2020

Dis/Ableist Consumption: A Critical Thematic Analysis of Avowed and Ascribed Neuro-Identities in the Classroom

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Neuro-Identities in the Classroom

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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June 2020

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Title: Dis/Ableist Consumption: A Critical Thematic Analysis of Avowed and Ascribed Neuro-Identities in the Classroom
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Degree Date: June 2020

Abstract

In the United States, faculty and students are publicly claiming neurodivergent identities and support for the neurodiversity movement. This study uses Collier and Hecht's cultural identity theories with Lang and Chen's two-step process, critical thematic analysis (CTA), to examine avowals and ascriptions with four diagnostic terms, ASD, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and dyslexia, of students and professors from Rate My Professors (RMP) with Ritter's frame of RMP as a phenomenon.

A total of 1,022 posts are analyzed to understand how students resist or re-inscribe popular medical model/deficit discourse in the classroom: student avowals (N = 232), professor avowals (N = 51), student ascriptions (N = 12), and ascriptions of professors (N = 736). Professors avowed dyslexia more often than the other neuro-terms. There were more ascriptions of professor's bipolar disorder than ADHD, ASD, or dyslexia. Also, there were more student avowals and student ascriptions of ADHD than ASD, bipolar disorder, or dyslexia.

Step 1 of CTA revealed key themes for each group. Five themes emerged from student avowals: *learning challenges, workload, accessibility, professor's aptitude,* and *impact*. Professor avowals revealed three themes: *admission*, *blame*, and *disclosure*. Three themes emerged from student ascriptions: *diagnosis effects students' self-perceptions, students (with the diagnosis) are disadvantaged in the classroom,* and *students are not treated equally or fairly by professors*. Four themes emerged from ascriptions of professors: students *declared* or *speculated* professors' neuro-identities and determined the *frequency* and *severity* of the professors' behaviors.

Step 2 revealed neuro-identities as outside of the "typical" or normal; marked by atypical ways of learning and teaching. Students described ableism and disableism as inherent to

traditional pedagogies, characteristics and behaviors, and federal/institutional policies. They also shared information about ways professors' behaviors deviated and the extent to which deviations by professors were tolerated—and the terms thereof; including ways students corrected or worked around behaviors.

Cultural identity theories and CTA are useful for understanding neuro-identity as an important cultural identity that is discursively constructed and negotiated in the classroom. More scholarship is needed to understand how neuro-identities interact with other cultural identities to improve communication across and within neuro-identities.

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Chapter One: From Deficit to Divergent

"As long as society continues to label people with disabilities as 'outsiders,' the cultural voice will be wide and the process to acculturate will be difficult" *(Humphrey, 2016, p. 78).*

For centuries, people in political and social positions of power used medicalized descriptions of human behavior to assert dominance over "others." Armed with labels, or terms, for naming others' deficit characteristics, diagnosticians and members of the dominant or "normal" group have taken it upon themselves to ensure abnormalities are policed (Armstrong, 2015; Davis, 1995; Dolmage, 2017; Linton, 1998; Silberman, 2015). In the United States, for example, neurodivergence sits within a dominant political, cultural, and pedagogical context that centers on neurotypical, or "typical" brain development. Labeling atypicality continues to be a powerful tool for policing abnormality (Lester et al., 2013, p. 53); and people with nonvisible disabilities are not widely understood, accepted or adequately accommodated in the academy (Dolmage, 2017; Kerschbaum et al., 2013; Kerschbaum & Price, 2014; Price et al., 2017).

"Contrary to public perception, individuals with severe mental illnesses can be highly successful despite—or because of—their psychiatric diagnoses" (Jones, 2015, p. 35). Still, differences are frequently "labeled 'defects' or 'deformities'" (Davis, 1995, loc. 2914). Diagnostic labels, along with stigma, remain effective tools for maintaining institutional prejudice and ensuring that "outsiders" are punished for atypical functionalities (Baker, 2011; Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Parsloe, 2015; Saunders, 2018). As communication scholars, it is imperative that we address issues of social justice and examine how we discursively reproduce these prejudices and power differences in our institutions.

Professors' identities, including neuro-identities, are discursively constructed and negotiated through communication with students in the college classroom (Coyne et al., 2016; Humphrey, 2016; Pensoneau-Conway & Cosenza, 2016). Recently, increased self-advocacy, online press about increasing workloads on professors, and concerns about professors' mental-health have brought neuro-identities to the forefront (see Price & Kerschbaum, 2017; Price et al., 2017). According to a recent study by Price et al. (2017), 62% of respondents (self-identifying faculty with mental illnesses) said "they'd disclosed their condition to someone on campus" (Flaherty, 2017). Although most of those faculty members shared that they disclosed to a peer (Flaherty, 2017), some professors have chosen or are choosing to avow their neuro-identities to their students. Few studies have focused on this phenomenon and more research is needed to understand *how* neurodivergent professors are discursively constructed in the college classroom.

Examination of students' ascriptions of faculty as atypical is warranted to study how neuro-identities are perceived in the current social political context of the neurodiversity movement. This study examines how neuro-identities are discursively constructed in the academy and whether students' use of neuro-terms reflects the dominant narrative of discourse as deficit or the emergent counternarrative of neurodiversity. This is important to address areas where these discourses are reproduced in the classroom, as well as, across other areas of our campuses.

1.1 Neurotypical Defined

The medical community is credited for introducing the term *neurotypical* into the English lexicon in the early 1990s. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, *neurotypical* is medical jargon for describing a person's normal brain development or "not affected with a developmental disorder and especially autism spectrum disorder: exhibiting or characteristic of typical neurological development" (n.p.). By the mid-late 1990s, autistics adopted the term in online

forums as shorthand for non-autistics, neurotypicals (NTs) (Blume, 1998; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Parsloe, 2015; Singer, 1998/2017). In these forums, autistics described NT behaviors as atypical or abnormal; NTs were positioned outside of autistics' experiences (Parsloe, 2015, p. 346). To better understand adoption of NT by autists, it is important to recognize its development alongside autism rights efforts by autistic self-advocates.

1.2 Autism Rights Movement

By the 1990s, autistic self-advocates and allies committed to publicly promoting autism awareness joined together and formed the autism rights movement (Autism Self Advocacy Network [ASAN], 2017; Dubin, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Robertson & Ne'eman, 2008). Despite their shared commitments to "advocating for the rights of Autistics," they disagreed on whether autism was a "medical pathology or 'disorder'" to be cured (Walker, 2014). This disagreement impacted how autism was characterized to the public; the ways autistics' experiences were described and whether a cure for autism was desired (Robertson & Ne'eman, 2008; Saunders, 2018; Silberman, 2015; Sinclair, 1993; Singer, 1998/2017). Self-advocate Jim Sinclair, described this conflict in his essay, "Don't Mourn for Us" (1993):

> It is not possible to separate the autism from the person. Therefore, when parents say, 'I wish my child did not have autism,' what they're really saying is, 'I wish the autistic child I have did not exist and I had a different (non-autistic) child instead.' Read that again. This is what we hear when you mourn over our existence. This is what we hear when you pray for a cure.

Andrew Solomon (2008) elaborated on why Sinclair's perspective resonated with other self-advocates who viewed autism as central to their identity. Solomon explained, "'person-first' terminology denies the centrality of autism and has compared 'person with autism' to describing a man as a 'person with maleness'" (see also Tumlin, 2019).

In the mid-late 1990s, sociologist and self-advocate Judy Singer (1998) studied autistic communities and identity in online forums and discussion boards. She discovered that self-

identification as neurodivergent or ND not only made a discursive claim about non-neurotypical identity, but it also acted counter to the deficit model and ableist claims that posit "non-neurotypical" as abject to normal or "neurotypical." In her study, she described this phenomenon as *neurodiversity,* noting autistic characteristics as natural or biological neurological variations of humankind (see also Armstrong, 2015; Saunders, 2018, Silberman, 2015). Singer argued that the autism movement was positioned to forge new possibilities for increasing "our understanding of our 'selves' and our place in the social world" (p. 28). Introduction of the term "neurodiversity" marked a dialectical turn towards humanizing autism spectrum disorder (ASD; and Asperger's syndrome).

By the mid-2000s, parents and grandparents of children diagnosed with autism were center stage (as evident in the immediate popularity of Autism Speaks in 2005) and a search for a cure was paramount (see also Rosenblatt, 2018). However, members of the autism rights movement were divided about how autism was being portrayed to the public; tension between deficit perspectives of autism as an "epidemic" and lived experiences of autistics were evident (Silberman, 2015; see also Saunders, 2018).

1.3 Neurodiversity Movement

In 2006, Ari Ne'eman founded the Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), a nonprofit organization by and for autistics. Members and allies of the ASAN were instrumental in the successful campaign to stop the New York University (NYU) Child Study Center from publishing a series of "Ransom Notes" posters that depicted "the diagnoses of Asperger's syndrome, autism, AD(H)D, and several other conditions as kidnappers, holding children for ransom" (Ne'eman, 2007). In "An Urgent Call to Action: Tell NYU Child Study Center to Abandon Stereotypes Against People with Disabilities," Ne'eman (2007) explained,

> This highly offensive ad campaign—which is set to launch on billboards, kiosks, print
> magazine and newspaper advertisements, and online—relies on some of the oldest and

most offensive disability stereotypes to frighten parents into making use of the NYU Child Study Center's services.

After identifying problems with the campaign, Ne'eman urged the public to voice their concerns via letter and by phone to key personnel at the NYU Child Study Center and collaborators who also worked on the campaign. The act unified the voice of members who rejected the dominant deficit narrative and resulted in their split from the autism rights movement and proclamation of the neurodiversity movement (Armstrong, 2010; Baker, 2011; Brown, 2011; Dubin, 2011; Hughes, 2015; Robertson & Ne'eman, 2008; Silberman, 2015; Singer, 1998/2017; Walker, 2014). Today, "ASAN's members and supporters include autistic adults and youth, cross-disability advocates, and non-autistic family members, professionals, educators, and friends" (ASAN, n.d.).

Together NDs, which "includes people with neurodevelopmental conditions neurological conditions, learning impairments, and mental health conditions" (Tumlin, 2019, p. 11), use diagnostic labels to establish cultural identities, or tribes, for neuro-identities (Singer, 1998/2017, pp. 19, 27; see also Price & Kerschbaum, 2017, p. 11). Today's members self-identify with a variety of neuro-identities. Autistics, ADHDers, and dyslexics, for example, are joining together to challenge typical as the ideal way of being and celebrate neurological difference (Brown, 2019; DeYoung, 2013; Dubin, 2011; Goodey, 2015; Hanan, 2018; Perner, 2012; Robison, 2013, 2019; Silberman, 2015; Sinclair, 1993; Singer, 1998/2017; Symonds, 2007; Walker, 2014; Weiss, 2016; Worley & Cornett-DeVito, 2007). Supporters maintain that more often their lived experiences are misunderstood and inaccurately described by neurotypicals (Abianac, 2018; *ASAN*, n.d.; Dubin, 2011; Grandin, 2010; Hughes, 2015; Sinclair, 1993; Singer, 1998/2017).

1.3.1 Neurodiversity and the Academy

Key figures in the neurodiversity movement, Thomas Armstrong, Temple Grandin, Ari Ne'eman, John Elder Robison, and Lydia X. Z. Brown—to name a few, have professional ties the academy. These academic scholars have discussed autism rights and neurodiversity in peer

reviewed publications, popular press, and other public forums. Their work has sparked campus and community discussions about neurodiversity and inclusion. Notably, some colleges and universities have shown their support; John Elder Robison serves as a scholar in residence and co-chair of the neurodiversity working group with The Neurodiversity Initiative at William and Mary,[1] and Colorado State University (CSU*)* staff covered Temple Grandin's scholarship in animal sciences, autism advocacy, and release of the *HBO* made for television movie, *Temple Grandin* (2010) (Phifer, n.d.; see also Thompson, 2017; CSU, 2019).

Although some ND professors have been recognized by academic institutions for their scholarship, expertise, inventions, and advocacy, self-identifying NDs are a minority in the academy. According to Jay Dolmage (2017), "the administrative and cultural milieu for disabled faculty remains relatively inhospitable, whether overtly or covertly. It's still very, very hard" for ND professors to self-identify (p. 177). Some ND professors who are afraid of the consequences (e.g., prejudice, shame, loss of credibility, termination) associated with avowed ND identity; going to great lengths to perform neurotypicality—to "pass" as normal or typical (Coyne et al., 2016; Golsan & Rudick, 2016; Kerschbaum et al., 2013).[2] According to Price and Kerchbaum (2017), this is not surprising since "a campus culture that stigmatizes or simply ignores mental disability

[1] His responsibilities include "regular meetings with groups and departments on campus about Neurodiversity" (William & Mary, n.d.).

[2] Wendy Lawson (2003) described the way neurotypicals "process life—the cognitive processes that...help to construct understanding" as neurotypicality (p. 21).

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tends to encourage silence and non-disclosure, which further exacerbates other problems surrounding these disabilities" (p. 5).[3]

Some professors are able to successfully negotiate accommodations privately with their supervisors (Price et al., 2017, p. 3). However, as Margret Price explained in a 2017 interview with *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* most faculty are unaware how to access accommodations and unsure what accommodations are available to them (Pryal, 2017). ADA standards alone do not adequately address professors' needs (Grigley, 2017; Kerschbaum et al., 2013; Kerschbaum & Price, 2014; Price, 2011). Kerschbaum and Price (2014) elaborated,

> When disability is not immediately "obvious," (as is the case with Margaret's mental disability), even if diagnostic labels are shared and information about a particular disability is provided, few people will know what to do or how to respond to build greater access, accommodations, and support.

Disability disclosures are filled with uncertainties. In part, as Goodley et al. (2018) explained, because "people respond to disability in deeply emotional ways" (p. 197). These interactions are complex; of which the outcomes can have long-lasting impacts on faculty—and the campus community (Price & Kerschbaum, 2017, p. 6). According to Price and Kerschbaum (2017), colleges and universities need to employ collaborative strategies for welcoming faculty with disabilities into the community (p. 6). Today, scholars are calling for campus leaders "to think of disability as a means to creating a campus that is more accessible for all its members" (Price & Kerschbaum, 2017, p. 6; see also Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2012).

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[3] See also Jones, 2015; Gold et al., 2016 for more about professionals, disclosure, and mental health diagnosis stigma in the fields of law and health care.

1.4 Literature Review on Neuro-Identities in the Academy

In the last thirty years, most communications studies research related to neuro-identities in the classroom has focused on students with learning disabilities (Ashlock, 2016; Atay, 2016; Atay & Ashlock, 2016; Brockmann, 2012; Cornett-Devito & Worley, 2005; Coyne et al., 2016; Fassett & Morella, 2013; Frymier & Wanzer, 2003; Golsan & Rudick, 2016; Jenks, 2017; Pensoneau-Conway & Cosenza, 2016; Price et al., 2017; Vidali, 2009; Worley & Cornett-Devito, 2007). To better understand the scholarship about neuro-identities in the classroom and how communication theories have been used to understand this phenomenon, 16 studies were examined under four interrelated themes: studying students with disabilities, teaching students with disabilities, teaching students about disabilities, and perspectives of scholars' neuro-identities. Specifically, I selected these studies for review because they addressed how invisible disabilities, disability identities, and disability in the classroom have been studied by communication scholars. The last group of literature covers research from neurominorities about institutional barriers to learning, teaching, and perspectives from non-neurotypical professors. These studies (re)center disability identity and pedagogy; they describe different ways for resisting or subverting institutional power.

1.4.1 Studying Students with [Learning] Disabilities

In "Communication and Students with Disabilities on College Campuses," David Worley (1997) challenged communication studies scholars and educators to reimagine the academy as a site for disability rights. At the center of social change are lived experiences of students with learning disabilities (SWLDs); since there was an absence of research dedicated to sharing these experiences (p. 136), more studies were needed. Since the 1990s, Worley and others have made important contributions to this area of research. This scholarship is particularly useful for

exploring how neuro-identities are (re)constructed in the classroom and whether they re-inscribe deficit discourse or resist institutional power with neurodiversity discourse.

Challenges that students with learning and physical disabilities experience in the classroom are different from those experienced by students without disabilities. According to a study by Frymier and Wazner (2003), "Students with disabilities reported feeling less understood [by professors] than students without disabilities" (p. 183). When students with physical disabilities were compared to SWLDs on perceptions of their instructors' conversational appropriateness and communication effectiveness related to accommodations, "students with physical disabilities reported more positive perceptions than students with learning disabilities" (pp. 182–183). Professors' negative attitudes towards accommodations for SWLDs can be useful for explaining why these perceptions differ between SWLDs and students with physical disabilities:

> Although professors may not overtly voice their concerns, they may appear reluctant to provide accommodations to students or seem suspicious of their disability. Most instructors have little if any background in learning disabilities, making it difficult for them to understand the student's needs. Thus, many college professors may not understand the ramifications of certain types of learning disabilities. (p. 186)

To learn more about "how SWLDs perceive instructor communication competence," Cornett-Devito and Worley (2005) recruited 21 SWLDs as co-researchers and participants for a study about lived experiences of SWLDs and related challenges in the classroom (p. 328). Guided by a topical interview protocol (including questions related to diagnoses and learning challenges), researchers collected students' accounts of "critical communication incidents" with professors and related information that could be used to educate faculty about SWLDs' experiences in the classroom (p. 320).

After conducting a thematic analysis, researchers identified attributes of professors with competent or incompetent instructional communication. Professors with competent instructional

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communication were described as approachable, knowledgeable of learning disabilities and accommodations, supportive of individualized needs, and open to unconventional learning methods. Professors with incompetent instructional communication were described as lacking regard for SWLDs' needs (individualized learning, accommodations, etc.) and were perceived as disrespectful of students' privacy. According to Cornett-Devito and Worley (2005), the interrelationship between competent and incompetent instructional communication culminated into what researchers called, "the front row"—a symbolic representation of SWLDs' desire to be acknowledged by instructors as competent and invested in learning (p. 327).

In "College Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLDs) and Their Responses to Teacher Power," Worley and Cornett-Devito (2007) interviewed SWLDs to learn more about how they perceive teacher's power and how they "negotiate their 'differentness'" when interacting with their professors (p. 20). Interviews were analyzed for and in/competent instructional communication and types of perceived power using French and Raven's typology of power (p. 23). Findings indicated that competent instructional communication was commonly associated with referent power and incompetent instructional communication was often associated with coercive power. SWLDs reported being more confident when they perceived their professor's power as referent. They felt more comfortable participating in class, motivated to engage course material, and were more likely to demonstrate self-advocacy behaviors, such as educating others about their disability. These responses to professors were described as assertive accommodation and assertive assimilation ("overcompensating" or "extensive preparation" to succeed in the course). Consequently, when SWLDs perceived professor's power as coercive, their self-advocacy efforts became more exhaustive and they responded with avoidance behaviors; some reported attempts at self-censorship (pp. 27–28).

Power differentials between professors and students with disabilities are evident beyond the classroom. According to Amy Vidali (2009), professors also rhetorically construct disability in formal communication. Her analysis of five letters of recommendation (LRs) written for a student with traumatic brain injury applying for graduate school, revealed a common message about disability: "This student is disabled and this is what matters" (p. 200). Likened to a "rhetorical hiccup," Vidali described faculty mentions of disability stereotypes in LRs as inserted— "awkwardly, consistently, and with little explanation or purpose" (p. 186). These "hiccups," she explained, were symptomatic and indicative of a more serious condition:

> Despite the best intentions of letter writers…the LRs I examine here are complicit in the legal and medical regulation of disability common in larger culture, and they reveal the limited ways in which disability is envisioned, both rhetorically and in higher education. (p. 187)

This study sheds light on the complex relationships that students, faculty, and institutions have with non-neurotypicality in higher education.

In "Caught in the Rhetoric," Golsan and Rudick (2016) demonstrated how a rhetorical analysis of disability support services (DSS) could be useful for understanding ways universities use language to "(re)produce dominant discourses of ableism and disableism" (p. 103). In their grounded theory and thematic analysis of 51 DSS mission statements on university websites, they identified four key themes: students with disabilities are a moral burden, students with disabilities are a legal burden, students with disabilities are a threat to academic integrity, and students with disabilities are dis-abled by the environment (p. 105). Each theme reflected deficit discourse and limitations for disability identities. Collectively, findings revealed the need for new narratives about disability in the academy.

1.4.2 Teaching Students with Disabilities

Alongside studies about students with disabilities, scholarship about pedagogical practices for teaching students with disabilities has developed. From pedagogical approaches to

technological tools, communication studies scholars are identifying ways our discipline can be a social justice site for students with disabilities. This growing area of research offers strategies for creating a supportive learning environment that recognizes students' disability identities.

In 2004, Julia Johnson described opportunities for communication studies professors to adopt Universal Instructional Design (UID) with critical pedagogy. According to Johnson, UID can be a useful pedagogical tool to resist reproducing oppressive forces that bring about inequalities in the classroom, if it moves away from pluralism—of inclusion and "mainstream way of being and knowing" (p. 147). Johnson described and then analyzed two UID principles, student involvement in constructing assignments and group fieldwork projects, which she implemented in her communication classes (pp. 148–151). Johnson resolved that critical pedagogy and UID could be useful for professors who are committed to inclusivity and social justice (p. 151).

In a search for new strategies and inclusive teaching methods, Ahmet Atay (2016) discovered that "new media technologies and social networking sites" bore teaching and learning opportunities that engage traditionally excluded students, (including students who self-identified as learning disabled) in meaningful, supportive, and respectful ways (p. 130). Atay added that technologies could support professors' goals and enhance communication with students with disabilities by creating spaces for learning and community outside the classroom, "where institutional power often actualizes itself and is exercised" (p. 144).

According to Mary Ashlock (2016), professors are be able to enhance interactions with SWLDs by adopting fundamental communication theories and strategies (i.e., Buber's three communicative acts, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and synergetic model of communication) into their pedagogy. For example, professors could use the 'I-You' range of Buber's speech acts to acknowledge students with disabilities and their desire for "deep friendships...and intimate relationships" (p. 118). Within this range, educators can communicate respect and

acknowledgement for "each student's personal identity" (p. 118). Pensoneau-Conway and Cosenza (2016) agreed that language is important for promoting learning environments where students with physical and learning disabilities feel supported and respected. In order for professors to create this environment, they must to be attentive to ways their "language either invites/creates or removes the agency of disability subjects" (p. 70). For example, professors could engage students in identifying ways their knowledge and experiences can add to the class.

Further, Pensoneau-Conway and Cosenza (2016) positioned poststructuralism as a useful framework for understanding narrative as (re)constituting the subject identity within a larger discourse of disability and for "multiple discourses and their formation, practices, along with their consequences" to be examined (p. 66). They suggested professors adopt a disability pedagogy that combines critical pedagogy, communication studies, performance studies, and disability studies to support disability identities and dialogue—to empower students with disabilities to resist institutionalized oppression (p. 66).

