2016

# Impression Management Strategies of College Professors with Disabilities

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### Recommended Citation

Running head: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management strategies of college professors with disabilities

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Communication Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, MN

July 2016

August 4th, 2016

Impression management strategies of college professors with disabilities

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.

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Dr. David Engen, Advisor

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Dr. Christopher Brown

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Dr. Jasper Hunt

**Abstract**

This qualitative study examined how college instructors with disabilities utilize impression management strategies in order to enhance their ability to teach more effectively in the classroom. Eight instructors from mid-size universities and community colleges across the United States were interviewed. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify emergent themes pertaining to the ways in which college instructors with disabilities use impression management in the classroom. Results showed that instructors in this study use a wide variety of impression management strategies in order to influence how they are perceived in the classroom and to improve their teaching effectiveness. These strategies included, immediate disclosure of disability, educating students on disabilities, improving relationships with students, improving instructional techniques, and making disability a non-issue. Implications and considerations for future research are proposed.

## Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Dave Engen, for his support and guidance throughout this thesis. I appreciate his willingness to serve as my advisor and for taking the time out to help me with this thesis. He inspires me greatly and the reason why this thesis is so inspirational is because of him. I am so honored and blessed to have had Dave as an advisor, he is the most amazing and brilliant person that I have ever met. Thank you so much for all that you have done for me, Dave, I think the world of you and you are the best advisor that one could ever ask for. I know I'll most likely be one of your colleagues this coming year, but I just want you to know that I'll never forget you.

Second, I would like to thank, Dr. Chris Brown, for all his help and support with this thesis. I appreciate his willingness to take the time out to not only serve on my committee, but to also give me insightful feedback that has really helped make this thesis a great one. Chris is one of my biggest inspirations and role models, and he is also one of the best instructors that I have ever had in all my years of education. I have enjoyed every single one of our fun weekly conversations, and he has always made me smile and laugh, especially on days when I am down and out. I am so grateful to have him as a friend and mentor and I would be lost without him and Dave. I wouldn't be the scholar or teacher that I am today without him. Thank you so much for all that you have done for me, Chris, you're the reason why this thesis is so inspirational.

Third, thank you so much to, Dr. Jasper Hunt, for being willing to serve as my outside committee member. I'll never forget the time when I emailed you asking you to be my committee member and you responded within less than an hour saying you would help me. I just want you to know that your quick response meant a lot to me. I loved the class that I took with you and it is the best class that I have ever taken at MNSU. Thank you for taking the time to give

me such wonderful feedback on my thesis; it is your insightful feedback that has helped make this thesis a success. Thank you for all that you have done for me and for making this thesis inspirational.

Fourth, thank you to all the staff, students, and TA's in the Communication Studies department for all that you do. You have truly helped me succeed and become the best educator and scholar that I could possibly be. You all are some of the best people that I have ever met and I could not be more than grateful to be in a department full of great people. I know the reason behind me switching to Communication Studies was quite traumatic, however you all made me feel so welcome that I am glad I did switch my major. Thanks to, Dr. Sachi Sekimoto, for all the guidance and mentoring that you have provided me over the years. I am so honored to have had such an intelligent and phenomenal professor like yourself and I am grateful to have both you and Chris as great friends and mentors of mine. I am a better scholar and critical thinker because of you. Thank you also to my favorite TA supervisor, Dr. Kristi Treinen. I am so grateful to have had you as a supervisor and thank you for helping me grow as a teacher. You inspire me to want to be a teacher even more.

Finally, thank you to all my family and friends. I love you all so much and thank you for your encouragement and support through this process. You all have helped me get through all of the challenges and obstacles that life has presented me. I am very fortunate to have you as friends and parents, I wouldn't be the woman that I am today without you all. To mom and dad, I love you both, and you are the best parents that anyone could ever ask for. Thank you for all that you have done for me, and like everyone else, you have truly inspired this thesis as well.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In my childhood, I was diagnosed with CHARGE syndrome, or more specifically, a vision and a hearing impairment. Doctors informed my parents that I have a bone conductive hearing loss which requires me to wear hearing aids on both ears. They were also informed that I have a retinal detachment in the right eye and Coloboma in both eyes, which caused me to become near sighted, meaning that I need to get close up to see things, such as words. Due to my vison impairment, doctors told my parents that I wouldn't be able to read well or be able to distinguish faces. As I got older, I proved doctors wrong by showing them that I was able to read passages and sentences and by majoring in a field that requires reading, speaking, and writing. As I entered elementary school, I was placed in a regular education classroom along with my non-disabled peers. Along with being enrolled in regular education, I was also enrolled in a special education program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, as well as Adapted Physical Education and Speech Pathology.

Despite being able to effectively manage my disability, throughout my life I have been have been judged, bullied, and discriminated against by my peers and teachers because of my disability. The judging and bullying began when I was in middle school. For instance, in sixth grade, two boys would come up to my locker at the end of the day and would shout "retard" loudly in my ear. I also experienced other name-calling, such as four eyes and dumb. My peers often assumed that because I was in special education that I was dumb, and when I would tell them that I wasn't dumb and was actually doing very well in my classes, they would say "well that's because you get extra help." The truth is, I was on the B honor roll all throughout middle school, and I got on the honor roll all on my own with no help whatsoever.

While I have been bullied by educators in the past, high school is when it got worse. I took a special education or study skills type of class from my first semester of ninth grade to my first semester of tenth grade, and the special education teacher for the class would mentally and emotionally abuse me every single day. She would belittle me by telling me how worthless I was and that I would never succeed in life and that I was a failure. She also told me "Chelsie, you can't do it, you can't do anything." In my first semester of tenth grade, my parents decided to get me out of the special education program because of her abuse. I eventually got out of special education by the end of my first semester of tenth grade and became a regular education student. Once I got out of special education, I started excelling and improving in school, and it turns out that I never needed special education in the first place and was fully capable of doing it all on my own. The reason why I am in graduate school today is because I am determined to succeed and prove people wrong, and surely I did.

Once I got into college, I also experienced some challenges that affected me both as a person and as a teacher. In my junior year of college, I enrolled into the education program. During my first semester in the program, I had an instructor in the program inform me that no person with a disability or vision impairment, for that matter, has ever made it to student teaching or graduated from the program. This remark made me feel like I was worthless and that there was no hope of me ever becoming a teacher. It left me under the impression that the instructors in the education program weren't willing to give me a chance to prove myself and were just simply writing me off. It also made me feel as though they were judging me based on my disability and not on myself as an individual and my abilities to teach. Truthfully, I never felt like anyone in the education program took the time to get to know me.

Another challenge that affected me was in my first semester of senior year of college when I took a literature class and the instructor in the course would often mentally and emotionally abuse me. I would meet with this instructor quite often for help with the course, but rather than helping me, she would belittle me instead. At every office meeting, she would tell me that she didn't feel I should be a teacher and that I needed years and years of tutoring. She also informed me that she thought I shouldn't even be graduating from college and that I am worthless and will never be successful in life. The thing that hurt me the most is when she told me that no one except her has ever cared about me and that all the things she was telling me were all facts and not opinions. Once again, I felt like people were making immediate judgments about me and not letting go of those judgments.

Although I have had many awful experiences in my life due to my impairment, the most horrendous and life-changing experience occurred during my second semester in the education program. As an undergraduate, I had hoped to become a high school English teacher. During my second semester in the education program, I was in the process of planning for student teaching that next fall and needed to make some accommodations before applying for student teaching, so I scheduled a meeting with my professor, another instructor, a disability services person, and my parents to discuss plans for student teaching. During this meeting, my professor spoke up and said "having a teacher with a vison impairment like yourself, Chelsie, is like a guy wanting to be a dentist, but he had no arms, so he couldn't do the work." A few months after this meeting, one of my teaching placements fell through and I was telling my professor how stressed I was because of this. His response was, "you should be stressed, Chelsie, you probably won't make it through the education program anyway." Surely enough, a month after that, the professor got me out of the education program. This situation really hurt me and made me feel worthless, however

I was able to get stronger and build more self-confidence, and today I am going into a career that I absolutely love, enjoy, and am passionate about which is teaching Communication Studies to college students. It is this experience that inspired me to do a research project exploring the connection between disability and teaching.

After all these experiences, I switched my major to Communication Studies and received a Bachelor's of Science degree in Communication Studies with a minor in English in the fall of 2013. I am currently in my second year in the Master of Arts in Communication Studies program. In addition to being a graduate student, I am also a second year Graduate Teaching Assistant in the department of Communication Studies and teach the basic general education course of Communication Studies. In this class, I have students ranging from freshman to seniors. Although, I try to come off as a non-disabled teacher in the classroom, I do inform students about my disability on the first day of class, as I believe in being honest with my students and in creating an environment that is open, safe, and fun for all. While I do tell my students that I am visually and hearing impaired, I also inform them that just because I have a vision and a hearing impairment doesn't mean I can't see or hear them. I tell them that as a way for them to understand that they aren't going to take advantage of me. As I teach, I often incorporate my disability into my lessons, such as through examples, as a joke or a funny story, and through activities and exercises. For instance, during the listening unit, I have students complete an earplug activity where they experience what it's like to communicate and listen to people when hearing impaired or deaf. I use this activity as a way for students to step into my shoes and understand what I go through as a hearing impaired individual.

In the classroom, while I am very enthusiastic and passionate about teaching, I also experience many anxieties and fears. Before I began my teaching assistantship, I feared that the

department or students would discriminate against me or judge me because of my disability. Many people in the Communication Studies department are very pleasant to work with and have been nothing but supportive and kind towards me; however this was a fear that entered my mind, especially after being discriminated before. Prior to teaching my first class as a teacher, I feared that students wouldn't like me or wouldn't accept who I was as a person. I even had nightmares that my students were going to throw things at me once I told them about my disability or that I was going to walk into an empty classroom and that no student would want to learn from me. In addition, I also worried that students would take advantage of me. After I got done telling my students about my impairment on the first day of class, most students didn't seem to care and were accepting and respectful of it. As a matter of fact, sometimes students would help me with certain stuff if they felt I was struggling, such as turning on the DocCam or helping me with the projector. Another fear is that students wouldn't learn anything from me, wouldn't want to be in class, or that they wouldn't enjoy my class. Some of my students have mentioned how much they have learned from the class and that they really enjoyed it. Most importantly, I feared that I wouldn't inspire students or make a difference in their lives and that I wouldn't get through to them or connect with them.

In addition to fears, I have also faced many challenges. One challenge I face is that I am not always able to hear a student's answer to my question. Quite a few of my students have very soft voices which can make it difficult for me to hear even with both of my hearing aids on. I inform students to speak loud enough so that I can hear or to raise their hand to get my attention if I don't acknowledge them. Another challenge is in terms of grading, it takes me awhile to grade my students' reflection papers and speeches primarily because I am a graduate student dealing with classes and also this thesis which makes it difficult to balance between my students

work and my own. In addition, my vision impairment also causes me to read slower which can make it difficult to give feedback right away. On occasion my students will ask when they will get their speech grade back and I inform them that I am doing the best that I can while being under the pressure of being both a student and teacher. Most importantly, I have gone through the challenge of not knowing how to handle certain situations in the classroom that may require the assistance of my supervisor. For instance, last semester a student approached me and asked me if she could video record her speech herself and give it to me rather than present it in front of class because she was so nervous about giving speeches. I didn't know what to tell her in the moment and didn't have the heart to tell her that without documentation she would have present it in front of class, I was afraid to tell her this because I feared she would think less of me as a teacher. Luckily, I was able to talk things through with my supervisor and get it resolved, however all of these challenges made me grow stronger as a teacher and made me realize the reality of teaching.

Furthermore, while teaching, there have been a few times where I have felt like my face or image was being threatened as a teacher. One example was last semester when a student refused to do her speech and told me that she would just have to fail the speech as she wasn't going to do it. The fact that I knew I would have to fail her not only made me feel sad and upset, but it made me feel like I was a bad teacher for failing a student. The last thing I want to do is fail a student, I want all my students to succeed and do well in my class. It is also my goal to inspire students and make them get the best out of my class and to learn, and when I feel like I haven't done that with a particular student, I question myself as a teacher and wonder what I have done wrong to not get through to that student. Another time when my face was threatened was when I handed a student's speech grade back and she sent me quite a rude email telling me

how upset she was and that I grade absolutely ridiculous. After reading this email, my feelings were deeply hurt. Not only did the email make the fear of students not likening me come back to haunt me, but it also made me loose a little self-esteem and confidence in myself as a teacher. While these experiences may have affected me greatly, it helped me to build more confidence and grow as a teacher. If there is one thing I learned about teaching is that we all go through obstacles and challenges, and overcoming those challenges allows us to learn, become stronger and gain more confidence, and become better teachers in return.

**Purpose of study**

All of these experiences have inspired me to want to further explore the experiences of college professors with disabilities and how they communicate with their students. I also plan to discover how professors with disabilities work to create and establish an impression amongst their students. In this thesis, I look at the challenges and communication barriers that instructors with disabilities experience. I also examine how they manage and construct their own identities in the classroom, such as deciding how or if they should disclose their disability to their students. Through this examination of their identities, I would like to have a better understanding of how their identity as a disabled person impacts their ability to teach effectively and how it influences their communication and relationships with their students.

By conducting this study, I am hoping to give people with disabilities a voice and a chance to open up about their experiences being a teacher with a disability. Through my own experiences, I have learned that some people with disabilities don't have a voice and a chance to express themselves in society, mainly because they are seen as inferior or weak. In addition to giving people with disabilities a voice, this study is intended to give researchers, teachers, and students more awareness and knowledge about disabilities, such as the barriers and obstacles that

professors with disabilities face when in the classroom. This is important as some people don't have enough knowledge about people with disabilities, either because they haven't had much exposure to people with disabilities or because they don't have enough training on how to communicate with people with disabilities.

Currently, there is a fair amount of research on disabilities in the field of Communication Studies, as well as there is a reasonable amount of research being done on instructors with disabilities. While there is some research on instructors with disabilities, the focus of past research seems to be focused on students with disabilities, rather than instructors. Therefore, I hope to add to this research by incorporating my own experiences of being an instructor with a disability along with the experiences of other professors with disabilities in order to gain a better picture of how a disability impacts a professor's ability to teach in the classroom and the impression management strategies that they use to influence how they are perceived in the classroom. By adding to this research, I hope to provide the necessary strategies to help nondisabled colleagues and students better communicate with instructors with disabilities and overcome the barriers or limits that may impact their communication.

**Research questions**

The research questions that I intend to investigate are:

RQ 1: How do professors with disabilities decide when and how to discuss their disability to their students?

RQ 2: How do college professors with disabilities perceive their disability and how it impacts their teaching effectiveness?

RQ 3: What impression management strategies are college instructors with disabilities using in order to manage the way that they are perceived in the classroom?

