Fall 2013

Disable. Dis-Able: the disabling effects of current disability discourses on cultural representations and interpretations of people with disabilities

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DISABLE. DIS-ABLE.
THE DISABLING EFFECTS OF CURRENT DISABILITY DISCOURSES ON CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

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English Departmental Honors Thesis
University of Colorado at Boulder
November 5, 2013

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Abstract

Because my brother was born with cerebral palsy, I became interested in why the general, nondisabled public inaccurately presumes his abilities, or disabilities. This thesis proves that the cultural representation of people with disabilities results from a pejorative disabled lexicon. These disability discourses circulate a disability logos; one where a person with a disability is helpless, born into unfair circumstances, and therefore unable to live a happy life.

This misunderstanding of a person with a disability is incongruent with disability government policy, which has created laws pushing for the incorporation of people with disabilities into public society. Such policies, like the American with Disabilities Act, the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, mandate the inclusion of people with disabilities into the workplace, public buildings, and schools. These acts thereby remove the descriptor of “helpless” by allowing individuals with disabilities the possibility of independence within these public spaces.

My thesis was born out of this perplexing dilemma; why cultural interpretations of disabilities fails to include these individuals into majority society as opposed to government policies. It is a quizzical investigation into this still prominent disability logos. I examine reasons for its existence, the history of such, and why this logos remains embedded in the cultural representation of disabilities today. This thesis argues that the language used to discuss people with disabilities, and metaphors incorporating disabilities, must be changed to advance cultural representations of a person with a disability because of language’s portrayal of cultural truths.
1. Introduction

“Wow, your brother is so tall,” people often say to me when they see this picture of my sister (Lauren), my brother (Sam), and myself. At about 5’4,” Sam is not short, however, Sam is not standing in this picture, either. In fact, Sam is sitting in his wheelchair while my sister and I are kneeling beside him. The person commenting on his extraordinary height does not know this, though, and I am always unsure of how to respond. Do I inform them of the real reason (his wheelchair) that he looks so tall? Am I lying, or hiding something, if I do not? Is letting the person believe that Sam is standing a misrepresentation of the truth, and does that dismiss an integral part of Sam’s personhood? And most importantly – why do I feel guilty not sharing this fact, and yet feel like I am oversharing if I do?

My brother is fifteen months older than my sister and I, and often when peers find out I have an older brother they become curious. And again I struggle with what to reveal; how to describe my brother and define our relationship. At twenty-two years of age, I am still unsure of how to formulate my response. Many times I have tried, while looking at this picture, to see an incredibly tall, standing man. It is impossible for me. I only see his body awkwardly protruding out of his wheelchair – a position his body assumes whenever he is excited – because I have only ever known Sam sitting; I have never seen him stand independently.
When I do choose to tell people, “I guess I could see how you would think that, but actually, he is sitting in his wheelchair and we are kneeling,” a familiar exchange begins, in which I attempt to convey the Sam I know: my brother . . . who happens to have cerebral palsy, but not my “disabled” brother. I must now choose my words and tonality very carefully, as I attempt to avoid those looks of understanding and sympathy that often proceed this declaration. Not only do I resent this reaction, but I do not need it. This is, and has always been, my reality: a brother who happens to be different from most other people’s siblings, and a member of a population that many people in our society have a very limited understanding of, and minimal interaction with.

Sam was born three months premature and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy (CP) shortly after. In layman’s terms, CP is a stroke at birth and has highly varied effects on the body and brain. An individual with CP can be anywhere from extremely high to extremely low functioning, and it can affect nearly any of an individual’s abilities. Sam’s CP falls somewhere in the middle: physically, his torso is extremely weak, making it difficult for him to stand. His muscles are weak as well, and by the age of seven his body had become too heavy for him to continue walking with a walker. Becoming increasingly more reliant on a wheelchair, Sam eventually put aside the walker for good. Today he uses a power chair and has a 24-hour live-in aid to help him with everyday tasks, such as hygiene, making food, getting dressed, and getting in and out of his bed, wheel/power chair, the car, etc. Mentally, Sam has a nearly photographic memory, rambles on about any philosophical and/or religious topic available to him, and writes exceptional prose. Because of his CP, though, his brain runs slower than the typical brain, and subsequently becomes overwhelmed faster. This mental diagnosis led to Sam’s
placement in special education classes in high school, and is the reason why he chooses to take only two classes a semester at Santa Monica Community College.

A few years ago, Sam was feeling ill and called my dad for a ride home from a crowded street in downtown Santa Monica, Los Angeles, where he currently resides. Because my dad could not fit Sam’s power chair in his car, he drove Sam’s power chair home and Sam’s aid drove the two of them home in my dad’s car. This is how my dad described his afternoon to me:

“I got into Sam's chair and began ‘driving’ it at slow speed down Third Street. What was so remarkable, and the reason I remember this so vividly, is what I saw while in that chair. Every single person who I passed did one of two things. Either they avoided eye contact with me entirely, or, if they made eye contact, the look on their face was one of incredible sadness, as if to say, ‘you poor thing.’ No one smiled. No one made what I would call ‘regular’ everyday eye contact with strangers, that matter-of-fact look that has no intent or meaning behind it.” (J. Hersch)

Sam’s weak torso causes him to dramatically lean to the left when he sits in his chair, as opposed to an individual with paralysis who might have the upper body strength to sit straight. His physical appearance makes it clear to the public that he is developmentally disabled, not paralyzed. A developmental disability is defined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention as “a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas,” and the most common developmental disabilities (DD) are Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; DDs tend to be outwardly identifiable, like Sam’s CP. That said, my dad is a
physically strong fifty-five year old man who presumably sat up straight when driving Sam’s power chair, displaying no signs of any other physical and/or mental impairment aside from his placement in the power chair. And yet, he “found the experience so disturbing that at the next corner [he] turned off Third and went onto a side street which was empty.”

When I asked Sam to describe to me his everyday interactions with the public, he said nothing that echoed my dad’s experience. In fact, Sam said he noticed no adverse reactions from the public when he power chaired down the street. In conclusion, my dad said to me, “What is amazing to me is that this must be Sam's everyday experience. He never talks about it, but how can it be otherwise?” Sam, though, explicitly states the opposite. Call me naïve, but I do not believe my dad experienced an animosity that Sam does not. However, this has always been Sam’s experience; he has never known another relationship with the public, and so he is ignorant of this treatment.

There is something about this power chair, the clear presence of a disability, which automatically necessitates a sympathetic response. I hesitate to vocalize Sam’s disability because of this misunderstood cultural understanding of a person with a disability. I can personally attest to Sam’s internalization of this treatment, and the negative impact it has had on his self-esteem. My interest in the originations, and reason for stagnation, of this detrimental cultural interpretation of a person with a physically apparent disability has stemmed out of Sam’s everyday experiences, and internalizations of them.
A fourteen year-old girl I work with has a low-functioning disability that has severely impacted both her mental and physical abilities; she is non-verbal and cannot walk independently. When I was describing her to my friend, he asked me, “what is the quality of life for someone like that” (Stolier). A similar interaction took place with another friend, when she said to me, “I would abort a child with down syndrome because I would never want them to have to live such a terrible life” (Cambell). I cannot speak for individuals with disabilities, and therefore cannot attest to their quality of life. However, what these conversations show is the general cultural understanding that a person with a disability does not have a high quality of life. But just because they do not have certain abilities a typical person has, does not mean their life is inherently worse. Because of this mode of thought, though, people with disabilities, like Sam, are generally exempt from societal rules, which leads to their marginalization from majority, nondisabled society.

As this thesis attempts to prove, this cultural representation results from a pejorative disabled lexicon. These disability discourses circulate a disability logos; one where a person with a disability is helpless, born into unfair circumstances, and therefore unable to live a happy life.

This misunderstanding of a person with a disability is incongruent with disability government policy, which has created many laws pushing for the incorporation of people with disabilities into public society. Such policies, like the American with Disabilities Act, the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, mandate the inclusion of people with disabilities into the workplace, public buildings, and schools. These acts thereby remove the descriptor of “helpless” by
allowing individuals with disabilities the possibility of independence within these public spaces.

My thesis was born out of this perplexing dilemma: why cultural interpretations of disabilities fail to include these individuals into majority society as opposed to government policies. It is a quizzical investigation into this still prominent disability logos. I examine reasons for its existence, the history of such, and why this logos remains embedded in the cultural representation of disabilities today.

2. Disability Language and Reality

Anthropologist-linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, authors of the “Whorf-Sapir Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis,” argue that “the structure and lexicon of one’s language influences how one perceives and conceptualizes the world, and they do so in a systemic way” (Swoyer). I apply this idea to the perception of people with disabilities, arguing that our contemporary cultural understanding of, and meanings of, disability reflects and results from the metaphors, images, and literal words used to describe disability.

According to Whorf and Sapir, language and identity are inextricably linked. In “The Status of Linguistics as Science,” Sapir writes, “Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society” (209). As stated within this quote, human interaction does not dictate language, but rather language influences human interaction. When a being arrives into this world, s/he is already part of a verbal community, and becomes subject to
predetermined ideals of what it means to be “human.” This applies directly to people with what are called “disabilities.”

As Sapir writes, “Even comparatively simple acts of perception are very much more at the mercy of the social patterns called words than we might suppose…We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation” (210). Interpretations of the possible cultural meanings of disability are shaped by the language (and image) associated with disability. The word “disabled,” therefore, determines social reactions to disabilities, and subsequently affects the reality of a person with a disability.

The term “language” designates all forms of interaction, including written word, speech, peer relationships, and policy. As Michael Oliver writes in “Politics and Language: Understanding the Disability Discourse,” “It is often assumed that the function of language is communication. While it is undoubtedly true that communication is a function of language, it is not the only one. Language is also about politics, domination and control.” As Oliver states, communication unarguably remains language’s most pertinent function, while also structuring social hierarchies. Examining a society’s lexicon exposes the power struggles, the identities, and the leaders, among other ideologies, too, of that culture. Magnifying and dissecting disability discourses in contemporary American society, as well as its history, thereby provides a method for determining the hierarchical placement of a person with a disability in society.

According to twentieth century linguistic theorist Ferdinand de Saussure, a word or sign consists of two terms: the sound-image and the concept, or signifier and signified. The sound-image refers to the imprint the word heard leaves on the brain, and the concept
results from the individual’s interpretation of that sound-image. The sound-image and the concept forever unite to form the sign, but the relationship between the two is arbitrary. For example, although different languages have a different word(s) for the concept of a plate, the individual, upon hearing the accepted word(s) within their language for a “plate,” interprets this sound-image as the concept of a “plate.” This arbitrary relationship permits an individual to arrive at any concept from any sound-image, or many concepts (and vice-versa), allowing individual words the possibility of multiple meanings.

When applying this structure of signifier and signified to the sign “disabled,” circulating cultural ideas about disabilities materialize into cultural representations of disabilities, which morph into accepted truths. Culture’s signs help determine how and what people in this culture can name and can think about – the language, or signs, of disability therefore become “reality.”

Strictly defined, “disabled” means “less-than-able,” and whom society has designated as “the disabled” demonstrates Saussure’s linguistic structure. The translation of “dis” and “able” in current language results from term’s intra-dependent relationship within the entirety of language. Saussure labels this effect the “value” of the sign. Because current language contains the sign “able,” defined as “having the power, skill, money, etc., that is needed to do something,” and “dis,” meaning “not,” the sign “disabled” comes to signify thoughts congruent with “not ‘having the power, skill, money, etc., that is needed to do some/(any)thing’” (Merriam-Webster). A person displaying characteristics consistent with an explicit inability therefore becomes associated with these meanings that emerge from the term “disabled.”
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*Cultural Construction of a “Disabled” Person*

Aimee Mullins, a disability activist and double-leg amputee, summarizes the broader contextualization of the word “disabled” within our society. Mullins says “I looked up the word disabled to see what I’d find, let me read you the entry. Disabled, adj, crippled, helpless, useless, wrecked, wounded, mangled, lame . . . weakened . . castrated . . . done for . . see also, hurt, useless, weak. Antonyms, healthy strong capable” (0:38). Mullins’ exposé of the definition for “disabled” articulates the still current understanding, as verified by the dictionary, that a disability is a negative aspect of someone's identity. Within this definition emerges the logos of a disability within our culture; a person with a disability is “helpless, useless, weak . . .”

