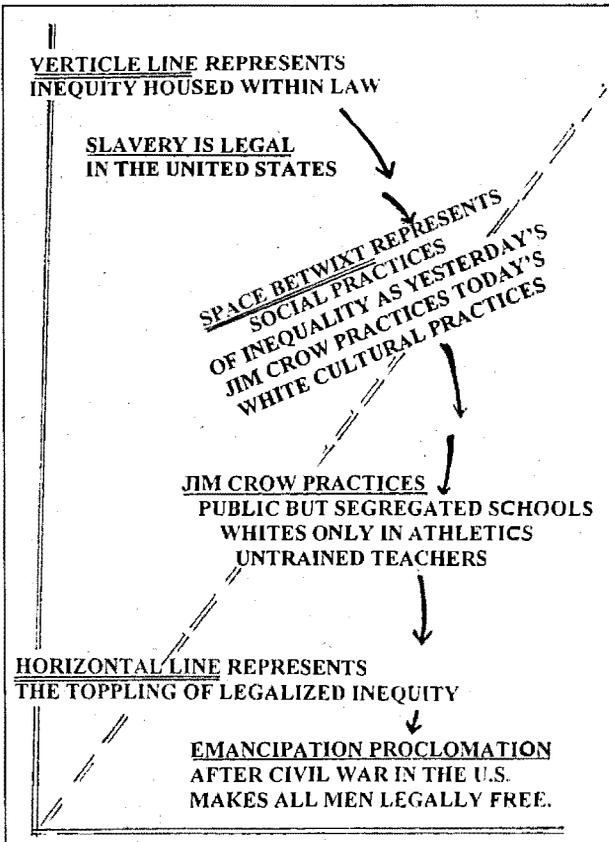


**Coloring the Imperfect Body:
Text for Discriminatory White
Cultural Practices in Academia**

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“Stories make you live right” is the statement of a citizen of the Western Apache Nation (Arizona State Museum 1998). But are we listening to the student’s story, or merely seeing stereotypes? Socio-cultural stereotypes undergird patterns of domination and power that continually reproduce social inequality (Nugent 1992) within the whole of society as well as on campus. Thus, I select culture to elucidate, through comparison and contrast, learning disabilities and the social impact of White Cultural Practices (Hill 1998) that discriminate despite the Americans with Disabilities Act and the legal emancipation of disabled students. I conclude with some thoughts on disability, and the selection and formation of persons as social change agents.

In a socio-cultural motif, then, I liken these practices in play today against persons with disabilities to the Jim Crow practices that prevented true social equity following the US Civil War and the legal emancipation of slaves. Jim Crow Practices then, as White Cultural Practices now, prevent the actual achievement of horizontal social equity after the toppling of the vertical inequity that had been imposed by law permitting slavery.



Jim Crow Social practices then, as White Cultural Practices now, reduced educational opportunity. Jim Crow Practices included unequal schooling with teaching of Blacks done by uncertified teachers and separate water fountains, lunch counters, and toilets. Such practices viewed as reasoned and normative filled the space between the verticality of slavery as in the accompanying drawing and the horizontal of legally defined equity (DeCortez 2000). It is those cultural practices betwixt the social statement of access and the political realities in existence for disabled students that I define here as White Cultural Practices.

The objectives of this study were two. First, I set out to discover how discrimination against the dis-

abled student in this case study was meshed within the larger whole - anthropology pedagogy, popular culture, and social stereotypes relating to learning as well as to evaluating students. Second, I sought to tease out differences in information processing of learning disabled students that are hindered by White Cultural Practices in Academia. I use culture here as presentation shorthand to illustrate that as a result of these disabilities outcomes commonly attributed as 'evidence of learning' in Academia do not apply.

It is my hope that anthropologists and others equipped with a more common place grasp of variation in processing and in indicators of learning will give life to the buzzwords 'equal access' through use of inclusionary practices in learning and in evaluation. This is not to say that minority cultural expressions used to contrast differences in information processing or seeing one's self within an example herein are evidence of one's actually being learning disabled or, the converse, that learning disabilities are not real deficits for students who have them and who are thereby restricted to compensatory modes. However, using this comparison model will illustrate that certain cultures privilege information processing forms and methods that would more adequately hide the manifestations of learning disabilities' functional differences.

