Identities amidst social categories of ability difference: Voices of self-identified “disabled” post-secondary students

Emily Hutcheon
Supervisor: Dr. Gregor Wolbring

Disability Issues and Advocacy Conference U of Tennessee, Nov. 29-30, 2012

ejhutche@ucalgary.ca
PRESENTATION MAP

1. Question mark

2. Disability Studies
   - Ableism
   - Symbolic Interactionism

3. Brain with topics:
   - Cognition
   - Memory
   - Learning
   - Development
   - Personality
   - Physiology
   - Perception
   - Society
   - Health
   - Language

4. Social
   - Body
   - Self
RATIONALE

Student experience [12]

Instances of vulnerability and empowerment [3, 4, 6, 9, 11]

Literature gap [1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10]

Higher education policy accommodations-focused [17]
The goal is to understand, *from the perspectives of this population...*

1. The relationship between the person’s *self* and the social world amidst *social categories* of ability and disability

How has this informed *identity*?
2. The role of **post secondary** experiences

**SELF/IDENTITY** ↔ **EDUCATION**

Role of change?
3. Provide a medium to freely express experiences of **vulnerability** and **empowerment** within a post-secondary setting.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disability Studies + Sociology of the Body

Ableism

1. BODILY/COGNITIVE function
2. CULTURALLY VALUED abilities

‘Disability’
Socially Constructed
Empowerment

Internalized
ableism

Symbolic
Interactionism

Micro-level symbol
exchange
METHODS

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Recruitment Strategy

   Expected N = 10
   Actual N = 8

In-depth interview

Transcription
**Thematic Network Analysis**

1. **Basic Theme**: lowest-order  
   - Advocacy (self/others)]  
   - [Saying nothing]

2. **Organizing Theme**: organize basic themes, provide a basis of assumptions which underlie global theme  
   - [Response to situations of vulnerability]

3. **Global Theme**: super-ordinate; produce an assertion; reveal interpretation.  
   - [Claiming the self: Voice of silence]  
   - [Claiming the self: Voice of assertion]
But yeah I think if our society was somehow...more than willing to help, and didn’t feel awkward around difference, and all that stuff...then suddenly, the physical differences that exist between people might not be perceived as disability and might be perceived as opportunity...” (P 003)
HEGEMONIC VOICE
Difference ↔ Ableism
Hegemonic Interaction

Social

Body ↔ Self
The fluidity of the Self

“And so you could say, you know, that made me feel impaired that...at the time I thought, you know I’m normal and everyone perceives me as normal, and then you have an event happen where you realize...maybe they perceive me as being impaired. I still feel like I’m normal. But the more it goes on, it shifts. It goes all the way down that spectrum. From normal at one point, to both sides of view...as being impaired...and like I said...it shifts.” (P 001)
HEGEMONIC VOICE
Difference ↔ Ableism
Hegemonic Interaction

Social

Body

Self

Internalized Ableism

Self ↔ Self
“I: What associations do you think it makes? To have that head rest?

R: Hm... Well I think it indicates, one, that the **impairment is even higher than you think**. Um that if you need a headrest, there's some problems with your neck, there's some problems ... so... And for some reason I associate mental disabilities with that as well.

I: Oh okay, and you don’t want others to make that connection.

R: Nope.” (P 006)
HEGEMONIC VOICE
Difference ↔ Ableism
Hegemonic Interaction

Social

Body

Self

Symbolic Violence → Actual Violence

Internalized Ableism

VOICE OF THE BODY

Self ↔ Self
“Yeah, and like... I've been abused in every way a person can be abused... And that sort of shit, you know, the trauma, the whatever... with the abuse, that stuff is actually relatively minor... What the bitch of it is, is that the people who abuse you are going to make you feel like you're fucking nothing, and they’re going to make you feel like everything is your fault.” (P 008)
HEGEMONIC VOICE
Difference $\leftrightarrow$ Ableism
Hegemonic Interaction

Social

Body

Self

Symbolic Violence $\rightarrow$ Actual Violence

Internalized Ableism

Pain $\leftrightarrow$ Emotion $\rightarrow$ Healing

VOICE OF THE BODY

Self $\leftrightarrow$ Self
“R: I don’t try to hide [emotional pain] or push it aside, I just take it... um yeah. I um...it’s more a physical feeling....like I would... remember what hurt me and I would get like this shooting pain.... it just kind of happens...

