive language is also used by institutions to gloss over differences and not address and explore them. Also, as articulated by critical intercultural communication and DisCrit scholars, identities do not function among a singular axis (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015; Erevelles, 2016 & Nishida & Fine, M. 2014). This assertion means that each student experience in terms of accessing and experiencing services at the University of Nevada-Reno will differ, based on intersectionality identity politics.

Second, the semiotics of an "intake" meeting with a "specialist" exemplifies the importance of Volisinov's (1986) work that states language and ideologies cannot be separated from each other. Students who apply are positioned unequally in at least two ways by the staff. The use of the word "intake" leaves impressions of a very explicit connotation of the student's unequal status when compared to the staff in this situation. The "intake" conjures up images of one person having total control over how to subjectively define disability in their own terms under the guise of objectivity. Such a guise is further communicated by "specialist," inferring those students do not know their needs as well as a professional would. Furthermore, research shows that the medical model of disability intersects with race, since racial renderings at least partially come from a medicalized understanding of race where White people are physically and cognitively understood as superior to people of color (Hobson & Margulies, 2019). As such, when disability intersects with race in terms of access to campus disability services, the medicalization of both likely functions together to create very specific experiences for students of color with disabilities needing to access such support services.

Disability as Purely a Medical Construction

In this dissertation, it is argued that viewing disability solely as a medical construction holds implications for disability and race, both separately and together. According to Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2013 & 2015) & Nishuda & Fine (2014) these two identities have been used throughout U.S. history to deny access to commons goods and services to such populations. The medical model of disability forefronts that disability is viewed as a defect, and the medical model of race views people of color as physically and intellectually inferior to White people (Nishuda & Fine, 2014). Both

medicalized renderings can be track back to the Eugenics Movement that lasted officially until around the 1940's in the U.S. (Annamma, Connor & Ferri 2013 & 2015 & Nishuda & Fine, 2014). However, as shown here, disability is often still conceptualized as a medical construction today, and the significance this has for students of color with disabilities is important to consider in terms of their access to disability support offices. To start with the Accessibility Resource Center at UNM, the website states in the "About Us" section: "To qualify for services based on learning disabilities, a psychoeducational report is needed or a verifying statement from a school psychologist, neuropsychologist, or other qualified professional."

Such a statement clearly positions disability as a medical construct by solely giving "qualified professionals" the ability to determine a disability. Based on the inclusion of a school psychologist and neuropsychologist before stating that a "qualified professional" is needed to determine disability, positions people without a medical background realm without authority to claim disability, further establishing disability as a medical construct. Moreover, such medicalization is not absent of racial biases. According to critical race theory and DisCrit scholars, race and disability need to be centered as identities that are socially constructed and not biologically determined, not to disregard the material impacts of these cultural identities, but to point to how they are socially constructed, upheld, and resisted via communicative practices, such as website content (Annamma, Connor & Ferri 2013 & 2015).

The Center for Accommodations and Support Services at the University of Texas at El Paso followed a similar trend in terms of documentation guidelines; however, they perhaps even further extended the pervasiveness of the medical model of disability (and

race). Their program had specific documentation guidelines for various disabilities that one can be lead to from the "About Us" section of the website. They listed particular requirements for students with hearing loss; a vision impairment; or a psychological/psychiatric disorder. While these statements are quite clear in establishing guidelines for documentation, it also unfortunately reinforces the medical model of disability by presenting disability as an identity that can only be substantiated through a medical lens. A doctor's evaluation from a specialty in the specific field (e.g., psychologists and neurologists) is required to verify a disability. Therefore, disability becomes not only an identity that is met with suspicion; but also intersects with race and class, as people of color with disabilities statistically face more class barriers, which will be discussed further later in this analysis section. (Annamma, Connor & Ferri 2013 & 2015; Annamma, 2018 & Harry; Klingner & Cramer, 2018). Furthermore, Saussure (2016) points out the difference between abstract and actual speech. While the language actually used on this website simply points to the necessity of verifying a disability, it also incorrectly conceptualizes disability (and race) as medical constructions, instead of looking at how to best include students as agents of their own experiences.

In addition, there are other ways that the University of Texas at El Paso perpetuates ideologies of ableism, particularly psychological and psychiatric disorders. These discourses stem from a medical disability framework. Furthermore, statistically people of color less access to such services that even pushes such people further to the margins of the disability rights movement. First, the website for the University of El Paso disability support services office states that in order to receive accommodations for disorders such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder a licensed

professional needs to send a report detailing the students diagnoses to the disability support services offices. These professionals can include counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and neurologists. Furthermore, the website states that in order for a student to qualify for services based on psychological and psychiatric disorders, a definite medical diagnosis is needed, including statements on what kinds of tests were run to come to such conclusions and how. Also, the website reminds students to bring their medical documentation to their intake appointments at the disability resource center and those reasonable accommodations will be provided for their disability.

Such guidelines at these institutions function to uphold disability as purely a medical construction. First, as stated earlier, by including licensed professionals as the only way a disability can be rendered as real, makes such accommodations only available to those in more privileged categories, which can create issues for how many people of color have access to such services. DisCrit theorists include intersectionality as a key part of understanding how racism and ableism intersect on institutional levels (Annamma, Connor & Ferri 2013 & 2015; Annamma, 2018). Therefore, these guidelines are more than just indicators of disability; they show how disability never exists as an identity in isolation. One's experience of disability shifts drastically when various identities, such as race, are examined alongside disability. Also, these statements function as gatekeepers for White Disability Studies (Bell, 2011by farther demarcating the communicative lines of who can be included in a disability group and who can't.

Lack of Intersectional Critique

Across all websites, disability is oftentimes connoted as a monolithic identity without giving attention to how race impacts one's access to services and experiences of

using those resources. As stated by Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015), disability studies have often been critiqued for zeroing on the "White" experience of disability, while dismissing how race and disability intersect to create nuanced and intercultural experiences. Therefore, a DisCrit perspective to any study centers "how racism and ableism function in relation to a standard of normalcy in ways that are often read as neutral" (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015). In terms of my work, a critical intercultural communication perspective becomes paramount. While DisCrit scholars provide a useful framework to study race and disability, critical intercultural communication scholars, such as Calafell (2015); Croucher, Sommer & Rahman (2015) & Hobson & Margulies (2019), show how difference is communicated via institutional practices (such as university websites).

Each identity that a person holds and/or is read as having impacts their lived experiences (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015 & Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013). The discourse analysis conducted in this study show the significance of intersectionality, not as an academic buzzword, but to focus on the complexity of identities. In addition, the discourse analysis shows that intersectionality does not always function as a site of empowerment for marginalized groups; it can be quite a messy process and further oppress certain groups of people. I was able to draw these statements from data collected during the discourse analysis process.

For example, across all websites when students with disabilities are discussed the word "we" is used in the context of explaining the disability support services centers. Drawing from semiotics and especially the work of Volosinov & Saussaure such a move may be small but holds much significance. On the University of New Mexico's

Accessibility Resource Center's website (2021), the phrase "we are a community of unique perspectives embracing our differences" is one of the first phrases on the website. However, this phrasing communicates at least a few different assumptions: 1) people with disabilities exist as a monolithic group with merging needs, values, and experiences 2) people with disabilities consider themselves in "community" with each other 3) the idea of "embracing differences" is ontologically understood in the same way among people with disabilities.

People with Disabilities Exist as a Monolithic Group with Merging Needs, Values, and Experiences

According to Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2018), DisCrit scholars, similar to those who study CRT, emphasize the power of intersectional identities to frame one's experiences at the macro, meso, and micro societal levels. Each identity that a person holds and/or is read as having impacts their lived experiences (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015 & Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013). The data from the websites in this study show the significance of intersectionality, not as an academic buzzword, but to focus on the complexity of identities. In addition, the research done in past work shows that intersectionality does not always function as a site of empowerment for marginalized groups; it can be quite a messy process and further oppress certain people.

Generally, Feminist Disability Studies, forefronted by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, is used as a means for women with disabilities to speak back to dominant systems of power, specifically patriarchal ideals. Feminist Disability scholars discuss the importance of viewing identities from an intersectional vantage point. However, CRT, DisCrit, and BFT theorists assert that race is often left out of conversations on feminism

and disability. As such, the need for intersectional analyses from a race/disability perspective becomes more paramount, which is where DisCrit theorizing holds much import.

