COMPULSORY ABLEISM IN THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: THE IMPERFECTION OF EXIGENCEY IN THE CASE AGAINST PERFECTION

BY

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Abstract

In many contexts I think of myself as able-bodied. But, disability is best determined relationally in particular contexts, and in certain instances my body does not fit the compulsory conditions of universal able-bodiedness. Disability and able-bodiedness change in given circumstances and across time. As the often-repeated statement in Disability Studies proclaims, we will all become disabled if we live long enough. Contra to the treatment of the disabled, those with idealized bodies, capabilities, and social capital is the theoretical category of the normate. Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation” participates in constructing compulsory able-bodiedness. The dyadic exchange Bitzer and Vatz inaugurate provides a particularly useful canvas for the conversation of disability and rhetoric with attention given to situatedness of rhetoric and the audience, meaning-making versus observation of recalcitrant fact, and a pragmatic or normative framework. A rhetorical model of disability may not be ideal for every description of disability, however, rhetorical analysis can be additive to the predominant medical and social models. Understandings of disability and the rhetorical situation benefit from analysis that includes a discussion of im/perfection, time, and fluidity. A proliferation of different, fluid, understandings of disability is required to avoid normalizing one model at the expense of all others. In his compact book, The Case Against Perfection, Michael Sandel firmly advances ethical objections against biological enhancement; Sandel normalizes ableism and denigrates disability in a number of places throughout his text.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Rhetoric made me disabled. Georgina Kleege begins her elegant text *Sight Unseen* declaring, “Writing this book made me blind” (Kleege, 1). The research and contemplation of blindness changed the understanding of preexisting embodied characteristics. Kleege explains her identification with “visually impaired” or “partially sighted" moved towards an affinity with blindness. Similarly, my relationship with research and reflection on rhetoric, which was necessary to write this text, has helped me to identify as disabled. I now identify as disabled, whereas I previously thought of myself having a series of discrete (im)permanent physical conditions; visual impairment, chronic bursitis, sciatica, depression, and obesity. I am just as physically disabled now as I was before I began writing this thesis, but the rhetorical situation has altered my own identification and understanding of the material and social conditions of my disability.

I am a white heterosexual cisgendered middle class American male who is considered able-bodied, or can frequently pass as able-bodied. When my six foot six inch and three hundred pounds meets an impossibly small desk in a classroom, a coach airline seat, a compact car, or most clothing stores, my body is no longer understood as universally abled. In an examination of the centrality of embodied experience, I would be remiss not to discuss my identity and place it in dialogue, while examining Bitzer’s disembodied scholarship. Writing about my body is not merely analytic, but is also performative. The introduction of bodies in areas defined by their absence disrupts exnomination. I write in my identity not
merely as an academic exercise but as a potential act of resisting the normalizing rhetoric of ableism.

In many contexts I think of myself as able-bodied. But, disability is best determined relationally in particular contexts, and in certain instances my body does not fit the compulsory conditions of universal able-bodiedness. What society considers “normal” heavily informs the construction of classroom desks, airplane seats, automobile dimensions, clothes sizes, the dimensions of entryways, the height of countertops, and thousands upon thousands of other design choices. Many bodies will not fit the conditions of these designs that correspond to able-bodied norms. I cannot fit in many classroom desks. I fit poorly in many airplane seats, with my knees jammed into the seats in front of me, and I spill over into the seats next to me. I experience tremendous pain after extended travel from remaining seated and often uncomfortably jammed into a space too small for my body. In these situations, I am disabled. Although my body does not change in these circumstances, the settings making demands on my body change which either allow me to pass as normal/able-bodied or mark me as disabled.

Disability and able-bodiedness change in given circumstances and across time. Disability is not something that is inherent in an individual. Disability is a mutable category that carries no calcified meaning or objective criteria. Disability is rhetorically constructed. A rhetorical model of disability may not be ideal for every description of disability, however, rhetorical analysis can be additive to the predominant medical and social models. I agree with Alison Kafer when she
declares her intent to “pluralize the ways we understand disability” (7). Disability can be a temporary, semi-permanent, or permanent condition. There is no immutable disability. No condition can universally be considered a disability. Able-bodiedness, however, can only be temporary. Kafer proposes a political/relational model to supplement, more than supplant the medical/individual and social models:

Under a political/relational model of disability…the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies. The problem of disability is solved not through medical intervention or surgical normalization but through social change and political transformation. This is not to say that medical intervention has no place in my political/relational model. By my reckoning, the political/relational model neither opposes nor valorizes medical intervention; rather than simply take such intervention for granted, it recognizes instead that medical representations, diagnoses, and treatments of bodily variation are imbued with ideological biases about what constitutes normalcy and deviance. (Kafer, 7)

There is no universal natural standard for mental or physical ability. Rather, situations contingently construct the idealized standard for temporary able-bodiedness. The finitude of life, if nothing else, will interrupt temporary able-bodiedness. “No one is ever more than temporarily able-bodied” (Carol Breckenridge and Candace Vogler, 349). As the often-repeated statement in Disability Studies proclaims, we will all become disabled if we live long enough (Bérubé, Davidson, Kafer, Garland-Thomson, McRuer, Michalko & Titchkosky).

Despite the capacity, if not inevitability, for disability to become a part of every life, disabled people endure consistent exclusion and oppression. Lennard Davis explains the veracity of such oppression: “For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with
disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group” (xv). It is essential to understand how disability functions as a relational enterprise instead of an inherent characteristic. Contra to the treatment of the disabled, those with idealized bodies, capabilities, and social capital is the theoretical category of the normate. Rosemary Garland-Thomas, the originator of the term, explains:

This neologism names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries. The term normate usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them. If one attempts to define the normate position by peeling away all the marked traits within the social order at this historical moment, what emerges is a very narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of actual people. (Garland-Thomson, p. 8)

It is worth repeating for emphasis that the normate is a minority of people, but holds authority and cultural capital. The normate is idealized and forms a conceptual norm, but not “normal” in as much as that designated by what is considered majoritarian.

**Imperfections Marked By Urgency**

Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation” participates in constructing compulsory able-bodiedness. Bitzer’s theory of situational rhetoric participates in an ableist taxonomy that normalizes ableism in and throughout a disembodied theory of rhetoric. The rhetorical situation is rooted in Bitzer’s theory of exigence,
“an imperfection marked by urgency” (6). Exigency marks what is imperfect, abnormal, out of place, that which urges one to compel others to perform a needed correction. I remember hearing Bitzer’s definition of exigency and wondering if my own body, frequently unable to use desks in classrooms, seats in planes, or the driver’s seat in many standard vehicles was the imperfection marked by these material conditions. These situations are marked by urgency. The lack of a desk in a classroom immediately speaks to how my body is out of place, or marked by a non-place in an ableist classroom. The passengers assigned to sit next to me on a plane directly speak to the urgency moving out of the imperfect state of sitting next to me. My own body becomes filled with pain with a sense of time that is all too urgent, on flights with relatively modest distances travelled.

Disability Studies is an emerging field of scholarship that has began to take hold in the academy. As Lennard Davis says, “Just because disability studies is on the map doesn’t mean that it is easy to find” (xiii). As an area in the academy that is growing, but hardly cemented or central, Disability Studies has barely influenced communication and rhetoric in the academy. There is much work to be done in revisiting rhetorical methods and applying a Disability Studies lens, synthesizing analyses, and formulating new criticisms and theories. I am attempting to contribute to a conversation about the rhetorical situation, exigency, and critical disability theory. This thesis is divided into four sections. The first is a discussion of “The Rhetorical Situation,” including the dyadic opposition spearheaded by Richard Vatz and a continuation of this conversation. This thesis
continues to analyze Disability Studies’ implication on situational rhetoric, including a discussion of how situational rhetoric contributes to forming norms that are used as a measuring stick to cast disability in opposition to normalcy. The next chapter is the case study, applying the disabled criticism of the rhetorical situation to Michael Sandel’s *The Case Against Perfection*. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my examination.

My goal is to expose the shaping of ableist norms and transpose meaning by criticizing and rearranging what had previously been the idealized spaces compulsory ableism requires. The telos of eradicating ableist norms is desirable, but attaining that goal is a project more difficult than this singular academic work can achieve. Exposing the ableist assumptions that ground Bitzer’s theory is a necessary step in eradicating ableist norms from rhetorical scholarship, but insufficient in attaining that goal in isolation. My hope is that this thesis can be part of a larger project that seeks to eradicate and transpose the ableist transgressions in the discipline. I have provided a brief description of each subsequent chapter.

**The Disabled Rhetorical Situation & Rhetorically Situated Disability**

The present chapter of this thesis offers an examination of how Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation” participates in shaping compulsory ableism, and continues the conversation that Vatz’s “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” inaugurates. I also examine Scott Consigny’s synthesis presented in “Rhetoric and Its Situations.” Bitzer’s germinal work, “The Rhetorical Situation,” has been an influential force in rhetorical academia since its first publication in 1969.
Orchestrating a rubric for evaluating the suitability of rhetoric to the response of situations creating the need for intervention, Bitzer was attempting to provide a theory of rhetoric as pragmatic. If a speech had no possibility to convince an audience to respond to the situation, then it was not rhetoric. Bitzer is establishing a normative theory of rhetoric, simultaneously advancing the conditions that provide the norms for rhetoric and how rhetoric performs, or greatly assists, in the (re)enactment of larger normalization processes. Enabling rhetoricians to gauge if a discursive act was a fitting response, “Bitzer’s theory helped formulate a critical language useful in doing rhetorical criticism as he himself suggested” (Smith and Lybarger, 199), rendering a vocabulary necessary for performing both rhetorical theory and criticism. In answer to the ontological question ‘What is rhetoric?’ “Bitzer posits the concept of response grounded in the rhetor’s encounter with the particularities of historical situations consisting of an amalgam of exigence, audience, and constraints” (Patton, 36).