1.4.3 Teaching Students about Disabilities

Four studies from the literature focused on ways professors can teach students about critical analysis and disability advocacy (Brockmann, 2012; Jenks, 2017; Miner, 2017; Walters, 2014). First, in *Rhetorical Touch*, Sharron Walters (2014) shared communication pedagogical practices aimed at empowering college students with disabilities through critical analysis of haptic technologies; teaching students how they can apply critical perspectives to discourses about disabilities and technologies. To do this, Walters pushed students beyond "accepting haptics as 'interfaceless' or 'magic' technologies," but "as technologies situated in a specific material and technological culture, with attendant discourses that need to be critiqued and examined" (p. 188). These perspectives enabled students to learn integral lessons about ways technologies privilege neurotypical and able-bodied users.

Second, Elaine Bass Jenks (2017) shared best practices for teaching students about disabilities in "Creating a College Course on Communication and Disability." With attention to a wide range of disabilities and disability issues, her course taught students about ways communication studies can help answer questions about how people with disabilities communicate with others, as well as, differences between disability stereotypes and lived experiences of disability. Throughout the course, students were introduced to non-neurotypicality through literature about SWLDs, high school students with autism, and mental health in the workplace; related assignments included reactions to popular films about non-neurotypicality and an interview with someone who has a disability (pp. 59, 61).

Third, *Some Same but Different* (2012) is a collaborative tool for professors and students to understand the breadth of disability and disability identity through narratives and open dialogue. Co-authored by Bettina Brockmann and communication studies students with disabilities, the book introduces students to a range of perspective on disabilities through the lived experiences of its collaborators. The book contains prompts for readers to reflect on their understanding of disability with opportunities for gaining new knowledge about disabilities. This reflexive and interactive process can help professors engage students in the "unlearning" and learning of disability by evoking students to engage in the world around them in novel and critical ways (p. 24).

Fourth, self-advocate Rebecca Miner (2017) explained ways professors could use disability-centered pedagogy to design technical communication courses where students can enhance their understanding of disability advocacy while developing technical communication skills. Miner suggested professors provide students with an introduction to literature and theories that can help establish "how specific meanings, concepts, models, socio-political junctures and theoretical perspectives are communicatively constructed" (p. 264). In addition to conversations

with the class about issues of disability and accessibility on campus, Miner discussed the Campus Accessibility Project, an experiential learning opportunity that enabled students to "use a rhetorical approach to create technical documentation and identify a need to better the campus environment for all students" (p. 268).

1.4.4 Perspectives of Scholars' Neuro-identities

Literature about scholars' avowals of disability to students in the communication studies classroom is sparse; only a few studies discuss professor's neuro-identities (Coyne et al., 2016; Miner, 2017). Recently, Coyne et al. (2016) discussed this gap in "Should I Tell My Students I Am Brain-Injured?" After having brain surgery, co-author and communications professor Paul Siegel, experienced residual effects on his word recall and speech, which impacted his teaching. While searching for literature on self-disclosures by instructors with similar diagnoses to students, Siegel discovered an absence of research about teachers' self-disclosure and non-neurotypicality; consequently, self-disclosure of brain injury must be strategic, with "no guarantee that an account will be accepted by an audience" (p. 54). According to the literature, instructors should use caution when disclosing their non-neurotypicality to students. Under particular circumstances self-disclosures can humanize and contribute to a positive learning environment, for example, when a teacher's self-disclosure relates to the course content being discussed (pp. 49–50). However, if students perceive teachers' self-disclosures negatively then the outcomes could include adverse effects on the professor's credibility and competence (p. 51).

Two additional studies addressed scholars' experiences with disability and self-disclosure (Fassett & Morella, 2013; Kellett et al., 2016). First, Fassett and Morella (2013) discussed Dana Morella's experiences as a graduate student with dyslexia (see also Morella, 2008). They posited performance theory as a useful framework to contextualize the lived experiences of people with nonvisible disabilities. Next, Kellett et al. (2016) identified counter-narrative and dialectical

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tensions in Melissa Frame's personal narratives about her teaching experiences as a professor and self-advocate with central vision blindness (p. 11). Though central vision blindness is not indicative of neurodivergence, Frame's experiences as a professor and self-advocate are important to understanding how disability identity is constructed in the classroom.

In *Remaking (the) Discipline*, Fassett and Morella (2013) described how Morella's performance of avowals and disavowals of disability exposed ways language shapes disability identities through the (re)iterative performance of self-advocacy as a graduate student with dyslexia (p. 141). Using critical performance theory and performance writing, they traced "the shifts in how, as a field, we have come to understand performance as faking, as making, and as breaking" (p. 140). These themes were important to understand how perceptions about non-neurotypicality led others in the academy to interact with Morella as "someone who is both able and illegitimate" (Fassett & Morella, p. 142). Fassett and Morella elaborated that disability identities remain situated within an environment that centers ability and normality: "We build this social environment in our own mundane communication in classrooms and faculty meetings; we learn and reiterate, often unknowingly, as institutional members, what is normal and what is not and what that means" (p. 144). They added, to resist institutionalized oppression, professors and students must share in the co-creation of solutions that reinforce belonging of all members (p. 146).

In "Communication, Teaching and Learning, and Faculty Disability," Kellett et al. (2016) used dialectical analysis to analyze speech professor Melissa Frame's personal narratives about her teaching experiences as a self-advocate and faculty member with central vision blindness. Frame's counter-narrative about disability was described by peers as "largely positive her relationship with students and administrators and her family, as well as in of her own sense of

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self" (Kellett et al., 2016, p. 12). However, her narrative revealed ongoing negotiation between the lived experiences with disability and discourses about disability.

Summarized in three key dialectical tensions: difference-advocacy, humor-engagement, and passing-authenticity, each dyad revealed something significant about Frame's communication as a teacher with a disability and broader implications about discourse of disability as a teacher (Kellett et al., 2016, pp. 20–24). Kellett et al. (2016) suggested, that together effective communication about difference, relief theory, humorous communication and humorous coping strategy were used to describe Frame's communication as logical, authentic, and inextricably linked to tensions of subjectivity and "normality" (pp. 24–25). Forthwith, Frame's narrative is exemplar for a move towards "social and discursive change around disability" and successful co-creation of a middle ground in the classroom between disabled and non-disabled (Kellett et al., 2016, p. 25).

1.5 Summary

We need more studies in the field about neuro-identities and faculty in higher education; there is still a lot to learn about what it means to be ND in the academy. As Atay and Ashlock (2016) prefaced in *The Discourse of Disability in Communication Education*, there is an urgent need for scholarship dedicated to understanding disability within the context of higher education:

> Although some progress has been made in the area of communication and disability, as communication scholars, we need to contribute to the discourse of disability and examine the ways in which our communicative practices influence people with disabilities, and how social institutions, such as media and education, either perpetuate social stigma attached to bodies that have different capabilities, and how these institutions have been oppressing or silencing the stories of people with physical and learning disabilities. (p. 3)

Members of the neurodiversity movement are not explicitly addressed in this body of work and it remains imperative that neurominorities be represented in communication studies scholarship. This study will address gaps in literature about ND professors, self-disclosure, and identity. It will

also offer a new direction for communication scholars invested in neuro-identities and discourse about neurodiversity.

In Chapter 2, I introduce Mary Jane Collier's cultural identity theory and Michael Hecht's communication theory of identity as theoretical frameworks for understanding speech acts, particularly, avowals and ascriptions of neuro-identities. I cover popular discourse about neuro-identities in higher education institutions and introduce Kelly Ritter's (2008) approach to *Rate My Professors* (www.ratemyprofessors.com) as rhetorical text. Next, I cover research questions, data collection, and methods for analysis in Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, I use Lawless and Chen's (2018) cultural thematic analysis to analyze avowals and ascriptions of neuro-identities. Lastly, I describe my findings, summarize limitations to the study, and offer possibilities for future studies in Chapter 6. After an avowal of neuro-identity as neurodivergent, I introduce Jay Dolmage's theory of mētis as a theoretic frame for resisting ableism in the classroom with support for neurodivergent-led policies that foster neurodiversity in academia.

Chapter Two: Neurodivergent As A Cultural Identity

...we have an initial responsibility to avoid presumptions of disability subjectivity as permanently disabled, as one-dimensional, as deficient. We have a further responsibility to avoid lowering expectations, infantilizing, and tokenizing those who avow a disability subject position. (Pensoneau-Conway & Cosenza, 2016, p. 71)

In the 1990s, Judy Singer (1998/2017) observed that "people with all kinds of marginal 'disabilities' like ADD and dyslexia are beginning to form communities and reproduce texts that examine the ways that they have been mistreated" (p. 27). This was evident in neurodivergent-led web-based communities, where neurodivergent (ND) identity centered on a desire to be part of a group that valued their similarities (p. 37). Through discourse, ND cultural identity was created and (re)defined with shared social norms and language, which flipped the script on normalcy by naming neurotypicals (NTs) as "outsiders" (Singer, 1998/2017; see also Silberman, 2015). Today, self-advocates continue to rally together to take political action that advances their ND cultural identity as meaningful; to be protected from discrimination and embraced through neurodiversity.

The communication studies theories that informed this research and critical discourse analysis are Michael Hecht's communication theory of identity (CTI) and Mary Jane Collier's cultural identity theory (CIT). Specifically, the speech acts—avowal and ascription, are important for understanding communication about neurodivergence as situated within the neurodiversity movement, institutional prejudice and popular discourse about atypical behavior identities. This theoretical framework has been used in disability identity work (see Beckner & Helme, 2018). Together CTI and CIT provide important theoretical frameworks for understanding how cultural identities are constructed and negotiated.

2.1 Communication and Identity Theories

Early studies of culture by both Collier and Hecht took an interpretive perspective to examinations of discursive accounts. These works focused primarily on accounts of intra- and intercultural interactions to understand communication rules, competence (i.e., appropriateness and effectiveness), and outcomes across ethnic groups (Collier, 1988; Collier, 2009a; Collier et al., 1986; Hecht, Alberts, & Ribeau, 1989). Their work was set apart from traditional studies of culture because it moved beyond reducing culture to background characteristics (Collier, 1989). As Hecht (2009) put it, CTI "emerged in the 1980s as part of a shift from considering identity a central element of human existence to identity as a social phenomenon" (n.p.). CTI soon followed and in the late 1980s as a framework for describing systematic methods of analyses to discursive texts to learn more about communication between cultures (Collier, 2009a, p. 261; see also Collier, 1988, p. 124).

Collier (1988) detailed this theoretical approach in her study of White, Black, and Mexican American students' intercultural acquaintance conversations:

> Cultural and intercultural communication systems are maintained when the structure or rules of what should be said or done are clear and when the functions or outcomes are positive or system enhancing. Ontologically, competent conduct which is rule conforming and produces positive outcomes for two individuals in a conversation for example, contributes to the continued life and quality of the system. Epistemologically, identifying intra- and intercultural communication system competencies is one method of increasing knowledge about how systems function and why some systems exist longer than others. The structure of the system is described here by means of delineating the communication rules. (p.123)

In this study, five rule categories (behaving politely/rudely, following/violating role prescriptions, content, expression, appropriate relational climate) and five outcome categories (personal goal accomplishment, being understood/misunderstood, self-validation/invalidation, relational validation/invalidation, cultural identity validation/invalidation) were identified (pp. 127–128). Notably, the role prescriptions category was "related to ascribed identities" (pp. 128–129), which

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referred to "behaviors viewed as appropriate due to race/ethnicity, gender, profession or

individual position in a particular situation" (p. 128). Collier also found that each group of students

emphasized different rules, outcomes, and behaviors (p. 142).

Hecht, Alberts, and Ribeau (1989) contextualized the effects power had on inter-ethnic

communication and people with marginalized identities in the United States. In this study, Hecht

et al. discussed ways access to power has been monopolized and institutionalized (pp. 387, 406).

They elaborated, "Separation of groups tends to deny the mainstream, high power group access

to the out-groups except through limited media contact. As a result, powerlessness and

stereotyping become salient issues for interethnic communication" (Hecht, Alberts, & Ribeau,

1989, p. 406).

Both Hecht and Collier's cultural theories evolved (see Collier, 2009a; Collier & Powell,

1990; Hecht & Baldwin, 1998). In 1993, Hecht described "layering of theory and research

methods" as integral to his research agenda (p. 76). He argued "there are alternative ways of

knowing that are continually juxtaposed and played off each other and/or blended together,"

which could be explored (p. 76; see also Hecht & Baldwin, 1998). Put another way, since each

framework is limited, Hecht argued, combining theories and methods "in creative ways" can

reveal more about communication (pp. 76–77).

Building on Burrel and Morgan's (1979) frame of ontologies as a "continuum" (as cited by

Hecht & Baldwin, 1998), Hecht and Baldwin (1998) called on scholars to move away from

competing perspectives of subjective and objective research. They explained:

> Ironically, exclusion and othering in scholarly dialogue reconstruct the prejudicial social
> relations it studies, setting up in-group/out-group, hierarchical power relations,
> stereotyping, and so on among the scientific and humanistic disciplines and approaches.
> Layering suggests that scholars in these areas consider other ideas, such as emotion
> and spirituality (but not necessarily by treating these rationally). At the same time,
> researchers who traditionally have focused on subjective perspectives also might let their
> ideas be informed by more objectivist ideas. In this sense, theoretical and metatheoretical

concepts can be seen as layered without recreating the very exclusionary and hierarchical processes they study. (p. 59)

This approach to social research welcomed different ontological perspectives and epistemologies (p. 78); citing interdisciplinary research as necessary for increasing understanding (p. 80). According to Hecht (2009), "Since 2000, CTI has been guiding a number of new lines of research that demonstrate its encompassing and

expansive view of identity" (n.p.).

In the late 1990s, Collier broadened her research perspective to include both interpretive and critical perspectives (Collier, 2009a). CIT has since been modified (and renamed cultural identity negotiation theory or CINT) to include an emphasis on "the influence of ascriptions and representations found in public texts and the role of structures such as institutional policies and ideologies on identity politics and negotiation" (Collier, 2009a, n.p.). According to Collier (2009a), "CINT works to build relevant bodies of knowledge about lived experiences and provides data to inform research, add relevance to instruction, and potentially transform oppressive structures, institutions, and relationships" (n.p.).

2.1.1 Cultural Identities

Identities and identification are communication acts that connect and disconnect people from each other (Hecht, 2009). Identity can inform how we see ourselves in relationship to others, who we interact with, and how we interact with others (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993, p. 19). CTI posits "identity as a social phenomenon" that can be examined with identity frames: personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, 2009). According to Jung and Hecht (2004), "People enact their identities and exchange the enacted identities in communication. In CTI, enactments are not mere expressions of identity but are considered identity" (p. 266). Additionally, since "people rarely operate out of a single identity," identity frames are useful tools for examining multiple identities on different layers (Hecht, 2009).

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One type of identity that can be examined with CTI and CIT is cultural identity. According to Collier (1989), "Cultural identities are identifications with and perceived acceptance into a group which has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct" (p. 296). Culture is social, dynamic, and situational (Collier, 2009a; Hecht, 2009; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). CIT scholars have examined how people negotiate different cultural identities across groups and within groups. For example, Elizabeth Metzger (1998) studied cultural identity enactment and communication of lesbian administrators in higher education institutions and William Faux (2004) examined cultural identities of coal miners from the anthracite coal region in Pennsylvania (see also Baldwin et al., 2006; Collier, 2002).

Collier and Powell (1990) studied cultural differences among student perceptions of faculty immediacy and effectiveness. Through discursive acts students revealed their interpretations of verbal and nonverbal feedback from faculty (p. 336). Their responses varied between ethnic groups on perceptions of faculty communication (pp. 338–347). This study is important because it found that by analyzing student avowals and ascriptions, students' "cultural background affects attitudes, beliefs and values about education, ideas about how classes ought to be conducted, how students and teachers ought to interact..." can be uncovered (p. 334).

2.1.2 Avowal and Ascription

Two important concepts from CTI and CIT, avowal and ascription, describe different but interrelated communicative acts "through which cultural identities are discursively enacted, challenged, and reinforced" (Moss & Faux, 2006, p. 26). According to Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993), "Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels" (p. 166). Through these acts counter and co-identities, or insider/outsider distinctions, are forged "along an explicit-implicit dimension" (Hecht, 2009; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Collier (2009a) elaborated, "...identity construction is part reaction to past ascriptions and part ongoing

and dynamic avowal of identity claims, and therefore both avowed and ascribed cultural identities are important" (p. 262).

Avowal is a "personal articulation of one's views about group identity" (Collier, 2009b, p. 286). An avowal can situate a person within or outside a dominant group with claims about their position on group membership criterion and performances relative to social situations, group norms, and institutions (Collier & Bornman, 1999; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). Acts of avowed identity can be identified by the utterances of "I am" and "we are" (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Moss & Faux, 2006, p. 26). Labels included in avowals can be examined with multiple frames to uncover how the identity is negotiated within a particular social, cultural, and political context (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993, pp. 168–169).

The second concept, ascription, is an articulation of an outsider's view about group identities (e.g., race, gender, profession; Hecht, 2009). Ascriptions can include important information about the perceived similarities or differences between one's own culture and another's (Chen & Collier, 2012; Collier, 1988, 1989, 2009a; Collier & Bornman, 1999; Hecht, Alberts, & Ribeau, 1989; Moss & Faux, 2006). This act can also reveal a person's prejudices, including stereotypes that (re)inscribe institutionalized norms (Collier, 1988, 1989, 2009; Hecht, Alberts, & Ribeau, 1989; Hecht et al., 2002). Ascriptions can be located in utterances of other: "they," "their," "she" or "her" (Moss & Faux, 2006).

According to CTI, statements include both avowal and ascription reveal how group identities are perceived in relationship to one another (Collier & Bornman, 1999; Collier & Thomas, 1988). Groups may also use comparisons to improve their bonds with one another and increase their level of satisfaction with the identity (Collier, 2009b, p. 296). Differences between the characteristics, or attributions, used by a group to avow a cultural identity and attributions that are "ascribed to that group by outsiders" can offer clues about competing rules or norms (Collier,

2009a, p. 261). Further, tensions identified between positive avowals and negative ascriptions, including self/other and in-group/out-group distinctions, can be used to determine power differentials between identity groups (Broome & Collier, 2012; Collier, 1988, 1989, 2009a; 2009b; Collier & Bornman, 1999; Hecht, Alberts, & Ribeau, 1989; Moss & Faux, 2006).

2.2 Disability Identities

Abled people and disabled people have a different view of the world; as a result, these communities operate with a different set of rules and social norms (Humphrey, 2016, pp. 76–77). According to Vernon Humphrey (2016), his experiences as a legally blind student were complicated by interactions with abled people who were unaware of the rules/norms of the disabled community (pp. 76–77). The cultural differences between abled and disabled communities are constituted through differing abilities (p. 77). It is believed that abled people can only come to understand these cultural differences through the act of becoming disabled (p. 80).

According to communication identity theory (CIT), four frames affect identities; changes within (or outside of) the frames have the potential to alter our avowed identities and our understanding of other identities (Hecht, 1993). Since identity is discursively enacted, analysis of discourse could reveal such changes. Based on this premise, Humphrey (2016) surmised that temporary transformation from abled to disabled "can affect the way individuals see themselves and their perception of identity, increasing stress and interfacing with the ability to communicate and acculturate into a new culture or reacculturate into the abled culture" (p. 80).

To test this theory, Humphrey (2016) examined faculty and students' discursive accounts about their experiences being temporary disabled on-campus. Analysis revealed the three major themes: "ADA/physical barriers, public reaction/perception, and communication" (Humphrey, 2016, p. 83). Findings from the analysis confirmed that the act of temporarily "assuming a

disability" challenged abled participants' perspectives about disability (p. 87). Humphrey

explained:

> The reaction to the changes in perception came from both ends of the spectrum some
> have family members with disabilities so they were not so surprised and others were
> completely shocked buy their new understanding of how challenging many routine things
> are for those in our community living with disabilities. (p. 85)

The experience brought about new opportunities for participants to begin important conversations

about disability in their classrooms (p. 86).

Neurodiversity exists to bring attention to neuro-identities that are situated outside of

normal and within this scope of disability. Rather than espousing a disability hierarchy, it is

important to investigate how in/visible disabilities are constructed as being "outside" the norm

(Wood et al., 2017; see also Dolmage, 2017). As Wood et al. (2017) explained:

> Physical or overt disabilities are seen as more "real" or "deserving" of accommodation
> than invisible, undisclosed, or psychiatric disabilities and conditions. Such rankings help
> no one, and they make it all the more difficult for students with mental illness to disclose
> and seek accommodation…Part of the cultural discomfort with disability is the
> normalization of the able-bodied—an attitude that rejects difference, disabilities, and
> individuality by creating a safely sanitized border wall between what's perceived to be
> "normal" and what's not.

Notably, people can embody both physical and in/visible disabilities; various physical or in/visible

disabilities. This perspective is foundational to this study. Disability identities are complex, and

this study aims to better understand self-advocacy of neuro-identities with diagnostic labels in the

classroom and perceptions of these identities in the classroom and the greater context of

competing medical/deficit and neurodiversity narratives.

Chapter Three: *Rate My Professors* as A Site for Rhetorical Analysis

As new identities, alliances and movements for and re-form themselves, there are signs everywhere that we are beginning to divide ourselves not only along the familiar lines of ethnicity, class, gender, and disability, but according to something new: differences in "kinds of minds." (Singer, 1998/2017, p. 27)

Since the 1990s, the *Rate My Professors* (RMP) website has accrued more than 19 million comments and ratings about professors in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (n.d.). Today, RMP attracts more than 4 million monthly users and it is the most expansive database of feedback about instructors, courses, and colleges, available to the public (n.d.). Although many academics have contested the reputation and validity of RMP as a course evaluation tool, some researchers advance RMP as a popular or cultural phenomenon, and thus an important site for textual analysis (Ritter, 2008; Yoon, 2015).

The position of RMP within popular media (formerly owned by Viacom and now owned by Cheddar Inc.) grants agentive opportunities for students to subvert traditional methods for delivering and accessing feedback about professors, courses, etc. (Ritter, 2008, p. 260; see also Yoon, 2015). As Kyong Yoon (2015) noted, "RMP' influence is not only limited to individual professors' reputations but also extends to the construction of institutional reputation" (p. 109). For example, RMP scores played a substantial role in the *2014 Forbes National College Ranking* (p. 109; see also CCAP, 2014).