**Précis of chapters**

Chapter two consists of a review of the relevant literature surrounding this study. The literature review includes topics, such as the definition of disability, history of disability rights, the background of Disability Studies and critique of ableism, teachers with disabilities, impression management with connections to disability, and finally the review of literature will conclude with a discussion of impression management in the classroom.

Chapter three provides a discussion of the chosen method for the study and a justification for that method, which is qualitative responsive interviewing. This chapter also provides the procedures for the study, including the recruitment of participants and the procedures for data collection. Furthermore, I explain my usage of the thematic analysis approach to analyze my data in order to develop linking themes that answer and correlate to my research questions and help me develop a clearer picture on how college professors with disabilities use impression management strategies to teach more effectively in the classroom.

Chapter four includes the analysis and discussion of the results of the study. In this chapter, the findings are organized into relevant themes. Essentially, I am answering my research questions and discussing emerging themes that developed through answering these questions. Through using direct quotations from my participants and by providing my own interpretations of the findings, I hope to provide a fuller picture of the experiences and impression management strategies of college professors with disabilities.

Finally, chapter five discusses the implications of the study and how the results of the study will benefit students, future and current teachers, and people with and without disabilities in general. Additionally, the limitations of the study are addressed, as well as suggestions and opportunities for future research as it relates to the findings of the study. I conclude this chapter by discussing how this study has helped shape me both professionally and personally.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I will examine the following, 1) definition of disability, 2) history of disability rights, 3) background of Disability Studies and the critique of ableism, 4) teachers with disabilities, 5) impression management with connections to disability, and 6) impression management in the classroom.

### Definition of disability

Before moving into any study dealing with "disability" it is important to understand the meaning of the word and the controversies and complexities of the word. There isn't just one definition for the term *disability*, rather there are several definitions. It is important to keep in mind that the term disability has a legal and technical meaning (Accommodating faculty members with disabilities, 2012). The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as "someone with a physical or mental impairment that limits them in some major life activity, such as cooking, walking, and talking" (Mancuso, 1990). Discussing the act, Simon (2000) clarifies that the act also defines a disability as an individual who "has a record of having such impairment or is regarded as having an impairment or disability" (p.71). The American Association of University Professors states that a disability can be considered continuous, episodic, or intermittent, such as cancer in remission. The term disability is also used to describe the different aspects of the disability process, as well as it is used to identify the impairments and physical, mental, and emotional limitations a person has as a result of a disease or injury (Altman, 2014). Altman argues that a disability also implies the participation restrictions a person has when the environment or society is not supportive, such as the restriction from a job that doesn't allow people with disabilities to work there.

Many people use terms to describe people with disabilities that may be offensive or discriminative, such as *retarded*. In the earlier days, disability was defined as a sin or as a person who is inferior or pitied (Chitereka, 2010). This correlates with what is often called disabling language, disabling language is language that perpetuates stereotypes about disabled people or uses demeaning or outdated words to refer to people with disabilities (Lynch, Thuli, & Groombridge, 1994). A few examples of outdated terms include: Retarded, wheelchair bound, handicap, etc. This type of language discusses disabled people and their community by refereeing to them by their medical condition or limitation rather than as a human being (Mackelprang, 2010).  In the beginning, disability was seen as a sin; later on it was defined as people needing assistance from rehabilitation in order to help them with life skills or tasks, such as wheelchairs (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). In addition, some people when they think of the term, disability, think of it as a negative term or not human. Being a person means to be able-bodied (Collier, 2012). Disabled people are sensitive to the words and labels used to describe their disability, such as intellectually challenged (Foreman, 2005). Collier argues that disabled people are sensitive to these words because it makes them feel devalued and dehumanizes them.

Instead of using language that signifies their disability, according to Foreman (2005), it is better to use first-person terminology so that it is referring to the person and not their disability, such as a child with Down Syndrome or a person with a disability. In other words, first-person language is meant to look at the individual rather than their diagnosis and limitations (Bickford, 2004). Bickford also argues that first-person language helps promote abilities rather than disabilities, as well as it creates more determination and self confidence in people with disabilities. In addition to using first-person, Foreman points out that it is important to use language that doesn't present people with disabilities as victims or using language that describes

their situation, such as being wheelchair bound. The use of first-person language will not only make people with disabilities more humanized, but it will also create less of a difference between non-disabled and disabled people (Collier, 2012). It will also help minimize the stereotypes and prejudices that are made against disabled people. Most importantly, first-person language argues that normalcy can be obtained if all people emphasize and treat disabled people as people (Titchkosky, 2001). My understanding of the complexities surrounding the word "disability" has inspired me to use the first-person language throughout this thesis.

**Brief history of disability rights**

Throughout history, many laws and acts have been passed to give people with disabilities more equal opportunities. The issues and rights concerning people with disabilities started being brought up in the 1931 Crippled Child's Bill of Rights which worked to provide more opportunities for disabled children in society. According to this bill, every disabled child has the right to an earliest as possible examination and treatment, efficient care and good prenatal care that can help prevent disability as best as possible, education, and to be fitted for self-support (Goldstein, 1936). These rights are also intended to advocate for services, such as vocational training that can help disabled children become independent adults. Goldstein points out that these rights called for disabled children to have their right for self-determination and the right to physical and intellectual development. A few decades later, the Civil Rights Act came about. According to Miller (2005), the title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed in order to prevent the discrimination of all people, including minorities. Besides discrimination, this act argues that no one should be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits under any program receiving financial assistance (Teitelbaum, Cartwright-Smith, & Rosenbaum, 2012). One purpose of this act was to advance the rights for independence and employment

opportunities for people with disabilities. It also gave them more equality and ensured that they were treated as equal citizens (Rollins, Middleton, & Harley, 1999).

In addition to the Civil Rights Act, the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was designed to remove segregated housing and create more integrated housing for disabled and non-disabled people. This act states that making housing unavailable due to race, disability, or gender is prohibited. The act expanded the rights for people with disabilities in regards to housing, especially at colleges (Bauman, Davidson, Sachs, & Kotarski, 2013). This act also requires housing to give accommodations or services for people with disabilities, such as a service or therapy animal. The first big milestone that opened the doors for many people with disabilities is known as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which offered employment and accommodations to "handicapped people" (Thornburgh, 1990). This act also placed children with disabilities into the mainstream school systems and guaranteed an education in a less isolated setting. Essentially, people with disabilities could learn right along with their non-disabled peers. According to Thornburgh, the act helped disabled people overcome the prejudice they faced and become more successful, such as earning a college degree. Furthermore, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ensured that children with disabilities have access to a free education and extracurricular activities available to non-disabled students. This part of the act enforces schools to provide equal opportunities that can help them reach the same level of achievement as non-disabled students (Smith, 2002). They must also have access to services that meet their needs, such as health services, athletics, specific courses, and field trips. Smith argues that disabled children should be educated along with non-disabled students and their needs and accommodations should be met, such as providing accessibility for those wheelchair bound.

Continuing on from the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. The purpose of the Americans with Disabilities Act is to confront and prohibit discrimination, as well as removing attitudinal behaviors towards people with disabilities (Miller, 2005). The goal of the act is to bring people with disabilities into the social mainstream of American life (Rush, 2012). This act gives people with disabilities equal opportunities for employment, education, and enforces employers and educators to give them reasonable accommodations in order to get around and be successful. As a result of this act, governments must make their programs and services accessible, such as healthcare. In addition, ADA also requires governments to provide public accessibility in hotels, restaurants, and other places (Bowman, 2011). This act has not only helped people with disabilities become more successful, but it has also raised more awareness on disabilities (Kanter, 2015). Along with the ADA, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act was also passed in 1990. The purpose of this act is to ensure that children with disabilities have a free education that places emphasis on special education and services that meet their unique needs and prepare them for life out of high school, such as post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015). In addition, children under this act are entitled to an annual individualized education plan which is a model of a child's curriculum and academic goals which are designed by teachers, administrators, and the child's parents (Shannon, 1999). This plan also determines the eligibility for services and requirements, and it also encourages the parents to take an active involvement in the creation of the plan. All these rights and acts regarding people with disabilities show that it is opening the doors towards equal rights for those who have a disability. However, just because there is more equality doesn't mean there aren't any challenges or issues, such as communication challenges for people with disabilities.

**Disability Studies and the critique of ableism**

As the visibility and rights of individuals with disabilities has grown, a new area of academic study has emerged, called Disability Studies. Disability Studies is an orientation of educational theory and research that works from a social and cultural model of disability and challenges the deficit model to normalize difference (Collins, 2013). Collins also points out that Disability Studies creates the need to consider ability and disability across different people, literacy, and discourses. Essentially, Disability Studies gets people to end their beliefs about people with disabilities and encourages them to develop new ideas about disability. To add to this idea, Disability Studies gives people the opportunity to stop viewing disability as something that is a given or is something that gets placed into humanity (Titchkosky, 2008). Furthermore, this field of study is meant to get us to understand that disability is socially constructed, meaning that many of the barriers that disabled people experience are not the fault of their disability, rather it is the way they are treated in society. The barriers that they often face are constructed by society, including physical and social barriers, such as wheelchair accessibility (Dunn, Clare, & Holland, 2010). There are so many ways that disability is defined and viewed, some see it as a negative, and others see it as a positive, therefore Disability Studies tries to change our views on what it means to be considered normal.

A central argument of Disability Studies is that society is set up to primarily accommodate able-bodied people which leads to ableism (Dunn, Clare, & Holland, 2010). Ableism is defined as a set of beliefs and practices that see being disabled as not being human (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). According to Wolbring (2008), ableism favors the abilities of able-bodied people and labels and defines disability as limited, dependent, and ill health. Ableism perceives disabled people as deficient and not being able to do the work. The

understandings of disabled people as inferior gets incorporated into the beliefs of non-disabled people, which leads to the creation of the barriers that make them inferior and not an equal participant in society (McLean, 2011). This leads to discrimination amongst those who are disabled. Ableism relates to disability discrimination in that some able-bodied people view themselves as better than those who are disabled. This superiority causes able-bodied people to feel the need to belittle a disabled person. In other words, those who are seen as outside of the norm (disabled people) are viewed as powerless and devalued.

Living in an able-bodied society can cause individuals to form an ideology that prevents them from seeing how society influences their perceptions about what it means to be "normal." Disability Studies looks into this ideology of normalcy. What serves to create oppression or discrimination are our own conceptions and attitudes that we hold about disability (Reid & Knight, 2006). In addition, Reid and Knight argue that what society sets as normal standard, such as ability or whiteness can influence our ideology about what is normal and not. The fact that society gives us these ideas about what it means to be normal through media and images not only blinds us from seeing how things really are, but it can also lead to discrimination and oppression against people with disabilities as they are viewed as inferior or abnormal by society. Thus, according to Reid and Knight, Disability Studies not only challenges the idea of normalcy as the regime of truth, but it shows the consequences of othering which frames people with disabilities as outsiders. For example, in my high school, developmentally delayed students were segregated and isolated from the rest of the school as the school system seemed to follow what society viewed as the normal student. As people, we are subjected to follow rules, regulations, and culture beliefs in order to fit the idea of "normal." Society expects people to act, think, and communicate as similar to one another or as how society expects them to act (Baglieri, Bejoian,

Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). Therefore, not following society's expectations and beliefs for "normal", being different from everyone else, or not having the characteristics of what society calls "normal" results in being viewed as abnormal, as an outsider, and different. Most importantly, as people, we have followed society's beliefs regarding "normalcy" for so long that we have become oblivious to what it actually means to be normal. Thus, Disability Studies not only challenges these views regarding abnormal and normal, but it also gives us a different perspective on what it means to be normal.

Furthermore, this idea of what it means to be "normal" is also constructed through our own interactions, behaviors, and performances. Normal is projected through the way we move, think, interact, and through other discourses, such as our race, ethnicity, and gender. Our everyday communication influences what is abnormal or normal in this world (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). In other words, through our own behaviors, actions, and performances, ideas get constructed about our own identity and what is normal and not normal. Therefore, the stereotypes and labels that people create about people with disabilities is shaped and maintained through their performance of their disability. The fact that "normal" is constructed through performance can make it difficult to change those ideas as they are embedded in society and in the individual. In addition to performance, power also influences the ideas of normalcy and disability greatly. The discourses of normalcy are constructed by the most powerful (able-bodied people) in order to dominate the most inferior (disabled people) (Selznick, 2015). Thus, able-bodied people create this picture of normal being able-bodied in order to gain superiority over disabled people which weakness and causes disabled people to fall under the abnormal side of the spectrum. Able-bodied people gain this dominance over disabled people by not only discriminating and stereotyping against disabled people, but also by creating this

ideology that normal is able-bodied. Creating this ideology can both make it harder for disabled people to reach the level of normal and can lead to people developing false assumptions of what normal actually is.

In order to fit into a society that caters to able-bodied people, people with disabilities often "pass" or act as an able-bodied person. Passing means to hide the parts of the disabled body that fall outside of the norm. Disabled people pass as normal as a way to not be singled out or different from their peers (Ashby, 2010). As mentioned earlier, society views "normal" as being able-bodied, therefore in order to not be seen as an outsider, people with disabilities need to live up to and follow society's expectations for being normal and that means acting like an able-bodied individual. As a person with a disability, I try to act as an able-bodied instructor and individual because I don't want people to think that I am any different from them or to look only at my disability rather than who I am as an individual. Also, trying to pass as normal is done as a way for people to manage their disabilities, such as pretending to hear what was said or lip reading (Hindhede, 2012). People with disabilities manage their disability to create a better impression of themselves and to create the impression that they are able-bodied and don't have a disability. Managing one's disability is also done to show that their disability doesn't affect them. For instance, I manage my disability by pulling my hair down so people can't see my hearing aids, not wearing glasses, reading lips, and trying to get up close to things at a distance where people wouldn't be able to notice that I have nearsightedness. Finally, people with disabilities try to pass as able-bodied in order to avoid the discrimination and stereotypes that they face. According to Selznick (2015), the fear of stigma and being discriminated has led many people with disabilities to a life of passing. People with disabilities face stigma because they are seen as inferior to society; therefore they must act like the superior group (able-bodied people) in

order to avoid that stigma. On another note, people with disabilities lack power in society, and the fact that society creates this image of normal being true and able-bodied people being superior in society may cause people with disabilities to fear that they will lose power and equality if they don't pass as able-bodied. Thus, passing as able bodied is done as a way for people with disabilities to gain power, control, and superiority.