In developing a vocabulary for rhetorical criticism, Bitzer classified a tripartite essence of the rhetorical situation. Exigence, audience, and constraints “comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation” (8). Bitzer emphasized that the audience and the constraints are brought to bear as conditions upon the audience, although they both influence the rhetor (6). Exigence is what compels us to write, speak, shout, or otherwise intervene in response. For Bitzer, these exigencies exist outside of rhetoric, but motivate rhetoric to redress (im)material conditions.
Enter Richard Vatz, whose “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” takes on Bitzer’s claim that rhetoric is formed in response to calcified or objective conditions. Vatz, in direct contradiction to Bitzer, argues that the rhetoric creates the situation and meaning entirely. The very concept of exigence participates in meaning making of imperfection, abnormality, and defect as the constant potential rhetorical failure. Many rhetorical situations are haunted by the disabled figure that is an imperfection to the exigence itself. Perhaps not all exigences elicit such a phenomena, but many rhetorical performances elicit a response with a disabled imperfection; a new exigence is thus created. An amputee asked to join the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot Movement” creates a new exigence, a new imperfection requiring redress. A person who processes audial information slower than the “normal” creates an exigence. The Autistic person who doesn’t read the rhetor’s intended sarcasm creates a new exigence. The rhetorical situation should be recognized as creating its own meaning, or at least participating in meaning-making. Vatz is compelling when he states, “meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors. As soon as one communicates an event or situation he is using evocative language” (Vatz, 157). Bitzer did not discover the rhetorical situation through observing public details; theorization and meaning creation seem to be obviously co-constituted. I did not observe an objective public fact in Bitzer’s text. If rhetorical theory and criticism operated on such a level, then the public facts would reveal themselves to us and we would have no need for deliberation.
Vatz writes, “the rhetor is responsible for what he chooses to make salient,” which demonstrates that every exclusion the rhetor chooses demonstrates a deprioritization of what the speaker finds unimportant (158). Vatz strengthens the importance of meaning making for his own theorization of the relationship between the situation and rhetoric: “Rhetors choose or do not choose to make salient situations, facts, events, etc. This may be the sine qua non of rhetoric: the art of linguistically or symbolically creating salience” (Vatz, 160). Where then is Vatz’s inclusion of the rhetor’s body, or of differences in bodies of the audience? If Vatz’s formulation of situational rhetoric accounted for embodied differences, which is to say disability, it would better account for the relational meaning making that does not operate in an inexorable universal fashion. By failing to address these differences, can one reasonably make the claim that Vatz is participating in exnomination? Exnomination is the process of creating the norm by never referring to the position that is already assumed as possessing status of conferring the center or standard. Vatz does not speak to how particular bodies influence the meanings that are created when they act as rhetors. When speaking about Vatz’s assumption of a universal subject position as rhetor, there are particular meanings made if the rhetor is blind, or deaf, or autistic. Each rhetor brings an embodied experience that includes their sex, race, age, (dis)ability, and so on. Any rhetor that addresses an audience as if they are a group of normate individuals fails to adequately account for their audience. Invisible disabilities and expectations for disclosure complicate the capacity for rhetors to know their audience. Normalized conceptions of a given audience’s
ability, however, are cast by even the most skilled and sensitive rhetors. Assumptions are conferred on the audience’s ability in their capability to congregate to (in)accessible spaces, process the rate of delivery, and render coherent judgment.

Scott Consigny attempts to mediate the disagreement between Bitzer and Vatz, taking the approach of many chicken-and-egg dilemmas. Consigny says that the relationship between the rhetor and the situation is between where Bitzer and Vatz have polemically argued. Consigny prefers a return to Aristotle, proposing “rhetoric be construed as an art of topics or commonplaces” (181). The relationship to the topic is Consigny’s attempt to mediate between Vatz giving free reign to a rhetor to create any meaning they wish, and Bitzer’s restraining the rhetor to only describe objective situations.

The art of the topic is there to make sure the rhetor gives the audience something that grounds the speech. While Consigny may be correct that “The rhetor cannot be merely a ‘universal artist’ in Vatz’s sense, with complete freedom to create problems arbitrarily,” it would be useful to give the rhetor appropriate due in shaping what constitutes the topic (181). Consigny objects to Vatz not accounting for calcified objective facts in the world. It is telling that Consigny’s objection to Vatz is not with the idea of the universal subject, which assumes all rhetors contribute to meaning making equally and universally.

Consigny attempts to ground the rhetor in the constraints of art to prevent the creation of meaning from the ether, which may be useful in analyzing disability. The constraints of art can assist in identifying the differences that exist in bodies,
how the rhetor artistically interprets their complicated existence, and their positive
and negative attributes. This is, at least, more appropriately situated than either
Bitzer or Vatz alone.

Exigence is a circumstance, occurrence, or event that is recognized as
requiring an appropriate response—“an imperfection marked by urgency” (Bitzer,
6). The response that exigence compels is urgent, with a window of time hailing a
prompt reaction. An exigence is not something that can be met with delay or
hesitation. Exigence “strongly invites the assistance of discourse producing
public awareness, indignation [emphasis added], and action of the right kind”
(Bitzer, 7).

Prompting indignation against imperfection, defect, a thing that is other
than it should be, creates anew another exigence. Audience members who
reside outside of the hegemonic understanding and reaction to a rhetor are an
imperfection. The formulation of pushing indignation against imperfection creates
a flawed understanding of situational rhetoric that demands a response. Bitzer’s
situational rhetoric theory places exigence as a rhetorical act that requires a
prompt intervention. Jay Dolmage, in Disability Rhetoric, briefly but succinctly
remarks, “Exigence has been called a flaw, defect, imperfection, abnormality. In
general, the rhetorician has been constructed as the person who can diagnose
the shape and nature of the exigent flaw and then fix it. In this view of rhetoric,
disability itself shadows the entire transaction, as the specter of rhetorical failure”
(105). Dolmage is very brief in his analysis of situational rhetoric and exigence,
but is quite illuminating. I was left wanting his analysis to continue further into the
conversation that Bitzer started, Vatz continues, and Consigny attempts to resolve.

Scott Lunsford gives careful attention to his theory of dis/ability and the way these categories are co-constituted. Lunsford argues rhetors that are silent on dis/ability are participating in the primacy of able-bodiedness; “we must understand the hegemony which makes dis/ability invisible through silence” (1). This exemplifies the process of exnomination, able-bodied writers are silent on disability, which creates abled-bodiedness as the standard or norm, by not referring to itself. These texts formulate a meaning of normal as compulsory. Even if rhetors are not able-bodied, it doesn’t change the meaning for disabled people. Norms then work through exnomination: disability is created and given meaning through the assumption that able-bodied is normal. It may be useful to think of disability as a rhetorical construction much like a black hole. Disability/blackholes cannot easily be observed or defined themselves, but the things surrounding it that are not the black hole/disability give shape and context to the surrounding objects/ability.

Disability is a rhetorical device used to distinguish diverse bodies from the ideal able body. Everyone becomes disabled if they live long enough. Rhetorical theorists don’t need to address ability; the assumption is that everyone is able-bodied. Rhetoric is historically tethered to democratic discursive practices, which centralize the audience in the fabric of its existence. If rhetoric is unresponsive to individuals who are impaired or differently bodied (and I include the mind in the
body), then it is not only inattentive to certain audiences but it is potentially exclusionary to how audiences are formulated.

**The Case Against Perfection**

The third chapter analyses Michael Sandel’s *The Case Against Perfection*, which argues against biological enhancement on supposedly sectarian ethical grounds. Sandel contributes to compulsory ableism and constructs disability to be solely negative in numerous places in his text. Applying a disabled reading of situational rhetoric to *The Case Against Perfection* reveals dilemmas in the assumption of disability that works against Sandel’s avowed goals in the text. *The Case Against Perfection* is intended to convince readers that they should not intervene in the biological process of reproduction if any “genetic disabilities” in the embryo, or unborn child is detected (88-89). Although Sandel’s intent is to encourage birth to all children, regardless of “genetic disabilities,” the underlying assumption is that certain conditions will reasonably move parents to consider abortions based on disability. Besides Down syndrome, which Sandel specifically frames in this dilemma, it is unclear what those genetic disabilities are that will move potential parents to reasonably consider abortion (88-89). One can conceptualize a host of neurodiverse diagnoses that can be legitimized as reasonable abortion considerations in the same model. I prefer neurodiverse as the neologism that best encapsulates a variety of identifications and diagnosis that are casted against the normate in terms of the mind, or neuro-processes.