According to the Center for College Affordability and Productivity (CCAP) (2014), student evaluations from RMP accounted for 10% of the ranking weight for the student satisfaction category (p. 2). Reasons for drawing from RMP included the volume of data available from the website, its existence "outside the control of university administrators," and its likeness to customer service and product reviews (pp. 2–4). They claimed RMP offers a "snapshot of what

students think about their classes is akin to what agencies like Consumers Report or J.D. Powers and Associates do when they provide information on various goods or services" (p. 2). In this sense, RMP "reflects the increasingly convergent interests of consumer culture and academic culture, shaping the ways that pedagogy is valued and assessed by students within the public domain" (Ritter, 2008, p. 259).

Online student forums, including RMP, are within the purview of accessible materials that could be used to assess teaching qualities and character. Administrators and committee members may access this information before making important decisions regarding hiring, retention, etc. Many students (and parents) consult RMP before and during registration to get a sense of students' experiences. Some students use the site as a guide to help them pick courses and instructors to take—or not take (Brown et al., 2009; Kindred & Mohammed, 2005; Kowai-Bell et al., 2011; Kowai-Bell et al., 2012).

Student feedback on RMP can have a ripple effect on students' expectations of the professor and course. Researchers suggest that RMP can influence students' expectations of instructors, which can impact their attitudes—and overall performance in the class (Coladarci & Kornfield, 2007; Kowai-Bell et al., 2011; Lewandowski et al., 2012). In *The Best 300 Professors* (2012), Franek et al. cautioned students in a section of entitled, "How to Use RateMyProfessors.com as a Student":

> It's important to know that reading through the reviews of professors help you understand the material, but you have to remember to use the website as a guide. In the long run, YOU are the most knowledgeable about the way you learn. You should walk into class with an open mind and make sure that you always give your best to the professor—he or she has dedicated his or her life to teaching students just like you. (p. 16)

Researchers agree that student feedback can affect professors' engagement with students, level of course preparation, and delivery (Kowai-Bell et al., 2012; Roche & Marsh, 2000).

Recent studies found that students judge professors on how similar they are to the "traditional" professor—who is White, able-bodied, and male (Anderson, 2010; MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2015; Mitchel & Martin, 2018; Reid, 2010; Subtirelu, 2015). Students' expectations and perceptions of faculty are also shaped by their own implicit biases (Addison et al., 2015; Anderson, 2010; Kindred & Mohammed, 2005; Lewandowski et al., 2012; Storage et al., 2016). According to Karen Gregory (2012), "Students show greater respect for professors with whom they can relate personally; those who 'care' and those who are 'helpful'" (p. 182). This supported Kindred and Mohammed's (2005) findings, which named "competence, knowledge, clarity, and helpfulness" as the most important attributes to students (p. 16).

3.1 *Rate My Professors* as a Phenomenon

According to Kelly Ritter (2008), "RMP reflects students' desire and ability to engage in institutional assessments, which seem to be otherwise taking place without their full input" (p. 261). Ever increasing in popularity, RMP has become "a rhetorical phenomenon born of our culture's fascination with evaluation, internet-based communication, and student anxieties about their relative position(s) in higher education" (pp. 261, 271). RMP grants students [what the traditional assessment does not] the agency to publicly access, share, edit or delete their own comments at any time during or after the end of the term, which gives students control of "the time and space of evaluation" (p. 270). Students use RMP to share experiences in the classroom; engaging with one another in "dialogue about expectations of teaching and learning" (p. 276).

RMP discourse contains critical information about students' expectations of professors and higher education institutions, ideas about the college experience, and individual student biases (Ritter, 2008, p. 275). Ritter argued "many RMP threads, the students end up judging one another's views and attitudes more than they do the professor him/herself, challenging

unsupported claims and providing counterexamples of experiences" (p. 275). For these reasons, RMP discourse is important texts for analysis of identities, ideologies, and power.

3.2 Research Questions

Scholars have exposed institutionalized ableism in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Brown & Leigh, 2018; Dolmage, 2017; Golsan & Rudick, 2016; Vidali, 2009, Wood et al., 2017), however, communication studies research on neurodiversity in HEIs remains underdeveloped. A recent study by Price et al. (2017) of faculty with mental disabilities discovered "a trend towards disclosures to peers, staff members, or students" (p. 11). Most often, faculty described their disclosure experiences as "slightly positive" to "very positive" (Price et al., 2017, p. 11). Though professors (and student) discursively construct neuro-identities in the classroom, little is known about how neuro-identities are constructed in the classroom or how student discourse as a means for policing or resisting non-neurotypical behavior of professors.

A combination of rhetorical theoretical frameworks that include discourse analysis, disability identity as cultural identity, are needed to address these important areas of research. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) presents a critical frame for investigating power differences and ideologies (Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 3; see also Price, 2011). According to Margaret Price (2011), CDA is a theory and method that compliments disability studies and analysis of academic discourses (p. 29). This frame, which rhetoric and critical thematic analysis fall under, will be useful for understanding how students (re)construct neuro-identities within popular deficit discourse.

Neuro-identities are discursive and can be analyzed in avowals and ascriptions. The first research question centers on avowals and ascriptions of students' cultural identity with diagnostic labels. By analyzing student avowals and ascriptions of neuro-identities, we can begin to understand how these identities are (re)constructed in the classroom. We can also uncover

similarities and differences across neuro-identity groups by analyzing student posts in groups based on key diagnostic labels.

RQ 1. How are students' neuro-identities discursively constructed through their posts and the posts of other students' evaluations of teaching on *Rate My Professors*?

The second research question aims to uncover avowals and ascriptions of professors' cultural identity with diagnostic labels. According to Powell and Collier (1999), professors and students maintain strict role-prescriptions that are reified through institution-based and informal student evaluations. However, it remains unclear how neurotypical and ND students (re)construct professors' non-neurotypical identities through ascriptions with diagnostic labels. Specifically, we need to understand how students perceive ND professors and whether there are similarities and differences across identity groups (i.e., ADHDers, autistics, bipolars, and dyslexics).

RQ 2. How are students discursively constructing professors' neuro-identities through evaluations of teaching on *Rate My Professors*?

Communication studies scholars agree more studies of student perceptions of professors' avowals of neurodivergence are needed (Atay & Ashlock, 2016; Coyne et al., 2016, Fassett & Morella, 2013; Golsan & Rudick, 2016; Kellett et al., 2016; Kerschbaum, 2014; Miner, 2017; Price et al., 2017; Subtirelu, 2015). By attending to professors' avowals and ascriptions, we can learn how students perceive neurodivergence in the classroom and whether they reflect popular deficit discourse or are more closely aligned with the neurodiversity movement.

Logics of ableism and disablism are employed in higher education (Dolmage, 2017, p. 6) and both are in opposition to neurodiversity. Dolmage (2017) explained,

> But academia powerfully mandates able-bodiedness and able-mindedness, as well as other forms of social and communicative hyperability, and this demand can best be defined as ableism. In fact, few cultural institutions do a better or more comprehensive job of promoting ableism. That is, to value ability through something like the demand to

overcome disability, or a research study to cure disability, there is also an implicit belief that being disabled is negative and to be avoided at all cost. (p. 7)

Both ableism and disablism are inherent to diagnostic labels. According to Sarah Parsloe (2015), the act of labeling a person (or persons) is a way to claim persons' agency, because it "undermines the individual's ability to take an active part in shaping identity" (p. 349).

RQ 3. How do students and professors police atypical pedagogical behaviors or resist ableism and disablism in the college classroom?

Answers to this question will help us uncover student-professor power dynamics in the classroom, norms, behaviors, and narratives of deficit discourse and neurodiversity. With this information, we can learn more about how neuro-identities are constructed through avowals and ascriptions in the classroom. To better understand how ableism, which is deeply embedded in the social and political fabric of HEIs (Golsan & Rudick, 2016),[4] I will use Jay Dolmage's descriptions of ableism and disablism.

According to Fiona Kumari Campbell's (2009), "Disablism is a set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities" (p. 4). Jay Dolmage (2017) added,

Disablism, in short, negatively constructs both the values and the material circumstances around people with disabilities. Disablism says that there could be nothing worse than being disabled, and treats disabled people unfairly as a result of these values. (p. 6)

"Ableism," however, "positively values" and centers able-bodiness (p. 6). "Ableism renders disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented

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[4] In a recent interview for *The Georgetown Voice*, self-advocate and professor, Lydia X. Z. Brown described ableism as "a system of oppression that targets and marginalizes disabled people" (Peregrino, 2019).

as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default" (p. 7). Both ableism and disablism are inherent in the academy (pp. 6–7).

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Critical Thematic Analysis

In "Developing a Method of Critical Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Communication Inquiry," critical intercultural communication scholars Lawless and Chen (2018) advance critical thematic analysis (CTA) as a qualitative method "to examine the interrelationships between interview discourses, social practices, power relations, and ideologies" (p. 1). It is the critical approach to cultural identity positioning "that moves us closer to challenging dominant structures and creating spaces, pathways, or opportunities for social justice" (p. 12). As Lawless and Chen explained, "Critically examining discourse allows us to envision new ways of communicating that are mindful of positions of power, status-based hierarchies, and marginalization" (p. 12). For these reasons, CTA is useful to uncover attitudes towards popular narratives about neuro-identities, ableism and disablism in the classroom.

This methodology was used to uncover how students use communicative acts to construct and (re)negotiate neuro-identities in the classroom. This study extended the applications for CTA to Collier's cultural identity theory (CIT) and Hecht's communication theory of identity (CTI) as useful frameworks for understanding neuro-identities as discursively (re)constructed and (re)negotiated—by and through social structures and political ideologies. This is significant because both bring attention to the connections between relational communication, popular discourse, and social ideologies.

CTA is a two-step process that begins with open coding following William Owen's (1984) thematic interpretation in relational communication (Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 5). According to Owen, this method of thematic analysis can be used to "discover the ways participants use

discourse to interpret their relationship" (p. 274). Themes (and sub-types) offer insight into how

people perceived various aspects of their relationship, highlighting their key concerns at that time.

After developing a range of themes (i.e., commitment, involvement, work, unique or special,

fragile, consideration or respect, and manipulation) and sub-themes, researchers can examine

"how these themes were conceptualized differently by various participants" (p. 277). This requires

a careful reading of the text for *recurrence* (meaning is repeated), *repetition* of keywords or

phrases, and *forcefulness* (dramatic pauses, tone, volume, and inflection that can be identified

with emphasis or exclamation) (pp. 275–276) with focus on "understanding, privileging, and

honoring what our participants actually say and reveal to us about their social worlds and how

these phenomenological experiences are similar" (Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 7).

The second step of CTA is closed coding, which builds on themes discovered in Step 1

(Lawless & Chen, 2018, p. 7). Lawless and Chen began with consideration of "what the emerged

theme might be doing or how it is functioning" (p. 7). Next, they examined what was hidden or

missing from the discourse in respect to "ideologies, positions of power or status hierarchies" (p.

8). Specifically, they used repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness to locate a new set of relevant

themes for the themes they uncovered in Step 1 (p. 8). Step 2 is integral to discover ways that

students construct neuro-identities in relationship to popular deficit discourse and the emerging

counter-discourse of neurodiversity. Findings reveal norms or behaviors that are being policed by

students in the classroom and challenged the traditional hierarchical relationship of professor-

student, and the status of the professor as the position of power.

3.4 Procedure

Key terms were selected from a list of most common diagnostic labels used by NDs or in

work about neurodiversity: Armstrong (2010, 2012), Dubin (2011), Hendrickx (2010), McGee

(2012), Robertson and Ne'eman (2008), Shore (2004), Silberman (2015), Singer (1998/2017),

Sumner and Brown (2015). Terms were crosschecked with relative neuro-identity terms. For example, people with dyslexia may self-identify as "dyslexic." These terms were included since they are also commonly used (and related) diagnostic labels. Remainder of the terms intersected as diagnostic and neuro-identity terms (i.e., "neuro difference" or "neurodivergent" or "neurotypical" or "neurodiversity" or "neurodiverse"). However, this combination did not yield any results.

According to the RMP *Facebook* page,

RateMyProfessors.com is the largest online destination for professor and college ratings…With content for students, by students, *Rate My Professors* is the highest trafficked site for quickly researching and rating professors, colleges, and universities across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

RMP also promotes the number of users on is a public collection of student comments about professors catalogued on the professors' pages (RMP, 2019). For these reasons, RMP meets the criterion of a non-social network (non-SNS). Skalski et al. (2017) described a non-SNS as lacking focus on its individual users—or network of users, with aim "to reach the largest audience possible" (p. 218).

The data-collection protocol followed Skalski et al.'s recommendations for acquiring user-generated content (in the form of student comments) from professors' pages on RMP with an external search tool, informed the data acquisition process (pp. 209–210). In September 2019, *Google's* search engine (www.google.com) was used to find student posts from RMP that contained *neuro-terms*, diagnostic labels and variations thereof used in avowals or ascriptions of non-neurotypicality. Seven paired or clustered neuro-terms were entered in the search box with

Boolean operators (e.g., OR),[5] along with the site only operator (i.e., site:ratemyprofessors.com) to limit search results to the site.[6] Adobe Acrobat software was used to archive search engine results pages (SERP) as PDFs (see Skalski et al., 2017, p. 225, for more detail). Each SERP contained page titles, URLs and related snippet text. Results were reviewed and qualified posts were retrieved from the PDFs; snippets were copied and pasted into a spreadsheet and sorted into four diagnostic groups: attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), bipolar disorder, and dyslexia. Duplicates within each category were removed; however, snippets with more than one key term were included in all qualifying categories. Additional details related to posts (e.g., date posted, course number, ratings, and tags) were not collected from the website for this study.

Next, avowals and ascriptions of neuro-identities were labeled according to the role of the person with whom the diagnostic term was describing, and whether agency was maintained. Four groups were identified: student avowal, professor avowal, student ascription, and ascriptions of professors. *Student avowals* referred to posts with students' ownership of or agency over the diagnostic term, which they used the term to describe their neuro-identity (e.g., "I have ADHD" and "I am ADHD"). *Professor avowals* included posts that mentioned professors' avowed neuro-identities with diagnostic terms and positioned the instructor as having agency over the diagnostic

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[5] "ADHD" OR "ADHDer" OR "Attention Deficit"; "Asperger" OR "Aspergers"; "Aspie" OR "Aspies"; "autism" OR "ASD"; "Autistic" OR "autistics"; "bipolar" OR "bipolars"; "dyslexia" OR "dyslexic" OR "dyslexics."

[6] The advanced search engine operator used in the search box was site: prefix. This enabled search of the pages within the domain. Keyword queries ("") were also used to search for exact terms throughout the domain. The operator related: did not yield any competitors or alternative sites.

term(s) (e.g., "He told us the first day he has Asperger's..."). *Ascriptions* contained diagnostic labels that students used in these acts to assert the diagnostic term as agentive—having greater or equal power to the student or professor. For example, "I suffer from ADHD" (student ascriptions) or "I think she is bipolar..." (ascriptions of professors).

Minor grammatical changes were made, in accordance to the latest formatting guidance from American Psychological Association (APA) on quotations. Some quotes contained errors that could "be distracting" to the read (APA, n.d.). These changes enhanced readability. For example, diagnostic terms, such as "adhd" and "Aspergers Syndrome" were changed to "ADHD" and "Asperger's syndrome." Shorthand or abbreviations, including "prof," hw," and "qs," were also replaced.

3.4.1 Description of Data

Data were collected from 952 independent URLs. Most pages yielded a single post with an avowal or ascription of neuro-identity and a neuro-term (i.e., ADHD, ASD, bipolar disorder, or dyslexia), $n = 891$. Sixty-one professor pages yielded two ($n = 50$), or three ($n = 11$) qualifying posts. Each post was reviewed and sorted by neuro-terms group ($k = 4$): bipolar disorder ($n = 409$), ADHD ($n = 315$), dyslexia ($n = 179$), and ASD ($n = 128$). Eight posts contained more than one neuro-term and were included in multiple categories: ADHD with dyslexia ($n = 6$), ADHD with bipolar disorder ($n = 1$), and ASD with bipolar disorder ($n = 1$). In all, 1,022 posts were collected.[7]

Next, posts in each neuro-term group were reviewed and sorted according to avowals (student, professor) and ascriptions (student, professor). Two posts were included in more than one avowal or ascription group: student avowal/ascriptions of professors ($n = 1$). More than half

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[7] Items that did not include an avowal or an ascription of neuro-identity were excluded.

of student avowals, N = 232, included ADHD (n = 124, 53.45%). The remaining student avowals

contained dyslexia (n = 78, 33.62%), ASD (n = 25, 10.78%), and bipolar disorder (n = 5, 2.16%)

(Table 1). There were more professor avowals of dyslexia (n = 24, 47.06%) than ADHD (n = 17,

33.33%), ASD (n = 7, 13.73%), or bipolar disorder (n = 3, 5.88%) (Table 2).

Student ascriptions, N = 12, included ADHD (n = 9, 75%), bipolar disorder (n = 2,

16.67%) and dyslexia (n = 1, 8.33%) (Table 3). No student ascriptions of ASD were found.

Finally, ascriptions of professors were identified, N = 736. There were more ascriptions of

professor's bipolar disorder (n = 399, 54.21%) than ADHD (n = 165, 22.42%), ASD (n = 96,

13.04%), and dyslexia (n = 76, 10.33%) (Table 4). One comment contained both ascriptions of

bipolar disorder and Asperger's syndrome (n = 1); this post was included in both diagnostic

categories for analysis.

Table 1

Student Avowals: Descriptive Statistics (N = 232)

Neuro-Term	*f*	% of Sample
ADHD	124	53.45
ASD	25	10.78
Bipolar Disorder	5	2.16
Dyslexia	78	33.62
Total	232	100

Table 2

Professor Avowals: Descriptive Statistics (N = 51)

Neuro-Term	*f*	% of Sample
ADHD	17	33.33
ASD	7	13.73
Bipolar Disorder	3	5.88
Dyslexia	24	47.06
Total	51	100

Table 3

Student Ascriptions: Descriptive Statistics (N = 12)

Neuro-Term	*f*	% of Sample
ADHD	9	75
ASD	0	0
Bipolar Disorder	2	16.67
Dyslexia	1	8.33
Total	12	100

Table 4

Ascriptions of Professors: Descriptive Statistics (N = 736)

Neuro-Term	*f*	% of Sample
ADHD	165	22.42
ASD	96	13.04
Bipolar Disorder	399	54.21
Dyslexia	76	10.33
Total	736	100

      Avowals (Chapter 4) and ascriptions (Chapter 5) of students and professors were analyzed using Lawless and Chen's (2018) CTA. Student avowals were analyzed in groups, according to neuro-terms. Next, groups of professor avowals were similarly examined. Then, student ascriptions were examined in groups according to neuro-terms, and finally, ascriptions of professors were studied in the same manner.

Chapter Four: Avowals of Neurodivergence

*What can visual thinkers do when they grow up? They can do graphic design, all kinds of stuff with computers, photography, industrial design. The pattern thinkers, they're the ones that are going to be your mathematicians, your software engineers, your computer programmers, all of those kinds of jobs. And then you've got the word minds. They make great journalists, and they also make really, really good stage actors. (*Grandin, 2010)

To draw attention to their experiences, some faculty and students are choosing to publicly *avow* their non-neurotypical identities and alignment with the neurodiversity paradigm, "asserting that neurological variation is not only natural, but is central to the success of the human species" (McGee, 2012; see also Dubin, 2011, p. 5). Speech acts about neuro-identities offer an important opportunity for learning more about these identities, including how these identities are constructed and negotiated. Avowed neurodivergence can offer insights into whether there are identifiable themes in the discourse that reflect the counter-narrative of the neurodiversity movement. Students' comments may contain student avowals of neurotypicality or non-neurotypicality (with or without diagnostic or neuro-identity terms)—these are all possibilities and opportunities to uncover themes from these identity claims about how students resist or re-inscribe ableism and disablism in the classroom (Dolmage, 2017).

Lawless and Chen's (2018) two-step process of critical thematic analysis (CTA) was used to examine student and faculty avowals of four neuro-identities (ADHD, ASD spectrum disorder, bipolar disorder, and dyslexia) from student posts on *Rate My Professors* (RMP). First, William Owen's (1984) method of closed coding was used to identify themes from communicative acts. Second, texts were reread for recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Once identified, the findings were examined for similarities and differences. Next, open coding (with repetition,

recurrence, and forcefulness) was used to discover another set of themes. Last, these themes were compared with deficit discourse (or the medical model) and neurodiversity.

4.1 Student Avowals

In addition to declaring non-neurotypicality, student avowals (*N* = 232) revealed differing levels of identification with their respective neuro-identity group. For example, some students described their ADHD as "moderate" or "severe." Students also described "suffering with" instead of "from" ADHD. Lastly, a small group of students resisted person-first language and identified themselves with neuro-terms, using identity-first language such as "bipolar person" and "ADHD-er."[8]

Themes

Five themes emerged from the student avowals: *learning challenges, workload, accessibility, professor's aptitude,* and *impact*. First, students described past and current *learning challenges* related to subject (e.g., mathematics, science, writing), lecture format, course type (online, traditional face-to-face), etc. Second, they discussed *accessibility* in the classroom. Third, they shared information about the breadth of the course load—or *workload.* For example, students emphasized the amount of reading, difficulty of exams, number of assignments. The fourth theme, *professor's aptitude,* referred to perceived competence of the professor's lectures, grading, advising, etc. Fifth, students shared the *impact* the professor and class had on their personal well-being, preparedness for future courses, GPA, and professional goals.

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[8] According to Price and Kerchbaum (2017), "In some cases, the same person will use these two kinds of constructions interchangeably, or in different contexts" (p. 11).

4.1.1 Student Avowals of ADHD

Student avowals of ADHD on RMP were examined, *n* = 124. ADHD students frequently used RMP as a forum to exchange information about their professors' behaviors, characteristics, and pedagogies. They also noted that ADHD, at one time or another, interfered with their learning and success in courses.

Learning Differences

Students situated ADHD identity as a learning difference that is commonly overlooked and undervalued in the traditional college classroom. They described different learning challenges in the classroom, such as difficulty staying seated for lectures, an inability to focus on reading materials, and trouble following instructions. For example,

Post: I am ADHD and would have normally found it difficult to sit through a 2-hour class, but the class is so fun. It feels like hanging out with your professor, more than anything. I pulled a lot away from this class.

Another student added:

Post: First things first: be prepared to read the whole textbook. I'm not a strong reader so I struggled with that (I have ADHD, so focusing too long on reading is almost impossible) but GO TO CLASS! His lectures are informative, interesting, and clear. [The professor] is super knowledgeable and really knows his stuff and is a kind person! Good class!