**Teachers with disabilities**

In this context of expanding rights and opportunities for individuals with disabilities, much has been written about teachers with disabilities. In the next couple of pages, I will provide a broad discussion of the prevalence of teachers with disabilities and summarize several important pieces of research focusing on the experiences of teachers with disabilities. To begin with, it is estimated that one in five faculty members at universities have a chronic health condition or a disability that may require them to need accommodations or services (Fuecker & Harbour, 2011). According to Whetzel, Goddard, and Mathess (2016) "close to one million educators ranging from preschool to post-secondary instructors could be in need of job accommodations" (p.3). The fact that there are more faculty members with disabilities is causing more services to provide accommodations for those faculty members, especially those services that were once only for students, such as disability services. Fuecker and Harbour discuss a service at the University of MN called UReturn which connects with disability services and provides faculty with disabilities with accommodations, such as accessible parking, equipment for classroom, and work adjustments, especially for those who may need to take leave of absences due to their condition. In addition to services, there are also many organizations and resources available to faculty with disabilities. Whetzel, Goddard, and Mathess (2016) mention the Association on Higher Education and Disability which meets the needs of faculty and all

people on all levels of higher education. Another organization is the United Federation of Teachers which helps improve school facilities, such as making schools more accessible.

One important issue in the research of teachers with disabilities is how they present themselves in the classroom. Stephen Gilson (2000) is a professor who is paraplegic and discusses his disability in the classroom in order to give students more knowledge about himself and disabilities in general. In his essay on teaching, Gilson argues that "responses from the source of knowledge, myself, and my work helps decrease anxiety and the negative biases that come with discrimination" (p. 132). His position suggests that it allows students to view "disability" as a source of knowledge and power as some people view people with disabilities as in need of services. As mentioned, the reason why people with disabilities are discriminated is because people without disabilities may not have enough knowledge on people with disabilities or because people with disabilities may not always disclose their disability to others. Other teachers with learning disabilities disclose their disability as a way of encouragement and connecting with students, as well as showing the success of people with disabilities (Valle, Solis, Volpitta, & Connor, 2004). Basically, teachers with disabilities disclose their disability as a way of encouraging students to share their own stories or as a way of relating to students by showing that they have flaws and challenges like them. On the other hand, Gilson argues that by not sharing one's experiences, it gives students implicit messages that people with disabilities can achieve their goals despite their disability. In other words, their disability doesn't define them as a person. In addition, Valle et al. (2004) mention that teachers may choose not to disclose their disability in order to not be seen as less competent.

Teachers with disabilities experience many challenges inside the classroom. For one, teachers with disabilities sometimes face a lack of confidence in their abilities to teach, have

trouble finding teaching positions, or experience a lack of accommodations, such as schools that aren't wheelchair assessable ( Bowman & Barr, 2001). In addition, professors with visible disabilities are often faced with negative attitudes and unapproachable policies. However, when teaching in the classroom, they often symbolize justice and respect for their differences (Hasashi & May, 2011).  Most importantly, faculty members with disabilities are entitled to the same rights, responsibilities, and due-process protections as nondisabled faculty members (Accommodating faculty members with disabilities, 2012).

There exists a variety of research and personal writings regarding instructors with disabilities. For example, Tidwell (2004) writes about her experiences being a hearing impaired teacher. Tidwell mentions that some professors with hearing impairments adapt to their hearing loss by pretending that they can hear when really they can't. In other words, some instructors with disabilities come off as able-bodied in order to avoid negative assumptions towards them and to fit in with their students and the standards and norms set by society. Tidwell also mentions that instructors with disabilities often face many obstacles, such as anxiety, embarrassment, students not taking the instructor seriously or rejecting them, and students feeling uncomfortable with the instructor. Some students may not have had any contact or knowledge regarding people with disabilities which can be a cause for the negative attitudes towards disabled instructors (Hasashi & May, 2011). Often, students are not aware of what it's like to teach with a disability, either because they've only had teachers who are able-bodied or because they are not aware that their words are hurting the image of their instructor.

While teachers with disabilities go through many challenges and obstacles, there are many positives to being a teacher with a disability. With teachers with learning disabilities, their lived experiences with literary difficulties help them be able to relate to students with similar

difficulties. It also helped motivate students to go into the teaching profession (Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). As teachers, we are all humans with feelings, thus having a disability not only makes them more human and relatable to their students experiences, but it also makes students realize that we have flaws and difficulties like them. Vogel and Sharoni also point out that having a disability made teachers more sympathetic and empathetic to youngsters, and it also gave them more creative styles of teaching and learning. Not only does having a disability allow teachers to be able to place themselves into the shoes of students who are going through similar issues, but it also allows them to teach from experience and to give students a different perspective, which can help promote creativity in the classroom.

Furthermore, having a disability presents many other benefits to students as well. Marie Beattie (2007) was a special education teacher who suffered a massive stroke. She conducted a study to explore how a teacher's disability impacted their students and their attitudes towards people with disabilities. In Beattie's study, it was found that "teachers with disabilities can influence the perception and attitudes of students and faculty and can educate them on what people with limitations go through. They can also be good role models to students with disabilities" (p. 21). Some people carry negative attitudes about people with disabilities, such as that they are weak or dumb. Thus, by educating students on what people with disabilities go through, such as discrimination or stigma, this may help eliminate some of these negative perceptions. Also, teachers with disabilities can be role models to others with disabilities in that they have been in their shoes and know what it is like to be an outsider. In Beattie study, it was found that "students had respect for the teacher as the teacher and not their disability, they were also observant that the ability to judge someone was not colored by their disability" (p. 23). In other words, by educating students about disabilities, this allowed  them to look beyond a

teacher's disability and see that it is not their disability that defines them, rather it who they are as a person. Students also gain more trust and respect when the instructor openly discloses their disability.

**Impression management**

In the pages to follow, I offer a broad overview of impression management and discuss some specific concepts associated with the theory. Throughout this discussion, I make links between impression management and individuals with disabilities.

**General overview of impression management theory**

Impression management is a far-reaching theory that essentially sees the world of communication as a stage. There are many facets to this approach of communication, and the first of these is performance. Goffman (1959) defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his conscious presence before a set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (p.13). As individuals, we are continuously communicating messages to others about who we are through our performances, such as the way we look or act. This performance causes the audience to form ideas and impressions about our identity. For example, a woman wearing a navy blue pant suit carrying a brief case while walking across the street may communicate the message that the woman is a professional businesswoman. After giving an impression of their identity to an audience, the individual works to make that identity or performance believable to the audience. Goffman argues that "when an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests that his audience take the impression that is being created before them" (p.10).

During a performance, the actor tries to persuade the audience by giving them the impression that the identity they are portraying is their true identity (Goffman, 1959). In other words, they get the audience to believe that their performance and identity is reality. How we perform and communicate our identity is complex for people with disabilities as they need to work extra hard to not only make their impression and identity believable, but also to change some of the negative perceptions that people often have about them. Often, the stereotypes or judgments that get placed upon them are created through the way they perform their identity, therefore making it difficult to change those perceptions. For example, at school, students may observe a student with a disability receiving help by a paraprofessional, thus creating the stereotype that they are not smart or need help. As a result, that particular student might try to change that impression through the way they interact with other students, such as talking in an intellectual and sophisticated manner.

When discussing individuals with disabilities, an important topic is how these individuals attempt to manage (or not manage) the way other individuals see themselves and how they want others to see them. Impression management is important to all individuals, but this process is complicated when an individual has a disability and attempts to control the meaning of that disability. For example, people with disabilities make decisions about when, where, and how to disclose their identity as a disabled person or to pass and give society the impression of an able-bodied person (Valeras, 2010). This is especially true for individuals who are teachers as they face an audience with great regularity.

Moving forward, Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959),* compares face-to-face interactions to actors on a stage performing in front of an audience (Goffman, 1959). As people, we present ourselves on a stage by disguising or performing our

character and personality to a group of people. While we may play our character on stage, our character often changes depending on the situation we are in. Social norms often cause us to switch characters depending on the situation (Zavattaro, 2013). For instance, how we portray ourselves in a job interview might be different then how we show ourselves to our friends. In addition, according to Babcock (1989), most individuals are concerned with giving good performances and attempting to create a certain image by getting others to believe in the character that they are conveying. People are rarely if ever free from self-presentational concerns and continuously try to influence how others perceive them (Becker-Lindenthal, 2015). These concerns are particularly salient for people with disabilities, who, almost by definition, end up having an identity not considered "normal" by a culture that emphasizes able-bodiness. According to Najarian (2008), disabled college students form positive images of themselves, as well as they come up with strategies to form an impression that will prevent them from being stigmatized. In addition, Olney and Brockelman (2003) state that disabled people try to maintain a positive image out of fear that they will be viewed as victims or being seen as a person who is using their disability to get advantages or pity.

Impression management theory is used as a lens to look at many kinds of social interactions. For example, Dillard, Browning, Sitkin, and Sutcliffe (2000) studied interactions at hotels.  Dillard et al. argues that hotels, such as the Ritz-Carlton, try to make the impression that they know their guests, care about and are concerned about their guests, and want their guests to be appeased if problems occur. The main goal of most hotels is not only to create a positive impression, but to also exceed guests' expectations, such as greeting them with a warm smile or giving them a hot breakfast each day. Impression management theory has also been used to look at the communication of waiters (Seiter & Weger, 2008). Seiter and Weger mention that waiters

use compliments, such as complementing what the guest selected off the menu in order to gain higher tips. In other words, restaurants use impression management strategies, such as compliments, sympathy, and other tactics in order to create a positive image of themselves. Finally, people with disabilities use quite a bit of impression management in certain social interactions in order save their image, such as when going to school or being interviewed for a job. Olney and Brockelman (2003) study found that impression management is used by disabled people as a strategy to avoid the negative stereotypes or consequences placed against them, such as discrimination. For example, when being interviewed for a job, a person with a disability may try acting and appearing professional, intelligent, and competent in order to prevent negative stereotypes or discrimination from the person hiring them.

**Specific concepts of impression management theory**

As explained, the way us humans manage impressions is within certain contexts or settings, such as in schools, restaurants, hotels, etc. There are a number of specific features of impression management discussed by several theorists. Goffman looks at the idea of front and backstage of performance. The frontstage is the performance or the place where the actor tries to create an impression of themselves to the audience. According to Goffman (1959) "the performance of an individual on the frontstage may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards" (p. 67). In other words, an individual constructs an impression of themselves to an audience and works to maintain that impression through their performance. They also maintain an impression that fits with the standards of the situation or setting that they are in. For example, a coworker at a coffee shop usually follows standards by doing what the customer wants and trying to act polite if a customer is rude or gives an obnoxious request. They are creating the impression that they are willing to

meet the customer's needs. This connects to people with disabilities in that they may try to give the impression that they are an able-bodied person in order to fit in with society and its norms and expectations.

Furthermore, the backstage often contradicts this impression. According to Goffman (1959) "the backstage is a place where the impression created by the performance is contradicted" (p. 69). In the backstage, the individual's true identity is hidden from the audience. This shows that we have different identities in certain situations, and sometimes we may be a different person in private then when we are out in public. Going back to the previous example, when the obnoxious customer leaves, the coworker may speak ill of the customer to their coworkers in private. There are some consequences with the backstage in that it can become the frontstage. Goffman describes this consequence using broadcasting as an illustration. "People who thought they were backstage were actually on air and what was heard backstage discredited the definition of the situation being maintained on air" (p.72-73). Some people may construct fabrications of their identity to others which can be revealed backstage. Thus, the impression that people give backstage speaks louder than the impression they convey to the audience. If their backstage identity is revealed, this may make the impression they give on the frontstage unbelievable. The concept of backstage identity is important for people with disabilities in that they often have to make decisions on whether to reveal or keep their disability as part of their hidden identity. For instance, people with disabilities often make decisions about telling someone about their disability and the accommodations that they need (Najarian, 2008). While there can be positives to moving their identity as a disabled person to the backstage, this can also come with consequences. Valeras (2010) argues that people who have a hidden disability tend to experience emotional distress because of the fear of being discovered for having a disability.

Another specific feature of impression management is the idea of "definition of the situation." As Thomas and Thomas (1928) state "his immediate behavior is closely related to his definition of the situation which may be an objective of reality or a subjective appreciation. If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 572). Goffman (1959) expands on this concept. According to Goffman, "he can influence the definition of the situation by expressing himself in a way that gives them the kind of impression that will lead others to act voluntarily in accordance to his plan. When an individual appears before an audience, his actions will come to influence the definition of the situation" (p.3). In order for an individual to perform an impression of themselves, they need to first understand the social situation they are performing in, such as the rules and norms and understanding what is expected of them and others in the situation. Once they define the situation, they then create an impression of themselves and the situation based on that definition. Through their performance, they persuade others to follow that same impression by their interactions, either verbally or nonverbally. By having others follow along, this helps maintain the impression of the situation. For example, at a school dance, students may observe that their classmates dress up, hang out with friends, and dance; this will lead them to following along with other students performances at school dances based on their interpretation of the situation and what is expected of them.

Drawing on the work of Goffman, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) describe the concept of face. The idea of the face-negation theory is that people from all different cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in communication situations, such as in conflicts (Zhang, Ting-Toomey, & Oetzel, 2014). In other words, facework is communication strategies that people use to save one's image and to support or challenge another person's face. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey also state that people often avoid conflict situations in order to avoid losing their face.

There are three levels of face concern; the first level is self-face concern which is the concern we have of our own image. This type of concern focuses on the "I" or the individual's concerns and interests (Ting-Toomey, 2010). In some contexts and cultures, the self-face concern is valued where individuals are expected to express their feelings in communication situations, such as anger, frustration, or sadness. People who try to protect their own face in interactions are seen as having high levels of self-esteem and confidence. An example of self-face concern would be a person with a disability not saying anything or walking away after being bullied in order to protect their own image.

The next level of concern is other-face concern which is the concern we have for another person's image. For example, if a person with a disability were discriminated, they may not report it because they don't want to risk the image of the person who made the discriminatory comments. According to Ting-Toomey (2010), this type of concern focuses on the "other" identity rather than the "I". In other words, the individual focuses on the other's needs and desires rather than their own. In the cultures that value other-face concern, the individual is expected to hold onto their feelings in interactions for the sake of relational harmony (Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Dorjee, & Lee, 2012).

The last level of concern is mutual-face concern which is the concern for both the self and the other's face. This type of concern focuses on the "we" identity. The mutual-face not only shows concern for one's interests and needs, but it also acknowledges the other's needs as well. Like other-face, cultures that value mutual-face require that people keep their emotions to themselves in interactions out of respect of others (Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Dorjee, & Lee, 2012). Individuals with disabilities are often forced to decide how to manage a conflict that arises around their disabilities. For instance, going back to the discrimination example, not only may a

person with a disability try to protect the image of the person who discriminated against them, but they may also protect their own face by not reporting the incident in order to not look bad or to avoid further discrimination.

