Rhetorics of Overcoming

REWRITING NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN WRITING STUDIES

Allison Harper Hitt

SWR
STUDIES IN WRITING AND RHETORIC

CONTENTS

1

Introduction: Rhetorics of Overcoming

> Sometimes disabled people overcome specific moments of able-
> ism—we exceed low expectations, problem-solve lack of access,
> avoid nursing homes or long-term psych facilities, narrowly
> escape police brutality and prison. However, I'm not sure that
> overcoming *disability* itself is an actual possibility for most of us.
> Yet in a world that places extraordinary value in cure, the belief
> that we can defeat or transcend body-mind conditions through
> individual hard work is convenient. Overcoming is cure's back-
> up plan.
>
> —Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*

I BEGIN, AS I USUALLY do when discussing disability, with a series of disclosures.

One. On the first day of every new class I teach, I disclose some version of the following to my students:

> My mom was sick with cancer the entire four years I was in
> college, and I had an agreement with the dean of my univer-
> sity that I could miss class or take extra time if I needed it. At
> the beginning of each semester for four years, I had to inform
> my professors of this arrangement. I know that you all have
> complicated lives beyond this class, and I don't require that
> you share them with me, but I do ask that you be mindful of
> our time together and let me know whenever possible if you
> will miss class or are unable to meet a deadline. I can work
> with you in restructuring due dates—*but only if you let me
> know you need help.*

I did not use this accommodation much (which is a different series of disclosures), but it attuned me to the idea of university accommodations—something that I saw peers struggle to obtain. And later, as I moved through different universities and learned about their accommodation systems, I realized what the dean had offered me was by no means a formal accommodation; it was informal, based not on proof of diagnosis but on a personal and institutional commitment to help a struggling student.

Two. In the final semester of my PhD program, I disclosed to a peer that I had/have a history of major depression and suicidal ideation—a risky disclosure that frequently requires reporting within university institutional spaces. I was told that this information was inappropriate to share in that space—a social function that I hosted at my house.

Three. In 2017, my doctors agreed that I needed a support animal to accompany me to work. She was *not* a service animal, and my university did not have a formal system in place for accommodating disabled faculty, which made the process difficult to navigate but also gave me some flexibility in what constituted *reasonable* accommodation. After an extended back-and-forth with the Disability Resource Center and Human Resources, the head of Human Resources contacted the Office of General Counsel, and I was granted permission for my support animal to be on campus: in my office, the classroom, and both departmental and university meetings. While my mental health often affects my ability to focus, speak, or engage in the classroom—and I try to have honest conversations about mental health with my students—these disabilities are otherwise invisible. Having a dog on campus, however, made it much more visibly clear to my students that there was *something* different about me without me needing to disclose anything. One morning, my students were talking about support animals as they waited for me to unlock the classroom. As my key entered the lock, a student said, "What do I need to do? Just pretend to be suicidal?"

These disclosures are surely familiar to folks with disabilities who have sought personal, professional, and institutional support. Often such disclosures are met with follow-up demands for specific

diagnosis: *What happened to you that you need a support animal?* These questions are also accompanied by dismissal or counter-diagnoses. For example, a colleague once entered my office after reading a blog post I had written about a student calling me insane. They placed their hands on my desk, leaning their body forward to demand a diagnosis, which prompted an uncomfortable disclosure. They seemed relieved by the information: "Oh, that's not so bad. My son has [x], [y], *and* [z], which is way worse."

Why do these disclosures matter—individually and together? How do they create a picture of the complexities of disclosure in the writing classroom and in our professional and interpersonal spaces more broadly? How do such disclosures shape my ethos as a scholar and instructor with a variety of mental illness diagnoses? What role do such disclosures have in *this* space, in *this* discussion of rhetorics of overcoming disability?

PAYING ATTENTION TO DISABILITY

Disability has always been a lens through which I have viewed and understood people and environments, my family, and myself. In "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes disability as "the most human of experiences, touching every family and—if we live long enough—touching us all" (17). Similarly, in her foundational text, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, Simi Linton describes disability as a central tenet of the humanities that those of us working in higher education must critically address. Yet despite the scholarship that constructs disability as an intersectional and pervasive identity category, many people understand it within personal contexts: they or someone close to them has a disability. Michael Bérubé addresses this personal influence in the foreword to *Claiming Disability*:

> Part of the reason I changed my mind so dramatically has nothing to do with anything I've read; when I became the father of a child with Down syndrome, I realized immediately and viscerally that disability can happen to anyone—including someone very close to you, and including you, too. (x)

Disability has been woven into my family tapestry. Growing up with an autistic brother, I saw him pass through many different systems: speech, occupational, and music therapy; inclusive and special education classrooms; and disabled student and adult worker programs that are constantly in a state of political and financial flux. Disability was always around me, but I never thought critically about it until I saw others denied access to education and services and experienced disability myself. I often witnessed the discrimination my brother faced from neighbors, strangers at the grocery store, peers, and administrators. I watched as he shifted from an inclusive classroom environment in junior high school to a special education program in high school, where he was repeatedly denied access to social interactions with students outside the program and gradually became nonverbal. My mom's nondisabled status shifted suddenly when she was diagnosed with advanced-stage ovarian cancer that—after four years of chemotherapy and radiation treatments—prevented her from sitting, walking, and eventually feeding herself. As a young adult, my own nondisabled status shifted when I was first diagnosed with major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Although disability was central to my childhood and early education, it only became visible to me once I witnessed and experienced the structural barriers and cultural stigma that denied members of my family access to educational, professional, and material resources.

These family experiences were all marked by narratives that implied we needed to overcome our different issues. For example, the emphasis on overcoming has been ever-present throughout my brother's medical history: a new diagnosis, a new form of therapy, a new treatment, new medications. "How do you think your brother would feel about being contained in an oxygen chamber?" my grandfather asked every time we spoke on the phone for a year. It was another new treatment—something he had read about in a magazine. When my mom had breast cancer during my early childhood, she was celebrated for overcoming—for *winning the battle* with cancer. And as many people with mental illnesses know (#ThingsDisabledPeopleKnow), there are constant messages urging

them to overcome: *Mental issues are only a mindset, and overcoming them is a matter of strength, a demonstration of willpower. Have you tried yoga? Meditation? Exercise?* Overcoming narratives are all around us, pressuring nonnormative bodies to perform normalcy.

Disability frequently shapes and is shaped by personal relationships, but it is also culturally pervasive—shaped by media representations and medical discourses that present disability diagnoses as increasing, something to fear or overcome. We are a society that likes to diagnose and label, so these statistics about increasing diagnoses carry great significance for how we understand and respond to disability. In March 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the proportion of children with a diagnosed autism spectrum disorder in the United States had increased from 1 in 88 to 1 in 68, a 30 percent increase ("CDC Estimates"). As of 2018, the CDC cites the number as 1 in 59; however, this statistic is based on just one study of 8-year-old children ("Data"). Autism is frequently referred to as a crisis, and framing data in a way that makes it appear more prevalent reinforces the fear of rapidly increasing rates. Disability is and has always been present. One in four adults in the United States has a disability ("CDC: 1 in 4"). One in six children has a developmental disability, such as autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), cerebral palsy, or an intellectual disability (Boyle et al.). These numbers should not alarm us; rather, they help contextualize the need for greater awareness and understanding of a significant portion of the population who are frequently marginalized; socially, economically, and physically mistreated; and misrepresented and exploited in research and through media representations.

