**Methodology**

**What is Phenomenology?**

Phenomenology is a way of understanding how people experience the world. It was started by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century and expanded by other philosophers. It's about how we perceive things, make judgments, and feel emotions. For example, Husserl talked about how we instinctively know how to shake hands based on social rules. Not doing this right, like in a job interview, might seem disrespectful. Phenomenology is especially interested in our direct connection with our surroundings and how our experiences are shaped by being part of a community.

**Phenomenology in Communities**

In a community, everyone has their own experiences, but they also share some experiences as a group. Even though people agree with the group's goals, they still have their own unique views. Phenomenology involves setting aside our own assumptions to better understand others' perspectives. It's about looking at how people interact with the world and with each other, especially in communities.

**How it Relates to My Research**

In my study on wheelchair users, phenomenology helps to understand how these individuals are viewed by society. For instance, when people use facilities meant for wheelchair users, like accessible bathrooms or elevators, it can make wheelchair users feel ignored or too visible. Also, people often make incorrect assumptions about the abilities of wheelchair users, which leads to feeling invisible. My own experiences as a wheelchair user shape how I view these situations.

**Differences in Experiences**

Different wheelchair users have different experiences and abilities. For example, I have more in common with wheelchair users who need more help than those who can drive modified cars. We all seek dignity and respect, but our experiences can vary greatly, especially when facing societal barriers like transportation or accessibility issues.

**Empathy and Understanding**

Edith Stein, a philosopher, talked about the importance of empathy and understanding each other's experiences. For wheelchair users, it's like constantly balancing on a tightrope, always having to think about how to navigate the world. It's important for organizations to understand and empathize with wheelchair users to improve their services.

*Everyday Challenges and Accessibility*

Wheelchair users often face challenges in daily life due to accessibility issues. For example, I've had difficulties with my wheelchair that affected my ability to move around, making me feel vulnerable. There's also a need for strategic planning in everyday activities, like using transportation services.

**Physical Function and Disability**

Phenomenology also looks at how the body functions. When movements are impaired, tasks that others do without thinking, like climbing stairs, become more challenging and deliberate for someone with a disability. This highlights the difference between functioning and non-functioning bodies.

**Being Part of the World**

Finally, phenomenology is about how people, disabled or not, connect with others and feel a sense of belonging. When disabled people feel understood and part of a community, it creates a positive connection. This is important in overcoming societal biases and promoting inclusion.

**Understanding Phenomenology and Disability**

Phenomenology looks at how people experience and interpret the world. For people with disabilities (PWD), this often involves dealing with assumptions and stereotypes. For instance, a service provider might unfairly assume that a person with a disability can’t work effectively, which can leave the person feeling disrespected and hopeless. This is a part of what’s called ‘corporeality’ – understanding our bodies in relation to others, which is a big deal for PWD.

**Misjudgments and Ableism**

There are many situations where people with disabilities face misjudgments. For example, I was once told by an employment agency that I wouldn’t be able to work anywhere other than a fast-food restaurant, despite my qualifications. This is an example of ableism – where people are judged and limited by their physical abilities.

**Relating to the World**

How wheelchair users relate to the world and to others can be affected by these kinds of assumptions. In one of my jobs, my work was undervalued because I needed a scribe due to my disability. This showed a lack of understanding from my employer about my capabilities.

**The Draw-Talk Process in Phenomenology**

Phenomenology can use creative methods to understand experiences. For example, I used a ‘draw-talk’ process with students in a Special Education class. They expressed their feelings through art, showing feelings of being unheard or isolated. This process helped to understand their relationality – how they see themselves in relation to others.

**Hyper-Visibility and Invisibility in Phenomenology**

In phenomenology, hyper-visibility means being too noticeable in a way that leads to negative stereotypes. Invisibility means not being recognized or valued. People with disabilities often experience both. These issues are influenced by power dynamics, social status, and social constructions. For instance, if a person with a disability does great work, others might wrongly assume they had help. This undervalues their abilities and contributions.

**In Summary**

Phenomenology helps us understand the unique perspectives and experiences of people with disabilities. It highlights the importance of seeing beyond physical abilities and recognizing the individual capabilities and contributions of each person.

**Lived Experience in Phenomenology**

Phenomenology appreciates the unique experiences of people with disabilities (PWD). It recognizes that disability is a natural part of human diversity. By focusing on lived experiences, phenomenology helps in understanding and accepting disabilities. It shifts the focus from personal responsibility for disability to a shared societal responsibility, promoting awareness and opportunities for PWD.