Workload

Students also discussed whether or not attendance was required, the format of the course and the duration of the class. The latter was used to emphasize how interesting or entertaining the class was; whether the professor, course material, etc., held their attention. One student explained,

Post: Had a great time in this class, Microbiology is hard to make interesting and "fun" at times but she did a good job even though we had a 3 hr lecture and I have ADHD lol. Doesn't tolerate shenanigans which I appreciate because goofing off is distracting and disrespectful to others. Recommend to everyone.

Two more students also commented on their 3-hour class:

Post: INCREDIBLE PROFESSOR! Only a few classes into history and I'm enjoying it more than I have any other course I've taken. He's engaging, knowledgeable, a great lecturer, and kind. I have learning disabilities (ADHD) but my mind doesn't wander in his class and it's 3 hours long! Heavy textbook use but that's okay. Textbook for the class is simple.

Post: Made class very interesting. Not far along into the class but so far, he's been able to keep me active and interested during the entire class, which is saying something when you realize it's almost—3 hours long and I have ADHD. He's a great guy, and I highly recommend.

Students emphasized the magnitude of specific class requirements, including lots of studying, homework, and reading. They also shared recommendations about how to pass the class. Advice included read the syllabus, "read the book and pay close attention in the lectures," follow instructions closely and turn-in assignments.

Accessibility

For ADHD students, accessibility was enhanced when professors were able to engage or "activate" their learning. This happened when professors captivated students, clearly explained information, grounded content in relevant examples, or offered supplemental materials (e.g., outlines and study guides). For example:

Post: Good choice of textbooks; short and to the point. The class was engaging, and the professor stayed on-topic and provided real-life examples to better understand the material. Those who said that his lectures were boring most likely weren't even CRIM majors. I have ADHD, and I can't recall the last time I zoned out in this class. Highly RECOMMENDED!

Post: I am a freshmen, I have ADHD, and I'd recommend this guy in a heartbeat. Put aside whatever bias you might have about the course's name, because this isn't a ram-it-down-your-throat class. The guy's big on quizzes, but it's all in the reading and class discussions. He's both hysterically funny, and very fair. If you need clarification, he can provide it.

Another student added that that even when the material was challenging, students benefited from professors who used different teaching methods to support students with different learning styles.

Post: By far the best teacher I have ever had! Learning programming is extremely tough! However, [the professor] is INCREDIBLE! He is incredibly good at teaching!! He will go over concepts in different ways so that EVERYONE understands! I have ADHD and I actually pay attention to his lectures! Amazing Teacher! Easy-A because he knows HOW to TEACH!

Another student shared:

Post: A great teacher, [she] made me want to major in Economics. I especially appreciated the extensive outlines she handed out at the beginning of most classes—so helpful, especially to an ADHD-er like myself. She also adds personality and humor to nearly every lecture and made even the most difficult subjects interesting. highly recommended.

Students appreciated assignments that prepared them for the exams and illustrations that helped them understand concepts. One student described that the teacher provided practice problems, adding "…and for once, I felt like I could keep up with the class despite my ADHD." Another student shared:

Post: I have difficulty with comprehension and struggle with my ADHD. [The professor] was awesome because she drew things out on the board to help people to grasp the concept. She is very bubbly, caring, and takes her classes serious. You have to show up and be ready to work hard. She was always willing to help me when I asked for it!

One commenter shared a learning strategy they used to study for quizzes and exams:

Post: I loved the hands of labs, it's my kind of thing. I'm no good with exams, so not a great grade, but had no problem with anything except reading. I have ADHD, so reading is evil. I made flashcards of all the keywords and quizzes to study for exams.

Some students noted specific pedagogies that *did not* enhance their learning.

Post: Very fast paced. No calculators allowed. Instructor does not lecture. Has the attitude that you should already know the material before class. Insists on group work— this works well for lots of people, but I have ADHD, so this teaching style did not work for me. To do well, do the assigned reading and be prepared to study a lot outside of class.

Professor's Aptitude

ADHD students appreciated professors who demonstrated excellent communication skills across different modalities (i.e., one-on-one and mediated). One student noted, "Very personable. Easy to talk to if you have any questions. Easy to follow lectures which helps me because I have ADHD. I would take her class again!" Other students shared:

Post: I only took [the course] just because it's a foundation class, but I'm so glad I chose to take it with [the professor]. She explains her assignments very clearly, and I have

ADHD, and she recognizes that people have many different ways of learning so she changes it up each class. Be ready to read and actually try! She just wants to see effort and progress.

Post: [The professor] is simply awesome. I took [the course] with him and it was my favorite class. [The professor] was good at responding to message. He was helpful regarding any concerns. Most of all, he knew his stuff and made the class fun. Even when I was tired, I had a hard time getting board or losing focus. And, this comes from a student who struggles with ADHD.

Students shared admiration for professors who were approachable, understanding, passionate, and organized. Professors who offered help to students or were available outside of class were also liked.

Post: [The professor] is an amazing instructor (coming for a student with severe ADHD). His preferred style is talking and drawing on the whiteboard (in lieu of PowerPoint). He tells a story; his material is organized and has a flow (and he makes it funny and entertaining as well!) Additionally, he is very approachable and always happy to help!

Post: I have taken a few classes with [the professor] and LOVED it!! He is passionate about what he teaches and is always available to talk. He has a very good teaching style for what I need in a professor (I have ADHD) because he is engaging and always has cheesy jokes to help keep students involved. I am taking two more classes of his [in the] fall!

Post: He was very helpful to me. Due to my ADHD, I was never able to concentrate in the highly interactive lecture sessions he prefers. But, to compensate for my attention deficit, he was willing to spend lots of time in one-to-one office meeting.

Post: Hands down best instructor I've ever had. Passionate about math, loves

calculus. GO. TO. OFFICE. HOURS! You will leave his office feeling more intelligent.

Warning to new students: Strict grader, but very straightforward. Don't skip homework

assignments! I have ADHD and I never lost attention in his class. Funny, respectful,

extremely friendly.

Students revered professors who went out of their way to ensure that everyone understood the

course content. One student shared, "[The professor] was my first-year professor and my ADHD

coach when I was at [the college] she really bent over backwards to help me out. A wonderful

lady and a great professor." Another student added:

Post: Great teacher. Half my class is online which I had never done before but she is very

helpful. Online quizzes you can take over and over until you get the grade you want—she

actually wants you to learn something. I'm ADHD and this has worked very well for me.

Very helpful and nice. I'd definitely take a class with her again.

Student praised professors who taught students with different learning styles.

Post: He was a great teacher. Explained everything from different angles to make sure

everyone could understand. Did not let lecture steer from direction, which is helpful. Silly,

and very passionate about what he does. Is always willing to help or explain after class. I

am ADHD and was able to still get an A-. Only uses textbook as a reference.

One student directed their comments at ADHD peers, stating that the professor was shared

whether professors were helpful, knowledgeable, and interesting:

Post: [This professor] is HILARIOUS and a super cool person! I was fortunate to have her

for the lecture and the recitation section. She was very into the subject she taught and

would relate almost all of the art pieces to random stories she had (good for ADHD-

minded people like me to connect ideas to). She was very helpful and clear about what she wanted.

Students also alerted peers to professors who were "rude," disorganized, and inconsistent. They provided examples of unacceptable behaviors, for example:

Post: Hated him. I'm dreading taking any more of his classes. He never replied to my emails, every time I would go to his office, even if we had an appointment, he would either not be there or tell me another time. He got off topic so much that I needed his help. I have ADHD, that kind of confusion really didn't help and I ended up failing the class.

Impact

They also described different types of impact their professor had on them during and after the course. Some professors left lasting negative impressions. Students shared:

Post: [The professor] is a licensed psychologist and he knows a lot about the subject. I have both ADHD and anxiety and after learning about them, I know how to better help myself. I am also able to better understand other people who have psychological disorders. I really enjoyed volunteering outside of class as well.

Post: [The professor] is the best math teacher I have ever had. As a student with ADHD and math comprehension issues, I always hated math—until I took [the professor]'s class. Also the best person to go to in the math center.

Post: As a student with ADHD and major depression (was depressed during the class), I found that [the professor] was beyond amazing. He was willing to do special office hours to explain the material to me in more detail and it really helped me understand it and get the A+ grade I needed in this class to go on as a chemistry major. The best professor I've ever had.

Post: The absolute best class I was in my freshman year. She is hilarious and super hyper and so sweet. She is so clear about what she is teaching and will answer any question. She is super flexible with students with crazy circumstances, I have ADHD and she was my mom accommodating teacher. This class is hard class no matter what, but she is the best.

Post: Steer clear is my best advice. his expectations are not very consistent or clear. As for guy himself, he's kind of a jerk. I have ADHD and get accommodations for it from the school. This guy is the only professor I ever had that made it difficult for me to get the extra time on tests that I'm allowed. Almost missed the final because of him.

Within-Group Identities

Severity. Students described their experiences as levels (or severity) of ADHD (e.g., "severe ADHD," "moderate ADHD," "a little ADHD").

Post: I suck at math, and I got a 3.3 in [the professors]'s class. I could never pay attention to him in class because I get bored easily and I have severe ADHD. I got such a high score because he records his lectures! I would put in my earbuds and re-listen to the lectures in order to get good marks on my homework. He is a great teacher and very straightforward.

Post: I have severe attention deficit. [The professor] is the only math teacher that could ever keep my attention. The pre-calc series is considered hard. He would do the proof, do the formal (book) solution and show us easier ways to look at the problem. I thrived under this system and still remember it all 8 years later.

Post: The best teacher I ever had. I wish more teachers could be half as good as [the professor]. He really cares about his students and their comprehension. I have

severe ADHD, and he really broke down the material for me to understand. TAKE HIM for 101 and 102 if you can!!!!!

Post: She's a great teacher who knows how to keep your attention. And I have a moderate case of ADHD. She's funny and her teaching methods are great. She hands out fill in the blank packets and goes over them during class, so you're paying attention and each class important and necessary barely had to read the text and got an A.

Post: Best professor EVER!!! Totally recommend him! Psychology is a difficult subject, but it is also SO INTERESTING! He has a way of speaking that keeps me interested (which is rare because I'm a little ADHD) He is a really down to earth guy, and his class is fairly easy. I totally recommend him!!!

Un/Medicated. Eight students' avowals mentioned medication prescribed for ADHD. A division between students who avowed ADHD was exposed; those who took medication to reduce ADHD symptoms and those who did not. Five students shared that they took medication. One student recalled that they pursued an ADHD diagnosis after an in-class inventory. This student declared, "I got tested and now I'm on medication which is really helping me." One student mentioned medication in order to legitimize their lived experience with ADHD and caution other students with a similar diagnosis:

Post: I went in for academic advising and my ADHD was brought up. He told me "everyone has that" like everyone he's ever come in contact with can't function without their daily, doctor-prescribed ADHD medication, and has been diagnosed by an adult ADHD specialist. He was condescending and I hope I never have to talk to him again.

Two students explained that the class was insufferable for ADHD students. Despite liking their professor's personality, one student explained that wasn't enough:

Post: [The professor] is not a bad guy, but as a teacher, I don't like him. He expects you

to read the textbook with the lecture, and that's very hard for me to do with my ADHD. I

can't focus enough even with my medicine to look at the text since it is so boring. But

while his tough exams are his ONLY grades, if he makes a mistake with grading, he'll fix

it.

One commenter added, "…if you struggle with ADHD like I do, even medicated, you will surely

suffer from this class. Yes, it's easy to BS it, it's [course name], but she is NOT someone who

cares for her students at all." Another student shared that the professor's pedagogy was

inclusive, that they did not need to take their medication to pay attention in the class: "…Normally

I have to take meds to focus in my classes. In this one, I'd rather crack open a beer."

Three students mentioned that they were not taking medication for ADHD when they

were in the class. Two identified as "unmedicated" and one student shared that they were "no

longer" taking medication for ADHD. Two students used this status to emphasize that they

professor was interesting, and able to hold their attention:

Post: [The professor] is teaching a straightforward, interesting college course. Imagine

that. If you are an entitled millennial who needs puppet shows, not for you. I took this

class with unmedicated ADHD and enjoyed it. [The] professor is very kind and has a

good sense of humor which may be lost on the dull wits of helicopter parented, 'Family

Guy' generation students.

Post: [The professor] is by far the best professor I've ever had. I have bad ADHD

which I no longer take medication for, but his class never lost my attention. He writes

amazing and detailed lectures, and every time I visited him in office hours he was a

tremendous help. I thought about taking an unneeded math class just to have him again.

Rating: 7/5.

One student added that the class format, which included lectures, essays, short answer questions, was not ideal for "unmedicated ADHD" students.

4.1.2 Student Avowals of ASD

Twenty-five student avowals of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or Asperger's syndrome were identified and examined. Students valued professors who were helpful and understanding of their unique needs. They also praised professors for being organized, warm, knowledgeable, honest, engaging, patient, and passionate.

> Post: She was very helpful and if you asked her to explain something that you did not understand, she would explain it very well. She did take some extra holidays due to her beliefs however, we did not fall behind. she was very organized. She is also very good with students on the autistic spectrum like me.

> Post: [The professor]'s knowledge of the field is immense. She communicates this knowledge well. [The professor] mixes the "visual" with the "verbal." I have learned a great deal from the "videoclip" examples. I am autistic and earned an "A" in her class.

Workload

Students commented on the difficulty or ease of classes. They identified reasons why the courses were difficult and emphasized critical course requirements (e.g., attendance, tests, and attention to emails from the professor). Paramount for student success were flexibility, feedback on essays or papers and tutoring from the professor between classes.

> Post: An AWESOME English teacher EVER! She cares about me since I have Asperger's syndrome and that English is my 2nd language. She makes the class feel comfortable and she's VERY flexible on phones. She helps you with your assignments as much as she can. She understands everyone and she gives you a lot of feedback on essays. Missed her already! :D

Post: [The professor] is an excellent professor and will take any time in between

classes to give extra tutoring or show how a problem functions. I'm autistic and don't

always see 'jumps' from one stage to another and still managed to get an A in class

because of his help! Make sure to show up for EVERY class or you'll miss big chunks of

info. No online work.

This supports scholar and autistic self-advocate, Stephen Shore's (2012) observation "that

providing sufficient structural supports such as regular meetings with professors" can be a useful

way for supporting autistic college students (p. 37).

Learning Challenges & Accessibility

Some students described social anxieties, including difficulty speaking in front of class

and interpreting social cues. Three students appreciated professors who were able to help them

improve their social skills. In one example, a student shared their experience:

Post: I have ASD and don't really interact naturally with my peers, so I was unhappy

about all the group work and participation. Over the course, I became interested in

improving my social skills and in understanding leadership qualities. [The professor]'s

teaching helped me grow academically and personally in ways that will have lifelong

effects.

Another student shared that the professor helped them "become [a] more confident speaker."

One student shared that the professor taught them improve their communication skills. Their

takeaway from the course was that they learned how to "become more vocal" and express

themselves "more fluently."

Impact

While some students reflected on experiences of academic and personal growth in the

classroom, others recalled feeling stressed, confused, and offended.

Post: I had him for Design I but he wasn't the original instructor. The class itself was alright but he pushed pretty forcefully for students taking what I figured was in intro course. I never understood whether he was joking or not, but I have Asperger's syndrome so I can't blame that on him. Overall, it was stressful.

Post: Patient and understanding when I needed deadline extensions. No attendance policy; I mainly needed to study and show up for tests/due dates. However, had crude sense of humor and joked that he "needed to go back to sensitivity training." Made big show of saying "retarded" to be deliberately controversial/offensive. Being autistic, I wasn't amused.

Professor's Aptitude

Some students used RMP as a space to share experiences that were unfair or just didn't make sense to them. For example,

Post: Worked hard, participated, turned in work on time, even talked to her daily to make sure I had a firm understanding of what I had learned and what was expected of me; my Asperger's and anxiety disorder make it difficult for me to talk in front of class, and was made to stop and sit back down during presentations. Passed all assignments, received an "F."

Post: Technically, the class was taken for credit, but I failed the class. I have Aspergers and she was no help at all, and she KNEW this. I am not great at biology, but at least I passed it when I took it several years later.

One student explained that they had to get the school involved after their professor discriminated against them for having Asperger's syndrome and breached their confidentiality by sharing the

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student's disclosure of ASD with the class: "She made fun of my high functioning Asperger's in front of the whole entire class, which WAS a secret…"[9]

4.1.3 Student Avowals of Bipolar Disorder

Five student avowals of bipolar disorder were analyzed; two students also avowed "severe anxiety" and "manic depression." Each student mentioned that they disclosed their bipolar disorder to their professor, and they spoke highly of professors who took time to listen, understand, and care about their experiences with bipolar disorder. One student reviewed course requirements and their professors' consideration:

Post: Be sure to read prior to lectures and you will be good. Homework and quizzes are really helpful. Exams are tough but if you do your work, they aren't too hard. Really nice and funny. Cares a lot about students. I am bipolar and we talked for hours in his office about it. Best caring professor I have ever had.

Bipolar students emphasized the importance of professors' emotional support; critical to their success in class (and beyond). Additionally, students appreciated professors who were "helpful" and "encouraging."

Post: [The professor] is incredible. She knows how to encourage discussion in seminar and create a space where everyone is welcome and excited to talk. Her feedback is helpful and encouraging. She was actually extremely understanding of my bipolar disorder and severe anxiety and how they affected my work and attendance. Great professor. One of the best.

---

[9] For a "general overview of major disability federal statutes," see ADA, n.d.

Post: I cannot describe how much I love [the professor]. I have bipolar disorder

and manic depression and shared my experience with the class and he loved me from

then on. He is the sweetest and most caring professor I've ever had, loves to talk to you

personally. Tests are so easy to pass plus if you listen closely he laughs at his own jokes

it's adorable.

Students offered little information about the challenges that they experience in the

classroom. One student described being at their "breaking point" during the semester. This

student described (in all caps) a series of events that left them feeling unsupported and betrayed

by their professor. Another student stated, "I'm a disabled, bipolar student—[the professor]

criticized my 'consistency.'" And the third student revealed that bipolar disorder had an impact on

their "work and attendance."

4.1.4 Student Avowals of Dyslexia

Seventy-eight student avowals of dyslexia were analyzed. Students appreciated

professors who were patient, helpful, and dedicated to helping students succeed. Students

praised these professors for clarity, kindness, and fairness:

Post: SHE IS THE BEST MATH TEACHER EVER! She explains with such clarity. I'm

dyslexic so math isn't my best subject but with her I understood everything and if you

don't get it she explains it step by step so you won't get lost. She has a lot of patience

and she's really nice. She also sounds like princess jasmine from Aladdin.

Post: [The professor] is a very kind and patient teacher. I'm dyslexic and she

helped my writing skills a ton! You also read a very fascinating book about the lost boys

of Sudan. The homework amount is not to bad and theirs only three papers. I would have

to say she's a great teacher and very helpful!

Post: First off it's [the professor], and she is amazing! I loved every min. of her class. I have ADD and severe dyslexia and I had no problem understanding a thing. She is very helpful and kind, you can reach her any time and with a fast response. Her class was a lot of fun always lively and a lot of laughter. Wish I could take all of my CD classes with her.

Post: [The professor] is wonderful. Funny, unique, fair, but tough. Be sure to get your heading right! He doesn't mess around with that. Followed the syllabus to the tea every time I took one of his classes. PAY ATTENTION!! Helpful, kind, and always there for you even if you are severely handicapped. I have dyslexia horribly so. My favorite professor of all!

Post: [THE PROFESSOR] IS THE BEST MATH TEACHER I HAVE EVER HAD...the content can be hard at times but she goes out of her way to make sure you understand. I would definitely recommend her to anyone who is taking math, whether you are good at it or not. I have dyslexia and if she can help me, she can help anyone...LOVE HER!!!

Despite perceiving the class as "tough," students shared excitement about being able to understand the content.

Students also esteemed professors who were understanding, passionate, and able to employ different teaching techniques to help students learn.

Post: Monday homework is fairly heavy so DO NOT forget to do that homework before Wednesday. She uploads helpful reviews with answers and video tutorials of the material. She is very understanding of different viewpoints of math and different ways of solving the same problems. I'm dyslexic and felt very understood and successful in this class.

Post: [The professor] is one of the best teachers I have ever had. He is

passionate and brilliant about the material he teaches, which is why he puts so much into

the syllabus. As a student with dyslexia, it takes me 3 times as long to read and he was

always cool about it. He is fair and relaxed, and never asks for more than he can give,

but wants you to learn!

Post: He is one of the best instructors. [The professor] in genuine and will help

make sure you understand IF you ask the questions. I am dyslexic and he used visual

teaching tools to help with more of the complex chemical processes. I would highly

recommend that you take this from him. He rewards extra for attendance.

Learning Challenges

Most student framed dyslexia as a learning disability; six students emphasized the

longevity of dyslexia as its impact on their learning. Students discussed challenges in one or

more areas, including: reading comprehension, spelling, writing, and mathematics.

Post: He really knows what he's talking about. However, if you want to pass his class

YOU HAVE TO STUDY! There's no getting around that. The only thing I didn't like was

he counts off for some of the simplest things. Like spelling; and when you're dyslexic like

I am, that can really hurt your grade. Overall a great teacher but very nitpicky.

Post: He is the reason I got into writing. Being a dyslexic I struggled with my

writing until taking a contemporary modes of interpretation class from [the professor]. By

the end of the semester he awarded me an A- for that amount of improvement and hard

work I put in. He values hard workers and those that constantly improve and revamp their

writing.

Post: I have been afraid of math for a long time so I was always refusing to take

math until. I met [the professor]. I am a student who is dyslexic and have many other

learning disabilities, but since I have taken [the professor,] he has help me to learn how

to love math even though I still have hard time he is always open to helping the students

understand.

And a new diagnostic label emerged, *dyscalculia,* or "dyslexia with math."

Post: I took two classes with this professor. He's great! I have dyscalculia (like dyslexia

but with numbers) and he is extremely helpful. He teaches every lesson multiple ways

and doesn't care how you do the work so long as you get the right answer. He

understands that people learn differently and is happy to help.

Ease and Accessibility

Students valued professors who took time to clearly cover materials and answer their

questions. Students benefited from visual aids, films, verbal imagery and explanations, ample

time to complete assignments and individualized attention. One student shared,

Post: Easy A, keep up with your deadlines. She allows you to work ahead. Interesting

class, enjoyed it. Online course; 1 initial post, respond to 2 people by Friday, and tests

are timed. I'm dyslexic this course gave me enough time. Keep communication with

teacher she is awesome but don't miss deadlines. You'll like her and her class. Very

prompt and kind.

Accessibility was also enhanced when professors enhanced course concepts with examples from

current and historical events. As one student explained,

Post: Being dyslexic, its sometimes impossible for me to grasp material purely from

reading it. [The professor] appealed to all the most effective ways for someone like me to

learn; visual/auditory aids, videos/documentaries, individualized attention, and real world

examples (both current and historical).