The final important facet of the impression management theory is a person's usage of sign vehicles, such as appearance and manner to create a certain impression and to give information about themselves to others. Firstly, our appearance speaks volumes about our identity and first impressions often revolve around appearance. According to Goffman (1959), appearance is the stimulus that tells us about a person's social status or ritual state, such as our economic status, race and gender, personality, what we do for work, etc. For example, a man who has a learning disability may dress in a suite and a tie as a way to communicate that while he has a learning disability, he is also a very smart and professional businessman. In terms of manner, Goffman describes it as stimuli that will tell us of the interaction role that the performer will play in the situation. For instance, if a person with a disability appears angered after being discriminated, it gives the impression that the individual is likely to vent his or her frustration of being judged during the interaction.

**Impression management in the classroom**

All of these ideas fit nicely into the idea of teaching as a performance. The classroom can be seen as what Goffman (1959) defines as a stage. According to Davis (2011), "the classroom functions as a stage in that teachers perform in front of an audience (students) who can interact and change the outcome of the performance based on their reactions" (p. 3). For example, students who engage, listen, and participate in class discussions can influence the performance or lesson by turning it into an engaging and positive one. Furthermore, instructors work to create a certain impression of themselves that they want to portray to their students

through their performance, such as creating the impression that they are credible and knowledgeable. For instance, an instructor may give a PowerPoint lecture with information from cited scholarly articles in order to show that they are knowledgeable on the topic at hand. According to Scott (2007), professors are under pressure to perform their professionalism by appearing competent and knowledgeable, and in lecture this can be especially difficult as teachers are required to adopt an authoritative role. Professors are held to high standards and expected to be knowledgeable in their subject area. With this in mind, professors perform this impression of an authoritative figure in the classroom in order to meet those high standards and expectations. For example, a professor prepares and guides lecture in order to give the impression that they are responsible and in control of the knowledge in the classroom. Finally, as stated by Davis, "the classroom is a site of performance in that teachers often use their own influential or favorite teacher and create their identity or impression based off the impression that their influential teacher gave" (p. 17). For instance, my favorite speech teacher in high school was both enthusiastic and passionate about teaching speech and his passion has leaded me to have the same passion about teaching public speaking to college students.

Impression management connects to teaching in that the teacher is trying to define the situation by creating the norms and expectations expected in the classroom. Preves and Stephenson (2009) argue that as humans we occupy positions, such as a student or professor, and our positions are given rights according to our status. For example, professors have an obligation to teach and a right to give feedback on students work, and students have an obligation to hand in assignments and a right to ask for clarification on their professor's feedback. According to Davis (2011), teachers often shift their roles in order to present a side of their identity that fits their position and the situation. For instance, teachers may act professional in the classroom, but with

their friends or family they act more casual. Furthermore, the roles, rights, and expectations constructed in the classroom gives students and teachers an idea of what the classroom situation will look like and how they should perform and act, such as the student should listen to the teacher during lecture. Goffman (1959) argues that people make meaning about the situation and the roles and identities in it through the use of symbols. In the classroom, professors do this by handing out the syllabus on the first day of class, meeting with students in their offices, and standing in front of the board.

As teachers, we often make decisions about how to portray ourselves through our frontstage and backstage identity in order to create and maintain the impression that we desire in the classroom. In the frontstage, the professor establishes themselves as a credible teacher who has enough knowledge and expertise to teach the course content effectively (Preves & Stephenson, 2009). When in front of the class or meeting with students individually, the professor might attempt to give students the impression that they are credible and knowledgeable by sharing their own experiences or their own research with the topic at hand. For instance, a professor might share their experiences of studying the cultures of Japan, Mexico, and Australia in order to show that they have expertise in Intercultural Communication. Some professors may also convey that they care about their students learning by helping them with an assignment or telling them that they did a good job on their paper to verbalize their support.

Furthermore, instructors may keep certain things to themselves or hide parts of their identity in order to maintain the image that they want to project to their students. Preves and Stephenson (2009) argue that instructors fear that if their backstage identity is revealed, this could lead to a loss of credibility. Hence, instructors may discuss certain issues in private as a way to prevent their true identity from being revealed and to maintain the image that they

intended to convey to their students. For example, rather than discussing a conflict they had with a student in front of other students, an instructor may discuss the conflict in private with another faculty member in order to not be seen as a mean instructor or less credible. The decisions we make about what we choose to show in our front and backstage identities can be complex for teachers as they are held to high standards and anything that gets revealed in the backstage could make the impression on the frontstage less believable and affect their effectiveness as a teacher. Preves and Stephenson point out that if a teacher's backstage actions are brought to the front stage, this could diminish their authority as a teacher and impact their students' impression of them. For example, if a student saw their teacher speaking ill of them to another instructor, this could impact their impression of the teacher in that they might not think the teacher is as pleasant as they are in the classroom. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be mindful of how they utilize the front and backstage as their actions can speak louder than their words when forming impressions.

Through their performance, teachers use sign vehicles, such as appearance and manner in order to enhance their impression in the classroom. In terms of appearance, teachers create their identity in the classroom through symbols, such as clothing (Preves & Stephenson, 2009). In the classroom, teachers use non-verbals, such as the way they dress in order to communicate who they are to their students and to create and maintain their desired image in the classroom. For example, a teacher may wear a nice blouse and skirt in order to create the impression that they are intellectual, credible, and take teaching very seriously. A teacher's appearance can also impact their image in that it can lead to snap judgments. According to Brooks (1985) "first impressions lead to snap judgments, and nonverbal behaviors, such as the way they dress are an important element in the formation of impressions" (p. 64). Oftentimes, the way a teacher looks

can lead to students forming assumptions or stereotypes about them which not only influences how they are perceived, but it can also influence their image and impression as a teacher. For example, a professor wearing a top with stains on it and messy hair might cause students to form the assumption or impression that the teacher is lazy, unprofessional, or less credible.

Secondly, an instructor's manner or the way in which they act in the classroom can influence their impression and the way that they are perceived by students. A teacher's manner can influence how a student behaves in the classroom and how they act towards them. First impressions influence evaluations of performance and form the basis for continuing attitudes from students, such as a student may act nice if they know that the teacher is pleasant (Brooks, 1985). Teachers act according to their desired impression in the classroom which leads to students acting in the same manner in order to maintain that impression. For example, if a teacher is mean and rude towards students, this may cause students to act in an unruly manner in order to create the impression that the teacher is not very pleasant. In certain contexts, a teacher's manner can contradict their appearance, such as when they are being evaluated. Evaluation systems that are based on student evaluations may cause professors to act in a defense manner in order to control the impressions students have of them (Larry-Crumbley & Reichelt, 2009). Teachers are often under pressure to perform well and give a good impression in the classroom which at times may cause them to act in a manner not correlated with their appearance. Also, if a teacher's evaluation doesn't follow with their impression, this may also make them act defensively which may reveal their true identity to students. A teacher's appearance or manner can lead to false impressions or cause students to be hidden from seeing parts of their identity. However, the stress and pressure to teach effectively and form a good impression can make this balance between appearance and manner even more complex.

Finally, face is important in understanding how teachers maintain a certain impression or image in the classroom. Firstly, face matters to teaching in that it shapes a teacher's impression in the classroom. Instructors work to maintain or enhance their face in the classroom, due to the desire to be liked and respected by students (Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, & McMullen, 2012). Some of the main goals of an instructor are to be perceived as credible, knowledgeable, and to be well liked by students. Therefore, they attempt to create and maintain this image of an effective teacher in order to a chieve this goal. For example, a professor might create an impression that they are easygoing and supportive by giving students a lot of guidance on assignments and giving good grades in order to maintain their image as an effective and credible teacher.

Face is also necessary in that an instructor may go through a situation, such as having their credibility questioned, which can cause them to lose their desired image as an instructor. Baiocchi-Wagner (2011) study found that instructors often lost their face when students questioned them or gave them criticism on their teaching. Thus, instructors used strategies, such as humor or avoiding the topic in order to regain their image. When an instructor looses their credibility or it is questioned, it can be quite difficult to regain that image because of the high standards set in place for teachers. Therefore, strategies, such as humor are needed in order to regain that image. For example, if a teacher trips or falls down in class, they may laugh it off or tell a funny joke in order to show that the situation isn't a big deal and to protect their image. To finish, face matters to teaching as it helps improve the teacher-student relationship. In the classroom, a teacher and student may get into a conflict, such as over a bad grade, which can impact their relationship and risk the image of both the teacher and student. Face is beneficial in defusing interpersonal conflicts and building positive rapport between the student and teacher (Lasley, 1979). Thus, face is important in resolving confrontations without causing the loss of

face of either the student or teacher. For instance, if a student comes into a professor's office and gets upset about a grade they received, the professor may try to help the student understand the problematic areas and give them advice on how to improve on the next paper. Doing this not only improves their relationship, but also helps maintain and improve the image of both the teacher and student.

Now that we have covered the existing literature on teaching, impression management, and disabilities, we now have the necessary information needed to understand how college instructors with disabilities use impression management in the classroom. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods needed to answer the research questions of this study.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

As stated earlier**,** the purpose of this study is to examine how college instructors with disabilities use impression management strategies in order to improve their teaching effectiveness in the classroom. In this study, I intended to discover how professors with disabilities go about disclosing their disability to students, how they perceive their disability as impacting their teaching effectiveness and relationships with their students, and the impression management techniques they use to manage how they are perceived as a teacher.

In this chapter, I explain in detail the methods used for the study. I discuss how the data from my interview participants was gathered, used, and analyzed in order to answer my research questions and to gain a fuller picture on the impression management strategies that college instructors with disabilities use to improve their teaching effectiveness in the classroom. In this section, I cover the following: 1) my position as a researcher, 2) procedures for data collection, 3) recruitment and description of participants, 4) the interview process, and 5) the method of analysis and process for coding the data.

**Position as researcher**

As discussed in my introduction, I have had many personal experiences with this issue surrounding disabilities. I have had to overcome many challenges and obstacles due to my disability, including discrimination and bullying. I believe my experiences of having a disability has impacted the interview process in many ways. For one, my own disability helped create a different communication climate for the interview. It also helped make me more comfortable asking questions during the interview. Likewise, I believe it also made my participants feel more relaxed in answering my questions knowing that I have a disability and have been through

similar experiences. In that regard, having a disability myself allowed me to reflect deeper on the questions being asked, such as putting myself into the interviewee's shoes and answering the questions of myself. This helped ensure that the questions weren't uncomfortable or ones that would be offensive if I were in the interviewee's position. Furthermore, my disability helped me to select questions that would allow me to not only learn about the interviewee, but also about myself as an educator and a person with a disability. For example, I selected questions that allowed me to learn about the challenges that teachers with disabilities go through and the methods that they use to overcome those challenges. Asking these questions helped me to better understand my own challenges and how I can overcome them.

I believe that the interviewee knew about my disability, which helped make them more willing and comfortable in sharing their own experiences with me. This mutual knowledge of our own disabilities not only made the interviewee more open about their experiences, but it also encouraged me to share my own experiences with the interviewee as a way of relating to them. In other words, my disability allowed me to play an active role in the interview process by incorporating myself into the interview which permitted me to have a voice in the interview just as much as the interviewee. This openness about our own experiences impacted the interview in that it helped make the interview more causal and conversational and it allowed us to connect and communicate on more of an interpersonal level through the sharing of our own experiences. In addition, it also helped create empathy throughout the interview. It created empathy in that it permitted the interviewee and me to step into one another's shoes and empathize with one another which gave us the opportunity to see things from another's perspective. Most importantly, my disability helped make the interview a learning opportunity for both me and the interviewee. Not only did I learn a lot as a researcher, but sharing my experiences with the

interviewee helped them learn from me and gain new ideas that might be useful to them as teachers.

**Data collection**

**Responsive interviewing**

The method used for this study is qualitative responsive interviewing. Responsive interviewing is understood as the interviewer and interviewee acting as human beings and forming a relationship during the interview process. This type of design is flexible and the goal is to reach a depth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Essentially, the interviewer and interviewee are both playing an active role in the interview process and are both influencing each other by the sharing of their own experiences. The sharing of experiences allows them to connect and relate on more of an interpersonal level. Self-reflection is also an important aspect of responsive interviewing. According to Rubin and Rubin, researchers need to examine their own reactions and understandings, and personal involvement is important in this type of interviewing as empathy gets people to talk. Self-reflection helps improve the overall quality of the interview. It also allows both the interviewer and interviewee to put themselves into the shoes of each other in order to empathize and understand their experiences. Through the sharing of experiences and reflecting on those experiences, it lets both the interviewer and interviewee learn something from each other through the process. Most importantly, self-reflection helps create a comfortable interview environment in that it allows the interviewer to reflect on the questions being asked to ensure that they are appropriate and don't cause any discomfort. This is especially important with touchy and personal subjects, such as disability. For example, during one of my interviews, I noticed that the person I was interviewing was having difficulty answering my questions. The interviewee mentioned that he was having a hard time with my questions and felt a little

uncomfortable. I then took a few moments during the interview to reflect on some of the questions I was asking. As I reflected, I tried to put myself into the interviewee's shoes by thinking of different questions that would not only be easier to answer, but that would be less personal and more comfortable. For instance, rather than asking him too many personal questions about his disability and the challenges that he faces in the classroom, I asked the interviewee questions about what he saw as his strengths of being a teacher and what he felt were some of the benefits of being a teacher with a disability.

Furthermore, responsive interviewing also involves conversational partnerships and extended conversations. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), the researcher and interviewee develop a relationship within a conversational partnership that influences the interview process. In this type of interviewing, the researcher needs to answer the same questions about themselves that they have posed to their partner. This allows for more disclosure and openness from both the interviewer and interviewee, which again, creates mutuality, comfort, and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. For example, in one of my interviews, one of my participants, who has a hearing impairment, mentioned that he asks students to speak one at a time during group discussions so that he can hear them. He then asked me how I handle noise in the classroom. I responded that I often ask students to raise their hands high or speak louder so that I can hear them, and I also sometimes have students speak one at a time during whole class discussions. This mutual sharing of our own experiences not only helped create more openness, but it also allowed both the interviewee and I to continuously learn throughout the interview. Conversational partnerships also allows the interviewer to step into the shoes of the interviewee and likewise. This creation of empathy can help the interviewer become more aware of the interviewee's feelings towards the questions. For instance, when interviewing individuals, there

were times when I would communicate my agreement with subjects such as "I know just what you mean, I've had the same experiences, and I know how you feel."

