

Twenty Four

The Hegemonic Impulse for Health and Well-Being A Saga of the Less Well and the Less Worthy

Linda Ware

If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as Crystal Palace, with a military band playing softly and a cinematograph working brightly; then I'd go out in the back streets and the main streets and bring them in, all the sick, the halt and the maimed; I would lead them gently, and they would smile me a weary thanks, and the band would softly bubble out the 'Hallelujah Chorus.'

—*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* (1908)

Disability requires adaptation, and we fool ourselves if we believe our buildings and policies will be expected to change more than the individuals who must access them.

—D. T. Mitchell, Foreword to *A History of Disability* (1999)

With the launch of each new semester, college campuses across the nation welcome new and returning students amid banners and with celebratory rituals designed to assure students that they have chosen one of America's Best Colleges! Typically, the search for a suitable college, facilitated by the initial browsing of colleges' Web profiles, begins well in advance of a student's senior year of high school. In streaming texts that proclaim a uniquely "exclusive" experience, unlike that offered by any other institution, many college Web sites look remarkably the same, with images of brown, black, Asian, and "other" diverse bodies parading across college Webpages—product-placement style—as if to convey exclusivity as synonymous with diversity. Market-managed mission statements brand colleges today as champions of diversity, social justice, and equity; some even link specific course offerings to ongoing campus-based diversity concerns. Students peruse college Websites in the hunt for the perfect fit, weighing institutional reputations, individual academic interests, extracurricular offerings, and increasingly, on-site recreational facilities, which will provide all the amenities to support personal wellness and a healthy lifestyle. Health, the hegemonic imperative, is conveyed in today's cul-

like racism, sexism, and ageism, is readily grasped in the context of social justice, Lennard J. Davis (2002) warned that in everyday use, ableism should not be reduced to a “trait or habit of thought on the part of certain somatically prejudiced people” (p. 102). Instead, he urged the use of critical literary analysis to ensure a “move away from the ‘victim-victimizer’ scenario, with which ableism, along with racism, sexism, and other isms, has been saddled and which leaves so little room for agency” (p. 102).

Ableism and Agency

Agency in the case of disability proves complex given the untroubled assumption that disability is synonymous with dependence and lack of attainment, as Nirmala Erevelles (2000) noted in her discussion of the politics of citizenship for persons with severe and/or cognitive disabilities. Similar to Linton, Erevelles borrowed from Young (1990), although she noted the limitations of Young’s analysis as it excluded persons viewed by society as (im)material due to cognitive impairment (p. 12). Erevelles explored issues of social justice in the example of individuals who fall outside that which is deemed “normal”—a concept generated by statisticians in the 19th century (see Davis, 1995; Hacking, 1990). Hacking, though, was quick to remind that statistics actually “uses a power as old as Aristotle to bridge the fact/value distinction, whispering in your ear that what is normal is also right” (p. 160).

Among contemporary philosophers engaged by disability studies and discussions on ableism, their scholarship considers issues related to personhood (Anita Silvers, 1995; Silvers & Wasserman, 1998); dependence and caring (Eva Kittay, 1999); autonomy (MacIntyre, 1999); opportunity and justice (Martha Nussbaum, 2006); and philosophical analyses of the just distribution of resources for special education provision in Pre K–12 settings (Lorella Terzi, 2008). Terzi veers from the antifoundational arguments typical of special education and instead draws on many of the foregoing philosophers and John Rawls (2001) to propose a framework for the just distribution of opportunities and effective access to educational equality for all.

Ableism, Agency and Education

Although disability has come to be viewed as the exclusive domain of special education, disability studies scholars are quick to trouble this assumption given the tradition in the social sciences and education that has long fixed individuals with disabilities as objects of study. Disability studies scholars Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, in their treatment of the cultural locations of disability, contend that among the disciplines most dependent upon narratives of disability in need of “normalization” (special education, physical therapy, occupational therapy, communication disorders, etc.), disability studies represents both a “threat and a saving grace” (2006, p. 189). On this, they offer:

It represents a threat in the sense of a once silenced object now given the agency to talk back to the professions that would speak its inferiority; a saving grace in that the inclusion of disabled people in any meaningful way suggests fields that are beyond reproach in their humanitarian commitment (p. 189).