**Impact of Ableism**

Ableism, or discrimination against disabled people, greatly influences how they're seen in society. For wheelchair users, this can lead to being overly noticeable (hyper-visibility) or completely ignored (invisibility). I plan to explore these experiences through my research. For example, I’ve faced situations where I was the center of unwanted attention or completely overlooked, highlighting the mismatch between self-identity and societal treatment.

**Research Method: Interviews**

To understand the everyday experiences of wheelchair users, I will conduct interviews. These interviews will use both structural and descriptive questions, allowing me to delve deeper into the participants' experiences and understand how they navigate daily life with a wheelchair.

**Autoethnography in Phenomenology**

Autoethnography is a method where researchers use their own experiences as part of the study. It pairs well with phenomenology because it involves deep reflection and storytelling, offering insights into how people relate to their environment and others. My own experiences as a wheelchair user will help illustrate these points in my research.

**Study Population and Criteria**

My study focuses on full-time wheelchair users who are adults and can communicate in English. They were chosen based on their experiences with hyper-visibility, invisibility, and ableism.

**Sampling Approach**

I used purposive sampling, which means selecting participants who specifically fit the criteria of my research, such as experiences with hyper-visibility or invisibility and thoughts on ableism. A smaller group of 7 participants was chosen to allow for a deeper understanding of each individual's experience.

**Research Motivation**

As a wheelchair user and student with cerebral palsy, my own experiences drive my passion for this research. My aim is to create a space where the voices and stories of disabled individuals are heard and valued.

**Lived Experience in Phenomenology**

My research in phenomenology focuses on lived experiences of people with disabilities (PWD), specifically wheelchair users. This approach values disability as a legitimate way of life, promoting awareness and opportunity. In phenomenology, disability is seen as part of human diversity, helping resist ableism—the discrimination against disabled people.

**Hyper-visibility and Invisibility**

I’m studying the impact of ableism on hyper-visibility (being too noticeable) and invisibility (being ignored) among wheelchair users. Hyper-visibility might involve being stared at, while invisibility can be as simple as being ignored during a walk. These experiences often lead to a mismatch between self-identity and societal treatment.

**Interview Method**

To explore the 'life world' of wheelchair users—their everyday experiences—I will conduct interviews using both structural and descriptive questions. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of how wheelchair use impacts daily life and interactions.

**Autoethnography in Research**

Autoethnography, where researchers use personal experiences as part of the study, complements phenomenology. It involves deep reflection and understanding how stories shape us and our actions. My own experiences as a wheelchair user bring unique insights to this research.

**Study Participants and Recruitment**

Participants are full-time wheelchair users over 18 years old, fluent in English, and living within certain time zones. They were recruited through Para-Sport Ontario and my personal Facebook. My research aims to create a space for disabled voices to be heard and valued.

**Sampling and Data Collection**

I used purposive sampling to choose participants who have experienced hyper-visibility, invisibility, and ableism. A small sample of 7 participants allows for a detailed exploration of their experiences. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in phenomenological research involve caring for and empathizing with participants. It’s about understanding and valuing their experiences without judgment or assumptions. I made sure participants understood the research and consented to participate, ensuring confidentiality and respect for their stories.

**Analyzing Data**

In analyzing the data, I focused on the shared experiences and stories of the participants. Phenomenology seeks to understand these experiences without preconceived notions or hypotheses. By engaging with participants’ stories, the research aims to uncover the universal essence of experiences related to disability, hyper-visibility, and invisibility.

One wheel at a time

There’s a door, but where’s the key?

Ability is not Fragility: The Eye of the Ability Holder

Step 1: Categorizing Basic Meaning Units

Identifying themes like accessibility, ableism, invisibility, hypervisibility.

Key Components: Themes of accessibility, ableism

Step 2: Finding the Phenomenological Essence

Understanding core meanings from participants’ shared experiences.

Key Components: Core meanings, shared experiences

Step 3: Evaluating Natural Attitudes and Assumptions

Analyzing society’s perceptions vs. participants’ experiences and personal reflections.

Key Components: Society’s perception, participant experiences

Step 4: Phenomenological Attitude

Emphasizing suspending judgments and assumptions.

Key Components: Suspending judgments and assumptions

Step 5: New Shared Meaning Units/Narratives

Developing “One wheel at a time” narrative including invisibility, advocacy/education, vulnerability, allies.