These disability statistics have been documented in the context of higher education as well. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 19 percent of undergraduate college students reported having a disability in 2015–2016 ("Fast Facts"). As in the larger population, this number includes individuals with physical, learning, and mental disabilities. In 2010, The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy (now The James G. Martin

Center for Academic Renewal) reported that 2 percent of college students had a documented learning disability, such as ADD, ADHD, or dyslexia (Vickers). Attention to disability in higher education has focused considerably on learning disabilities, but educational researchers have increasingly attended to the rates of undergraduate and graduate students with mental disabilities in higher education, and whether these student populations are supported and appropriately accommodated. In its 2015 annual report, the Center for Collegiate Mental Health reported that the number of college students seeking mental health services had grown at five times the rate of enrollment: from 2010 to 2015, "institutional enrollment grew by 5.6%, the number of students seeking services increased by 29.6%, and the number of attended appointments increased by 38.4%" (*Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2015* 7). In 2017–2018, 54.4 percent of students attended counseling for mental health concerns (*Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2018* 10). It isn't reasonable to speculate that this is solely because of an increase in disability; instead, this indicates a variety of factors, including a rise in diagnosis of mental health issues, a reduction in the stigma of counseling, and the availability of more support services. More urgently, these numbers indicate a need for more transparent conversations about mental illness in higher education. According to the 2013 National College Health Assessment, more than one-third of US college students had difficulty functioning due to depression, and 30 percent reported serious considerations of suicide—up from 24 percent in 2010 (Novotney). For four years, I taught 80 students per semester, and these statistics indicate that roughly 27 of my students *every semester* may have been struggling academically because of depression and suicidal ideation. These numbers are especially important to consider when structuring the pedagogical environments of writing centers and first-year writing classes that serve all university students regardless of their disciplines, expertise, or abilities.

Despite statistics of increasing diagnoses saturating our news and media, the purpose of this book is not to measure the validity of these increases or to determine whether there is a disability or men-

tal health crisis in higher education. It is against and within this landscape, though, that this book exists because scientific, cultural, and personal discourses inform how we theorize and accommodate disability. Some education scholars argue that increasing cases of disability may simply indicate an increase in labels. For example, in *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn*, education scholar and innovator Cathy Davidson discusses cognition, active learning, and technology's ability to reimagine classroom practices and accommodate a diverse range of twenty-first-century learners. This reimagining is necessary, she notes, because we are more likely to label a student as learning disabled if they do not fit into our pedagogical practices (10). In other words, we diagnose, label, and accommodate—trying to fix our students rather than trying to fix our practices. As a writing professor, I am interested in how disability is positioned as something that must be diagnosed and overcome in order for disabled student writers to be successful. More specifically, as a mentally disabled writing professor, I am interested in practices that make college writing spaces more accessible to a wide range of students—and instructors—who do not identify as disabled, disclose disabilities, or seek institutional accommodations.

There is a persistent tendency in higher education to try to diagnose disabled students[1] and default to accommodations rather than crafting more accessible pedagogical environments. As in medicalized approaches to disability that rely on cure, disabled students are told to overcome their disabilities. In this way, overcoming becomes cure's backup plan. *Rhetorics of Overcoming: Rewriting Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies* has two interconnected aims: (1) to identify and analyze rhetorics of overcoming within the field of writing studies that have shaped disciplinary understandings of disability and writing; and (2) to develop strategies for overcoming ableist pedagogical expectations that are informed both by theories of multimodality[2] and disability studies (DS), and by the embodied needs of students. While this book is grounded in the field of writing studies and rhetoric, rhetorics of overcoming are not unique to this discipline; rather, these desires for diagnos-

ing and overcoming disability extend far beyond college writing students. In this introduction, I define rhetorics of overcoming—disability discourses of diagnosis, disclosure, accommodation, and individual achievements—and illustrate how they operate within both public and academic discourses.

DEFINITIONS AND DISCOURSES OF OVERCOMING

The overcoming narrative is a classic trope in DS that positions disability as something that must be overcome for an individual to be successful—the disability version of the bootstraps narrative that individualizes struggles and achievements and glorifies triumph over personal hardships. Simi Linton argues that the overcoming narrative stems from ableist ideologies that position disability and disabled groups as inferior to able-bodied groups. Linton explains, "The popular phrase *overcoming a disability* is used most often to describe someone with a disability who seems competent and successful in some way, in a sentence something like 'She has overcome her disability and is a great success'" (17). This idea can be interpreted a couple of different ways: an individual has willfully risen above the limitations of their disability, or they have risen above society's expectations of how a disabled person should act and be. Most often, we encounter the first example: a woman who wills herself to walk again after a car accident, a boy with Down syndrome who makes the basketball team, a dyslexic student who overcomes her learning disability and gets a full ride to Harvard.

The ideology embedded in the overcoming narrative communicates "personal triumph over a personal condition" (Linton 18). That is, disability is an individual issue that requires individual attention. As Linton notes, this rhetoric has not been generated within the disability community; rather, it is an external demand from an ableist society that positions disability as something in need of cure. Often, this external demand is internalized. For example, a dyslexic student may be repeatedly told—because she transposes words or letters in her writing—that she is a bad writer, which she internalizes and carries into the college writing classroom. Writing instructors know that writing is more than grammar and usage, but

the logic of overcoming demands that this student overcome the characteristics of dyslexia to be a successful writer.

The logic of overcoming disability exists in many contexts beyond the classroom, ranging from personal experiences to media representations of overcoming adverse issues with the body.[3] Although there are many examples of narratives of overcoming, I focus on those that have manifested in my own personal and social experiences: discourses of overcoming cancer, inspirational narratives circulated in print and digital media, and examples of academic ableism. My personal connection to these issues will be self-evident. These brief examples provide a starting point for understanding the wide-ranging manifestation of overcoming narratives, and I highlight how these discourses affect societal perceptions of disability before introducing how I use the term *coming over* to assess and reimagine more accessible writing pedagogies.

Discourses of Overcoming Cancer

For those who have experienced cancer or witnessed a loved one's experiences, the metaphor of cancer as a fight or battle is a familiar one. In her discussion of breast cancer, Kristen Garrison argues that in the cancer-as-war metaphor, "Women are enlisted in a battle against the self, their bodies made war zones, with cancer as the enemy, medical professionals as infallible heroes, and treatments of search-and-destroy by any means possible."[4] When my mom was dying, I listened to doctors, family members, neighbors, and grocery store acquaintances place responsibility on her to push through, to fight, to overcome because she was *too strong* to let cancer beat her. How we write about cancer, how we name and describe it, influences cultural and personal understandings. For example, as Karen Kopelson argues, "the language we use to talk about breast cancer makes possible or impossible what we understand, and then do, about breast cancer as the public, political, raced, classed, and gendered health crisis that it is" (131). The language of breast cancer often reduces the experience to the individual level rather than acknowledging the structures and intersectional differences that affect people's experiences.