Professors also supported dyslexic students with "strategies for working with dyslexia," including reading pages turned upside-down.

Course Workload

Students shared tips about textbook use (or non-use), alternative formats (i.e., audio books, text-to-voice software) for required readings, importance of notetaking, attendance, etc. For example,

> Post: [The professor] really made me look forward to the class every day. The class was quite large but I still felt like I got individual attention. [The professor] never makes you buy textbooks/plays making the class VERY accessible. I also have dyslexia, so reading is VERY hard for me but all of the plays were available as PDFs. I was able to use a computer program so they can be read to me.

> Post: She'll help you, but you'll be talked down to, to the point of annoyance. The tests are confusingly worded and formatted. Didn't pair well with my dyslexia. Not understanding of work schedule. There's an attendance grade, so be sure to show up for class. No book, just print the lab manual. I just didn't have the time and this takes a lot of it.

> Post: He is very cool. SHOW UP!!! Take notes and you'll have an easy A. Also, he doesn't work with a textbook so don't buy one. You have to read, if you don't like to read buy a membership with audible that is what I had to do since I'm dyslexic. You'll like him. He's really easygoing and funny. I liked him he was the man!

Impact on Students

Students were also candid about how professors made them feel. They valued professors who built their confidence and self-esteem.

Post: [This professor] is AWESOME! I am someone who has struggled with math my

entire life due to being dyslexic and he made it so I was able to understand to the best of

my abilities. Never once did I feel stupid if I didn't know the answer and he always took

the time to explain a problem when someone was confused. He is also easy on the eyes

;) lol.

Post: I cannot exactly remember the course number for the classes that I took

with her but back in 1997 she was my organic chemistry teacher and how amazing she

was. She was the Best teacher I ever had and gave me to courage and confidence to

continue on to my zoology degree, even with my dyslexia! She let me see the brilliant

side of me. Thank you [professor]!!

Professor's Aptitude

Knowledge of dyslexia and best practices for teaching dyslexic students varied greatly

among professors. Some professors worked with students to ensure accommodations were met.

Post: I took [the professor] for Pre-Cal and Calculus 1. I have dyslexia and he worked

with my accommodations. His lectures are power points and if he gets done with his

lecture, he will work on some homework problems. Gives quizzes out but not on test day.

Study the review sheet it is similar to the test.

Other professors responded negatively to students' dyslexia disclosures. One student recalled,

"He told me to drop out of school because I would not make it in the real world." Another student

shared their professors' apathy towards dyslexic identity:

Post: Worst teacher I have had in my entire life. She is just not a good person. I went to

her and told her I am dyslexic and she straight told me she didn't care even though I was

just letting her know not asking for help. Class average: 60...curve: NO. Reinforces the

fact that those who can't do teach and those who can't teach math at [this college].

Students also recalled disability rights violations by professors. For example, one student shared a breach of confidentiality:

> Post: Teacher is not helpful, she announced that I had dyslexia in front of the entire class. Moreover, her classes are scatterbrained and have no apparent purpose. There is no chronological order to her teaching of history. Everything seems to be said as a side note. Assigned readings are painfully long and laborious. Do not take her GE classes.

4.2 Professor Avowals

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, non-neurotypicality in the academy has traditionally been studied through the lens of typical-professor and atypical-student. However, less is known about the power differences between atypical-professor and typical-student. Open coding of professor avowals revealed three types of descriptions of professors' avowals. I described these themes with the terms: *admission*, *blame*, and *disclosure*. First, students framed the avowals as *admission* to non-neurotypicality; students drew connections between their professors' neuro-identity and pedagogy. Second, students perceived professors' avowals as disingenuous. They supposed the disclosures were excuses—attempts to shift *blame* from their pedagogical weaknesses to a diagnostic label. Third, students framed the avowals as statements or *disclosures* of neuro-identity.

4.2.1 Professor Avowals of ADHD

Seventeen students stated that their professors' avowed ADHD. Each of the three themes, *admission*, *blame*, and *disclosure*, were identified. More students framed professor avowals as disclosures, $n = 8$, than admissions, $n = 6$, or blame, $n = 3$. Students who said their professors "admitted" to having ADHD described these professors as talkative, energetic, and interesting; admission of ADHD was directly linked to these characteristics. ADHD behaviors

were apparent to these students and professors validated these observations through avowals of non-neurotypicality.

Post: Hard class. He is a very nice person and interesting stories. He is hard to follow. He jumps around topics a lot but he did admit to having ADHD and he is also 71 years old. Make sure you take lecture and his lab. Do not take a different professors lab you will. Be lost in lecture if you do. He doesn't post grades in D2L.

Post: Showing up on time, participation, and assignment completion are musts, but [the professor] is a very interesting instructor who uses her past experiences as a psych counselor as illustrations. She cares about students as individuals. Also self-admittedly ADHD and speaks at the rate of a machine gun. Very much enjoyed her class.

Post: Piece of cake. You get pts for showing up to class which is a bonus for some, but it's not a lot so won't affect grade too much. Write the papers, study the exams, do well on the quizzes and this class is a breeze. Teacher is a bit erratic during lecture, but this is due to ADHD which she admits. Very lenient. Easy and interesting class!

Post: [The professor] is one word...CRAZY! she admits that she has ADHD and has an addiction for caffeine and boy can she talk. She talks and rambles on about anything and everything. She also talks really fast. The class is easy. Do all the work and get at least a C on the tests and you'll end up with a B...that's what I did. Too bad she's leaving!

Three professor avowals were reframed as "blame." Students explicitly stated that the professor used their ADHD as an excused for their "poor teaching":

Post: Basically [the professor] loves to ramble about his life and all the past surgeries he's had. Half of the time he loses focus on a math problem and realizes he's teaching

the class then laughs and blames his ADHD. Honestly not a good professor. He's not

there for students and you learn nothing. Unorganized. AVOID IF YOU CAN.

> Post: This class was the worst I have taken at [the university]. It was worse than
>
> Am Heritage. He blames his poor teaching skills on the fact that he is ADHD, tries as
>
> hard as he can to trick you on his huge tests, and relishes in his multiple choice questions
>
> that include options A thru R. Terrible experience, learned nothing but lessons in how to
>
> be a bad teacher.

Here, students described ADHD as neither legitimate nor acceptable.

Professor disclosures were situated within student's perception of why professors self-

disclosed. These are examples of what Buttny (1998) called *reported speech:*

> Reported speech seems reserved for capturing the most crucial or interesting parts of the
> narrative. This may be because reported speech, especially direct quotes, comes closest
> to presenting what was said, and thereby, done. The reported speech conveys the "what
> was said," but some context for the reported speech is necessary to indicate "what
> actions were done" along with their social significance.

Hence, a closer reading of the posts in the disclosure category revealed that students actually

perceived these avowals as *admission*s (n = 6) or *blame* (n = 2). Students associated ADHD with

additional work; need to supplement their learning, tolerate atypical behaviors (rapid or excessive

talk, movement, disorganization, etc.), and filter out unimportant or irrelevant information from

professors. For example,

> Post: He is an extremely knowledgeable man. His articles and newspaper ads that he
>
> brings into class add value. Read the chapters before watching lecture otherwise you will
>
> probably be lost, he moves along very fast and you'll have to tolerate his ADHD that he
>
> addressed he had at the beginning of the semester.

> Post: She is a funny teacher and she told the class she had ADHD. I didn't pass
>
> the class even though I showed up every day, did the homework and got a tutor. It was a

hard class for me because, I couldn't remember everything. I didn't like how she said we

should already know this from Math 0098. I haven't taken that class since Fall 2015.

Post: ALWAYS LATE not professional at all ugh. She just talked about her sex

life and her ADHD like if we cared! She didn't teach at all everything was online but yet

the class was on campus. Easy A but if you are interested in learning don't take her! She

could care less if you went to class or not always eating on the bright side she would

always take us food.

Students were skeptical of their professors' ADHD identities. Despite praising professors for

being knowledgeable, students often associated ADHD with "poor teaching." One student shared,

"ALWAYS LATE! never used the book not professional all she talked about was her ADHD! it

was more like ADHD 101 not PSY 101 could care less if u show up to class!" Another student

explained:

Post: I don't think he doesn't want to help; I think he just is a bit arrogant and this makes

people resistant to be open to learning from him when he makes students feel dumb for

asking a question. Sometimes it's like he's speaking 600 mph. He's said he has ADHD

and that is abundantly apparent. Go to class, focus and repeat your labs over and over.

According to Buttny (1998), the use of direct quotes provides key information about how students

perceived what they were being told (p. 49). The following post, for example, demonstrates how a

typical student evaluates and criticizes their professors' performance through their avowed neuro-

identity:

Post: [The professor] is the spaciest, most off-track, unfocused person I have ever

encountered in my life. She has a self-proclaimed case of "bad ADHD." Expectations

were 100% unclear—wretchedly useless in regard to preparing you for tests and essays.

She engages in extremely off-topic conversations for 95% of class time, making it

useless to show up.

This act of othering places the professor outside of the typical or acceptable.

4.3.2 Professor Avowals of ASD

Seven posts reframed professors' avowals as autistic as disclosures. One comment

named professor Temple Grandin. Since Grandin is an acclaimed inventor, scholar, professor,

advocate, and autistic at Colorado State University (see Phifer, n.d.), the following comment was

included:

Post: Professor Grandin is perhaps one of the all time greats. She's very famous

worldwide for her work with livestock, and for improving treatment of animals—especially

cattle. She was born autistic which is what helps her see things from an animal's

perspective. As a teacher, she is knowledgeable, friendly, confident, and helped me

outside of class.

Students described their professors as "very funny," "very helpful," "really kind," and genuine. For

example,

Post: She is a very easy professor. You do have a lot of work but it is all at home and you

have as many attempts as you want. You will also have discussion questions each week

but they are not that difficult. There is no final exam and absolutely no tests in class. She

does mention that she has ASD and she is very funny and tends to swear a lot.

Post: I don't care what anyone says, this is a great professor. He responds back

to emails quickly, overall nice guy. He does sometimes put people on the spot, but he

made it clear that he's autistic and doesn't mean to do that. He is also extremely lenient

in extending time for homework. He is very helpful. Would definitely take another class w/

him.

However, a second reading of the posts revealed that three of these posts more closely aligned with *admission*. One student described a professor who avowed Asperger's syndrome, but tried not to "let it show." Another student explained that their professor's avowal was warranted because they were *unable* to perform neurotypicality.

> Post: [The professor] made it very clear on the first day of class that he was autistic, not that I have a problem with that, but it really showed in his teaching that he did not fully understand the concepts of the human mind and human interactions himself, yet the whole point of his class was to teach us just that. He should teach Abnormal Sociology instead.

Lastly, a new perspective emerged which situated students as practitioners. One student explained, the professor avowed ASD and "we" must turn to the diagnosis for explanation of particular (stereotypical) behaviors. In summation, the professor admitted to their atypicality and we cannot evaluate them as if they were neurotypical. As one student shared,

> Post: [The professor] is incredibly intelligent. He mentioned to our class that he is on the autism spectrum—students need to realize that this disorder makes it difficult for people to feel empathy. So he may seem super cold but he is actually really kind and wants students to succeed. This class helped me become a skilled writer and I really respect him.

4.3.3 Professor Avowals of Bipolar Disorder

Three professor avowals of bipolar disorder were identified. Although these comments do not contain the words "admit" or "blame," these themes were apparent. Students described their professors' avowals as overstated. For example, one student revealed that sympathy works both ways:

Post: I will never forget this worthless teacher. I had a disability and he moved me around in noisy areas ON PURPOSE during a make-up test. My grades were 92, 96, 97, 62, 93. I got a B because of this jerk. And then, two weeks after my terrible test, he broke down crying in class talking about his bipolar disorder. Hypocrite!!

Another student explained, that the professor repeatedly avowed bipolar identity. They shared, "Professor has mentioned numerous times his bipolar status. I haven't learned anything new by taking this class. It is a univ. requirement and now I am done with it." The third post revealed that avowed bipolar identity was not an "excuse" for unprofessional behavior, lack of empathy, and prejudice:

Post: She's the worst teacher I've had. Does not like blacks or other minorities. She stats that herself and brother are bipolar and it's very clear to see. If you disagree with her you will not get very far in her class. DO NOT TAKE THIS TEACHER!

In all, students described professors as pity-seeking; unprofessional and unfair.

4.3.4 Professor Avowals of Dyslexia

Twenty-four professor avowals of dyslexia were examined, and all three themes were identified. Most students explained that professors shared or avowed their dyslexic identity. Most students (*n* = 14) described their professors' avowals as *disclosures.*

Some students described their dyslexic professors as "funny," likable, and good professors. For example, a student mentioned, "Took him many years ago at [the college] and enjoyed his class. He was kind enough to share his dyslexia with the class. He was funny and he related his real-life experience to developmental psychology, that made it interesting." Others commented,

Post: He's funny and will not miss a chance to tell you about his dyslexia. You can tell that he's a very sweet person willing to help you as much as he could because he just

wants everyone to pass. His tests are weird; sometimes they come straight from his homework problems and review questions, other times you don't know where he got them from. Overall good professor!

Post: [The professor] is a great guy and professor. His labs are pretty straight forward. Usually a half hour lecture and the rest of the time is spent doing the lab. It may be important to note that [the professor] said he is colorblind, deaf in one ear, and dyslexic so sometimes he gets caught up on simple things and it can be distracting. Overall, good guy and good class.

Post: He is good a professor...he might make some minor mistakes on chalkboard but he would say that he is dyslexic...He is really helpful during his office hours...One of my favorites...

Some students emphasized that these professors delivered "VERY clear" instructions. For example,

Post: All you need to pass this class is common sense. She's perfectly clear about what she expects out of you and she doesn't expect you to be a genius. Just do the work and keep up your stuff. DON'T THROW ANYTHING AWAY. Just make sure you check your grade a lot because she does make mistakes sometimes. She'll tell you from the start, she's dyslexic.

Post: [The professor] is a very dedicated professor who obviously cares about his students' success. He is open about his battle with dyslexia, so it is truly up to the student to ensure that they understand exactly what he wants from them because not all requirements will be crystal clear. You can really tell he enjoys teaching; I enjoyed the course.

Other students revealed that their professors had an atypical way of presenting information that required close attention. For example,

> Post: [The professor] is a really good guy, and a very approachable professor. If you show up to class, engage and put forth a minimal effort, you'll succeed with flying colors. But he'll be the first to tell you he's a little dyslexic, so make sure to pay attention to the way he presents his information or you could be left a bit confused.

One student shared that although it took some time to get comfortable with the professor's teaching style they "better grasp[ed] how connected a lot of concepts are." Another student found following the lectures closely to be a challenge because the professor "had a tough time with words." This student added, "so long as you get the idea of what he's saying, you'll do fine."

> Six students framed their professor's avowals as excuses or "blame." They emphasized their professors' "inability" to complete do necessary job-related tasks. Some students believed that their professors used the neuro-identity to justify their laziness.

> Post: Doesn't know how to teach. Blames dyslexia for his inability to explain anything. He uses [another professor's] PowerPoints and is too dumb to take off [the other professor's] name from them. Makes the worst analogies. Taking him for any class would be a huge mistake.

Dually, students described that they had to compensate for their professors' lack of effort or skill. Two students shared,

> Post: If you are looking to fail, come take a class with her! This woman can't teach for nothing and ALWAYS blamed it on her dyslexia! It's rather comical to see the students teaching HER instead of her teaching us. STAY CLEAR AWAY from this professor!

Post: Extremely hard...blames everything on his dyslexia...boring voice...bad

analogies...will put you to sleep...hard quizzes and tests. I got a C in the class and really

worked hard all semester. But if you can teach yourself, go for it.

Lastly, four students used "admit" to frame professor's avowed dyslexia. In two instances,

students described feeling uneasy and confused during the course. Students described the

pedagogy as puzzling:

Post: This professor is now at [this university] and [another university]. I took her at [the

university] and withdrew before the deadline. She openly admitted that she was dyslexia

and I couldn't pinpoint it but I knew something just wasn't right with her style/method of

teaching. I am sure I can pass elementary algebra, but not if I take it with her...

Post: This class is incredibly boring! The teacher admits she's dyslexic. Writes

everything on the board, no power point, no book. MUST GO TO CLASS! The drawings

she writes on the board are impossible to understand and really make no sense at all. I

took this thinking it'd be an easy A and ended up stressed out. The only plus is that she

grades easily.

Two of these students noted that dyslexic professors employed unconventional teaching

strategies that focused more on their own needs than the needs of the students. For example,

Post: Self-confessed dyslexic, has to write 500 bullet points on blackboard to stay on

topic. Uses "UMMMMM" between sentences while teaching COMMUNICATION. No

tests, no mid-term, no final exam, grade is what she thinks it should be. Assignments get

check marks and no corrections. No idea what your grade is until after she submits it at

mid-term.

Post: This professor is dyslexic!!! He has admitted in class a few times for

messing up words on the board that he has dyslexia. On top of that, he sucks! You ask

him for help or to explain something and he will repeat what he says over and over in

different ways still not answering your question. Then [he] wonders why we fail his

quizzes and tests.

Chapter Five: Ascriptions with Neuro-Terms

In the long term, academics need to be seen not as the privileged elite sitting in the ivory tower of scholarship, but as individuals who, when it comes to navigating workplaces, may also be marginalised and whose voices may remain equally unheard. (Brown and Leigh, 2018, p. 4)

Student and faculty ascriptions with neuro-terms comprised most of the posts identified on *Rate My Professors* (RMP). *Student ascriptions* (*n* = 12) referred to posts that contained neuro-terms but did not include student avowals of neurodivergent identity. Most often, these students gave agency to the neuro-term(s) (e.g., "I suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder…").

Faculty ascriptions of non-neurotypicality (*n* = 730) included explicit identity statements with neuro-terms. Some of these professors may have disclosed their neuro-identity to the student or class. However, students were not clear about whether these professors avowed their non-neurotypicality publicly, to the class, or the individual.

5.1 Student Ascriptions

Rather than avow non-neurotypicality, fourteen commenters advanced their student identity with ancillary medical terms. They posited ADHD, bipolar disorder, and dyslexia as diagnoses, learning disabilities and illnesses. Notably, student ascriptions were not associated with ASD. Three themes emerged from these posts: *diagnosis effects students' self-perceptions, students (with the diagnosis) are disadvantaged in the classroom,* and *students are not treated equally or fairly by professors*.

5.1.1 Student Ascriptions of ADHD

Nine student ascriptions of ADHD were analyzed. Students framed ADHD as a learning disability; most students "suffer[ed] from" or received "treatment" for ADHD (i.e., medication).

Together these posts revealed that ADHD is a disadvantage in the classroom and overcoming or treating ADHD are key for success. One student, for example, posited ADHD as a hinderance to learning in the absence of visual aids and breaks. However, others described a very different learning experience:

Post: I am not here to suck up to [the professor] or to be a "teacher's pet". If you keep up on the homework and take good notes, it is NOT HARD to pass this class at all. This is coming from someone who got Cs and Ds my senior year of high school and diagnosed with ADHD. If you're not a reader, this class isn't for you. Otherwise I recommend this professor.

Post: Very helpful teacher. Very passionate about philosophy. Can literally talk for hours about philosophy and still had my attention. I suffer from extreme ADHD and her class had my attention the entire time. She starts off mean but once you get her flow of things, it gets easier. I'm taking her ballet class next semester; it should be interesting.

Post: I love [the professor]! [The professor] kept the class fun and interesting. Kept my attention, & interest. [The professor] repeated things many times, and consistently gave us reminders in our e-mails which is very helpful for someone like me who is diagnosed as ADHD. At times she went fast, but I do take into consideration my ADHD, and that summer is accelerated.

The power differences between professor-student were evident. One student claimed that that their professor empowered them to succeed in the classroom; relieving their academic and emotional distress:

Post: This teacher changed my life. Before this class I was depressed, thought I was stupid, but she helped me slay my greatest enemy: Algebra. Now I am headed into pre-

calculus and with treatment for ADHD it seems happiness returned. That was months

ago and I am still riding the high of her education.

This contrast between the students' personal deficits and the professors' excellence was also

suggested by another student:

Post: Awesome lecturer. I suffer from attention deficit issues and low auditory

comprehension, and I had no trouble following her lectures. They were interesting and

comprehensive with plenty of visuals! She's great at answering student questions and

teaching for both majors and non-majors. Extremely fascinating course material, too.

Would recommend.

These power differences were paramount when accommodations were discussed. For example,

Post: I suffer from ADHD. When I requested extra notes and clarification (which I am

entitled to and she must respect) she accused me of lying and said I obviously skipped

her class. I never missed a single class. Also her voice is terribly lulling and she isn't very

good.

5.1.2 Student Ascriptions of Bipolar Disorder

Two student ascriptions of bipolar disorder were identified. Both students missed class

for medical reasons, or treatment. Only one student received support from their professor. In the

first post, the student praised their professors' helpfulness and offered advice for peers to

succeed in the class.

Post: Excellent instructor. I suffer from Bipolar Type 1 and she accommodated me in Fall

of 2017. She understood my illness, helped me individually, and allowed me to miss labs

because of medical reasons. This teacher went above and beyond and to me became a

friend as well. The course itself is moderate; just study and read her slides and you will

pass!

In the second post, the student tried to reconcile the professors' investment in information about bipolar disorder with the level of care they expected the professor to express for the those diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

> Post: I had a breakdown and could not attend class two times because I was in the hospital. I had doctors excuses but she did not care. I was actually diagnosed with bipolar disorder which she specializes in. All my other teachers helped me. She was the only one who wouldn't let me make up any missed work.

Together these posts suggested bipolar disorder is a disruptor to education that, at times, prevented them from attending classes. Both students expressed needs for medical attention and help from teachers; positing bipolar disorder as debilitating and inconvenient.

5.1.3 Student Ascriptions of Dyslexia

One student ascription of dyslexia was identified. In this post, dyslexia was described as a learning impediment:

> Post: Unless you're completely distraught and crying on the floor or just caught him in a great mood, he will talk down to you like you are a bona fide idiot. I suffer from numerous learning disabilities that go from slowed mental processing disorder, dyslexia, Auditory processing disorder, etc., which sucks in music. Not understanding or compassionate.

Here, the student described the professor's attitude towards all students as disrespectful, with the few exceptions.