Because of the limited space available, I will discuss just two of these disenfranchising Jim-Crow-like practices: first, the irrational attribution of personality traits so as to retain social inequality, and second, failure to accommodate divergent information processing modes in teaching and evaluation.

To begin, examine the personality traits this sign of a form-within-a-partial-circle that is used to designate 'accessible spaces' relegates to disabled students on campus. In this symbol disabled bodies are genderless, broken, and without human form. But cast as The-Imperfect-Other, the individual student with disabilities becomes not scholar, but scholarly text. The disabled graduate student storyteller of this case study created a coloring book depicting discrimination she experienced within anthropology pedagogy on a university campus.



This headline from a news clip is a further example of the first White-Cultural-Practice, that of irrational attribution of personality traits in an academic setting. Taking eight years, as this news clip describes (Arizona Daily Star 1998) to learn a foreign language is not remarkable perseverance given that the disability of this particular student is an inability-to-walk. The University Spin here is to extract charity monies. The Spin's success lies in the reconstitution of embedded campus power relations by employing power stereotypes: i.e., socially preferred Able-Beings doing or contributing charity for the Not-Able-Body.

newspaper Attribution of Relationship

Crippled doll faces real-world obstacle

through the doors of the Father doll of existence

"How come and true" however people with disabilities that is not a child? Mother said they will continue to learn in the future to give ourselves to the future

© 1998 First Edition, Tucson, Arizona, August 1

Perseverance pays

Disabled woman from Kazakhstan gains entrance to

By M. Scott Skinner
The Arizona Daily Star

She taught herself English so she could write the most important letter of her life.

It was addressed simply to the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721, USA.

The letter traveled across continents and oceans from her home in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic.

And it was a plea for the education she couldn't get at home.

"I have taught myself English," she wrote. "I cannot walk and live a wheelchair permanently. Please let me know the fee you fee students because I am 28 already."

"It took me several years to study English and it took me some time to make up my mind to continue my education, as well as my choice to be educated in well-developed for that. Thank you in advance. Sincerely, Kazakhstan."

In July 8, she was officially admitted (1), and on Tuesday night she arrived in after a 32-hour series of flights.

It was the end of a long journey, and getting of another.

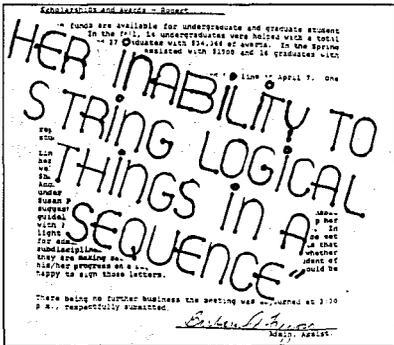
Tatyana still struggles with English she'll have to make every lesson go to teach keep her in school.

Her mother, who has lived on Arizona previous since Tatyana's father passed, was very sick, in good of her only daughter.

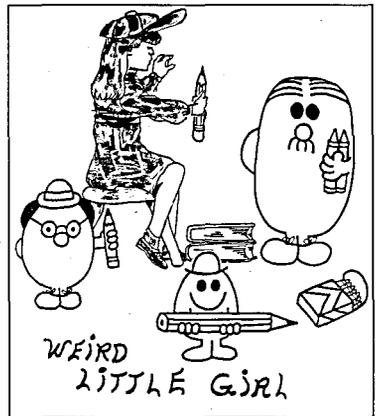
"She said she will make money," Tatyana said. "But still, she said I must go."