Although I do not intend to conflate cancer and disability, there are similarities in their narratives about overcoming bodily issues. People with cancer may face long-term disabilities and, even if a person with cancer doesn't identify as disabled, their condition may be disabling (American Cancer Society). Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson contend that "any body subjected to the medical gaze becomes disabled to some extent, through its positioning as passive object, and through the over-signification of bodily deviation" (29). Narratives about cancer and disability share medicalized desires for diagnosis and cure for the abnormal body—the need for early detection, prevention, and technological intervention. There are overlaps, too, in the emphasis on overcoming adversity through determination and personal success. Breast cancer is an enterprise: it became the most common cancer worldwide in 2021 ("Cancer"), one in eight US women is diagnosed with it (*Breast Cancer Facts*), and millions of dollars are raised each year to research it.[5] It affects women and men regardless of race, class, age, or sexual identity, yet it is commercialized as an individual issue and as something that happens because someone was not proactive or happy or strong enough.

Narratives and rhetorics of overcoming cancer are everywhere. They manifest in the barrage of pink merchandise in October and the assurance that, when you buy a pale-pink can opener, you contribute five cents to Komen for the Cure. They are promoted in campaigns like #NoMakeupSelfie that purport to raise cancer awareness while erasing the experiences of individuals who undergo chemotherapy and radiation treatments.[6] They are represented on billboards on the side of the interstate—such as one that read, "Threw cancer a curve ball. Overcoming. Pass it on" ("Threw"). The image featured a young boy with one leg dressed in a baseball uniform and promoted the idea that if *I* can overcome cancer, so can *you*. Images like this are meant to be inspirational but also convey a message that we must try harder to overcome, that overcoming is as simple as "throwing a curve ball." Decontextualized representations about overcoming can do more harm than good, both to readers who come to expect and demand overcoming and to the folks such inspirational narratives purport to help.

Inspirational Discourses of Overcoming

In her discussion of the visual rhetorics of disability, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson ("Politics") categorizes and historicizes the ways in which images have worked to construct our understandings of disability. Images are powerful because of their immediacy, and Garland-Thomson argues, "Photography's immediacy, claim to truth, and wide circulation calcifies the interpretations of disability embedded in the images, at once shaping and registering the public perception of disability" (58). Images represent disability as wondrous, sentimental, exotic, or realistic. Overcoming invokes both wonder and sentimentality, which work together to "produc[e] the convention of the courageous overcomer, contemporary America's favorite figure of disability" (61). I contend that these inspirational messages—which can be found in many forms of both print and digital media—construct a societal expectation of individual responsibility to overcome, which ignores larger systems of inaccessibility and ableism that require people to "overcome" in order to be perceived as successful. These external demands and expectations for overcoming are harmful both to disabled individuals and to the possibilities of intervening in these inaccessible systems and rewriting more accurate, inclusive, and accessible narratives of disability.

The billboard example of Adam Bender, the young baseball player who threw cancer a metaphorical curve ball ("Threw"), exists within a larger narrative of overcoming adversity through a national campaign of inspirational messages funded by The Foundation for a Better Life (FBL). FBL is a nonprofit that provides motivational and inspirational messages "as a contribution toward promoting good values, good values and a better life" ("About Us"). FBL's advertisements feature positive values like equality, justice, and respect by highlighting the achievements of famous actors and actresses, professional athletes, humanitarians, and everyday Americans. In addition to television and radio commercials, FBL creates billboards as part of its commitment to public service: "The messages, depicting heroes of our time, are seen across America's highways and on Times Square. Thousands of schools around the world also use our motivational materials to communicate positive values to youth" ("About Us"). FBL constructs rhetorics of over-

coming within cultural and educational contexts through its visual representations of overcoming, hard work, and determination. Indeed, Alison Kafer illustrates this in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, drawing attention to FBL's circulation of ableist narratives that "prais[e] individuals with disabilities for having the strength of character to 'overcome' their disabilities" (87) and position overcoming as a way to live a *better* life.

Overcoming is often attributed to hard work and determination, and FBL represents "hard work" with an image of Whoopi Goldberg with the text "Overcaem dyslexia." The letters *e* and *m* are transposed as they might appear to a dyslexic reader. Emphasizing this writing error suggests the understanding that overcoming a disability does not erase a disability, but Goldberg's description still ends with a reminder to work hard: "Today, Goldberg has come a long way from a teenage mother to one of the most powerful women in show business, thanks to hard work—including the hard work of believing in herself" ("Overcaem"). Dyslexic students are often told that they are not determined or working hard enough to overcome their writing issues in the course of a semester, and messages like this emphasize the individual responsibility of working hard to overcome your disability.

FBL's billboards also include examples of academic determination, such as Harvard graduate Brooke Ellison smiling in her graduation robe and cap, with her wheelchair and ventilator visible. The text reads, "Quadriplegic. A-. Harvard." The image communicates a connection between Ellison's physical disability—a spinal injury from childhood—and her intellectual capacity. The fuller description details her high SAT scores and the role of her mother, who lived with her in the Harvard dormitories, but again Ellison's description ends with an inspirational message about determination: "No matter what sort of adversity or challenge you might face, you can always believe that, with hope, it can be conquered and, in the end, you will be stronger for it" ("Quadriplegic"). Each story of hard work and determination highlights willpower, inner strength, and the power of believing in yourself rather than acknowledging the importance of strong support networks or even suggesting that

you do not need to erase your disability to succeed. Kafer writes, "Within this individualist framework, disability is presented as something to overcome through achievement and dedication" (89). Collectively, these advertisements are meant to inspire viewers to achieve their dreams; however, they also communicate a message about disability as something that must be overcome to reach those goals, which shuts down any possibilities of affirming disability as a positive attribute or way of being.

Many popular representations of disability invite overcoming and sentimental narratives, and these are common in both print and digital media. The overcoming narrative is widely circulated through inspirational news stories in forums like Reddit, YouTube, and other social media platforms. These stories are meant to inspire individuals to persevere and overcome their hardships—to make nondisabled readers feel happy that disabled people are overcoming adversity, guilty for not doing enough to accomplish our own goals, relieved that we are not them, or hopeful that we, too, can overcome if we find ourselves in a similar situation. For example, the Scott Hamilton quote "The only disability in life is a bad attitude" is frequently placed on images of physically disabled children or athletes. Images that encourage overcoming perpetuate medical-model views about disability, though in ways that are frequently well-intentioned. Disability activist Laura Hershey argues that we are hesitant to challenge or outright critique efforts that seem "fundamentally good, or at least well-meaning." At the same time, Hershey notes that the "actions which are intended to help a certain group of people *may actually harm* them" by reinforcing their devalued status. Images that encourage overcoming are intended to inspire but have damaging consequences.