However, at the institutional level, more specifically at U.S. universities, past research indicates that intersectional research on race and disability is lacking in some key areas, specifically how Whiteness and disability intersect to uphold "White disability studies" as the dominant disability narrative (discourse). Therefore, my study aims to begin filling this gap by centering how disability resource center websites are symbolic of a larger issue within disability resource centers on university campuses. In this study, websites are specifically focused on as symbolic of the messy intersectionality politics in disability resource centers. People with disabilities exist as a monolithic group with merging needs, values, and experiences becomes an issue that is exemplified on disability resource centers websites, especially when considering Harvey's (2006) assertion that spaces have multiple meanings.

On the University of Nevada-Las Vegas's website, the semiotics in terms of how accommodations and advocacy are rendered signals back to the ideologies of Whiteness that often go uncritiqued at the intersection of race and disability. In particular, on the homepage it states one of the center's purposes is to facilitate "appropriate use of advocacy" among students (University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 2021). However, the website fails to include any clarification of how appropriateness is understood here. In critical race/Black feminist studies, people of color are often deemed as too much or excessive in their performances of race and/or gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Collins, 2013). Therefore, this raises the critique that "appropriateness" may be

understood within the contours of Whiteness. Since there is not an explanation offered, of course one can't say for sure; however, it does point to the larger issue of some disabled bodies/performances being understood as acceptable and others as not, exemplifying the idea that there is a lack of intersectional critique happening here.

Additionally, the messy political landscape of intersectionality among the disability community becomes more apparent on the Student Disability Services website at Texas Tech University as well, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. The website included a letter about how online learning may impact the processing of accommodations, which is an important step towards transparency and access during these unprecedented times. On the other hand, from a DisCrit intersectional perspective, the argument can be made that such a gesture doesn't go far enough in terms of inclusivity and leads to a key assumption of the material resources of the Disability Services clientele, especially given its status as a minority-serving educational institution.

As shown by DisCrit scholars, race/ability/class functions as a key intersectional construct to further understand many experiences of students of color with disabilities (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, (2013); Annamma, Connor, & Ferri (2015). However, this letter falls short specifically in addressing intersecting forms of oppression, such as race and class. Some questions are raised such as: why is the assumption made that all students have fairly equal internet access, especially given race, class, and ability intersectional politics; and how will the needs for accessible computer equipment (e.g. screen readers) be taken into account? This letter assumes that most students have access to this information, ignoring race, class, and intersections that clearly exist. While solutions are not offered here, the hope is that it will spark discussions about how

disability services departments can exercise increased reflexivity and mindfulness in terms of the services they offer and who may be left out of taking full advantage of such services.

At this point in this section, it's useful to not only view the intersection of race and ability in terms of specific policies outlined on these websites, but how the very access to such services further speaks to a troubling intersection of race, class, and ability. On the website for the disability services office at University of Texas-El Paso, in the documentation section it states that "any cost-related expenses are borne by the student" (University of Texas El-Paso disability services website. In addition, the website for the disability resources office at University of Nevada-Reno, claims in its "About" section that their office provides "equal access to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from university programs." University of Nevada-Reno disability resource center website). However, under the tab of "who should complete the application" on the same website it says, "students with documented disabilities." These two statements function together in contradiction, according to DisCrit's commitment to intersectionality (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013).

Again, DisCrit scholars contend that disability needs to be analyzed alongside race and class, at the least. By saying in one section of the website that costs for diagnostic testing is the responsibility of the student and in another part of the same website is reminiscent of the disconnect that often exists between the critical study of how race and ability intersect communicatively in educational environments. On a more general level, White Disability Studies often leads to people with disabilities (in this case,

students) being understood as only a singular group in public discourses and specifically in the language use on these websites.

People with Disabilities Consider Themselves in "Community" with Each Other

According to disability and race intersectional scholars, such as Annamma, Connor & Ferri, (2015); Bell (2013); Blanchett (2010) & Harry, Klingner & Cramer, (2007), race is often not theorized and considered alongside disability. In fact, the critique is leveled by some of these scholars that such moves to study disability at the intersection of other forms of identities such as feminism and queer studies often fall short of critiquing the Whiteness of disability studies that undergirds much of this intersectional scholarship (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, (2015); Bell (2013) & Blanchett (2010). Such a false notion of community and disregard of intersectional identity politics shows on these websites, indicative of the disability community in general and the policies and practices of disability support services on university campuses.

For example, on the Accessibility Resource Center website at the University of New Mexico, it states "we are a community of unique perspectives embracing our differences" (Accessibility Resource Center website, University of New Mexico). From a critical disability and critical communication perspective, a few issues are presented here on a semiotic level at the least. Specifically, in this statement there are issues with "we." First, "we" functions as a nondescriptive means to describe the clientele and staff at the Accessibility Resource Center by not being mindful of who such a word includes and who it leaves out, further exemplifying Volosinov's (1986) assertion that language and ideologies cannot be separated from each other.

Additionally, “we” indicates some form of togetherness, sameness, common purpose, and furthermore a community. However, the issue presented here is both general and particular in terms of its scope. According to Volisinov’s semiotic theories, language should not be understood as an objective form of communication; rather, it needs to be critiqued as a structure embedded with ideologies. As such, the usage of “we,” as stated earlier is symbolic of how the disability studies and the disability community organizes itself. More specifically, according to critical disability scholarship, Whiteness has often gone unrecognized and uninterrogated within disability studies. Therefore, “we” presents an issue in how it’s used on the website at the Accessibility Resource Center at the University of New Mexico.

Also, the University of North Texas’s disability resources website states that they “value diversity” and strive for “campus engagement through diversity, equity, and inclusion.” However, there is not any explanation offered about what valuing diversity means and what striving for campus engagement through diversity, equity, and inclusion actually looks like, again showing that such websites are not an objective form of communication; rather, they often provide little detail about how diversity is actually practiced, leaving the impression that diversity remains undefined in the realm of Disability Studies.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 discussed the lack of intersectional critique of disability and Whiteness communicated through these disability resource websites and ableist (and racial) power differentials between staff and students. In the next chapter, I build on these foundations

to my work by problematizing disability as only a social construct and discussing the politics of naming disability support offices.

Chapter 6: Analyses Part 2

In this chapter, the categories, problematizing disability as only a social construct and the politics of naming disability support offices in terms of the intersection of racism and ableism in disability support services offices via their website content, are discussed.

As argued by critical disability studies scholars, much importance lies in viewing disability through a social lens, as a part one's identities, instead of viewing people with disabilities as defective as through a medical model lens. However, in this section I problematize the question: can and should disability be only a social construct, and what are some implications here? The purpose of this section is not to leave with a definitive answer; rather it is to generate avenues for future discussions. To understand how disability identity can function as only a social construct, significance first lies in reviewing transability. It's important to note that much of what is analyzed here may seem contradictory to the rest of this dissertation which focuses on hearing diverse voices within the disability community, but the questions to focus on in this section are: how does transability communicate a delegitimizing of disabilities, and how is transability an outgrowth of Whiteness?

Transability

Transability is defined as a desire to have a physical disability even although through a medical model lens one's body is defined as able-bodied (Boesvald, 2015; Stevens, 2011). People may have experienced transability for a long time, but more recently with the rise of the transracial movement, transability has also emerged into the public consciousness, specifically for people with disabilities and/or people who identify as transgender. In particular, the transability publicly named as a social identity that

people experience in 2004 by Sean O'Connor. He identifies as transabled and uses a wheelchair to perform his identity in a way that feels fitting for him. O'Connor coined the term to compare a transability desire to the transgender movement; marking that both groups feel like they were born in a body that does not match their identities (Transability.org archive, 2017). Furthermore, people who identify as transabled view their disability as an acceptable form of body modification and body art, claiming that having a disability is their desired way of being. However, people who identify as a person with a disability from birth or through an accident largely view people who identify as transabled as dishonest.