Furthermore, “dis” provides its own historic reference to negative connotations, reaching as far back as BCE and continuing into the fourteenth century. In Roman mythology, “Dis” is the alternative name for the Greek Hades, appearing first in Virgil’s Aeneid, and later in *Dante’s Inferno*, where “Dis” claims the title of both the lower levels of hell (8-9) and Lucifer’s name (Harpur 330). The word “disability,” therefore, not only translates into variants of the notion “less than able,” but also contains malicious undertones. In “From disability to ability: changing the phrasing of the debate,” disability theorist Paul Harpur writes, “Rather than just representing the opposite of something, the word ‘dis’ arguably represents something stronger such as undesirable or perhaps even something evil” (330). The thesaurus’ list of synonyms for “disabled” shows the multiplicity of signifieds associated with this signifier, all of which encompass the history of “dis” because of their adverse implications. Disability is thus defined as encompassing every ideal not present within the word “able,” and dissociated from positive ideals.
Paul Longmore, a founding father of the disability rights movement and the late director of the Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University, clarifies the cultural definition of the disability logos, saying, “those views of what disability is point to the fact that disability is not simply metaphysical and physiological, it’s much more importantly, it’s social and cultural, it’s a constructed identity . . . the stigma is globalized to engulf their entire identities” (Hoffman 02:18). As Longmore explains, society has manufactured this shame associated with being disabled, which then becomes incorporated within the cultural interpretations of “disability” and the identity of a person with a disability.

Elaborating on possibly more signifiers, Longmore writes that what “‘Americans individually and collectively fear most” is "limitation and dependence, failure and incapacity, loss of control, loss of autonomy, at its deepest level, confinement within the human condition, [and] subjection to fate,’” ideas which are loudly spoken through the disabled body (qtd. Wilson 174). As the antonym to “able,” “disable” also signifies what Longmore determines scares Americans – that physical representation of a reliance on others, and an inability to escape this dependence; the disabled body epitomizes the antithesis of the idealized American. The dreaded helplessness present at the site of the disabled body metamorphoses into social reactions to these individuals, culminating in Longmore’s description of “fear.” As Longmore argues, a disability becomes disabling more through its confinement and representation of this cumulative fear, than from the physical effects the specific disability has on the individual.

Furthermore, disabilities are not restricted to the poor or the sick, the dirty or the clean; anyone, at any time, can become disabled, transforming a once independent figure
into one reliant on another. This dependence also severely contradicts the notion of independence interwoven within the idealized American, heightening the dread Longmore expresses above. They represent to the non-disabled American public what they fear they could become - dependent, “needy,” disabled.

The binary able/disable dictates this separation between two distinguishable groups: those who can, and those who cannot. An “able-bodied” individual can therefore distance themselves from the identity of “disabled” people, asserting independence as desirable as Americaness, which is self-proved by their ability to “help.” As Mary Klages, in her book “Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America,” writes, “within the domestic sphere that creates the empathic self, humans are recognized as fundamentally embodied, but the significance of those bodies is inscribed through their ability to feel for and act on behalf of the weak or dependent or suffering, rather than through their genitalia, skin color, sensory apparatus, or capacity for rationality” (6). As Klages articulates, human empathy is derived from our capacity to help others, as determined by apparent strength, and therefore supposed ability, personified through our physical body. Words like “helpless, useless . . . weakened” create an image of disability as dependence, rather than independence – this enables non-disabled persons to display their humanity by helping the helpless to enhance their “empathic self” (Mullins; Klages 6). Widening this division between the two groups is the fact that “empathic subjectivity is defined as a fundamentally embodied and also universal form of self, one that considers bodies similar on the basis of their capacity to feel and express emotions. The body is framed as a site not of sexuality, productive labor or rationality, but of feeling for others and acting to help others" (Klages 6). That said,
those who have bodies described as “able” can (and have the moral duty to) “help” those who have bodies signifying a supposed need for this help.

In “‘Saying The ‘F Word … In The Nicest Possible Way’: Augmentative Communication And Discourses Of Disability,” Tom Shakespeare elaborates on the distinction, claiming “disabled people are an oppressed group, stereotyped as ‘other’ in a number of ways, such as by being seen as dependent, vulnerable and unable to make their own decisions or speak up for themselves” (qtd. Brewester 128). As Shakespeare underlines, this contrast between abled and disabled people enacts an “us” and “them” nomenclature that translates into a majority/minority social and political structure.

This belittlement of people with disabilities formed in the mid eighteenth century, where, in an attempt to integrate people with disabilities into larger society, these signifiers became conflated with the disabled lexicon. Klages describes the origins of the disabled logos, writing:

"By mid-[eighteenth] century, the scientization and professionalization of institutional care for the disabled began to produce images of disabled people as defective, as failed humans, and thus as a class distinct from, and inferior to, nondisabled people; these depictions marked a separation between the professional and the popular cultural sentimental views of disabled people, which continued to portray them as ‘afflicted.’” (4) Today, particular medical and scientific interpretations of people with disabilities have significantly advanced. For example, they are no longer viewed as “defective” and “failed humans” who should be sterilized, placed in insane asylums, and, in severe cases, not continue to live (“Disability Rights;” Carter-Long 01:50). However, the formation of an
"inferior" group, and the "popular cultural sentimental views . . . [portraying] them as 'afflicted,'" currently thrives, determining the treatment and representation of people with disabilities in society (Woeful Afflictions 4).

Continuing to articulate the history of this cultural view of people with disabilities as "afflicted," Klages writes:

“Since the first efforts to integrate disabled people into mainstream culture in the late eighteenth century, disabled people have existed largely as ‘poster children.’ They have served as silent spectacles, images to be viewed by the non-disabled, whose importance has been in their ability to appear pathetic and to produce a sympathetic or sentimental response in nondisabled people. They have, as a result, been relegated to the status of permanent children, defined by their perceived dependence on the nondisabled. Like children, they are assumed to need protection, whether in the form of individual guardianship or of special laws governing their educational and economic existence.” (2)

Our contemporary interpretation of people with disabilities today echoes this eighteenth century interpretation, emphasizing the present need for further improvement in the cultural representation of disabilities.

Throughout the last century, disability politics has attempted to deconstruct able/disable with new laws and programs encouraging the incorporation of people with disabilities into mainstream American society.¹ Yet the social meanings of the culturally

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¹ Laws and Programs are detailed in the next section.
available signifiers of disability remain congruent with images established some two
hundred years ago in American culture.

3. Repression of Presidential Disability

The number of disabled citizens in the United States rapidly increased during the
first half of the twentieth century. After World War One, the number of wounded and
disabled veterans was about 204,000 (“Veterans: World War 1”). The first great polio
outbreak of 1916 led to “more than 27,000 cases,” and in the second great outbreak of
1952, “nearly 60,000 children were infected with the virus; thousands were paralyzed”
(“Wiping Out Polio”). Today there are about three and half million disabled veterans
living in this country, and the programs that exist to address the needs of these veterans
are in part a reaction to the boom in the disabled population seen in early the 1900’s
(“Newsroom”). This century also elected America’s first and only president with a
significant physical disability, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But even amidst the
rise in the disabled population and new disability policies, President Roosevelt
consciously hid his disability from the public; a testament to society’s reluctance to
accept people with disabilities into the mainstream, and particularly as the leader of the
Free World (Davis 23).

When Roosevelt contracted polio in 1921, he was already a public political figure,
having conquered the title of New York Senator, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and a
vice-presidential candidate in the 1920 presidential elections (Kiewe 89; Stein 38). Intent
on continuing his political career in spite of his polio, the need for masking his altered
physical state was understood as a necessity if he hoped to become president. Davis W.
Houck in “Reading the body in the text: FDR’s 1932 speech to the democratic national
convention,” affirms this concern, writing, “Roosevelt’s political enemies claimed that his crippled body automatically disqualified him from presidential duties” (20). Here Houck also provides a glimpse into public perception of the disabling aspects of a physical disability at this time.

Roosevelt’s seemingly ludicrous hopes for political success expressed the disproportionate emphasis the public placed on physical strength as a signifier of mental capabilities. Margaret “Daisy” Suckley, Roosevelt’s closest friend by the end of his life, wrote in her diary on August 7, 1933, “the President is a MAN - mentally, physically & spiritually - What more can I say” (qtd. Houck 20). In response, Houck writes, “why would Roosevelt be seen as anything other than a ‘MAN’” (20). This literary interaction incorporates ideals of manhood into the entangled relationship between body and mind, and as Houck specifies, “polio raised an additional issue – that of Roosevelt’s masculinity” (22).

This (assumedly irrelevant) connection between polio and masculinity emerges from “the body politic,” a sociological theory Moira Gatens argues is “‘a creation of men for men’” (qtd. Houck 22). As Houck explains, the president resides at the top of the body politic, and the individual seeking this role “‘should satisfy our expectations of ‘masculinity’” (qtd. Houck 22). “Masculinity” is admittedly a cultural construct, however, as R.W. Connelly states, “‘true masculinity . . . is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies’” (qtd. Houck 22). That said, a physically altering disability contests this ideal manhood and therefore impedes the individual’s quest for ultimate political success. As Houck writes, “The correlation, then, between masculinity and the
male body is ruptured precisely at the point of physical incapacity,” identifiable within Roosevelt’s reliance on a wheelchair (22).

According to Houck, “the masculine ideal” of the 1920’s “was to possess not only physical strength, but also to exercise mastery over one’s physical body” (23). In order to accomplish this bodily sovereignty, Roosevelt would have to prove to the public he had defeated polio’s adverse physical effects, because, “within the socio-historical context of masculinity and politics,” his polio rendered him “not ‘man enough’ to govern” (23). Critical, then, to Roosevelt’s political aspiration was the ability to appear physically strong and independent. Fortunately for Roosevelt, media had yet to advance past the stage of newspapers and radios, making the concealment of Roosevelt’s physical weakness relatively easier in comparison to today’s increasingly all-seeing visual-media-centered culture.

In acknowledgement of the body politic narrative, both Roosevelt and his political team structured his campaign around proving his physical abilities to the public. Houck writes, “Roosevelt’s disguise . . . was born of both personal insecurity and political necessity. To entertain any hopes of the presidency after his 1921 infection, Roosevelt believed that he had to show himself to the voting public as physically fit, in a word, he had to walk” (20). This strategy was applied merely two days after Roosevelt’s polio diagnosis, when The New York Times reported that Roosevelt “‘caught a heavy cold and was threatened with pneumonia' and was 'recovering slowly' (August 27, 1921)” (qtd. Houck 23). Once the thin disguise of a cold wore off, his doctor, George Draper, reassured the public that Roosevelt would regain his stride, publicly stating “‘you can say definitely that he will not be crippled. No one need have any fear of permanent injury
from this attack’” (qtd. Houck 23). This was the first of numerous press releases detailing Roosevelt’s falsified recovery. The extent of FDR’s role in this public deceit, however, remains unclear today. Regardless of who initiated this first exaggerated statement, the language-based media of newspapers and radio proceeded to portray Roosevelt as the man Draper here depicts for the remainder of his political career. Draper also directly addresses the fear “the disability” created in the early 20th century American ideal of individualism and self-reliance.  

Government policy after WW1 had little empathy for people with disabilities despite the increase in the disabled population. A 1924 Virginia law “allowed[ed] for sterilization without consent of the ‘feeble minded, insane, depressed, mentally handicapped, epileptic’” etc., showing the effort to prevent the “spread” of inherited disabilities (“Disability Rights”). The U.S. Supreme Court further supported this view when they “upheld the law in its 1927 Buck v. Bell decision,” leading to the beginnings of sterilization programs in twenty-seven other states (“Disability Rights”).

Daniel J Wilson, in “Braces, Wheelchairs, and Iron Lungs: the paralyzed body and the machinery of rehabilitation in the polio epidemics,” confirms that social dogma of the time would have supported this treatment of people with disabilities. Wilson writes, “While growing up in the thirties and forties,” there was “‘a general, perhaps unconsciously felt, fear of the disabled. This was not so much a fear of them but a fear of what they symbolized—human vulnerability to disease, disability, and death’” (176). Wilson here re-iterates Longmore’s earlier mentioned fear of people with disabilities. Apparent within this echo is the parallel between current cultural interpretations of

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2 Re-iterating Longmore’s earlier correlation between American fear and dependence.
disabilities and twentieth century view of people with disabilities. However, during Roosevelt’s presidency, this cultural animosity of people with disabilities was vocalized, as proven within Roosevelt’s political strategies.