Finally, in terms of extended conversations, Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that during the extended conversation, both the interviewer and interviewee develop common understandings that differ from person to person. Responsive interviewing recognizes that "each conversational partner has a distinct set of experiences, different constructions of meaning of those experiences, and a different area of expertise" (p. 33-34). This implies that each interview is unique in its own way and has its own identity. By having different experiences and expertise, this not only gives both the interviewee and interviewer the opportunity to gain new perspectives, but it also allows them to look at the world from a different point of view. Most importantly, it creates a sense of diversity amongst conversational partners. Using my study as an example, I selected interviewees that had different experiences, such as one interviewee was totally blind and another had minimal vision. I also had participants with different disabilities and areas of expertise, such as Political Science and Biology. Having participants from different backgrounds helped both the interviewee and I to look at things from a different point of view and gain different ideas in regards to teaching. For example, one of my participants shared that she gets students engaged by asking them a silly question at the beginning of each class period. I shared that I often will ask a student to read a certain passage on the PowerPoint in order to get them engaged. Sharing this allowed both the interviewee and I to gain different perspectives on how to better engage students. Overall, creating diversity amongst participants is what helped make this study unique.

Responsive interviewing will allow me to better organize my data into themes and analyze how each of the themes work together in explaining how college professors with

disabilities utilize impression management in the classroom. Responsive interviewing also provides my participants with the opportunity to fully open up about their experiences and how their disability impacts them in the classroom. The freedom that responsive interviewing offers to interviewees will allow me to develop an understanding of their thoughts and opinions; it will also give me more data to analyze which will be useful in painting a clearer picture of how college professors with disabilities are using impression management in the classroom.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format. Responsive interviewing is a form of semi-structured interviewing. The semi-structured format is a conversational type of interview format where the participant and interviewer talk about important topics as they pertain to the research questions that the researcher is seeking answers to. Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015) explain that semi-structured interviews are for the most part open-ended which allows participants to answer openly. Most importantly, a semi-structured interview allows participants to freely express their opinions and gives flexibility to both the interviewer and the participant. Overall, responsive interviewing/ semi-structured interviews provide a fuller picture of the interviewee's beliefs or perceptions on a particular topic or issue (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004).

**Recruitment of participants**

All participants for this study were recruited using the snowball and purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher uses his or her own judgment when selecting a sample. This sampling method gathers rich data needed to answer the research questions and allows the researcher to identify specific individuals who have the knowledge, experiences, and the information that the researcher needs in order to answer the research questions (Blankenship, 2010). Initial recruitment for this study occurred over email and by phone. Via email or phone, I recruited participants who have a self-identified disability and are professors at a community

college or university. Once I received confirmation, I emailed participants to set up a time, date, and place to meet to conduct the face-to-face interview. If the interview was via phone, I contacted participants through email to set up a date and time to call and conduct the interview. In addition to purposive sampling, I also used the snowball sampling technique by interviewing people who my participants and I know personally who are instructors and have a self-identified disability. Snowball sampling is a technique used when members of the specific population are difficult to locate (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). After each interview, participants were asked to refer other potential participants who may be interested in participating. Referrals were then emailed; the recruitment process for referrals followed the same process as the initial participants.

For face-to-face interviews, I had participants read and sign their consent forms prior to the start of the interview. For phone interviews, I sent the consent form, via email, a few days before the interview and had participants read and sign the form and then send the signed form to me electronically. I then verified that the form was read, signed, and received on the day of the interview.

**Participants**

The total sample for this study consisted of eight college instructors with self-identified disabilities. Four participants were male and four were female. All participants were Caucasian and ranged from the ages of 26 to 65. Four of the individuals were full time professors, two were teaching assistants, and two participants were part-time adjunct faculty members. Of those participating, six worked at four mid-size universities and two worked at a small community college. Participants had college teaching experience ranging from one year of teaching experience to 28 years. Education levels varied amongst participants: Three participants had Ph.D. degrees, three held MA degrees, one interviewee held an MS degree, and one interviewee

held an MD degree. Participants were from a variety of academic departments, including

Rehabilitation Counseling, Political Science, Communication Studies, Biology, and Ethnic

Studies. The sample included a wide range of disabilities. One female interviewee identified

herself as autistic, two male interviewees acknowledged themselves as hearing impaired, two

female interviewees had vison impairments (one completely blind and the other had sever tunnel

vision), and one female and one male participants identified themselves as paraplegic. In

addition, one male participant identified himself as partially quadriplegic.

**Interview process**

For this study, five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and three interviews

were conducted over the phone. The face-to-face interviews took place at a location that was

most comfortable and convenient for each participant. Phone interviews were completed at the

local campus radio station. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. A total of

twenty questions were asked in the interview (see Appendix A). Each interview was recorded,

and before the interview participants were asked to give their consent for the interview to be

recorded. Before the interview, all participants were informed that the information they provide

will remain confidential and that their real names won't be used in the final report of the study.

During the interview, I took note of my participant's nonverbal and verbal behaviors as a way to

ensure that they weren't uncomfortable with the questions being asked.

Interviews followed a structure that went as follows: Building rapport questions, probing

questions, and closure questions. In the beginning of the interview, I began by asking

participants about their work and educational background, as well as about their personal

experiences living with a disability, such as the challenges and obstacles that they face. By

building rapport, this helped create a more relaxed, casual, and comfortable interview

environment. With such a personal subject, building rapport allowed my participants to feel more comfortable and at ease with the questions being asked and with disclosing personal information. Most importantly, it allowed the interviewee and I to relate and connect on an interpersonal level. After building rapport, I then started to dive into more personal questions that related to being an instructor with a disability and their usage of impression management. I asked participants to discuss how they use impression management in the classroom and the strategies and tools that they use to teach effectively. I also asked them to discuss how their disability impacts them in the classroom and what they do to incorporate their disability into the classroom. While I asked questions in a similar order as they appeared on the interview script, I tried to deviate from the script by letting the interview lead itself by asking questions not present on the script in order to create more of a conversation between the interviewee and I and to get the interviewee to open up and dig deeper about the topics discussed. I concluded the interview by asking participants for closing thoughts and for advice on how we can communicate better with professors with disabilities and with people with disabilities in general. Finally, at the conclusion of each interview, I debriefed by asking participants how they were doing and how they felt the interview went.

**Method of analysis**

The method for the analysis of the data centers on the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge that describe the phenomenon or theoretical framework. The identifying of themes involves a careful reading of the data. These themes then become categories for analysis (Fereday &Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This type of analysis serves five purposes: Seeing, finding relationships in the data, analyzing data, thoroughly observing a case, and quantifying qualitative data. Essentially, thematic analysis is used in order to reduce

and maintain large amounts of data without losing the context and for organizing, summarizing, and focusing the interpretation of the data (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

**Coding**

I transcribed all content of each of the eight recorded interviews in great detail, except for things not relevant to this study, such as bibliographical information. This was done as a way to ensure that each transcription clearly included all items relevant to my thesis, and only leaving out material clearly not of value to my study. While listening to each interview, I would often go back and replay certain parts of the interview again. This was done in the event that any parts of the interview were unclear and to ensure that the information was accurate and that nothing was missed. Participants were assigned fake names on the transcriptions. No follow-up interview was conducted.

After completing all transcriptions, I saved a copy of each transcription onto my computer. The coding process involved five steps:

In step one, I coded and placed passages under the research question that the passage best fitted under; such as passages that related to the disclosure of disability were placed under research question one. I did this by going through each transcription and reading passage by passage.

In step two, as I read each passage, I assigned a color for each research question, such as yellow if a passage pertained to research question one.

In step three, I placed each colored coded passage into the appropriate research question. I also created a color code for the miscellaneous section which is for passages that didn't fit with any of the research questions, but that could still be relevant to include in my analysis.

In step four of the coding process, I began by examining the passages under each research question and looking for one or two themes that emerged from each question. Overall, there were around five to six themes that emerged from my examination (one to two themes per research question).

In the final step, once all of the themes were laid out, I then selected five or more passages for each category/theme that I felt best represented that particular theme.

In the next chapter, I present the results and analysis of the study. Essentially, I analyze how college instructors with disabilities use impression management techniques in order to teach effectively in the classroom. I also discuss the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Direct quotations from interview participants are incorporated into the analysis of my findings in order to provide a fuller and deeper understanding of the usage of impression management techniques by college instructors with disabilities.

**Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study. More specifically, I combine my participants' experiences with the research discussed in chapter two in order to further explore and understand the impression management techniques that college instructors use to help them teach more effectively in the classroom. As I coded my data, I found two themes in two of the three research questions. One research question included one theme. Once again, the research questions for this study are:

RQ 1: How do professors with disabilities decide when and how to discuss their disability to their students?

RQ 2: How do college professors with disabilities perceive their disability and how it impacts their teaching effectiveness?

RQ 3: What impression management strategies are college instructors with disabilities using in order to manage the way that they are perceived in the classroom?

The major themes that emerged from my analysis included, 1) immediate disclosure of disability, 2) educating about disability, 3) improving relationships with students, 4) improving instructional techniques, and 5) making disability a non-issue.

**Two themes related to RQ 1**

RQ 1 focuses on how college instructors with disabilities decide when and how to disclose their disability to their students. The two themes that emerged from RQ 1 are: *The immediate disclosure of one's disability* and *educating students on disabilities*.

**Immediate self-disclosure**

The first theme that evolved from RQ 1 was *the immediate disclosure of disability*. Instructors in this study disclose their disability as a way to eliminate the stereotypes and assumptions placed against them. In the interviews, I asked participants how they decide when it is appropriate to reveal their disability to their students, and most mentioned that they do it on the first day of class in order to eliminate the stereotypes placed against them. For instance, Eric, a hearing impaired professor, responded to this question by saying "I tell them the very first day of class, it's necessary and helpful for them to know that I have a hearing impairment. They need to know that I don't hear well or they'll think I am not attentive" (personal communication, March, 2nd 2016). In addition, Lauren, an instructor with cerebral palsy, discloses her disability not only to avoid stereotypes, but also to make students gain exposure and awareness of disabilities. According to Lauren, "I try to overcome the challenges by being very honest about my position and identity. Verbally confronting them on the first day and letting them know that I am sure it feels different for them to have a professor with a disability because I know that there are not many of them and I understand this experience being different for everyone and I will do my best to be as open as I feel comfortable" (personal communication, February 23rd, 2016).

As expressed in Lauren and Eric's responses, immediate disclosure of one's disability is important because it helps eliminate some of the biases and stereotypes that non-disabled students carry about people with disabilities. This connects to Hasashi and May's (2011) study which found that people often hold negative stereotypes or assumptions about people with disabilities because they don't have enough awareness of people with disabilities. Therefore, instructors in the study disclose their disability as a way to give students more awareness about disabilities which can encourage students to let go of the stereotypes and assumptions that they

hold. Most importantly, instructors in this study disclose their disability as a way to give students different perspectives on instructors with disabilities and disabilities in general.

Another finding of interest from the interviews is that interviewees in this study disclose their disability early on in order to create the kind of impression or face that they want to give in the classroom. When instructors face judgments or assumptions, this can lead to a loss of credibility, competence, and face. Thus, in this study it was observed that the interviewees' disclosure of their disability helped them maintain their credibility and competence as a teacher. In my interview with Jennifer, who is a visually impaired instructor, she mentioned that she would be uncomfortable not disclosing her disability. When asked why, she responded "I would be uncomfortable if they didn't know about my visual impairment because I could be standing up there lecturing and someone raised their hand and I didn't see it and they would think I was a mean instructor because I didn't see it. It's very important for me to disclose my disability right away" (personal communication, February, 25th 2016).

Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) argue that in interactions, people use communication strategies in order to save an image or an impression, particularly their own. Teachers, such as Jennifer, Lauren, and Eric disclose their disability as a way of avoiding the risk of losing their image as an instructor or being seen as less competent. In other words, they may fear that because they have a disability and are viewed as inferior that they will be seen as lesser by their students. Therefore, instructors, especially Lauren and Jennifer go out of their way to protect their own face, such as by acting knowledgeable. In general, it is gathered that instructors interviewed for this study, disclose their disability in order to maintain or construct the image of themselves that they want to convey to their students, such as being seen as a knowledgeable teacher.

Very much related to the above is how instructors interviewed for this study disclose their disability in order to define the situation in the classroom. According to Goffman (1959) "the definition of the situation" explains how individuals make sense of the situation and how they are expected to act in that situation in order to create an impression of themselves that coincides with the situation that they are in. In my study, Jennifer, defines the situation in her class by telling students about her condition and what she expects from them. When I asked Jennifer why she feels the need to disclose her disability immediately, Jennifer discussed that she discloses her disability as a way for students to understand her situation and to respect her as an instructor. As she explains,

The first day of class, I go over the syllabus and one of the first things I do after I give my name and tell them where my office is, I tell them about myself and about my vision impairment. The main reason I tell them is because I want them to understand that the reason I don't see something is because I can't see well or the reason I run into things is because I didn't see it.  By telling them about my disability early on, it trains them in a way that they know I better move my backpack because she is not going to see it or someone will tell me, "Jennifer someone put their backpack there so you might run into it", and they inform me of these types of things. I am very upfront with my students' right at the beginning of the semester and tell them about my vision impairment, and I find that they don't take advantage of that, rather they are helpful (personal communication, February, 25th 2016)

Jennifer's response illustrates that instructors disclose their disability as an impression management strategy to model how they expect students to act and perform in the classroom. This not only gives students a better understanding of how to act in the situation, but through the

teacher's and the students' performance of these expectations, it gives the impression that the classroom is a site for mutual openness, trust, and respect. This idea of mutual understanding and trust ties in with Beattie (2007) study which found that when teachers disclosed their disability, students started respecting them as their teacher rather than acknowledging them for their disability. Beattie's study and Jennifer's disclosure of her disability highlights that immediately disclosing one's disability in the classroom is helpful as not only does it help students understand what is needed and expected of them in the classroom situation, but it allows them to see the teacher for who they are as a person rather than their disability.

**Educating about disabilities**

The second theme from RQ 1 is *educating students on people with disabilities*. A few of my participants shared that they discuss some of the challenges that people with disabilities go through in order for their students to understand what some of their clients may go through. When Jennifer discussed how she incorporates her disability into the classroom, she mentioned "I tell stories and I teach about it. I am constantly educating them because as future nurses or hygienists they need to know how to deal with people with disabilities. I've been in situations where someone should know I have a disability and need help, but they disregard it "(personal communication, February 25th, 2016). Similarly, John, who is partially quadriplegic, talks about some of his own challenges in the classroom in order to model the difficulties that his students clients are going through. "I tell them how I struggle with my own anxiety and how I overcome them. I model what their clients are going through" (personal communication, February 3rd, 2016).

Jennifer and John's responses clearly demonstrate that it is necessary to discuss some of the limitations that people with disabilities go through as many students or individuals without a

disability may not be aware of those limitations or about disabilities in general. This connects with Beattie's (2007) study which found that "teachers with disabilities can influence the perception and attitudes of students by educating them on what people with limitations go through" (p. 21). Some of the perceptions or stereotypes that students hold about people with disabilities are not only a result of society's views about disabilities, but also because people are not educated about people with disabilities, primarily because it is something that is not always discussed. Thus, instructors in this study discuss the struggles and limitations of people with disabilities as a strategy to create more empathy and understanding in the classroom and to give students a different perception or impression of people with disabilities, such as seeing them as inspirational people who have overcame adversity. In addition, the instructors in this study seem to also be doing this as a strategy to help students better communicate and work with people with disabilities. Some non-disabled people may not know how to communicate with people with disabilities, again, due to the lack of knowledge. Therefore, modeling how to communicate better with people with disabilities may help improve the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people. It can also serve as a stepping stone for improving the perceptions and stereotypes of people with disabilities.