In general, people who identify as transabled have said that they need to have a physical impairment and/or perform such an identity to be fully themselves, to feel that they are offering an authentic performance of their identity (Boesvald, 2015; Stevens, 2011). Transability is traditionally framed medically as Body Integrity Disorder. However, people who identify as transabled argue that becoming disabled is not a choice for them; that becoming disabled is the only way that they can feel fully human (Stevens, 2011).

People who identify as transabled view their obtaining of an impairment as body art, akin to a tattoo or piercing. The transabled community argues that by becoming a person with a disability they redefine the U.S. standard of beauty and meet their needs for self-expression. In fact, some people who identify as transabled do not view the limbs that they desire to be removed as ugly; rather as an extra part of their body that is not needed. Therefore, they argue that by getting rid of an excess body part they feel as they can finally function as they feel they are. In calling to view disability as body art, the

transabled community aims to resist the medical model of disability and embrace the social model of disability, where an impairment is viewed as an identity that needs be embraced (Stevens, 2011). Furthermore, the transabled community resents that transability has been traditionally framed as an illness, Body Integrity Disorder (Boesvald, 2015). For example, on the archives for the website, transabled.org, which offered to people who identify as transabled to share how they navigated this identity, Elizabeth says she uses a wheelchair, because she feels it is an accurate and positive way of self-expression (transabled.org, 2015).

Contrary to the beliefs of people who identify as transabled, in general people who were born with an impairment or obtained one through an accident, have argued that the transabled community further commodifies disability by gaining a state of ecstasy from the able-bodied public's curiosity and fascination with disability (Boesvald, 2015). As such, a person holding a transability identity can also reproduce performances of disability that further cast disability as a deficit that does not need to be taken seriously. For example, some people who cannot afford the high cost of becoming disabled (e.g. the hospital bills after a purposeful injury or making one's living space accessible), decide to physically keep their abled body but distance themselves from it whenever possible by using a wheelchair even if it is not physically needed for instance.

Therefore, transabled people who don't have a surgery or accident to physically remove or change their limbs can switch between an able-bodied identity and transabled identity when it is convenient for them. In general, the disability community argues that transabled individuals not only commodify disability, but they also view people who identify as transabled as untrustworthy, as people who are only trying to gain the benefits

of a disability identity (e.g., Social Security, Medicaid, accessible parking, educational accommodations) (Boesvald, 2015). Since an overview of the politics of transability has been provided, now what was found on the disability support offices websites will be discussed in terms of problematizing disability as only a social construct.

Problematizing Disability as only a Social Construct

On the University of New Mexico Accessibility Resource Center website, it states the following:

> Applicants can be regarded as having such an impairment whether actually having the impairment or not.

While not much clarity is offered on the website regarding the exact, intended meanings of this statement, it appears that the UNM Accessibility Resource Center has extended its consideration of disability to beyond any aspect that can be materially constituted in some way (e.g. visible disabilities, test scores). As such, the social model of disability, forefronted by McRuer (2005) is upheld here as the standard on which to base how disabilities are constituted but at a cost, specifically for people of color with disabilities. Transability functions largely as a Western construct and it's not recognized as an emerging social identification in most other parts of the world (Boesvald, 2015, June 03). Additional reasons are discussed below as to how and why transability further disenfranchises people of color with disabilities, and correspondingly how leaving this possibility open via the website may specifically impact students of color with disabilities in different ways.

First, people of color, specifically people of color with disabilities, face magnified economic challenges that can lead to poorer educational outcomes (Annamma, Connor &

Ferri, 2012 & 2015 & Dolmage, 2015). According to these texts, students of color with disabilities are more likely to be placed in special education environments while in elementary and high school. This inequity stems from several factors, but the most paramount factor to discuss here is economic. Students of color with disabilities are also less likely to have the ability to be able to access a learning disability diagnosis, which as stated earlier often leads to greater access to classrooms that are considered mainstream (Blanchett, 2010). So, in the realm of transability, it can be argued that even if a student of color socially identified as transabled they would be less likely to be able to access university disability support services anyway. As such, the statement on the Accessibility Resource's website that "applicants can be regarded as having such an impairment whether actually having the impairment or not" further upholds Whiteness in disability resource centers. Noth (1990) comes into play here as well, because while these language changes can be viewed as linguistically arbitrary, they hold significant material consequences, as discussed below.

The criminalization of disability is more likely to occur for people of color with disabilities and students of color with disabilities in particular (Annamma, 2018; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013, 2015). The presence of disability is more likely to be understood as a lack of discipline or even as an act of defiance for students of color with disabilities (Annamma, 2018). This again has important outcomes and implications, including unjust discipline practices, as stated by Annamma (2018). However, it's contested here that this criminalization of disability for students of color can also lead to less access to disability resource centers if the student is attending school at the university level in the first place, since this population already has less access to services at other

levels of education). By extension, a transability identity seems as it would be largely unattainable from a theoretical perspective to students of color with disabilities since there is less access to educational services to begin with.

Additionally, it can be argued that transability functions to uphold ideologies of American exceptionalism. Since transability is emerging largely in America as of now, it further lends itself to the ideologies of American exceptionalism. In many parts of the world, the rights of students with disabilities are barely recognized, if at all (Hehir, 2007). As such, the very idea that an Accessibility Resource Center can focus on including students who may be regarded as having an impairment, whether they physically do or not, speaks to a culture of American exceptionalism. Generally, American exceptionalism refers to ideologies, taken-for granted knowledge and ways of knowing, that rest on the assumption of American superiority (Torpey, 2009).

As such, students in American educational environments may feel that they are entitled to morph any kind of feelings they may experience into a viable form of social identification, without considering any implications of doing so. In addition, issues are raised about how exactly disability is identified and the possible consequences of viewing disability as only a social construct on other university disability resource office websites, such as at the University of Colorado-Denver. The website discusses the process of student reporting in semiotically contradictory ways that highlight the possibility of universities viewing disability solely as a social construction.

Specifically, the website states that: “students must self-identify as a person with a disability” (University of Colorado-Denver Disability Resource Office website, 2021). While the university may intend this statement to indicate that the responsibility lies with

the student to identify their need for services in lieu of a professor recommending such services, self-identification of disability becomes a complex endeavor when the possibility exists of only viewing disability through such a lens. While viewing disability solely through a social lens, questions may be raised as: what are some race/ class implications of transability, specifically for university students who may be trying to access disability support services?

Socially identifying with a disability, specifically a disability that requires academic accommodations, is not a linear process for students. Students of color face additional obstacles, such as: a lack of access to rigorous testing for a learning disability diagnosis and overrepresentation in special education classrooms (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013, 2015; Annamma, 2018 & Blanchett, 2010). Therefore, a solely social identification with disability would largely only be available to White students. Again, it is impossible to know the exact intentions of these websites within the realms of this study; however, their semiotic usage provides useful data to draw from in terms of discussing the implications of disability being understood through only a social lens (transability).

Some of the other schools analyzed followed a similar trajectory. University of Colorado-Denver renamed their disability resource center, the office of disability, access, and inclusion. While recognizing that disabilities can performatively manifest in various contexts in different ways, significance still lies in understanding that while the medical model of disability represents the experiences of having a disability inaccurately, a turn towards transability largely ignores the materiality of disability. Kafer (2013), while recognizing the significance of the social model, also contends that the ways in which

disability is performed in the flesh significantly alters the experiences of identifying as a person with a disability, in a general sense. Therefore, transability poses a problem here.

More specifically, as discussed earlier, the semiotic structure of how a university disability office is named, holds impact. While the intention of the disability resource center at University of Colorado-Denver to rename their center as "the office of disability, access, and inclusion" may have been to recognize that disability can exist in many forms, the semiotic usage of inclusion has the potential to stretch the meanings into the murky waters of transability, and as an extension of that, uphold ideologies of Whiteness in the disability community.

As Volosinov (1986) contended, language does not function as an objective and natural form of communication. The word "access" raises an issue in this context because of its lack of specificity: access for who and under what circumstances? Such lack of specificity can allow the idea of transability to come into play. As stated earlier, most people who knowingly identify as transabled likely identify as White based on access issues connected to transability. The idea of transability seems to function as an identity only largely available to people who have many systemic privileges to fall back on (e.g class privilege, which is also often linked to race). So, "access," without the use of more specified language, further leaves room for Whiteness to impact students with disabilities even more so than it already does.