When Tatyana was 8 years old she had a recent tingling and numbness in her lower See TATYANA, Page 1A

Turning then to the case study, next is an illustration of faculty meeting minutes. Expressed herein is a third example of irrational personality trait attribution. The Anthropology Professor indicates to the 32 professors present that the graduate student of this case study "can not string logical things in a sequence," attributing her learning disabilities as the absence of reason and intelligence (Small 1998). The Professor then applies this false stereotype to 'rationalize' his assertion (Tamgiah 1990) that criteria should be changed so that 'Others' like our disabled student can not gain admission to the anthropology department. The result is that all members of the student's committee of three years duration silently withdrew keeping the fact of this faculty meeting a secret. Though writing tutoring is free to non-disabled students on campus, these false stereotypes enabled the University to deny the writing tutoring medically necessary for this student.

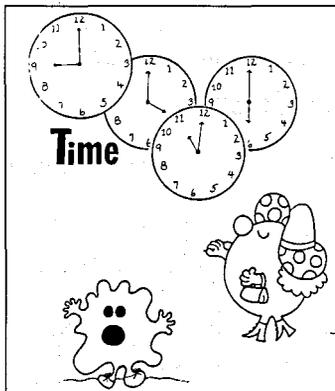


The plan to end admissions of learning disabled graduate students to the anthropology department and to deny free aid continue the embedded power relationships on campus. Through play upon stereotypes, affirmation is given to the view that these White Culture Practices are rational and 'reasoned' in their exclusionary tenets. In actual practice the University



generates income and has for forty years through its Jim-Crow-like policies of charging learning disabled students prohibitive fees for otherwise free academic support services.

"I was portrayed as a broken being," said our graduate student. This sketch shows the student's portrayal on the right of a disabled person as attractive, unique and feminine versus her portrayal, left, of faculty consigning her to just a Blob-of-Disability wearing shoes - a coloring book illustration of the disabled body as contested cultural text (Wilshire 1989).



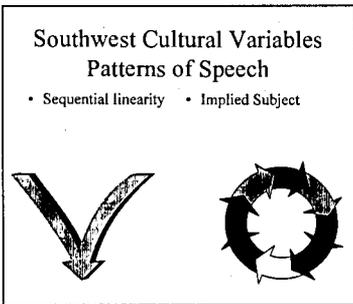
Turning to my second category of Jim-Crow-like social practices, through contrasting similarities and differences with reference to two known cultural orientations of the American Southwest, it is hoped that readers can more clearly conceptualize divergent information processing modes (Chacon 1999) and visualize Pedagogy Practices that discriminate. Our

CULTURAL VARIABLES
Southwestern United States

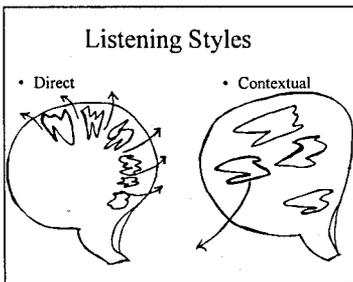
- Patterns of speech
- Listening styles
- Self-orientation
- Learning modes
- Reasoning
- Verbal messages

graduate student fits best within the non-dominant Mexican-American/Native-American cultural orientation because of her biology-based differences in function. Six categories of information processing common to these cultural orientations can illustrate how Anthropology Pedagogy discriminates against persons with learning disabilities. I identify these six categories as modes of speech, listening styles, self-orientation, learning styles, reasoning modes, and dominant verbal messages.

The White mode of speech is converging and sequential. The second orientation (on the right), that of Native Americans and similar to that of our disabled student, is a conversation of shades of implied subject matter. As an example, one might be advised by a Native American friend operating out of this second mode that he is having a picnic, that people are coming on Sunday, that friends that the listener knows will be arriving at 2 p.m., and so forth over the course of a 45 minute conversation. These are clues to the subject as opposed to linear or persuasive statements. The listener is intended to recognize and accept the invitation, never directly stated, to come to dinner on Sunday around 2 p.m. Anthropology Pedagogy, however, privileges the white cultural use of linear, often persuasion-based, direct statements/arguments in class discussions as well as in written expression.