5.2 Ascriptions of Professors

This group of posts was comprised of student claims about professors' non-neurotypicality using one or more of the key neuro-terms. Four major themes emerged from these ascriptions. First, students *declared* or *speculated* that their professors had ADHD, ASD, bipolar disorder, or dyslexia. They also determined the *frequency* and *severity* of the professors'

behaviors. Lastly, students also used the neuro-terms to describe (in whole or in part) professors' pedagogy. More students ascribed bipolar disorder (*n* = 399) than ADHD (*n* = 165), ASD (*n* = 96), and dyslexia (*n* = 76). One comment contained both ascriptions of bipolar disorder and Asperger's syndrome:

> Post: Bipolar, insufficient explanations, unwilling to explain unless he believes your
> question is worth it, and possibly has Asperger's syndrome. He seems brilliant and might
> very well may be...in another class. In this class he doesn't seem interested in teaching
> it—at all.

5.2.1 Ascriptions of Professor's ADHD

One hundred and sixty-five ascriptions of professor's ADHD were examined. Near half of the students made explicit statements about the professors as being or having ADHD (*n* = 80). More than half of these posts, *n* = 46, included an emphasis on the severity of professors' ADHD. And 60 students *speculated* their professor was or had ADHD. These comments often mentioned the professors' movements or rate of speech. For example,

> Post: Very confusing professor. I'm not sure what he has but I think he has ADHD, he
> cannot stay still for long periods and never finishes a thought process. We had to do 15
> assignments in this Bull S. class, which we did, and he gave the majority of us Bs.

Students were divided on whether ADHD enhanced or inhibited their learning. Some professors, for example, covered materials too quickly for students to take notes or keep up with the lectures. Students were critical of professors who assigned "a lot of homework" or gave tests that were difficult for students to complete in the allotted time. For example,

> Post: [The professor] has ADHD. She runs around the classroom at a speed that you
> can't take notes. She assigns a lot of homework. Her tests are too long and make it very

hard to complete on time. She does not allow extra time to finish tests. She has office

hours to help you if you[']re not available then, you'll fail unless you're a math genius.

Students were particularly critical of professors who were unable to stay on topic during lectures. They characterized these professors as "distracted" or "confused":

Post: Horrifying. Please avoid. Cannot stay on track. Someone with ADHD this severe

should not be teaching something that requires absolutes. Cannot answer questions

asked of him, seems confused and starts talking about something else. Eventually people

simply stopped asking questions. Completely unfocused. You will be ill prepared for

Math95 :(

Post: One of the worst unfocused, lazy teachers I know. Often came to class

unprepared and has some form of ADHD as he could never stay focused on any topic to

completion before heading off in a different direction topic. Seventy percent or more of

this class failed or withdrew. Stay away from this guy will hurt or ruin your GPA. Also,

recommend another college.

Post: Absolutely horrible. A professor with severe ADHD, very disorganized and

easily distracted. Additionally, her level of condescension is out of control. I would not

recommend anyone take a course with her as professor, and I would, in fact, attempt to

dissuade anyone I know. By her standards, no one can analyze a text...PERIOD.

The impact of professors' "ADHD" behaviors on students varied, as did students' recommendations about whether peers should take or "avoid" the professors. Students who cautioned peers described feeling anxious when listening to the professor. One student shared:

Post: He is extremely ADHD and listening to him in class gave me anxiety. He was never

clear on what he wanted us to do. All his assignments looked identical and his ramblings

in class made absolutely no sense. I still do not know what I learned in this class. Try and avoid taking him if you can!

More often, students ascribed ADHD to hyperactive professors who lacked professionalism, focus, clarity, and organization. For example,

Post: I understand she has ADHD, and perhaps that's why she's all over the place, but that is no excuse for being rude and disrespectful to students who ask questions pertaining to vague assignments, she's extremely unprofessional. I haven't learned anything, other than knowing my money was wasted on an incompetent professor. DO NOT TAKE HER CLASS.

Post: I think she may have ADHD or something...she seems kind-of ditzy. The textbook would pretty much teach you everything you need to know because when she teaches, it feels like she doesn't know what her own point is. She's VERY nice, though. :)

Post: Well, he is kind. I didn't want to start off bad...But he is hard to understand, assignments aren't listed or clarified by him, due dates are constantly changing, constantly off topic, ADHD to say the least, and he is indirect. It's like he is expecting us to read his mind. Your textbook is your only hope for passing. Good Luck.

Students were also critical of professors who were unprepared for class. This included unstructured or disorganized lectures that lacked important course-related information. Students were also frustrated by professors who were not thoughtful about how their course design and requirements impacted students.

Post: This man is terribly disorganized and extremely ADHD. He is all over the place. This class is hard because he barely teaches you anything in lectures. He babbles. The textbook was a lot of money and he didn't even know how much it cost when he assigned it. He was surprised when someone told him. Avoid. It's a nightmare.

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Post: This guy has a SEVERE case of ADHD. He loses his train of thought all the time. He says whatever comes to his mind with no consideration of the students' feelings. He may be a great artist but his teaching skills are lacking. He provides very little instruction to students and makes rude comments when they don't do things the way he wants.

Some students made explicit remarks about professors' "strange" and atypical behavior:

Post: [The professor] is the worst, most inept, disorganized, confusing, and overall strange professor I have ever had. After classes 3 times a week for about 2 weeks, I legitimately started to believe she suffers from some kind of ADHD or something. She is simply strange. She isn't stupid, but she literally rambles, acts strangely, and teaches nothing.

Post: THIS PROFESSOR SUCKS!!! I DON'T KNOW HOW HE GOT HIRED WITH SUCH BAD ADHD!! THE CLASSES ARE POINTLESS AND YOU DON'T DO ANYTHING BUT PAPERS. HE'LL SIT THERE AND TALK RANDOM BS FOR 3 HOURS AND ALL YOU GET OUT OF IT IS TO WRITE A PAPER ABOUT SOME RANDOM TOPIC. WOULD LEARN JUST AS MUCH FROM BEING IN CLASS WITH A NORMAL PROFESSOR FOR 5 MIN.

One student associated a professor's unprofessional or child-like behavior with ADHD:

Post: [The professor] is nice in lab but expects way too much from students. He's not aware that students are in other rigorous bio classes and are not fast learners like him. He gives out "pop" quizzes which is annoying especially if you have another exam that same week. Plus, I think he has ADHD because during lab exams, he'll distract you by drawing on happy faces on your tests.

Although these students were critical of their professors, there were also many students who spoke highly of ADHD professors. They described them as helpful, friendly, energetic, and funny or fun. For example,

> Post: Easy. The syllabus calendar literally says "discuss book" and "discuss movie" for weeks on end. All you do is have class discussions. She talks A LOT, it's really funny watching her think out loud. Very verbose and ADHD, lol. She's very helpful (because she just LOVES to talk) multiple choice exam took me 20 minutes. EASY A!! She's really sweet and lenient.

> Post: He is ADHD but a lot of fun. [The professor] is a math guy but loves to help his students understand what they are learning for the long run. Very personable and uses life experiences a lot as examples. Very down to earth and lets you know what to expect. I wish I could have him for all my classes. Definitely recommended.

ADHD professors were also described as knowledgeable and entertaining. This combination made the professor or the class "interesting." Students described these teachers as likable and praised the course design. They also shared that these professors "went out of their way" to ensure that they understood course content.

> Post: [The professor] is an interesting teacher. She has MAJOR ADHD and you will understand this within the first 5 seconds of her walking in the room. However, her class is SUPER easy and that's exactly how she designs it. Definitely take a class of hers if you're looking for a low stress class.

> Post: PASSIONATE TEACHER. Very knowledgeable. Might seem unapproachable and tends to whip through the material but is just ADHD and scheduled tight. Ask her to slow down. Ask questions. She's awesome. If she can't answer a question, she'll look into it for you. Don't be afraid of this one!

Post: Very interesting guy, clearly knows a lot about the subject. Often plays

instruments during his lectures. Seems like he has ADHD, he's all over the place. I can't

say anything bad about the guy. Random quizzes, 2 tests (midterm and final), group

project, and 2 two LMAs which are two short papers about a concert you attended.[10]

Some students described being entertained while learning a great deal of information. This

unconventional teaching style supported different learning styles. For example,

Post: Such a nice guy! He's a little ADHD so he sometimes goes off on a tangent but it's

hilarious. All tests are in class essays and he lets you bring note cards. Teaches US

history in a very different style than most. You will learn a lot of new things that you have

never been taught before. All PowerPoints are on Blackboard in case you miss a class.

ADHD and Medication

Notably, five students referenced medication as treatment for ADHD. Medication

provided a moderator for particular behaviors; distinguishing between un/desired and

un/professional behaviors. One student stated that their professor was helpful "when she takes

her meds." Another student compared their professor to someone ran out of the ADHD

medication to give emphasis to the professor's inability to stay on topic. Others used medication

(or lack thereof) to emphasize ADHD behaviors:

Post: [The professor] is the man. Best professor that I have ever taken. His lectures are

based on what you want to talk about and he uses real life, relatable examples. You learn

a lot about his life because he does not hold back, it really helps understand the material.

He is super ADHD and not medicated but that makes him who his is, the greatest.

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[10] Live music attendances (LMAs).

Post: It's clear that those who took the class in person loved him and the ONLINE class hated him. I'm in the online class and it's extremely difficult. He jumps around so much I've got to wonder if he has ADHD and he's not medicated. This week we have 87 essay questions with many of them having multiple questions in addition to the discussion board.

Pedagogy as ADHD

Sixteen students used ADHD to frame their professors' delivery, teaching or lecturing. Students described these professors as unprofessional, unfocused, and disorganized lectures. Specific examples included,

Post: I took this class because people say the professor is easy. This is not the case. No matter how hard you try you will get the same B as everyone else, including the kid in back eating glue. His lectures consist of ADHD ramblings and meaningless diagrams on the board. If you want to learn, take someone else. If you want an easy A, you won't get that.

Post: Class is an easy A. Quizzes SOMETIMES make up the tests. The lectures don't have much structure to them or organization—like ADHD macro lectures. Grading criteria is somewhat clear—could be better. Doesn't offer much extra credit (less than 6 pts). Don't really know where your grade stands throughout the quarter (hoping for the best). Book is kinda used.

Post: Do not take him! He has teaching ADHD. Like all the other comments he jumps from one topic to another way too fast. He doesn't give you a chance to actually read projections, his in class test are put together terribly and it's hard to grasp exactly what to read from all the lectures, handouts, textbook reading, speakers, etc.

Here, ADHD was synonymous for a style of delivery that was unstructured and fast. In particular, students explained that during these lectures, there was less teaching than eccentric performance.

5.2.2 Ascriptions of Professor's ASD

Ninety-six ascriptions of professor's autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or Asperger's syndrome were analyzed. Most students (n = 65) *suspected* that their professor had autism or was autistic.

> Post: [The professor] really knows his material. If you do not plan on continuing to Calc., take a different teacher. He teaches Calc. 3. I think he teaches trig to prepare students for calculus. He is very particular. Don't worry about the grade, just do the work and understand the material. He is Russian, stutters, probably Asperger's, great teacher.

Nineteen students *declared* that their professors had ASD. Five students described their professor's ASD as "a little bit" or somewhat autistic:

> Post: [The professor] is great. He is a little out there but in a genius kind of way. He is extremely intelligent perhaps mixed with a little autistic type qualities—like a savant maybe. I learned so much and you are never bored in his class! Thoroughly entertaining.

Two students stated that *someone* told them that their professor was autistic. For example,

> Post: [The professor] is a great guy; I was told that he has Asperger's, but his slower teaching style was just what I needed. His exams came from the notes and they were multiple choice. He seems withdrawn and quiet, but I like him. I don't think that most students who haven't dealt with introverted personalities would understand his uniqueness, but he's great.

Students frequently described professors as knowledgeable or intelligent. Students valued this characteristic when it enhanced their learning.

Post: [The professor] is obviously autistic as anyone can tell when they first meet the guy, but he is a fantastic maths professor. He understands calculus theories and how various equations are derived like the back of his hand. He is very lenient in grading; going to office hours is very helpful. He's a very nice guy and will try his best to get your grade up.

Post: [The professor] is hilarious, obviously loves what he does (maybe a little too much), a little autistic (if you ask me), and incredibly smart. I took Biostat with him, and he actually managed to make it interesting with examples and such. I want so badly to be his matchmaker.

Post: Please ignore how beautiful she is...but take notice of her teaching skills. She's a fantastic teacher and will stop the lecture until everybody understands. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Her mathematical skills are amazing (might be autistic lol). Show up and do your homework or you won't pass. For somebody who hates math she is great.

However, students were critical of this quality when they couldn't keep up with the professors. For example,

Post: Asperger's! If you know what that is then you know what to expect. Very intelligent but social skills are lacking. Scatter-brained and difficult to relate to. You can't understand him and worse off he can't understand you. Tho he does make effort to try to help student, a tutor is might be necessary if you have minimal calc[ulus] background.

Post: The readings and homework don't have anything to do with each other so you're just guessing and failing. I taught myself SQL on Codeacademy to prep[are] myself for this. It didn't help. He is clearly on the autism spectrum, that's fine, but due to it he lacks the soft skills to make...sense. Questions are blown off and he doesn't stay on topic. Big ego.

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Post: Honestly, [the professor] has been the worst teacher that I have ever had since kindergarten. He has a difficult time explaining things because he is a little autistic. He also doesn't explain or give examples of the formula or when to use them. He expects his students to already know physics, but we don't; that's why we're taking the class!

Post: Avoid this professor. He spends the least amount of effort possible. If you can't learn it on your own, he will not help. Communicating with [the professor] is like conversing with an autistic parrot, he repeats one thing over and over again.

Post: PLEASE AVOID HIM AT ALL COSTS! He was hands down the worst professor I've had. He was a good guy with a lot [of] interesting stories that had ZERO RELATION TO BIO! He has Asperger's (autism) which makes him hard to keep up with. He warned us the first day "I am not a teacher so drop while you can if you can't handle that." Just plain terrible.

Like these student, other students shared that they had difficulty understanding everything their professor covered in-class. This was less problematic when the professor was nice and helpful:

Post: Fairly certain he has Asperger's. Very, very hard to follow, and goes off on lots of rabbit trails. He gives lots of online tests which aren't always related to the material covered in class and are very difficult. However, he is very nice and helpful when approached one-on-one. He directs the jazz combo very well but can't be followed in a class.

Post: An amazing professor who has autism and a support dog. His course outline lists all of his expectations. He is very knowledgeable and will help you understand if you are confused. He does not put grades on Blackboard. No extra credit. Short weekly writing assignments. If you want an easy class, don't take this. Best class if you really want to learn.

Post: I made an A. He is an easy grader. He's hard to describe...ingeniously

eccentric, and quite possibly, mildly autistic. And yet, he makes low brow jokes, at which,

the freshmen loved to giggle. WILLing to help. He made it interesting. Promptly answers

emails. DO NOT procrastinate on papers! I would definitely take him again.

Students cued in on their professors' atypical behaviors, whether they admired them or

not. For example,

Post: One of the most inspirational speakers and teachers I've encountered. Very much

cares for what he has to say. As for his antics and outbursts, I'm pretty sure he has

undiagnosed Asperger's syndrome. I loved his classes regardless.

Post: I took her class at [the college], and she was just completely persona non-

grata in my opinion. I didn't get my mid-term back until the day of the final. We spent way

too much time on group activities that weren't relevant to the textbook. Worst part of all,

she gives out anecdotal information as fact, like that Sheldon on BBT has Asperger's.[11]

Overall, students were critical of odd or unusual behaviors.

Students shared a range of intense feelings towards the professor and class; going so far

as to describe the professor as "maddening" and the experience as "miserable":

Post: This guy is maddening. Pretty clear to me he doesn't know squat about

biochemistry. He lost some of my work and blamed me. Tests you on stuff he never

mentioned. Seems somewhere on the autism spectrum when it comes to communicating

[11] The atypical fictional character, Sheldon, from the popular television show, *The Big Bang Theory (BBT)* reflects the not-so-novel "nerd" and "autistic" association. For more about the nerd/outsider and "autistic" trope, see Dolmage, 2017, pp. 161–162.

with other humans. You can pass his class, but you have to actually show up, and it's painful.

Post: Absolutely awful experience. Unbearable to attempt to listen to in lecture, and curriculum content of the course is completely pointless and does not relate to anything meaningful or relevant to real life. It's unbelievable that this is a required course. [The professor] has Asperger's and is miserable to listen to. All tests were online because he's lazy.

Post: [The professor] is the absolute worst teacher I have ever had in my life. I am a solid A student and I have a C in his class because he doesn't give you any help, he's dismissive, condescending, he makes me want to kill myself. I think he might have Asperger's. There's no reason he should still be allowed to teach here and it needs to be ended.

Post: AVOID AVOID AVOID. This professor is by far the worst professor at [the college]. His lectures are terrible, he scowls at every student, and it is a pleasure not to have to see that human ever again. He has weird ticks like something from Asperger's? I don't know how students can stand being in his presence.

Students were critical when they had to go outside of the class to learn course content.

Post: DO NOT TAKE THIS TEACHER. I think he is highly autistic. Knows his stuff, but rambles in class and jumps from topic to topic, spending barely any time on the material. I learned EVERYTHING outside of class. His accent is incomprehensible, and he does not take class seriously. STAT dept held review sessions JUST for his students before exams.

Post: He is the worst! I could've done a better job. I think he's autistic or something. He expects you to know everything even though he doesn't lecture on it.

Stand there and talks about NOTHING, no trust me I gave him a chance because I wasn't to certain of what everyone had to say about him on this site but its literally all true! DON'T TAKE HIM.

ASD with OCD

Three students said their professor also demonstrated obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) behaviors. At the start, students described them as above average, however, accolades quickly turned into criticism:

Post: Very good professor. He's slightly autistic and has OCD so at times the class may feel like it's dragging or he's talking in circles but he truly knows what he's talking about and has a real passion for the subject which is nice to see. Just pay attention and show up to class and you'll do fine.

Post: [The professor] is the most interesting professor I have ever had. He is very OCD and very hard to talk to. He knows his material but is so smart he has a hard time getting it across or teaching it. I'm not being mean, but I'm pretty sure he's mildly autistic. Or just has severe Asperger's. If you're good at math and know your stuff you'll be fine.

These professors were competent but lacked in personality and personability. The emphasis here to focus on the content taught. Finally, one student described these diagnostic terms as grounded in a specific behavior—grading.

Post: [The professor] is a strict grader. His nitpicky grading is OCD almost to the point of expressing autistic characteristics. Just make sure that you read his mind to know what he wants to hear and not what he asks; or if you're in his lab you'll do fine. Lectures are tedious and dull, and he asks questions that accomplish nothing but awkward silence.

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Pedagogy as Autistic

Three more students described their professors' behaviors—homework submission process, teaching style, and grading, as autistic. Here, students used autistics to describe an act, not a neuro-identity.

Post: Nice guy, but honestly should not be teaching this class. He lectures at a level far beyond the level of retarded undergrads. You need to attend SI if you want to not fail the quizzes. Homework takes a long time and has the most autistic submission process. Labs are okay, but a pain to do every week. Everything takes absurdly long to get graded.

Post: Terrible. He obviously knows what he's doing but can't teach. The way he grades is autistic. He expects everything on the test to be perfect. Didn't curve anything. Homework took forever. Stutters like crazy and wears ridiculously tight shirts. I barely passed, don't take him.

Post: She is the worst acting teacher I've ever had. She tries hard and is supposedly knowledgeable (wrote a book or two) but cannot communicate for the life of her and loses control of classes with opinions in mere minutes. An easy A but you have to go to class and deal with her borderline autistic teaching style.

These professors were perceived as being eccentric and demanding. Students criticized their pedagogy as either too rigorous or unintelligible.

5.2.3 Ascriptions of Professor's Bipolar Disorder

The largest group of teacher ascriptions included bipolar or bipolar disorder (n = 399). One hundred sixty students *speculated* that their professors met criteria for a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. These students made statements like the following:

Post: Never talks about what is on the exam, contradicts himself to[o] much, I personally think he is bipolar and unfair. Dropped his class before I failed. If you expect to learn and receive a good grade, [the professor] is not the professor for you.

Post: She's one of the toughest professors I've ever had. She's an extremely hard grader, so make sure you work extra hard on papers and exams. Sometimes she seems bipolar—she has her exceptionally nice days and her extremely mean days...make sure you do your best to get on her good side.

Post: This teacher displays characteristics of bipolar disorder. She is very strict, doesn't let students use the restroom. Does not make class enjoyable to attend, and can be very rude. I would not recommend this "teacher".

One hundred and two students *declared* that their professors had or were "bipolar." This declaration most often included an example of how the professors' mood disrupted learning. For example,

Post: UHM, YES HE iS BiPOLAR...HE GOT MAD AT THE WHOLE CLASS BECUASE MOST PEOPLE FAiLED HiS DUMB MiDTERM BUT HHHHHHHHHHHEEEELLLLLLLLOOOO iF MOST OF THE CLASS FAiLED iT CANT JUST BE THE STUDENTS FAULT...iTS GOTTA BE THE TEACHERS FAULT TOOOOOO.

Post: [The professor] is a really talented woman, her art is incredible and her skill is clear. Her course however is not. She is scatter brained and bipolar. He[r] mood changes throughout the quarter and you can expect to have bad day if she is. Overall the course is great but you learn more from the tech than [the professor].

Post: He is not the greatest teacher. He doesn't give you the due dates til the class before its due. He is bipolar and tends to get angry very easily. I enjoy the class

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about 40% of the time and the other 60% feels useless. I just feel like if he clarified what he wanted us to do a little more I would like the class more.

Fifty-two students described their professor as "sometimes" or "kinda bipolar." Here, students often included a statement about something students liked about the professor or the class:

Post: Not my favorite teacher. Reminds me of kinda bipolar. Lectures are SUPER boring, its hard to stay awake. However, you are able to have a page of notes for your test, and most of the questions on the test are questions from previous quizzes he's given. He is pretty easy-going for the most part though.

Post: I think he's hilarious..[.] But also scary sometimes. A little bipolar and plays with random objects around the room mid-speech.. Makes me crack up. Kinda boring, but only 2 multiple choice test which are easy if u study a little. Some of it is common sense. You have to do 6 three page papers but you can basically just copy and paste from his notes and get an easy 85 on them all. If you like to participate he'll shut you down but if u don't he'll call on u so he's very annoying with that.

Some students inserted the label to justify why they did not earn an A in the class—it wasn't their fault, they explained:

Post: He was alright, but I wouldn't take him. He seems to be a little bit of bipolar to me. I received a B in his class, but I personally would not take him again. OH, the second day of class you already have to present.

Post: The first day of class she was unnecessarily rude to a couple of students resulting in more than half the class dropping her by the second day. Very unclear of her expectations for assignments. Hard grader, I don't believe anyone passed with an A in the class. Sort of bipolar, sometimes shes in a good mood but most of all shes not.

Students often discussed bipolar behaviors as hindrances to learning. Some students recommended the professor and class—but cautioned their peers about professors' "abnormal" or atypical behaviors.