Furthermore, the Office of Disability Access at the University of North Texas shows, via some of their website content, that efforts to be more inclusive may be pushed too far. A lack of specificity in word usage can lead to transability identities being rendered as acceptable, specifically in this context of a disability resource office on a

university campus. According to the University of North Texas Office of Disability Access website, one of its goals is to provide "campus engagement through diversity, equity, and inclusion" (University of North Texas Office of Disability Access website, 2021).

While diversity, equity, and inclusion often function as buzzwords for universities and university offices to uphold images of progressiveness, those words often don't translate into concrete policies and practices (Ahmed, 2012). Without any further explanation of what diversity, access, and inclusion looks like as concrete practices and efforts in the disability resource office, one is left to wonder: who is included and who is not included in the efforts for diversity, access, and inclusion? This broadness in terminology again causes Whiteness to surface by allowing the understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion to be rendered as only subjective.

The Politics of Naming Disability Support Offices

Power differentials between staff/students impacts the very foundations of such offices as well, including how their offices are named. Background research was conducted for this study on the politics of naming disability support offices (Oklahoma State University, January 6th, 2020; Texas A&M University Division of Student Affairs Staff, October 1st, 2019 & Gilbertson, May 16th, 2020). It was found that while articles existed on this topic, there wasn't an analysis, which such a complex issue deserves, of what the implications were in terms of the intersection of racism and ableism. To summarize, the research stated that such name changes were made to attempt to appear more inclusive of various identities but not a lot of explanation was offered after that in

terms of who they were trying to be more inclusive of, and the consequences of their naming practices.

The University of Texas at El Paso's disability support office is named Center for Accommodations and Support Services. The Division of Student Affairs, a section of university programs, houses the office. While these may seem like small changes, such moves are consequential, as Noth (1990) focuses on the material significance of language. Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015) also discuss how by simply naming a theory, such as DisCrit (Disability/Critical Race Theory), holds significance. While racism and ableism have likely been intersecting within education as long as it has existed, the naming of such experiences has the potential to shift them into public discourses in ways that allows some people in marginalized communities to make sense of their experiences and connect them to larger systemic issues. Importance lies in noting here that DisCrit was birthed in the halls of the ivory tower, and therefore is not readily available to marginalized groups. Still, it offers a useful start in opening important conversations about the intersection of racism and ableism and the politics of naming such centers.

However, it's contended that like much of critical intercultural communication and education theories, the politics of naming especially in terms of the representation of the disability community can't be situated on a dichotomy; meaning the politics of naming includes complex issues that many times do not have a clear-cut right/wrong response. Specifically, in this section, importance lies in remembering Paulo Freire (1995) who, as an educator, focused on strategies for critical pedagogy to shift towards an understanding of education as a processual endeavor; in contrast to the traditional

banking model of education where students play the role of passive consumers instead of co-constitutional participants (Freire, 1995).

The name changes at University of Texas at El Paso, and other similar revisions to the naming of disability resource centers at: University of Colorado at Denver and University of North Texas, contribute to the shifting communication of disability discourses in education; however, embracing the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1995) importance lies in unraveling the consequences such name shifts may have for students of color with disabilities in particular. In Atay and Toyosaki (2018), they discuss the urgent need for increased nuanced work within critical intercultural communication that embraces "intercultural and intersectional reflexivity" (Atay & Toyosaki, 2018). By embracing intersectional reflexivity, they focus on "critiquing work from within institutionalized education" (Atay & Toyosaki, 2018).

This dissertation functions as an attempt to respond to this call, although of course it will be done imperfectly. While the name changes to disability resource centers were generally made with the goal of more inclusiveness of students with disabilities, scholars in critical theory in general and critical intercultural communication in particular focus on both the intentions and the outcomes of moves towards greater inclusivity. Specifically. Tuitt, Haynes, & Stewart (2016), argue that importance lies in focusing on the complexity of critical intercultural communication to analyze how, as stated earlier, critical intercultural communication does not necessarily always offer clear-cut solutions; instead, one of its guiding impetuses is to continuously work towards ideals of inclusivity and justice.

Such a notion is of great importance here to discuss how changing the name of disability resource centers to variations such as "accessibility resource centers" may also have the unintended consequence of further pushing students of color with disabilities to the margins of who is often served by disability resource offices. According to Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015), people of color with disabilities have less access to the disability community as a group, since Whiteness pervades every aspect of disability culture. Therefore, students of color with disabilities generally have unequal access to education and disability empowerment groups. (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015).

As such, semiotics plays an important role here in arguing how the structure of the titles of these offices may function to create further questions about what the office actually does, especially for students of color who may not have the same or similar access to the disability community. At the University of New Mexico, their disability services office is named the Accessibility Resource Center. The University of Colorado at Denver disability support office is entitled the Office of Disability, Access, and Inclusion. The University of New Mexico may have constructed this title to be more inclusive of a wide range of people with disabilities; however, in some ways it can have opposite impacts. Such a change of name assumes that the word accessibility is universally understood.

In the same token, while the University of Colorado at Denver does include the word disability in their title, they use more complex words as well such as acts access and inclusion. The way that these titles are structured assume that all people who may benefit from such services understand what such words mean in terms of the services they may have access to. Such a statement aligns with the critical intercultural communication and

critical semiotics theory in understanding that that meanings words fluctuates and are not stable my on social groups and contexts.

Generally, to theorize about the intersection of semiotics and Disability Studies importance lies in drawing from the key work of Volosinov (1986). This linguist approaches the study of language in ways that hold significance in understanding the structure of language with regards to intersectionality and Disability Studies. First, Volosinov (1986) approaches the study of language from a framework of Marxism. Specifically, he asserts that language and ideology cannot be separated from each other. To say it another way, language does not function as an objective, naturalized mode of communication; rather it is embedded with ideologies; for instance, about how people with disabilities are referred to in everyday discourses.

For instance, expanding on the University of New Mexico and University of Colorado-Denver examples utilizing a semiotics perspective reiterates the power and politics of naming. At the University of New Mexico, their disability services office is named the Accessibility Resource Center. The University of Colorado at Denver disability support office is entitled the Office of Disability, Access, and Inclusion. Such a move from the University of New Mexico functions arguably as an attempt to make their office's title align with a social model of disability. However, since language does not function in objective ways, it also holds significance, as argued earlier for further Whitening disability discourses by using "progressive" disability language that may not be as available to diverse disability populations. I put "progressive" in quotes here to signify how language termed as inclusive can also function to make disability appear further as a monolithic identity.

More specifically, as discussed earlier, the semiotic structure of how a university disability office is named, holds impact. While the intention of the disability resource center at University of Colorado-Denver to rename their center as "the office of disability, access, and inclusion" may have been to recognize that disability can exist in many forms, the semiotic usage of inclusion has the potential to stretch the meanings into the murky waters of transability, and as an extension of that, upholds ideologies of Whiteness in the disability community.

As Volosinov (1986) contended, language does not function as an objective and natural form of communication. The word "access" raises an issue here because of its lack of specificity: access for who and under what circumstances? Such lack of specificity can allow the idea of transability to come into play and upholds ideologies of Whiteness. As stated earlier, most people who knowingly identify as transabled also identify as White. The idea of transability seems to function as an identity only largely available to people who have many systemic privileges to fall back on (e.g., class privilege, which is also often linked to race). So, "access," without the use of more specified language further leaves room for Whiteness to impact students with disabilities even more so than it already does.

The Office of Disability Access at the University of North Texas shows, via some of their website content, that efforts to be more inclusive may be pushed too far. A lack of specificity in word usage can lead to transability identities being rendered as acceptable, specifically in this context of a disability resource office on a university campus. According to the University of North Texas Office of Disability Access website,

one of its goals is to provide "campus engagement through diversity, equity, and inclusion" (University of North Texas Office of Disability Access website, 2021).

While diversity, equity, and inclusion often function as buzzwords for universities and university offices to uphold images of progressiveness, those words often don't translate into concrete policies and practices (Ahmed, 2012). Without any further explanation of what diversity, access, and inclusion looks like as concrete practices and efforts in the disability resource office, one is left to wonder: who is included and who is not included in the efforts for diversity, access, and inclusion? This broadness in terminology again causes Whiteness to surface by allowing the understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion to be rendered as only subjective, which becomes an issue, specifically since the majority of university administrators in general identify as White.