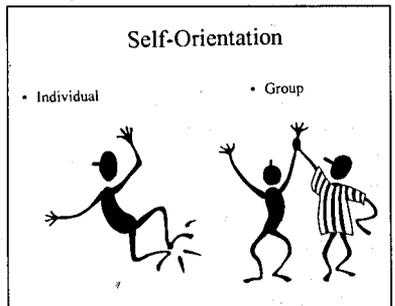


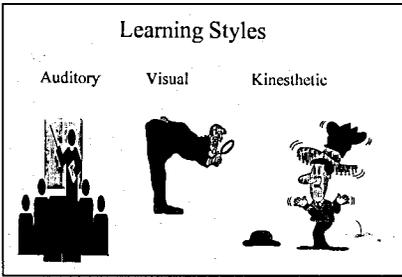
Listening styles of these two cultural orientations are quite different too. The dominate white mode (on the left) is one of listening to a fact and responding, asking questions, listening to the next fact followed by the same immediate voiced-response as indicated in this drawing showing fact followed by response-arrow, followed by fact, followed by response-arrow. The non-white mode, on the other hand, is similar to that of our student with learning disabilities. The listener reflectively listens for clues. Listening this way there is only a single response-arrow because no response is given until the information received has also been reflected upon. Anthropology Pedagogy, in contrast, privileges as evidence-of-learning the “instant talk” pictured on the left. Here it must be remembered that the student with learning disabilities functions in this assimilation mode because of existing deficits that prevent adoption of White ways. The White orientation, left, is to the self as an individual. The non-white orientation is toward the group, the family, consensus, and sharing ideas verses persuasive discourse. Sharing works best for our learning-disabled graduate student, because distractions in communicating are reduced.



Learning styles differ too. White Cultural Practices in academia privilege auditory learning as in lectures. Native American children learn by watching their elders and then doing the traditional skills observed; that is, visual followed by kinesthetic learning modes. Our disabled student learns best through actual performance as in the kinesthetic teaching mode pictured on the right.

Reasoning styles are opposite to each other as well in these two cultural orientations. The White Way of Anthropology Pedagogy is direct reasoning

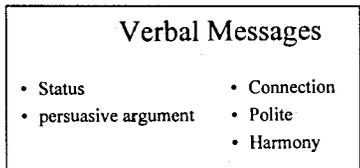




ing, may be miss-read as not intelligent. The learning disabled student must gather and translate incoming information so as to understand. Next she must translate her understandings back into forms familiar to the non-disabled public so that her listeners can grasp the meaning of her expression.

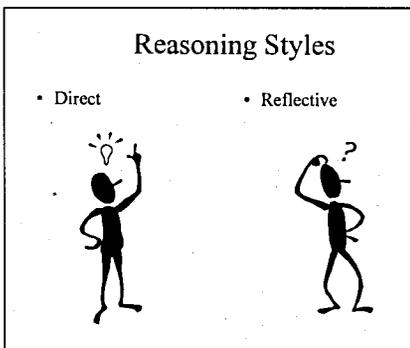
Dominant verbal messages in Anthropology Pedagogy are status messages and persuasive argument. The non-white way is one of verbalizations that share information, that connect. Our disabled graduate student processes information at a reduced speed.

The less pressured, slower speech cadence found in the sharing common to non-dominant cultures of the Southwest lends itself to this student's reduced-speed of information processing and her reflective modes of learning. To be able to contribute, our graduate student may even try to digress from the persuasive tenor of a given exchange.



Anthropology Pedagogy privileges White Practices that discriminate, that misconstrue Non-White ways, that irrationally attribute false personality traits in reconstituting the existing social inequality that marginalizes disabled students on campuses. Thus it was that faculty easily accepted these stereotypes to justify the professors' exclusion of and withdrawal from our graduate student.

"Anthropology faculty represented me as disabled and unable while employing disenfranchising pedagogy," said our student (Small 1998).



"I was denied tutoring that was otherwise free. Writing publishable quality research manuscripts was assigned to me as being qualifying. Unable to get faculty input, I relied upon scientists at research conferences and journal editors to achieve quality. Yet, I was told I must take a leave of absence from the university to 'recover from my disabilities.'"

