Intersections of Marginalization and Possibility: A Phenomenological Analysis of Disabled Students’ Experiences with Online Learning

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning allowed for accommodations that were previously unavailable. However, this reconfiguration of supports did not always occur. Research centering student experience alongside the complexity of social contexts in online learning is lacking. Using Intersectional Critical Disability Studies and Queer Phenomenology, we investigate disabled students’ experiences with online learning. Interviews with secondary and postsecondary students reveal that online schooling reinforced barriers and hindered full inclusion and support. The pandemic emphasized the feelings of insignificance of their education, restricting their societal roles. Disabled students in this study relied on individual relationships and support to navigate their schooling. Using the concepts of inheritance/disinheritance to explore how the shift to online learning further affected secondary students with disabilities, this paper argues that the changes functioned primarily to protect the non-disabled and perpetuate able-bodiedness, thereby placing access further out of reach and thus entrenching limitations to dreaming past barriers.
Keywords

disabled students – futurity – Intersectional Critical Disability Studies – online learning – Queer Phenomenology – transition

The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing forms of inequality (Selwyn & Jandrić, 2020), surfacing new inequalities that indicated much about the current state of schooling. Due to changes in instructional models and school operations, disabled students\(^1\) needed adjusted accommodations and revised supports. While there were many challenges, with the changing modes of instruction, the format of online learning and the increased use of technology allowed for accommodations that were previously unavailable. For instance, things that were previously considered “special” for access and previously “impossible” or “undoable” in the context of the needs of disabled students became a given part of the world for non-disabled students (i.e., access to devices on a 1:1 basis, Wi-Fi, and online or recorded classes with captioning available). However, this reconfiguration of supports and recognition of co-existing advantages of online learning did not always occur for disabled students as much as for non-disabled students. Stelitano et al. (2022) found that, “despite the massive disruption brought about by the pandemic, many long-standing patterns in roles and support for educating swd [students with disabilities] remained unchanged” (p.2), this left disabled students with shards of the previous routine accommodations of normative (in-person) schooling, and often without the transformations that were possible. Despite this recognition, there has not been critical consideration of the move to online learning that centers disabled students’ perspectives and experiences and if or how their needs were met; this study seeks to address this gap.

Online Learning and Disability

Given that schools produce differential harms on students from complex interactions of disability, race, and gender that produce destruction over time (Annamma, 2107); it is reasonable to assume that any major fracture in the

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1 Person-first language (i.e., person/student with a disability rather than disabled person/student) is often considered preferable in many professional journals, the idea being that person-first language foregrounds the person, not a “diagnosis.” Conversely, disabled activists argue that person-first terminology implies that disability is somehow a diminished aspect of the self, rather than an aspect of identity that is a source of pride. In this article we try to honor that by using disability identity language in general terms.
context of learning can produce knowledge that speaks to the differential impacts. Therefore, furthering understanding of the period of online learning may have provide glimpses into alternate possibilities for disabled students whose needs are otherwise often erased or rendered invisible to the school. However, because the shift to remote instruction left many teachers feeling less confident in their capacity to meet their students’ required accommodations (Stelitano et al., 2021), much of the literature grounded in perspectives of online learning during the pandemic centers teacher rather than student experiences of in-person instruction. This literature largely focuses on whether or not teachers felt prepared (most report feeling unprepared) and the differences they noticed (Hanreddy, 2021; Lambert & Schuck, 2021; Piceci & Cancellara, 2020); however, we cannot assume that students have the same experiences. Before the pandemic, the majority of research on online learning primarily centered on individual students who voluntarily engaged in online courses. Consequently, this research placed a greater emphasis on the art of delivering effective instruction, as noted by Mayer (2019). This emphasis tended to downplay the significance of critical social factors that come to light through the students’ experiences, leading to a gap in the existing literature. In the context of disability, a body of literature has emerged, emphasizing the application of Universal Design for Learning to digital formats. This approach aims to accommodate variations in learners’ needs within the evolving landscape of digital education, as demonstrated by studies such as Basham et al. (2020) and Kilpatrick et al. (2021). This literature often focuses on making instruction more accessible via improving content-delivery, but ignores the differential impacts afforded by a structural analysis that understands the complexities of the social contexts in which online learning occurs. This is not a criticism of UDL, rather it is an observation that the research – by focusing on access to content – necessarily did not account for students’ experiences. Likewise, a study by Krazinski and Cartier (2022) found that one large urban district in the United States prioritized representational domains of accessibility and largely ignored the more dialogic engagement aspects that for remote learning accentuate the need for strategies specific to learner location and environment. Skilled teachers have many instructional moves to support disabled learners that were transformed or not possible during online learning such as being able check-in with students privately or read body language. These are just two examples of many that had to be reworked. While some have suggested alternative approaches to online learning that suggest situated, embodied, and anti-oppressive pedagogies, this is mostly at the postsecondary
level² (Collier, 2012; Migueliz Valcarlos et al., 2020; Morris & Stommel, 2018) and more work is needed that extends this into applicability for K-12 contexts.

The dominant narrative is that outcomes for all students, regardless of disability status declined during the pandemic, and that this decline was amplified for disabled students (Stelitano, 2022). The report by Stelitano et al. summarizes key points, including the way interruptions impact both early identification and transition services, and how compensatory services are still not being reconciled, contributing to the “compounding” nature of the pandemic decline for disabled students. They also note that medical needs shaped choices around remote or in-person learning for students with certain types of disabilities. However, and most important to the study at hand, largely their findings pointed to a need for research that individualizes perspectives and does not overgeneralize and make broad assumptions about disabled students all having the same experience. They critically note that much of the research refers to “students with disabilities” as monolith, which “masks critical variation” (p. 2) of the experiences disabled students faced, and points to the need for more individualized an multiplicitous perspectives. This need drives the theoretical framing and justification for methods used in this study and discussed in subsequent sections.

Krazinski and Cartier (2022) found that one large urban district in the United States embraced language of equity during the pandemic and yet discursively defined this as attending to racial disparities and often the inclusion of disabled students as a separate matter, thereby imagining the needs of disabled students to be a single axis issue of, as critical race scholars (Annamma et al., 2013) have pointed out, without naming the intersectionality present in disability, whiteness therefore becomes the assumed and imagined default. Regardless of setting, ability, race, gender, and class still shape what accommodations are available; leading to a need for a critical and intersectional framing that addresses this gap in the literature. Therefore, the authors seek to apply a situated analysis that is grounded in student perspectives and use this to develop more dynamic understandings of what was learned from online learning grounded in critical theory. This study seeks to dig deeper into the social contexts of learning that perpetuate injustice for disabled students in secondary education via the perspective of the students themselves.