Ultimately, overcoming narratives are meant to soothe the able-bodied, to make viewers feel better or be thankful for their bodies. Examples from Autism Speaks, an organization with a controversial mission and approach to raising awareness about autism, are seemingly endless. In 2015, Autism Speaks shared the article "They told my parents I wouldn't talk; Now I'm graduating from college" on its Facebook page with the following description: "This story

of overcoming the obstacles will make your night. #AutismAwareness." The post got 10,460 reactions. I genuinely love stories like this. Many autistic people—my brother included—are able to accomplish much more than what doctors, therapists, and teachers predict. However, in very few words, this post invokes wonder (*Can you believe this?*) and self-indulgence by emphasizing how *readers* will feel after consuming this narrative. The circulation of inspirational overcoming narratives contributes to a cultural narrative of disability that is disembodied from disabled experiences and conflates overcoming with success. The saturation of these narratives about students overcoming their disabilities shapes assumptions and understandings of disability, who disabled students are, and what they need.

Disability Discourses in Higher Education: #AcademicAbleism

The social and cultural pervasiveness of rhetorics of overcoming necessarily influences how people understand and engage with disability in other contexts. In *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*, Jay Dolmage investigates the many ways in which university systems have been structured to exclude nonnormative bodies, minds, and abilities. Academic ableism is disability-based discrimination that occurs in higher education, and Dolmage argues that "the ethic of higher education still encourages students and teachers alike to accentuate ability, valorize perfection, and stigmatize anything that hints at intellectual (or physical) weakness" (3). Disabled students face physical, social, and pedagogical barriers that deny them equitable access to learning. Instructors know that students enter the classroom with a range of abilities, knowledges, and needs, but it can be difficult to create accessible pedagogical spaces when students' needs are not disclosed—either informally or institutionally.

In higher education, there is an expectation for students and instructors to overcome mental and psychiatric disabilities. Disability disclosures of mental illness are risky in academia, where we are "often still devoted to the mythos of the good man speaking well, the professor as bastion of reason, the *cogito ergo sum*" (Pryal 8).

In academia, where the mind is highly valued, there is fear among both students and faculty of disclosing any variations of the mind. The mentally disabled are often stripped of rhetorical significance and denied personhood, dismissed as rhetorically *un*sound. Margaret Price writes, "To lack rhetoricity is to lack all basic freedoms and rights, including the freedom to express ourselves and the right to be listened to" (*Mad* 26–27). There is an association and conflation of mental health with madness that necessitates a static notion of rationality for the rhetor to exist. Reflecting on her own psychiatric disability, Pryal writes, "I feared I would be seen as unreasonable, irrational, and therefore unable to do the work required of a professor. I feared that because of my disability, my career would be over" (4).

This fear of disclosure and retribution is widespread among faculty with psychiatric and mental disabilities. In a cross-institutional qualitative study of 267 mentally disabled university faculty, Margaret Price et al. reported that most of their survey respondents (86.9 percent) did not request accommodations from Disability Services, and many indicated fear that these requests "might affect tenure and promotion, lead to avoidance or poor treatment by others, or affect factors such as salary or job security." Narratives of mental illness in higher education emphasize deficit, discouraging disclosure by faculty members and, frequently, students.

Thousands of these narratives about ableism, mental illness, and higher education can be found on Twitter through the hashtag #AcademicAbleism. Taken together, these tweets contextualize how rhetorics of overcoming are written, circulated, and rewritten within academic contexts. From March 20, 2014, to December 30, 2018, there were roughly 2,300 #AcademicAbleism tweets. In the grand scheme of the Twittersphere, two thousand tweets in four years is not particularly noteworthy, but the hashtag has become a space used consistently by students and faculty to share everyday experiences with barriers in higher education, respond to cultural or popular discourses about disability in higher education, and advocate for accessible pedagogical and curricular practices. Perhaps most important, it has prompted a series of additional hashtags to continue the conversation about ableism in academic spaces.

The #AcademicAbleism hashtag emerged in March 2014 after *The Guardian* published multiple articles about graduate student mental health in a series titled "Mental Health: A University Crisis." These articles focus on how commonplace mental health issues are in academia, such as PhD students who struggle with depression, sleep-related issues, eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. For example, the article "How to Stay Sane through a PhD: Get Survival Tips from Fellow Students" explains why doctoral students are *sad* and how yoga may serve as a positive activity to "stay grounded amid academic stress" (Weitershausen). This advice is well-intentioned but downplays students' mental health concerns while simultaneously placing the responsibility of mental health on individual students rather than addressing the structures that create and perpetuate an institutional culture of depression, anxiety, and pressure to overcome those feelings. With its reduction of serious mental health issues to mere stress, within a broader series that ignores the institutions that often create and perpetuate these issues, "How to Stay Sane through a PhD" sparked a Twitter conversation about inaccessible academic structures, practices, and attitudes.

Originally begun by graduate student Zara Bain (@zaranosaur), the hashtag #AcademicAbleism was used by a mix of graduate and undergraduate students in the UK and the US to report instances—whether isolated or repeated—of inaccessibility, discrimination, and exclusion in higher education. The majority of the #AcademicAbleism tweets address the challenges students face in trying to secure access to equitable classroom accommodations. There are more than 2,000 tweets that address negotiating and/or securing accommodations through university disability support services and/or talking with instructors. This number does not include the tweets about specific kinds of accommodations, such as captions and subtitles for in-class videos, access to a notetaker, laptop or computer use, extended time on assignments, and adjusted attendance policies. These narratives are written by students with chronic illnesses who drop (or get dropped from) classes because of strict attendance policies, deaf students who are required to watch

uncaptioned videos or to read aloud in class, and students whose accommodations are outed because they use laptops in class. Many undergraduate and graduate college students have also used the hashtag to reflect on how their experiences with academic ableism, particularly the lack of institutional accommodations (or instructors who chose not to enact those accommodations), prompted them to leave academia.

The #AcademicAbleism conversation illustrates both the institutional demands for students to overcome their disabilities and also the self-advocacy of students who must overcome inaccessible structures within their university systems. In *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning,* Tanya Titchkosky writes, "Structures are neither static nor accidental but are, instead, social activities; they carry messages about collective conceptions of people and places, conceptions which themselves come into existence through such social structures and activities" (92). University policies, classroom spaces, and pedagogical practices all carry messages about who belongs in and can access those spaces. Many students do not feel welcome to challenge inaccessible practices with their instructors, and Twitter conversations like #AcademicAbleism, #EverydayAca demicAbleism, and #WhyDisabledPeopleDropOut are channels to voice these experiences, express solidarity, and share strategies with others. As a social space, Twitter invites students, instructors, and administrators to *come over*, identify inaccessible practices, and rewrite more accessible narratives and institutional practices. These conversations highlight the importance of listening to students' needs, because providing accommodations does not require listening to students' *needs* in different contexts; instead, it is a process that listens to *diagnoses*. Twitter is a useful space for coming together to rewrite disability and accessibility narratives, and these conversations can be really useful for providing insight to those of us who work in higher education. However, instructors and administrators also need to create space in programmatic and classroom cultures for listening to students' needs and collaboratively rewriting rhetorics of overcoming.