The goal here is to discuss how these name changes function on the websites analyzed to uphold ideologies of Whiteness of disability, as also discussed in my previous section on transability. First, I define what the politics of naming means in the context of this study. Then, I focus on the data on the politics of naming gathered in my study and what it does to illuminate Whiteness in disability studies.

To devise the definition of politics of naming for this research, from Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015); Benwell & Stokoe (2006) & Blanchett (2010) come into play to assist in providing a groundwork for how politics of naming is defined within the study. All of these authors focus on how race and Whiteness impacts the experiences of people with disabilities and argue that the disability experience is drastically different for people of color with disabilities. Therefore, politics of naming in this study refers to: the ways

that the organization of the names of disability resource centers themselves are organized and structured to include/exclude certain segments of the disability population.

First, the specific word "accommodation" is used across all the websites: University of New Mexico; University of Texas at El Paso; University of Colorado-Denver; University of North Texas; Texas Tech University; University of Nevada-Reno; and University of Nevada-Las Vegas. Such language is used to describe ways that people with disabilities are treated fairly in the classroom and to offer more equal access to the opportunity to learn and gain the same knowledge as students who do not identify as having a disability. However, according to the article, "Baccalaureates or Burdens? Complicating 'Reasonable Accommodations' for American College Students with Disabilities" (Krebs, 2019), the word accommodations need to be understood as holding different implications.

Overall, Krebs (2019) argues that the word accommodations play a detrimental role in academic discourses on disability. The author states that "accommodations" connote ideas of luxury and entitlement. Krebs (2019) further adds that accommodations is often used to describe reservations at a hotel, for example, not what a student needs to be granted fair access to academic programs at a university. The author offers a critique of such language that is much needed in the realm of Disability Studies to critique how discourses continue to uphold ableist power structures, specifically within academia.

However, in this study, Krebs (2019) critique needs to be pushed further to include race, going back to my original research questions about the politics of intersectionality in the disability community. Specifically, the question is raised here: how does Krebs (2019) assertions relate to the politics of naming of disability support

services offices, and how do they uphold ideologies of Whiteness in the disability community, specifically in academia? First, Krebs (2019) simply shows why the politics of naming matters. A name represents more than just title of a service; it holds consequences for how specific groups of people are understood, in a general sense according to Benwell & Stokoe (2006) and of course Krebs (2019) for students with a disability.

Like Krebs (2005), Clare (2017) in her book *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Disability and Cure* speaks to the politics of naming when the words brilliant and imperfection are used side by side. Brilliant, according to the Webster Dictionary, is used to describe people or objects who are "distinguished, striking, and distinctive" and imperfection is used to describe people or objects who are "not perfect or defective" (Brilliant, 2021, in *Webster Dictionary* & Imperfection, 2021, in *Webster Dictionary).* As such, this organization of words holds significance from both a critical intercultural communication perspective and disability studies perspective. It shows that "brilliant" and "imperfection" can not only exist together; rather they provide a way to conceptualize how disability and difference can be both brilliant and imperfect all at once. However, in both pieces race again largely remains absent from the conversations, which is where my study comes into play to explore how ideologies of Whiteness are upheld in disability discourse via the naming practices of the disability resource centers and how disability services are positioned within discourses via the websites.

Annamma, Ferri & Connor (2022) provide a much-needed start to unraveling how Whiteness is essential to understanding the processes by which disability resource centers give out/not give out accommodation requests from students. In fact, they state that

accommodations are actually “services for White supremacy” (pg. 39), but more nuance is needed to this discussion.

In terms of this study, examples were found that highlight the importance of discussing the politics of naming not only the specific names of the disability resource centers themselves, but also how the specific practices of the centers are discussed via the website content and the potential consequences of this. Additionally, importance lies in mentioning here that the politics of naming, like much within critical intercultural communication, is extremely contextual and does not always have a clear-cut solution and/or response. However, this type of theorization and discussion holds great import to continue moving towards more socially-just aims, which intersectionality plays a big role in, as argued throughout this dissertation.

First, the disability resource center at the University of New Mexico is named the Accessibility Resource Center. I use both Crip Theory-informed and DisCrit- informed lenses here to discuss how this name simultaneously functions more progressively from a Crip Theory standpoint and perhaps more exclusively with a DisCrit reading. Crip Theory, as stated earlier, focuses on the social model, which views disability as a part of diversity and more importantly as an identity to be recognized and even celebrated in humanizing ways. On the other hand, the medical model of disability centers such impairments as a defect that needs to be fixed (McRuer, 2006). In this sense, the politics of naming the Accessibility Resource Center as such holds an important role in furthering the social model of disability. The term “accessibility” communicates connotatively that making university policies fairer for student with disabilities is an act that in some ways move towards a university’s socially-just aims. Rogers & Swadener, (2001) assert in their

work that the study of semiotics as it intersects with disability studies is crucial to interrogating how discourses about disability impact perceptions held about disability, and the name "Accessibility Resource Center" exemplifies this by furthering a more positive image of disability.

The need exists to examine how the same title can simultaneously hold what may appear as opposing meanings; but shows the nuance required and complexity of studying from a critical intercultural communication perspective. According to Croucher, Sommier & Rahmani (2015), the complexity of critical intercultural communication furthers the discipline by helping us as scholars realize that the messiness of critical intercultural communication is in fact what makes our analyses crucial for discussing concerns of diversity and intersectionality. In that sense, while the name of the disability resource center at the University of New Mexico and other similar universities such as: at the University of Texas at El Paso; the University of Colorado at Denver; and University of North Texas, in a sense turns away from the medical model of disability, it is argued here that a consequence of this may be decreasing the access of students with disabilities to these services, specifically to students of color with disabilities.

According to Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013 & 2015); Annamma (2018) & Blanchett (2010), people of color in general and students of color in particular face unique challenges at the intersection of racism and ableism. One of these challenges stated across all these resources is a general exclusion from "mainstream" disability educational and activism groups. "Mainstream" is positioned in quotes here to point out how mainstream connotatively refers to White disability groups. In this study, the University of Texas at El Paso, the University of Colorado at Denver, and University of

North Texas all changed the names of their disability services offices to Center of Accommodations and Support Services, the office of Disability, Access, and Inclusion, and the office of Disability Access respectively. Words such as "accommodation," "access," and "inclusion" have become buzzwords in the disability community to move towards centering a social model of disability (Davis, 2016; Dolmage, 2017 & Grue, 2011 & 2016). However, since students of color with disabilities generally have less access to disability groups and advocacy spaces, these buzzwords may not be familiar to them and may prevent them from accessing the services they really need.

Also, the politics of naming for disability support services offices holds impacts not only in the naming of disability services offices but in how their policies and processes are discussed on their websites as well. On the University of New Mexico, Accessibility Resource website, it states: "a psychoeducational evaluation is needed or a verifying statement from a school psychologist, neuropsychologist, or other qualified professional" (Accessibility Resource Center website, 2021).

The disability support services offices at the University of Texas at El-Paso and at the University of Colorado-Denver also follow similar trends, in terms of including language about needing statements to "verify" a specific disability from "professional" resources. Again, these specific words are in quotes to further look at the issues these words create and how they need to be discussed from discursive and DisCrit perspectives. According to Benwell & Stokoe (2006); Dolmage (2013) and Grue (2011, 2016), discourses around disability not only shape ideas about disability but the naming of disability itself.

Disability, then, is fore fronted as socially constructed as shown by McRuer's (2006) medical and social models of disability. It is not an inherent condition; rather it is "rhetorically constructed" as a means to communicate differences, and even more so differences that render individuals less competent and/or significant (Dolmage, 2013). Other literature by intersectional disability scholars, such as Annamma (2018) & Dolmage, (2013) speak as well about words functioning as a catalyst for constructing differences, such as race, via a disability lens.

Therefore, when words such as "verify" and "professional" are used to discuss the accessing of disability accommodations on a disability resource center website, there are consequences of that language use for students with disabilities in general and even more so, for students of color with disabilities. When a disability must be verified or checked, the assumption becomes that the individual requesting accommodations may not be credible or perhaps is even using disability as a means for unnecessary accommodations.