Post: I refer to him as my psychologically-abnormal-abnormal-psychology teacher. The first half of the semester he was subdued and monotone, the 2nd half he was very animated and passionate during lectures. If he isn't bipolar, he sure acts like it. Not a hard class, still learned a lot, I recommend him. Just be prepared for his uniqueness.

Post: Mixed feelings for her class. She's bipolar. But at the same time, she's pretty laid back and funny at times. But when you annoy her, she can be rude. Overall, it's a very easy class and it's fun if you have/make friends in there!

Post: Hes a funny old man. He's very sweet at heart, but he can be very bipolar at times. He's a good guy, hes get mad easily because he feels like the students take advantage of his softness, which they are. But if u need a lab u should take him!

Although a small group of students stated that they could tolerate these behaviors, most students asserted that bipolar behaviors were intolerable and reasons for peers to avoid professor and classes.

Post: She's really not that bad! Well, not as bad as some of the other people have rated here...We have one book, that we are constantly reading out of. She does extend paper due dates. She can be bipolar at times but it's really not that huge of a deal. She can be easily persuaded!

Post: Very comical. Non traditional teaching style. No slides. Notes are only based on what you hear. He's crazy (in a good funny way, but sometimes bipolar). You REALLY need to pay attention in class and practically write down everything that YOU think is important. Otherwise, fair course that requires adequate effort.

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Post: [The professor] is a great professor! He expects students to work for their grades, and he will give you as much help as you want as long as you go to class. If you chronically skip class don't expect him to help you out. A really jolly guy overall; sometimes bipolar. If you are willing to put in the work he will help you as much as he can.

There were three types of criticisms that students had towards professors ascribed as bipolar. These included the following: bias; melodramatic; and inconsiderate. Some comments addressed all three themes. For example,

Post: I have recently found out that [the professor] is bipolar which explains her random outbursts in class and rudeness to all students. If you are not willing to handle that do not take her. She gets insulted when you do not understand the material and will get angry if you ask a question...I would not recommend taking her at all.

Bipolar as Bias

Students were critical of professors who showed favoritism. For example:

Post: Totally bipolar in her approach to students. If you're a "pet" you're in. If you're not a pet, and you struggle she will hold that against you for the whole semester regardless how well you do or how much you try to improve. Must have been a frustrated english teacher in a previous life. VERY tough grader on essays and papers.

Post: She isn't helpful unless she likes you. Subjective in grading, is either bipolar or has bad sugar level issues. Does not explain well, uses examples but limited explanation. Likes to let next project be a surprise, so when you realize they all tie in together, you're screwed. Pick a really interesting piece Styrofoam you'll b[e] drawing it for weeks.

Post: [The professor] is an alright prof, although definitely has some bipolar issues. She treats us like we have an IQ of 20 and are 5 years old. She means well most of the time but can tell she definitely doesn't like certain students. Really focuses on important, real world issues. Tests are straight-forward. You can easily pull of a B+ by barely studying.

Students were also critical of professors who did not espouse their ideologies.

Post: [The professor]'s class was overall an easy one. The only thing that I didn't like was that she didn't respect her students. She always criticized our opinions. She's also very bipolar everyday she has a different mood. I really disliked how she disrespected her students maybe not up front but she does it discreetly and you can always tell when she does.

Specifically, students called attention to professors who were "feminist" or "liberals."

Post: Incredibly helpful when writing papers and cares about student's grades. However he seems to have a love/hate relationship with the class which changes every day. Reading is minimal, almost everything is online, and flexible on essays. Weaknesses are his bipolar attitude towards the class and very liberal.

Post: It seems like [college name] got her to teach CAT because they can't find anyone, but she is def not qualified to teach CAT. A lot of time, she just mumble[s] about her own story and her PowerPoint has no content but a title, so I see no point of choosing her as a teacher. She is also very bipolar and use profanity in class. Btw, she is a feminist.

Post: The first teacher i got at [the college] that is super rude, has an attitude problem, bipolar (smiling one second, angry the next), her rules/format is all she cares about. Constantly tells us that if she was a math/science, male professor, we would have

more respect. Gives you attitude and bias regarding questions you ask. Horrible attitude, but easy A.

Professors who did not hold a specific ideology were also criticized:

Post: Lacks clarity at times. Not completely consistent with her views. Sometimes she doesn't even know what she's saying. Sometimes bipolar. But you can tell she cares. She has the potential to be a very good professor as she creates a standard, more focused direction. take her. She'll get better with each semester.

Post: I don't know why she has bipolar views. I took her class & it was better than most. You have to do 5 essays. Do whatever assignments she gives & you'll make an easy A. She's pretty chill and gives good feedback. Her labs are easy & can literally bump your grade if you do few extras. She doesn't accept late assignments & attendance isn't mandatory.

Students also made comments about the professors' general "bias":

Post: This teacher sucks and she is bias! Too bad she plays games. She is very unstable at times and has an attitude. Other times she is calm. Maybe she is bipolar? Overall, I would not take her again because I believe in honest with out bias!

Post: She is not mean but if she likes you, she's super nice. She can be kind of biased sometimes and what she asks for the essays that she gives every week and sometimes even two, are unclear. That's what makes her hard, you don't know what she is asking and depending on her mood, she can be bipolar a bit. But I've had no problems with her.

Bipolar as Melodramatic

Professors were also described as dramatic. For example,

Post: This instructor seems to be bipolar. She tells you something and then changes her mind all at the same time. She is a true Drama Queen, she blows every situation out of proportion.

Post: She may be bipolar, since she is a nice old lady in person, but sends the raging, emotional emails of a teenage girl. she does know quite a bit about many subjects, and doesn't refrain from going off topic to discuss. her zero-tolerance attendance policy needs to go. still, it was worth the experience. grow a thick skin and take the class.

Professors were described as overly emotional, or unable to control their emotions. At times students also mentioned these emotional reactions were accompanied by a lack of physical control in the classroom:

Post: Writing assignments way to vague. Friend went in to ask for help, [the professor] threw book over his desk at her because she asked the wrong question. I'm convinced he is bipolar. Stay on his good side or you will hate his class.

Post: Bipolar. Was literally "throwing" our books in the back of the lecture hall during quiz. He is very moody and hard to talk to. Condescending and just seems like this is the last place he wants to be. Rude to the other professors too. Not sure why they let him get away with it. Would rather he stay in his office and let the others take over.

Post: He is definitely bipolar and has crazy mood swings. Aside from his yelling at random moments and being mean to everyone and not answering questions, he's okay, not hard and not easy.

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Students frequently associated bipolar disorder with rapid or dramatic mood swings. Some of these students shared that the professor was friendly one day, but "mean" the next day.

Post: He says one thing and when you go to her, it's something different (think along the lines of someone who's bipolar). You truly never know which [the professor] you will encounter on a day to day basis. For the most part, it's the mean one.

Post: [The professor] seems to have bipolar disorder. He's really nice one day but the next he's freaking pissed. He tries to explain material in class, and even uses PowerPoints to help visual learners. On the other hand, he also assigns problems on things that were never covered. He isn't available to meet outside of class, and has a preference for athletes.

Other students described more frequent changes in professors' moods. Students were unclear why the professor' attitude changed so rapidly. They were also perplexed why professors responded differently to students in the same class.

Post: She is sweet, at first. Never had a teacher that is so bipolar...one minute she is so nice and the next she flips out on you. She does not know what she is doing, and I haven't learned ANYTHING in her class! I would say avoid taking her, but there is no getting around her because she's the only teacher that teaches this. Good luck.

Post: Not just moody but bipolar! One minute talking in a pleasant voice about how wonderful life is, the next brow-beats and insults students. Complete whackjob.

Post: I saw this professor make a girl cry for asking questions. He is cool with most people, but seems to single others out for no reason. Acts bipolar—one minute he's willing to help and the next he explodes at you for asking. Learned literally nothing from this class, but passed with a good grade.

Several students shared that professors would overreact or that their mood would change when they were asked questions in-class.

Post: OMG. This teacher made my life a living nightmare. She insults you in front of everyone. She cussed alot. She lost it sometimes and freaked out on people. I think She is bipolar. To be honest I couldn't get through the class. She was never clear on HOMEWORK or what was due.

Post: Knows theories. Doesn't know how to apply them realistically/practically. Will also blow up at the most random times out of nowhere in an almost bipolar-like fashion. It is as if she cannot control herself. Cater to what she wants you to do/think, match your stuff to her templates, and talk up how amazing everything she says is and you pass.

Post: This professor is by far the worst professor at [the college]. He gets upset that his class asks questions. He is unclear and makes fun of you for asking him to clarify a tough subject. He is rude, unethical, and admits that he will dock points off your test if he is in a bad mood. He shouldn't be allowed to teach given his bipolar condition.

Post: I'm taking him for chemistry lab this guy is the worst teacher he gets mad when you ask him a question it's like he is bipolar sometimes he is nice then sometimes he gives you a mean remark. He grades very tough with the lab if you think you will pass you won't even if you already know the material he wants it was good luck he's terrible.

The act of asking questions was posited by students as a common practice in class and students' expectation for professors to respond in a particular way was noted. Specifically, professors should perform within emotional constraints. For example,

Post: The best way I can describe [the professor] is bipolar. He can be helpful and funny, and in less than a minute he will begin talking down on a student like an inconsiderate

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jerk. During lectures no one would participate, I suspect no one wanted to awaken his

emotional hulk. If you have to take his class as I did make sure to start off strong.

Another criticism of professors was oversharing. These following posts support Coyne et al.'s

(2016) findings from self-disclosure literature. According to their research, studies suggest "that

students will deem others' moderate but not highly intimate self-disclosures acceptable and

relevant" (p. 49). Here, students were disinterested in professors' lives, especially when it was not

relevant to the lesson:

> Post: I really think this teacher is bipolar/crazy!! She's always going off subject and talking
>
> about her life, LIKE WHO CARES!!!! I can say that she is super easy, although you will
>
> have a lot of readings to do. I would recommend her if you want an easy A!!

> Post: Doesn't teach you anything, just speaks about his personal life and
>
> experiences. You have to read SO much and be perfect with grammar and punctuation in
>
> papers. I think he may have bipolar. His mood swings are horrendous. If you're an athlete
>
> you shouldn't worry about grades too much.

Some students mentioned that the professors' personal life or "personal problems" could be the

reason they are unable to act professionally in the classroom.

> Post: The worst teacher in every way you can imagine. Respect of student, timeliness,
>
> morals, sanity. She was bipolar and had been hurt in her life and it showed.

> Post: Horrible teacher...cant keep her story straight. She will say she wants one
>
> thing and tell another student something completely different. Sounds bipolar to me.
>
> Seems like she was having personal problems and taking it out on her class. Avoid her at
>
> all costs.

Bipolar as Inconsiderate

Many students mentioned that they were disrespected in the classroom. This created tension between students and the professor. For example:

Post: She knows her history material in and out, but has a horrible attitude, sometimes displays erratic behavior very bipolar and displays very little respect towards her students. It doesn't matter if you approach her with a pleasant attitude she is still rude and disgusting. [The professor] should not be teaching, she should stick to research and publishing!

Post: Not a clear woman or teacher. Very confusing. Avoid if you can. Her condescending, contradictory, and bipolar nature made us students feel inadequate. There are lots of wonderful English teachers at [the college]. Choose a quality teacher and have an easier life.

Students valued being able to give input during class and when they were ignored or belittled, they lost interest in the course and materials.

Post: [The professor]'s lectures are incoherent and disorganized. He does not foster class participation or group analysis; rather he spends the entire hour lecturing 'stream of consciousness' style. His bipolar-like personality made this inherently interesting topic insufferable. His expertise in this area is a HINDRANCE to a student's learning!

Students also discussed concerns about professors' inconsistent level of teaching, specifically, they were a good teacher for one class or subject and not another.

Post: Her chemistry lab is easy, however this lady is bipolar! If you try to ask her if you're doing something correctly, she'll be really snarky with her reply. Just go to class, don't say a word, and you'll do fine. If you don't mind being talked down to and want an A, take her.

Post: Most only get to see [the professor] in the intro classes where he's funny. In the upper courses, he's different. Can be calm one moment & the very next (if you don't immediately understand his material) he'll flip on you into a blind rage. Someone mentioned he may be bipolar - well he is, so be aware of that! Flaky adviser, unless you're a GEOLOGY major.

Lastly, students were critical of professors who were too rigid or casual on grading criterion for assignments or parts thereof.

Post: Her behavior is erratic at times. I've discussed it with fellow students, we all agree that she seems to be bipolar. She sets unattainable standards for her students yet is unable to demonstrate any proficiency in graphic design. A surprisingly bad teacher.

Post: Treated students as if they were middle schoolers. Lots of busy work, she takes assignments other teachers use but requires twice the amount of work/length. This is the worst teacher I've ever had. She only gives you a good grade when you write the paper exactly the way SHE wants it. She tends to be bipolar; deducts points for papers that are not stapled. She needs to be fired!

Post: This teacher is completely 100% awful! Her grading must be based on her bipolar moods. When you write an essay that you've put so much into and get back insufficient, how in the world does that teach you anything?! I thought I was going to school to learn. Telling me my work is insufficient means this teacher is insufficient at best.

Students insisted that bipolar professors lacked clarity, consistency, self-control, consideration, and dependability. Bipolar behaviors were misaligned with their expectations of the typical professor.

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Pedagogy as Bipolar

It was clear that there are acceptable ways for professors to acts in the classroom. In addition to the previous themes discussed in this section, students drew attention to specific pedagogies that violated these expectations was by describing them as bipolar. For example,

Post: Class is 50 mins long, she spends the first 30 mins on chatting about random things and then tries to read off a PPT for the remaining time. Almost always lets students out late or barely on time for the next class. Pretty easy but she's a bipolar grader. One big project that she doesn't really teach us how to do. Textbook only for quizzes.

Post: If you would like the following take her: Confusing lectures that contradict the textbook, clicker questions on brand new material which is not what clickers were designed for, not knowing how to answer questions, bipolar grading scale, and learning the material as she goes along. I managed to get an A by reading the textbook.

Post: I swear this dude has grading bipolar. He counted off for things sometimes but not every time (holding notes). We never knew what he wanted out of us so we didn't know how to really prepare. Was hard to please with speeches and visual aids. Skip him for speech, take him for theatre.

Post: She's really nice but senile, kinda bipolar when it comes to being late to class and a semi strict attendance policy. She has a tendency to show up late and be gone alot due to health issues but a good teacher if you are disciplined enough to learn with someone just giving you the information.

Here, bipolar was a stand in for inconsistent, emotional, and unprofessional behavior. These professors were framed as wielding power of grading or attendance over students.

Bipolar professors had a tremendous amount of power. It was the professors who altered the affect in the classroom, disrupted feelings of assurance or certainty, and revealed unequal

social status among students. These departures from the typical, rational, unemotional, and polite, were called out by students through the use of this diagnostic label. Notably, this was the only label used in association with explicit remarks by students to "fire" the professor.

> Post: He was certainly the worst teacher I have ever had at [the university]. His exams were insanely hard and he had the worst bipolar attitude ever. I'm pretty sure they fired him! Biggest psycho EVERRR.

> Post: Very bipolar, arrogant, treats his students as if they're stupid. I regret taking his class. I never enjoyed his class, only because I couldn't participate because he had the tendency to shut students down and make them feel stupid. Oh and was very **** to one of my class mates. He should be fired, he makes [the college] look bad.

> Post: Treated students as if they were middle schoolers. Lots of busywork, she takes assignments other teachers use but requires twice the amount of work/length. This is the worst teacher i've ever had, only gives you a good grade when write the paper the exact way SHE wants it, tends to be bipolar deducts points for papers not stapled. She needs to be fired!

5.2.4 Ascription of Professor's Dyslexia

Seventy-six ascriptions of professor's dyslexia we examined. Most students (n = 60) *declared* that their professors had or were dyslexic.

> Post: By no means a slacker class. There's A LOT of reading that you need to actually DO, but he's generally a good guy and really does know his stuff. He's dyslexic so he sometimes says dates wrong, but he knows what's up.

> Post: Awesome professor, makes attempts at funny jokes, laid back, issues with spelling and grammar but that's just due to his dyslexia. Take notes and he sends out

review sheets so you can just fill in what you missed, then you should do fine. Just remember, A is about 95 overall average.

Post: No offense, but [the professor] has dyslexia. He makes a lot of mistakes. His test are tricky; on our final he questioned us on material he did not teach. Calculator is mandatory! He refuses to post grades online, you would have to personally visit him to understand his method, which he makes us as he goes... Unclear teaching.

Students were critical of their professors' mistakes; attributing them to dyslexia. For example,

Post: I have to admit, he's really intelligent. However, it kinda sucks that he has dyslexia. Whenever asked to spell a word, 75% of the time he spells it wrong. And when he handed out his syllabus, there's no due dates on any of the homework. This caused me to fall behind and miss a lot of homework.

Post: If you take a class with her, you will teach yourself the material. She moves so quickly that she makes MANY mistakes. It is impossible to keep up with her even though the other kids in class will pretend that they understand. She has dyslexia and will teach something one day and say that it was incorrect the next. The most inconsistent professor.

Post: Don't fuss about her bad spelling. She is dyslexic, give her leeway. Very intelligent. The logical/math side her brain just overpowers her language/art side. Has a master's degree in mathematics and PhD in physical chemistry. That says enough.

Fifteen students suspected that their professors were dyslexic because they "made mistakes on the board," "exam questions didn't make sense," transposed numbers, did not read from the screen, read aloud, mispronounced words, made typos, etc.

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Post: Moves very fast and doesn't show different methods of solving. Seems annoyed with students who don't understand the first time around. Never really explains problems, just writes them out on the board. I think she's dyslexic[.] 7 out of 10 times she was writing answers backwards making things even more complicated!

Post: Didn't know it was possible to be dyslexic with numbers until I met this lady. Made mistakes on the board that students had to correct, and often went over work after we were supposed to be done with it. Was No help at all and work was entirely packet and worksheet based.

Post: Honestly the worst professor I've experienced. Many of his test answers are completely wrong. He often words questions so terribly that it's impossible to comprehend. This may be because of his dyslexia. Either way, my grade was way lower than it should have been as a result of HIS mistakes that he refuses to take ownership for. Do not take. Ever**.**

Students described how the professors compensated or self-corrected:

Post: Although he can be dyslexic with numbers sometimes, [the professor] does a[n] excellent job explaining material to a spectrum of different learning abilities. If you don't understand something and speak up, he WILL take time to explain it in a different way that may help things "click" for you mathematically.

Post: I hate algebra! But this professor is actually easy to follow (which is great because the text is worthless). She is happy to rephrase or review anything that you need clarified. I think she is slightly dyslexic but always catches her mistakes as soon as she makes them. Overall she is a clear, helpful, and fair professor.

Post: Although it was a summer course, lecture mostly consisted of flying through the notes at the speed of light and merely scratching the surface of all topics. He is a

stunningly slow grader, does not make his own exams (very HARD & do not go w/ notes),

is dyslexic (led to various errors), and just disorganized overall. Half the class dropped.

RUN!

Students had a threshold for the acceptable amount or *type* of mistakes professors could make.

Post: I did not enjoy being in [the professor]'s class, quite frankly. Every time she tries to

explain something, she [gets] it wrong. Then tries to correct herself, then words it wrong

again. She has dyslexia, which isn't her fault, but makes it extremely difficult to follow

along in class. She does not explain things well at all.

Post: Very helpful, easy grading, and consistent teaching style. Difficult to

understand at times due to accent. Possible dyslexia (problems spelling simple words).

Do your homework, study and put in some genuine effort and passing this class will be

within reach. Overall I was satisfied with her and this class.

Some students emphasized that the mistakes their professors made in-class interfered

with learning.

Post: This teacher is literally the reason for all of my stress. She is so unclear about

anything she wants. She is rude and does not care about her students doing well in her

class. She is an extremely hard grader, yet always asks her students how to spell simple

words. She is dyslexic. DO NOT take this teacher, she ruined my GPA.

Post: Wow...she is awful. Words don't describe how much I dreaded going to her

class 3 times a week. There's no question she's dyslexic. I learned everything on my own

because I had to. The class wasn't hard, but she made it harder than it should be. Avoid

if at all possible.

Post: [The professor] is dyslexic and says the things backwards... and he goes

on tangents but they usually end up on the exam. Very good professor, really helpful. If

you relisten to his lectures and do the assigned problems you will get a[n] A. He cares

and breaks the material into simple concepts and stories that you won't forget. TAKE

HIM!!!

Post: [The professor] is a nice man but he shouldn't be a professor. He has

dyslexia which makes it hard for him to go through problems without making a million

mistakes. Also his tests are almost impossible. DON'T TAKE HIM.

Three students said the professor was "a bit" or "a little" dyslexic, and one stated that the

professor had "severe dyslexia."

Post: Worst professor. He has severe dyslexia and cannot teach. He is always wrong in

lecture and redoes the same problem over and over again. Although he is smart, he

makes errors over and over again to the point where you have to learn yourself.

Post: Pros: Cool person, good personality. Exactly who you want teaching you

photography. Cons: The photo assignments and lab work require WAY TOO MUCH free

time (plus LOTS of creativity). She is a little dyslexic. Not the best test-maker (questions

are open ended, but she grades very specifically. A lot of my 'wrong' answers were right).

Post: [The professor] is very enthusiastic and will make every effort to make her

class fantastic. She's still learning how to teach and is a bit dyslexic so lectures can be a

little bit confusing, but in labs and research she is very informed, kind, and helpful.

Students associated dyslexia with confusion and tried to warn their peers about the area or areas

of pedagogy where professors most frequently made errors.

Chapter Six: Disrupting Ableism and Disableism

We currently live in a society in which one single disability can be linked to any other disability in a negative way. But could we live in a society in which the accessibility we create for one person can also lead us to broaden and expand accessibility for all? On the way to this world, educators at least have to recognize physical access is not "enough"—it is not where accessibility should stop. (Dolmage, 2017, p. 10)

This study suggests that critical thematic analysis is a useful method for examining avowals and ascriptions of students' and professors' neuro-identities (i.e., ADHD, ASD, bipolar disorder, dyslexia) on *Rate My Professors*. The themes uncovered through this 2-step process revealed ways that students discursively police and resist ableism and disablism in the classroom. In this chapter, I will discuss the results, summarize key point from the study and offer comments about the scope, design, and methodology. Lastly, I will give recommendations for disrupting the marginalization of neurominorities in the classroom with *mētis*; suggesting future studies explore new theories and methods for understanding neurodivergent identities, examining communication between and within neuro-identity groups, and resisting ableist and disablist hegemonic norms.