Thomas Hehir (2002), the former director of the Office of Special Education Programs and now on the faculty of Harvard, defined ableism as “the devaluation of disability” (1). In

his essay “Eliminating Ableism in Education,” Hehir cited the “pervasiveness” of the ableist assumptions that come into play in the education of children with disabilities that “not only reinforce prevailing prejudices against disability but may very well contribute to low levels of educational attainment and employment” (ibid). Hehir argued that “ableist assumptions become dysfunctional when the educational and developmental services to disabled children focus inordinately on the characteristics of their disability to the exclusion of all else.” (4).

In sponsored research for the New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE), Hehir and his colleagues completed a comprehensive review and evaluation of the special education program that included the DOE’s oversight of this legally mandated program (2005). Their discussion of the dysfunctional and bloated bureaucracy that has long characterized the NYC DOE underscored an “inordinate reliance on medical model service delivery systems [that] can compromise the interests of children with disabilities” (p. 13). In the final analysis, their report resonates with the insights of Gregg Beratan in discussion of “institutional ableism” (2006). Beratan traced educational policy for disabled children and youth across decades of federally funded initiatives mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that has, in practice, ensured disparate opportunity for disabled children in public education. Both Hehir and Beratan point to the structures that have been codified by society through legal bureaucratic means and financed by public dollars that undermine educational opportunity for the less able and less well among us. Finally, in complement to Hehir’s analysis, the Australian sociologist Fiona Campbell (2008) raised discussion of “internalized ableism” which, like internalized racism, is an “ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture” (p. 152).

Disability as a “Symbolic Network”

What becomes apparent in this brief overview of disability studies scholarship is that when we shift to understanding disability as a “symbolic network” of meaning, we find that death, disease, injury, rehabilitation, and cure are de-emphasized and greater emphasis is placed upon disability as a product of social injustice. On this, Tobin Siebers (2008) argued:

[disability studies] does not treat disease or disability, hoping to cure or avoid them; it studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas attached to disability identity and asks how they relate to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression, attacking the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being.

Disability studies writ large, offer insight into historical, political, and social meanings ascribed to disability and to disabled populations that reveal the workings of power, knowledge, and culture. With this as the background, our attention can turn to an interrogation of systems that have long shaped a form of social oppression unique to people with disabilities. Disability studies offers the opportunity to understand this system of oppression while simultaneously asserting the positive value of the contributions to society by disabled people (Linton, 1998; Siebers, 2008; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006).

The section that follows attempts to contextualize ableism and disability studies situated within the context of burgeoning concerns for temporarily disabled students in postsecondary institutions. The “Case of Cat” offers a composite narrative informed by various data sources that include interdisciplinary disability studies literature; media accounts that inform

the public construction of disability and wellness; e-mail discussion specific to the role of disability service provision on college campuses; information posted on college Web sites across the United States and accessed during the 2007–2008 academic year; and excerpts from the “local” experiences of undergraduate students who participated in campus activism in support of disability awareness and access at Graceland (pseudonym), a small liberal arts college in upstate New York during the 2007–2008 academic year.

The Case of Cat

Following a minor accident during her freshman year, Cat sustained an injury that resulted in the acquisition of a temporary mobility disability that would shape the remainder of her undergraduate college experience at Graceland. Self-described as “unpoised,” but armed with a set of aluminum crutches, Cat recounted her early efforts as she “crutched” across campus—a term she coined in an effort to spin out her new, albeit temporary identity. Graceland is noted for its exceptional beauty, located at the Western “gateway” to the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, it is distinguished by gorgeous hills and a nearby gorge. Sloping pathways wind through the campus beneath a canopy of hardy trees whose gnarly roots shape a network of raised seams along the brick and cobblestone paths. Following Cat’s injury, this picture-postcard setting became a danger-riddled obstacle course that included a forty-five minute excursion (one way) from the freshman dorms tucked below the base of the “Hill” to her classes atop the “Hill.”