While conducting my interviews, it was interesting to discover that instructors in this study have their students discuss their own stereotypes and biases in the classroom. I found this especially useful as it is a topic that isn't always discussed both in the classroom and in society. A good example of this is when I asked John how he incorporates his disability into the classroom, and he brought up the fact that he has his class discuss their own stereotypes and how society often jumps to conclusions about people with disabilities. "I try to develop confidence in the classroom. We spend a lot of time in the classroom talking about our own stereotypes,

prejudices, and our own biases" John further elaborates on this point by mentioning that "we spend time talking about how society often jumps to conclusions about people with disabilities. I use myself as an example and I use any type of an example that can to help my students deeply connect to what we are talking about, whether it's myself, others, or life in general" (personal communication, February 3rd, 2016).

Having students talk about their own judgments and biases can be best explained by Goffman (1959) concept of front and backstage identity. Often, the stereotypes or perceptions that we make are placed in the backstage, especially in the classroom where these stereotypes might not always be discussed. However, openly discussing these stereotypes in the classroom moves these stereotypes from the backstage to the frontstage. Instructors in this study moving their students stereotypes from the backstage to the frontstage is beneficial for various reasons, including to build better communication and trust, to make them understand the consequences of their stereotypes, and to work together to change these perceptions and judgments. It is especially important when it comes to teachers and students constructing a positive image and impression of themselves in the classroom as our impressions are often created through how we present ourselves on the frontstage.

I found it particularly interesting how instructors in this study incorporated their disability into their lesson plans in order to give students a better understanding of the course material and to teach them more about disabilities, such as about some of the misconceptions associated with injury. For example, Jennifer incorporates her vision impairment into the classroom by sharing her experiences with a disability and connecting that to what students are learning in class. According to Jennifer, "with teaching Anatomy, we have a unit on the eye, in one of my classes, I spend a great amount of time talking about my disability and how it relates to what we are

learning with the retina and photo receptors, so it's a perfect time to talk about it and students thoroughly enjoy it and ask many questions" (personal communication, February 25th, 2016). In addition, in my interview with John, he talked about how he sees his disability as a way of educating students on some of the misconceptions that people have about people who suffer from injuries. "In my medical aspects class, when I talk about neurological disorders, I will use myself as an example. There are a lot of misconceptions about nerve damage that if you break your neck, you can't feel anything, that's not always the case. I tell them about the chronic pain and the misconception of sensation. We also spend a lot of time talking about invisible disabilities" (personal communication, February 3rd, 2016).

Furthermore, instructors in this study including their disability into the curriculum serves as a good strategy to improve their image and credibility in the classroom. This connects to Stephen Gilson (2000) essay on teaching as a quadriplegic instructor where he mentioned that "responses from the source of knowledge, myself, and my work helps decrease anxiety and the negative biases that come with discrimination" (p. 132). Because of their disability, some students may assume or fear that as a result of their limitations they are not knowledgeable or capable of teaching. Thus, instructors in this study use their own disability and experiences as a method to change their students' perceptions of them and to create the impression that they are knowledgeable and capable of teaching. By creating this impression, instructors in this study are not only using it as a way to prevent discrimination and to protect their image, but also to help alleviate the fears and anxieties that their students hold of them as instructors. In other words, instructors in this study are creating this impression and talking about their disability as a way to breakdown the communication barriers and create better communication between themselves and their students.

One of the most inspirational findings from my interviews is that instructors in this study see their disability as a way to educate their students on respecting and understanding human differences. A lot of the instructors that I interviewed talked about how they educate their students on human differences as a way of getting them to honor these differences and to make them understand that there is no such thing normal. For example, when I asked John if he wanted to be perceived as an able-bodied person by his students, he mentioned that he wants his students to see that his disability is just another human difference and that normal to him is a bad word. "We tell students that disability is just another human difference. I try to get them to take disability as an equation; I tell them to call me John. In my field, normal, is a bad word, normal means average. To be normal, means to be higher than everybody else, it is a misinterpreted word in society" (personal communication, February 3$^{rd}$, 2016). Bruce, who is a hearing impaired professor, also teaches his students to be mindful of differences, as well as he encourages his students to take it a step further by introducing themselves to those who are considered differently-abled. "We are all differently-abled and we have to honor and respect that. I encourage them that if you know students on campus who are differently-abled, take the initiative and reach out. If you see minority or international people, go up and introduce yourself, you never know they may end up being your best friend" (personal communication, February 17$^{th}$, 2016). Bruce further explained how he motivates and trains his students to recognize those differences.

> I try to inspire people to be professional, to be human and humane, to understand that there are differences amongst all of us, that every day we have to have personal hygiene, and we have to have discipline about recognizing differences. We do have prejudice that comes with us and are part of our baggage, we all experience xenophobia, we all fear new

things or someone who is new which makes us anxious, but we can discipline and train

ourselves (personal communication, February 17th, 2016)

Instructors in this study educating their students on human differences and the idea of

normalcy fits in nicely with Goffman's concept of performance. Goffman (1959) defines

performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his

conscious presence before a set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (p.

13). Society constructs ideas about what it means to be abnormal and normal, such as normal

means to be able-bodied or average. These ideas are constructed through our interactions and

performances of our identity. With this in mind, instructors in this study use their own

performance and communication as a way to change students' perceptions on what it means to

be normal, and they do this by teaching students on the ideas of disability and normalcy. As

mentioned, the way these ideas get formed about normalcy is through performance, therefore in

order to reconstruct these perceptions; performance and educating students on normalcy is

needed in order to do so.

Furthermore, instructors in this study encouraging their students to communicate with

people who are different than them is a very important finding that is necessary to discuss. Some

students may be fearful or nervous about communicating with those from different backgrounds,

primarily because they haven't any interactions with a person who is different. Therefore,

instructors in this study are educating students about being different and communicating with

those who are different in order to help ease their anxieties and to break the communication

barriers that exists between people with and without a disability. Breaking these communication

barriers can motivate students to drop their negative stereotypes, which can help create better

respect, understanding, and empathy between those with and without disabilities. Most

importantly, instructors like Bruce, encouraging their students to communicate with those that are different from them is needed not only to improve communication, but to create more diversity and to allow students to learn and gain different perspectives from those that are different from them.

### Closing remarks

RQ 1 asks the question: How do instructors with disabilities decide when and how to disclose their disability to their students? Based on my analysis of these two themes, it is evident that instructors in this study disclose their disability only if it is relevant to the course content or if it is useful towards them or their students. In terms of students, instructors in this study disclosed their disability when they felt it was necessary to make themselves more empathetic to students going through similar challenges. Instructors in this study also made decisions about disclosing their disability if they felt it would helpful to them as instructors, such as in terms of saving their own image if they are judged by a student. This decision of deciding when and how to disclose their disability can be quite complex in that instructors not only have their image to consider, but they also have their disability to consider as well.

## Emergent themes from RQ 2

RQ 2 looks at how instructors with disabilities perceive their disability and its impact on their ability to teach effectively in the classroom. *Improving relationships with students* and *improving instructional techniques* are the two primary themes that developed from this research question.

**Improving relationships with students**

*Improving relationships with students* was the first theme that emerged from my analysis of RQ 2. One of the first things that caught my eye is that instructors in this study see their disability as a way to make themselves more accessible and approachable to their students. For example, Ben, a paraplegic instructor, sees his disability as a way to be approachable to his students and to communicate with them on a more interpersonal level. "My disability makes me approachable to my students. I think they see my body and the way I carry myself, they find that they are able to have actual conversations with me. I don't think my disability hinders my relationship with my students, at least not at the end of the semester" (personal communication, February 12th, 2016). In addition, in my interview with Molly, who is a professor who is blind, we were talking about how she creates a positive image of herself as a teacher, and as we talked, she mentioned that she shows her students that she is there for them by being accessible and listening to their own life problems. "I try to communicate with them all, so that I am accessible to them as human beings. I do sometimes have students come and talk to me about what is going on in their life. I had a student come in the other day and vent to me about his situation with a girl that he is seeing. I will listen to them and do my best to tell them what I can" (personal communication, February 10th, 2016).

Being approachable and accessible to students is important in improving teacher-student relationships in that it makes the teacher more relatable to the students. Some students, including myself, perceive teachers as an authority figure in the classroom. These perceptions can make the professor look less human than they really are. Linking this back to Scott (2007) study, professors are under pressure to perform their professionalism, and in lecture this can be especially difficult as teachers are required to adopt an authoritative role. Therefore, professors

in this study see their ability to be accessible as a way to escape from their role as an authority figure.

Several instructors in this study explained that they believed their disability made them appear more human to their students. Being more human allowed instructors in this study to communicate at eye level with their students which not only helped them construct a more positive connection and relationship with their students, but it also allowed both themselves and their students to influence one another. When students, like Molly's, disclosed their challenges, this presented instructors in this study with the opportunity to disclose some of their own flaws, insecurities, and challenges, not just to make them more human, relatable, and approachable, but to create this mutual influence between their students and themselves. For instance, Jennifer mentioned that when she discloses her own challenges, this influenced her students to relate and disclose some of their challenges as well. "Let's face it, a lot of students have challenges and when they know that their instructor has challenges of her own, it makes me more relatable to them" (personal communication, February 25th, 2016).

Through being approachable and human-like, instructors in this study are constructing this idea that the classroom is a place where the student and teacher can be human together. This construction is best explained by Goffman's concept of performance. During a performance, the actor tries to persuade the audience by giving them the impression that the identity they are portraying is their true identity (Goffman, 1959). Applying this to the study at hand, instructors, like Molly and Jennifer, created the impression that while they are authority figures, they are also helpful resources to their students. Instructors in this study made this impression believable through being available, approachable, and through this mutual sharing and understanding of their own and their students challenges. Those interviewed believed that making this impression

of being more human not only helped create a more positive image of themselves as teachers, but it also improved their teaching effectiveness in that by being approachable, it showed that they care and are supportive of their students. Caring for their well-being and showing support causes students to build more respect and trust in their teacher. This mutual respect and trust enhances their effectiveness as a teacher and fosters more of a positive classroom environment. Overall, the fact that instructors in this study believed their disability made them more human and approachable illustrates the fact that we don't teach to teach, we teach to inspire and make a difference in students' lives.

Another noteworthy finding from my analysis is that having a disability helped instructors in the study be able to relate to students who are considered outsiders or who have limitations like them. For example, Eric sees his hearing impairment as a huge advantage as it makes him more relatable to students who have similar limitations. According to Eric, "I use my disability as a way of relating to them, being human, and vulnerable. Some of them don't hear well and some of them have other limitations. I think it's an advantage in some ways to have a definable limitation because students will sometimes relate directly to that and speak about their limitations. It's an advantage in that it creates empathy" (personal communication, March 2nd, 2016). Similarly, Bruce also sees his disability as a way of relating to students who are considered outsiders like him. "I work with a lot of international and minority students and I think because I have always felt like an outsider, I have enjoyed working with them because they are an outsider and I can relate and understand what they are going through" (personal communication, February 17th, 2016). Lastly, in my interview with Molly, I asked her about some of the positives of being blind. She mentioned that being blind is beneficial because it not

only let's her relate to students who have limitations, but it also helps her advocate for those who are seen as not so good. As she explains,

> I feel like I can relate with other people who are considered not as good. I feel like that gave me a little bit of a window on what other people deal with in the world. I can have solidarity, if I weren't blind or had any kind of a disability or illness, maybe I would be more insolated. Because of being blind, when they would say bad things about black people or poor people, there was something in my mind that said, wait a minute, I am not as good of a human being in other peoples eyes too. I am going to take what they are saying about people who are black or poor with a grain of salt. (personal communication, February 10th, 2016)

These observations from my interviews with Bruce, Eric, and Molly illustrate that relating to students, especially those with similar limitations, is important not only in improving their relationship with students, but also in finding common ground with them. The fact that instructors in this study have a disability allows them to find commonalities with their students, whether that is a similar limitation or a related experience. Instructors in this study finding what they have in common with their students is a tactic that they are using to increase their ability to connect with their students. By finding similarities with their students, this allows instructors to form a sense of community in the classroom. In addition to finding similarities, instructors in this study use empathy as an approach to build their connection with students. Being an instructor with limitations can be a benefit in that it gives them the capability to sympathize and place themselves into the shoes of students who may be going through similar challenges, it also allows students to empathize with their instructor as well. For example, in Bruce's interview, he mentioned how his disability made him a better listener. "By being hearing impaired, I am an

outsider too, so I can relate to being an outsider. It's made me a better listener, I listen to who people are and I want to know who you are. I love learning about people and it's the reason why we are here, it's an enriching thing to do" (personal communication, February 17th, 2016).  This creation of empathy applies to Vogel and Sharoni (2011) study which found that having a disability allows teachers to be able to place themselves into the shoes of students who are going through similar issues. With that said, empathy and creating common ground creates mutual understanding, respect, and trust between the teacher and students. It also creates better communication and listening which are just two of the most important aspects in improving the relationship between the teacher and student.

**Improving instructional techniques**

The second theme that evolved from RQ 2 is *improving instructional techniques* in order to influence how instructors with disabilities are perceived in the classroom. It was interesting to learn the strategies that instructors in this study took to enhance their credibility, and it was also interesting to discover the techniques that these instructors used to improve the image of their students. For example, in my interview with Paige, who is an Autistic instructor, we were talking about how she gets students more engaged, and she mentioned that she comes up with alternative ways to make students more comfortable and engaged in class discussions. "I look for ways to make my activities more accessible, and I make sure to give people who may not feel comfortable with any particular activity, an alternative activity" She further adds "one of the things I do is the introvert cheat card, and its note cards that they turn into me at the end of the class and they can write questions that they would like to talk about or write ideas that they have for activities rather than verbally talking in discussions. It helps them feel like they are welcome in the class even if they are not comfortable" (personal communication, February 16th, 2016).