RHETORICS OF OVERCOMING AND COMING OVER

Writing studies, despite being a relatively new discipline, has established itself as a space to question, analyze, and rewrite narratives about what academic writing should be and who has access (or is denied access) to certain spaces and pedagogical practices. With its attention to access, identity, and different forms of knowing and composing, writing studies is a unique space for counteracting ableist narratives and resisting rhetorics of overcoming. Indeed, there has been critical interdisciplinary work in DS that affects both composition pedagogy and rhetorical studies. In *Disability Rhetoric,* Jay Dolmage explores common disability "myths" or tropes, including overcoming, which requires the individual to surmount their disability through either sheer determination or superhuman strengths:

> In this myth, the person with a disability overcomes their impairment through hard work or has some special talent that offsets their deficiencies. . . . The audience does not have to focus on the disability, or challenge the stigma that this disability entails, but instead refocuses attention toward the "gift." This works as a management of the fears of the temporarily able-bodied (if and when I become disabled, I will compensate or overcome), and it acts as a demand placed upon disabled bodies (you had better be very good at something). (39–40)

Super crips are "courageous or heroic super achievers" (Shapiro 16) who are represented as "'superhuman' because they achieve unexpected accomplishments or live a normal life just like people with no disabilities" (Zhang and Haller 321). Super crips satisfy the desire for overcoming while curtailing fears, but they do not represent all or even the majority of the disabled community. Yet this simultaneous fear of disability and desire for the disabled to overcome is pervasive in different spheres of knowledge production.

In this book, I explore how *rhetorics of overcoming*—discourses promoting the idea that disabled students must overcome their disabilities in order to be successful, to fit in, or to meet the stan-

dard—manifest in writing pedagogies through medical-model desires to diagnose students or encourage students to self-disclose and then default to accommodating practices. I identify rhetorics of overcoming as dominant discourses of disability that focus on diagnosis, disclosure, and accommodations. The culture of institutional accommodations in higher education seeks to meet students' needs yet is contingent upon diagnosing and accommodating students on an individual basis. Accommodations are individual measures for individually problemed bodies, and the way institutions often provide them (and instructors receive and interpret them) absolves institutional practices of blame and instead places it on students. Students are responsible for seeking and securing accommodations and, thus, inclusion in academic culture. Accommodations become a way to "fit in" to the mainstream, where "fitting in" rather than challenging oppressive structures is the ultimate goal (Jung 162). Institutional models for accommodations raise an important question: How can we move away from rhetorics of overcoming—the desire to diagnose and accommodate students—to better meet the needs of both disabled and nondisabled students in our classroom and writing center pedagogies?

To be clear, I am not making an argument for the complete eradication of accommodations, but I want to reimagine the current use of accommodations as the only way we meet students' needs—as afterthoughts or retrofits. In *Academic Ableism*, Jay Dolmage writes, "Retrofits like ramps 'fix' space, but retrofits also have a chronicity—a timing and a time logic—that renders them highly temporary yet also relatively unimportant" (70). A student submits accommodation requests every semester. As evidenced by the #AcademicAbleism narratives, this process is not always easy, which sometimes means that students have not secured their accommodations by the time classes start, or that the accommodation is not even applicable—for example, an accommodation granting extra time on tests in a writing class. Retrofitting is not always negative, as it is not always feasible to remove and replace inaccessible structures, but we need to evaluate the process. The sole reliance on accommodations limits the potential to craft more accessible

pedagogies, by meeting students' needs *only* if they provide formal documentation.

Throughout this book, I interrogate how rhetorics of overcoming manifest in writing studies scholarship and practices while demonstrating the value of engaging disabled students and instructors in discussions of accessible writing pedagogy—inviting them to *come over* and share their experiences, needs, and expertise. In practice, accessibility is often a unidirectional process, where instructors and administrators only address access within the legal parameters of institutional accommodations and/or try to create accessible physical and digital writing environments without input from disabled students (and instructors) who have valuable experiences that can—and should—inform research practices, curricular development, and pedagogical instruction. I call for development of understandings of disability and difference that move beyond accommodation models in which students are diagnosed and remediated, instead encouraging instructors, administrators, consultants, and students themselves to work together to craft accessible writing pedagogies that meet students' access needs.

I want to imagine a *coming over* narrative that embraces disability, difference, and nonnormative practices—a narrative that informs the crafting of pedagogical practices that welcome a wide range of embodied experiences to *come over* and join the conversation on accessibility. When I first encountered Brenda Brueggemann's multimodal text "Articulating Betweenity: Literacy, Language, Identity, and Technology in the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Collection," I was struck by her discussion of *coming over*. She argues that we should not think of students as needing to *overcome*, which suggests a deficit that must be fixed, but rather we need to recognize the importance of students *coming over*, which repositions deficit as "performative gains" (Brueggemann, "Articulating"). Instead of demanding that students overcome language deficiencies, coming over is a commitment to performing what are often deemed as nonnormative expressions of rhetoricity. That is, coming over indicates an embrace—on behalf of both the student and the instructor—of disability and difference. This flips the traditional narrative that po-

sitions disability as something that must be overcome in order for student writers to successfully meet literacy and language standards.

Central to this reframing is the concept of "betweenity," a rhetorical process of toggling between decisions and identities and, as often occurs in educational spaces for disabled students, a process of being stuck between experiences and expectations. Brueggemann defines *betweenity* as "a relational space between one's various identities (and others who share, or don't, those identities) and also a relational space constructed by (and through) one's literacy (reading, writing, speaking) skills, particularly in a dominant language." Betweenity can be both an agentive process where disabled students make decisions about how they choose to express and represent themselves, and also a space where student writers get stuck between their own literacy practices and dominant literacy and language standards. In educational environments, betweenity is a space where disabled students are taught dominant literacies, but it also exists as "a space where the deaf other is potentially educating (hearing) others, and younger/distant deaf others as well—often in and through the non-dominant literacies." Betweenity is a back-and-forth process where disabled students negotiate rhetorical and literacy practices with themselves and with instructors, which can be an oppressive space when students are forced to overcome their nonnormative expressions of rhetoricity, but can also be a collaborative space where students share knowledge about literacy and language. It is this tension—between overcoming and coming over—that I explore throughout this book.