With an enrollment of just under 6,500 students, the campus is not expansive. However, the only roadways are those located along the perimeter, near faculty parking lots and student dorms. Not unlike many college students managing a fifteen credit-hour course load, Cat usually filled her backpack to capacity. Now that she was sporting crutches, the weight of the backpack intensified. However, this was a “no choice” scenario: she either crutched all the way back to the dorm at midday to drop off her morning materials and collect her afternoon supplies before crutching back up the Hill, or she would bear up and carry the full load all day. Depending on other daily commitments including labs, college-wide events and extra-curricular activities, Cat planned her day with this in mind. This route became even more treacherous as the winter months covered the paths with snow and ice. Repeated falls and slips resulted in re-injury and extended her use of crutches for months beyond the six weeks her physician initially recommended.

A Trip to ODS

Cat’s early attempts to seek support as a temporarily disabled student led her to the Graceland Office of Disability Services (ODS). She searched the ODS Web site where she learned:

Graceland, in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and related state and federal legislation, is dedicated to providing responsible advocacy, reasonable accommodations, and support services to students with disabilities who present current and proper documentation of disability to the Office of Disability Services. It is the mission of the Office of Disability Services to provide qualified students with disabilities, whether temporary or permanent, equal and comprehensive access to college-wide programs, services, and campus facilities by offering academic support, advisement, and removal of architectural and attitudinal barriers.

And further:

The Office of Disability Services will proactively provide, at no cost to the student, reasonable accommodations designed to ensure that no qualified student with a disability is denied equal access to, participation in, or benefit of the programs and activities at Graceland.

In sum, ODS maintained, “It is the goal of the Office of Disability Services to maximize student success, self-advocacy, and independence in an accessible academic environment.”

Despite this seemingly responsive language, Cat would soon learn that Graceland was similar to many colleges across the United States that had yet to institutionalize support mechanisms for temporarily disabled students. Support turned on a student’s “qualification” for entitlement that ultimately turned on the decisions made by one individual. Reasonable accommodation was not provided in Cat’s case as her primary needs pertained to *access*, which meant moving from point A to point B across campus. Upon arriving at various campus buildings, access also meant getting inside without having to balance herself on one crutch as she pulled a heavy door towards her and then pivoted in a turn to right herself to enter. Access included temporary transportation on campus via the low-speed Global Electric Motorcars (aka “Gem” cars) used by Graceland to move computer hardware, garbage, recycled materials, and other small loads. In Cat’s estimation, the Gem cars could greatly facilitate campus access for students with temporary disabilities. Finally, *access*, at a minimum, meant that Graceland would provide a map that designated accessible routes on campus (i.e., doors with pushbutton entry, elevator designations, non-stair/step pathways, and disabled parking spaces) so as to minimize wasted steps and lost energy. When Cat learned that Graceland had no such map, she created one. Each semester, the map passed from office to office for approval, at the time of her graduation four years later, the map still awaited approval.

Campus Access: A Non-Issue

By the end of her freshman year, Cat had related her concerns to various administrators including the president, the provost, and the dean of students, since Graceland maintained a literal “open door” policy for students and faculty alike. Given the inclement weather that year that sequestered students in their dorms, it was perhaps the image of an “unpoised” Cat propped up on crutches, with her mountaineer’s backpack precariously perched on her slight physique, that suggested the seriousness of her concerns. With each visit, she recounted the obstacles she experienced, questioned how permanently disabled students navigated the Graceland campus and how visitors and family members managed on the campus. She volunteered to organize a campus walk-through for the administrators to point out the obstacles, but despite her valiant efforts to raise awareness, she ended her freshman year with a sense of failure. Her repeated efforts to voice her concerns yielded little more than empathetic gestures and a polite nod that preceded the question, “*Have you shared your concerns with ODS?*” At first, the question seemed sincere, but after Cat had heard it again and again, it became an insult: of course she shared her concerns with ODS!