² In the U.S., secondary education refers to the educational level that follows primary or elementary schooling and typically encompasses the middle and high school years (approximately ages 12–18). Postsecondary education is also referred to as tertiary or higher education and encompasses educational pursuits beyond secondary school (e.g., colleges and universities, trade schools, or vocational training).
Research Questions

This paper argues for a critical and intersectional framing that considers the complex social contexts of online learning. It emphasizes the need to understand the experiences of disabled students and examines the enduring legacies of ableism and racism within special education. The research questions proposed aim to explore how secondary disabled students perceived their learning experiences during remote learning, how they understood the limitations and possibilities of online education, and what their experiences reveal about the systemic structures of special education.

1. How did secondary disabled students understand their experience of learning and school during online learning?
2. How did secondary disabled students understand what was possible during online learning based on the normative world and what was understood to be inherited or disinherited?
3. What does these students’ understanding of their learning and schooling experiences suggest about the enduring legacies of the racist and ableist structures of special education?

Theoretical Approaches and Positionality

As scholars grounded in Disability Studies, the authors understand disability as having important social and political implications (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012; Goodley, 2016), seeking to explore disability as a social process. Both authors are in the northeastern United States, and the research sites for this research were also located in the northeastern United States. We understand this to be a social location aligned with voices that dominate most academic research fields culturally and linguistically. Author 1 is a white neurodivergent woman and former special education teacher who found online learning to have

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3 Special education is a system of tailored educational support and services designed to meet the unique needs of disabled students. In the U.S., special education is legally mandated and governed by federal laws. The primary legislation that provides the legal basis for special education services is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); however, this concept is not limited to the United States and is present in various forms in education systems globally.

4 Likewise, for the purposes of this study, we understand phrases like “cultural capital” to be references not to one’s cultural attachments on a personal level, but rather references to epistemic, material, and semiotic tools that allows one to access resources controlled by the dominant group.
advantages for some of her disabled students, as well as herself. For instance, some students who experience regular sensory overload that compounds recovery time for dysregulation, taking valuable time out of the instructional day, were able to instead be more efficient with work time at home. Likewise, for herself, she noticed that online learning allowed her to manage her time more effectively and to be more participatory in meetings since she was no longer mitigating burn out experienced by navigating environments that do not center the sensory and social needs of neurodivergent bodies. Additionally, features like closed captioning, making files available digitally, and the ability to converse in a Zoom chat allowed for modes of communication that both she and some of her students benefitted from. She noticed that the advantages did not cleave neatly along lines of privilege leading to questions around the way online learning can inform our understandings of privilege and oppression in schooling. Author 2 is a white male neurodivergent individual whose position is shaped by his academic work and by his experiences as a teacher and as a parent of a neurodivergent child. He has been teaching online since the early 2000s including during the pandemic. His experience teaching online and supporting a child engaged in online learning during the pandemic reinforced for him the many inequalities in schooling particularly around access and accessibility. As white scholars, we consider how our vantage point may be limited by our experiences with race privilege, as well as how our own experiences with of affordances of online learning and disability may have shaped our question formulation. All students in the study have been assigned a disability label by an institution, as that was a key means to our identification of eligibility during recruitment. Given this, a disability label is assigned to these students regardless of their level of understanding or consent. We also contend that any researcher is never solely an “insider” or an “outsider.” Like Narayan (1993), we understand researchers to have a “multiplex” identity that needs to be unpicked regardless of their group status. Particularly, given our affiliations with institutions that support us in ways never fully available to our participants, we find ourselves to be “outsiders.” Additionally, all our participants were recruited by institutional mediation and through university connections in some way. This can impact participants’ perceptions and expectations around the interview purpose and content. We understand ourselves “insiders” in that we are neurodivergent and have personal experience with disability and/or being disabled, and also with navigating the educational system on behalf of students both personally and professionally. However, we also must highlight that we did not experience our own primary and secondary education as a student with an IEP, which was our recruitment method. This adds a non-agentive bureaucratic layer to the label of disability and to our students’ educational experience of disability that we
do not share. For these reasons, however, we found Ahmed’s (2006) work to be particularly productive methodologically to foreground complexity.

We hold that the research of disability should be both grounded in the perspectives of disabled individuals, avoiding monolithic understandings of disability. This study adopts two theoretical approaches to accomplish this. First, the Intersectional Critical Disability Studies (ICDS) approach, such as those developed by Annamma et al. (Annamma et al., 2013), is utilized to explore the differential privileges and oppressions at the intersections of disability, gender, and race. The ICDS approach emphasizes the need to consider disability within a broader social justice framework that accounts for the ways in which various forms of oppression may uniquely comingle phenomenologically and interactionally (Annamma, 2017).

Second, Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology is used as a method of analysis to examine the orientation of disability and the forces that produce marginalization and privilege. Queer phenomenology is a theoretical approach and a methodology that aims to explore the ways in which bodies and experiences shape and are shaped by social norms, power dynamics, and cultural representations. An important concept that informs this study from Ahmed’s queer phenomenology is the notion of futurity defined as follows: Ahmed draws a distinction between the terms future and futurity. Future typically denotes a linear and forward-moving sense of time, often associated with progress and anticipation. It suggests a predetermined trajectory, shaped by dominant norms and expectations. On the other hand, futurity encompasses a broader understanding of possibilities and potentialities that extend beyond linear notions of time. It involves the imagination of alternative futures that challenge or deviate from normative structures and offer new ways of being and relating. By using both ICDS and queer phenomenology approaches, this paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of marginalized students. Specifically, this paper aims to examine how the intersection of disability, gender, and race shapes the embodied and interactional experiences of disabled students.