Bitzer’s theory of situational rhetoric would treat disability as a calcified and objective fact, not a rhetorically constructed norm. The embodied disability,
at minimum Down syndrome, is an imperfection marked by urgency for Sandel, and that imperfection requires a response. Sandel wants that response to be a “natural” birth and life, pronounced through ethical deliberation centered on the giftedness of life (93). Vatz’s theory of the rhetorical situation holds Sandel creating an exigence, constructing disability completely through cultural meaning. Beyond assuming the universal rational subject of the audience, Vatz fails to account for the embodied experience of particular addressees. A rhetor speaking to an audience about gun violence and mental illness creates an exigence to place responsibility for violence within neurodiversity, simultaneously creating a new exigence for every neurodiverse person. This cannot be sufficiently explained by failing to properly identify the audience. It establishes a norm of neuroability, an idealized understanding of how the mind and body function. This norm is also established through form, as well as content. Autistic individuals notoriously report not understanding when a rhetor is sarcastic or joking, and create a entirely different – and quite literal – meaning that rhetors did not necessarily intend.

All those that exist outside of the “normal human functioning” are an exigence, an imperfection marked by urgency. The appropriate response to this disability for Sandel is medicalization. This brings us back to Lennard Davis: “People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group” (xv). The rhetorical construction of a “normal” (which is to say
able-bodied) human subject provides the ontological backing to treat those with disabilities as if they are without dignity, or less than human. This rhetorical construction is in turn used to mobilize legitimate violence against disable-bodied minorities. Minority categories will be implicated by discursive constructions of disability in order to marshal violence against blacks, women, queers, and so on, become more prone to discrimination as they are associated with disability. Douglas Baynton maintains “Disability has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups. Not only has it been considered justifiable to treat disabled people unequally, but the concept of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them” (33).

Implications

Disability Studies and rhetorical studies may both recognize many of the elements of my examination, but greater attention can be paid to the development of situational rhetoric beyond the initial dyadic polemics of Bitzer and Vatz. I hope analyzing situational rhetoric, compulsory able-bodiedness, and disability can provide an intensified understanding of the relationship between the rhetor, the audience, and the situation. My application of situational rhetoric and critical disability studies to The Case Against Perfection may also help bolster the relevance of rhetorical studies to disability studies.
Chapter 2: Disabling The Rhetorical Situation

People hate to think they’ll become disabled. They always say ‘I’d rather be dead than disabled.’ When they find themselves in the hospital, they’re always terribly depressed. But they usually figure out after a while that they’d rather live and be disabled than be dead. I want people to think of disability as a social problem. That you might become disabled at any minute. To think not in terms of us and them. Think of the eventuality. Everybody becomes disabled unless they die first. 

Mark O’Brien (Breathing Lessons)

The dichotomous thinking of perfection/imperfection is similar to the dichotomous thinking of disability/ability. For example, the phrase describing people without disabilities as "temporally-abled" implies that once an individual has a disability, then they lose all their abilities. This ignores that all humans have a range of abilities and qualities in which they may surpass many others. However, imperfections and disabilities will always exist simultaneously with qualities that may be viewed socially as approaching perfection along with abilities. As Arokiasamy (1993) stated, "Every single person has some ability while no person has infinite perfection" (p. 83).

Erin Martz

Bitzer insists both the audience and the speaker are “standard” terms, approaching universality in concept, with only the situation taking place between them requiring theorization (1). Bitzer does not account for (dis)abled differences between various rhetors and their audiences; he may in fact be constructing a theory of situational rhetoric that effaces difference. Vatz theorization of situational rhetoric runs in a completely opposite direction from Bitzer, belied by the title of his article “The Myth of The Rhetorical Situation.” Vatz clarifies:

I take the converse position of each of Bitzer's major statements regarding this relationship. For example: I would not say "rhetoric is situational," but situations are rhetorical; not"... exigence strongly invites utterance," but utterance strongly invites exigence; not "the situation controls the rhetorical response..." but the rhetoric controls the situational response; not "... rhetorical discourse... does obtain its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it," but situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them (159).
Vatz puts no constraints on the rhetor’s capacity to create meaning or situations outside of the decisions of the rhetor, there is only the “choice of events to communicate” (156). While criticizing Bitzer’s determinations of rhetoric based on context, Vatz espouses, “One never runs out of context. One never runs out of facts to describe a situation” (156). Yet, neither Bitzer nor Vatz find importance through context of inventive utterance to choose an inclusion of (dis)abled embodiment. Consigny’s attempt to synthesize the dyadic disagreement of the relationship between situation and rhetoric circulates compulsory able-bodiedness. Consigny theorizes situational rhetoric as the negotiation rhetors undergo in an attempt to “make sense of what would otherwise remain simply absurd” (185). The struggle to render coherent what began as indeterminate is, for Consigny, a heuristic and managerial task for which the rhetor possesses a universal ability: “He will possess a truly ‘universal’ power or capacity to function in the various rhetorical situations which constantly arise” (180). The insistence of this universal capacity is normalizing. What of people who fail managing indeterminacy? Neurodiverse rhetors and audiences are not accounted for in Consigny’s attempt to ground his “Art” of rhetoric.

In the present chapter, I continue the discussion of “The Rhetorical Situation” inaugurated by Bitzer and the dyadic opposition spearheaded by Vatz. I use a disability lens to analyze the theory of situational rhetoric continued by Consigny. Bitzer and Vatz ignore how ableism infects their theories of situational rhetoric. They omit the lived experiences of those who do not fit within the able-bodied norms, norms which Bitzer and Vatz circulate. Centering the definition of
exigence as an “imperfection marked by urgency” (6), Bitzer perpetuates ableist assumptions. Imperfection conceptually requires the idealized ableist norm to create opposition. Omitting the disabled communicative moments excluded from Bitzer, and subsequently Vatz, stunt the conceptual potential for their rhetorical theories to explain communication more broadly. Applying a critical Disability Studies lens to analyze situational rhetoric can help further communication studies by avoiding previous theoretical pitfalls and illuminating new avenues of theorizing participation of audience and rhetor.

Communication studies and rhetoric are ripe and rife with possibilities, if not necessities for a disabled criticism. The dyadic exchange Bitzer and Vatz inaugurate provide a particularly useful canvas for the conversation of disability and rhetoric with attention given to situatedness of rhetoric and the audience, meaning-making versus observation of recalcitrant fact, and a pragmatic or normative framework. Communication theories about the rhetorical situation do not account for disability. Understandings of disability and the rhetorical situation benefit from analysis that includes a discussion of im/perfection, time, and fluidity.

Bitzer’s formulation of exigence obviously centers on a conception of the imperfect that deviates from the ideal. The relationship between rhetoric and striving towards perfection goes beyond exigence in various ways, including the drive to render judgment and create change towards utopian ideals (Hyde). Disability is intimately intertwined with a relationship to perfection, the ideal normate being the paradigmatic figure against which disability is cast. Beyond
kairos, the rhetorical situation is tethered to urgency, a temporal concept, as well as the pragmatic constraints determining the pragmatism of a rhetorical act.

Disability is situated through temporality, whether it is through temporally-able bodiedness, the duration of an impairment, or occupying “no future” (Kafer, 3). This temporal understanding of disability is an essential component of understanding disability as fluid, as is the notion of becoming disabled if one lives long enough. Understanding the fluidity involved in rhetoric exposes what Bitzer’s original framework obscures. Jenny Edbauer explains, “Rhetorical situations involve the amalgamation and mixture of many different events and happenings that are not properly segmented into audience, text, or rhetorician” (20).

Im/perfection

Rhetoric is frequently designed to foster an internalized ideal imaginary, a perfect world or set of actions the rhetor is attempting to persuade the audience to endorse and move towards. Bitzer’s formulation of exigency is transparently an effort to have rhetoric move audiences towards perfection, with urgency. For Bitzer, exigence is what motivates a rhetor to move an audience towards the perfect social; utopia. In bidding to find the best means for persuasion, rhetoric itself is concerned with moving towards perfection in language, regardless of the rhetor’s specific goal. Michael Hyde clarifies:

Coming to terms with perfection defines a rhetorical process that calls on our ability to find the right and fitting words and other symbolic devices for communicating to others in the most enlightening, truthful, and effective ways possible whatever it is that we understand and hold to be "right," "good," and "true": something that is especially worthy of consideration and respect and inspires us to better our lives and the lives of others, to achieve our full potential. (15)
Rhetoric is concerned with perfecting itself, making the most convincing version of a rhetorical act is on face laudable. The goal of moving towards perfection, however unattainable, goes beyond maximizing persuasive appeal in rhetoric. Hyde notes the rhetorical process in regards to perfection inspires us to better our lives and others. Rhetoric attempts to judge which horizons are desirable in their proximity to perfection, and rhetoric is concerned with how to move us as individuals and collective audiences to approach these ideals. “All humans are imperfect,” we are all bundles of various dis/abilities (Martz).

The move towards an idealized future is utopianism. Not in the sense of fictional utopianism, but in striving towards perfection (that is unattainable). “In rhetorical communication, an implied utopia may be present as the imagined better city or society for the rhetor or the audience; or it can be the setting of an imagined rhetorical situation” (Portalano, 119). Although considered a radical departure from the status quo, this utopian projection is inescapably shaped by the culture from which it is produced. As an “imagined symbolic better world,” utopian futures allow rhetors and audiences to judge conditions in the present by means of comparison (Portalano, 119).