To engage in a process of *coming over* necessitates the creation of pedagogical spaces that privilege—not just accommodate—nonnormative literacy practices. And, as I will argue throughout this book, the crafting of multimodal pedagogical spaces makes room for students to perform disability and different literacy practices that acknowledge, respect, and *privilege* a wide range of embodied processes of meaning-making. This privileging not only more wholly enacts socially just and inclusive pedagogies, but also makes room for the composition of more robust, rhetorically rich texts. Importantly, this process of coming over must also invite disabled

students to discuss how they best learn and compose, to better facilitate their own learning but also to broaden definitions of literacy and rhetorical expression. This discussion cannot just happen in individual classes once the semester has begun, but must instead take place at the curricular level to prioritize accessibility. I contend that rewriting rhetorics of overcoming as narratives of coming over is one way to overcome ableist pedagogical standards. To come over is to co-construct writing spaces that are accessible and inclusive to students with nonnormative rhetorical practices, presenting students with multiple access points for engaging, learning, and composing. Whereas rhetorics of overcoming rely on medical-model processes of diagnosis, disclosure, cure, and overcoming for individual students, coming over involves the valuing of disability and difference and challenging systemic issues of physical and pedagogical inaccessibility.

COMING OVER IN WRITING
STUDIES RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

In higher education, there is an expectation for students to learn and demonstrate knowledge in certain ways, and to disclose disabilities in order to have their access needs met if those expectations are inaccessible to them. In writing studies, students are expected to engage dominant literacy practices, engage specific processes and technologies, and compose texts that meet a set of normative criteria. As I will argue throughout *Rhetorics of Overcoming*, these expectations are often ableist and inaccessible to disabled student writers (and more broadly, a wide range of nonnormative student populations), resulting in the need for students to engage in complex processes of disclosure. As noted previously, this toggling between what students *want* and *must* disclose in order to have their access needs met is loaded with power dynamics as students and instructors come together to navigate what access looks like in a writing classroom. I wonder, though: To what extent do students need to disclose disabilities for us to build accessible writing pedagogies? How do we work with each other and with students to develop accessible teaching practices and, by extension, accessible research practices that inform these teaching practices?

Like much cultural rhetorics scholarship, this book reaches across disciplines to develop an accessible framework for disrupting one-size-fits-all pedagogical theories, practices, and methodologies. In particular, I address how attention to DS can inform how we engage disability and accessibility in our research and teaching practices. In "Stories of Methodology: Interviewing Sideways, Crooked and Crip," Margaret Price and Stephanie Kerschbaum note how disability crips[7] the ways in which we imagine, enact, and write about methodology—that is, how centering disability makes visible the exclusionary nature of normative research practices. They claim that "from the beginning, DS scholars have understood that methodology is a key mechanism of disabled peoples' oppression, and that taking back our methodologies is a means of fighting back" (23). Qualitative research is a staple in writing studies research, although there are access issues and normate assumptions about how both researchers and participants should act within the kairotic space of an interview. There is also the issue of how disability is represented within that research.

For this project, I focus on rhetorics of overcoming to interrogate normality and medicalized discourses about disability and writing. As Simi Linton notes, there are many methodological concerns involved with researching disability:

> How does the structure and focus of research contribute to ableist notions of disability? What perspectives inform the choice of variables, theories to be tested, interpretative frameworks to be employed, and subjects/objects to be studied? How has the research agenda been influenced by the absence of disabled people in academic positions? (72–73)

These questions are vital to a study of disability and accessibility, particularly as issues that have either been ignored or not explored thoroughly within writing studies.

Building on the work of disability rhetoricians—such as Dolmage, Kerschbaum, Price, Brueggemann, Vidali, Walters, and Yergeau—who theorize how disability and accessibility have been rhetorically constructed within different contexts, I employ rhetorical analysis to better understand how rhetorics of overcoming have

manifested both in writing studies scholarship and in our peda-gogical practices. Because attention to disability necessarily means paying close attention to the body, my work is also informed by embodied theories of multimodal and digital composition (Alexander and Rhodes; Arola and Wysocki; Butler, "Embodied Captions" and "Where"; Cedillo; Ceraso, "(Re)Educating" and "Sounding"; Dolmage, "Writing"; Shipka, "Including" and *Toward*; Yergeau et al., "Multimodality"). Building on the methodological work of disability, writing, and multimodality scholars, I developed an institutional review board–approved study in 2014 that involved a survey of undergraduate students enrolled in writing courses across five institutions, a workshop with writing instructors, and follow-up interviews with both students and instructors. Here, I offer snippets from this qualitative research that led me to question the role of disclosures in rhetorics of overcoming, reflecting on the methodological challenges of developing an ethical qualitative study of accessibility and negotiating disability disclosures—both students' and my own.

Inviting Students to Come Over and Share Their Experiences with (In)Accessibility

I frequently encounter arguments from other instructors and administrators that disabled students' needs are *dramatically* different from those of nondisabled students, that their learning needs are beyond what we can adequately prepare for in the space of a writing classroom, or even that we must make decisions about what is best for disabled students because they cannot articulate their own needs. To design more accessible writing pedagogies, we must value and listen to the needs articulated by all students—those who disclose disabilities and those who do not. Specifically, I argue that we need to cultivate spaces for students to share these needs in ways that are not othering. To better understand the dynamics of accessibility and how students understand their needs in writing classrooms, I surveyed undergraduate students about their experiences in college writing classes, from specific questions about disability and accommodations to broader questions about the use of multimodality in their writing classes.

This study was fraught with disclosure negotiations, from drafting questions to conducting follow-up interviews with participants: *Do I ask students to disclose disabilities? Do I disclose disabilities?* For the survey, I asked students whether they identified as disabled but chose not to require them to disclose those disabilities. Instead, after asking whether students identified as disabled, I asked, "If yes, is this an important part of how you perceive yourself as a writer (how you read, learn, understand texts, brainstorm ideas, write and revise)?" Seven of 121 students disclosed disabilities, and five indicated that their identification with disability was an important part of how they perceived themselves as writers and secured accommodations. There were three students who indicated that they did not identify as disabled but had requested and received accommodations, which legally requires a disability diagnosis and documentation process. These results left me wondering about self-identification and how to create systems of support that aren't reliant on disability disclosures and diagnoses.

My questions about the role and ethics of disclosure in the classroom and research contexts intensified during a follow-up interview with a creative writing major, Tiana.[8] She disclosed an issue with multiple stimuli in her survey, and an hour into our interview about disability identity, disclosures, and rhetorics of overcoming, Tiana offered another disclosure: "Throughout my life, I've dealt on and off with these issues of depression and anxiety. I mentioned this multiple stimuli thing that I have, so I can't deal with multiple stimuli. So these are ways that make my brain if not disabled [then] unique, you know what I mean?" She had not disclosed depression or anxiety in the survey, and I was interested in why she had mentioned it. What had changed in our conversation that Tiana felt comfortable disclosing that information, and what did she gain from it?

Disability disclosures are never static: they are contextual to situations and to audiences. In "On Rhetorical Agency and Disclosing Disability in Academic Writing," Kerschbaum draws on Price's notion of *kairotic* spaces, "the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged" (Price, *Mad at School* 60), to argue that disability disclosures exist

within complex systems of "circulating narratives of disability and able-bodiedness, relationships among interlocutors, and institutional and environmental contexts" (Kerschbaum, "On Rhetorical Agency" 63). People make sense of different discourses in relation to their own experiences and goals for how they want to identify themselves and be identified by others, and students often engage in a process of "risk management" (Wood, "Rhetorical") when making choices about when and where to disclose. There are many reasons why a student may not disclose, and in the kairotic space of our interview, I had not thought of creating a space where we could exchange knowledge; rather, I had established a space where Tiana would share knowledge with me and where I held the power, as someone conducting disability research without disclosing my own position with regard to disability, which may have reinforced my able-bodied appearance.