Methodology

Disability and access are knowledge relations of knowledge that emerge between bodies and environments. The authors contend that Intersectional Critical Disability Studies as a methodology can “recommit(s) the field to social justice work” (Minich, 2016), and define disability as a “space of interpretive encounter” (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 56). To examine experience and space as social
processes lends itself to a phenomenological approach to better understand the lived experiences of disabled students, and to therefore address the aforementioned gaps identified in the literature review. In the context of this study, this unprecedented educational context brought the ways in which privilege operates into more stark relief as this normalization of the use of technological tools did not “level the playing field,” but instead recreated pre-existing hierarchies built from *not only* centering ablebodiedness but also whiteness. In this study, we follow in the line of Flowers’ (2021) analysis building on Ahmed’s work, using the pandemic context and a critical disability lens. Flowers (2021) asserts that ableism is an organizing force in the world and the world is thus oriented toward “the abled.” This leads us to understand that, despite the opportunity for disruption, bodies are repositioned not by the supports available, but by proximity to colonial hierarchies.

Queering phenomenology as a methodology helps to examine this repositioning more holistically and accurately, by casting aside assumptions of “neutral space” to consider and contest the ways the objects that constitute the “background” from dominant vantage points may define one’s experience, especially for marginalized individuals. Ahmed (2006) notes that we inherit a world made white by a history of colonialism which is oriented toward whiteness, ablebodiedness, and straightness; queer phenomenology focuses on the ways certain bodies do not follow direct lines, the way they queer the spaces they are in, as well as what forces produce a straightening effect. This allows us to focus on both material and discursive impacts of a particular context, and the aspects that might not be as legible via other analysis. Queer phenomenology as an analytic method provides an intervention that allows one to step outside traditional lines of data analysis, tracing and collecting data obliquely; allowing one to bring forward what is traditionally in the “background” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 23), thereby centering of the complexity and intersections of their experiences. Additionally, by using Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenological frameworks of inheritance, orientation, and proximity, we can conduct critical analysis that interrogates the role of disability, race, and other factors, even when these have gone unnamed.

**Methods**

Employing a qualitative phenomenological inquiry process (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; J. Smith et al., 2009; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015; Wertz et al., 2011), semi-structured and open-ended interviews were used to gather perspectives on online learning from five secondary students identified as having a disability. Each student participated in two or three interviews of 20–45 minutes each. Consideration of unique communication needs was considered at every step of
the process and flexible settings were offered to create conditions for increased participant access and comfort.

Ethics and Consent
Consent is too often considered something that disabled people are unable to offer. This viewpoint perpetuates problematic and ableist ideologies. Instead of recognizing how disabled people have been coerced or placed in positions without their consent, it reinforces ableist beliefs that align with the justification of conservatorship and institutionalization, which is deeply concerning. We push back on this assumption and instead ask, how can we make consent accessible? In the case of this study, it meant giving participants extended lead time, an accessible copy of the description of the study in plain language, and encouraging them to review the details with people in their circle of support. We also emphasize consent as an ongoing and constant negotiation that gives participants full control. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose several weeks before beginning and were reassured that at any time they could withdraw or refuse to answer questions, as well as edit or redact their answers retroactively. Consent was not presented as a one-time instance, but as an ongoing process that gave participants full control. Parental consent was obtained for participants under the ages of 18, and both parents and students were given direct access to the researchers to ask any questions ahead of time. The researchers engaged in member-checking and reflexive practices that interrogate their social locations and identities concerning an intersectional understanding of race, gender, and ability (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). The use of reflexive memo writing, checking for researcher consistency in identifying themes and discussing discrepancies, was embedded throughout the project. If a student presented a topic that indicated a particularly agentive move (i.e. strayed from the interview questions or introduced a new topic), the researchers interviewed the student again. One student requested to have their parent present during the next interview, which was welcomed as they were encouraged to include anyone they wanted in the process. While the study did engage with diaglogic member-checking via follow-up or additional interviews to the extent that questions about particular topic were raised, these we made sure were topics that arose naturally. We did not engage in further practices that might assume that the information the participants presented to us was of a compromised truth value. We instead take responsibility for the ways our social locations and theoretical frameworks interpret that data and decline to use the assumption that we can find objectivity or “validity” by interrogating participants further which assumes there is a truth to be found that they are hiding, and risks us using interpretation of data as a means to underwrite
colonization of knowledge. We understand the knowledge generated is partial and consider this recognition an ethical stance.

Participants
Participants were five students in total who were secondary students during the pandemic. Two participants were 17 years old in a suburban school district, one participant was 15 in an urban school district, and two participants were currently enrolled in a college program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities but were in secondary programs during the pandemic, ages 20 and 22. All five participants currently had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or had one when they were in secondary school and had been in secondary school during the pandemic. Four of the participants were male and one was female. To bring generative possibilities for complexity to the foreground and to be sure to include affordances of online learning in connection with the research questions, participants were also required to self-identify as finding some benefit in online learning. Participants were selected via purposive sampling (Check & Schutt, 2011), in coordination with regional school districts and an inclusive college program. Inclusion criteria for participants was that the students had to be in secondary education during the pandemic and have an IEP at the time.

The participants pseudonyms, current (at the time of the interview) grade level, and relevant social locations to the study are as follows:
1. Lucas – secondary school, white Latinx student with class privilege
2. Mike – secondary school, student of color without class privilege
3. Nancy – secondary school, white student without class privilege
4. Steve – college program, white student with class privilege
5. Dustin – college program, white student with class privilege

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5 An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is an educational plan created to address the specific learning requirements of disabled students. In the United States, this plan is legally mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that ensures children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education.

6 The authors include these identifiers not to reinforce biological importance, but to note importance of the way they bear on the social pressures and factors that affect these students, as well as how the students’ inheritances were constructed according to norms of cisheteronormativity.