The impossibility of perfection does little to slow down the use of the imagined utopian as a marker of judgment. For many, disability must urgently be removed from the future, since “disability means imperfection” (Smart). The negative judgment of disability may produce anxiety towards becoming disabled, or internalized disaffection over our currently identified conditions. Kafer bluntly explains the relationship between disability and the future:
If disability is conceptualized as a terrible unending tragedy, then any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid. A better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very absence of disability that signals this better future. The presence of disability, then, signals something else: a future that bears too many traces of the ills of the present to be desirable. In this framework, a future with disability is a future no one wants, and the figure of the disabled person, especially the disabled fetus or child, becomes the symbol of this undesired future (2-3).

We would benefit from understandings of disability that are not trapped in the undesirability of tragedy, or impairments that must result in cure or death.

This is the motivation for eugenics that has been implemented through force, law, and normalization. Attempts to eradicate particular physical and mental conditions continue through various medical treatments that extend to prenatal screening for various genetic markers that result in the ultimate eradication of difference. Disability is best understood as positive, as including benefits as a “resource” to be cultivated and flourished, a definition that “refuses the dominant understanding of disability as a deficit to be tolerated and protected and seeks to bring forward the benefit disability brings to the human community” (Garland-Thomson, Conserving Disability, 343). A rhetorical model of disability refuses the drive towards a utopianism free of disability. Disability rhetoric, rather, offers a place of dwelling to conserve disability, as Garland-Thomson explains:

I use the verb conserve here intentionally to do the precise semantic work of explicating counter-eugenic logic. To conserve means to “maintain (a person or thing) in continuous existence; to keep alive, existing, or flourishing; to preserve ... intact” (Oxford English Dictionary 2000)... The principle of honoring the “is” rather than the “ought,” the contingent rather than the intentional nature of an environment, is what I wish to capture with the word conservation. The idea of preserving intact, keeping alive, and even encouraging to flourish denoted by conserve suggests that the characteristics, the ways of being in the world, that we think of as disabilities would under such a definition be understood as benefits rather
than deficits. Furthermore, I would distinguish the concept of conservation subtly from the concept of protection. Something in need of protection is understood as more vulnerable than something to be conserved. I intend the term conserve to suggest the prevalence, persistence, and enduring sturdiness of disability rather than its fragility or vulnerability. (Conserving Disability, 341)

In establishing her argument for conserving disability, Garland-Thomson identifies three distinct benefits to disability: narrative, epistemic, and ethical resources. Arguing that disability assists in narrative understanding “teaching the nondisabled how to be more human” (Garland-Thomson, Conserving Disability, 344). The epistemic benefits of disability arrive through “experiential gestalts,” a phenomenology of disability, allowing for “disabilist hearing” that “expands our understanding of musical experience and production” (345). Kleege’s visual experience with blindness “viewing the world askance” (104) as she places objects close to her and sees differently than the normative “right way” (96). This close, slower, sidelong viewing questions where the blind spots of vision reside, problematizing the normalized glances that purport to take everything quickly observed as a unified whole. Disability as an epistemic resource assists in producing new forms of knowledge, which may be inaccessible to the able-bodied. Garland-Thomson’s view of disability as ethical resource conjoins with the frequent refrain of becoming disabled if we are fortunate to live long enough; “The primary benefit would be valuing the inevitable growing into disability inherent in the human condition” (349). This benefit is gained from the proliferated understanding that difference is the only universally shared trait.

Disability then, is both generated by rhetoric, and produces rhetoric. “As both a generative concept and a fundamental human experience, then, disability
generates circuits of meaning-making in the world” (Garland-Thomson, Conserving Disability, 344). Normalized conceptions of hearing are used as a barometer to determine deafness, and deafness generates the capacity for “disablist hearing.” The deaf lesbian couple, Sharon Duchesneau and Candace McCullough, and their attempt to conceive a deaf child, illustrate disability is both generated by, and generates, rhetoric. When attempting to use a sperm bank, the couple was informed “men with congenital deafness are precluded from becoming sperm donors” as “deafness is one of the conditions that sperm banks and fertility clinics routinely screen out of the donor pool” (Kafer, 76). The attempt to eradicate deafness, and many other disabilities, is the attempt to implement an able-bodied utopia. Disability is rhetorically constructed as unfit for the reproductive future, an imperfection marked by unreproducability. Simultaneously, Duchesneau and McCullough rhetorically generate disability as a gift; “A hearing baby would be a blessing,” Duchesneau is quoted, “a Deaf baby would be a special blessing” (Sanghavi). Duchesneau and McCullough are rhetorically judging deafness as the situated ideal, as perfection.

The move towards indignation at the abnormal is dangerous for all bodies that are diverse. Bitzer gives no specific attention to bodies in their ability, race, sex, sexuality, gender, class, citizenship, and so on. Assuming a universal access as either the rhetor or audience does not match the material conditions of lived experience. Many will never have equal access to the right to perform as either rhetor or audience, or equal access to a foundational right to have rights.
There cannot be a single text capable of even describing the various components establishing the ableism in situational rhetoric, let alone a single intervention to appropriately modify this trajectory.

In a secondary manuscript, Bitzer discusses exigences of and in the mind:

The factual components of some exigencies exist in thought, attitude, disposition, and other such mental states; for example, it is a fact that a certain person holds false beliefs dangerous to self or others. Exigences of this sort are no less real and forceful than those linked to physical and external factual condition. This is to say that exigences are to be understood as real, historic, existent—whether the factual component is an array of external physical objects or of elements in a mental state (Bitzer, p. 90-91).

I struggle to negotiate the contours of what constitutes a legitimate exigence from a mental state. How does Bitzer square the circle between his insistence on “objective and publicly observable historical facts” and “elements in a mental state?” It appears, for Bitzer, the relationship between the mental state and the historical objective facts lies in their fidelity to one another. It is true that components of facts take place in the mind; components of every belief, idea, theory, and thought, take place in the mind. The statement is true, but so banal as to have little to no use. Bitzer is paralleling objective facts with beliefs that are not dangerous to self or others. The text provides a meaning that marks neurodiverse perceptions as defect, imperfection, flaw, abnormality, or thing that is other than it should be. People who process differently, understand differently, and think differently from the idealized and normalized interpretation are demonstrating a mental state that is exigent.

The intersections of marginalized identity categories are uniquely situated to be an imperfection or a prefigured rhetorical failure. Given the relationship the
subaltern has with the rhetorical situation regarding its differences or abnormalities provides insight when Bitzer says;

The exigence and the complex of persons, objects, events and relations which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them. To say the situation is objective, publicly observable, and historic means that it is real or genuine — that our critical examination will certify its existence. Real situations are to be distinguished from sophistic ones in which, for example, a contrived exigence is asserted to be real; from spurious situations in which the existence or alleged existence of constituents is the result of error or ignorance; and from fantasy in which exigence, audience, and constraints may all be the imaginary objects of a mind at play (Bitzer, p. 11).

It would be naïve to read this text and not find meaning in the fantasy of the mind at play. “Objective and publicly observable historic facts” assume a universal perspective, understanding, experience, axiology, and worldview that seem more fantasy than fact. There is no “observable historic fact” that escapes embodied phenomenological differences. The capacity for distinguishing between real and contrived or spurious exigences using an undefined process of critical examination can provide little comfort for those on the margins. Rather, these so-called “objective facts” are an apparatus that allows a dominant group to establish their perspective as neutral, correct, and of highest importance. This process of exnomination is one of the most important functions of norming the attentive rhetorical critic must interrogate.

Attempting to provide the best model of disability is a rhetorical move towards perfection. The process of criticizing models of disability that are inadequate or dangerous seems necessary to attempt to perfect Disability Studies. The imagined perfection of Disability Studies is paradoxical, when
utopianism/perfection is frequently understood as the absence of disability. The judgment, or criticism, of particular models of disability must remain contingent. As disability materially changes in an individual, disability also shifts among cultures and places. Put differently, the imagined future of disability frames how a particular model is evaluated and how it approaches disability in the here-and-now.

**Time**

It is again worth returning to the well-rehearsed refrain from disability scholars; everyone will become disabled if they live long enough. This temporal projection is central to disability as a theoretically universal enterprise. “Everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are ‘intrinsically impossible to embody’ fully, and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary, disability being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough” (McRuer, Disability Studies reader, 304). Disability then, is only a matter of time.

Disability may also move towards a reconceptualization of time, and our orientation to time. “Disabled people who never seem to arrive anywhere on time,” and frequently require extra time demonstrate the need for a reconceptualization of time (Kafer, 26). Kafer explains this extra time could be from various sources, a slower gait, attendants, malfunctioning equipment, a refusal from public transit to pick up a disabled passenger, etc. (26). Kafer proposes adopting “crip time” which “might be not only about a slower speed of movement but also about ableist barriers over which one has little to no control”
(Kafer, 26). This is a rhetorical judgment of the way ableist time operates, and a suggested reorientation of our relationship to time.

What does it mean to shift the temporal practices of situational rhetoric? It seems incoherent to test for the fit of a situation without a correlation to time. Perhaps we ought to dwell in the extra time in which disability and disabled people operate. The timeliness of exigence has a profound relationship to disability, the urgency required to redress the abnormality begs the question of the ability to respond in such a timely fashion. Kairotic spaces do not have a universal relationship with diverse bodies.