6.1 Discussion

Neuro-identities are discursively constructed and negotiated. They are marked by stereotypes, vales, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. Like other cultural identities, neuro-identities include shared symbols and rules that reinforce belonging. This study revealed ways neuro-identities are marginalized in the classroom; professors with ADHD, ASD, bipolar disorder, and dyslexia are not regarded as highly as neurotypical professors and many students with dyslexia or ADHD do not consider themselves "normal" students.

Perceptions of neuro-identities vary by diagnostic label. Bipolar disorder, for example, remains highly stigmatized as demonstrated by the disproportionate ratio of avowals to ascriptions. The absence of student ascriptions of ASD was also notable. Students maintained that ASD was central to the way they experienced the world and their relationship to others. More scholarship is needed to understand how neuro-identities interact with other cultural identities to improve communication across and within neuro-identities.

6.1.1 Students' Neuro-identities

RQ 1. How are students' neuro-identities discursively constructed through their posts and the posts of other students' evaluations of teaching on *Rate My Professors*?

Student Avowals

Within Group Differences. Students shared a range of learning challenges in traditional, hybrid, and online college classrooms. Some students named challenges in areas of reading comprehension, spelling, writing, and mathematics. Other students described strategies for working around or through these challenges. Lastly, some students resisted the deficit model by giving accounts of both their learning challenges and strengths, or by advocating for their accommodations.

A group of students emphasized the medicalization of their diagnosis due to the severity or longevity of symptoms, or their need for medication. These students re-inscribed deficit discourse by medicalizing their neuro-identity. ADHD students mentioned medication and the severity of their ADHD more often than students with ASD, bipolar disorder, or dyslexia. Although some ADHD students mentioned the duration of their ADHD symptoms or behaviors, more often, dyslexic students emphasized this point.

In-Group/Out-Group. Some students esteemed professors and peers as normal; reifying power differentials between student-teacher and atypical student-typical student. For example,

students recalled feeling marginalized—different from or less than the normal student. One student shared, "Absolutely rude. Will kick you out of class if you don't have a pen. She doesn't care that I am autistic. Plays favorites. Always late for class." Another student commented:

> Post: She is very nice, easy going and open. Class is fairly easy and fun. If you take this class with her you will become more confident as a public speaker. I have Asperger's and I got full credit on all of my speeches.

Students revealed that power was enacted through pedagogies, professors' characteristics and behaviors, and federal/institutional policies. Students described accessibility in the classroom as shifting and affective. For some students, accessibility was a power struggle with professors and institutions. Three students resisted the popular narrative of deficit discourse and instead, employed neurodiversity discourse; they described the professors as disconnected or old-fashioned:

> Post: Awful!!! I was pulled out of class on multiple occasions and threatened with a failing grade unless I show "enthusiasm" toward the material. When explained that I have epilepsy/ADHD, she went on about how sick her dog has been lately and how much pain that is causing her. Bizarre experience. AVOID.

> Post: The first day of class, I told the professor that I have an autistic disorder called Asperger's syndrome. He gave me an extra assignment because he "wants to cure" me. He puts other students down and teachers thinking he is better than everyone else. It got so bad I had to withdraw from the class. If you find out you have the teacher—switch!!!

> Post: He was out dated. I have dyslexia and he told me to drop out of school because I would not make it in the real world. Sorry [professor] but you should have retired a long time ago. Not a very kind man.

In many instances, students repeated the trope that disability is something that can be overcome by the individual (see Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2012). For example, if a non-neurotypical student can overcome these challenges then someone "without" these challenges will have a much easier time in the class. Students also expressed that if a professor teaches in a way that engages non-neurotypical students in the topic and for an extended length of time (i.e., 3 hrs), then neurotypical students should have "no problem" in the course.

> Post: Lectures go by fast because he is enthusiastic and moves a lot, great if you have ADD or ADHD like me. Homework is Not a lot. Lectures can get confusing but once he goes through the examples You WILL completely understand. Study Guides are amazing, totally like the exams. Just do your homework and study guides and you will pass.

> Post: He is exactly the kind of teacher you need. He's caring, intelligent, and makes you work for it. It was not an easy A. I am ADHD, and he was attentive and helpful. There was a lot of reading. Make sure in your discussions, you reply to more than 2 people. I really appreciated his feedback. Also loved that the books cost me less than $5.

> Post: She's not overbearing, like a lot of professors I've had. As an autistic person, it's nice to have a professor who I can see myself in. That being said, she is a bit of a tough grader, and the tests rely a lot on remembering facts rather than understanding concepts. Still, a solid class.

> Post: Although he has SO many papers, they are not terrible. They are 6+ pages but VERY doable. I struggle with dyslexia and was able to do his class and pass with an A! Just be VERY proactive to do the papers beginning of the week rather than end. And use outside sources! Definitely recommend class! I learned A LOT!

Attitudes, Beliefs, & Values. Students described course requirements and shared tips with prospective students about how to succeed in the class. Some students attributed their difficulties with assignments or tasks to their neurodivergence. Many students shared information about the amount of required reading, writing, difficulty of exams, style of lecture, grading scales, attendance, participation, discussions, etc. They also added whether meeting with the professor was helpful, or if students needed to rely on teaching themselves. Although it is no novel for students to question the utility of a course when it becomes difficult (Collier & Powell, 1990, p. 343), it is notable when it turns into an ascription of a professor's non-neurotypicality.

Many students identified professors who were able to teach in ways that enhanced their understanding. Specifically, students recalled getting additional help:

> Post: I took my first college class with this guy. I was really nervous because I have Asperger's syndrome, which affects my performance in certain class activities. He was very understanding when I discussed my struggles with him and was very willing to tweak assignments so that I could do them. I was very impressed with his method of teaching.

> Post: [The professor] is amazing. I currently have her for a Chem 100 tutor. I was having a chem math issue that was doubled due to my being dyslexic. [The professor] showed me an easier way to do and understand the math problem in the first 10 minutes of my tutoring session. She is an amazing, caring math genius, and willing to help students who have math issues.

They described rapport with professors who showed them respect. They also shared admiration for professors who rewarded hard work. For example,

> Post: I am dyslexic ADHD and I hate English and writing. [The professor] has been the best English teacher I HAVE EVER HAD!! She pushes you and expects you to work for your grade but honestly her class is worth it. 10/10. I would take her again.

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Post: Excellent! He is the best ever. He would do everything in the world for everyone if everyone needs help, especially people who works hard and has autism like me. Extremely and highly recommended! :) Like he is a great uncle to me. Way and beyond above caring and understanding the students' need. I had him for two class in the past two years.

Post: [The professor] was a hard professor, but really knew the subject. As hard as it was to keep up, I really enjoyed his class. He gave plenty of graded materials so you had plenty of chances to get a good grade. He took personal interest in his students, giving me strategies for working with dyslexia. One of the best teachers I ever had.

Norms for Professors. Across all groups, students expressed appreciation for professors who were helpful and understanding. According to Kindred and Mohammed (2005), "competence, knowledge, clarity, and helpfulness" are the most important attributes to student evaluators (p. 16). Additionally, students expressed interest in quality teaching and course content. Kindred and Mohammed also found, "appearance and personality were related to ratings and perceptions of instructors in general" (p. 16). One student exclaimed, **"**Always willing to help! Awesome teacher take her and learn something! Due to my ADHD not bad to look at either with red hair and different nail colors who can complain!!"

In an analysis of RMP posts, Gregory (2012) confirmed, "Students show greater respect for professors to whom they can *relate* personally; those who 'care' and who are 'helpful'" (p. 182). According to Gregory, students also preferred "a professor who is demanding, yet helpful and likeable, who teaches a rigorous, yet manageable course" (p. 181). This was echoed in many students' avowals of non-neurotypical neuro-identity. One student commented, "She was great for a student like me. I am numerically dyslexic but that didn't matter because she teaches the course very straightforward, great professor[.]" Others repeated,

Post: [The professor] is a phenomenal math teacher. Take it from someone who REALLY

struggles with math, I'm dyslexic. She's great at explaining every part of a problem, and

while she can go quickly at times if you just ask her to slow down she will. She does

assign A LOT of homework so be ready. If you work hard to do it all you'll get an A on

ALL of the tests!

Post: Well now it's 2012. I've had a blast being in THREE classes with [the

professor]: Intro to Interior Design, Textiles, and Internship. I have ADHD and [the

professor] kept me interested, motivated, and on track. She wants everyone to learn and

be the best they can. Most of all you can tell she honestly CARES about her students.

Avoid her and cheat yourself.

Student Ascriptions

Together, student ascriptions exposed ways that the academy reinforces the idea that

disability identity is a "bad thing," rather than "an asset" (p. 93). Students' explained ways that the

academy systematically disconnected them from the typical student. They experienced what

Dolmage (2017) called *academic ableism*, specifically, their pursuit of accommodations isolated

the students' "demands for change" and ultimately left the student feeling defeated and

stigmatized for being disabled. Students who received accommodations often praised their

professors for helping them, rather than recognizing that they are always deserving of such

treatment. And students whose needs were not recognized by professors were further isolated

from the deserving or typical college student.

One-way students brought attention to this distinction was by stating that they suffered

from the disability. According to Dolmage, this framing is problematic for students and disability:

> When disability is seen as something "suffered" by a very few, and otherwise invisible
> and nonpresent, then disability can never change the culture of higher education, and
> higher education will continue to wear out students with disabilities, to hold disability itself
> in abeyance, and to create access fatigue. (p. 93)

Notably, the absence of student ascriptions of ASD supports growing self-advocacy efforts of the neurodiversity movement. Rather than describe themselves as suffering, students with ASD *only* discussed their neurodivergence as an avowed neuro-identity (see Chapter 4).

6.1.2 Professors' Neuro-identities

RQ 2. How are students discursively constructing professors' neuro-identities through evaluations of teaching on *Rate My Professors*?

In-Group/Out-Group. Across all groups, admissions included descriptions of both professors' neuro-identity *and* students' account of professors' atypical behaviors or characteristics. For example, "He jumps around topics a lot but he did admit to having ADHD and he is also 71 years old"; "[The professor] made it very clear on the first day of class that he was autistic…it really showed in his teaching that he did not fully understand the concepts of the human mind and human interactions himself"; "She stat[e]s that herself and brother are bipolar and it's very clear to see"; and "…he might make some minor mistakes on chalkboard but he would say that he is dyslexic."

Themes from these posts also revealed what Dolmage (2017) described as "the sickness model" (pp. 56–58). According to Dolmage, "In the sickness model, we are unsure of exactly to what degree the university might be disabling, but the blame and the impact almost always falls on individuals to shoulder" (p. 58). Students frequently disregarded their professors' avowals of neuro-identity when professors did not perform these identities in stereotypical. For example, students situated these labels as excuses:

Post: This man is an idiot. All over the place, likes to blame it on his ADHD, I say chalk it up to incompetence and his winging it, rather than planning for the course. Always late, likes to intimidate students, especially females. Avoid if you're actually looking to learn something.

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Post: She takes attendance way too seriously. She seemed like kind of a

narcissist, very self-obsessed. Hardly made an attempt to remember anyone's names

due to her "dyslexia," which she frequently brought up. Tons of projects that required far

too much time.

Students did not permit the professors to define their own relationship with disability and neuro-identity on their own terms. Instead, students re-told the avowals in disablist and ableist terms—reifying the popular misrepresentations of disability (see also, Dolmage, 2017, p. 5).

Students re-inscribed deficit discourse when they discussed their professors' neuro-identities. This was explicit in posts that framed professors' avowals as blame and admission. These themes can be re-framed as accounts of *excuses* and *justifications* (Coburn-Engquist, 1998, p. 46), that upheld ableist and disablist logics while othering professors' disability identities in the classroom. According to Coburn-Engquist (1998), these accounts are type of "powerful strategy in constituting the reality of the specific event" (p. 46). Notably, even the "positive" posts described professors as being outside of the norm.

Accounts. J. L. Coburn-Engquist (1998) studied ways power and subjectivity were discursively (re)constructed through accounts. By combining Buttny's (1993) methods of accounts analysis with Shotter's (1993) theory of social accountability, Coburn-Engquist offered a framework for studying social problems as (re)produced through discourse (n.p.). Specifically, we can identify the values or beliefs that operate implicitly within accounts and the "practical-moral knowledge" or social accountability that controls what is acceptable—or right (pp. 51–53). Put another way, what people say about their behaviors reflects what is socially acceptable at the time—at least within a particular social realm. Accounts show what members believe is morally sanctioned or socially acceptable behavior. We can learn more about that social realm by identifying the underlying values and beliefs of the communicative act.

Accounts can be challenged; the appearance of can be challenged with the reality to reveal power differences (Coburn-Engquist, 1998, p. 153). Following Coburn-Engquist's (1998) logic for examining child protection discourse in this way, we can examine discourse and then challenge it with the reality of how the discourses function (pp. 153–154). For example, Golson and Rudick's (2016) study of Disability Support Services (DSS) discourse found that although it appeared that the discourse of DSS is to provide support for students with disabilities, the reality is that the discourses of reinforced ableism and disablism (p. 103).[12]

This study revealed that there are important differences between avowed and ascribed neuro-identities. The pervasive use of bipolar disorder and ADHD in ascriptions of professors, for example, revealed that neuro-terms have been adopted as cultural terms—not just diagnostic terms. Rather than restate stereotypes, students used these neuro-terms to police pedagogies that failed to meet their expectations.

Next, student avowals provided information about obstacles that interfere with their learning. It was evident that despite their desire to learn, some pedagogies were aimed exclusively at teaching only a particular type of student. Contrary to student ascriptions with neuro-terms, students who avowed neuro-identities viewed this as a limitation in the professor's ability to teach, rather than their inability to learn. This was significant because it revealed ways students used their agency to resist ableism and disableism.

These posts can be a useful pedagogical tool for professors to teach students about ways our identities and biases shape our understanding of ourselves and others. They can also be used to start a dialogue about how these perceptions impact pedagogies, learning, and our

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[12] See Peterson (2016); see also Dolmage (2017), Gallagher (n.d)., and Price (2012).

shared experiences in the classroom. Ultimately, more conversations about what it means to be

neurodivergent in the classroom are needed to reduce stigma and increase understanding.

6.1.3 Policing and Resisting Atypical Pedagogical Behaviors in the Classroom

RQ 3. How do students and professors police atypical pedagogical behaviors or resist

ableism and disablism in the college classroom?

In-Group/Out-Group. Students used diagnostic terms as stand-ins for calling out

professors' behaviors that were atypical—and unacceptable in the classroom (see also Price &

Kerchbaum, 2013). Together, ascriptions of professors with neuro-terms revealed distinctions

between what is atypical and typical in the classroom through the use of *attributes*—behaviors or

characteristics for professors that they perceived to be atypical. As Hecht, Ribeau, and Alberts

(1989) explained, negative attributions (commonly in the form of stereotypes) can reveal power

differentials between avowals and ascriptions:

> At the same time, any 'out-group' is stereotyped when its members are treated
> categorically rather than as individuals. Separation of groups tends to deny the
> mainstream, high power group access to the out-groups except through limited media
> contact. As a result, powerlessness and stereotyping become salient issues for
> interethnic communication. (p. 406)

Norms for Professors. Specifically, students offered information to peers about not only

how these behaviors deviated from the traditional classroom experience learning, course

requirements, grades, etc., but also the degree to which these deviations could be tolerated—and

the terms thereof. If the atypical behaviors could be "tolerated," some students provided

suggestions on ways to correct or work around these behaviors.

6.2 Limitations and Strengths

During the study, RMP was sold by Viacom and acquired by Cheddar, Inc. As a result,

the website underwent changes. Though this did not impact the data collection, it did impact

some of the previously gathered information about the site, including pages that described the

number of users, posts, etc. Less than 0.1% of the total comments on *RMP* were returned via *Google Search* for this study. According to *Google*, website developers can "prevent snippets from being created and shown for your site in Search results, or let *Google* know about the maximum lengths" (n.p.). This means there is the possibility that more posts containing the key terms searched exist on the website.

Miss- or alternatively spelled neuro-identity or diagnostic labels (e.g., dislecksia) were not captured.[13] The abbreviation for *attention deficit disorder,* was not included since it was indistinguishable from the widely used word *add*. Although additional methods are required for retrieval of diagnostic-specific comments from all comments containing the letters "a-d-d" in sequence, analysis of posts with student avowals, student ascriptions, teacher avowals, and teacher ascriptions and ADD would yield more generalizable results about perceptions of AD(H)D in the classroom.

The most commonly mentioned neuro-identity terms were included in the study. However, considerations to include additional neuro-identity and diagnostic terms, including obsessive compulsive disorder (Armstrong, 2010; Hendrickx, 2010), Tourette syndrome (Hendrickx, 2010, McGee, 2010), depression (Armstrong, 2010; McGee, 2012), dysthymia (Armstrong, 2010), schizophrenia (Armstrong, 2010), Alzheimer's disease (McGee, 2012), and epilepsy (McGee, 2012), were made. Considerations for other methods of data collection, including surveys, interviews, etc., were also made.

Demographic information was not collected for faculty or students. Collection of professor's names, positions, institutions, etc., from the website violates RMP's Terms of Use

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[13] See Gold (2013) for the alternate spelling of dyslexia.

Agreement (https://www.ratemyprofessors.com/terms-of-use). Student comments are anonymous; no demographic information was available.

6.3 Considerations for Future Research

Analysis of other texts including manuscripts, recorded lectures, tweets, etc., can be useful for developing a greater understanding how avowed and ascribed neuro-identities are reproduced in the classroom. It would be worthwhile to examine qualitative reviews from student evaluations of teaching (SETs) for example, to uncover whether students use neuro-terms in institution-based evaluations that are submitted to the department and later reviewed by professors. It is possible since students also comment on professors' behaviors in these evaluations that neuro-terms may also be present in some of these reviews (see Flaherty, 2020).

According to Collier & Powell (1990) there are a number of cultural factors that can influence how students perceive pedagogy (p. 348). In addition to student's neuro-identities, other cultural identities (i.e. gender, race, class) should also be studied to better understand how ND identities are discursively constructed across these cultural identities. Future studies should also explore how disabilities are performed and perceived differently across disciplines with considerations for the type of work, duration, setting, etc.

We need to explore other creative and empowering theories or methodologies to promote neuro-identities within and outside the classroom. In keeping with the mantra of the neurodiversity movement, future work must include neurodivergent leaders, agencies, etc. (see Gowen et al., 2020, pp. 38–39). Together, we need to challenge popular narratives that cause harm and continue to address ways that the academy excludes neurodivergents. According to Dolmage (2017),

> We need to allow for an environment in which students can claim difference without fear of discrimination. This environment must include disability—currently, it rarely does. Further, disability cannot be seen as something one person diagnoses in another.

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> Disability must be seen as socially negotiated; people with disabilities must be seen as the moderators, the agents of this negotiation. (p. 85)

6.4 "I am Neurodivergent."

Student and faculty avowals of non-neurotypicality are forms of disability disclosures. These disclosures are "complicated by the fact that disabled identities always intersect with other identities and that the risk-taking that accompanies disclosure is not experienced equally or in the same ways by all people" (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017, p. 1). Like many other neurodivergents (NDs), I have a complex relationship with the diagnostic terms ascribed to me and the respective neuro-identities that I avow. For example, when I introduce myself in class, I usually share that I am ND. This speech act creates space in the classroom for discussions about communication, self-advocacy, and disability identities. However, for medical purposes, my records include diagnoses of OCD, anxiety, ADHD, and depression. Price and Kerchbaum (2017) described this situation poignantly:

> Context is an important aspect of the language that disabled people use and prefer. For example, diagnostic labels may be needed in order to set up legal accommodations. However, a faculty member who uses diagnostic labels when speaking with her university's ADA Coordinator may prefer a different term in her everyday life. (p. 11)

Since many people lack an understanding of these labels and how they interact, full disclosures more often evoke cognitive dissonance when shared.[14]

6.5 Neurodivergent Theories and Methodologies

Julie Cosenza's (2014) analysis, "Language Matters," flipped the script for dyslexic scholars and knowledge production in the academy. Rather than understand dyslexic writing as problematic, "wrong" not "right," Cosenza used excerpts of "non-normative" writing from Dené

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[14] See also Price & Kerchbaum (2017), p. 11.

Granger's (2010), "A Tribute to My Dyslexic Body," to demonstrate how written communication and performative writing of dyslexic writers operates between binaries of "right" and "wrong" to reveal that which exists outside the linear constraints of normal knowledge construction (p. 1199). Cosenza (2014) explained the significance of this decision:

> I draw on her scholarship to help explain how a dyslexic methodology might look on the page or function for the reader. I draw on her beautiful words and non-words to help illustrate a unique, liminal space of knowing and writing that works to challenge the traditional structures of academic writing. (p. 1192)

By constructing a dyslexic methodology, not only could it disrupt "normative knowledge production in higher education," but also liberate dyslexic ways of knowing by elevating it to an encouraged form of knowledge production and communication (pp. 1191–1192). With this framework she extends other "non-typical" forms of knowledge construction—ways of knowing that have been disciplined in and by the academy, can emerge (p. 1200).

Following Hecht's (1993) layering approach to research, future studies can reimagine research that uses Cosenza's framework and Dolmage's theory of mētis, for example, layered with other communication theories and methods to reveal even more about how neuro-identities are re-constructed in the classroom. Mētis is an example of a creative theory that combines rhetoric and disability studies to resist ableism and disablism.

Dolmage's (2014) analyses of narratives and stories, reveals ways ableist narrow re-telling of history has attempted to hide disability; reveals narratives that challenge ableist norms; reveals how history operates sideways; revealing ways disability defies ableist limitations; reveals ways disability maneuvers around ableist restrictions; reveals a history is constructed through and with disability—to apply mētis requires critical examination of social and political power over disability as perpetuated by deficit-driven otherwise unquestioned inconsistencies embedded in ableism (p. 8). Troubling the distinction between 'able' and 'disabled' bodies, Dolmage suggested

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a "crucial transition to proposing models and theories that situate disability as meaningful and as meaning-making" (p. 93).

Mētis can be particularly useful for thinking about novel or atypical ways to understand avowed neuro-identities and neurodivergent pedagogies. In this study, students shared important information about how neurodivergent professors enhanced learning in the classroom. For example, ADHD professors made topics interesting and course content relatable and relevant. Professors who avowed ASD offered students flexibility on deadlines and opportunities to make multiple attempts on homework which built confidence and understanding. Students linked professors who avowed dyslexia with clear delivery and concern for all-types of learners. These examples demonstrate ways that neurodiversity can enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

More combinations of theories and methods are integral to continue to understand ways non-neurotypicality makes connections that neurotypicality cannot. These discoveries are necessary for students and professors to move beyond ableist and disablist perspectives of disability—towards transformational pedagogies that value neurodiversity in the classroom.

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