Prompted by Tiana's disclosure, I decided to disclose my own history with and scholarly interests in disability and writing. I wasn't sure what to expect from that disclosure—whether Tiana would address it, build from it, or simply ignore it—but she immediately responded by explaining her interconnected experiences with depression, anxiety, and writing:

> When I was a teenager . . . I had issues with depression, anxiety, and I was seeing counselors, and those are *problems* that have never gone away for me. Especially when I was in college for a while it just got really bad. I was still doing [*pause*] you know my work in the classroom, I was getting really good grades, and I was involved in a lot of things. And for all intents and purposes, I was a functional human being except for the fact that I was completely overridden by these feelings, which I think more people have than admit to them. I learned slowly throughout college, the more I wrote then the better I felt.

She explained that what caused her anxiety was something that she could harness to compose detailed, thoughtful writing. Throughout the interview, Tiana positioned herself as someone whose needs

were not frequently met in writing classes and who disclosed disabilities but did not receive accommodations. In an academic culture where we meet students' needs based largely on diagnoses and formal accommodations, where does that leave students like Tiana?

Inviting Instructors to Come Over to Discussions of Accessibility

In addition to learning from students, I wanted to create space for writing instructors and consultants to share concerns and strategies about accessible classroom practices. I organized a workshop for writing faculty and graduate students to introduce universal design (UD) and multimodality as frameworks for identifying inaccessible classroom structures and to brainstorm inclusive practices; I then conducted follow-up interviews with instructors. To preface this conversation, I shared the survey results that I had collected in order to foreground students' experiences *before* discussing how to craft more accessible and inclusive practices. Three key themes emerged from this workshop: how to accommodate what we don't know or can't see, how to develop accessible practices at both the classroom and curricular levels, and how to accommodate students whose accommodations don't apply to writing classes.

A common refrain in the instructor workshop was that it is easy to determine the accessibility of physical environments but more difficult to determine pedagogical inaccessibility. During an interview, I asked one of the instructors, Brian, to articulate his understanding of accessibility:

> I think of [accessibility] as providing a range of opportunities [for students] to do the work of the course or follow their own desires or come up with their objectives or values but in a range of different ways. So I'm thinking of it as access points. Access points that some students are going to be able to reach more easily based on maybe ability, but then having enough of those so that students can feel like based on their individual ability and whether it has to do with overcoming a particular type of mental or physical handicap or not—or what they conceive of as a handicap or what has been diagnosed as one.

Talking openly with students about how assignments may benefit particular types of learners and creating access points where students can engage with content differently are small-scale practices that can help cultivate a culture of accessibility. On a larger scale, discussing accessibility in composition pedagogy classes and teacher training seminars instills an awareness of the many different ways students learn and make meaning. Foregrounding accessibility means evaluating how we—as practitioners, as scholars—value and engage with difference.

One faculty member, Elijah, disclosed a learning disability during our interview, connecting his understandings of accessibility to his experiences as a writing center administrator with a learning disability. As I discuss in Chapter 3, writing center discourses of accessibility and disability are often framed in terms of diagnosis and accommodation, as Elijah acknowledged: "If we can see a student or some aspect of a student that indicates some form or level of disability, because it's obvious and because it's harder to ignore, that oftentimes becomes a focus both in literature and also how [writing center staff]—whether it's instructors or tutors—approach their work." This resonates with a diagnose-and-accommodate approach to disability, but, because of his own invisible disability, Elijah noted that he tried to be mindful of the unknowns:

> I only am aware of the things that students are willing to disclose, so part of that for me is being open [about] my own learning disability, trying to get students to feel comfortable to be willing to disclose information so that I can hopefully rethink my classroom or rethink my tutoring strategies and approaches in a way that's going to help those students.

Self-disclosures are rhetorical strategies that are shaped by embodied experiences and are dependent on context. Elijah reflected on his own experiences and self-disclosed in the kairotic space of the one-on-one consulting session to make students feel comfortable sharing their own learning needs. This is not unlike my disclosure to Tiana, which created space for a dialogue.

A METHODOLOGY FOR RESISTING
RHETORICS OF OVERCOMING

I opened this chapter with a few disclosures of my own, which in many ways is an ethical necessity for folks engaging in disability work—something I discuss later in this section. It is my goal to frame disclosure as a form of rhetoricity; that is, disclosure can function strategically to build writing environments that more fully account for a wide range of students' and instructors' needs. Disclosure was a dominant theme throughout both the students' and the instructors' responses about disability and accessibility that I highlighted in the previous section. Although the study was limited in scope, what I learned from creating space to listen to the needs of disabled and nondisabled writing students was the significance of (self-)disclosure in the process of ensuring pedagogical accessibility. Ultimately, this research raised questions for me about the ethics of disclosure in both research and pedagogical contexts:

- What are the rhetorical potentials and risks of researchers disclosing to participants in studies of accessibility and disability?
- What are the rhetorical potentials of students disclosing disabilities to their instructors and classmates? In contrast, how do external demands for disclosure harm students' learning? What risks do students face when they disclose in face-to-face, digital, and anonymous environments?
- How do we create pedagogical spaces that do not rely solely on systems of diagnosis and disclosure to ensure accessibility for disabled student writers?

These are questions that I hope to address throughout *Rhetorics of Overcoming*. And although there are no easy answers to any of these questions, I rely on DS theory and methodology as frameworks for better understanding these issues and designing more inclusive research and pedagogical practices.

Disability studies methodology draws attention to whose voices and narratives are represented in our research and how we ethically and inclusively represent ourselves and our participants in our re-

search. In "Disability Studies Methodology: Explaining Ourselves to Ourselves," Margaret Price observes that "like DS scholarship more generally, DS methodology aims at a radical reshaping of relations of power" (164) in terms of whose knowledges and experiences are valued and represented—and why. Price draws on Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of contact zones to identify four contact zones that shape DS methodology: access, activism, identification, and representation. DS methodology builds on feminist and social justice methodologies by encouraging researchers to be critical of long-held methods that may be inaccessible to researchers and/or participants, to adapt our methods, and to be reflexive and transparent about our practices. Being reflexive about how we represent ourselves and our participants means we must always be ready to adapt to the kairotic situation of the qualitative interview, so the disability researcher is not wholly participant nor observer, objective nor subjective (Brueggemann, "Still-Life" 19–20). Rather, we toggle between these roles. This state of betweenity emphasizes the complexities of the power dynamics in disability research: disability is dynamic, and accessibility must always be negotiated.