Bitzer’s insistence on timeliness seems at odds with shifting away from current conceptions of time:

There comes a time in the situation when the leader of the fisherman should say, "Throw the nets." In the situation generated by the assassination of the President, there was a time for giving descriptive accounts of the scene in Dallas, later a time for giving eulogies. In a political campaign, there is a time for generating an issue and a time for answering a charge. Every rhetorical situation in principle evolves to a propitious moment for the fitting rhetorical response. After this moment, most situations decay; we all have the experience of creating a rhetorical response when it is too late to make it public. (13)

“Curative time” is Kafer’s moniker for an imaginary of disability that requires intervention, it cannot conceive of disability as something to be conserved, or admired (29). Medical intervention is not the issue for Kafer, rather it is the normalization of intervention. The urgency before decay, before it is too late fits neatly between Bitzer’s exigency and curative time.

Relational, social, and rhetorical models of disability require a specific time for coherence. “What we understand as impairing conditions—socially,
physically, mentally, or otherwise—shifts across time and place, and presenting impairment as purely physical obscures the effects of such shifts” (Kafer, 7). There is no disability that can be placed outside of time in these models, yet there may seem to be certain recalcitrant disabilities. Perhaps embracing these incoherencies would foster an appreciation for seemingly incommensurate positions. “The disabled body is contradiction, ambiguity, and partiality incarnate” (Garland-Thomson, Integrating Disability, 28).

“The methodology of intellectual tolerance” is proposed by Garland-Thomson to explicitly tolerate “what has been thought of as incoherence” (28). Embracing “the partial, the provisional, and the particular” this tolerance embraces disability while leveraging a critique against “normalizing phallic fantasies of wholeness, unity, coherence, and completeness (Garland-Thomson, Integrating Disability, 28). Disability can seem incoherent in a number of fashions, including the simultaneous embracement of life and death. Disability can simultaneously be incomplete, a vivid death around the corner, and a vivid affinity to life in the present, a totalizing identity, a rhetorical relational enterprise, and a material reality. Requiring disability to remove any feature to solidify the dominance of another countervailing feature is ableist eugenics that runs counter to proliferating various understandings of disability.

Disability changes the orientation towards time vis-à-vis the relationship towards “no future,” particularly in those whose diagnoses are expected to dramatically shorten their life expectation. Garland-Thomson describes how an “expect[ing] death at any moment frees her from the burden of using the present
as an investment in a future” (Conserving Disability, 353). A death sentence
“strangely affirms the life she has” which actually “relieve[s] rather than
intensif[ies] anxieties” (Garland-Thomson, Conserving Disability, 353). The
simultaneous contradiction of death sentence and open future, provide a
dramatic shift in looking towards the horizon:

Imminent and vivid aliveness and his equally vivid mortality—indeed,
people with disabilities and disability in general—present the difficult
challenge for modern subjects not only to live in the moment but also to
engage in a relationship not based on the promise of the future. Disability
demands that we all might imagine a subject without a future life trajectory
perpetually managed in the present moment. (Garland-Thomson,
Conserving Disability, 353)

Refusing to fear death, to understand the finitude of life as imminent and
inescapable removes the requirement for curative time and a drive towards
utopian futures. This frees situational rhetoric to focus on the here-and-now
without staying beholden to compulsory able-bodiedness of the future perfect. In
this way, disability affirms life, in providing ultimate appreciation for the present,
and all the different subject positions possible in its horizon. Or as Garland-
Thomson explains; “What we call disability is perhaps the essential characteristic
of being human” (Conserving Disability, 1).

Fluidity

Disability is not neat and tidy; it escapes a unifying grand narrative or
model of analysis. Disability resists static categorizations; it changes over time,
across cultures, and comes and goes within particular individuals. My own
experience with disability identification, as well as certain conditions, most
notably chronic bursitis, ebbs and flows. Most days, there is hardly any pain in
my feet, other days it is unbearably painful to walk, and my mobility is profoundly limited. Most of my life I understood myself as able-bodied, but now I cannot relate to that situation.

The move towards indignation at the abnormal is dangerous for all bodies that are diverse. Given Bitzer’s lack of attention to bodies in their ability, race, sex, sexuality, gender, class, citizenship; assuming a universal access as either the rhetor or audience does not match the material conditions of lived experience. Many will never have equal access to the right to perform as either rhetor or audience, or equal access to a foundational right to have rights.

“Another may not currently be disabled, or currently be disabled in a particular way, and become disabled, or become disabled differently, either with time or through an accident. Another may have a disability that comes to them one day or moment, and leaves the next, ever-returning and ever-leaving. Still, another may be disabled and not be easily identifiable as such” (Chandler). Garland-Thomson is succinct in claiming; “disability… represents aspects of the human condition that are unpredictable, unstable, and unexpected: in short, contingency itself” (Conserving Disability, 340).

Disability can be understood as a process of becoming, a constantly shifting embodiment that allows us to relate to other individuals and communities in fluid, ever changing capacities. “And in community motivated by a desire for disability, disability can be an ‘inter-subjective experience’ that is, enacted between two members, one disabled the other not, owned by no one, cradled by both. Disability teaches us that just as embodiments shift, so, too, do our
communal experiences and relations” (Chandler). This communal shift is an apt description of how understanding an audience, or a public, as disabled avoids a determination of an audience as compulsorily able-bodied. Normalizing the audience into rigid able-bodied and able-minded capacities is consistent with Bitzer’s reliance on realism, but incommensurate with the contingent subject of disability.

There may, however, be a benefit in considering recalcitrant conditions that exist materially in society, or in the body, that are not best addressed through social constructionism, relationality, or rhetoric. Bérubé explains:

On the one hand, disability is quite obviously constructed (a “culturally fabricated narrative,” in Garland-Thomson’s phrase), insofar as there are any number of social contexts in which deafness is not disabling or as wheelchairs would signify (and get around) very differently in a world without stairs. On the other hand, disability is often quite immediately physical, material, and substantial (the Zizekian “hard kernel” of reality…), regardless of what any academic social theorist or any proponent of so-called common sense might think or say about it. (If I Should Live So Long, 340)

Individuals, or communities, have a fluid relationship with disability, even under the realist understanding of disability; conditions still come and go, and what conditions qualify as disability are still contingently determined. The very models, or definitions, of what disability’s essential components are also fluid. There cannot be a calcified framework for evaluating disability that avoids normalization and accounts for shifting standards and embodiments of disability. For Bérubé, there is a vacillation between social constructionism and critical realism, which demonstrates why a proliferation of different, fluid, understandings of disability is required to avoid normalizing one model at the expense of all others (340).
Chapter 3: The Case For Imperfection

Disability rhetoric correctly postures that disability is an afterthought bound to an exclusionary ableist matrix that sets the terms of engagement. The working model of inclusion is really only successful to the extent that people with disabilities are able to ‘opt in’ or be assimilated through being countable, categorisable, rehabilitatable and employable. A drive towards self-determination may mean that it is not possible for some disabled people to be truly ‘free’ within the confines of liberalism with its assumptions of productivity and unencumberance. People may lose person status because they fail to meet certain criteria.

Fiona Kumari Campbell

Today cretin is used for a definable medical condition: dwarfism and mental subnormality connected with enzyme deficiencies in the synthesis of thyroid hormone, as distinct from Down’s syndrome and other genetically caused abnormalities unconnected with thyroid function. These conditions are still as undesirable as they were in the Middle Ages. If we feel the alternatives have too many negative connotations, we can rename such symptom-complexes with generalized euphemisms such as mental retardation. But sooner or later the schoolyard finds out, and retard becomes the coinage of abuse. Everyone ought to deplore the abuse, but it is a delusion to suppose that we alter medical facts by dispensing new names, for it is the medical condition that is the problem, not the words that describe it.

Denis Dutton

Biological manipulation of humanity is here, and the capacity for antenatal biological enhancement is seemingly at the doorstep. In his compact book, The Case Against Perfection, Michael Sandel firmly advances ethical objections against biological enhancement. Sandel relies on a combination of ecumenicalism and ambiguity as the cornerstone of his ethical objection. Attempts to distinguish ethics grounded in respect for God are couched in terms of giftedness and nature without attempts to define either. Giftedness and nature are deployed, however, through problematic tropes for reasons beyond their ambiguity as thinly veiled disguise for ecumenicalism. Sandel normalizes ableism and denigrates disability in a number of places throughout his text. This is an apt
demonstration of Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, particularly his theorization of exigence, participating in shaping ableist norms. Applying the disabled criticism of Bitzer to Sandel reveals particular nuance to the compulsory able-bodied dilemmas of both texts.

*The Case Against Perfection* is a demonstration of exigence, or an imperfection marked by urgency, transporting a disembodied and ableist meaning onto the world. Sandel’s ecumenicalism normalizes a supposedly universal nature, circulates ableist norms, and demonstrates the disabled criticism of situational rhetoric. The goal of this chapter is not to sanitize the discursive choices of Sandel, but to criticize the shaping of ableist norms and transpose meaning by exposing what had previously been the unmarked spaces ableism requires. The norm does not announce itself as norm. The norm elevates itself through a process of naming the other so the norm seems natural, neutral, and preferred.

In Sandel’s seemingly eternal return to giftedness, he discusses the distinction between healing and enhancement:

> The need for healing arises from the fact that the world is not perfect and complete but in constant need of human intervention and repair. Not everything given is good. Smallpox and malaria are not gifts, and it would be good to eradicate them. The same can be said of diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, and spinal cord injuries (Sandel, 101).