A survey of Roosevelt’s accessories attests to Roosevelt’s awareness and manipulation of this credo. His leg braces were painted black to hide them amongst his socks and pant suit (Stein 38). He leaned on his sons and added extra support to his lectern for standing support to avoid using crutches (38). Doctor’s reports describing his physical health as near perfect were leaked to the media (38). Roosevelt’s public actions displayed a similar theme: when Roosevelt won the democratic nomination in 1932, he flew to Chicago to accept it in the flesh, a tradition unheard of at the time (Davis 22). Roosevelt did so, though, to prove the extent of his physical strength and fearlessness, which was amplified by the American public’s distrust in aviation at this time (23). The majority of Roosevelt’s posters showed only his face or him sitting at a desk, exemplifying the term “chained to his desk,” and publicizing a presidential image of Roosevelt that did not visibly portray his disability (Stein 39).
Paradoxically, while hiding his disability, Roosevelt also initiated the first policy improvements for people with disabilities. In 1921, before his presidential election, Roosevelt created the Rehabilitation Center in Warm Springs, Georgia, and granted control to his law partner, Basil O’Conner, in 1928 due to his demanding campaign schedule ("NMAH"). O’Conner turned the Rehabilitation Center into a non-profit, which he named the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. This non-profit raised money for polio research prevention and polio care, and O’Conner used Roosevelt’s name to increase its public visibility ("NMAH"). In 1938, actor Eddie Cantor changed the name
of the foundation to the “March of Dimes,” (its name today) which asked the public to send in dimes as their donations (Helfand, Lazarus, and Theerman).

In 1935, Roosevelt passed the Social Security Act, “establishing federally funded old-age benefits and funding to states for assistance to blind individuals and disabled children and extending existing vocational rehabilitation programs” (“Disability Rights”). The SSA personified Roosevelt’s “highest aspirations: universal health care, old-age pensions, [and] unemployment insurance;” proof of Roosevelt’s dedication to helping individuals, such as those with disabilities, who had both health and economic hardships (Kennedy). The SSA also exemplified Roosevelt’s commitment to public reform, noticeable within his own words, when he said, “we are trying to construct a more inclusive society. We are going to make a country in which no one is left out” (Perkins 113). And although “compromise after compromise whittled FDR's grand vision for a comprehensive system of social provision,” “those first steps have proved hugely consequential for generations of Americans,” such as the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid decades later, which improve the lives of people with disabilities today (Kennedy).³

These welfare programs resulted from the WW1 to the mid - 1970’s social understanding of “disabilities.” Defined as "the medical model," disability was explained as a “medically determined deficiency, rooted in the individual, inevitably leading to significant limitations or even total inability to participate in work and other major aspects of social life” (Kimberlin 28). As this literally reads, a person with a disability

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³ Medicare and Medicaid are government programs added as amendments to the SSA, signed by President Johnson in 1965, to "provide medical and health-related services to specific groups of people in the United States" (“What is Medicare/Medicaid?”).
was interpreted as lacking key components of the human form – they were mentally and/or physically “deficient” (33). The SSA appealed to this understanding of disabilities with its creation of a system of monetary and medical benefits that individually assessed the extent of that person’s “deficiency.” This valuation was based on the presumption that these individuals could not achieve social and financial independence, while ignoring the contradiction this language presented amidst Roosevelt’s personal achievements.

Regardless, though, of the adverse representation of disability the SSA ascribed to, this political recognition of disabilities was a major victory for Roosevelt and for the disability rights movement. Verifying the success of this first achievement was the 1940 establishment of The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped, the 1946 creation of The National Mental Health Foundation, which “exposed the abusive conditions at facilities and became an impetus towards deinstitutionalization,” and President Truman’s “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week,” also instituted in 1946 (“Disability Rights”). Contrary to Roosevelt’s minimal public exposure of his disability, his fight to pass the SSA clearly ignited the beginning formations of government programs to increase the visibility of disabled figures in public.

However, because polio’s physical effects on the president were expertly curtailed in the media, parameters were unknowingly set for the construction of his memorial; a framework that would block its completion for decades to come. This would lead to architectural issues when configuring the representation of this country’s only four-term serving president in his official memorial. Would the architect include his physical disability? And if not, what would be their reasons for not including Roosevelt’s body?
Would his visual legacy be to erase his disability, while his political legacy worked to include disabled people into the term “American?”

The first memorial depiction of Roosevelt on public property was easy to remove from the grasp of this perplexing representational dilemma: the dime. This coin was in part chosen in commemoration of Roosevelt’s work with the disabled population, and in particular, his role in creating the March of Dimes. And because of the size restrictions of a dime, this tribute avoided having to depict Roosevelt’s wheelchair (Stein 42).

The next aspect of Roosevelt’s life debated post-mortem was the future of his articles of support, “the material props that had enabled Roosevelt to serve as president,” that were consistent accessories to his livelihood (43). Roosevelt’s attempts during his presidency to conceal these apparatuses followed into his posthumous depiction, as “his braces were considered too unsightly to be exhibited with other FDR memorabilia at the family home on the Hudson River.” Furthermore, “many of the ramps throughout the capital were removed as soon as Harry Truman assumed the presidency,” as ironically, “the Hyde Park estate in New York became difficult for those who have trouble walking” (43). The description of his braces as “unsightly” appeals to the disability logos at this time, and the reversion to an inaccessible Hyde Park Estate underlines the attempt to erase from history Roosevelt’s reliance on a wheelchair.

Roosevelt’s internalization of the “the body politic” appears as well in his request to conceal the extent of his disability for future generations. In “The President’s Two bodies: Stagings and Restagings of FDR and the New Deal Body Politic,” Sally Stein argues that “just as he understood that the semblance of physical autonomy was essential to public acceptance, he also anticipated that few citizens after his death would want to
confront an explicit depiction of his impairment or his need to manage it” (43). Confirming this notion, Roosevelt described to Justice Felix Frankfurter his idea for his memorial: “[placed in the center of that green plot [in front of the National Archives in Washington D.C. should be] . . . a block about the size of this (putting his hand on his desk). I don’t care what it is made of, whether limestone or granite or what not, but I want it to be plain”” (qtd. Stein 43). Roosevelt’s vision materialized in 1966 and sits on the corner of 9th Street and Pennsylvania in Washington D.C., devoid of any representations of his disability. But Roosevelt’s admirers were unsatisfied with such simplicity, and enacted plans for a grander statement. However, this more ostentatious memorial would take half a century to execute, largely due to the issues Roosevelt anticipated (43).

A year after FDR’s death, the construction of a site in his honor was approved by a “congressional resolution” in July 1946, however, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission took another ten years to form. Finally settling on West Potomac Park as the location for this memorial in 1958, the commission announced a contest for its architectural design in 1960, and as Stein describes: “the terms for a 1960 design competition were remarkably open, stipulating principally that the memorial be ‘a

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4 I am unsure of why it took the commission ten years to form.
creative work of art and not a useful building . . . that look[s] . . . to the character and work of Franklin Roosevelt . . . and transmit[s] his living image to future generations”” (43). The vague guidelines and ambiguous language, such as “creative work of art,” and “character and work,” for the proposal were to allow for artistic leniency. However, this loose description also avoided any requirement for the physical display of Roosevelt; here abstract art was key. Because FDR’s disability was still a taboo subject, and the advancement of disability policy had only just begun, the congressional committee members perhaps hoped to avoid articulating how the architects should physically represent FDR. This loose language left the physical representation of Roosevelt up to the architect, thereby removing the responsibility in determining how FDR should be portrayed from the congressional committee (43). Many critics, however, thought it was absurd to believe that the public was unaware of Roosevelt’s disability. The argument went that such a public figure could not disguise such prevalent physical eccentricities (wheelchair, braces, etc.) because of his constant appearance in public (Clausen 25). However, as his eldest son, James Roosevelt, affirmed, “‘it amaz[ed] me how many people of that period were not even aware of father’s handicap’” (qtd. Houck 20).

The FDR Memorial Commission received over five hundred applications and settled upon William Pedersen and Bradford Tilney as the winning designers. Like the many rejected plans, theirs “[featured] tall shafts ‘to express the inspiration and hope that Roosevelt gave to the world,’” and contained many steps and extremely tall planks (Stein 44). Ironically, their memorial would have been inaccessible for Americans who, like Roosevelt, could not walk up “the ubiquitous terracing” (44). In response to their exclusion of any visual or explicit portrayal of FDR’s disabled body, the pair maintained
it was unnecessary due to the ample amount of publicly available photographs of Roosevelt (44). Slabs of material engraved with the President’s famous phrases reached as tall as 165ft to symbolize the “height” of Roosevelt’s presidential accomplishments (44). Because “the spare design of simple incised slabs ‘quite literally made FDR’s words his monument,’” they simultaneously functioned as a celebration of Roosevelt’s literal achievements, and a distraction from the missing depiction of Roosevelt, the man. Here, the visual representation of Roosevelt, or lack thereof, conceded to cultural interpretations of a disability. However, Roosevelt’s family disliked the absence of Roosevelt’s figure, leading to Pederson and Tilney’s resignation in 1965 (44).

While the commission renegotiated their strategy, the disability rights movement gained influence in federal policies. President John F. Kennedy was elected to office in 1961 at the heart of the civil rights movement. This movement came to symbolize not just the liberation of African-Americans in society, but all groups of people marginalized due to their differences. The disabilities movement would eventually use the unifying strategy of the civil rights movement to alter public perception of disabilities, commencing after the 1970’s. However, improved political policy advancing their assimilation occurred first, granting the movement political clout for this future cultural fight.
Political sociologist Sarah E. Kimberlin remarks on the necessary compatibility between disability politics and social representations of disabilities, writing, “political participation of people with disabilities and the theories underlying governmental disability policies are rooted in shifting societal conceptions of the nature of disability” (28). Changing representations noticeably began in the 1940’s and 1950’s with the emergence of “parent activists . . . fight[ing] for education and services for children with disabilities” (“Self-Definition and Autonomy”). By the 1950’s, advancing medical technology increased the survival of people with “formerly fatal injuries and diseases,” and “efforts by this growing population of military veterans and young adults to participate fully in society gained momentum” (“Self-Definition and Autonomy”). The children with disabilities of this era grew up demanding this inclusion, sparking a need for new disability policy by the 1960’s.

President Kennedy’s administration appealed to this desire, and “appointed a special President’s Panel on Mental Retardation [calling] for the deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities and increase in community services” (“Disability Rights”). Kennedy next signed “The 1963 Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Health Centers Construction Act,” which “authorized federal grants for construction of public and private nonprofit community mental health centers” (“Disability Rights”). Remarkning on the creation of this act, President Kennedy said on October 24, 1963, “we can say with some assurance that, although children may be the victims of fate, they will not be the victims of our neglect” (“Disability Right”).

Although Kennedy was killed nearly a month later, the push towards integration of people with disabilities into mainstream society had just begun. When Lyndon
Johnson took over as President in 1964, he continued advocating for people with disabilities. That year he signed the Civil Rights Act, Medicare and Medicaid were established in 1965 as amendments to the SSA, Veteran’s Affairs were expanded in 1965 thanks to the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments, “[authorizing] federal funds for construction of rehabilitation centers, expansion of existing VR programs and creation of the National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped” in 1968, which “prohibited architectural barriers in all federally owned or leased buildings” (“Disability Rights”). These initiatives opened doors (literally) for people with disabilities, disproving the medical model’s devaluation of them, and fueling their imminent demand to change the political and cultural understanding of a disability.

Coinciding with the restlessness of the disability movement was the veteran members of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Commission’s re-visitation of the construction of Roosevelt’s memorial. Rescinding the open competition in anticipation of bypassing the same conclusion as the previous plan, they asked Marcel Breuer to design the project (Stein 45). Breuer was a German immigrant, well known for his modernist approach to design, and perhaps the commission hoped his affinity for abstract art would better appeal to their visions of this commemoration (Gatje).

Breuer’s proposal did indeed differ from that of the past. Instead of giant blocks, he showcased triangles of a much shorter stature only reaching 60 feet in height (Stein 45). Breuer’s seven triangles would encircle a suspended cube of thirty-two feet, which would display a “reproduction of a photojournalistic portrait of FDR. Like a newspaper halftone, it was composed of dots that, depending on the viewer’s distance, would merge more or less into a recognizable image” (45).
However, Breuer’s drawings failed once again to visibly depict FDR’s disability. This missing component upset the District of Columbia Commission of Fine Arts, who rejected the proposal in 1967, although the FDR Commission had previously accepted it in 1966 (45). The public explanation for denying this proposal was an artistic disagreement, claiming the portrayal of Roosevelt’s face was “too modernistic . . . and too trendy in its references to pop art” (45).

Breuer’s design invoked many other criticisms as well that were directly related to the depiction of Roosevelt’s physical body. Critics condemned the minimal exposure of Roosevelt’s picture, which was disguised by the surrounding triangular sculptures (Stein 45). His face, as a conglomerate of various sized spots, too closely resembled his appearance in the media. Some contended this display was evocative of Roosevelt’s “inaccessibility except via the mass media” because his head was his most circulated public image, which Breuer had cited as his reason for incorporating only Roosevelt’s face (45). Furthermore, the cube appeared to be suspended in mid-air, but was in fact reliant on a block, reminiscent of Roosevelt’s falsified media depictions as independently stable (45).