7 Class privilege refers to the unearned advantages and benefits that individuals of higher socioeconomic classes experience due to their economic and social status. These advantages can include better access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and a higher standard of living, often at the expense of those of lower socioeconomic status.
Data Analysis

Data Analysis was conducted using an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (J. Smith et al., 2009). Participant interviews were coded in an iterative cycle broken into two larger phases: First, they were coded individually, using the process outlined as follows. Secondly, they were coded together to understand both commonalities and points of tension. Interviews were inductively coded by a process of “Theming the Data” (Saldaña, 2021), to analyze participants experiences and meaning making. This process involves initially generating topical descriptive codes and then selecting the most salient codes and coding again using in vivo coding, which preserves participant voice by keeping language and phrasing intact. This is a way of bracketing our phenomenological analysis by suspending our assumptions about what is most salient to participants, and preserving the unique contours and nuance of individual participant voices. We then consolidated the in vivo coding into larger themes shaped by the complexity preserved in this method. Researcher memos were also used as a source of data and enfolding into the later stages of coding, including those that reflected on personal assumptions and judgements to make room for the ways participants views may have diverged from our own expectations. The approach of the study is to foreground differential perspectives and allow for complicity and multiplicity. Therefore, an intersectional thematic analysis using Queer Phenomenology as an interpretive framework was used. This is defined by Ahmed's (2006) concepts of inheritance, orientation, and proximity as method of thematic data analysis were employed as analytic tools. Using the Ahmed's (2006) definitions of inheritance, orientation, and proximity as method of identifying data to select for thematic data analysis, we explore how objects that appear in the data serve as objects and “orientation devices” (p.3). That is, by virtue of our positionality, we inherit orientations that make things im/possible for
us. Certain orientations (heterosexuality, whiteness, ability) put certain things as proximate, or within reach. This is that which is available to us. Through organizing forces like ableism (the structure and format of educational systems) the world is prepared for some bodies (inheritance) and not others (disinheritance). For the purposes of this study, we define these three central analytic concepts and explain how they guided our interpretive criteria:

1) **Inheritance**: An understanding that by virtue of our positionality and social locations we inherit orientations that make things im/possible for us.
   
   Application: When analyzing the data, we attended to the narratives, and particularly repeated narratives, that highlighted inherited beliefs, values, and societal norms. For example, if a participant discussed the impact of cultural expectations on their life choices, we interpreted this through the lens of inheritance, recognizing how these inherited orientations shaped their experiences.

2) **Orientation**: Ahmed defines orientation by drawing upon Husserl’s philosophical table. The way one is seated at the table (or if one has a seat at all) is a point of beginning produces lines that impress directions onto a person, determining the course of their life and how they follow straight or oblique lines in that trajectory.
   
   Application: We used this concept to interpret how participants navigated their social environments and the directions their lives took based on their orientations. For instance, if a participant shared experiences of feeling marginalized or privileged in certain spaces, we analyzed this through the lens of orientation, understanding how their positionality impacted their life paths and access to opportunities, particularly related to transition, given the ages of the participants.

3) **Proximity**: Certain orientations (heterosexuality, whiteness, ability) put certain things within reach and determines that which is available to us.
   
   Application: We used this concept to explore how participants viewed and secured access to resources, support, and opportunities. For example, if a participant talked about the ease or difficulty of accessing education or social support, we interpreted these narratives in ways that considered how their proximity to or distance from these resources was influenced by their social identities.

10 For example, while these orientations impress directions upon students that form potential trajectories, they are also not entirely fixed, leading students with more cultural and educational capital to respond to their orientation defensively (i.e., by “collecting” accommodations and resources even if seemingly learning in disjunct and even contradictory trajectories).
Findings

Inheritance: “Everything a Senior Would Get”

The students spoke of temporal and social objects in commodified terms as part of one’s inheritance that one is entitled to after conforming to the expectations of school. For example, Nancy, despite finding some benefit in online learning, spoke about desiring to go back to in-person schooling saying, “I wanted to be able to finish off school in school, and like, have my senior ball, the homecoming. Everything a senior would get.” These configurations of events served as objects set at the “table” (Ahmed, 2006) of school. These hallmarks defined and shaped school experience during remote learning. Even when the building was physically vacated, they were psychically prominent as anchor points. Ahmed (2006) explains that inheritance describes how heterosexuality is idealized as a “social gift” that is assumed to engender the continuation of life itself, and as one that the child must always repay back (p. 86). Students often spoke of social inheritances; namely key events, relationships, and social situations that ascribe status as key considerations in how they conceptualized school during remote learning.

As Ahmed (2006) notes, nearness of objects shapes both perception and what one can do (p. 88). Ideas of inheritance were shaped students’ descriptions of futurity and transition planning of what they thought they could do. Transition is a central part of mandated special education services once a student reaches high school age. Notably, were how frequently the students’ answers contained contradictions in their interviews around the topic of future. Often when asked to describe their experience with online learning, rather than speaking concretely and grounded in examples of learning formats or tools; students answered the question obliquely. For instance, when asked “What did you miss about in-person school?” At first Steve said, “There’s not really anything I can think of.” However, he continued on, “Oh definitely the events of Blue at Nightfall,” a campus social gathering. Here, Steve does not directly answer what he misses about in-person academics, but instead the friendships. This commonality was especially present for ideas of transition to post-secondary life and futurity. The role of privilege shaped the way students spoke about their transition plans and their hopes for the future; as well as contributed to inconsistencies in vision and planning. Due to the experience of disability complicating these students’ ability to receive and be seen as deserving of the inheritances of their peers, their inheritance produced disjunct orientations that reflected the shards of objects that were in their reach. Students repeatedly demonstrated participation in taking on the directions and motions that respond to the inheritance promised as a social good, even if there were contradictions
to it. These narratives were defined by fractures. “Fractured inheritances” spoke to the way their inheritances as disabled students are less secure. For instance, Lucas shared, “I want to be an animated animation producer, director and probably director. And being a producer means being an accountant. So I have to learn accounting.” This shift occurred frequently with him oscillating between more artistic career dreams and those that reflected the path set out by the school, despite the disparate nature of the juxtapositions or tensions of feasibility for serious pursuit of both.

However, according to the intersections at which the individual student was located, these contradictions were shaped differentially. The privileged end of these disabled inheritances created particular types of disjunctures. These were shaped by accumulating possibility and support and holding onto multiple avenues of possibility, even if they contained contradictions. For example, Lucas, the student with the most social, cultural, and financial capital had multiple iterations of a future mapped out. This spoke to a unique version of capital where he was able to move through systems more fluently, exercising the ability to mute certain supports as a navigation tool that allowed him to procure a more possibilities. These possibilities diverged depending on the setting. At school, in the presence of his teaching assistant, he spoke about taking accounting classes, justifying this connection by his interest in digital animation. Here, he drew upon more evidently rehearsed ideas that are emphasized by vocational rehabilitation as part of mandated transition supports by the state for eligible students. He drew upon a menu of common jobs that are supported by state agencies as connected to transition services. However, when interviewed with his mother at the local coffee shop by his house, outside of the institutional purview, different inheritances shaped by privilege (family connections, wealth, etc.) emerged, revealing access to creative and entrepreneurial possibilities and resources. In this setting, his plan was to run an animation studio and supervise artists, and the state supports faded into the background. He spoke about the ingenuity of his ideas and international connections to the industry, as well as a plan for this that was well-resourced by family. In this space, Lucas was able to be legitimized as a producer of creative ideas and own other aspects of his privilege that were unable to be acknowledged in the school setting by bureaucratic transition mechanisms focused on compliance. Lucas demonstrated a type of strategy of accessing and maintaining possible futurities and supports as a type of social and educational capital with which he could mute or downplay certain privileges to benefit from both the state-dispatched supports and maintain opportunities beyond it. It was not seen as necessary to rectify or question the
distance between accounting and digital animation, however, and both were called on to support the future.