> The text calls for a eugenic move against ablediversity and neurodiversity. I use the term neurodiversity, first coined by Judy Singer, to demonstrate the capacity for an affirmation of the abundance of different kinds of brains (Armstrong, ii-iv). I have not previously seen the term ablediversity used, and
although imperfect, it is the best term I can conceptualize to demonstrate the appreciation for the richness of different kinds of bodies in the world. Coupling “spinal cord injuries” with “smallpox and malaria,” Sandel is categorizing ablediverse bodies with diseases. Sandel’s intent may be innocent, but this does not absolve the dangers circulated through the meaning created by the text. At minimum Sandel should be more deliberate and careful in distinguishing attempts to treat impairments, but securing the rights of those living with said conditions so their humanity is not eradicated. Sandel does not discuss what it means to eliminate the given that is not good; what does it mean to eradicate “diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, and spinal cord injuries”? Parsing out the distinctions between a condition and a person living with disability, however, would not be sufficient to remedy the dangerous meaning created by Sandel’s text.

There are three distinct groups of people who are directly affected by the meaning of disability the text helps establish: those already living, the conceived but unborn, and future generations. Those already living with disability must navigate through a world that is built in the form of the able-bodied normates. Normates are both nouns and verbs; normates are both bodies and the active construction of cultural authority. Sandel’s text normalizes what a typical body looks like, and how it functions. *The Case Against Perfection* is establishing a case for the able-bodied as normal. Anyone with diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, or spinal cord injuries is not perfect, not good, and not normal. This is dangerous. Lennard Davis describes the intensity of this danger, “For centuries,
people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group" (xv). The disparate treatment of those with disabilities is informed by the creation of able-bodied normates. People with disabilities are not de facto born into a natural world of ableism, this world is constantly (re)created through the norms and ideologies driven by rhetoric.

The second group of people, those currently unborn and still in the womb, are situated in a unique time when diagnoses of conditions are more capable than science’s capacity to manipulate human genes. This group is, perhaps, the most precariously positioned. They cannot advocate on their own behalf and require a campaign solely from others to be waged on the unborn’s behalf. The capacity for science to isolate genes that signify a particular genetic condition will almost always precede the capacity to modify that condition. It is difficult to even conceptualize the ability to modify a genetic condition before isolating a unique sign of that condition. This circumstance may lead to some parents considering terminating a pregnancy. The ableist normate reinforced by Sandel’s text circulates an ideology that contributes to that decision making process. The idea of people with disabilities being less-than the able-bodied normate is not neutral; it is created through rhetoric and discourse such as The Case Against Perfection. Sandel circulates tropes of disability that not only legitimize aborting fetuses that test positive for certain genetic conditions, but normalizes the enterprise. Sandel
has made it seem legitimate, normal, and desirable for parents to eliminate conditions attached to certain children in utero.

Unborn children conceived in the future with more robust bioengineering capabilities is the final group directly implicated by the ableist ideology furthered by Sandel. This seems to be the group towards which Sandel's writing is primarily directed. In the introduction he removes questions of scientific limitations, resource distribution, and safety. Preferring to focus on a hypothetical future where these dilemmas are resolved, Sandel asked if bioengineering could still be rendered unethical on the grounds of giftedness. Hypothetical people have always interested me less than existing people. Prioritizing the future generations at the expense of the current seems misfocused. Hypothetical generations of disabled people also deserve to be rhetorically and materially addressed as every bit a human being as much as any able-bodied future person.

Perhaps somewhat ironically, Sandel discusses future disability in terms of inevitability. Sandel simultaneously furthers the normate, claiming, "Everyone would welcome a gene therapy to alleviate muscular dystrophy and to reverse the debilitating muscle loss that comes with old age" (Sandel, 10). There is a certain arrogance displayed in the asserted universalization of opposition to growing old. While it is true that old age is accompanied with muscle loss, I find it hard to accept that everyone would welcome the reversal of aging. I am unsure how this fits in with Sandel's claims of naturalism and giftedness. The finitude of life seems necessary for both a natural and gifted theory of life. I can't help but
think of Sandel’s passage in distinction to disability activist Mark O’Brien’s words that begin the previous chapter:

People hate to think they’ll become disabled. They always say ‘I’d rather be dead than disabled.’ When they find themselves in the hospital, they’re always terribly depressed. But they usually figure out after a while that they’d rather live and be disabled than be dead. I want people to think of disability as a social problem. That you might become disabled at any minute. To think not in terms of us and them. Think of the eventuality. Everybody becomes disabled unless they die first. (Breathing Lessons)

Both Sandel and O’Brien agree that old age invites disability, but there is a profound difference in their responses. Sandel is advocating for a medical treatment in an attempt to return what he considers normal. O’Brien is attempting to move away from treating differences in ability as oppositional categories, and moving towards conceptualizing disability as a social issue. Treating disability as a social issue requires a recognition of the able-bodied world as constructed, an awakening from assuming the able-bodied world as natural and inevitable. Ablediverse bodies are not described as gifts anywhere in The Case Against Perfection, rather ablediverse bodies are only contrasted as the given which is explicitly not a gift. There is no appreciation for the richness of different bodies to be found in Sandel’s book. Sandel’s ecumenical discourse is unpersuasive at convincing secularists about the ethical risks of biological enhancement, and the text’s deployment of discourses that efface ablediversity and neurodiversity overshadow any illumination the book provides.

Sandel is participating in shaping the difference between desirable and detestable phenotypes. There is an explicit difference between gifts and the given, where the given exemplifies certain phenotypes that are best eradicated.
Perhaps it bears repeating Sandel’s claim, “Not everything given is good. Smallpox and malaria are not gifts, and it would be good to eradicate them. The same can be said of diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, and spinal cord injuries” (Sandel, 101). It would be useful for Sandal to clarify what the essence of a gift is, what are a gift’s necessary distinguishing features. The only necessary component of giftedness seems to be its desirability according to Sandel, and indebtedness to something beyond humanity. Perhaps then it would be useful for Sandel to elucidate the essence of humanity. It is frustrating in a book about the ethics of human giftedness there is little attempt to define either. *The Case Against Perfection* participates in shaping normocentric beliefs and attitudes towards ablediversity and neurodiversity, legitimizing eugenic elimination of otherness and effacing difference. Sandel has directly expressed the desirability of eliminating particular conditions or phenotypes. People that exhibit the conditions or phenotypes that Sandal has established as given, but not gifted, and distinctively “not good” are posited as less-than-normal. The ideology of ableism is continually constructed through rhetoric such as *The Case Against Perfection*.

Normocentrism is Laurent Mottron’s term for when autistic people are judged by non-autistic standards (Mottron, 34). This concept seems useful for analyzing Sandel’s treatment of a number of neurodiverse and ablediverse phenotypes. Many neurodiverse and ablediverse characteristics are viewed as negative in *The Case Against Perfection*, as if “it is always a problem to be solved” (Mottron, 34). A prominent example of the text performing this
normocentric function is the opening of the book. Sandel’s own discussion of deaf communities demonstrates how exnomination operates. Sandel returns us to Duchesneau and McCullough, the deaf lesbian couple who sought out a sperm-donor with higher chances of giving them a deaf child. The couple conceptualized deafness as a cultural identity, which Sandel surmises as an ethical question: “Suppose, for the sake of argument, that deafness is not a disability but a distinctive identity” (Sandel, 1-2). Although his intention is seemingly to give weight to Duchesneau and McCullough’s interpretation of deafness, he performs normocentrism by qualifying their understanding only “for the sake of argument” and quickly returns deafness to the label disability. This notion of deaf as disabled performs a function to cement the dominant mode of understanding a rich and varied population of hearing differently. In other words, people that hear “normally” serve as a standard, creating a hegemonic cache for how a population should hear. Not only does this serve to invalidate the deaf communities own interpretation of deafness as a culture, but it serves to create a center and periphery around what could be considered an ablediverse notion of hearing.

For Sandel, deafness singularly operates under a medical model, never a social/relational/discursive model. There is no concern for the way that deafness can operate as a social touchstone, how there can be a cultural anchoring through disability. The medical model only understands deafness as a symptom to be cured, or treated. Nowhere in Sandel’s text is any discussion of the benefits that can come from deafness. Hearing, as a marker of able-
bodiedness begins to form the center, or what is considered “normal.” This is the process of exnomination: by not having to refer to the condition of “hearing” the normate is made to appear neutral, natural, and inevitable. Deafness is a medical condition that exists only in opposition to the norm.

Sandel contrasts Duchesneau and McCullough’s search for a sperm donor likely to provide a deaf offspring with an “infertile couple” seeking an egg donor that “had to be five feet, ten inches tall, athletic, without major family medical problems… No one objected that height, intelligence, and athletic prowess are disabilities that children should be spared” (Sandel, 3). Perhaps Sandel is attempting to be clever in contrasting the treatment of deafness and dominantly conceptualized neuro and able bodied. The move to describe these dominant traits in a progeny where “no harm is involved” does more to create an idea of normocentrism (Sandel, 3). The Case Against Perfection is doing work to create a case for an idea of the perfect mind and body, establishing an archetype for what appropriate bodies look and function like. An athletic tall body with no history of medical problems becomes the dominant standard that normalizes how differently abled bodies are to be judged. The contrasting genetic preference performs a rhetorical move to establish the normal and the deviant, the desirable and the detestable.