Many interpreted this portrait of Roosevelt as mimicking Roosevelt’s relationship with the public and his disability: deceiving the public through tricks of image just like Breuer was deceiving the public through architectural tricks. Explaining his artistic
decision, Breuer said, “‘I chose the cube because it is the very center, the very base of
form - practically perfect . . . The globe is comparable, but it isn’t static; it moves too
much. I preferred the great stability, the ‘standing power,’ of the cube. FDR had ‘standing
power’ too’” (qtd. Stein 45). Breuer’s metaphor visually articulated the disability logos
because he incorporated the cube into Roosevelt’s physical illustration. Deeming it
“practically perfect” defined Roosevelt as almost perfect too, and excluding Roosevelt’s
body thereby iterated his disability as hindering to his political perfection. Breuer’s
description of Roosevelt’s “standing power” confused his intentions as well, because
Roosevelt could not independently stand; outlasting any other president by two terms, his
power to stay, much more than stand, pertained to Roosevelt’s presidential career (45).

The rejection by the District of Columbia Commission of Fine Arts proved that a
key aspect of Roosevelt was missing from the memorial, however, this commission failed
to articulate the details of their disapproval. This missing piece once more encapsulated
public discomfort with admitting to Roosevelt’s physical disability. Public sentiment
appeared to understand the need for such acknowledgement, yet no individual was
willing to bravely admit this truth.

After Breuer resigned from his project in 1969, the Memorial Commission took a
five-year hiatus before consulting the Department of Interior for help locating the next
proposal (45). During these five years, the disabilities rights movement would settle on a
new mode for advancing disability representation, easing the next architect’s task of how
he or she would configure Roosevelt and his achievements.

Kimberlin argues this shift occurred in public meanings of disability as images of
disability moved away from the medical model to what is known as the social model.
Within this (social) model, people with disabilities “were limited not by their physical or mental impairments per se but rather by society’s failure to consider their needs when designing the built and social environment” (28). Inaccessible architecture and urban design, as Kimberlin explains, create environments that make disabilities invisible. Kimberlin further writes, "'Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society'" (qtd. 29). As Kimberlin indicates, the environment itself enforces the invisibility of the disabled, administering their status as second-class, or minority citizens (as unAmericans). Further differentiating from the medical model’s individualization of disabled persons’ deficiencies was the social model’s emphasis on we, merging all disabled people into one disabled person with one resounding cause.

Through the final decades of the 20th century, disability rights activists insisted that they, “the disabled,” were a minority group deserving of civil rights (Kimberlin 30). As Kimberlin asserts, “The movement emphasized the common experience of discrimination as a unifying identity” (30). Attaining civil rights promoted not just a chance at “material gains” (medical model) but also “empowerment and transformation of the consciousness of their members” by recognizing their strength in numbers and right to this fight (30). This struggle resulted in two transformative acts: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), “enacted by Congress in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education, just like other children,” and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), "a law embodying the sociopolitical view of disability and a civil rights model of disability" (‘IDEA-;’ Kimberlin 32). The IDEA and ADA encompassed the social
model’s application of “the disabled” by attempting⁵ to curb marginalization through increased educational and environmental accessibility; regardless of specific disability limitations, all people with disabilities could expect incorporation into public education and environments. The ADA accomplished public inclusion through initiatives like building codes, street codes, and workers’ rights protecting people with disabilities from discrimination, as well as permitting requests for adaptations at work (“Americans with Disabilities Act”).

Although pivotal to the social model, “the disabled” also creates problems for the disabled identity. Shakespeare suggests that “one of the dangers of [this] essentialism . . . is that it provides a simplistic reductionism, an ‘us and them’ approach. While this is comforting and secure, it offers risks” (108). Shakespeare’s use of “essentialism” denotes the universal characterization of “disability” as encompassing all people with disabilities, politicized by the social model. “The disabled,” then, culminates within one body of people nullified by the same oppression, and thereby emphasizes the distinction between the disabled and the non-disabled. “The disabled,” as well, invalidates the unique experience of each individual with a disability based on their type and functionality (high-low) of disability, as well as the other aspects of that individual’s identity (sex, gender, race, class, etc). However, the inherent contradiction within the “disabled cause” is that both unification and individualization are necessary for advancing political and

⁵ I write “attempting” because IDEA and ADA exemplify political acceptance of public inclusion of disabilities, but social society retains marginalization, as I will later depict through close-reading of literal language.
social representations; one of the many paradoxes associated with the disability rights movement.⁶

Accompanying this matured political attitude of disability was the congressional committee’s next memorial attempt. Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, a memorial committee member, recommended modern architect Lawrence Halprin, a West Coast designer known for pioneering landscape architecture (Martin; Stein 45). Halprin’s proposal was accepted six years later in 1975, and gained preliminary approval in 1976 from the District of Columbia Commission of Fine Arts (45). Complete funding for his project was not appropriated until the late 1980’s, due to setbacks from the Vietnam War, and ground was not officially broken until 1991 (45). Construction of FDR’s official presidential memorial began forty-six years after his death.

This memorial consisted of numerous natural settings and various statues, including Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, and nine differing representations of citizens, designed by an array of architect’s chosen by Halprin (45). “Halprin’s plan was far more expansive, appearing to offer something for everyone, a middle-of-the-road compromise strategy that had an appeal in the war-weary, post-Watergate era . . . Instead of rising high, Halprin’s memorial would extend parklike over seven and one-half acres on one side of the Tidal Basin,” Stein explains (46). But Halprin, too, grappled with how to represent FDR’s physical body. As Stein reports,

“In his notes from 12 March 1974 [Halprin] indicated that he would like something ‘bigger than life, standing with cape and cane and braces -

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⁶ Extremely beneficial to a person with a disability’s life are both government welfare programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security Disability Insurance, and Social Security Income, resulting from the medical model, and the creation of the ADA and IDEA, stemming from the social model.
because that’s how most of us remember [FDR].’ Four days later, Halprin changed his mind . . . [and] also admitted to himself, ‘The statue issue is a tough one in terms of scale. Also should [FDR] be seated as he normally was when we saw him or standing . . . I think sitting is better—but how?’”

(46)

Halprin’s articulation of “standing” to imply a “bigger than life” attitude signified the still current relationship between power and physical strength. Yet his contemplation of incorporating Roosevelt’s braces and cane into this embodied ideal exposed advanced cultural willingness to represent Roosevelt’s disability. However, Halprin questioned how to depict Roosevelt seated, delineating, once again, uneasiness with memorializing Roosevelt’s wheelchair; Halprin only felt comfortable exposing so much of Roosevelt’s physical weakness. His quandaries also harp upon the falsity of media depiction during Roosevelt’s presidency because, although Roosevelt was most often usually depicted as seated, Halprin understood Roosevelt’s wheelchair was purposefully missing from these images (46).

Halprin’s various standing and sitting statues (Stein 48)

The issues interspersed throughout the construction of Halprin’s memorial do well to define the difficulties at the time both aligned with normalizing disabilities in society, and associating abilities with the word “disabilities.” His decision to include a number of standing and seated statues of ordinary citizens intended to distract the public from the position of Roosevelt’s body, whether seated or not (Stein 47). As Stein explains,
“Halprin must have hoped that amidst a throng of figures – some were standing, others were sitting - relativity would prevail and distract viewers from the long-vexing issue of how to visualize the leaders powers to govern and inspire” (47). The fear that Roosevelt’s disability would impede a visitor’s understandings of his success exemplifies the difficulties in altering the accepted concept associated with “disabled.”

The final display of Roosevelt would function as a culmination of many ideas, as Halprin attempted to please both Roosevelt’s family and supporters (47). For example, his size would be larger than the other statues to display his overbearing presence, however he would be seated (47). As Stein details,

“The three-dimensional rendering includes minor allusions to FDR’s physical impairment - the tiny wheels added discreetly to the high-backed armchair, disproportionately thin lower limbs, one of which juts out awkwardly from beneath the cape, and the rather abrupt postural shift between the arrangement of legs off to one side and the torso, hands and head facing forward - without directly acknowledging his handicap.” (49)

The wheels Stein mentions are oddly placed at the bottom of Roosevelt’s chair and are hardly visible due to the giant cape hanging around his neck (47). This inclusion of his wheelchair, yet its diminutive presence, suggests Halprin’s determination to include Roosevelt’s disability without granting it any attention. The sculpture would therefore still exude power and strength due to Roosevelt’s magnified size, without the presence of his disability threatening this message, while visually ascribing to the disability logos.
Contrary to the literal translation of the sculpted Roosevelt, the statute appears to echo Roosevelt’s attitude towards his disability. According to Stein, the minimal exposure of Roosevelt’s wheelchair renders it unacknowledged, very similar to Roosevelt’s public representation of himself and his disability (47). Neal Eastern was the architect chosen to design Roosevelt’s statue, and in Kelli Peduzzi’s children’s book, “Shaping a President: Sculpting for the Roosevelt Memorial,” she pictorially details Eastern’s sculpting process, among others, and writes, “‘Neil wants to suggest the disability but doesn’t want it to be the first thing people notice’” (qtd. Stein 49). And, as Stein argues, Peduzzi’s critique is illustrated as follows:

“To defer consideration of the cloaked body, Estern lavished attention on the elaborately braided closures of the naval officer’s cape, the carving on the signet ring that adorns the left hand, the deep ridges of wrinkles in both hands and face, and the rhythmic waves of hair. In case these surface details are not sufficiently distracting, there is also the diversion of a dog posed beside the commander in chief.” (49)

As this projection of Roosevelt displays, disability discourse of the 1990’s still struggled to accept Roosevelt’s disability as an accomplice to his political achievements. And although Roosevelt’s disability was finally included in his memorial, Peduzzi and Stein’s
criticism of Eastern’s work resounded within the disability rights movement; his wheelchair’s camouflaged presence did little to appease this audience.

Disability activists, agreeing on their disapproval of Eastern’s artistic representation, could not agree on why they disapproved (Stein 50). Some blamed the public during the time of FDR’s presidency, claiming FDR did not want to hide his disability but did so out of a reaction to the social stigma of disabilities (50); others alleged that the media concealed FDR’s disability more than he would have liked. Another argument advocated for emphasizing his disability because it provided the president with a source of strength due to his need to overcome adversity (50). Some said that had Roosevelt been alive today, he would have unarguably wanted to be a symbol for the disability rights movement (50). And finally, others admitted that Roosevelt may not have wanted to be a central figure for disability activism, however, “regardless of what Roosevelt did or wanted, identification of his disability at this time would provide needed inspiration” (51).

Although by the 1990’s the movement had attained a plethora of political victories, the problems with Roosevelt’s sculpted display exposed how much further the movement had to advance. Yes, people with disabilities could take public transit, enter most buildings, and no longer had to worry about being fired for necessary adaptations. However, people with disabilities were still marginalized and expected to be less able to achieve success; disabilities were acknowledged yet still not accepted into the "us" majority, exemplified within Roosevelt’s visual articulation. Hoping that encompassing the president’s disability within his memorial would endorse the need for public acceptance of people with disabilities, “the mid-1990s disability activists began
advocating changes in representation of the president to indicate that his reliance on wheelchairs, braces, or canes corresponded to the condition of ‘millions of others living with disability,’” and as many activists alleged, Eastern’s work lacked this influence (Stein 51).

Just as adamant, though, were those opposed to enunciating Roosevelt’s disability, with some claiming such a depiction would erase his presidential era’s representation of disabilities, thereby belittling the need for advancements (Stein 52). Others argued Roosevelt wanted to help those facing adversity, but not be categorized as one of them, “to remember him as disabled would be akin to taking his image in vain, violating his express wishes” (52). Here importance was placed not on the positive impact this memorial could have for the movement, but on accurately encapsulating history.

Such varied interpretations of Roosevelt’s outlook on his disability glorified the discontinuity of the disability rights movement. Should disabilities be acknowledged, and if so, should they be highlighted within public discourse? Finally, though, a circulation of two photos of Roosevelt in his wheelchair, proving the wheelchairs existence, ended the debates. As President Clinton announced, “he would ask Congress to mandate inclusion of a second statue of Roosevelt, this time sitting in a wheelchair” (Stein 52). Some have taken issue with the size of the wheelchair, claiming the small wheels and tiny back make the wheelchair appear like it was made for a doll (52). However, disability activists in favor of altering Eastern’s sculpture could rest.