For Nancy, contradictions were less in the fractures of coherence of the ultimate career plan, but more in the immediate next steps with which she had less familial support than Lucas, thus indicating her more pronounced precarity and less capital in the form of advocacy support. For her, college plans were more of a distant conjecture, despite being a student who was framed by the district as not needing as much formal support. In her first interview, she reported she did not expect to get a diploma and had resigned herself to this reality, with unclear images of her future past her senior year, claiming she would be, “taking a year off school because school has been stressful. I’ve gone through a lot of bullying and stuff.” She shared she planned to attend college after the year off. In a later interview, she shared new plans to attend the local community college for art and had decided against a year off. She was surprised to find out she would be getting a diploma, presumably due to the variances on testing requirements that were passed by the state department of education during the pandemic. Her descriptions of her future vacillated, indicating an unsecured idea of what she can inherit in terms of workforce opportunities, reflecting the way class and gender impact what was conveyed to her about her futurity. Financial considerations of being independent via having a job were less present in her transition plans. Despite her lack of class privilege, she did not feel it imperative to center concerns about earning a living. The absence of parent advocacy as an inheritance had left her immediate next steps in more contested territory.

Expanding Inheritances through the Digital

Students emphasized that their perspective was that teachers did not change or start to do anything differently because of the technology made available. Dustin confirmed that it “just went back to the way it was,” and others echoed these sentiments. However, the role of privilege in utilizing and leveraging digital worlds opportunities to expand and animate one’s inheritance, was a theme, regardless of whether use of these new worlds extended into school pedagogy and formal accommodation plans. The extent to which digital worlds translate into more material exercising of privilege is relative to the other privileges one has (race, class, education). This seems to indicate that online resources can be used as a tool for those who have certain privileges and know how to access information and connections that the school or locality may otherwise not provide. Lucas shared a digital history that was laden with resources used strategically. These strategies reflected understandings of his position in a capitalist system, but also require social, cultural, and educational
capital to leverage. When asked about his experience during pandemic learning, his parent recounted a history of utilizing digital resources to engineer an education for him that would be more accessible and supportive than the default. For example, his mother used a Facebook group for mothers of Autistic children to find his current school through which they exercised their ability to relocate. She noted that he keeps in touch with his friends from the previous school online, but that the school was not focused enough on academics. Here, online spaces made it possible for them to cobble together high-quality curriculum with access to affirming social opportunities. This indicated that online resources can be a tool for those who know how to access information and connections that the school or locality may otherwise not provide. However, despite being able to leverage digital worlds and having them play a role in his experiences, including being part of an e-sports team, Lucas still missed in-person socialization during the pandemic. He had speech groups online that were social, but missed the in-person friends who were upperclassmen and members of the football team. This data demonstrates that despite expanding inheritance, online friends do not produce equivalent inheritances to digital ones. Rather, online friends are a social supplement, but do not enact status in the same way.

Mike, who was at a large urban district spoke about digital worlds fondly around video games and playing his new games with his brother but did not have digital spaces transfer to leverage privilege in school settings. Regarding the school setting, he spoke about the digital as more of a barrier and tool of isolation, indicating that he did not see the same options for leveraging digital worlds like some of the other students. He spoke about the challenges of the digital as he entered high school. Since cameras were off in zoom class, he could not see faces or get to know his peers, creating a barrier to making friends that was more pronounced in a large district. He remarked, “because like I said, they wouldn't turn on the camera. So all I would see is their name, and I wouldn't know who they were.” His school experience as a new highschooler during the pandemic, especially in formal classroom settings, was increasingly one of anonymity that was emptied of social connection. Therefore, during the pandemic he relied heavily on connection with his previous teacher via the Remind app.

Other students such as Nancy spoke about the role of digital media in their lives as a sustaining force, but again as one that did not always translate to be foregrounded in shaping in-person schooling. Nancy used the digital to discover her creativity during the pandemic and to develop her self-efficacy as an artist. It seemed here is where she found familial support as well, yet she still described her situation in such a way that reflected having to have her
own motivation. She shared, “So I’m pushing myself to keep going with it. Cuz I fell love with it. Mmm-hmmm. And the way I fell in love with it is just something I want to just keep going with ... and then my family supports it and then they're like, you should keep doing it. You have the knack for it, that type of thing.” She shared her photos, some of which are of flowers and others are of family. She described the sense of affirmation she has gotten from taking photos and the specific challenges to learning to photograph (notably, with more specificity than any curricular challenge she described). In the second interview she shared the reason she is interested in going to college for studio art is because of her success in taking photos and the way they have been well-received.

Focus on Routines and the Social

One common way students answered these questions by focusing on the routine aspects of online learning, such as how it affected their routine. Students described it making their routine a bit easier, such as not having to get on the bus, make lunch, or wear ear defenders while changing classes. Lucas discusses the challenges associated with navigating in-person school. Some of these are environmental, sensory, or may involve the overall structures and infrastructures, technologies, and routines of schooling. While online learning was self-evaluated by students in terms of task completion, affordances were positioned in relation to being able to avoid some of the more cumbersome aspects of the school day. Some remarked that the routine of online learning is easy because you can just wake up and get started on it, as Lucas remarked, right “at the breakfast table.” For Lucas, this part made school easier. He said, “It was good. Like it was easy. It was it was easy for me to wake up and just have breakfast and just get started on the Chromebook. I don’t know, and I didn’t have to go on the bus. But there’s some points where I forget to turn on the online (and) tune in. But yeah, I’m pretty good about that.” One student remarked that with the shift to technology becoming normalized he was happy that he had less restrictions around iPad screen time, as it became indiscernible to his parents from homework. When speaking of in-person schooling Lucas emphasized the navigation aspects of the building. For instance, at home he did not have to wear ear defenders in the halls, get ready to get on the bus, get organized, and make a lunch.