Normocentrism can perform a gender and cultural ordering as well. Sandel’s text works towards this end while simultaneously disciplining neurodiversity and ablediversity across sex and cultural difference. Sandel writes:
One technique for sex selection arose with prenatal tests using amniocentesis and ultrasound. These medical technologies were developed to detect genetic abnormalities, such as spina bifida and Down syndrome. But they can also reveal the sex of a fetus, allowing for the abortion of a fetus of the undesired sex. Even among those who favor abortion rights, few advocate abortion simply because the mother (or father) does not want a girl. But in societies with powerful cultural preferences for boys, ultrasound sex determination followed by the abortion of female fetuses has become a familiar practice (Sandel, 19-20).

Cultural normocentrism is at play where Sandel is depicting American culture, which the text reveals as pluralistic in its attitude towards abortion, but above the notion of performing infanticide towards unborn women. America is contrasted to other societies where culture is not as enlightened, and where abortions of female fetuses are a “familiar” practice. American culture may be conflicted with regards to abortion, but it is at least nobler in regards to aborting fetuses based on sex selection. There is no citation provided for American abortions related to sex selection, it is an assertion that needs no proof other than the cultural cache of America’s progressive culture.

The text also performs a normocentric function towards sexual difference. The underlying assumption in this passage is that maleness is desirable across the globe, opposed to “the undesired sex” which is marked as female. America may not have a familiar abortion practice towards undesirable female fetuses, but there is still a “powerful cultural preference for boys” (Sandel, 19) this text helps circulate. Maleness is treated as the ideal, for this passage, for America, and for the world. Sandel may be against sex selection abortions, but his text moves the ideology of maleness as preferred, which is a crucial assumption that motivates the very abortions he seems to find disagreeable. Certainly this is not Sandel’s
intent. To be sure, he has gone out of his way to cast aspersions on sex-selection. But this judgment is saturated in masculinity, placing the male as ideal and sons as desirable. The female fetus is assumed to be undesirable, perhaps even understandably disposable. Female fetuses are effaced in their ablediversity, the female-to-be as Sandel conceives of fetuses is outside of the “normal,” or human, or gifted. The text provides little in the way of counterdiscourses that demonstrate an appreciation for females, particularly for the essence of their femaleness. Absent any celebration of ablediversity as it relates to femaleness, there is little in the text to work against the effacement of femaleness.

Down syndrome is another trope that Sandel employs to cast ablediverse and neurodiverse people as deviant and undesirable. The tests that allow for female fetuses to be aborted were intended to detect Down’s and spina bifida. The logical conclusion of this section of text is that spina bifida and Down syndrome were to be (appropriately) detected and (legitimately) eliminated, instead of the questionable practice of sex selection abortions. Down syndrome is referred to as ‘Prince Charming’ syndrome because of the friendly and smiling dispositions they exhibit (Armstrong, 150). The idea that neurodiverse populations exhibiting characteristics of Down syndrome should be detected early, and potentially eliminated is part and parcel of the logic exhibited in The Case Against Perfection. This logic is buttressed by Sandel’s understanding of medicine used appropriately to create “normal human functioning,” but not enhanced capabilities (Sandel, 46-47). For Sandel, Down syndrome is not
normal human functioning; this is a textbook example of normocentrism in regards to neurodiversity. Down syndrome is deviant and undesirable, an aberration outside of the normal that needs to be controlled.

Sandel returns to Down syndrome and the novel responsibility parents face in their newly found choice regarding having a child with the syndrome. Sandel goes so far as to say there is an implication of moral responsibility and blame that goes into the choice of having a child with Down syndrome in the new era of genetic manipulation:

Once, giving birth to a child with Down syndrome was considered a matter of chance; today many parents of children with Down syndrome or other genetic disabilities feel judged or blamed. A domain once governed by fate has now become an arena of choice. Whatever one believes about which, if any, genetic conditions warrant terminating a pregnancy (or selecting against an embryo, in the case of preimplantation genetic diagnosis), the advent of genetic testing creates a burden of decision that did not exist before. Prospective parents remain free to choose whether to use prenatal testing and whether to act on the results. But they are not free to escape the burden of choice that the new technology creates. Nor can they avoid being implicated in the enlarged frame of moral responsibility that accompanies new habits of control (Sandel, 88-9).

The passage clearly places a “burden of choice” and “moral responsibility” that lends itself to parents “feel(ing) judged or blamed” for their children having Down syndrome. The normocentric undergirding is profound. Although Sandel has come out forcefully in the text against biological enhancement, the underlying assumption towards Down syndrome and disability is overwhelmingly negative. There is a noticeable absence of any moral questioning about the legitimacy of abortion, an interesting position for such an ecumenical treatise. This passage is also difficult to square with the rest of Sandel's attempt to limit the freedom of choice to pursue bioengineering.
Sandel is offering up the choice and responsibility governing that choice over the option of aborting a fetus genetically coded with Down syndrome. The undesirability of neurodiverse people is approaching a zenith. What of the moral responsibility for parents that chose to abort a neurodiverse fetus? Sandel offers no recompense. They hardly seem unburdened by the choice to terminate the pregnancy because of the drive for a “normal” baby. What of the chance at play in a fetus with Down syndrome? The genetic lottery is still at play, and Sandel’s normocentric rhetoric has stacked the deck against a neurodiverse fetus making it out of the womb. The text has a meaning that shapes the reader’s understanding of neurodiversity that seeks to discipline minds outside of the dominant mode of functioning.

Returning to, and expanding, a previous statement from Sandel provides an opportunity to investigate the situational rhetoric of disability and The Case Against Perfection. Discussing the origins and appropriate function of medicine, Sandal claims:

Medicine intervenes in nature, but because it is constrained by the goal of restoring normal human functioning, it does not represent an unbridled act of hubris or bid for dominion. The need for healing arises from the fact that the world is not perfect and complete but in constant need of human intervention and repair. Not everything given is good. Smallpox and malaria are not gifts, and it would be good to eradicate them. The same can be said of diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, and spinal cord injuries (Sandal, 101).

This passage is both straightforward and explicit as an example of how Sandel contributes to an understanding of a universal subject that is able-bodied. “Normal human functioning” creates a meaning that effaces all difference in humanity; there are not multiple forms of humans with multiple appropriate ways
of functioning. The assumption is that there is a universal human subject that is rational and able-bodied. This is again the presence of exnomination, creating the norm by not referring to able-bodieness, but assuming that everyone creates meaning universally, when this is not the case.

Orchestrating a rubric for evaluating the suitability of rhetoric to the response of situations creating the need for intervention, Bitzer was attempting to provide a theory of rhetoric as pragmatic. If a speech had no possibility to convince an audience to respond to the situation, then it was not rhetoric. “In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive,” attempting to convince the audience to act is a necessary standard by which to judge the efficacy of “rhetoric-as-essentially-related-to-situation (Bitzer, p.3-4). Bitzer wrote that rhetoric "functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action " (p. 3-4). The efficacy of a rhetorical act can thus be judged by its capacity to move its attendant audience to changes in thought and/or action.

The uses of “(im)perfection” in the section from Sandel and from Bitzer’s conception of exigence are a synecdoche for the relationship each has to the other. For Sandel, the imperfection is (quite literally) disability. The world is imperfect because of spinal cord injuries and Down syndrome. These imperfections are rhetorical. Although both paralysis and neurodeviancy are calcified existing conditions, they have no meaning until they are rhetoricized. An
important part of their rhetoricization is the value, or undesirability, attributed to the disabilities. For Bitzer, the imperfection is anything that deviates from the norm in a way to elicit a rhetorical response. Sandel’s rhetorical imperfection is the presence of bodies that are disabled. Sandel is moved to respond, with rhetoric, to write the book that normalizes able-bodiedness. These two texts when read together demonstrate the danger in solely relying on the medical model of disability, and marking bodies as imperfections that require a medical intervention.

Disability haunts Bitzer’s syntax used to theorize exigence, the criticism of this discourse is a necessary intervention to allow both rhetors and audiences with disabilities to shift from imperfection towards appreciation. Disability haunts rhetorical failure as it relates to exigence in a rather direct fashion as the figure of the flaw, defect, imperfection, abnormality, a thing other than it should be. Those that speak differently than the “norm” are more likely to be associated with the imperfection than the urgent remedy—someone signing their words instead of speaking them creates an exigence rather than producing resolution.

Discussions of the body are largely absent from Bitzer’s text. Bitzer does not discuss how different bodies relate differently to the situations that produce rhetoric. Nor does Bitzer argue how audiences should react to rhetoric differently grounded on the body of the rhetor, or how audiences’ compelled actions will be negotiated differently by an address. Negligence does not establish intent. There is no reason to think that Bitzer intentionally participated in normalizing an idealized body to assess exigence, perform rhetoric acts, or react to
performances. Intent is not integral, as unknowing participants circulate
discourse and ideology that perform a normalizing function of rhetoric. Bitzer
does not discuss the body, in any of its abilities, capabilities, movements, or
identities because he has already assumed one. Highlighting the importance of
“norm” as both a noun and a verb in the relationship to exigence as it both
creates and wields authority. “The term normate has been developed in the field
of disability studies to connote the ways normalcy is used to control bodies—
normalcy, as a social construct, acts upon people with disabilities” (Dolmage, 9).
To norm is to employ a logic of negation through negative qualification; the
abnormal while axiologically second, is existentially first. Exnomination is the
process of elevation through naming the other, and not the self, which makes the
normate seem natural, neutral, and primary. In Bitzer’s text, able-bodiedness
does not have to be declared, because it is assumed as the starting point for the
rhetor and the audience. The norm is always already there, and does not require
naming. The normate only needs to name the other to distinguish itself. The
center only needs to point out the periphery and its inadequacies, but not
proclaim itself or its prominence.