Taking up DS research involves questioning who we imagine as our participants when we design studies, and making space for our own identifications with disability. Price writes, "I argue that DS research must make more space for explicit identification by researchers—not in a rote, 'here's my diagnosis' way, but in ways that are characterized by creativity, contradiction, and revision over time" ("Disability" 169). When I first presented data from this study in 2015, an audience member raised their hand and told me that I read as nondisabled. And for the purposes of the survey that I distributed, I did not disclose otherwise. Brueggemann warns that self-reflexivity "risks turning representation into a solipsistic, rhetorical position in which the researcher (the self)—ah, once again—usurps the position of the subject (the other). For in being self-reflexive, we turn the lens back on ourselves, put ourselves at the center of representation" ("Still-Life" 19). I didn't want to fixate on myself, yet found myself disclosing in follow-up interviews to build connections. In *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*, Kersch-

baum describes resisting disclosure because she was not studying herself: "But that sense of detachment was the very thing—or one of the main things—that kept me from really understanding that my experience of deafness was not just something that happened to me, but also something that others took up in various and complicated ways" (24). Disclosure and self-reflexivity can be channels for more deeply engaging research, particularly studies of disability and accessibility.

To actively resist rhetorics of overcoming, it is of theoretical and political importance for disability researchers to state their subject positions in complex and meaningful ways, because "stating that one identifies as disabled or nondisabled calls attention to the absent voice of disabled people in scholarship and illustrates that the reader may tend to make the assumption, although probably not consciously, that the writer is nondisabled" (Linton 153). In the context of the researcher-participant relationship, not sharing my positionality with participants—coupled with a lack of visible disabilities—may have read not as an attempt at objectivity but as a performance of able-bodiedness. Disclosing is an opportunity to build trust, and disclosures can and should move beyond a disabled/nondisabled binary to include familial, work, social, and political relationships to disability (Corbett). Disability studies offers a way to think about disclosure differently: rather than being used as a mechanism to formulate prescribed practices that are designed to address the checklist characteristics of a diagnosed disability, disclosure can be used rhetorically to build accessible support systems.

Although I will illustrate the ways in which disclosure can be stigmatizing and harmful, I also hope to illustrate the ways in which students, tutors, instructors, and administrators can use disclosure rhetorically. Disclosures can be used to build community and to share access needs, and they operate as tangible reminders of the material needs of students. As I turn toward UD and multimodality as two theoretical frameworks that writing instructors and administrators can use to resist rhetorics of overcoming, disclosure serves as an important reminder to center students' embodied experiences and needs when designing pedagogical infrastructures.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

I begin Chapter 2 ("(De)Valuing Disability: Moving beyond Accommodation Approaches to Accessibility in Writing Studies") by contextualizing and historicizing overcoming within the field of writing studies, highlighting the dominant discourses that have influenced our pedagogical theories about disability and writing. I focus first on scholarship that aligns with medical and social models of disability, arguing that we can better understand the field's treatment of nonnormative student writers by placing medical-model and basic writing discourses in conversation. Then I address how social models of disability have been applied to writing studies, exploring UD and multimodality as two theories that can inform an embodied multimodal writing pedagogy and move *beyond* the accommodation approach that informs prevailing scholarship, practices, and attitudes for and toward disability.

Multimodal composing and teaching practices are widespread, and theories that highlight the multiple and diverse ways that students know, learn, and compose can help instructors and administrators proactively construct accessible pedagogical environments rather than defaulting to accommodation. In addition to writing classrooms, I explore accommodation approaches to accessibility in writing center contexts in Chapter 3 ("Resisting Diagnosis and Creating Avenues for Agency in the Writing Center"), identifying the ways in which rhetorics of overcoming have influenced writing center scholarship and pedagogy in order to theorize accessible consulting practices grounded in theories of UD and multimodality. I argue that the rhetorical agency built into multimodal pedagogies offers students, consultants, and instructors flexibility in finding access points and negotiating their learning and composing needs without moving through a process of diagnosis, accommodation, and overcoming. In Chapter 4, "Guaranteeing Access(ibility) in the Multimodal Writing Classroom," I offer a framework that foregrounds accessibility as an integral part of rhetorical practice, highlighting accessible multimodal practices that instructors can adapt for their writing classrooms.

Finally, I conclude in Chapter 5 ("Toward an Ethics of Accessibility") with snapshots of how rhetorics of overcoming shape my day-to-day experiences of navigating campus. I do so to illustrate how these narratives of overcoming are both reinforced and resisted in different contexts. Specifically, I illustrate how multimodality and UD manifest in ways that increase accessibility and work toward disability justice in university settings, and how—in other ways—inaccessible spaces could benefit from a universally designed, multimodal lens. Ultimately, I contend that explicitly addressing disability and accessibility in conversations about literacy and writing in multiple modes is necessary for foregrounding the role of accessibility in composing.

Increasingly, a range of students' abilities, disabilities, technological literacies, and comfort levels are present in the classroom, and it is simply not reasonable to think that students can or should always access all modes equally well. Indeed, during our interview, Tiana asked, "Disability is just sort of about mode of learning and alternative modes of learning, and how do you get away from a structure that doesn't actually apply to a large percentage of kids because they're learning and receiving information in different ways?" There is a complex landscape of needs in the college writing classroom—particularly in first-year writing—and many of these needs are never disclosed. Writing instructors and administrators need to redesign pedagogical structures that necessitate a disability disclosure or diagnosis and reinforce rhetorics of overcoming, developing practices that instead foreground accessibility and reaffirm students' embodied ways of learning and composing. In the following chapters, I illustrate how theories of UD and multimodal composition can increase the accessibility of writing pedagogy, but this process involves *coming over* to a different orientation to disability and accessibility—one that requires listening to the needs of students and valuing the experiences, knowledges, and literacies they bring into the classroom.

In this accessible, thoughtful, engaging text, Allison Hitt enacts a pedagogy of disclosure, inviting all of us to come over together to reconsider the harms and barriers regularly raised by rhetorics of overcoming in writing studies. Taking up theories from multimodal composing and universal design to individual pedagogies and programmatic practices, Hitt brilliantly teaches us what it might mean to come over rather than overcome, and consequently, to participate in creating more socially just institutions and fields.

– Stephanie Kerschbaum, University of Washington

Rhetorics of Overcoming addresses the in/accessibility of writing classroom and writing center practices for disabled and nondisabled student writers, exploring how rhetorics of overcoming—the idea that disabled students must overcome their disabilities in order to be successful—manifest in writing studies scholarship and practices. Allison Harper Hitt argues that rewriting rhetorics of overcoming as narratives of "coming over" is one way to overcome ableist pedagogical standards. Whereas rhetorics of overcoming rely on medical-model processes of diagnosis, disclosure, cure, and overcoming for individual students, coming over involves valuing disability and difference and challenging systemic issues of physical and pedagogical inaccessibility. Hitt calls for developing understandings of disability and difference that move beyond accommodation models in which students are diagnosed and remediated, instead working collaboratively—with instructors, administrators, consultants, and students themselves—to craft multimodal, universally designed writing pedagogies that meet students' access needs.

Allison Harper Hitt is assistant professor of rhetoric and composition at Ball State University.

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