The disability movement’s vacillating response to Eastern’s design raises the perplexing moral intent of Roosevelt’s memorial. That is – is the intention of a memorial
to memorialize the past for the sake of the present, or to remember the past as it was amidst the changing scope of present ideals? When Halprin searched the media for pictures of Roosevelt to aid his decision in the representation of the former president, almost all the photographs and posters he found displayed a seated president, or just his neck and face. Therefore, including Roosevelt’s wheelchair seemed to falsify aspects of his presidential career. That being said, the question remained, should this memorial enclose America’s past ignorance, or should it exhibit the advanced representations of the present (Stein 47)?

Prominent Washington journalist Daniel Schorr adds another dimension to this query, as he questions the fox fur shawl missing from sculpted Eleanor Roosevelt and the missing cigarette holder from FDR’s statue, two of the Roosevelts’ distinguishing accessories (Kiewe 88). Schorr asks whether or not Eleanor would have been an animal activist today, retiring her fox fur, and whether or not Roosevelt would have discouraged cigarette smoking (88). Likewise, in lieu of Roosevelt’s dedication to appearing physically strong, it is presumptuous to assume Roosevelt would have campaigned for disability rights; or as Schorr asks, “why does everybody with a cause seem to know that FDR and Eleanor today would be sharing that cause” (88)?

But the half-century long controversy of the Roosevelt memorial overruled the contemplation of such hesitations; the memorial was not intended for the Roosevelts or to acknowledge America’s past mistakes. In “The Body as Proof: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Preparations for the 1932 Presidential Campaign,” Amos Kiewe writes, “disability rights groups, however, demanded that the biases of his own time not be countenanced in ours” (88). Roosevelt’s memorial had come to embody a vision larger than its contents, much
like Roosevelt’s larger than life presence. Finally showcasing the extent of Roosevelt’s disability, his memorial would officially function as a tool for advancing disability representation due to the inclusion of the president’s disability as a component of his successes.

Roosevelt’s memorial was completed on May 2, 1997 (Stein 52). As Clinton proclaimed, “‘a statue portraying his disability will stand as a reminder to current and future generations of Americans that disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way diminished the ability of a person to fully participate in all aspects of American life’” (52). Clinton here confirms the late twentieth century doctrine of disabilities, as exemplified within Roosevelt’s public display of his disability (or lack thereof), the media’s denial of his disability, and the hesitation of the various characters involved in creating the memorial to admit to his disability. The distance American cultural representation of disability has come surfaces within Clinton’s words, too, because of this eventual enforcement of prominently displaying Roosevelt’s disability in his memorial.

![Clinton’s mandated second FDR sculpture (Stein 53)](image)

This public acceptance took decades to accomplish; however, the acknowledgement of a disability does not further advance the portrayal of a person with a
disability. This change in society’s representation of people with disabilities has in fact allowed for a continued iterance of past disability logos, as Kiewe writes,

“Subsequent political and present-day attitudes make it amply clear that a man handicapped as Roosevelt was would stand no chance of reaching the White House today. In an age where pictures trump words, television would mercilessly fix in every viewer’s mind the very images of physical helplessness that FDR largely managed to avoid.” (92)

Surfacing within Kiewe’s words is the current continued association between disability and weakness, and the ongoing relevancy of the “body politic.” Many critics agree with Kiewe’s assumption, dispelling the notion that cultural interpretations of disabilities has improved. And although Houck claims “the body’s performance was vital to one’s masculinity in the 1920’s,” clearly twenty-first century culture agrees with this claim. Our visual-media obsessed culture would likely dismiss Roosevelt as a presidential candidate due to the probable exaggerated media exposure of his disability; an articulation of the consistent cultural interpretations of a person with a disability throughout the last few centuries.

Still today, then, the stigma of weak, helpless, and sickly loudly adheres to the concept of disabled. A disabled person is no longer removed from public representation, like in the past decades, however the presence of physical differences is still considered an abnormality. As current disability representation therefore confirms, public endorsement of disabilities has only made the vocalization of the disability logos socially acceptable.

5. Transforming Language
A photographic account of Roosevelt’s Hyde Park estate appears in the May 29, 1939 edition of LIFE magazine. The article includes this picture (“The Photographic Essay”):

The caption below it reads: “The entrance hall, opening from the door under the portico, leads through an arched hallway to the library, whose parchment lamp can be seen behind sofa. Behind the President’s chairs is a statue of him done in 1911 when he was a senator. On the wall at right are paintings of burning ships” (“The Photographic Essay”). When quickly glancing at this photograph, a reader might see a room with furniture in it, and the caption would confirm this initial interpretation. However, upon a closer look, the reader might notice Roosevelt’s wheelchair; a rare public sighting in 1939. There is an odd dichotomy between the detailed components of this room in this caption, and missing detail describing the two types of chairs in the photograph. This missing detail exemplifies the interdependent relationship between visual images and words, as well as both of their representational influences on cultural interpretations.
Although the image includes Roosevelt’s wheelchair, the assumedly purposeful missing accentuation of this fact iterates LIFE’s hesitation to boldly disclose Roosevelt’s disability. Perhaps LIFE felt comfortable printing this picture because Roosevelt was halfway through his presidential career, thereby lessening the media’s caution towards exposing his disability. But in this situation, language is necessary to confirming the magazine’s intentional display of Roosevelt’s wheelchair. Based on LIFE’s description of this picture, one could surmise the public’s discomfort with Roosevelt’s disability, displaying the strength of language to capture social dogma; here linguistic representation trumps pictorial representation. An alternative argument surfaces as well - that in not defining the chair as a “wheelchair,” LIFE was normalizing the representation of a disability. However, social credo of the mid-1900’s caused the purposeful exclusion of FDR’s disability from his public representation, supporting the negative reading of this caption. The reading of this picture therefore confirms the influence linguistic representation has over cultural interpretations of visuals.

So far, we have looked at the visual cultural representations, and subsequent linguistic representations, of Roosevelt’s disability, or the absence of any such visual and linguistic representations. The public visual display throughout his presidential career and majority memorial controversy is a message of the invisibility of disability. However, today’s visual-media centered culture renders this invisibility impossible, attesting to Kiewe’s claim that Roosevelt would not win a current presidential election. If one were only to examine the current visual display of a disability, the unavoidable encapsulation of public figures’ disabilities would appear to contradict the notion that cultural representations have not changed. But, when looking at other representations, specifically
linguistic representations of disability, these cultural representations remain consistent with the cultural representations of the past few centuries. Our disability lexicon, then, must be rewritten so that it includes the perspective of everyone (disabled and non-disabled). To accomplish this, the language used to discuss (to “name”) disability, and people with disabilities, must be inverted to expose the “other” perspective.

Lauren witnessed one example of this inversion. She attended a panel of University of California, Berkeley students who use wheelchairs discussing their activist group called, “Are Cripples Screwed.” The subject of this panel was the normal sex-life of people with disabilities, and their name resulted in a play-on-words. Taking back ownership of the word “crippled,” these students removed the word’s pejorative interpretation that has become incorporated into our society’s terminology; crippled, in this instance, literally means people who have trouble walking (Hoffman). Afterwards Lauren told me, "For the first time I actually understood that I was in a room with people who sit through life instead of stand, not in a room with people with disabilities" ("Lauren Hersch"). She, like me, has lived with a brother in a wheelchair her entire life, and yet it was not until she was a part of the minority that her perspective was inverted. Suddenly she was looking at the world from the perspective of the people in wheelchairs on stage, placing her in the “other” category as someone who often stood; roles were reversed and the disability lexicon was defined by this minority.

Examining Kiewe’s final comments on current adverse implications of media exposure exemplifies the stagnation of cultural interpretation of disability, even amidst advancing government policy. Currently accepted literal phrases verify the consistence of these cultural interpretations, and the need to encompass minority perspective more
consciously into verbal language. For example, Roosevelt’s “standing power” was a metaphor for his strength as a four-time elected president, manifested too within the structural content of the first two memorial plans. When an individual presents an excellent speech or performs well in a play, they receive a “standing ovation,” excluding all individuals unable to stand and creating a similar analogy that furthers their marginalization (Coogan 180). A job well done is congratulated with an “outstanding performance,” or a “stand-up job,” and when an individual behaves poorly, they are metaphorically “looked down upon” (180). “Blind” “is used in colloquial English to imply ignorance or stupidity; i.e., ‘turned a blind-eye,’ ‘blind to the fact,’ or ‘What? Are you blind’” (“Style Guide”). When searching for the term "disabled" in a newspaper, "disabled" delineates the disengagement, or failure, of a machine, such as the phrase: "despite shooting from unidentified snipers that disabled their convoy's lead vehicle," making "disabled" synonymous with an inability to function (Gordon and Landler). In Major League Baseball, players are put on the "disabled list" when they are hurt, allowing the team to "temporarily add other healthy players," while defining "disabled" as unhealthy ("Disabled List - DL"). Disability, therefore, is linguistically enshrined, even in the twenty-first century, as a culmination of cultural representations of disability persistent throughout the last several centuries.

Disability theorist Tom Coogan claims this literal negative contextualization of people with disabilities, and the word "disabled," oppresses people with disabilities; he labels it "oppressive language" (180). And, as the National Center for Disability Journalism explains, “using ‘blind’ as a synonym for ‘ignorant’ is inaccurate and perpetuates stereotypes,” an argument that applies to all of the phrases presented above.
These literal representations of disability reinforce the binary able/disable and the preference for able within society. Such accidental vocalization of the disability logos supports the need to change language to incorporate all people’s perspectives.

Negative cultural representations of disabilities are re-iterated and confirmed every time such phrases are incorporated into language. As Brewster writes, “Non-disabled society, being the dominant group, creates a discourse of disability that is inevitably ideological, encompassing as it does ideas regarding relative status and worth” (128). Here Brewster details language’s ability, when determined by the majority, to establish two different groups in society and depict the preferred group (non-disabled). Every time such language is used, the oppression of people with disabilities remains intact, and the individual with the disability consciously, or unconsciously, internalizes this oppression (S. Hersch). Their identity then results from this internalization, often negatively affecting their view of their own self-worth (S. Hersch). Therefore, looking at language used in connection to disabilities translates into cultural interpretations of people with disabilities, and helps to explain the still present undervaluation of a person with a disability in society.

Language’s power to graph concepts of weakness onto the disabled identity can be exemplified within the term “caretaker.” In “Making ‘Care’ Accessible: Personal Assistance for Disabled People and The Politics of Language,” Christine Kelly explains the word “care” “as a complex form of oppression.” Kelly claims this oppression results from the assumption that people who are disabled are in need of dependence on someone else for their wellbeing (563). Elaborating on this explanation, Kelly writes:
In the context of disability, care is haunted by the specters of institutionalization, medicalization and paternalistic charities which, in varying degrees past and present, systematically marginalize people with disabilities . . . literary and figurative institutions still exist worldwide and policy frameworks continue to reflect oppressive ideologies under the guise of ‘caring for’ people with disabilities.” (565)

The idea expressed within this quote implies that “care” has come to mean a lack of control over oneself, complying with signifieds attached to the word “disabled.” And although political policy has advanced by acknowledging that a person with a disability needs extra help, the language of this policy devalues this political victory. Kelly demonstrates this interpretation through a comparison of a “caretaker” to a “personal assistant,” where the former implies a person helping an individual with a disability, and the latter pertains to a person helping an individual of great wealth and/or responsibility. But both personal assistants and caretakers have jobs requiring similar objectives: to run the errands and complete the tasks asked of them by their employer to ease their employer’s life. Both titles pertain to the same job, but personal assistant, equated with "support’ or ‘attendant services,” are informed by the notions of choice and control,” in comparison to the word "caretaker,” which denotes a reliance on another (Kelly 566). This dependence on another human being has become a defining negative aspect of having a disability, and society’s aversion towards dependence further restricts the integration of people with disabilities into the mainstream.

7 “Medicaid Caregiver”: Medicaid allocates money for an individual’s “caregiver.” Details of qualifications and monetary amount are state-based (“How Do I Become”).

8 As Longmore earlier explains on pg. 10.
Above I provide clear examples within literal phrasing that encompass the
disability logos, imprison it, and re-circulate it. But because language informs our reality,
language also functions as a tool for changing cultural representations of disabilities. As
Klages writes, “Material practices can be changed by legislations (such as laws requiring
wheelchair accessibility and the availability of telecommunications devices for deaf
people and blind people), but attitudinal barriers require the revision of cultural images
and meanings” (Woeful Afflictions 3). Here Klages advocates for thinking beyond
government policy when attempting to resolve the marginalization of people with
disabilities.