Dolmage describes the way normalization requires moves to distinguish
from the abnormal:

Rhetorically, normalcy functions not to define itself, but to mark out what it
is not. Understanding this negative capacity is of utmost importance
because, Douglas Baynton has written, ‘disability has functioned
historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has
also done so for women and minority groups…the concept of disability has
been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing
disability to them’ (Dolmage, 9).
The move guiding indignation towards the abnormal is dangerous for all bodies that are diverse. Combining indignation and urgency in moving against imperfect bodily conditions motivates actions that create the material conditions for ableism. This is how the world of ableism produces the harsh material realities that Lennard Davis describes for disabled individuals.

The importance of Sandel’s words cannot be overstated. Sandel is defining what a human is, and what value is attached to particular bodies. Bitzer’s task is also important, as it searches to define the ontological category of ‘rhetoric.’ Reading these two texts against each other, joining them in dialogue with embodied discussions of disabilism demonstrates the underlying meaning both authors have ignored while manufacturing “normal” bodies. I do not, however, attempt to render either text as without value or merit. My reading may not be charitable, but it is also not inaccurate. I do want to highlight the rhetorical violence done to disabled bodies in the manufacturing of able-bodies norms in both texts.

*The Case Against Perfection* creates an opening for discussion over bioethics, and is exceedingly accessible for a public audience, and to that end it is affective. Sandel is also affective at mobilizing discourse towards a normocentric conceptualization of neuro-functioning and able-bodiedness. The diffusion of discourses that castigate neurodiversity and ablediversity are abundant and profound. There is little sense of giftedness bestowed on any fetus and/or person that exhibits behavior or ability outside of the dominant or what Sandel would place as, even if not label, “normal.” What this points to is that
Sandel is not just making an argument against biological enhancement, but that his argument rests on the assumptions and rhetorical choices that efface difference. I think Sandel has successfully made a case against imperfection.
Chapter 4: Implications

Treating disability as an objective and publicly observable fact traps stigma and psychological violence as a perpetual and quotidian phenomenon. Stuttering, stammering, and twitching may be unavoidable or comfortable for some, but these characteristics can become part of a neurodiverse diagnosis that can render one legitimately targeted for exclusion in education, employment, and other material opportunities. Treating disability as rhetorical “should challenge cultural meanings that surround disability, as it situates disability itself as positively meaningful and meaning-making” (Dolmage, p. 4). This could have profound implications for racism and sexism as objective facts as well. The rhetorical function of race, sex, citizen, and so on is an essential function of the normalizing function of exnomination. The dominant group’s perceptions become neutral, correct, and simultaneously elevated. The recognition and treatment of bodies as rhetorically constructed can produce positive meaning and meaning-making for bodies that are disabled, racialized, sexed, gendered, diseased, or otherwise other.

Analyzing the rhetoric of disability is necessary for producing material changes. Tracing the meaning-making of material objects such as wheelchairs, stairs, plane seats, white canes, iron lungs, etc. could prove useful for creating a grammar of universal accessibility. These material objects are not extant static entities that exist outside of embodied human interactions; rather, they convey messages of accessibility, in/exclusion, and normalization. Discussing the parti,
or “grammar of architecture,” Aimi Hamraie explains how courthouse steps mean:

[When a courthouse is designed with steps that lead to its entrance, the design of the building may make a statement about the transcendence of law above the people. Interior grand staircases that lead the public into courtrooms and judges' chambers can communicate the democratic openness of arenas of legal decision-making. Nevertheless, the very presence of stairs argues for a particular understanding of citizenship—one defined by the ability to climb steps—that results in an implicit and potent exclusion of people with mobility or sensory disabilities from the symbolic and physical aspects of courtroom space. Although the building may communicate democratic intentions in some ways, its parti can, in other ways, produce material and symbolic exclusions of bodies for whom the design of the building does not account. (Designing Collective Access)

It doesn’t flow so smoothly as to reorient our understanding of how these material conditions and objects communicate to then change material conditions, but understanding the way material conditions function rhetorically may be a precondition to a disabled material design scheme. These material-discursive formations change across audiences; wheelchair users can find rhetorical value in “the grunge look of heavy use” (Kuppers, 81), whereas wheelchair’s meaning-making operates on a separate valence for “walkies” (Chandler).

Disabilities Studies’ rhetorical implications extend beyond communication studies across the humanities. Discussing what it means to be human is intrinsically tied to all human sciences. The importance of disability rhetoric to various academic disciplines is explained by Berube; “the question of representation of human beings to human beings—in public policy; in social theory; in art, literature, and academic collections of essays—is very much a question of adequacy, of inventing modes of understanding that will be adequate to the staggering complexity of the subject, adequate to the ancient imperative of
the humanist to perceive nothing human as alien” (343). With appreciation for disability as valuable there can be implications that exist beyond academia in this formation.

Regarding disability as beneficial is not universalizing every physical or mental condition as magnanimous. Discussions of disability ought to include benefits, which include narrativity, epistemology, and ethics. There is a danger in only including discussions of disability as conditions to be cured, killed, or overcome. There is, however, also a downside to only including disability as beneficial. People with disabilities will often want caretakers, ongoing medical care, or attempts at curative treatment. The rhetorical model of disability should not come at the expense of medical treatment and caretaking. Rhetoric has the capacity to reorient the framework in which treatment and care currently rest, and shift understandings of accessibility to include caretaking and medical treatment.

Accessibility is best understood as an unending process of creating and re-creating spaces and places that are welcoming to disabled people. Accessibility is pro-active; it requires anticipation to ensure invitation instead of potential exclusion. Are there physical walls, stairs, narrow doorways, or large gaps impeding a variety of mobilities? Are there loud noises or strong scents that alienate certain sensitivities? Accessibility requires a willingness to change, to become accessible in ways previously unthought-of or overlooked. A rhetorical disability lens can facilitate in building accessible spaces instead of relying on reactionary accommodation. The distinction between accessibility and accommodation parallels the difference between appreciation and recognition.
Recognizing disability is insufficient, at best it allows for a reactionary accommodation, which can only apologize for the inconvenience of stairs on the courthouse to the wheelchair bound. Recognition does nothing to safeguard against the universalized medical model that too often results in the worst of institutionalization and eugenic impulses. Appreciating disability registers the obligation for structures that are profoundly accessible for a multitude of minds and bodies.

At some point during the year while reading this thesis, my advisor asked me if I wanted a child with Down Syndrome. I told him I didn’t want children, but if I did want children, I wouldn’t care which disabilities the child would have. I came home and started to edit my thesis, and found a passage from Kafer that I had forgotten about that seems apropos:

As James Watson—a geneticist involved in the discovery of DNA and the development of the Human Genome project—puts it, “We already accept that most couples don’t want a Down child. You would have to be crazy to say you wanted one, because that child has no future.” Although Watson is infamous for making claims about who should and shouldn’t inhabit the world, he’s not alone in expressing this kind of sentiment. Watson’s version simply makes clear some of the assumptions underlying this discourse, and they are assumptions that cut to the heart of this project. The first is that disability is seen as the sign of no future, or at least of no good future. The second, and related, assumption is that we all agree; not only do we accept that couples don’t want a child with Down syndrome, we know that anyone who feels otherwise is “crazy.” To want a disabled child, to desire or even to accept disability in this way, is to be disordered, unbalanced, sick. “We” all know this, and there is no room for “you” to think differently. (Kafer, 3)

I began this thesis sharing the realization that rhetoric made me disabled. I now realize that writing this thesis is going to make some people think I am crazy.
References


Curriculum Vitae

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Education

M.A. Communication Studies, Wake Forest University, Spring 2015
Area of Study: Rhetoric and Disability Studies
B.A. Idaho State University, 2013
Major Field: History

Diploma Jupiter High School, Jupiter, FL, Spring 1996

Awards for Intercollegiate Policy Debate

Semi-finalist and third individual speaker at the Cross Examination Debate Association National Tournament, 2009
Three-time first round at large bid recipient and top twenty individual speaker at the National Debate Tournament, 2008, 2009, 2010
Invited Participant at the Kentucky Round Robin, 2009
Fellowship, Arizona Debate Institute, 2009

Employment History

Assistant Director of Debate, Idaho State University, 2010-2014
Assistant Coach, The College Preparatory School, Oakland, CA, 2010-Present
Assistant Coach, Head-Royce School, Oakland, CA, 2007-2010
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Wake Forest University, Fall 2013-2015
Senior Faculty and Lecturer, The Gonzaga Debate Institute, Summers 2010-Present

Summer workshops: (Present) I have worked as an advanced instructor for high school students at debate workshops sponsored by the following Institutions: Gonzaga University, Stanford University, The University of Michigan, The University of Kentucky, and Wake Forest University. I have taught hundreds of students, given small and large group lectures, and designed the curriculum for a variety of topics.
Scholarship

Published Works
“Disability and Sitcoms: A Legit Analysis”, in *The Sitcom Reader* ed. Mary Dalton and Laura Linder. (Forthcoming)

Invited Presentations:

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