However, the problem then manifests as more systemic in nature because it extends not only to individuals but systems of ableism in education that frame disability accommodations as unnecessary or even indulgent (Krebs, 2019). In a similar vein, the usage of "professional" in discussing who has the power to determine who may access disability accommodations and who may not, shifts the focus unnecessarily from a humanizing perspective of people with disabilities to simply viewing disability as a condition that needs to be diagnosed by someone with medical authority.

While the consequences of using such words holds value when being discussed from a Disability Studies perspective, the discourse becomes more intersectional in its focus when discussing the consequences of these words being used on disability resource

center websites from a DisCrit perspective. Students of color with disabilities face a specific set of obstacles, as stated before in this dissertation, in terms of accessing services in the first place and equitable services when they can do so (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015; Annamma, 2018; Blanchett, 2010 & Harvey & Klinger, 2014). Therefore, when asking for "professional" documentation of a disability to access services at a disability resource center it further pushes people of color with disabilities in general out of the disability resource centers and the accommodations they need and deserve. In addition, students of color with disabilities often face increased scrutiny when claiming they have a disability (that is, when they can access these disability-diagnosing services (e.g., educational psychologists) in the first place. Their race and disability together can be used to rhetorically position them in disability studies discourses as less worthy of receiving disability support services in education, which results in such services being less accessible to this specific population (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015; Annamma, 2018; Blanchett, 2010 & Harvey & Kligner, 2014).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Broader Analytical Themes

After reviewing the data and the analytical claims, the two most salient themes that emerged are: the complexity of intersectionality in the disability community in general/the complexity within disability resource center websites in particular, and intersectionality as key for Critical Intercultural Communication.

Complexity of Intersectionality

The complexity of intersectionality within the disability community emerged as a key theme in my literature review and theoretical research and also held consistent across my own project of analyzing the disability resource center websites from university campuses.

DisCrit, the school-to-prison-pipeline, White Disability Studies, and past research on disability resource websites at universities have set a firm foundation on which to discuss the complexity of intersectionality within the disability community (Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2013, 2015); Annamma, (2018) & Bell (2013). DisCrit, similar to CRT, functions using a variety of concepts: the function of racism and ableism together in ways that are presumed neutral; the power and politics of intersectionality as frames to one's experiences; social constructionist ontologies; the importance of counternarratives/counter storytelling; Whiteness/ability as property; and activism as crucial to the development of critical-oriented academic theories (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2013, 2015).

The concept of intersectionality functions as the bedrock to these concepts, because without an understanding of intersectionality, specifically within the disability

community the other concepts of DisCrit would not hold the same level of importance. In order to understand the importance of social constructivism and the dangers of viewing identities through a neutral lens, consideration of the intersectionality politics within the disability community is necessary. Also, counter stories rely on a reflexive understanding of the multiple and complex meanings that can emerge from studying intersectionality.

Annamma (2018) and Bell (2013) both provide useful reiterations of DisCrit, specifically intersectionality, that helped lay the groundwork for this specific project. Bell (2013) discusses the Whiteness that has always been inherent in disability studies and research. According to Bell, the disability experience is often viewed as monolithic, ignoring the ways in which one's multiple identities (e.g. race and class) impact the experiences of navigating multiple institutions (e.g. education) with a disability. While Bell (2013) also argues that to study race and disability at the intersection of identities becomes very complex, it is necessary not only to reflexively understand how they function together but also to resist the Whiteness inherent in theorizations on disability. Thus, Bell (2013) claims that "White Disability Studies" would be a more accurate name for Disability Studies.

Bell (2013) provided a more general framework of White Disability Studies that assisted in anchoring this project, and Annamma (2018) offered a more nuanced example of applying DisCrit to an institution to show how DisCrit functions in a variety of settings. In her 2018 work she uses qualitative first-person narratives that she gathered from incarcerated women of color with disabilities to explore how their education experiences of the U.S. special education system impacted their outcomes of criminal behaviors. While the setting and method of her project and mine differ, her work

forefronted the importance of more intersectional work on race and disability. From a communications perspective, Dolmage (2013) offered additional perspectives that cemented the importance of intersectionality in communication work. While our sites of research differ in many ways, his work on the communicative constructions of race and disability at the intersection of identities exemplifies how race and disability work together to rhetorically position people of color with disabilities further to margins of U.S. society. While texts exist, such as Blanchett (2010) & Harry & Klingner (2014) that interrogate the roles that race and disability play in education, the presence of this work at the university level is underdeveloped, which lead to the manifestations of this study.

As stated earlier, the complexity of intersectionality was present during much of this research of the disability resource websites as well. For example, in chapter 5 it was found on the Accessibility Resource Center's website at the University of New Mexico that students are responsible for self-identification of their needs for services, and it is the staff's job to verify the student's disability. Similarly, according to the disability resource website at University of Nevada-Reno, one of their goals is to give students "equal access to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from university programs" (University of Nevada-Reno Disability Resource website, 2021). Lastly, the disability resource center at Texas Tech University states on their website that they are the "most comprehensive student disability support office in the nation" (Texas Tech University Resource website, 2021).

While these points of research were pulled from different parts of this dissertation, they all revolve around a larger theme of the complexity of intersectionality, in this case for students of color with disabilities. Self-identification of disabilities raises

an issue for students who may not have the financial resources to have their disability identified in their place. As stated in the literature review, the process of identifying a learning disability does not occur in a linear process that is the same for everyone. The presence of race and class certainly situates each student differently, specifically in terms of what kinds of disability resource services they have access to, if any at all (Blanchett, 2010). The politics of identities in the disability community also come into play here as well since intersectionality, specifically in terms of disability, race, and Whiteness, are not discussed in such contexts often enough and can often be downplayed or even ignored (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015; Annamma, 2018; Bailey & Mobley, 2018; Bell, 2013 & Dolmage, 2013). These examples also assisted in creating my next point in this conclusion: intersectionality as key for critical intercultural communication.

However, in my future research, the plan is to expand my analysis to look at the experiences of more culturally specific groups of people of color with disabilities, because the aforementioned label functions quite broadly. The breadth of this study will aim to include Latinos/as with disabilities, as their voices are underrepresented in DisCrit literature thus far (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013 & Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2015). While using Latino/a as a label in research, Baca Zinn & Zambrana (2019) highlight the caution of using the label and also the rich, nuanced analysis that can be generated when studying Latino/a populations, which points to intersectionality functioning as key to such theorizations and analyses. Specially, they state:

> We caution that Latino/Latina as a social construct must be problematized, that is complicated by differences in national origin, citizenship, race, class, and

> ethnicity and by the confluence of these factors. An intersectional approach acknowledges these differences and seeks to reveal and understand how they shape experience. When we use the term, Latinas, it is not as a unitary term that homogenizes distinctive groups, but as a term of implicit solidarity with other U.S. groups with a Spanish colonial history and genealogical, political, cultural, and ethnic ties to Latin America.

Intersectionality as Key for Critical Intercultural Communication

This study aimed to utilize a critical intercultural communication lens throughout, although it also drew from the interdisciplinary nature of critical intercultural communication, specifically as it intersects with sociological groundings of disability and race. During their discussion of issues that the critical intercultural communication field has faced and will face in the future, Croucher, Somnier & Rahmani (2015) point to the politics of intersectionality as currently and always an important issue to theorize about and consider in critical intercultural communication work. While there will not necessarily be a concrete answer of how to best address intersectionality in critical intercultural communication, the key lies in the willingness of students and scholars to continue challenging themselves to push the boundaries of intersectional work in the discipline (Croucher, Somnier & Rahmani, 2015).

Scholars who study the intersection of race and ability exemplify this need, whether specifically characterized as a critical intercultural communication scholar or not. Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2013 & 2015) introduce DisCrit, largely centered in sociology, as a useful framework to see how race and ability intersect specifically in education contexts. In her 2018 work, Annamma applies DisCrit to the school to prison

pipeline for females of color with disabilities by specifically gathering first-person narratives of their educational experiences that impacted their eventual turn to criminality. While not specifically mirroring this present study, it does show the importance of studying race and disability not only separately but together to show how they intersect communicatively to frame the intersection of race and disability in education, and as also argued via DisCrit, in other societal sectors too.