Kelly's suggestion to change the term "caretaker," provides an example of one
area of "cultural images and meanings" that can be altered to create a positive view of a
person with a disability (Woeful Afflictions 3). A few disability organizations have also
adopted literal language as a platform for representational advancement by publishing
variants of a “Disability Style Guide” online for current journalists (“Style Guide”).
These are not forced rules for journalists to follow, nor read, but serve as resources for
journalists covering stories about people with disabilities. The National Center for
Disability Journalism, the Research and Training Center on Independent Living, the
Society of Professional Journalists, Parent to Parent of New York State, and the Special
Interest Group on Accessible Computing are the most comprehensive guidelines I have
found, and provide an array of concerns within literal language wherein people with
disabilities are adversely depicted. These organizations emphasize the use of person-first
language (a person with ____), the current politically accepted disability lexicon, and
certain hampering portrayals of an individual with a disability. In specific, RTCIL\textsuperscript{9} discusses “portrayal issues” as follows: “do not focus on disability, do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman or heroes, do not sensationalize a disability, do not use generic labels, put people first, emphasize abilities, do not use condescending euphemisms, do not imply disease, [and] show people with disabilities as active” (“Guidelines”).

After a continuous three month survey of the online sites of the top three most widely circulated newspapers in the country (\textit{The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times}, and \textit{USA Today}, respectively), I have found a variety of articles that exhibit the lexical prejudices that RTCIL, and its fellow contemporaries, warn against. Through a close reading of these articles, I will explain what the implications of the authors’ particular word choices are, and then show how these phrases and/or sections can be rewritten to remove and/or alter the disability logos. In providing examples that incorporate said representations, I affirm the paramount need to further promote these resources, as well as identify additional antagonistic linguistic portrayals of people with disabilities. This process will articulate the effect these literal depictions have on the disabled identity that is both internalized by an individual with a disability, and displayed in nondisabled society.

The first stage of this process analyzes the word choice and structure of sentences within these certain articles that intentionally, or unintentionally, display the disability logos. In “Autistic Man Breaks through Silence,” an article written by Emily Le Coz on July 14, 2013, a plethora of sentences exemplify this deterministic language. Such

\textsuperscript{9} Research and Training Center on Independent Living
sentences and/or phrases are as follows, wherein the phrases I proceed to rewrite are highlighted.\textsuperscript{10} “The last word Watson Dollar spoke before autism erased his ability to do so was ‘lights;’” “Watson had lost almost all of his 150-word vocabulary along with an interest in the world;” “The Dollars got the dreaded diagnosis on May 17, 1993;” “They did everything they could to loosen autism’s grip, but it wouldn’t let go;” “The disorder had permanently severed communication in their only child and, in doing so, isolated him from the world;” “Watson was lost, and he wasn’t coming back;” “Because she doubted he’d understand a verbal explanation;” “Watson not only understood, but he was able to respond — albeit slowly and while clutching her hand;” “People like Watson who have autism suffer deficits;” “Hallmark signs of the disorder include a lack of eye contact, limited or absent language;” “Others, like Watson, are labeled low functioning because they lack language and a means with which to connect to the world;” “the odd behavior of the young man obscures his inner world;” “Watson leans back in his recliner and stares at the ceiling while unintelligibly reciting the script of a favorite movie;” “Otherwise, he seems lost, disconnected, on his own;” “‘These incessant questions,’ Watson replies . . . ‘Incessant.’ \textbf{Not a feeble-minded word.}\textsuperscript{10} 

Similar phrasing appears in “Challenged, but Determined to Compete for the Tiara,” an article written by Neil Genzlinger on June 23, 2013. They are as follows:

“\textbf{Challenged, but Determined to Compete for the Tiara: ‘Miss You Can Do It’ Showcases Challenged Girls;}” “Others can’t speak or can barely be understood when they do;” “The

\textsuperscript{10} These sentences are rewritten later, and the highlighted sections are either removed or rewritten. The highlight is meant to call the reader’s attention to the section within the phrase (or entire phrase) that articulates a component of the disability logos.
parents of these children talk movingly about **coming to grips with the news that their child would be disabled.**"

And finally, “Theme Park Policy Angers Parents of Special-Needs Kids,” written by Rachel Richardson on June 13, 2013, includes the phrases: **“Disabled guests** now have to request a boarding time for rides, **but autistic kids can go ballistic while they wait,”**

“Visits to the park eased his anxiety and offered a **respite from the day-to-day challenges of living with autism.**”

At first glance, the importance of these phrases may seem trivial. But, as Saussure’s system of language and the linguistic relativity hypothesis explain, language determines cultural interpretations of concepts. These phrases verbalize signifieds associated with “disability,” and when an individual reads these articles, they are unknowingly adding these signifieds to their own interpretation of disabilities.

These examples provide areas within these articles where an exchange of words, or re-organization of the article, would portray a disability differently. Coogan helps articulate this possibility through literary definitions given by twentieth century post-structuralist Michel Foucault, and Saussure, writing, “in the Foucauldian view of discourse . . . the speaking/writing ‘subject’ is presented simultaneously as being subject to a non-negotiable cultural ideology, and as an agent that engages with cultural meanings that are ‘contingent, negotiable, and revisable’ (2002, 285)” (280). Foucault’s understanding of a subject’s relationship with society, then, becomes chained both to a culture’s unarguable belief system, as well as a person’s ability to discuss, and perhaps alter, such cultural beliefs. This would place the signifier disability, and its associated signifieds, as non-negotiable within the accepted cultural ideal, but also as a concept for a
person to discuss and play with. However, Coogan continues to write that when incorporating “Saussure’s structuralist theory of language . . . the subject agency that Foucault describes only [occurs] within the rules of a whole social system that demands subjection (2003, 165–166)” (280). As Coogan’s thought delineates, modifying these “rules” provides the possibility for changing cultural interpretations of disabilities. This responsibility, however, lands on the verbal members of society, because those who are non-verbal lack the means that are necessary to create their own definition of disabled (Coogan 280). These non-verbal individuals have a lesser ability to offer an alternative lexicon because of social society’s emphasis on verbal language. Foucault articulates this preference within the binary speaking/writing, in which he claims the act of speaking is valued above writing in our culture (“Klages on Poststructuralism/Derrida”).

And although all individuals with disabilities are not non-verbal, nondisabled society, being the majority dominant population, has greater influence over disability discourses. The authors of these articles use nondisabled diction, however, their language can be changed to become inclusive without nullifying their original intention(s). This malleability of language thereby confirms Longmore’s view of the disabled identity as a “constructed identity.” Coogan continues to explain that, “the possibility of finding a ‘new language, and, therefore, new discourse to provide the means with which to speak,’” can lead to a disability as an experience that “‘can be expressed in a non-oppressive way ahead of language’s evolution’ (2003, 180)” (280).

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11 Derrida’s speak/writing binary places spoken word and written word on opposite sides of the binary, where spoken word is preferred to written word in our culture (“Klages on Poststructuralism/Derrida”).

12 First referenced and discussed on pg. 10
restructuring these phrases can allow for narratives that are absent of the disability logos, and thereby reconstruct how these authors portray people with disabilities.

Coogan’s solution can be applied to these articles by rewriting the aforementioned highlighted words. In “Autistic Man Breaks through Silence,” this first phrase, “The last word Watson Dollar spoke before autism erased his ability to do so was ‘lights,’” dramatizes the effect autism has had on Dollar’s communication, and places importance on the ability to verbalize a word. Instead, though, the sentence can read, “The last word Watson Dollar spoke before autism altered his mode of communication was ‘lights,’” implying autism changed Dollar’s usage of language, but did not rid Dollar of the ability to communicate. Deleting “erased” also removes the negative portrayal of the effects of autism on an individual. The phrase, “Watson had lost almost all of his 150-word vocabulary along with an interest in the world,” portrays Watson’s autism as having reduced both Watson’s intellectual abilities and his curiosities. In writing “the world,” Le Coz portrays the assumption that Watson’s now non-verbal language pertains to a disinterest in everything, again exaggerating the ways in which autism has affected Watson. Instead, writing “Watson had lost his ability to verbally communicate almost all of his 150-word vocabulary along with the same interest in his surroundings,” removes the assumption that losing verbal communication also means losing “vocabulary,” as well as a disconnection to the larger, verbal, world. When Le Coz writes: “The Dollars got the dreaded diagnosis on May 17, 1993,” she implies the subjective notion that becoming disabled should be feared, instead of specifically attributing this feeling to the Dollars’. However, writing, “The Dollars got the diagnosis they feared on May 17, 1993,” instead delegates this assumption to the Dollar’s interpretation of autism. In the following
phrase: “They did everything they could to loosen autism's grip, but it wouldn't let go.”

Le Coz personifies autism and describes it as having violently defeated Watson. Re-writing the sentence as: “They did everything they could to limit how much autism would change Watson’s abilities, but had little success,” characterizes their efforts, instead, as trying to combat the severity of Watson’s autism, and removes this violent personification. The sentence, “The disorder had permanently severed communication in their only child, and in doing so, isolated him from the world,” denotes a now uncommunicative Dollar, and claims that being non-verbal has removed Dollar from majority society; here Le Coz marginalizes non-verbal individuals. Instead, writing, “The disorder permanently severed vocal communication in their only child and, in doing so, limited his interactions with the outside, vocal, world,” informs the reader of the particular form of communication Watson lost, and the possible effects this would have on Watson’s relationship with verbal society. In the phrase, “Watson was lost, and he wasn't coming back,” Le Coz seems to associate Watson with the communicative, non-autistic boy he once was, and this now uncommunicative, autistic child as someone different. Here, the autistic Watson is described as unreachable; someone of “the other.” Instead, writing, “Watson had permanently changed,” denotes a change in Watson’s persona, but does not describe him as having become a different person. Within this phrase: “Because she doubted he'd understand a verbal explanation,” Le Coz portrays the assumption that having autism determines Dollar’s intellectual capabilities, seen again in: “These incessant questions,’ Watson replies . . . ‘Incessant.’ Not a feeble-minded word.” Le Coz again echoes this portrayal when she writes, “Watson not only understood, but he was able to respond — albeit slowly and while clutching her hand,” because of the
objective shock embedded within this phrase when the Dollar’s learned of Watson’s communicative abilities. Le Coz, here, also undermines his actions with her child-like description of his lethargy and fear. These phrases can instead be written as, “Because she was unsure if her son would understand a verbal explanation,” where “unsure” is more hopeful than “doubted;” “‘These incessant questions,’ Watson replies . . . ‘Incessant.’ An intelligent word proving a complex mind,” and, “As he clutched her hand while typing slowly, Watson proved to his mother he could understand as well as respond,” which describes Le Coz’s subjective interpretation of the situation and places emphasis on Watson’s actions. When Le Coz writes, “People like Watson who have autism suffer deficits,” she invokes marginalization with “People like Watson,” and articulates autism as a disease. Instead, the sentence can read, “Watson, and others with autism, can display certain deficits,” thereby individualizing Watson and removing the association of suffering with a disability. The sentence, “Hallmark signs of the disorder include a lack of eye contact, limited or absent language,” presents Dollar’s mode of communication as a form that is excluded from language. Continuing this notion she writes: “Others, like Watson, are labeled low functioning because they lack language and a means with which to connect to the world,” while also describing his form of communication as an automatic eviction from majority society. Instead, these phrases can say: “Hallmark signs of the disorder include a lack of eye contact, some verbal or nonverbal communication;” “Others, like Watson, are labeled low functioning because they lack verbal language and a typical means with which to connect to the social world.” The word choice used here: “the odd behavior of the young man obscures his inner world,” describes Dollar as strange and thereby marginalizes people with atypical
behavior; seen again with: “Otherwise, he seems lost, disconnected, on his own.” When rewritten, such phrases read: “the unusual behavior of the young man obscures his inner world;” “Otherwise, he appears uninterested and disconnected,” in which his behavior is described as different, and removes Watson from a solitary, “other” space.

In the article, “Challenged, but Determined to Compete for the Tiara,” the placement of the word “challenged” situates the focus of this title on these individuals’ disabilities, instead of on the individuals, themselves. The use of the word “challenged” as a descriptor for these individuals’ with disabilities is problematic, too, because it describes them as deficient. Instead, writing: “Determined to Compete for the Tiara, In Spite of Cultural Challenges,” places the focus of this title first on these individuals’ goal, and then explains why this goal might be challenging. Genzlinger repeats his focus and descriptor in the subtitle, when he writes, “‘Miss You Can Do It’ Showcases Challenged Girls,” conjuring up the image of a pageant that features deficient girls. The subtitle can be written instead as, “‘Miss You Can Do It’ Includes Girls with Disabilities,” emphasizing inclusion, and focusing on the girls first, and their disabilities second. When Genzlinger writes, “Others can’t speak or can barely be understood when they do,” he inaccurately describes their communicative (dis)abilities, and also articulates his experience as a fact. Instead, the sentence should be written as, “Others are nonverbal or might be difficult to understand,” detailing why the individual would not be able to speak, and removing certainty from the inability to understand s/he. When writing, “The parents of these children talk movingly about coming to grips with the news that their child would be disabled,” Genzlinger emphasizes these parents’ disheartening experience, and subsequently portrays the notion that a disability would negatively alter
these families’ lives. Instead, the sentence can read, “The parents of these children talk movingly about the journey of raising a child with a disability,” removing the subjective negativity from this phrase.