The emphasis on the non-instructional aspects of the school day was foregrounded in many students’ interviews. Nancy was the only feminine-identified student in the study and one who was more precariously positioned yet had the least amount of formal support. In Nancy’s interviews the logistical barriers presented by in-person school manifest via emphasis on social conflicts. She remarked that not being in the physical school building allowed
her to avoid the “drama” that happened in the halls in between classes. Nancy’s interview has a lot of contradictions. From one perspective, she missed her friends and getting away from home, yet she also shared that online learning was less drama (“less of the he said she said” she kept remarking). She confirms that most of this drama happens in the halls during downtime (this is when relationships are built and destroyed- fits in with ideas of more precarious orientation). These moments of contraction indicate disjunctures wherein the body oscillates between straightening forces and its inability to fully ever arrive at the table that was not set for it.

Nancy emphasized that the perk of not being in the building was being able to avoid the “drama” and “he said she said” that comes with the downtime of school such as during changing classes. To note: She also emphasized her desire for very normative hallmarks of high school social life, such as the senior ball as inheritance. When asked more about these aspects of school, she was very attached to them. On these topics she said she was “very emotional. I was crying yesterday about it after school about the having to leave school thing.” Nancy recounted a school history of objects that largely brought stress, both academically and socially, but also a palpable attachment to the norms and ideals related to them. She indicates that these events are objects that animate her practice of daily schooling and overcoming of struggle, entwined with academics in her narrative. The juxtaposition of these hard daily social experiences against the hallmarks of normative schooling (dances, ceremonies) as objects of desire are positioned in the students recounting as a type of reward of normative inheritance. These rewards are prevalent but are articulated with some vagueness that indicates distance (“Everything a senior would get”). Mike was the only student to speak of specific pedagogical strategies as connected to the changes without the interviewers specifically probing this topic and did so briefly saying he missed the whiteboard and chalkboard for modeling. Steve and Dustin spoke of liking the notes being provided after the class, but only upon additional probing.

The Banking Model of Education

Lucas, in speaking of the ways in which he overcomes failure, summoned language that speaks to competitive models of education that reward grit and perseverance.\(^{11}\) He remarked he will, “Come back on top if I just try...” He shared

\(^{11}\) Language about “grit” or “perseverance” has been critiqued as racist and ableist because it can perpetuate inequality and overlook systemic barriers without considering the diverse abilities and challenges people may face (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Pickens, 2014; Tefera et al., 2019).
that he is proud of the “scores” he is getting in school and that he is “getting good grades.” Like Lucas, all students were less concerned with assessing their own progress on specific standards or learning goals and instead described a “banking model of education” (Freire, 1972) that must be endured to arrive at receiving the best possible inheritance. In a banking model of education, the emphasis is on task completion rather than the content of the learning itself. Students conceptualized learning in ways that defined it as task completion. Self-assessment of learning was posed as “getting the work done,” in ways that positioned task completion as academic survival. For example, Mike said he was not proud of anything when pressed about schoolwork and learning. When probed more on this, he said “getting the work done.” When Nancy was asked what are you most proud of from the period of online learning, she remarked, “getting through” and “being able to graduate in two months.” In this framing, mention of a temporal experience, such as a senior ball also becomes commodified as curricular objects wrapped into the banking model as currency one becomes qualified to inherit when one complies with the tasks and demands of “getting through” to the end of the year. These assessments are ways of orienting oneself towards the banking model as a straightening device that provides the type of reassurance that one can ensure one’s inheritance.

**Executive Functioning: The Act of Reaching**

The focus on task completion marked a decline in meaningful feedback about criteria and standards and a shift to emphasis on the format requested and turning it in in the proper place. One student remarked that, at first, they “were passing you because they had no way to explain what the work was to you.” When asked what was hard about online learning, students highlighted executive functioning challenges, describing the barriers to online learning as organizational. Mike summarized it as “like not really knowing what I’m doing. Like, not knowing like, how to do the work and stuff. So I kinda didn’t know how to like, do the things the teacher was showing on the computer.” Lucas remarked that remembering things that he had to do was difficult, but his 1:1 paraprofessional helped him remember things and his mother helped him know what website to be on. Connecting this to the banking model, he said, “working without someone is just you won’t get stuff done and and sometimes having sick days can make you miss work and I learned that the hard way.” Likewise, all students this situation of amplified executive functioning challenges was most addressed by 1:1 support (whether informal or formally assigned), which became an object of proximity that defined the experiences of all the students interviewed.
**1:1 Relationships**

1:1 relationships were a defining theme during online learning for these students. This speed at which learning must be accomplished is linked to the urgency with which students spoke of reaching for the 1:1 person to both guide them through the learning, protect them, buffer them from ableist structures, and ensure their futurity. These can be seen as straightening devices as indicated by the way students referred to them in ways that reinforced their normativity in other areas beyond academics. This format for social interaction was often most proximate to the students, but some were more formally secured than others, reflecting levels of privilege and the ways the relationships were used as means of mitigating the forces of ableism and barriers to inheritances that students came up against. Lucas spoke in terms of “we” quite a bit, remarking that teachers were his friends, and spoke in ways that assumed he would always be getting support and took it for granted. This speaks to the way these relationships were used as an emotional buffer against the harms of the emphasis on executive functioning that was a primary source for marginalizing these students by making it difficult for them to demonstrate learning independently. Mike talked about a particular teacher as very influential, stressing that this was his only person at school he felt could depend on, saying “I used to go see him all the time. He is the only person I have.” For instance, Steve, a white student with class privilege jokingly alluded to a romanticized relationship with a support person, describing her in a way that reinforced his status as a heterosexual man. Interestingly, when asked what his strengths are, he reported that his strengths were the support person.

Students also returned to the ways having a particular support person mitigated the challenges to accomplishing the tasks presented. The proximity of these relationships is also often related to support with executive functioning to address the access problems presented by the banking model and accentuated by online learning (i.e. when Lucas remarked “Working without someone you just won’t get stuff done...”).