The question also served to remind that all things disability-related were considered the exclusive domain of ODS, and that office held the administrative power to determine the response to issues, and to dismiss what amounted to a non-issue. In Cat’s view, this seemed odd (pun intended) as her concerns were tagged as unique and “special,” yet they fell outside the

general concerns of the campus. Cat soon realized that there were very few disabled students and faculty on the Graceland campus, with the exception of those who, like herself, were temporarily disabled. This reality, against the refrain she heard again and again: “Our campus is just not friendly to people with disabilities,” proved increasingly troublesome. It, too, was an odd construction, seeming to suggest that the “campus” was culpable, rather than the individuals who constituted the campus. In Cat’s mind, this was contrary to the emphasis on “community” that was repeatedly stressed well past her initial welcome to campus, and one in which the “community” was intended to represent individuals rather than structures, buildings, and policies.

The Administrative Nod to Disability

In the spring semester of her sophomore year, Cat was invited to speak to the Campus Committee on Safety. As she once again recounted her experiences, *sans* any visible markers of disability, she noted the polite attention of students, staff, and faculty who made up the committee, although her concerns did not appear to register as a legitimate “safety” issue. Following her presentation, as if on cue, one of the committee members asked, “*Have you shared your concerns with ODS?*”

Cat would later learn that in the final report to the President, prepared by the Campus Committee on Safety it was noted that when the committee returned the following year (Cat’s junior year), her concerns merited further attention. However, no such notification followed until the spring of her senior year. At that time, Cat submitted a letter chronicling four years of concerns specific to access, addressed to the Chancellor of the state system. Soon thereafter, many things quickly fell into place, as we will see.

After Cat’s initial injury she grew acutely aware of the difference between architectural and attitudinal barriers. She was drawn to strangers she saw crutching across campus, whom she often pressed for information about their access experiences. She became increasingly aware of the absence of visibly disabled students and visitors on the Graceland campus. This was remarkable given the number of students with visible disabilities that had been part of her public school experiences. Cat wondered about the impact of this exclusion and whether the lack of visibility influenced the non-issue status of her concerns, and she wondered if the administration’s nod to disability was visible to anyone else.

The Constitutive Outside

In the disability studies literature, Michel Foucault is often summoned to explain societal responses to excluded people, which many scholars have extended to include discussion specific to disability (Davis, 2002; Mitchell & Snyder, 1997, 2000; Tremain, 2005). Recent scholarship by Tobin Siebers (2008) expanded on the notion of the “constitutive outside” in a treatment that borrows from Foucault’s (1984) use of “heterotopias”—places external to all places, even though they may be possible to locate in reality (Foucault, 1984). These spaces assume movement back and forth from the center to the margin such that the center “requires for its very existence the others at the margins, and that in this sense the margin is the true center” (Siebers, 2008: 133). What holds in the example of Cat is how this theoretical notion might be applied to explain the *dis-ease* summoned by her early interactions with Graceland administrators.

Although Cat held only a temporary pass to the land of disability, she nonetheless entered a “heterotopia” by virtue of this “different experience.” According to Siebers:

People with disabilities living on the margin have a different experience. Their experience demonstrates that society is constructed without their access in mind and with little thought of visiting the places left to them (Siebers, p. 133).

In a nuanced discussion of the value of disability experience as “evidence,” Siebers draws from various media accounts of marginalized individuals who, on a daily basis, experience the prejudice (somatic or intentional) that accompanies their disability. He cited the case of George Lane, a wheelchair user who was jailed for his refusal to climb up two flights of stairs to a courtroom in Tennessee. Lane was subsequently jailed for contempt, and when he attempted to seek damages, his case was declined on the basis of “states rights.” Several legal bouts later, his case made its way to the United States Supreme Court (*Tennessee v. Lane* 2004), and in a surprise decision, Lane won the right to sue the state of Tennessee for damages under Title II of the ADA. The particulars of the case are elaborated upon by Siebers (see especially pp. 120–134). Suffice it to say, the attitudinal “v.” architectural issues noted by Cat were revealed in this case as well.