From a critical communication perspective, Dolmage (2013) highlights how race and disability are often constructed together. Dolmage (2013) uses a critical rhetoric framework to show how race and disability were mutually constructed to position certain non-White bodies as invaluable social beings who should not qualify as U.S. citizens. Again, while not in the same context as my study, Dolmage's (2013) work offers another useful example of how race and disability have been strategically used together to push people of color with disabilities further to the margins on an institutional level. While not technically focused on critical intercultural communication, Dolmage (2013) necessitates that the nuances of how the intersections of race and disability are enacted receive consideration.

In terms of this study, examples emerged as well of intersectionality as key for critical intercultural communication. White Disability Studies emerged through the discourses present on these websites and also exemplified the ways in which systemic power and privilege is embedded in the discourses on the disability resource centers websites. For example, studying transability in terms of its presence on these websites raise important questions about how intersectionality functions in critical intercultural communication and disability studies: how can the wording on such websites uphold the

very possibility of transability existing in university settings; how does transability uphold Whiteness; and what can be done to resist transability? Some of these questions were discussed in this dissertation, but further consideration in future work is needed to explore these important topics more fully and to analyze the intersectional implications of transability more closely from a critical intercultural communication perspective.

In addition, other examples emerged throughout of intersectionality playing a key role in the future of critical intercultural communication research that also raised more areas to explore. First, the issue of disability resource centers needing medical documentation of a disability for a student to access services functions as an example of the import of continuing intersectional research in critical intercultural communication in general and disability and communication intersectional work in particular.

As shown in this study, disability resource services at universities are attempting to be more inclusive by recognizing that disability functions in a myriad of ways for students by altering the names of the offices to be more inclusive. However, the universities in this study still asked for some form of medical documentation of a disability, which has been argued here, raises intersectional issues of access, specifically for students of color. Two complex questions that merit much attention but were outside of this dissertation's general scope are: how can disability resource centers move away from asking medical documentation while still upholding the integrity of their department, and how can the names of the disability resource centers move towards an inclusive model of disability, while staying accessible to multiple cultural groups at the same time? These questions deserve attention in future research, and also show why intersectionality is key for the future of this work in critical intercultural communication.

Possible Future Directions of this Research

In this section, parts of my previous prospectus are used. While time limits impacted the ability to complete the original idea now, hopefully it will manifest in the future as it's also an important project. The research would focus on the institutional setting of disability student services in a college campus and on the experiences of students of color with disabilities to explore how these services may be promoted as a key resource for all students with disabilities while ignoring how various identity markers, such as race, play a role in students of color access to these services and the quality of their social and academic experiences on campus.

The research would incorporate discourse analysis and CRT methodology for the analysis of institutional discourse and the narratives of the lived experiences of students in order to illuminate how students of color negotiate the intersections of race and ability and resist racism, ableism, and Whiteness. The research questions and sub questions guiding this investigation would be: how do the institutional discourses of disability support services programs reproduce or challenge particular narratives of identity for college students with disabilities; how is intersectionality addressed in such discourse; how does the discourse construct notions of authenticity; how does the discourse center Whiteness; how do the narratives and counter-narratives of students of color with disabilities exemplify ways in which students reproduce and resist the dominant institutional discourse; how do students articulate their intersectional identities and the ways these affect their experiences; how do students relate to problems of authenticity of disabled bodies and Whiteness, and how do their narratives and counter-narratives relate

to Whiteness? To explore these questions, the methods of interviewing and discourse analysis would be applied to collect and analyze data.

Discourse Analysis and CRT Methodologies

This research would combine discourse analysis with CRT methodology centered on narratives and counternarratives**.**

Data Collection

Site of Study. The proposed site of study would be disability resource centers on university campuses. Importance lies in understanding how one's experiences with the disability resource centers come from various disability perspectives (e.g disability and race). As articulated via a DisCrit lens by Annamma, Connor & Ferri (2015), disability never functions alone but at the intersection of race.

In terms of access, trust, and ethical positioning, the communication with staff at these offices must be sensitive to the fact that words such as racism/ableism or Whiteness can often be received as accusatory name-calling (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Participants. Current UNM students of color with disabilities who have used the services of ARC at any point during their college would be eligible.

An invitation letter via email in university programs that serve the populations that I am aiming to reach: African American Student Services, Native American Student Services, El Centro Student Services, and the Accessibility Resource Center. I will use the email that is publicly available on each organization's website for the initial contact. If response rate is low, I plan to use snowball sampling to gain more responses if the response rate is low. I plan to interview 10 to 12 students who have used ARC. The students interviewed are ideally going to be a relatively equal mix between students of

color and White students to tease out any differences more accurately in experiences of using ARC. While gender, age, and sexuality of course play a role in how one may experience ARC, my research's scope does not cover these areas.

Interviews. Individual, in-depth interviews will be the method to collect data. The interview will be conducted via Zoom, given the current COVID-19 restrictions. The main goal of this interview will be to respond to research question #2 and its sub questions: how do the narratives and counter-narratives of students of color with disabilities enact ways in which students reproduce and resist the dominant institutional discourse; how do students articulate their intersectional identities and the ways these affect their experiences; how do students relate to problems of authenticity of disabled bodies and Whiteness; and how do their narratives and counter-narratives relate to Whiteness?

In general, important decisions have been made about my interviewing format to respond to these questions most accurately. As a researcher, I will offering as much agentic control to the interviewees as possible, specifically since I am working with populations who have and do face the discrediting of their experiences as real and relevant to the ontological, epistemological, and axiological development of theoretical understandings within qualitative research (Berger & Lorenz, 2016). Thus, in terms of the interview format, it would be constructed as semi-structured. While it is significant for a researcher's data to ultimately respond to the general research question, it is also important to create space for the participant's own ideas to emerge outside of the scope of the actual interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Marshall &

Rossman (2016), semi-structured interview questions should generate more details and nuance.

For example, instead of asking a question to the effect of whether participants have experienced difficulties in accessing/receiving services in the Accessibility Resource Center as a result of your race, a more semi-structured question would generally be constructed as whether they can describe their experiences with accessing disability-related accommodations at the Accessibility Resource Center, Such a phrasing is important within the realm of qualitative and ethical research for a few reasons: it creates space for the researcher to expand their response in their own words, and also it does not assume that they have experienced difficulties. Scholarship within the critical paradigm is not and should not be understood as a neutral production of knowledge (Moon, McIntosh & Nakayama, 2019). However, within the realm of qualitative interviewing it is essential to not ask leading questions. In such inquiries, assumptions are made by the researcher about the participants' thoughts and emotions (Rossman & Taylor, 2016). The questions in general would focus on the simultaneous constructions of race and ability with a specific focus on the participant's experiences within the Accessibility Resource Center.

Data Sets. The key data sources for the analysis of ARC's discourses are official documents like official mission and vision statements and other messages about their services and target student population published in its organizational web site.

In addition to organizational documents and texts, I will be using the transcripts of interviews with students as another source of data generation for this study.

Data Analysis

Coding Procedures. I will use a combination of inductive and deductive coding to analyze the data sets. Deductive coding will center the commitments of DisCrit as analytical categories to generate possible future themes and directions for the future of DisCrit research. For example, in a study that I previously conducted on the intersection of racism and ableism, a participant said that they did not feel as they truly belonged in any identity group, such as people of color or people with disabilities, because they have experienced racism and ableism by both groups. If I were coding such statement in an inductive way, I would generate my own codes from interview data, instead of working from an already-formed statement or theory. But I can also code the interview deductively by focusing on dimensions of the concept of intersectionality and see how statements like this one show assertions indicative of intersectionality, Whiteness, etc. I will apply both inductive and deductive coding in the process of analysis because they would enable me to both add to DisCrit theorizing and engage in my own theory-building.

Based on my past work and study, I have decided to use manual coding to most accurately represent my variety of methods used. I will be using deductive coding with thematic analysis as described below, specifically looking for language that points to a general culture of colorblindness (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). In addition, for my individual interviews I will be using inductive coding for to code for the presence of narratives and counternarrative in the student's responses. Narratives are defined by Delgado & Stefancic (2013) as anecdotes that speak to the prominence of power and privilege in institutional spaces (e.g., education). On the contrary, they define

counternarratives as stories that push back against public discourses of neutrality in institutional settings.