I: In your body, somewhere?

R: Yeah, I’m not sure, actually, because it’s not in my...kind of like mmm...a mental pain, I’m not sure...” (P 004)
“I: So you said that sometimes you can tell when people think of you like that, or they think ... lesser intelligence.

R: Yeah. Mhmm. Yeah. Friends will make fun of you in a joking manner...

I: Okay, okay. So in those situations, you... do you feel impaired in those situations when someone ...?

R: Um...yeah.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah. I laugh it off... (chuckles)” (P 007)
HEGEMONIC VOICE
Difference ↔ Ableism
Hegemonic Interaction

VOICE OF ASSERTION

Pain ↔ Emotion → Healing

VOICE OF SILENCE

Self ↔ Self

Symbolic Violence → Actual Violence

Internalized Ableism

Self ↔ Self

VOICE OF THE BODY

Body ↔ Social

Social

Self ↔ Self
“... If [other disabled people] don't convey the confidence, then... are they really going to get hired at the end of the day? Like how would they present a job interview situation? So like, I think that ability to demonstrate value, to demonstrate confidence, um, you know, just anything that you might have that is valuable, whether it's academic ability, charm, whatever, like... the more that you have, the easier it is for your voice to be heard.” (P 008)
“So I mean I definitely think that people in general, your peers, should know more, professors should know more, but it comes down to who’s going to do it, right? Like... is it your responsibility as someone who’s disabled to make others aware? Or should the school do more to spread...should we [be spreading awareness] back in high school, elementary, junior high?” (P 002)
Role of School

I: And so you found that those two programs gave you sort of an increased self-awareness? In a sense?

R: Yeah. I would say the education program much more so. ..like in terms of identity formation for my disability... where I actually thought about [it], so.

I: Mhmm. And before you hadn't really thought [about it] too much?

R: No, not at all. (P 006)
CONCLUSIONS

For research participants
   Product dissemination
   Therapeutic interview

For practice/policy
   Importance of participants’ voice
   Ableism and higher education policy
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Ableist violence

Importance of the body

Vulnerability and empowerment/resilience
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Participants
Dr. Bonnie Lashewicz
Dr. Cairine Logan
REFERENCES


14. http://www.google.ca/imgrs?imurl=http://acsweb.ucsd.edu/~rsteier/CSE3/Lab2/MyMajor_files/image002.jpg&imrefurl=http://acsweb.ucsd.edu/~rsteier/CSE3/Lab2/MyMajor.htm&usg=__XKNcNjNBBga_eBOGQDrIHmFk_Y=&h=357&w=313&sz=16&hl=en&start=17&sig2=iA1RjTIjwrtdtkNK5KFKMw&zoom=1&tbnid=q6ZbPNN-E7PTOKM:&tbnh=128&tbnw=112&ei=8MSUTfnNF42qsAOMr_S9BQ&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dsocial%2Bpsychology%26hl%3Den%26biw%3D986%26bih%3D560%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:10%2C342&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=247&oei=7sSUTcd__JMvdiAK0t9z7CA&page=2&ndsp=18&ved=1t:429,r:6,s:17&tx=80&ty=78&biw=986&bih=560


16. http://library.thinkquest.org/08aug/00362/Final/conclusion.gif&imrefurl=http://library.thinkquest.org/08aug/00362/&usg=__cKepXC1Exlp2qOFeIQU4jDTEw=&h=303&w=456&sz=4&hl=en&start=0&sig2=09qrd2aRwlwMwLjAmF1rBA&zoom=1&tbnid=Z9FWvIKOBGUWAM:&tbnh=117&tbnw=176&ei=RcWUTE-_EozUialU34ydCQ&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dconclusion%26hl%3Den%26biw%3D986%26bih%3D560%26gbv%3D2%26tbs%3Disch:1&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=326&oei=RcWUTE-_EozUialU34ydCQ&page=1&ndsp=15&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0&tx=73&ty=84

17. http://ucalgary.ca/drc/node/93