Siebers also cited, for example, the fact that of the 12,487 taxis in New York City, only three are accessible, leaving few options for the many disabled people in need of an accessible cab, whether as residents or visitors. Similarly, in the case of Robert Fine, a native New Yorker who acquired multiple sclerosis and became a wheelchair user and was reluctant to give up his West Village apartment. Instead, Fine opted for a life that was largely restricted to his apartment, taking only occasional trips out when, his friends would carry him down from the second-floor. These are common, “no choice scenarios,” faced by disabled people in the example of transportation and housing, and they parallel, in many ways, those experienced by Cat. They reveal the challenges posed by understanding the socially constructed nature of disability experience, which Siebers contends has the “potential both to augment social critique and to advance emancipatory political goals” (p. 122). With allusion to the often-anthologized H. G. Wells short story, *In the Country of the Blind* (1904), Siebers observed:

In a country of the blind, the architecture, technology, language use and social organization would be other than ours. In a country of the mobility impaired, staircases would be nonexistent, and concepts of distance would not imitate our own. In a country of the deaf, technology would leave the hands free for signing, and there would be no need to shout across a noisy room (p. 122).

Awareness Beyond the Nod

On temporary assignment to the disability “gulag” (Harriet McBryde-Johnson, 2003), Cat was acutely aware of both the social marginalization the disabled experienced on campus and the fact that disability was not among the diversity concerns targeted by Graceland. Like many campuses across the nation, the legally mandated ODS “owned” all disability-related issues on campus. It operated in higher education in much the same way that special education operates in general education: it is highly invested in specialization, exclusivity, and the promulgation of a form of beneficence that would ultimately mark the field as “beyond reproach in their humanitarian commitment” (noted earlier by Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). Thus, there was no

collective investment in access and the inclusion of disabled individuals on campus outside the ODS. In much the same way that Graceland, as a structure, not as a collective community, was ultimately faulted for being hostile and unfriendly to the disabled, the onus for including disability beneath the banner of multicultural concerns fell to no one person in particular. Or, as in Cat's case, it did fall to one person in particular, the ODS administrator.

Cat came to this insight slowly as there were no venues on campus to discuss any aspect of disability except those framed by treatment, cure, and correction. The nuances Siebers outlined relative to disability experience rooted to cultural concerns, agency, and value that would advance emancipatory political goals were not part of any social, academic, or administrative conversation at Graceland. As a psychology major, Cat searched the course offerings at Graceland and found only one course that offered a somewhat unique approach to disability, a freshman writing seminar titled, *Disability in America*, a new offering for 2007–2008 academic year.

Well into her senior year, Cat was less than hopeful about raising awareness beyond the nod. To her surprise, much finally came together in her final semester—albeit fully by coincidence. The section that follows outlines a few coincidences that ultimately served Cat in her efforts to educate Graceland, and for purposes of this chapter, they offer a compelling case of how the hegemonic impulse for health and well-being informs ableism, or more to the point, institutionalized ableism operates at the hands of “somatically prejudiced people” (Davis, 2002, p. 102).

Coincidence One: The Roommate

In the fall of her senior year, Cat's roommate, Gen, sustained a sports-related injury that necessitated the use of crutches. As a senior, Gen was distressed to sit out the season; however, it paled in comparison to the distress of crutching across the campus. With each obstacle Gen encountered, Cat's feelings of *déjà vu* turned into rage as a now “hostile witness” given her knowledge that the real barriers at Graceland were attitudes rather than architecture. When she wrote her letter to the Chancellor of the state system, Cat realized how thorough her documentation was, and she realized the strength of her commitment to educate Graceland about students who are welcomed until they become less well and less worthy of support by the College.