Paige's interview helped me see that accommodations, flexibility, and adjusting the classroom environment are all important techniques in improving both the student and the teacher's image and in increasing their relationship. The benefits of these techniques can be best explained by the concept of face. Face is beneficial in building positive rapport between the student and teacher (Lasley, 1979). Instructors in this study had a fear of expressing themselves due to uncomfortably, and they also feared being judged. This fear helped instructors in this study use it as a way of relating and being more empathetic towards students who held similar fears. Having this mutual fear allowed instructors in the study to create this impression of a compassionate and caring teacher, and through this impression, it made them form a better connection and bond with their students. In addition, using these techniques also saves the students image. Sometimes when individuals, especially individuals with disabilities open up about their experiences, this can lead to stereotypes or judgments. Thus, by providing an alternative way to express themselves, like Paige did, this may help prevent a student from being labeled and can help protect their image. Overall, instructors in this study finding alternative ways to have students express themselves in a more private way might be helpful in addressing the stereotypes regarding people with disabilities without the fear of being known or judged.

Furthermore, it was astonishing to discover the numerous of techniques that instructors in this study use to train their students on how to work and communicate with them more effectively, however the fact that some students haven't had much exposure to people with disabilities doesn't make this at all surprising. During my interview with Eric, I asked him what it's like being a teacher with a disability to which he responded "I sometimes have a student in the front tell me what someone in the back said. In some cases, they have to write it down as I can't see where a question comes from, so they have to raise their hand so I know who

spoke"(personal communication, March 2nd, 2016). In addition to having students repeat what was said in the back, Eric also uses a directive style approach during discussions in order to make it easier for him to hear in class. "We do some discussions, but it has to be one person speaks and then the next. I couldn't hear what anyone said if it's all at once. I'll have them raise their hands and I'll invite comments, it's not an open form" (personal communication, March 2nd, 2016). Similar to Eric, Jennifer also trains her students on what is expected of them in the classroom. As Jennifer explains,

> I tell students don't bother raising your hand because I am not going to see you, just holler if you have a question. If you raise your hand it's because that's what you've been trained to do, but I am probably not going to see it. When students say "is this the structure?" I train them that I need to point it out to you and then I'll ask, "is this what you were pointing to?", or take my finger and put my finger to where you are pointing to so that I know what I am supposed to be looking for. (personal communication, February 25th, 2016)

The fact that instructors, like Eric and Jennifer, teach their students about what is expected of them and inform them about how they should act in the classroom proves that this is crucial in teaching students how to communicate effectively with instructors with disabilities, as well as it is necessary in improving the relationship between the student and instructor. This links to Goffman's concept of "the definition of the situation." According to Goffman (1959), "he can influence the definition of the situation by expressing himself in a way that gives them the kind of impression that will lead others to act voluntarily in accordance to his plan" (p.3). In terms of communicating effectively, some students may not have had an instructor with a disability which can make it difficult for them to understand how to interact and what is expected of them in the

classroom. This lack of training and knowing what is expected of them can be the cause for some of these stereotypes surrounding people with disabilities. Therefore, instructors in this study teaching students about how to act is a way of helping students know and become more comfortable in working with people with disabilities. By defining the situation for students, it can also help make them become more respectful towards the instructor, especially if the student better understands how their disability affects them. Most importantly, it creates more mutual empathy and understanding between the student and teacher.

### Closing remarks

In RQ 2, I attempted to find out how instructors with disabilities perceive their disability and its impact on their ability to teach effectively in the classroom. Instructors in this study see their disability as a benefit and as an advantage to their ability to teach effectively in the classroom. As a matter of fact, their disability improves their ability to teach effectively in that it makes them more relatable and enhances their ability to connect with students. It is also a benefit in that it makes them more human and approachable to their students. Overall, instructors in this study see their disability as an important asset and tool in their classroom.

## Theme from RQ 3

Finally, RQ 3 explores the types of impression management strategies that college instructors with disabilities use in order to influence how they are perceived in the classroom. The main theme that emerged from the analysis of this question was the theme of *making disability a non-issue*.

**Making disability a non-issue**

The main theme that developed from RQ 3 was *making disability a non-issue*. Speaking of making disability a non-issue, instructors in this study created this idea that their disability is not a problem in order to drop the previous assumptions that students hold about disabilities and the classroom being a site for the able-bodied instructor. According to Dunn and Andrews (2015) study, people with disabilities were once seen as being pitied or needing help in order to achieve life tasks. In comparison, Dunn, Clare, and Holland (2010) mention that society caters to able-bodied people, which leads to the perceptions that people with disabilities are in need of help because they are in a society where able-bodied is the superior group. Instructors in this study use certain techniques in order to change these assumptions, one of them being not making their disability the center of attention. For instance, during my interview with Eric, I asked him how students respond when he discloses his disability, he responded "my disability, it's significant; it's something that I've had to directly think about, work on, and constantly let those around me know. It's significant, but at this point of my life, apart from making a quiet office and managing the classroom, it's not the center of attention" (personal communication, March 2nd, 2016). John also doesn't make his disability the center of attention by teaching his students that having a disability is just a part of everyday life. As he explains "anytime I bring up my own disability, I try to bring it up in such a way to convey to everyone that it's no big deal. If I stumble, it doesn't have to be a big deal. Disability should be understood like skin color or hair color, being a natural part of the environment and it doesn't need any extra attention" (personal communication, February 3rd, 2016). From these interviews, it is clear that instructors' making their disability a non-issue is important in order to eliminate some of their students perceptions about disabilities and to give the impression that their disability isn't important. It is also crucial

as some students may be so focused on their disability that they might not focus on the class itself. Therefore, instructors in this study demonstrate that their disability doesn't affect them in order to not distract the learning process.

Furthermore, instructors in the study made their disability a non-issue in order to save and protect their own and their students' image. Instructors in this study use the technique of making their disability and the term "disability" light-hearted rather than negative or serious. For example, Eric uses humor as a way to make light of his condition in the classroom. As he explains "I try to make it a non-issue or an advantage through grace and humor. There is no reason to talk about it unless it's helpful to them" Eric further adds "someone will say something and I'll mishear it and repeat it and everyone will laugh" (personal communication, March 2nd, 2016).

These techniques that instructors in this study use to make their disability a non-issue connects with the idea of mutual-face concerns, which is the concern for both oneself and the other person's needs and interests (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). In class, the instructor may face stereotypes or prejudice remarks which can harm their image as a teacher, such as their credibility. Therefore, instructors in this study use the strategy of not bringing attention to their disability as a way to help them not only avoid stereotypes, but to also help them create a more positive impression of themselves as teachers, such as being seen as more competent. On another note, when students judge or stereotype against an instructor with a disability, this can cause them to lose their face as well, such as they may be seen as disrespectful. Thus, Eric, John, and other instructors in the study give the impression that their disability is not a central issue in order to not only save their face, but to save the face of their students who may make those stereotypical remarks against them.

Besides turning attention away from their disability, another finding that I found fascinating is how instructors in this study made their disability a non-issue through their performances in the classroom. Goffman (1959) explains performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his conscious presence before a set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (p. 13). Instructors in this study utilized performance in order to give the impression that their disability doesn't hamper or affect their ability to teach. Jennifer, for example, mentioned that she knows all of her information and that her disability doesn't affect her knowledge. "Although it has hampered me a little bit, it hasn't changed me as an educator, I still know the information" (personal communication, February 25th, 2016). Ben replied similarly when asked what made him want to be a teacher "I don't think about disability when I think about life. It doesn't hamper my ability to teach" (personal communication, February 12th, 2016). Ben also discussed more about making his disability a non-issue while explaining the strategies that he uses to create a positive image of himself as an instructor. As he explains,

> I am unapologetic in who I am. I don't use my disability as a crutch, I talk about my
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> successes and failures with my students and I talk about how bad of a public speaker I
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> can be and how I struggle in my own relationships. That is one of the strategies I use to
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> project who I am to my students. I think being able to show vulnerability is important and
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> getting students to really connect. (personal communication, February 12th, 2016)

In most of the interviews, I noticed that most of my participants didn't feel their disability impacted them in the classroom or that they saw their disability as being a limitation and they seemed to pass as able-bodied in the classroom in order to give the impression that they can teach just like everybody else. It seems logical to conclude that the instructors in this study have

performed this impression that their disability doesn't affect them for quite some time which has caused this impression to become created and embodied into the classroom. Embodying this impression into the classroom is a technique that instructors in this study are using to make their disability not a barrier to their teaching. The performance and embodying of this impression is important in the classroom because the instructor's actions and performances speak louder than their words when creating an impression. An instructor can certainly say that their disability doesn't affect them, but they need to demonstrate it through their performance in order to give that full impression.

I found it intriguing how instructors in this study define the classroom situation through their performance in order to take focus off their disability. According to Goffman (1959), "he can influence the definition of the situation by expressing himself in a way that gives them the kind of impression that will lead others to act voluntarily in accordance to his plan. When an individual appears before an audience, his actions will come to influence the definition of the situation" (p.3). Students often come into class with preconceived assumptions, expectations, and standards about what a "normal" teacher is supposed look and act like. Thus, instructors in this study try to meet those standards of the classroom situation by communicating to students that they are able to teach, such as by sharing their experiences or through other strategies, such as being more organized in order to show that they are competent in the classroom. For instance, Jennifer, creates the impression that she is a competent teacher by better organizing things in lab. As she discusses "I organize my stuff and go around the room and make sure that I see this model is there and I know where everything is at because I want to be well informed as possible. I want to make sure that I am the knowledgeable person in the room" (personal communication, February 25th, 2016). The classroom has been constructed as a site for able-bodied teachers, thus

in order to maintain that impression that has been embodied into the classroom by society, instructors in this study attempt to pass as able-bodied teachers as a way to correspond with the expected norms and standards that have been set in classroom. The fact that instructors interviewed pass as an able-bodied instructor proves that it is vital for them to follow the behaviors that are expected of them in the classroom. Not following these expected behaviors and norms in a given situation is what can lead to the stereotypes that people with disabilities often face.

Last, but not least, I found it especially crucial, yet very truthful that instructors in this study use certain strategies to make their disability part of their hidden identity. One strategy that teachers in this study use is communicating to students that their disability doesn't make their identity, rather it is who they are as a person that defines their identity as a teacher. As Lauren states, "people with disabilities aren't solely defined by their disability or what society views as deficient, but they are a person with different interests. There are a number of differences to their identity and their disability doesn't define who they are" (personal communication, February 23rd, 2016). A second strategy that my participants use is showing students that there many positive characteristics that they as an individual and as a teacher possess. They use this strategy as a way to place their identity as a person with a disability on the back burner. Molly, for example, believes that they are many other positive characteristics to her identity, and therefore she performs those characteristics to her students. As she explains,

> I don't think the fact that we have a disability is the most important thing about us. I really don't. If I were to talk about identity, there are other things that would come up before that, my gender, my profession, my political views. For me, disability is not real high on the chart. It's one characteristic of the many characteristics that I have. Maybe it

has made me more sensitive to prejudice or to people being violated because I won't put up with someone else's humanity being disrespected. Maybe it has something to do with that because of the things I have encountered. My disability doesn't tell anyone about the commitments I have and who I am. I know people consider it their central identity, if they see themselves that way, then that's their right, but I wouldn't consider it the primary thing about who I am. (personal communication, February 10th, 2016)

As we saw in the first theme from RQ 1, instructors in this study made their disability part of their identity, however in this theme, disability becomes part of their hidden identity. This switch between known and hidden identities compares to Goffman's idea of the frontstage and backstage. As Goffman (1959) states, the frontstage is where the actor gives the impression of himself that he wants to convey to the audience, and the backstage is where their true identity is hidden from the audience. When teachers in this study immediately disclosed their disability, this brought their identity as a person with a disability to the frontstage in order to give the impression that they are people with difficulties just like anyone else. However, when instructors in the study chose to not let their disability define them, this moved their identity as a person with a disability to the backstage. The true identity that instructors in this study wanted to convey to their students then became part of their frontstage, such as being seen as competent and knowledgeable. This switching in-between making their disability their frontstage and backstage identity illustrates that instructors in this study do this to maintain the impression that while they are humans with challenges, they are also teachers who teach and their disability doesn't make up a large portion of who they are as instructors.

**Closing remarks**

RQ 3 explores the ways in which instructors with disabilities use impression management strategies in order to influence the way that they are perceived in the classroom. Based on my findings, it is apparent that instructors in this study are often faced with judgments or stereotypes that get embedded in society. Therefore, making their disability a non-issue is necessary not only to take the attention off of the instructor, their disability, and these stereotypes, but to also show their students that their disability doesn't define them as a person or as an educator. It is clear throughout this theme of making disability a non-issue that performance is the key strategy needed, not only to make disability a non-issue, but to change some of the views that society often holds about people with disabilities.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

In this final chapter, I discuss the implications and limitations of the study. I also provide suggestions for future research. In addition, I revisit the experiences that have brought me to this study. Finally, in this chapter, I provide closure for this study by expressing what I have learned throughout this process, both professionally and personally.

**Implications**

The first implication of this study is that it demonstrates that instructors with disabilities have many advantages. One advantage is that having a disability allows instructors to be able to connect and relate to students. Instructors in this study had many challenges, as did their students. Therefore, it helped both them and their students better understand and empathize with each other. In addition, many of my participants also had flaws and insecurities, like their students, which made them more relatable and brought them to eye level with their students. Their flaws and insecurities also made them more human which helped improve their relationship and communication with their students. Another advantage is that the instructor's disability and their own experiences with having a disability can present them with a lot of knowledge to pass onto their students. For one, instructors with disabilities can give students different perspectives or examples from their own life as it relates to topics discussed in class in order to help them see life and the content learned in class differently. For example, if one of the topics revolved around discrimination, the teacher may share their experience of being discriminated in a job interview because of their disability as a way to show students how their stereotypes or judgments affect people in real life. As learned from my participants, having a disability gives teachers something unique and interesting to discuss, especially since not many

classes cover this topic of "disability." The fact that their disability gives them something unique to discuss increases their effectiveness as a teacher in that it creates more active participation and engagement from students. All in all, while having a disability can come with certain teaching challenges, it also comes with a host of benefits, including the fact that it enhances one's ability to teach effectively.

A second implication of this study is that it highlights the fact that instructors with disabilities are very similar to instructors without disabilities. One way in which they are similar is that they go through similar challenges and anxieties. Instructors in this study went through similar challenges, such as getting students more engaged and dealing with difficult students and colleagues. In addition, they also have some of the same anxieties, such as the fear of students not liking them and nervousness about not being prepared for class. For instance, Paige, like many instructors, worried about how the classroom would gel and what her students would be like. Secondly, instructors with disabilities are like non-disabled instructors in that they use impression management in similar ways. While instructors with disabilities are viewed as inferior and have to work harder to create a good impression, they are still held to some of the same standards as their non-disabled colleagues, such as they are expected to be role-models, credible, and competent. One way they use impression management similarly is in terms of face. Like instructors without disabilities, instructors with disabilities also go through experiences where their credibility or image is at risk or questioned which causes them to use certain face strategies in order to protect and improve their image as a teacher, such as better organization. How instructors with and without disabilities define the classroom situation for their students is also very similar. This is similar in that they both inform and train students on what is expected

of them and how they are expected to act in the classroom, such as training students that they need to speak one at a time rather than all at once during discussions.