In “Theme Park Policy Angers Parents of Special-Needs Kids,” the subtitle emphasizes the disability of the individuals, determines a difference, and preference, between people with disabilities and autism, and exploits an autistic child’s possible reaction for sarcastic intent. This subtitle reads: “Disabled guests now have to request a boarding time for rides, but autistic kids can go ballistic while they wait.” This nonsensical sentence could possibly be rewritten as, “Guests with certain disabilities now have to request a boarding time for rides, which parents fear may upset their autistic kids, who do not qualify for this privilege.” When rewritten, this subtitle does not distinguish between individuals with disabilities and autistic children. Here, as well, the incorporation of details that explain what the article will continue to discuss removes the subtitle’s emphasis on disabilities. Later, Richardson incorporates a personal interpretation of autism into an objective description, when she writes, “Visits to the park eased his anxiety and offered a respite from the day-to-day challenges of living with autism.” Instead, this sentence can be written as: “Visits to the park eased his anxiety and offered a distraction from day-to-day activities that Gage found challenging,” specifically attributing the “challenges” to an individual’s experience.

The above rewritten phrases are cause for concern because of the disability logos that they reiterate. These authors enact the many signifieds of disability that this paper has discussed, linguistically communicating current cultural representations of people
with disabilities that align with the past. The risks of essentialism\textsuperscript{13} surface within these sentences, where the depiction of these individuals with disabilities stem from cultural representations of “the disabled.” And while rewriting these phrases helps dilute the perpetuation of these two groups, these articles’ narrative angles delineate this notion, too.

In Le Coz’s article, this detrimental attitude is displayed as follows:\textsuperscript{14}

“The smiling, inquisitive boy who’d sung and pranced around his house in Magee now sat sullen and withdrawn. He rarely spoke. Instead of saying ‘juice’ or ‘outside,’ Watson met his needs by tugging the nearest adult to the refrigerator or the backdoor.”

Le Coz’s choice to describe Dollar as a once “smiling, inquisitive boy who’d sung and pranced around his house,” but now appears, “sullen and withdrawn,” portrays a person with autism as the antithesis to a happy, interactive being. This section enacts the understanding that once Dollar became autistic, his language, as well as his enjoyment, disappeared. However, autism does not necessarily alter a person’s state of happiness. Furthermore, a person’s ability to speak does not dictate their level of contentment, either. Le Coz places Watson in the category of “other” due to his now supposed disinterest and inability to participate in the typical, verbal world. And although these sentences can be re-written, words have to be removed, and the point of view of this paragraph must be altered, as well, to portray the effects of autism differently.

“The Dollars got the dreaded diagnosis on May 17, 1993 — 10 days after his second birthday — autism — and took immediate action.”

\textsuperscript{13} Explained by Shakespeare on pg. 31.
\textsuperscript{14} The italicized sections are taken from the articles, and the discussion is beneath them without italics.
Although I re-word this sentence earlier to make it subjective, the idea that having a disability lessens the quality of one’s life still remains; the word should all together be removed. Even though I cannot change the way the Dollar’s view Watson’s diagnosis, incorporating this opinion into the article merely reiterates adverse cultural interpretations of disabilities.

“Pam and Donald eventually accepted reality: The disorder had permanently severed communication in their only child and, in doing so, isolated him from the world.”

This sentence is rewritten earlier as well, however, Watson’s disability is here used as a ploy to invoke the reader’s empathy, depicting a disability as something to be pitied. Autism is here described as a proponent in removing Watson from the typical, verbal world, placing Watson within “the other,” and belittling his new reality.

“His own mother often wondered, ‘Is he even in there?’”

Here I am incapable of re-wording a quote, however the incorporation of this quote furthers the depiction of a person with a disability as an alien being. Watson’s autistic diagnosis supposedly renders him unrealizable and unreachable. By exhibiting this quote within her article, Le Coz circumvents the notion that he has become a foreign entity; something unknown to the typical world.

“That question lingered two decades, until, on Nov. 11, 2011, Watson sent a postcard from the other side.”

Le Coz here literally places Watson in the group of “the other” when she writes “the other side.” However, even though Watson is autistic and views the world differently than a typical brain might, he still remains a part of society. This sentence should either
be removed or entirely rewritten to simply say “Watson verbally communicated with his parents on Nov. 11, 2011.”

“And with that, Watson cracked a door between two worlds long ago severed by autism. That door would open again and again in the months that followed, each time revealing more of the young man who’d been trapped behind it for years.”

Yet again, we see within this paragraph division between Watson’s reality and a typical reality within the metaphor of “a door between two worlds.” But it is not so much that Watson was “trapped” due to his autism, but that a mode of mutual communication between Watson and his parents had yet to be discovered. Le Coz faults his autism for his disconnection to majority society, instead of the exclusivity of majority, verbal language. Here Le Coz articulates cultural understandings of Watson’s disability by placing him in an incommunicable “other” space. This section must be entirely rewritten to portray an inclusive interpretation of people with disabilities in society.

“Children with autism don’t get pleasure from connection and thus lose their motivation to communicate.”

This generalization pertains to a commonly misunderstood interpretation of people with autism. Although it may be true that some autistic children feel this way, not all do, known to me through my recent work with autistic children. This sentence references Le Coz’s research, however, it also depicts children with autism as experiencing reality in the same way. This discussion of “connection” further articulates the distance between people with autism and people without, speaking to the “us” and “them” distinction within our cultural. I believe, though, it is safe to assume most people crave personal connection, however, this can be attained in many forms. This paragraph, instead, should
discuss Watson’s form of personal connection, and his difficulty attaining it in verbal society.

“Otherwise, he seems lost, disconnected, on his own.”

Although I remove “lost” and “on his own” when I rewrite this sentence above, Le Coz’s remaining description of Watson still articulates Watson as existing within the “other” space. Here Le Coz portrays Watson as someone, something, unknowable to majority society. However, this perception stems from majority society’s minimal understanding of the autistic brain, and not from autism’s effect on Watson. Watson “seems lost, disconnected, on his own” because Le Coz is unfamiliar with Watson’s persona. Le Coz, though, only needs to use the term “disconnected” to articulate her feeling of disconnection to Watson. Including the other descriptors only reinforces the alienation of an individual who acts in ways that are different than majority society is comfortable with.

This article’s conclusion, however, presents a very different view of a person with autism then is interwoven throughout the majority of this article, reading:

“‘Presume competence,’ Pam said. ‘Presume they're absorbing everything. Expose them to the world, and never give up. He was 20 years old when his big breakthrough came. It can happen.’”

The focus of this article should be the Dollar’s amazing discovery and new found, communicative relationship with their son after decades of rare interactions. However, as exemplified within the earlier phrases, Watson’s perceived alien actions, as a result of his autism, steal the spotlight. Le Coz, then, must have felt that the article would have greater appeal if she emphasized Watson’s ability to emerge out of his “other,” unknown
space, and exist within the accepted “us” space. Within her decided angle is the hesitance to describe a person with a disability as instinctively a part of “us,” contrary to Mrs. Dollar’s final advice to “presume competence.”

In Richardson’s article, a few sections denote a similar display of people with disabilities, iterating not just a need for re-writing, but a need to restructure the angle of the article. They are as follows:

“Disabled guests now have to request a boarding time for rides, but autistic kids can go ballistic while they wait.”

As the article’s subtitle, this sentence should further detail the components of the article, and inform the reader of the article’s focus. That said, this subtitle accomplishes neither. Instead, this subtitle immediately engrains an image of a “ballistic” autistic child in the reader’s mind before s/he even reads the article. The missing specifics as to why the child may be upset, places the articles focus on this exaggerated possible side-effect of an amusement park’s disability policy change. However, this article actually discusses the pros and cons of this new policy, and exemplifies an autistic child’s frustration as one possible con. Richardson also seems to imply that there is a distinction between “disabled guests” and “autistic children,” where the former group is receiving the preferred treatment that the latter group deserves. The depiction of the article’s angle then, based on this subtitle, is the exaggeration and generalization of autistic children’s tendencies for tantrums, instead of focusing on the new policy.

“‘I'm not asking for free admission to the park or everybody stop the world for him to get on,’ said Marcy Mullins, a Harrison, Ohio, mom of an 11-year-old autistic boy. ‘I would
like to just see him happy, and if he can ride a ride a few times, it would mean the world to me.’”

As mentioned earlier, I cannot re-write a quote. However, Richardson exposes her desire to evoke a reader’s sympathetic connection to her article with the inclusion of this quote. Here, pitying people with disabilities is literally entangled within Mullins’ cry for help. Mullins tries to appeal to a reader’s maternal instincts, as she deems this amusement park the sole proprietor of her son’s happiness. The reader should thereby feel sorry for both the son, whose autism has supposedly emptied his life of happiness, and the mother, who only wants to see her son smile. However, by incorporating this quote, Richardson further marginalizes people with autism. This quote articulates the assumption that his disability limits his ability to be happy, and therefore majority society should exempt her son from societal rules. Her son, then, becomes banished to “the other,” a space that exists outside of societal norms.

“The policy change presents problems for children with autism, who thrive on routine and order and have difficulty waiting in or out of line, parents say.”

Generalizations of autistic children’s behaviors are made within this sentence. Having recently visited an amusement park with children with autism, I know that many autistic children can, in fact, wait in line. But due to cultural generalizations of “the disabled,” these children are exempt from societal expectations. Instead, an attempt should be made to teach an autistic person rules that allow them to participate in general society, which would include them into the majority. This sentence should therefore be removed or pertain to an individual.
In an article written by Paula Span on July 8, 2013, titled “High Disability Rates Persist in Old Age,” she begins with an assumed cultural sentiment of disabilities, and thereby sets the tone for the rest of her article. Her first paragraph reads:

“Weird berries. Capsules of unpronounceable supplements. Yoga or tai chi. Crossword puzzles. Such amulets, we’re told, may ward off disability — which is the real fear that accompanies aging, isn’t it? Not the sheer number of years that will have passed, but the things we’ll no longer be able to do.”

This section can be rewritten to read: “Such amulets, we’re told, may ward off becoming disabled- an increasingly likely possibility as an individual gets older,” which would remove the article’s implication that our culture fears becoming disabled. But even with this rewriting, this paragraph still embeds the desire to avoid becoming disabled within the remainder of the article. This introduction perpetuates the readers internalization of the notion that as we get older, we fear becoming disabled – but is this the real fear? Who decided it was so? And furthermore, Span’s use of the word “disabled” implies its literal definition of “not able.” Although becoming disabled later in life diminishes an individual’s abilities, the individual may still accomplish what they once could accomplish via other means. The central claim of the article rests on the still high number of elders becoming disabled despite supposed advancements in health and technology.

That said, Span’s beginning is more concerned with the fear of being disabled than the inability to reduce the likelihood of becoming disabled. Within this opening, Span manages to assign both fear and a poor quality of life to the concept of a disability, regardless of my rewrite.
Cultural Effect of Linguistic Representation:

The language used in these articles to describe people with disabilities demonstrates majority society’s interpretation of “normal” and “not normal;” signifieds of the signifiers “us” and “them,” respectively. As an oppressed minority, “the disabled” have a minimal influence over how they are linguistically represented. Our language, then, mainly presents the view of nondisabled majority society. In re-writing sections of these articles, I have attempted to rid language of this hegemonic institutionalized privilege by using language ascribing to the perspective of both nondisabled, and disabled, society.

The deconstruction of able/disable is an integral component of this inclusive language. As Shakespeare writes, “perhaps the maintenance of a non-disabled identity in the context of physical limitation is a more useful problem with which to be concerned: rather than interrogating the other, let us rather deconstruct the normality-which-is-to-be assumed” (96). Here Shakespeare shifts the spotlight from trying to normalize cultural interpretations of people with disabilities, to reconfiguring the socially constructed ideal “normal;” “normal” implying a typical physical appearance, and a sound mental appearance through the use of total verbal language and normative social connections. Shakespeare continues to write, “a wider problem . . . is that everyone is impaired (Sutherland, 1981) . . . If everyone is impaired, we face difficulties if we seek to identify disabled people on the basis that they experience particular physical deficits not shared by the majority population” (96). As Shakespeare concludes, the able/disable, us/them, binary deconstructs when “impairment” replaces the descriptor “disabled.” For a binary
to remain true, two distinct categories must exist; in particular, people who are able and people who are not able. This binary serves as the center of cultural beliefs and portrayals of people with disabilities in its embodiment of the disability logos. But because a disability simply means an impairment, this binary’s truth flounders amidst Shakespeare’s claim of the universality of human impairment. Society must then re-create the idealized normal based on the fact that everyone is, in some aspect, imperfect.