Coincidence Two: The Campus Personal Safety Subcommittee on Access

On the day following acknowledgment of the receipt of her registered letter to the chancellor, Cat's inbox was flooded with responses from the president, vice president, provost, dean of students, various campus directors (i.e., grounds and services, buildings and maintenance), university police, and the faculty member who chaired the subcommittee on campus access and was the newly appointed co-chair of the Campus Personal Safety Committee. By coincidence, this same faculty member taught the writing seminar, *Disability in America*, and by further coincidence served as the faculty advisor for a newly formed interdisciplinary student organization, Students Educating About/Against Ableism (SEAA). Cat met with this faculty member, who ultimately supported Cat and her campaign to educate Graceland, although it was an undertaking that was far more challenging than either had anticipated:

Prejudices against disability are extremely difficult to overcome because they are built into the environment. Even if one could wave a magic wand and improve everyone's attitudes about disability, the built environment would still remain as a survival of discrimination and an impenetrable barrier to the participation of people with disabilities. For those who doubt the existence of disability discrimination, the built environment should stand as living proof of the social exclusion of the disabled, but attitudes sometimes prove as rigid to change as concrete walls, wooden staircases, and cobblestone walkways (Siebers, 2008, p. 134).

Coincidence Three: A SEAA Change

SEAA had just won temporary approval by Graceland to organize as an officially sanctioned organization. The students modeled SEAA after a similar student organization founded at nearby Syracuse University²—although all that the two programs shared was ideology. Syracuse was internationally recognized as being among the most proactive institutions in the support of disability activism. Course offerings and scholarly production by faculty had, for decades, produced the most critical work on disability outside the pathology/problem paradigm. Syracuse was a relatively short distance from Graceland and, thus, bound by similar geographic and architectural obstacles, although efforts to challenge institutionally ableist attitudes were part of an ongoing campus initiative, viewed through a collective lens of shared investment.

Following the first round of the application process, students were notified that SEAA appeared to be a duplication of the student branch of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a professional organization for special educators. Several conversations later, the SEAA students convinced the campus Student Association director that ideologically, SEAA was quite distinct from CEC. The conversation was new to the SA director who was stymied by the notion of an organization that challenged the traditional humanitarian impulse to cure and care. The application was finally approved, with a position statement and a mission outlined as follows:

Position Statement

Disability is more than just a physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental impairment. Disability affects more than just the person who has it. It is the right of every human being to be educated about disability and given the opportunity to discuss the sociocultural aspects associated with it (Syracuse University, original citation). The Graceland community will be enhanced by a broader conceptualization of disability that demands inclusion, equality, and social justice. Inclusion, equality, and social justice as well as accessibility, supported by the law, are just the starting points.

Mission

It is the mission of SEAA to educate the campus and community of Graceland about disability, informed by the value and necessity of interdependency in all human endeavors. SEAA seeks to provide a forum that encourages a closer scrutiny of what can be done to change the stigma associated with disability. These opportunities will include discussions, film series, and community events pertaining to educating about ableism.

Cat was invited to present at the first “official” SEAA meeting—a last-minute invitation that coincided with the previously slated agenda which included a discussion of only two items: Alliance with the Richland Center for Disability Rights (CDR) in nearby Richland, and “Campus Alliances—Where Are They?” As Cat once again recounted her experiences and

ture by constructs that tap into beauty, intelligence, consciousness, wellness, and even campus safety concerns.¹

Far fewer students begin their search for postsecondary education informed by the content outlined on the Office of Disability Services (ODS) Web page, which is usually linked to the college administration homepage. These exclusively text-based pages are less engaging as compliance and legal language requirements than the glossy images of fun-seeking students, that fill the screen. Despite diversity/justice/equity campaigns that herald a welcome for all, “the sick, the halt, and the maimed” are conspicuous by their absence in the welcome-back campaigns of many college campuses. What will become more apparent in the discussion of ableism that follows is that the mandate to view disability as pathology is embedded in society is viewed through an exclusively medical lens that has been shaped by the professions and the institutions designated to “deal” with disability. It should come as no surprise that disability falls outside the traditional multicultural concerns of many colleges and universities in North America. Certainly, this is a topic that merits further consideration. However, this chapter has as its focus “visibility” in the example of disability. It considers the unwritten assumption that equates attainment with entitlement for the most able in society, and it challenges the boundary thinking in many institutions of higher education that have yet to recognize the relevance of exploring disability in interaction with different constructs of diversity.