Lucas, for instance, remarked on his homework help, “Working without someone you just won’t get stuff done ... ” Establishing the importance of this relationality as primary is both a means to an end of completing the task of school, and a subversive act in that it queers the neoliberal logic of ableist independence that dictates the expectations for how a student moves through school independently.

Unlike Lucas who framed his teachers as friends who did school right alongside him, Nancy recounted a reliance on the strategy of approaching teachers privately. According to the differential and intersecting ways students are impacted by their disability, 1:1 support when not formally assigned, was
accessed privately. For example, Nancy, a student deemed more independent by the district, showed indications that she needed support that was not formalized. Notably, she showed up to her first interview escorted by a friend. To manage stigma while still meeting her support needs, Nancy had to engage in more calculated strategies than other students who had more privilege. This was hard at the incipience of online learning, she said, until she figured out “workarounds,” which included using the chat to send messages, or hanging on the zoom after class when others logged off and would not know she was meeting with the teacher.

Discussion

Inheritance

These disabled students were largely taught to self-assess using metrics derived from the banking model of education (Freire, 1972). This model is focused on task completion and therefore overly orient toward scrutinizing their own executive functioning. These findings are related to what Fovet (2023) found even while intentionally attempting to implement critical pedagogy practices. Fovet found that neoliberalism permeated the “branding” of the online format, shaping student expectations and thwarting attempts for more dynamic pedagogy. Students, therefore, Fovet posited did not engage in the same way due to their expectation. These students showed less evidence of being consciously applied in their programming before the pandemic, which exacerbated the distance from their learning once school went online. Largely students avoided articulating what supports worked well for them as well as the criteria that they were being evaluated by. The students drew upon understandings of inheritance in how they positioned themselves during the time of online learning, which was less about pedagogical moves of access to curriculum and more about access to social inheritances shaped by the ableist structures of schooling. As noted in Bourke et al. (2013), self-assessment is a critical piece of inclusion in the curriculum, so the fact that students were alienated from deeper engagement with this process may be reflective of how included they felt in the curriculum, and how accessible online learning was to them. Many of these events related to futurities that confirm one's proximity to normalcy, or the idea that even during remote learning, they would still be proximate to certain inherited futurities at the end of the pandemic. Certain inheritances, therefore, were within reach for these students, while others were communicated to them as inconsequential and made invisible.
As Ahmed (2006) writes, the gaze onto an object depends on histories and how they “arrive,” even if the gaze is dim (p. 88). This is not at all to say inheritance recedes from consciousness, however. Despite remote learning and the reconfiguration of the goalposts and subsequent dimming of the objects, for many of these students, these objects were not objects within immediate reach regardless of the pandemic and remote learning. Like Flowers assertions (2023) there was a sense that the relationship to inheritance has gone unchanged. Regardless of the massive changes for many students with online learning, these students reached for the reassurance of the same inheritances from before the pandemic; those that had been guaranteed by the histories of their surroundings. Ideas of social inheritance dominated the ways these students locate themselves as learners and shaped the way students in this study named and valued certain experiences during online learning. They spoke of social inheritances as anchor points in their consciousness; namely key events, relationships, and social situations that ascribe status, regardless of contradictions. This included how they thought about futurity and, due to their less secured inheritance, may try to accumulate inheritances regardless of contradictions. Lucas had learned to hedge the possibility of multiple inheritances, wherein he accrued whatever was most proximate to him, as indicated by the fracturing of across contexts. This is a type of cultural and social capital used to navigate what it means to be marked as a disabled member of society while recognizing that being gainfully employed and independent is critical to survival in where he is situated in the United States. Digital worlds allowed them to capitalize on these inheritances and expand them, but still were susceptible to structural oppressions and did not replace the offline world.

**Orientation**

The students repeatedly used language that evoked the banking model of education to describe their accomplishments during online learning. The way they reflecting on their learning reflected orienting oneself towards one’s inheritance. Ahmed defines orientation by drawing upon Husserl’s philosophical table. The way one is seated at the table (or if one has a seat at all) produces lines that impress directions onto a person, determining the course of their life. Orientation dictates paths and whether they follow straight or oblique lines, impacting how we move and relate to others, as well as define our own experiences. Most students focused on vague assessments of getting the work done that positioned task completion as survival. The banking model of education (Freire, 1972) is prevalent in how these students oriented themselves to online learning in relation to the straightening objects of the able-bodied
and normative gaze in education, which, as Flowers (2023) writes, precedes the pandemic. There seemed to be two modes in which they answer questions about online learning with regard to assessing their progress and how they learn.12 Students either answered these questions by focusing on secondary aspects of online learning, such as how it affected their routine, or they spoke in ways that defined learning as task completion, indicating that these objects, and not deeper learning content were their anchors of orientation. Since the banking model values executive functioning and independence, emphasis on this view of the “table of school” produces a distance and alienation from sitting at the table for those who cannot perform executive functioning tasks independently and normatively. When asked questions that requested that they describe their experience with online learning, instead of speaking concretely and grounded in examples of pedagogy, learning formats, or tools; students answered the question obliquely, indicating that these factors are less relevant to their orientation in school. This disorientation was palpable as students were often unclear on specifics of how to assess their own learning and progress on a standard or topic unless it was a question about task completion. Given that it is communicated to these students that these skills are equated with being a competent and agentive learner, this led students to look for alternative places to exercise agency and access competence and value, such as through digital media or 1:1 relationships, and often students would express their agency from this queering of their position by turning the conversation and reorienting it back to their vantage point by bringing up these topics.

The findings around orientation indicate that these students predominantly view their academics through a banking model (Friere, 1972), suggesting an orientation towards education that, as Ahmed (2006) explains, is a direct product of their seated position in relation to dominant structures. Viewing their learning mostly as mere task completion meant that students focused on independence and executive functioning, or peripheral aspects of learning, rather than content (i.e. the what of the learning). This orientation also reflects the arguments set forth by Flowers (2021), who outlines the reentrenchment of ablebodiedness as the default, or norm, despite covid-19’s disruption. Students showed a sense of alienation from the ownership of learning beyond this. Instead of attempting to penetrate the normative system to find value in the learning in their class content, they found agency and educational value in digital media and personal relationships. This suggests that despite efforts

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12 We also consider that as researchers from a major university, we may be seen as “straightening objects” in the interview setting and consider that this may have implications on how students answered these questions.
to deepen or make learning meaningful in recent years, disabled students may still not access this type of learning, and calls for a reorientation of educational frameworks more explicitly moving away from the banking model and resisting learning structures that underscore these values, particularly in the ways they may devalue disabled students.