Key Components: Invisibility, advocacy/education, vulnerability, allies

Research Framework: Leadership, Visibility, and Resisting Ableism

Initial Coding: Identifying Core Concepts

Keywords: Leadership, hypervisibility, invisibility, ableism.

Objective: Capture initial mentions and contexts related to leadership roles, visibility, and experiences of ableism among individuals with disabilities.

Process Coding: Analyzing Actions and Interactions

Focus Areas: Arguing for rights, action-oriented behaviors, training for awareness.

Goal: Document specific actions taken to resist ableism and promote visibility, including leadership initiatives and advocacy efforts.

Values Coding: Underlying Values and Beliefs

Values: Transparency, assertiveness, personal growth.

Purpose: Explore the values that drive individuals with disabilities to seek leadership roles and challenge societal perceptions.

Deductive Coding: Themes from Literature

Existing Themes: Misconceptions about productivity, societal roles of people with disabilities.

Application: Use literature to identify common themes and contrast them with new findings, focusing on debunking myths about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Inductive Coding: Emerging Narratives

Emergent Themes: The significant contributions and leadership qualities of people with disabilities.

Strategy: Allow new insights to emerge from the data, highlighting the diverse talents and leadership capabilities that individuals with disabilities offer.

Key Themes for Exploration

• Leadership and Visibility: Examining how individuals with disabilities navigate leadership roles, including the challenges and opportunities related to visibility and hypervisibility.

• Resisting Ableism: Strategies and actions employed to challenge and resist ableist perceptions and practices, both within and outside the disability community.

• Training and Awareness: Initiatives aimed at raising awareness and educating others about the capabilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities.

• Societal Misconceptions vs. Reality: Contrasting societal misconceptions with the real-life experiences and contributions of individuals with disabilities in leadership and other roles.

**Participant Demographics**

The participants who responded to my study were primarily white Caucasians. While this limits demographic diversity, the focus of the research is on the universal experience of disability, transcending race, age, and ability

Researchers Perspective on Participant Diversity

**Importance of Diverse Experiences in Research**

In my study, the varied age ranges and durations of wheelchair use among the participants added depth to the analysis. Understanding experiences of hyper-visibility, invisibility, and ableism from those who have used wheelchairs since birth or since their teenage years provides a rich perspective. This diversity highlights that reliance on a wheelchair and awareness of disability can occur at any stage of life.

**Valuable Lessons from Personal Experiences**

Each participant's journey with their disability offers unique insights and lessons. Their stories reflect how perceptions shift and adapt over time due to their experiences. These narratives are crucial in comprehensively understanding the phenomenon of disability, particularly in the context of societal attitudes and barriers

**Contributions to the Research Field**

By including participants with different backgrounds in terms of the onset and duration of their wheelchair use, the research embraces a wide spectrum of lived experiences. This approach ensures that the study reflects a broader range of perspectives, enriching the understanding of how disability is experienced and perceived in various life stages.

**Enhancing Understanding and Awareness**

The participants' stories contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding disability, particularly in relation to societal attitudes like ableism. These narratives are vital for educating others, fostering empathy, and advocating for more inclusive and understanding societal attitudes towards people with disabilities.

**Researchers voice Participant Experiences in Research**

**Paul’s Experience**

Paul, one of the participants in my study, became disabled in his 70s. This is significant because it shows how perceptions of wheelchair users can change based on personal experiences. Paul's story helps us understand how someone's views on the productivity and capabilities of wheelchair users might shift after they themselves become wheelchair-dependent later in life.

**Common Experiences Among Participants**

All the participants, regardless of their age, shared experiences of being overly noticed (hyper-visibility), being ignored (invisibility), and facing discrimination (ableism). These experiences were common in different stages of their lives, like during their education, in the workplace, while living independently, and in their relationships with friends, family, teachers, and co-workers.

**Navigating Ableism**

A key part of their experiences was learning how to deal with ableist attitudes and interactions. This involved finding ways to engage with others and handle situations in a manner that matched their own values and desires. By sharing these stories, we get a clearer picture of the challenges wheelchair users face and how they adapt to different life circumstances.

Thematic Analysis and Coding

Coding, Analysis , Framework and Themes

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In my research, I analyzed the interviews by identifying common themes. This process, called thematic coding, helps understand how wheelchair users perceive and interpret their experiences. The themes focused on self-identity, relationships, body image, environment, and shared experiences. I made sure to set aside my own biases to accurately reflect participants' experiences of being too noticeable (hyper-visible), ignored (invisible), and facing discrimination (ableism).