Our society’s lexicon, and subsequent cultural interpretations of people with disabilities, has refused to acknowledge this deconstruction. Linguistic representation thereby continues to circulate cultural representations of people with disabilities that articulate the disability logos. As discussed throughout this paper, language preserves cultural truths, while also reinforcing them. Therefore, the authors of these articles are not to blame for how they portray people with disabilities. In most circumstances, they are merely subconsciously continuing this tradition of disability portrayal that is rooted within our accepted language. Contrary to Shakespeare’s claim, then, able/disable remains intact within these linguistic portrayals of people with disabilities. Readers of these articles consume the beliefs articulated within these articles, and unknowingly incorporate them into their perception of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are then pitied and separated from majority society as a result of what nondisabled persons have read and/or heard.

5. Conclusion

In lieu of universal impairments, every individual within this world excels at particular abilities and struggles with others. In “The Opportunity of Adversity,” Amy Mullins mentions another important logos, that “what has always been a truth,” is “that
everyone has something rare . . . and that the human ability to adapt is our greatest aspect" (7:23). Because physical society has been built by nondisabled, majority society, people with disabilities were born with a superior ability to adapt, a key to human survival since the world began. Mullins, here, manages to not only deconstruct able/disable, but to invert it, too.

In “My 12 Pairs of Legs,” Mullins relays an interaction in which she was asked if she had the ability to choose her height. In response to Mullins’ admittance, that, yes, she could choose from five different heights, the woman said, "but Aimee, it's not fair that you can change your height when you want it" (8:13). Mullins’ adaptation, which requires the usage of prosthetic legs, has enabled her with an ability a person without amputated legs does not have, but desires. In a society that has placed people with disabilities in a category of being born with unfair circumstances, Mullins has placed herself, the amputee, in the superior category, once more inverting able/disable.

Although Mullins proves the ability to invert able/disable, it has yet to be incorporated into cultural representations and interpretations of people with disabilities. As Mullins says, "the only real and consistent disability . . . is the world ever thinking that I could be described by those definitions" (of a disability) (“The Opportunity of Adversity” 10:13). The disabled identity is unique in that it only exists within a cultural construction, as Longmore mentions earlier, and I linguistically exemplify. Based on my research on the importance of language in determining cultural behavior, and accepted cultural truths, I believe reforming the way people with disabilities are written, read, and discussed about is a key to minimizing the disabling effects of cultural attitude towards people with disabilities.
The disabled body unarguably is an abnormality within majority nondisabled society. That said, this abnormality does not have to mean that this individual must be treated as abnormal. Therefore, normalizing the concept of a disability is necessary to including people with disabilities into nondisabled society.

In concurrence with the notion of disability as a cultural construct, Harpur advocates for the removal of the word “disabled” from our lexicon. Harpur categorizes the term “disability” as “ableist nomenclature,” which is “the ability to describe discrimination without the necessity to define what impairments constitute a disability” (331). As Harpur here states, the term “disabled” lacks specificity, and merely “describe[s] a person with different abilities by reference to what they are not” (330).

Majority nondisabled society, then, has created this descriptor that specifically references these individual’s outwardly identifiable abnormalities. Instead, Harpur suggests using the word “impaired” because of the word’s inclusivity; everyone, at some time, is, has, or will be, impaired. For example, a pregnant woman temporarily reliant on elevators would be one of many in need of a physical adaptation (people in wheel/power chairs, people with strollers, on crutches, etc.). Abled/disabled, here, deconstructs within political and cultural interpretations of a person with a disability because all types of impairments, temporary and permanent, are encompassed into the “impaired” identity.

That said, let us look at this picture one more time: Which one of us has the impairment? Sam, whose physical impairment surfaces within
his body’s abnormal configuration? Or Lauren, whose eyesight necessitates her reliance on glasses to perfect her vision; her visual impairment. And what about my inability to remember names, dates, and information for longer than ten minutes; my mental impairment. Now that the “hidden” impairments in this photo are exposed, too, who here is disabled? All? None?

When the descriptor “disabled” becomes replaced with the word “impaired,” the stable cultural understanding of a person with a disability falters, just like I have been unsure my entire life of how to describe my brother. This confusion deconstructs the cultural understanding of “the disabled,” and confuses the identity of a person with a disability, too. However, “the disabled” also provides a source of pride, a source of strength, and a cause to fight for for many individuals with different abilities. This paradoxical need to rid and keep “disability” in cultural diction emphasizes the importance in changing many forms of the disability discourse. If all this drama can emerge from one word, surely the importance of changing our accepted disability lexicon cannot be too hard to imagine.
An Interactive Guideline for Writing and Conversing About People with Disabilities

WORD CHOICE

1. Do not imply that non-verbal communication means a lack of intelligence

*Ex.: “Watson had lost almost all of his 150-word vocabulary along with an interest in the world” (Le Coz).*

*Cultural implication:* A non-verbal individual does not understand a verbal individual, nor is interested in anything.

*Rewritten:* “Watson had lost his ability to verbally communicate almost all of his 150-word vocabulary along with the same interest in his surroundings.”

*New implication:* A non-verbal individual cannot verbalize words, causing a change in this individual’s interests because of an inability to participate in a verbal interaction. However, non-verbal is no longer equated with a generalized disinterest and less intelligence.

2. Do not objectify a subjective interpretation of a disability

*Ex.:* “The Dollars got the *dreaded* diagnosis on May 17, 1993” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* The diagnosis of autism is feared; having autism is bad.

*Rewritten:* “The Dollars got the diagnosis they feared on May 17, 1993.”

*New implication:* In attributing this fear to the Dollar’s personal interpretation of autism, autism remains a neutral diagnosis.
3. Do not personify a disability, especially in a violent and/or negative way

*Example:* “They did everything they could to loosen autism’s grip, but it wouldn’t let go” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* A disability is to blame for why the individual has become disabled.

*Rewritten:* “They did everything they could to limit how much autism would change Watson’s abilities, but had little success.”

*New implication:* A disability is no longer portrayed as a victor, demonizing the disability. Instead, a disability is portrayed neutrally.

4. Do not equate non-verbal with non-communicative and confinement

*Example:* “The disorder had permanently severed communication in their only child and, in doing so, isolated him from the world” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* An individual who cannot communicate using the English, verbal language is therefore unable to communicate, and confined to a solitary space.

*Rewritten:* “The disorder permanently severed verbal communication in their only child and, in doing so, limited his interactions with the outside, verbal world,”

*New implication:* Autism can make an individual non-verbal, however, this does not necessitate isolation. There simply is a disconnection to the English, verbal world because of mistranslation.
5. Do not describe a person with a disability as existing outside society

*Ex.*: “Watson was lost, and he wasn’t coming back” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* A non-verbal individual is an alien being and will never be the person they were before they became disabled.

*Rewritten:* “Watson had permanently changed.”

*New implication:* Having a disability changes an individual, but does not create a new individual nor place them in an unreachable space.

6. Do not equate the effects of a disability to the effects of a disease

*Ex.*: “People . . . who have autism *suffer* deficits” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* A disability causes a person to suffer.

*Rewritten:* “Watson, and others with autism, can display certain deficits.”

*New implication:* Autism can have specific effects on individuals.

7. Do not equate non-verbal with not having a language

*Ex.:* “Hallmark signs of the disorder include a lack of eye contact, *limited or absent language*” (Le Coz).

*Cultural implication:* There is only verbal language, therefore a non-verbal individual has no language. Their language is not a language.

*Rewritten:* “Hallmark signs of the disorder include a lack of eye contact, some verbal or nonverbal communication.”
New implication: Although non-verbal individuals have a language, their language does not use the words understood as verbal language.

8. Do not describe unfamiliar behavior as strange behavior

Ex.: “The odd behavior of the young man obscures his inner world” (Le Coz).

Cultural implication: A person whose actions are unfamiliar is a weird person.

Rewritten: “The unfamiliar behavior of the young man obscures his inner world.”

New implication: It is difficult to read a person whose actions are seemingly nonsensical.

9. Do not describe an individual with a disability as isolated

Ex.: “Otherwise, he seems lost, disconnected, on his own” (Le Coz).

Cultural implication: Because this individual is non-verbal, he seems unable to fit into society.

Rewritten: “Otherwise, he appears uninterested and disconnected.”

New implication: There is a disconnection here and he seems to be uninterested.

10. Do not focus on a disability instead of an individual; Do not describe the individual as “challenged”

Ex.: “‘Miss You Can Do It’ Showcases Challenged Girls” (Genzlinger).
Cultural implication: These individuals are foremost disabled; they are not individuals but are “challenged” people who will be placed on display at this pageant.

Rewritten: “‘Miss You Can Do It’ Includes Girls with Disabilities.”

New implication: The focus here is on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into a usually nondisabled population of contestants.

11. Do not imply that a disability reduces the quality of that individual’s life

Ex.: “Visits to the park eased his anxiety and offered a respite from the day-to-day challenges of living with autism” (Richardson).

Cultural implication: Autism makes every day difficult for an individual.

Rewritten: “Visits to the park eased his anxiety and offered a distraction from day-to-day activities that Gage found challenging.”

New implication: Here autism is presented as neutral, and the challenges are contextualized, removing the negative portrayal of autism.

12. Do not describe the actions of a person with a disability as crazy

Ex.: “Autistic kids can go ballistic while they wait” (Richardson).

Cultural implication: A person with a disability is going crazy, implying the consciousness of their actions.

Rewritten: “Not sure of why they must wait in line, autistic children may get very upset.”
New implication: An autistic person may not understand certain situations, causing them to become in proportionally upset.

POINT OF VIEW

1. Do not describe a person with a disability as an antithesis to happy, interested, capable, etc.

   Ex.: "The smiling, inquisitive boy who’d sung and pranced around his house in Magee now sat sullen and withdrawn. He rarely spoke. Instead of saying ‘juice’ or ‘outside,’ Watson met his needs by tugging the nearest adult to the refrigerator or the backdoor" (Le Coz).

   Areas of concern: “now sat sullen and withdrawn;” “Instead of saying . . . met his needs by tugging.”

   Cultural implication: An autistic person is no longer happy or interested in his/her surroundings, and his or her actions have been reduced to that of a child.

2. Do not make the focus of an article a general claim about disabilities

   Ex.: “Such amulets, we’re told, may ward off disability — which is the real fear that accompanies aging, isn’t it? Not the sheer number of years that will have passed, but the things we’ll no longer be able to do” (Span).

   Area of concern: “the real fear;” “the things we’ll no longer be able to do.”
Cultural implication: Everyone fears becoming disabled, and this fear is the fear of not being able to do things we once could do. This fear of a disability is thereby embedded within the remainder of the article.

3. Do not portray a person with a disability as existing outside society

Ex.: “That question lingered two decades, until, on Nov. 11, 2011, Watson sent a postcard from the other side” (Le Coz).

Area of concern: “sent a postcard from the other side”

Cultural implication: A person with a disability exists in the “other” space, outside of majority, nondisabled society.

4. Do not make general claims about disabilities effects on the population

Ex.: “Children with autism don’t get pleasure from connection and thus lose their motivation to communicate” (Le Coz).

Area of Concern: “Children with autism”

Cultural implication: All people with autism experience the world the same way, emphasizing the distinction between people with autism and/or disabilities, and people without.

QUOTES

1. Do not use a quote emphasizing the individual’s marginalization

Ex.: “His own mother often wondered, ‘Is he even in there’” (Le Coz)?
Cultural implication: Even his mother did not view Watson as a communicable, connectable individual, dramatizing Watson’s marginalization.

2. Do not use a quote that evokes a reader’s sympathy and/or pity

Ex.: “‘I’m not asking for free admission to the park or everybody stop the world for him to get on,’ said Marcy Mullins, a Harrison, Ohio, mom of an 11-year-old autistic boy. ‘I would like to just see him happy, and if he can ride a ride a few times, it would mean the world to me’” (Richardson).

Cultural implication: We should exempt this boy from societal rules because he is so rarely happy. The mother’s plea increases the effect of this claim, as the reader should feel sorry for both Mullins, who just wants her child to be happy, and the boy, whose autism has rendered him unhappy. The boy becomes further marginalized because the reader feels sorry for him, and places him in a space outside of cultural norms, exempt from societal rules.
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