Notes on Ableism and a Nod to Disability Studies

The analysis presented in this chapter necessitates a few brief notes on ableism and something of a nod to disability studies. Disability studies is a burgeoning field in academe that includes area studies scholarship in the humanities, cross-disciplinary scholarship in the social sciences, and recent work emerging in schools of education. In each instance, these interdisciplinary literatures trouble historical interpretations of disability that have been exclusively medicalized, deficit-driven, and bureaucratically managed to produce the socially marginalized individuals we label disabled. At the center of this field of interdisciplinary scholarship are analyses of the social construction of disability and richly layered critiques of ableism that aim to reclaim and reimagine disability as more than a medical/biological event that is rooted in individual pathology lodged.

Ableism is an equally new construct that is prevalent in disability studies academic literature and yet is also very much rooted in contexts both in and out of academe, as evidenced by this chapter. The disability studies scholar, Simi Linton (1998) defined ableism in the context of a “divided society” where privilege and power by non-disabled people operate in both overt and covert ways. Her often-cited book *Claiming Disability, Knowledge and Identity* draws on the work of the feminist theorist Iris Marion Young (1990), who outlined the limits of a conception of justice that fails to seek institutional remedy for the unintended cultural sources of oppression (*Justice and the Politics of Difference*). For Young, parallels between racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism turn on recognition of modern society’s impulse to denigrate some bodies as “‘different,’ as the ‘Other.’ . . . in terms of bodily characteristics such as ‘ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated, or sick’ ” (p. 123). In discussion of the politics of difference, Young recognized the impact of cultural change when “‘despised” groups seize the means of cultural expression to redefine a positive image of themselves—an argument Linton endorsed in her call for *claiming* disability, identity, and knowledge. Whereas ableism,

concerns, it became clear to the SEAA members that Graceland might benefit from activism rather than alliance at this time. Cat would later explain how extremely emotional it was to share her experience with this audience and feeling, for the first time, that it mattered. She was honored rather than dismissed, and noted that “I felt like I had hit a wall, one that SEAA broke down and gave me in its place, hope and courage” (personal correspondence).

In very short order, SEAA organized an action in partnership with CDR and an official campus tour guide in a campaign to raise awareness about ableism. The action was staged as a “regular” campus tour with Chris, the director for advocacy at CDR (a wheelchair user), and five non-disabled Graceland students who wheeled along in chairs on loan from a nearby wheelchair rental. Other students followed on crutches, a mix of both temporarily disabled students (recruited by Cat), and those enacting disability (recruited by SEAA) for this event to create the visibility that was sorely needed at the Graceland. The action would simultaneously serve as the campus walk-through that Cat had, for years, offered to provide for the administration. The Graceland guide worked with Cat in advance of the tour to follow what would be a typical tour that would incorporate a few dead-end barriers similar to those she navigated as a freshman.

In addition, Cat and Gen invited various Graceland administrators, and flyers were posted all over campus the previous day. The Graceland action ultimately included numerous non-disabled allies who joined in the action scheduled at noon—the exact moment when many Graceland students, faculty, and staff would otherwise be scurrying to lunch. A reporter from the campus newspaper and a photographer were assigned to the “campus tour.”

Coincidence Four: Oh No! Not a Simulation!

It bears mentioning that disabled people and their activist allies rarely endorse simulation activities as they quickly revert to parody rather than providing perspective on living with disability. Although the SEAA advisor initially discouraged the simulation component of the action, after much discussion, the students decided to choreograph the event as serious theater for the benefit of the Graceland community. One SEAA member, a theater major, scripted different characters in meaningful roles that necessitated the use of mobility devices as more than mere props. Her script was written with the greatest attention to detail to minimize stereotypical constructions and insensitive actions. One student was in character as a recently disabled person, with a bearing of aggressive, non-compliant behavior that could be read in her body language and behind her forbidding, oversized dark sunglasses. Another student positioned himself separately from the crowd, as if planning an escape or adamantly unwilling to fall in line on the mock tour. Others rolled along in pairs, unfazed by the obstacles they encountered and cheerfully greeting the flummoxed students who came their way. Others—working without the benefit of a script—voiced their grievances to the administrators, including the ODS director, who remained visibly annoyed throughout the action. Sweaty and frustrated, the students turned to her with their questions: “Where is the elevator?” “Who has the key to the elevator?” “Why isn’t there any signage?” “How would I get into that so-called “accessible” dorm when the doorway is so narrow?” At one point, a student asked why the button on the exit to the library door was broken. In response, the ODS administrator shrugged, “It keeps breaking because non-disabled students use it.”