**Researcher's Role in Analysis**

As the researcher, I continually reflected on how the data related to my own life as a wheelchair user and how it differed from the participants' experiences. This reflection was essential to ensure that I accurately captured the participants' stories without letting my personal experiences overshadow theirs.

**Transcription and Verification Proces**s

After interviewing participants, I transcribed the conversations word-for-word. Participants were then asked to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy and make any necessary changes. Most did not make any changes, but one participant edited out some personal details.

**Participant Demographics**

The study included seven wheelchair users, varying in age and time using a wheelchair. Their backgrounds ranged from students to professionals, offering diverse perspectives on their experiences with hyper-visibility, invisibility, and ableism.

**Key Findings from Interviews**

Participants shared their stories about how being a wheelchair user affects their daily lives. They discussed challenges related to visibility and discrimination, and their suggestions for improving awareness and respect for people with disabilities. The findings revealed the resilience of wheelchair users and their desire for recognition of their capabilities, beyond their disabilities.

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**Discussion and Connection to Literature**

I connected participants' stories to existing research, highlighting the real-world implications of their experiences. The study underscores the need for societal changes to better acknowledge and accommodate the needs and dignity of wheelchair users.

(**dis)Ability is Not Fragility: The Eye of the Ability Holder**

For direct quotes for all themes go to website thesis eportfofo metholgy wheelchair users speak out

Understanding Ability in Disability

This theme, "(dis)Ability is Not Fragility: The Eye of the Ability Holder," highlights how participants in the study understand and use their abilities to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices often associated with disability (ableism). It emphasizes that people with disabilities (PWD) have unique strengths and capabilities.

**Beyond Overcoming Limitations**

The participants demonstrated that their motivation to achieve their full potential is not just about proving their capabilities to themselves. It's also about educating others and raising awareness about disabilities. This approach helps break down misconceptions and shows that having a disability does not mean being fragile or less capable.

**Empowerment and Self-Respect**

The theme also reflects how participants find empowerment and self-respect in doing things their own way, whether in sports, work, or daily activities. They seek freedom and autonomy, challenging the notion that disability equates to a lack of ability.

**Researchers Voice**

In my personal experience, I have many feelings about the word inspirational. I do not feel it is inspirational to get up in the morning or brush my teeth. However, I do feel that being acknowledged for the extra effort and planning it takes to attain proper supports etc. is valuable to portray an accurate representation of my life as it is truly lived.

**Disability and Inspiration: Understanding Regulatory Mechanisms in Perception**

Inspiration is often connected to disability as a way to understand people based on what others think their abilities are. How people fit into the world is judged by how close they are to what is considered normal. This includes how they think, act, and create their own space.

For example, Chris’s experiences show that there can be a big difference between how he sees himself and how others see him. When disability is seen in this way, it leads to a misunderstanding of what living with a disability is really like. It oversimplifies the experience and assumes that all people with disabilities have the same experiences, without recognizing each person's unique abilities.

Allowing students with disabilities to participate in sports shows consideration for attentional reconfiguration. This means recognizing (dis)Abled individuals can do the same or similar things as able-bodied individuals However, they may have to do it a different way, or in their own way. This way of thinking draws attention away from the problem with the body and more towards a problem with societal assumptions that (dis)Ability means inability. This is not the case and when (dis)Abled students are given the opportunity to showcase their ability through sports, it then becomes possibilities for not who I am, rather what I can become.

Ableist assumptions can limit not just the physical and professional abilities of individuals with disabilities but also opportunities for creating universally accessible designs and collaborative work that benefits everyone. For instance, wheelchair users might not be common in real estate, but their involvement can bring significant advantages. They can provide valuable insights for home buyers with disabilities and offer unique perspectives to able-bodied clients. This approach maximizes the potential use of environments, ensuring they are accessible and useful for everyone. Recognizing the expertise of realtors with disabilities is important, and their skills shouldn’t be overlooked just because of assumptions about their abilities.

When stories about bodies not working 'normally' are shared, they often support the idea that bodies should be perfectly functional and free of disabilities. This suggests that the ideal body should work well and not have any disabilities. But it's important to remember that no one is completely independent. Everyone has their own way of moving, though some people don't have to think much about it. Some environments are designed with certain bodies in mind, making it easy for them to move around without any obstacles, but this isn't the case for everyone.