**Proximity**

The barriers of schooling were in the expectations that upheld the white normative ablebodied individual and therefore place independent executive functioning as a requisite to citizenship and participation. While these produce an orientation in the student that may focus on the social, this vantage point barred from being privy to perceive other types of barriers due to the way the learning process is controlled and mediated by the support person. As noted by Tews and Lupart (2008), socialization can be compromised via the presence of paraprofessionals making the case for these supports to be used with great care and acknowledgement of the barriers they can introduce. However, instead of harnessing the potential of technology and addressing issues via accessible technology solutions or accommodations that would make disabled students more independent and therefore able to take more responsibility in their own learning process, students were directed to not question the default format its parameters and instead utilize another individual as support for access. Reliance on this type of mediation of access issues seemed to be encouraged by schools, and students reached for these relationships as touchstones that not only addressed academic challenges, but the host of other schooling challenges such as reinforcing value through social status, which reside in the social contexts of schooling.

Navigating shame and isolation imposed by the stigma of being labeled with a disability can produce a reaching for ways to mitigate this stigma. Ahmed (2006) writes that queer bodies experience a loneliness that causes one to reach “out towards others that can be glimpsed as just about on the horizon” (p.104). Shame is at once contagious and individuating, and that there is a political and relational nature to this (Sedgwick, 2003). The experience of shame on non-normative bodies can function as a disciplinary mechanism to maintain societal boundaries and can become constitutive of identity. Students relied on these individuals to mediate the phenomena of school. That is, gauge their progress, overcome challenges, and navigate issues of access. Regardless of the type of question students were asked, they often returned to 1:1 relationships as being most proximate. These relationships often functioned as a “catch-all” protection or “straightening device,” a mediating force to help students navigate the demands of school, manage stigma, and interface with the world.
in ways that helped them access inheritances and futurities of normativity and ablebodiedness. When students were not formally assigned a support person, they described reaching for and cultivating a 1:1 relationship with a teacher that could serve as an anchor point and mediator. Privilege produced different understandings, entitlements, and negotiations of how these 1:1 relationships worked. Students with formally assigned support understood they were entitled to such support and were more likely to also characterize these relationships in a way that spoke to other social needs, such as friendship.

Analysis around proximity reveals a need for a reevaluation of the default support structures present in schooling for disabled students. Students utilization of paraprofessionals or other support people to manage stigma and fulfill relationship needs points towards the way combating disability stigma must be prioritized in schools, as well as how well – being and social relationships are unmet needs without formal supports. This points towards the need to rethink definitions and values around independence and clarify what independent learning actually means and looks like and what the supports are intended to accomplish (i.e do they reinforce a version of independence tied to white ablebodied self-sufficency, or do they truly seek to make ownership over ones learning accessible?).

Implications

Recent work by Disabled activist scholars have pointed out the need for Disability Justice work to address issues of equity around digital access as a civil right (Hankerson & Brown, 2020). This study adds to this conversation by adding key implications and findings that students and parents leverage digital worlds to fill gaps in their daily life. More research is needed to understand how digital worlds can be leveraged as part of addressing holistic student needs and to understand how white ablebodiedness could be interrupted instead of replicated in the transitions to digital spaces. The authors ask, What is the potential for digital worlds, and how can we not recreate differential oppressions and accentuate them but leverage these potentials to rectify inequities? A further implication is unfortunately less surprising, and that is that disabled students’ futurities are still vastly insecure and bureaucratic transition policies are not providing enough orienting devices for students to follow lines that are cohesive (whether they are oblique or straight). Lastly, an implication of this study is the specific focus on executive functioning: Online learning has increased the burden of executive functioning barriers for these students, entrenching ideas of the banking model of education and creating
more emphasis and dependency on 1:1 relationships as mediating tools, which also usually become social mediators as well. Schools need to understand how these 1:1 relationships are acting as straightening devices that may delay the radical changes needed both to access points for online learning, but how they reflect the normative expectations and terms of how disabled students are positioned as learners and social beings.

Conclusion

This research employed Ahmed’s queer phenomenology (2006) as a methodological framework to explore the experiences of disabled secondary students in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. By adopting an Intersectional Critical Disability Studies perspective, we aimed to challenge prevailing orientations that prioritize the abled population and shed light on the complex intersections of disability, identity, and education. Drawing upon Ahmed’s notion of queer lives as those who fail to make gestures of return on inheritance (2006), we recognized that disabled students are often expected to repay the debt of allowing them to perform normativity in schooling by being conferred with symbolic gestures of normativity. However, avenues for their full inclusion and meaningful participation in society remain limited, as evidenced by the disorientation experienced during transitional periods.

Our findings highlighted the disjunctures and struggles experienced by disabled students as they oscillate between conforming to societal norms and the inherent inability to fully arrive at a table that was not set for them. The disorientation and difficulties students faced when asked about specific supports underscored the lack of consistent and secure inclusion within the educational system. Online learning, as accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, further reinforced the message that their education was inconsequential, leaving them with limited paths to carve out independent roles in society. The students’ responses to online situations reveal the prevailing orientation of the educational world towards abled students. This is evident in how the students envisioned their futures, which revolve around societal norms and attaining employment, rather than challenging the predetermined notions of disabled embodiment shaped by medical conceptions of disability. Despite facing disproportionate alienation from the education system, these students are compelled to maintain this orientation to navigate their schooling experience. As a result, they rely on mediating forces, such as 1:1 relationships to conserve energy and mitigate the demands of executive functioning, which appear to be the primary focus of school tasks.
Through interviews and analysis of narrative data, this study revealed the impact of the educational world's orientation towards the abled on disabled students' experiences. It became evident that disabled students must navigate a schooling experience that often fails to consider their unique needs and perspectives. Despite their disproportionate burden of alienation, these students maintain an orientation towards normative ideas of the abled white body, imagining their future within the constraints of fitting societal norms and expectations. By employing Ahmed's queer phenomenology as a methodological framework, we have illuminated the ways in which disabled students negotiate their identities, navigate societal expectations, and envision their future.

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