What had once been Cat's private experience at Graceland now became an incredibly public display of institutional disregard for disabled students' needs, voiced by many in the Q&A that followed the "campus tour." Many of the same issues Cat had wondered about earlier were contextualized by the experiences of other students. In addition to the challenges of access, many cited clear instances of prejudice that illustrated Siebers' notation that everyday exclusion can be depicted in "no choice" scenarios. One student explained that when his family wanted to tour the campus prior to his admission, his younger sister could not accompany them because she was a wheelchair user. Another student explained that during graduation, his grandfather was not seated with his family, but had to sit with other disabled people in a "ghetto" designated as "special seating." In an emotional account, a residence assistant (RA) explained that weeks before a wheelchair user arrived for her campus tour and was assigned to the accessible dorm on campus. However, the dorms were inaccessible because the doorways were too narrow to accommodate her chair, and she was forced to sleep in the shared suite. The RA, having witnessed the visitor's difficulties, acknowledged shamefully that she did not report this incident beyond her immediate supervisor. As reported in the student newspaper, *Staff Editorial*: "Due to the lack of options for disabled students, many have been forced to wrestle with the ultimatum: health or education? Nobody should have to even ponder this question" (4.17.08). In addition, the Graceland action was fueled by the student newspaper blog that revealed the need for education at Graceland. Comments reflected a range of reactions, from an obvious lack of information and education to obvious contempt, as indicated by the post: *Why would someone in a wheelchair even come to our campus?*

Conclusion

Until disability is experienced first hand, most students, staff, and faculty move through inaccessible physical spaces on their college campus, unaware of the obstacles posed by heavy doors, circuitous routes to elevators, broken or dented sidewalks, steep topographical inclines/declines, and the many manmade architectural barriers erected in public spaces. Should access or supports be needed in the event of an accident, most disabled individuals soon realize the need for poise and persistence in order to obtain even the most basic entitlements that might ensure continued participation in daily routines. Despite the rhetoric posted on ODS pages promising the "removal of architectural and attitudinal barriers," the reality is that such a job belongs to each of us.

Beyond one's individual experience with disability—experience that will happen to anyone who lives long enough—the need exists to raise awareness about ableism through secondary and postsecondary curriculum. The approach needed is one that promotes understanding through cultural perspectives and disability-related themes throughout the undergraduate and graduate curriculum, in dance programs, athletic programs, women's studies coursework, film, history, music, philosophy and even psychology, and science provided deficiency is not the fundamental starting point. Efforts to promote disability visibility are underway on many college campuses, and similar to Graceland, the efforts will necessitate action that exceeds one individual office or entity charged to address disability through a "services" orientation. As the SEAA position statement noted, disability affects more than just the person who has it. Clearly a broader conceptualization of disability demands inclusion, equality, social justice, and accessibility in the local context, so as to better grasp the spirit of the law applied more broadly. As

this chapter reveals, the efforts of non-disabled allies helped to expose limits of the systems and structures designated to meet the compliance requirements for ADA. More importantly, while the students gained a deeper understanding of the disability experience—and were, indeed, much the wiser for it—much remains to be determined by the institution's policies that may unwittingly endorse the hegemonic imperative for health and well-being, while somatically authorizing institutional ableism.

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Notes

1. Valerie Harwood offers a critical analysis of the aftermath of the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, noting how pervasive policies have become in response to the threat from students who may appear less well, as in her discussion of those identified with depression. Her article is forthcoming in *Theory, Culture & Society*.
2. The Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee at Syracuse University can be accessed at (bccc.syr.edu). Although the committee began under the direction of graduate students, it has served Graceland students well in their efforts to bring attention to issues of disability as diversity on college campuses.

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