Original Research Questions Revisited

In this last section, the original research question and subsequent sub questions are posed again, and I briefly reflect on how these questions have been responded to in this research.

1. How do the institutional discourses of disability resource centers reproduce or challenge particular identities for college students with disabilities?

   Institutional discourses are defined here as both institutional policies and everyday communicative interactions that frame how identities (e.g. race and disability) are constructed and resisted (Benwell &Stokoe, 2006).

   Some sub-questions that emerged from this larger inquiry are:

   a. How are the politics of intersectionality visible in such discourses?

The politics of intersectionality were visible throughout the discourses that were looked at in multiple ways, some which will be briefly discussed here and will hopefully assist in generating more discussions on this topic in the future. First, the politics of intersectionality made the politics of naming a more complex issue to discuss.

For example, some of the university disability resource programs in this study, have moved away from using the word “disability” in the title of their office, and also do not describe ways their offices are trying to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, if this goal even mentioned at all. As discussed in this dissertation, the politics of intersectionality are particularly visible in these cases of politics of naming, because the consequences are not considered for groups of people with disabilities who may not have

as much access to disability advocacy and cultural groups (e.g. people of color with disabilities).

The disability resource center at the University of New Mexico is named the Accessibility Resource Center and disability resource center at the University of Texas at El Paso is named the Center for Accommodations and Support Services. However, as discussed in the politics of naming section of this dissertation, such a shift relies on the assumption that all people with disabilities would have access to the same meanings of accessibility, accommodations, and support services when it is shown through past research that Disability Studies relies heavily on White ontologies and epistemologies. Additionally, the politics of intersectionality were present throughout the website content too, as it was discussed how in many cases, the monolithic "we" was used to refer to the disability community who makes up the clientele of such offices, without attention paid to who "we" included and/or excluded.

Additionally, during chapter six in the section on disability as only a social construct, the politics of intersectionality are evident in the discourses on the websites about the possibility of transability existing among the student population as a valid disability identity. On some of the websites, such as the University of New Mexico's Accessibility Resource Center it states "applicants can be regarded as having such an impairment whether actually having the impairment or not (Accessibility Resource Center website, 2021). In more of a general way, the section on the politics of naming shows both the complexity and necessity of intersectionality. The word "accommodation" romanticizes disability and further works to render non-White disabled bodies as ineligible users of its disability support services.

Lastly, the "we" usage on university disability support services websites, such as the Accessibility Resource Center at the University of New Mexico, fails to consider identity and intersectionality politics in the disability community. The "we" statements discussed are very broad, and they do not consider who is included and who is left out of such statements.

b. How do the discourses construct notions of authenticity?

In this research, it was found that only certain groups of students with disabilities, along the lines of race and class, seem to have authenticity in the disability community by how users of these disability resource centers are positioned throughout the websites. First, the issue of self-identification came into play across the research. Students hold responsibility for self-identification of such a disability, but as argued throughout this dissertation "self-identification" holds much cultural meaning in terms of what it means to self-identify with a disability, how it is done, and who has access to self-identification.

Furthermore, the issue of self-identification and authenticity arose from a faculty perspective on these websites as well. When faculty were included on disability resource center websites, if at all, they were only included in the temporary disability category, which raises questions about underlying assumptions of who with a disability can hold a faculty position (e.g., people who don't necessarily identify as a person with a disability). As such, authenticity in such a situation is constructed in a very limited way.

c. How do the discourses center ideologies of Whiteness?

Ideologies of Whiteness were apparent throughout these websites, as shown in this dissertation. The burden of self-identification is often put on the students, which shows the "Whiteness of disability" in many ways, as argued throughout. The contextual

circumstances that students may face in their lives, specifically in regard to race, are not considered. The "Whiteness of disability" is never specifically even mentioned on these websites, even though ample research exists to support such a claim. In addition, the monolithic "we" is used throughout to represent the disability community as one, as in they are all united, instead of looking at differences in the experiences of disability.

One key example lies on the disability resource website at the University of Nevada-Reno. One of the office's goals is to provide "equal access to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from university programs" (University of Nevada-Reno, 2021). However, specific policies are not listed in terms of who this statement includes and what concrete measures the office is taking to provide "equal access."

Questions that need to be discussed include: what does equal access mean and what does equal access look like? It is through such consideration on all of the websites included in this research that a need for more diverse voices in the disability community can be communicated to the website's users. Of course, disability and race intersect in so many ways, as also shown here, but this move holds great import to increase access and fairness in disability resource centers on university campuses.

Appendix A

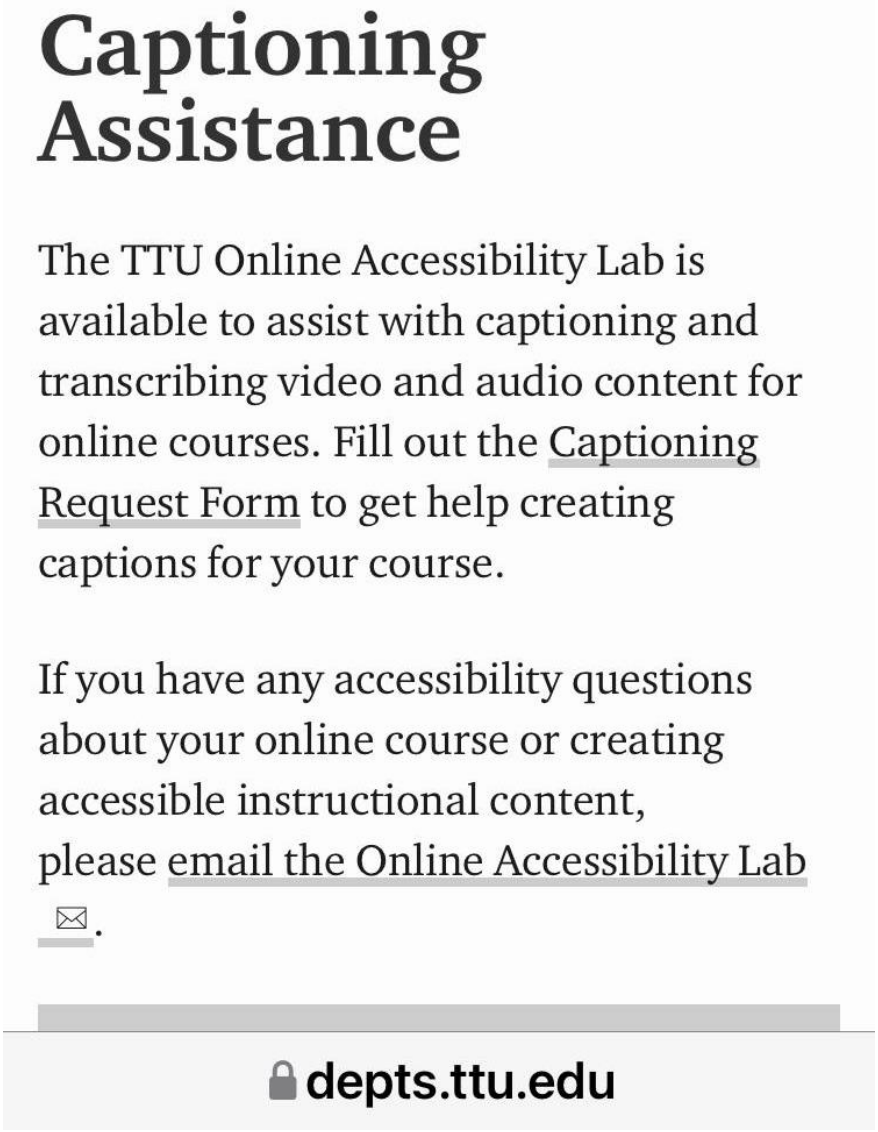
These are the two screenshots taken to back up a claim that is made in the analysis chapters to offer an exemplar of my research. Texas Tech's Disability Resource Center includes a tab for faculty with only two items and none that actually pertain to faculty with disabilities.

Figure 2

Tab 1: Online Accessibility Evaluation

Figure 3

Tab 2: Captioning Assistance



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