The Associated Press reported that the Americans with Disabilities Act is not enforced in education. In this particular case the US Department of Education responded with lawyers

uniformed about disability who signed a unilateral plea bargain (Small 1998) with the University that was hindering of and punitive toward our graduate student thereby affirming and giving federal approval to Jim-Crow-like White Cultural Practices that marginalize disabled students.

The media continues to see the campus story as the charity funds that prostitution of disabled-bodies as hapless can garner. Astoundingly, the University claims (Small 1998) that a federal judge ruled that the University did not have to supply disabled students with academic



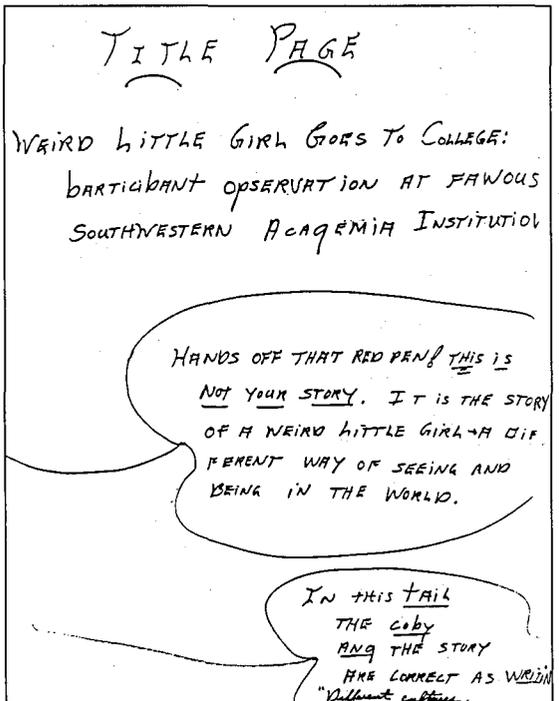
support services already available and free to non-disabled students. Thus, the University continues in its Jim-Crow-like discriminating in the charging of fees of learning disabled students for otherwise free academic support services. Senator John McCain has posed no corrections to the ADA legislation he created. As a result 85 to 90% of cases of discrimination are lost by the disabled person in the United States.

Pages from our graduate student's Coloring Book are insightful. Let us look at this commemoration ritual (Turner 1969) of coloring one's imperfect social body. Resistance to stereotype thought regarding persons with disabilities can be seen in the admonitions of this alternative title page: the student sees letters as eschewed and warns against the ghastly use of 'corrective' red ink. Next learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder are pitched as having positive qualities, citing famous persons

with these disabilities in concluding with the non-disabled student (bottom) wanting to be weird too. This is an apt portrayal of resistance and accommodation (Nugent 1992) in coloring book form.

Quoting our graduate student: "I was dubbed 'the first black lady on the bus' by some disabled anthropologists because of my opposing Academia using Jim-Crow-like Culture Practices to discriminate. I did not self-select this role as social change-agent."

Today's Weird Little Girl of coloring book hues, our student, is a reluctant bus-rider. However, anthropologist Emily Martin has dubbed the personality trait expressions of narrowing of focus, high energy, and sustained pursuit as the usual pattern of those with LD and ADD. She describes these as desirable traits in producing Flexible Survivors, workers able to function in today's global economics



(Martin 1999). Expression of these personality traits within marginal space and status to which some persons are constrained may contribute to the formation of social change agents. The manic persona of Martin's depictions and persons with disabilities are both persons-of-difference (Douglas 1966) that can, society willing, function on the margins of cultures.

In this regard, disability can be biological novelty (Haught 2000). Novelty being critical to the adaptation of all living things over time and through time, the theologian Teilhard de Chardin theorizes, as regards the trait expression of individual organisms and persons, that God rejoices in just such novelty - in novel rather than common trait expression (Haught 2000).

For the Apache-Nation wisdom lies in the telling-of-the-story. Listening to each individual's story is the means to getting beyond stereotypic beliefs and practices. Stories reveal White Cultural Practices that can be done away with to end pedagogical exclusion of and the socio-cultural oppression imposed upon Persons-of-Difference.

For the Apache-Nation, "Stories make [us] live right." This is wisdom well worthy of our application in academia.

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