A third implication for this study is that it gave a number of individuals with disabilities a voice. As mentioned numerous of times, many people with disabilities don't have much of a voice because they are viewed as inferior in society. Therefore, this study will not only help inspire instructors with disabilities to speak up, but it will also present them with more opportunities to have a voice. The interviews that I conducted serve as a good example for this. While I listened to my participants share their experiences of being an instructor with a disability, this gave me the courage to speak up about my own experiences as a person and as an instructor with a disability. This mutual sharing of our own experiences not only caused us to influence one another, but it also presented us both with the opportunity to have our voices heard. This connects to Rubin and Rubin (2005) concept of responsive interviewing, which is when the interviewer and interviewee are in a relationship where they mutually influence each other in the interview process. Furthermore, this study will help instructors with disabilities develop alternative ways to express themselves without the risk of losing their image, such as a blog where they can express themselves, but remain anonymous. As evident in this study, instructors with disabilities are at risk for losing their image or credibility. Therefore, developing alternative ways to express themselves will not only help them express themselves, but it will also save their image at the same time.

The fourth implication of this study is that it demonstrates how impression management can be a useful way to view how we, as individuals, communicate messages about our identity through our everyday performances. Generating a better understanding of this theory can be useful in making individuals more aware of their own performances and impressions which may

help resolve some of the issues surrounding disability, such as discrimination and prejudice. As humans, we subconsciously perform our identity and create impressions of ourselves to others. The fact that our performances are done subconsciously, makes us unaware of how our own actions or behaviors are affecting our image and the perceptions and impressions that others have of us. The discrimination and stereotypes of people with disabilities are often a result of this unawareness. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of how we use impression management in our everyday lives can help us become more conscious of our actions and the impressions that we give off to others, both verbally and non-verbally. This awareness may also be beneficial in eliminating the stereotypes made against people with disabilities as it will make individuals, including those with disabilities, more aware of how their performances are influencing or causing these stereotypes. For instance, it could make an instructor with a disability more cautious of how they are defining the classroom situation in order to avoid the stereotypes made against them. Most importantly, this study will provide instructors and people with disabilities with the impression management strategies needed to combat these judgments and stereotypes, such as in terms of face.

A final implication of this study is that it demonstrates how the impression management theory can be beneficial in understanding how teachers with disabilities use impression management in the classroom in order to protect and improve their image and to meet the high standards expected of them as teachers. For one, this theory can help gain a better understanding of the difficulties that teachers with disabilities experience when trying to meet these high standards and in creating a certain impression in the classroom. Teachers are not only expected to be role models and set a good example for their students, but they are also held to high standards and are expected to meet them, such standards include, being knowledgeable,

competent, and capable of teaching. Meeting these standards can be even more of a challenge for teachers with disabilities as their disability often makes them inferior to their non-disabled colleagues and students. Therefore, teachers with disabilities need to use certain impression management techniques in order to meet these standards and to gain superiority in the classroom, such as by passing as an able-bodied instructor. With this in mind, the theory of impression management is not only beneficial in understanding the complexities of being a teacher with a disability, but it is also useful in exploring how teachers with disabilities go about meeting these high standards and creating the impression of a credible and competent teacher, such as in regards to performance and face. Most importantly, the impression management theory is useful to the study of teachers with disabilities as it can help generate new impression management strategies that may help teachers with disabilities not only meet the high standards expected of them, but that may also help them in creating a more positive image of themselves as teachers.

**Limitations**

The first major limitation for this study was the types of disabilities studied. For this study, there were five different disabilities studied, autism, hearing impaired, paraplegic, quadriplegic, and vision impaired. While this may seem like quite a few, some of the instructors disabilities were repetitive in number, such as two vision impaired and two hearing impaired instructors. Although this study is limited to these types of disabilities, it may be due to the fact that these types of disabilities are a representation of the disabilities that are both visible and ones that some instructors are more likely to self-identify themselves with. Some teachers may have invisible disabilities that are unnoticeable and are ones that people don't consider a limitation or a disability, such as depression. On another note, while the lack of different types of disabilities was a limitation, it was also a limitation in that it prevented the study from digging deeper on

how instructors with the same disability disclose their disability and utilize impression management in the classroom. However, the limit of teachers with disabilities available made it necessary to go broader rather than too specific.

Another limitation was the sample used for the study. This study included all college instructors, which did not include the perspectives of students of those whom I interviewed. While I gained a lot of helpful insights from my participants that were useful to both this study and to me as a researcher, I believe this study would have gained a more fuller picture of how college instructors with disabilities use impression management in the classroom if the perspectives of students were incorporated into the study, along with their instructors. In the interviews, I asked my participants how students responded to their disclosure of their disability, and some of my participants shared that they weren't necessarily sure how their students felt. Therefore, for future studies, it would be beneficial to get a student's perspective on their teacher's effectiveness and their use of impression management in the classroom and compare that data with their teacher's. Doing so would provide a deeper understanding of how instructors with disabilities use impression management in the classroom, both from a teacher and student standpoint.

The last limitation for this study was in terms of the research method used. There was a limited amount of time in the study to conduct an ethnography or classroom observation of the eight interviewees' teachings in order to provide, me, as a researcher with a more clear understanding of how my participants perform their identity and incorporate their disability into the classroom. It also limited me from physically seeing how my participants demonstrate and use impression management while teaching in front of students. Like I mentioned above, all of my interviewees provided me with enough data that was useful in helping me understand what it

is like being an instructor with a disability and using impression management in order to help them teach effectively. However, combing both interviews and ethnographies, would have allowed me to develop a further and more in-depth understanding of how college instructors with disabilities utilize impression management in the classroom.

**Future research**

Based on the findings and limitations for this study, one suggestion for future research is to focus on the impression management strategies of teachers with disabilities at all levels of education, including K-12 and Preschool teachers. First, future studies should compare and contrast how educators with disabilities at different levels of education disclose and incorporate their experiences with a disability into the classroom, such as how does a 2nd grade teacher talk about their disability to students vs. a college instructor. Secondly, it was not clear from the interviews, the different factors that teachers with disabilities take into consideration when deciding how or if they should disclose their disability to their students. Therefore, future research should explore the different factors that go into a teacher's decision on whether or not to disclose their disability, such as the intellectual or age level of students. This is important for future studies in order to gain a deeper understanding of how impression management is used by teachers with disabilities in the education system as a whole and also to develop a better understanding of how the amount or use of impression management varies amongst educators with disabilities at all levels of education. Most importantly, when I conducted this study, I found it fascinating the different reasons why teachers with disabilities use impression management, such as to connect with students. Consequently, future research should further examine how the reason for the usage of impression management differs for teachers with disabilities across the education system.

Another recommendation for future research is to examine how teachers with disabilities from different countries and culture backgrounds use impression management and how they disclose and incorporate their disability into the classroom. This study was limited to the United States and to Caucasian teachers; no other race or ethnicity was studied. Further studying different countries and cultural backgrounds can provide a fuller picture on how impression management is used by teachers with disabilities both globally and across different ethnicities and races. Future studies should also explore ways in which teachers with disabilities from different countries or backgrounds disclose and discuss their disability in the classroom. This would be interesting to study as cultures have different ways of communicating and have different values or norms about the disclosure of one's disability. In addition to cultural backgrounds, future research should look into how teachers with disabilities from different regions of the United States use impression management and discuss their disability in the classroom. Unfortunately, this study was limited to the Midwest region, with the exception of one participant being from the east coast and another from the southwest part of the United States. Therefore, it would be important and fascinating to look beyond the Midwest and explore the communication techniques of teachers with disabilities from different parts of the United States in order to get a clearer picture of how impression management and disclosing one's disability differs or compares from those in the Midwest or in other regions of the United States.

A final suggestion for future research is to focus on students with disabilities and their disclosure of their disability and usage of impression management. Since this study focused only on college instructors, it might be interesting to look at the other side of the desk and see how students disclose their disability to others and use impression management and how that compares or contrasts with teachers with disabilities. Another potential study could be to observe

how students disclose their disability and use impression management with their peers verses

their instructors. These are both important studies for future researchers to conduct as it will give

more of a broad understanding of how impression management is used by people with

disabilities in the education system as a whole.

**In summary**

Through conducting this study, I have learned so many remarkable things that have

helped me grow as an individual. I was encouraged to do this study last year by my favorite

professor, Dr. Brown, who told me "Chelsie, you should think about writing about your own

experiences being a person with a disability, I think you have an inspirational story to tell." I'll

admit I was hesitant to not only write about my experiences, but to conduct this study in general.

The experiences that I went through were so traumatic that they left me with a permanent scar. I

was scared to go back or even talk about these experiences for fear that they would leave me

feeling worthless or guilty all over again about having an impairment. This study has helped me

see my own disability in a more positive light in that it has encouraged me to be proud of my

disability and to see that having a disability is beneficial in so many ways, such as it helps make

us more human. It has also made me see my own experiences differently in that it has made me

realize that sharing my own story is not only important for my own healing, but it is also

important in helping others who may be going through a similar situation. Throughout this

journey, I have learned more about myself, such as that I am capable of doing more than what I

thought I could do, such as I have the ability to inspire and make a difference. Most of all, this

study has made become the strong person that I am today.

Not only has this study impacted me personally, but it has also influenced me as an

educator. In my teen years, it was my dream to be a teacher and it was a career that I loved more

than anything. Then when I went through the traumatic experience of being discriminated by my professor four years ago, I lost all the hope and dreams that I had for teaching. Not only did I feel worthless and like I would never be able to do anything no matter how hard I tried, but I also felt like my disability was being seen as something negative in the world of teaching. However, I have regained all of that enthusiasm and passion that I had for teaching because of this study. Through my interviews, I have learned that I am not alone and that many of the challenges that I have went through were ones that my participants have gone through as well. I have also discovered that there are many positives to being a teacher with a disability, such as that my experiences have given me plentiful of knowledge to pass onto my students. In addition, I have gained many helpful strategies from my participants that have helped me improve my effectiveness as a teacher. For instance, the fact that my participants shared their experiences with their students encouraged me to start sharing my experiences more with my students. Doing this helped me create more of a positive bond with my students. In general, this study has made me grow as an educator and has made me see that I really am capable of being a teacher.

Overall, I have learned so much throughout this study, not just about myself, but also about others as well. Most importantly, I have come to realize that as instructors with disabilities, we do have the power to inspire and impress. All we need to do is believe and we can make greatness happen for all.

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IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

## **Appendix A: Interview questions**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself?

2. What is your work and educational background?

3. What has life been like living with a disability?

4. What is it like being a professor with a disability?

5. What made you want to become a teacher? How did your disability play a role in that decision?

6. What tools or strategies do you use to help you teach effectively in the classroom?

7. What are some of the challenges and obstacles that you experience in the classroom?

8. How do you overcome those challenges? What strategies or methods do you use to overcome them?

9. What would you say are your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a teacher? What do you do to overcome or improve your weaknesses?

10. Do you tell students about your disability in the classroom? If so, how do you determine when or if it is appropriate to reveal your disability to your students?

11. If you do inform students about your disability, how do they react or respond?

12. How do you incorporate your disability or your experiences with having a disability into your classroom? What do you do to teach your students about your disability?

13. If you don't reveal your disability in the classroom, what are your reasons behind not doing so?

14. How do you feel your identity as a disabled person impacts your communication and relationships with your students?

15. What strategies or methods do you use to create a positive image of yourself as a teacher?

16. Can you tell me about an experience in the classroom or in an interaction with a student where you felt like your face or image was being threatened.  How did you handle this?

17. What fears or anxieties do you experience when you enter the classroom and when you teach? What do you feel are some of the fear and anxieties that your students have about having a professor who has a disability?

18. How do you perceive your disability in terms of its impact on your ability to teach effectively in the classroom? In other words, in what ways do you feel your disability impacts you in the classroom?

19. How does your usage of impression management with your students differ from your usage of impression management with your colleagues?

20. What advice would you give to students or colleagues at the university on how to better communicate with professors with disabilities?

**Appendix B: Participant consent form**

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Chelsie Gaspar and I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am currently conducting research that involves college instructors who self-identify themselves as disabled. This research is being conducted under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. David Engen.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand ways in which college instructors with disabilities use impression management in the classroom. The purpose is to also develop a better understanding of the experiences and challenges that professors with disabilities face while in the classroom and discovering how they are able to overcome those barriers.

Procedures: If you agree to participate and sign the consent form, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately an hour. Before conducting the interview, I will explain to you how the interview will be conducted, informing you that the interview will be audio recorded, for which I will obtain your consent. In the interview, you will be asked questions about your teaching and personal experiences with a disability. I will then move into more personal questions, including your experiences being a professor with a disability, how you communicate with students in the classroom, and the strategies that you use to help you effectively teach in the classroom. At any time, if you feel uncomfortable answering a particular question, it is your right to skip any questions that you are uncomfortable with or end the interview. You may also ask to end the interview at any point.

Risk and Benefits:  Some of the questions asked in the interview will be quite personal and may produce discomfort as you explore your thoughts on the topic—this is the main risk of participation. One benefit of this study is that it will give you the opportunity to express yourself and to have a voice. Another benefit is that this research allows you to open up about your experiences being a college professor with a disability and the obstacles that you had to overcome. Finally, participating in this study will allow you to share strategies or methods that are helpful to you in the classroom, which may be useful to other professors with disabilities.

Confidentiality: All information gathered will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any report of this study, instead pseudonyms will be used. If you accept being audio recorded, the recordings will not be shared with anyone. Consent forms and recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato.  These items will be accessible only to the researcher and her academic advisor. Recordings will be deleted no later than three years after the completion of your interview. Your comments may appear (without your name) in a graduate thesis on this topic and in potential research articles about teachers with disabilities.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Voluntary nature of study: Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your current or future relations with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Even if you sign the consent form, you are free to stop participation at any time. You do not need to complete participation if you feel uncomfortable doing so

Contact: If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at Chelsie.Gaspar@mnsu.edu or (507) 389-5359. You may also contact my advisor at David.Engen@mnsu.edu or 507-389-5537. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the treatment of human subjects, contact: MSU IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Institutional Review Board, (507) 389-1242.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this page of this form and return all pages of the consent form to me. For face to face interviews, you can hand the signed consent form to me on the day of the interview. For long distance interviews, once you have received the email with the attached consent form, please read it and sign the form. You will then need to scan all pages of the consent form and send me all pages of the consent form as an email attachment. Contact Dr. Engen or me at the contact information above to arrange how to receive a copy of this form if you would like a copy to keep for yourself. Thank you for your participation.

I have read the above information and understand that this interview is voluntary and I may stop at any time. I consent to participate in the study.

Your Signature _____          Date _____

MSU IRBNet LOG #: 835528-1

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT