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# Experiencing Dyslexia Through the Prism of Difference

A dissertation presented by Keith C Murphy to the Department of Anthropology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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# List of Acronyms

BDA: British Dyslexia Association

DAI: Dyslexia Association of Ireland

DFI: Disability Federation of Ireland

DNA: Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid

EDA: European Dyslexia Association

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

SLD: Specific Learning Difficulty

IDA: International Dyslexia Association

IFL: Identity-First Language

HGNC: HUGO Gene Nomenclature Committee

PFL: Person-First Language

WFN: World Federation of Neurology

WHO: World Health Organisation

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# Abstract

According to research by AHEAD (2021), students with specific learning difficulties are accessing third level education in greater numbers than ever before. My research has shown this to be the case also, however, my research, alongside a larger body of research (Clouder 2020; O'Brien, 2019; McCullagh, 2018) have highlighted that student with dyslexia tend not to access the support services. Within the body of research conducted in third level education in Ireland, few have focused on the overall experiences of students with dyslexia studying in third level education. My study addresses this gap in knowledge as it provides an insight into how students with dyslexia navigate third level education.

Ethnography was used as the principle method of research in this project, and 16 participants took part. The participants varied in age range and identified as different genders. The range of programmes studied by the participants were at undergraduate and postgraduate level and my research participants were attending four different third-level institutions.

Contemporary discourse and literature surrounding dyslexia is often dominated by notions of disability, deficit, lack, vulnerability, and social expectancies around achievement in education. Accepting dyslexia as an integral part of the self and viewing it through a prism of difference as opposed to a deficit, were emerging themes in this study, as motivators to success. Institutional and attitudinal barriers also emerged as common themes in this study as did the impacts on academic self-worth, self-esteem, and self-confidence as a result of studying in third level education with dyslexia.

My research found that when students identify dyslexia as a limitation, it becomes a barrier to successful learning and has a negative effect on their identity, which impacts them socially and academically, due to what I call internalised ableism. However, an easier pathway to success is achieved when viewing dyslexia as a difference and studying through a Neurodiverse Approach. This approach enabled my participants to achieve academic success, not despite their dyslexia but in partnership with it. Ultimately, this dissertation asks what their specific experiences are and what does it mean to study in third level education with dyslexia.

This research and its findings are therefore relevant to several stakeholders such as policy makers, third level education institutions, disability support staff and teaching staff.

## Seen Butt Unseen

Sit down, shut up, your dumb,
Said my secondary school teacher, “you’ll end up a bum”
I actually believed I was dumb
And that’s why into her French class, I could not come.

If I stay in school,
They will say I’m a fool.
So, I’ll get a job,
And earn a few bob

The trenches are dark and also deep,
Just below the trench line, my head I must keep.
To what was said, I really did care,
So never again would I put myself out there.

So, I left school
Convinced I was a fool.
And entered the workforce
Where they used a tool

Call it fate,
Or call it luck.
But an accident
Forced me back to the book

A computer course with office skills

This adult learning is giving me some thrills.
From level three, five and four
To Maynooth University, they opened the door

However, all the while, the struggle got greater
It was a constant battle, not to say, “See you later”
Where you being, or is it been, I was over there, or is it their
Where or wear, oh I just don’t care

I write, I write
But it still looks like shite
I try, I try
Yet I still feel like the dumb boy

Remember the trenches
Where they hide the imposters
It takes all my efforts
Not to turn to the Fosters

I feel so stupid and my head it can hurt,
At times I wish I could bury it in the dirt.
She said to me “get your head outa the sand, all will be grand”
Lets’ take a test; it’ll be for the best

The test says Dyslexia, is that why I’m shite?
Reading the report helps turn on a light.
Like leaving a tunnel, it’s suddenly bright,
This piece of paper says I am neither dumb, stupid or shite

This Dyslexia I’ve got
Has stirred up the pot
It’s a gift I’ve been handed,
To become a learning bandit

When I was young,
School was no fun
I was just ‘BOLD’
Because I couldn’t do it how I was told

But now as an adult this learning is fun,
Feels like I stepped out of the night into the sun
This is because my diagnosis is a gift
That has ended my constant internal rift.
(Keith Murphy, 2016)

## Introduction

An educational setting is one of the few places where dyslexia can be marked and negotiated by other people such as academic staff, other students, and institutional structures. Having dyslexia can also be something that needs to be explained, resourced, and supports negotiated for, and the diagnosis and existence of dyslexia, defended. Using ethnography as a mode of enquiry, exploring my research participants' lived experiences of dyslexia, allows for insights into the experiences of living with dyslexia from the inside out. Likewise, ethnographic writing "combines writing with a personal touch in combination with a scholarly responsibility, while calling for accessible styles" (Wulff, 2021:12).

### *My Story*

We have all heard the philosophical debate surrounding the idea, that if a tree falls within a forest and no one sees it, does it make a sound? I have borrowed these ideas from the Quantum theory argued by Baggot (2016), that something cannot exist without being perceived by consciousness. Or is sound only sound if someone hears it? Although we may not hear the tree fall, through measuring motion, it can be confirmed the tree has fallen. The physical phenomenon of the tree falling is measured using instruments. However, if no one hears the tree fall, it can be perceived to have made no sound. We can view the effects of a word, a sentence, or an action by one person or towards another person alongside this tree falling argument.

If no one else hears it, (the word or sentence), or if someone hears it and perceives it to be of little value and/or effect, can it then be perceived to have caused little or no damage or lasting effects? When a student with dyslexia has to read aloud in a classroom or lecture hall or answer a question in front of a lecturer or their peers, it can have many negative impacts on their 'self'. Having a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) such as dyslexia and having to partake in these activities can have lasting effects, even if these effects cannot be measured. There are no visible blemishes or scars to measure the effects of those words at that moment. However, as the findings in this research will show, the words can register, bury themselves in the subconscious and manifest later in life.

There is often that one moment in someone's life, a moment that can define the path your journey takes and starts a series of events which maps out your narrative. I was born into a working-class family and reared in working class areas in North and South County Dublin and educated in some of Dublin's most lower-class socio-economic districts. When it came time to go to secondary school, my family had settled in one area, and I started secondary school in the knowledge that I would be able to complete the course and stay in one school during this time. When I was attending secondary school, students sat an entrance exam which determined which class they went to. The 'A' class was the top class, and it was expected students who were in this class would continue after the compulsory three years of attendance to study for a further two years and complete the

Leaving Certificate. The other classes in each year were ‘B’, ‘C’, and ‘D’, and after my entrance exam was completed, I was put into the ‘B’ class. My path-changing moment occurred during the first week of September, in year one of my secondary school educational journey.

In those days, the prefabricated buildings were so cold, that students were given permission to wear their ‘woolly’ hat in class. Some of the students wore mitten gloves, the ones without fingertips in them. The prefabricated wooden buildings with flat roofs and lots of windows helped exacerbate the ‘fridge’ effect and when it rained, all we could hear were the raindrops dancing off the roof and windows. There were 30 students in each class, lined out in rows of five desks across and six desks long. The class remained in that room for all academic subjects, and the teachers came to the class. It was during the morning period of classes on the second Monday morning in September that I wrote my name in *Gaeilge* on the front cover of my Irish class copybook. This would change my pathway, the moment my tree fell, and although no one really heard it, I felt the waves and would do so for the next three years in secondary school and carry the effects for the next thirty years.

No sooner had I written my name, than the head teacher from the ‘A’ class walked in. A small man whose reputation preceded him, he used violence and corporal punishment as his first, middle and last resort with brown fingers from chain smoking on non-tipped Player’s cigarettes. He went to the top of the class and had a quick word with our teacher, then he looked at the copies on each student's desk. He then shouted something in Irish to me and left, however, I did not know what he had said and sat there looking lost, a look I would adopt for the next three years. It transpired he had expelled a student from his 'A' class, and I was the only one who had my name in *Gaeilge* on my copy; when the other head teacher witnessed this, I was promoted to the 'A' class. My parents were delighted; however, it made me very apprehensive as it was a class full of high achievers and affluent students from the good side of town.

During this time, I had a broad Dublin accent, undiagnosed dyslexia, and an inability to pronounce certain words most notably in the French language and this would become my 'tree falling' moment in education. On my second day in the 'A' class, I was asked to read from our French book, a book I did not have, and I was expected to read in a language I had never seen, as at that time, languages were only taught in the 'A' classes. Some of the class had read aloud already, however, when they read, their French sounded like they were singing the words. For me, it did not have quite the same effect in my thick accent with no previous practise. Being forced to 'make an attempt' by the teacher was my tree falling moment. The sound of tittering and laughing from my classmates was hard to take, however, I could handle that. It was witnessing my teacher, whom the whole class looked up to, laughing at me as I read, which left the real embedded scars. This became a daily event, and the ridicule became worse, leading to me imploding one day in class. My teacher made me sit at the back of the room looking out the window from then on. This tree falling moment affected my self-confidence, self-esteem, trust, invoked shame and started the process of my voice suppression, which further lead to my academic imprisonment.

My own story highlights the impacts of attitudinal and institutional barriers, discourse, behaviour and cultural expectancies around school, difference, and literacy. This is my story told from my experiences around formal education about a moment in time which had everlasting effects on me, my life and those who lived life with me. It also highlights the important point of how social expectations tied to social class can affect and stigmatise people. My neurodiverse difference was both ridiculed and associated with negative connotations by my peers and those I held in esteem in my story. However, this dissertation will highlight how these moments have served as the drivers for myself and my participants to build resilience, challenge mindsets and institutional structures and for them to achieve success in third level education.

This whole experience was the motivation for me to complete this research as upon my return to education, my tree falling moment resurfaced. After a serious accident rendered me unable to continue working in my chosen career of decorating, during my rehabilitation I decided to return to education and complete a basic computer course. However, the same demons resurfaced, and I faced all the same issues that appeared in my story. Nonetheless, with some helpful supports in place for me, I was able to continue my journey back into education. This also allowed me to recognise similar issues in myself, in other students and when I received a diagnosis of dyslexia in 2016, it all made sense. I had experienced and 'lived' my own struggles in trying to navigate third level education and witnessed other students with similar issues, navigate their own journeys.

This led me to explore how other students with dyslexia navigated third level education, the struggles they faced, the barriers which we encountered, and it was the motivation to challenge and thus, alter fixed mindsets, prejudices, attitudinal and institutional barriers, and societies expectations of students with dyslexia in third level education. Exploring dyslexia as a difference rather than identifying it as a deficit allowed me the freedom to unravel what society can often perceive as the complications surrounding dyslexia and highlighted how identifying with a diagnosis of dyslexia can carry cultural and societal expectations and perceptions. This often can then identify you within our society as having a deficit in your thinking or your brain functioning and can label you as a less intelligent person. However, identifying as I do with dyslexia as a difference and viewing dyslexia through a neurodiverse approach does not lessen dyslexia and/or its affects, but it helps to conjure up very different societal perceptions and expectations. I also witnessed students with dyslexia achieving what they desired in life; however, it nearly always required them to build resilience and adapt and find different ways to achieve this.

My research has highlighted how dyslexia is often viewed through an ableist lens and it advocates changing to a more neurodiverse approach, viewing dyslexia through this neurodiverse lens without ableism. Looking at dyslexia without internalised and externalised ableism, enables us to advocate on behalf of people with dyslexia using this new lens. This new idea positions dyslexia in the realm of difference and encourages people with dyslexia in education to use a growth mindset, build resilience, make use of the supports that are available and develop strategies that work for them. My research will highlight how adopting these ideas above and using a neurodiverse approach has paved the way for academic success for myself and all my research participants.

Having dyslexia and being in third level education is an experience that is very individual, experienced in many ways and influenced by many internal and external factors, therefore, using the metaphor of a prism is a perfect way to imagine the complexity of the experiences. A prism can be described as a glass or other transparent object, triangular in shape, with refracting surfaces at an acute angle with each other, which separates white light into a spectrum of colours. The idea of a prism can be used to highlight both the clarification and the distortion afforded by particular viewpoints.

Dyslexia also has many different facets which correlates with a prism through which one sees differently through its many angles and views. We identified dyslexia with a prism in this research due to its multifaceted nature, with different angles and experiences, depending on how it is looked at and who does the viewing and especially, whether or not dyslexia is perceived as departing from what is normal, usual, or expected. My research on experiencing dyslexia through the prism of difference has shown us how this experience is individual and experienced differently. For Zinn *et al,* (2005), "gender is organized and experienced differently when refracted through the prism of sexual, racial/ethnic, social class, physical abilities, age, and national citizenship differences" (:1).

In this dissertation, the prism approach likewise highlights the varied ways in which social difference affects the organisation and experience of dyslexia. This 'prism' also became a tool in the hands of the research participants, who, after years of struggle, learned to analyse their own experience as multifaceted and many-shaded, involving not just ordeals and shame but also empowerment and self-discovery. This research thus shows how participants experience dyslexia through multiple 'selves' and identities, in terms of other aspects of difference. It highlights the experience of dyslexia from the inside out and challenges the notion that difference is a binary system comprising rigidly dichotomous entities, arguing instead that it is "multifaceted, complex, always changing, and infinitely sociocultural" (Slesaransky-Poe and García, 2009:204).

### *How Dyslexia Presents*

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty affecting the acquisition of fluent and accurate reading and spelling skills. This occurs despite access to appropriate learning opportunities and difficulties with dyslexia occur on a scale from mild to severe. People with dyslexia may experience greater stress and frustration as they endeavour to learn, resulting in heightened anxiety, particularly in relation to literacy. If their needs are not identified and supported early in their education, the relative gap between pupils with dyslexia and their peers grows over time. While support at any age can help, its impact is greatest in the early years of schooling.

Dyslexia is often described as a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) or Specific Learning Difference and according to the World Federation of Neurology, (WFN, 2019); the disorder is manifested by a difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity. Rather than existing as a discrete entity; dyslexia can occur along a continuum and varies in severity (Shaywitz, Escobar, Bennett, Fletcher & Makuch, 1992; Paulesu, Demonet, Fazio & McCrory, 2001 & Talbot & Kerns 2014). Research also found that the orthography used in one's culture determines the performances of these reading tasks. This, therefore, highlights the differences for students with dyslexia speaking different languages. Italian people with dyslexia often performed better than French or English people with dyslexia.

Trafton (2016) demonstrated that people with dyslexia displayed reduced plasticity in brain activity. Brain plasticity can be, when one is learning and having new experiences and connections, our brains can alter and people with dyslexia can have a decrease in neural adaptation upon repetition of those students with dyslexia (*Ibid*). Consequently, students with dyslexia, when presented with information shown to them previously, processed this information as if it were new information. Biomedicine provides a neurobiological explanation for the causes and risks associated with dyslexia and dictates the treatment of it. This can "heavily influence the creation of disability categories and labels" (Baber, 2016:3) which in turn, can impact the lived experiences of students with dyslexia, their identity, and experience of education. Socio-cultural theory suggests that a person's "sense of identity will inevitably be affected by what is valued in their society and culture" (Burden, 2008:188). In Western societies, literacy is a highly valued skill or commodity and in an Irish context, third level education is particularly highly valued. In Ireland, education offers elevated status and prestige within most families and communities. Consequently, if there is a perceived inability to acquire these skills, "it is highly likely to have a negative effect upon any individual's conception of themselves as competent" (Burden, 2008:189). If students identify dyslexia as a limitation, it can become a barrier to successful learning and have a negative effect on their third level educational experience.

In an Irish context, Dyslexia Association Ireland (DAI) submitted their strategy for 2016-2018 to the Minister for Education and Skills in 2015. This was delivered to gain earlier interventions for students with dyslexia, more education/awareness for educators on dyslexia in the classroom, to increase awareness of dyslexia and access more supports for students with dyslexia. The Ahead (2017 & 2021) studies highlighted results and showed that 450,000 people in Ireland have dyslexia which is 10 percent of the population. My research highlights how factors such as attitudinal barriers, social attitudes and institutional barriers led to people with dyslexia being systematically hindered during their third level education experiences.

### *Research Questions*

This dissertation asks several questions relating to the experience of dyslexia in third level education in Ireland. I explored the following three key questions with each of my research participants.

1. How do students with dyslexia experience and navigate third level education in Ireland?
2. How do these students understand their dyslexia in the context of an environment so heavily reliant on text-based learning and assessment?
3. What does it feel like to negotiate the disclosure process, the discourse surrounding dyslexia and the cultural perceptions connected to dyslexia/neurodiversity, in third level education?

By answering these questions, I will provide a deeper knowledge, insights and understanding into how learning is experienced by those operating within an environment and culture that champions the very issues that hinder people with dyslexia. An example of these issues can be, however, are not limited to reading, writing, short-term memory retrieval both in an oral capacity and in final written examinations.

### *Introducing the Findings*

My research has found that students' personal experience of dyslexia is not always entirely negative. Institutional barriers and attitudinal barriers have been identified as one of the main findings in this research. However, all the negatives that have been highlighted within the findings have been found to be the motivators of achieving success in third level education. Positive aspects of my research participants experiences of dyslexia have been identified including "deep approaches to learning, creativity, increased motivation and determination, strategic planning skills and excellent problem-solving skills" (Beckett & Darnell, 2020:54). Therefore, highlighting those positive experiences of dyslexia can occur alongside more negative effects and when students with dyslexia embrace these, they can be utilised as liberators and empower the students to achieve success in their studies. My research also indicates the need for enhanced institutional and academic staff's understanding of dyslexia and associated provision for individual learners with dyslexia within third level education.

My research shows how discourse and identification of difference can affect confidence, the self, invoke shame and fear, and how all this leads to the suppression of your voice. It also highlights how there is an underlying cultural and social stigma surrounding neurodiversity, particularly concerning conditions such as dyslexia. The positive aspects and emotional and psychological benefits of disclosing dyslexia from the research participants experiences surrounding supports, accommodations and the ‘self’ are also discussed through the findings.

### *Organisation of this thesis*

Chapter One is the methodology chapter, which is focusing on ethnography. This is followed by Chapter Two which discusses the literature reviewed within the research project, what the theoretical foundations are built upon, and the authors standpoint. The themes which emerged from my research are discussed within the following Chapters and this section also uses images with very little text to explore the impacts of dyslexia on my research participants. The implications, recommendations and conclusions of the research projects findings are discussed and highlighted in the last Chapter, which is in turn followed on by the Bibliography.

# Chapter 1: Methodology

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research which I carried out in four different third level institutions during the academic semesters in 2018; the first semester from January to May and the second from September to December. This project had a total of 17 research participants, all of whom had a diagnosis of dyslexia and had either completed a third level education degree or were in the process of finishing one. There were 14 female participants and three male participants; one of these male participants was me. The other participants and I, varied in age and were all from various geographical locations in Ireland. There were four participants from the 40+ age range, three from the 30-40 age group and the rest, ten, were in the 19- to 30-year-old age range. One of the research participants was from County Louth, three were from County Kildare, two from County Carlow and the remaining 11 were all from County Dublin. Between them, they had attended or are currently attending four different third-level institutions in counties Dublin, Kildare, and Carlow. The courses which my participants either completed or were completing at undergraduate level ranged from, Applied Social Care, Law, Anthropology, Social Policy, Sociology, Social Studies and Social Work. Master’s courses in Adult and Community Education, Social Work and Humanitarian Law were also completed.

I sent out an expression of interest in my project via the four third-level institutions access offices which my research participants where or had attended. The disability services officers sent out an email about the research project to all their students who were registered with them as having a diagnosis of dyslexia. This email contained an introduction, along with a brief overview of the research project (Appendix 1), what it entailed and what their role as a research participant would entail for them. No specific variable arose, or no rationale was discovered for the very low participation in the project by the male student population, as the only inclusion or exclusion to participation was having a diagnosis of dyslexia and being registered with the access office in your institution. Consequently, no rationale emerged within the research for the variation in gender, geographical location, programs studied and/or age differences. The participants were all given non-identifying names which are as follows, Smithwicks, Heffo, Alex, Winehouse, Turbo, Calloway, Rolling Stone, The General, Ali, Kitty Kat, AIB, Herbie, Anne, Joy, The Driver and Summertime.

As mentioned at the start, the methodological tool I employed mainly was participant observation, which is the distinguishing feature of ethnographic research. Ingold (2017) suggests that "good ethnography is sensitive, contextually nuanced, richly detailed, and above all faithful to what it depicts" (:21). It also aims to describe life as it is lived, "by a people, somewhere, sometime" (*Ibid*). Ethnographic research is well-suited as the basis of an analysis of dyslexia as a lived reality in the everyday practices and experiences of those living with the hidden disability. Using ethnographic methods assumes that researchers “must first discover what people do and the reasons they give for doing it” (Compte & Schensul, 2010:6). Ethnography is also concerned with “learning about people, in contrast to studying people, through immersion in native populations” (Jones & Smith, 2017:98). Conducting this immersion into the participants’ real-world setting and providing detailed analysis enables the researcher “to discover and describe the complexities and shared cultural nuances of the social world, and to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation” (Jones & Smith, 2017:98). Researchers must then interpret these actions through their narratives, experiences and lenses, alongside theoretical frameworks. Ethnographic research involves a degree of human participatory interaction, which takes place within the participants’ “natural settings” (Bryman, 2016:38). It also involves the sharing of knowledge and experiences about a phenomenon being researched and it explores how people make sense of what happens and what the meaning of that happening is.

Clifford Geertz discussed how man makes meaning of his world and that man is an “animal suspended in webs of his own significance” (1973:48). He equally argues that our society can make meaning through education. Geertz (1973) suggests there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture and today’s Irish and Western cultures place high value on academic achievement. Geertz (1973) suggests humans are, “incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves though culture” (:49). Hence, this research has explored cultural understandings of dyslexia and how my research participants navigate and identify with dyslexia within third level education. Although this research moves across multiple themes, one of the central themes is concerned with the formation of identity and collective identity and how this negative identity can be transmitted within social groups and become part of the social “legacy the individual acquires from their group” (Geertz, 1973:4).

It can be a difficult process to try and measure social relations, actions, feelings, emotions, how people live, how they view their world, cope with it, and change it. When I am looking to understand a particular social interaction, I must understand the wider context in which the experience occurs. My research collected data through participating in my research participants everyday lives within their third level institutions which included, attending their lectures, sitting with them in their small group tutorials, and hanging out with my research participants while they attended group work meetings related to their courses.

Ethnographic methods are diverse and that enables us to utilise a range of approaches which are based on participation and observation, in-depth interviews, and detailed writing analysis. Jones and Smith (2017) argue that “It is the depth of fieldwork and the continuous process of engaging with participants and their natural environments that is central and adds strength to the findings of ethnographic studies” (:98). I used these methods to conduct my research to gain an insight and understanding into how my research participants engaged. “As to observe is not, in itself, to objectify” (Ingold, 2017: 23), it is more to notice what people are saying and doing, and to watch and listen. During this process, the ethnographer becomes immersed in the culture as an active or passive participant and records extensive field notes. As stated earlier, I conducted this fieldwork in lecture theatres, small group tutorials, cafés, and public spaces within the universities my research participants attended, observing how they approached teaching, assignments and managed their workloads. I also conducted small passive participation, shadowing some participants in their interactions in group work and lectures which were of a very varied nature and included modules that were both of an applied and theoretical design.

This was a deliberate decision, as some modules require more participation than others. This approach therefore gave a broader insight into my research participants in these teaching and learning environments. I also gained permission from 10 of the participants and their group work peers to observe how they took part in their group work studies. This allowed me to observe how the research participants navigated the smaller group scenarios, as opposed to a larger lecture hall which can provide an opportunity to ‘hide’ within the larger group environments. These observation sessions comprised two forty-minute meetings with each of the

10 participants. During this process, I took field notes which were used later during the writing-up process.

The locations used within these institutions for my fieldwork were lecture halls, smaller rooms for tutorials, and public spaces. In these third level institutions the larger lecture halls were all of a similar structure and layout. One of the universities had a long history and some of the lecture halls were of an older design; however, the other three were more modern and the lecture theatres were designed whereby the person delivering the lecture was on a stage or at a podium and the sitting spaces were structured to step up in a rise to enable participants in the lecture to have a clear view of the events. Lectures usually held much larger spaces with large audiences; the smallest lecture theatre I attended had around 103 students whereas the largest theatre had close to 400 students. The time span of these lectures varied from forty-five minutes to three hours and due to the structure of the lectures, which involved supplying the theorical foundations of the module topics, it provided limited space for answering questions or student participation. Tutorials rooms are of a much smaller and intimate nature, which may hold only up to thirty or forty students and are designed for more practical sessions and much more student participation. My participants' groupwork sessions would generally have four to six students and myself. These could be held in these tutorials rooms when they were available, if they were not unoccupied, we sat around in the college cafes or other public spaces.

I interviewed a specific population of the student cohort across four different third-level educational institutions who self-selected. During the lead up process, I had gained a small insight into their educational journeys and their ‘stories’ fitted within the context of my research. I met and spoke with each one on an individual basis, whereby each one was informed of the nature and the purpose of my research. I informed my participants of their right to withdraw before a specified date. We all agreed that I would send all my research participants a copy of only their transcript to allow them to confirm what was said and gain their consensual participation. It was agreed between my research participants and myself to protect their identities and that the research participants real names would not be used or any material which could identify them. I received full Tier 3 ethical approval from Maynooth University to conduct the research, and this included a detailed consent form (Appendix 2).

The interviews took place in ‘natural settings’ chosen by my participants, and I attempted to “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Creswell, 2012:36). I tried to understand the behaviours and rituals of people interacting with dyslexia during their academic lives. The interviews with my participants were used to develop a shared understanding and analysis of the phenomena through systematic “observation in the ‘field’ by interviewing and carefully recording what they see, hear and observe people doing while also learning the meanings that people attribute to what they do and say” (Compte &

Schensul, 2010:6). This was achieved through actively engaging with the interviewees and, as Ryan states, "this is a constructed as an interpersonal situation" (2004:77).

Alongside the researcher's eyes, ears and awareness of body language, a recording device (LiveScribe pen) was used to ensure I saved and could document the data, which were subsequently transcribed. I used conversational type questions to enable my research participants an opportunity to speak openly and at length. From the beginning, I used questions to allow my participants to construct and present their life stories and experiences of having dyslexia in third level education. The questions asked were about having dyslexia and were around family history of dyslexia, brief experiences of formal school and how they experienced third level education with dyslexia, particularly in relation to teaching, learning, assessment and supports. They were also asked about how they understood their dyslexia and how they thought others understood it, what the disclosure process was like, the discourse and identity experienced, being neurodiverse and the cultural perceptions and prejudices surrounding dyslexia. The subject of taking their dyslexia away and dyslexia being their kryptonite was also explored. I framed the design and conduct of these interviews to ensure a respectful, reciprocal, democratic and empowering dialogue (Byrne and Lentin, 2000). This helped to design a research process to eliminate what Kale (2006) identifies as the inequality at the heart of interviewing. Ethnographic interviewing was a technique applied to understand the behaviours and rituals of my research participants interacting with dyslexia in their academic lives.

After I completed the interviews, I transcribed the recorded data exactly. This was to ensure the richness from the recorded data was reported with no attempts to “clean up the speech” (Fraser, 2004: 187). This enabled me to read and re-read the transcripts several times to tell the stories of my research participants as “it is the detail and completeness of the record that provides the richness and texture of the written product” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:148). These interviews varied in length and locations and my research participants choose to discuss their dyslexia in public spaces such as: their institutions public spaces, coffee shops, cafés, public houses, and a library. Regardless of the diagnose, the research participants had all excepted their dyslexia as a part of who they were and through this acceptance of their neurodiverse difference, they were comfortable discussing dyslexia with me in public spaces. Costa coffee was the venue of choice during the interviews, of the 16 participants, ten of them chose a Costa venue as their preferred space. Two chose a public bar close to their homes, although we consumed no alcohol, one a library, one another local café and two just suggested that we sit in their college library. The interviews took from one hour and up to three hours to complete. I made a conscious decision to hold the interviews after some of the participant observations had taken place as I felt the research participants would tell me their ‘stories’ in a more detailed way if they knew me better and felt more comfortable around me.

I conducted a quantitative survey (Appendix 3) with my research participants and expanded this further with students in a Dublin university. This was to highlight how the font styles that third level educational institutions recommend we use in our assessments can act as a structural barrier, not only to students with dyslexia, but to all students attending these third level institutions. This survey was conducted with my research participants and 273 students registered on a Level 8, Applied Social Care Degree on four font styles, the two recommended by the third level education institutions and two other styles. The results confirmed that the two compulsory fonts were the least favoured and one of the other fonts, Verdana, was the favourite font, being preferred by 78% of the students. These results are further expanded upon in later chapters.

This research also used autoethnography to connect my research to the wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Ellis, 2004) of having dyslexia and studying in third level education. It is a self-reflective form of writing used across anthropology and other disciplines or as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004: *xix*). This allowed me, my research participants, and the readers to form an understanding of the social context and culture of studying in third-level education with dyslexia and experiencing this through the prism of difference.

## Ethics

Research should always be constructed through pre-understanding, openness, closeness, and distance. According to Raheim, Magnussen, Tevit Sekes, Lunde, Jacobsen, & Blystad, "the co-construction and situating of knowledge, trustworthiness and integrity, power relations, and ethical dilemmas are given primacy in the qualitative methodology" (2016:1). One of the methods I incorporated into my interviewing was to avoid, or if they emerged within the conversation, to replace questions that implied that I was searching for a right answer rather than answers that focused on the respondent's true point of view. This was done by a carefully thought-out process of question design and conducting a mock interview with a member of The Dyslexia Association of Ireland. I also reflected constantly on the reaction and answers to the questions I asked during my interviews, my line of questioning and I paid attention to where the interview was going or if it was being led. I also used Schön (1983) to assist in this reflection through the method of 'in-action and 'on-action'. Thus, eliminating bias led answers to suit the research, or any preconceived notions of what answers 'I might like'.

I also avoided questions where the research participants felt they had to answer in a certain way, to avoid answers they might feel, are not socially acceptable or to give answers for me to like and/or accept. I practiced this using unconditional positive regard and empathic techniques developed by Carl Rogers (1963). Historically, this is one of the most universal forms of bias and can easily occur when the research is looking like your questions are not being answered. For a reader to trust the perspective of a researcher, the disclosure of the researcher's position concerning the data is vital. According to Pitard (2017), "Who am I concerning the research? becomes the central tenet in disclosing the positioning of the researcher" (:1). Acknowledging the researcher's positioning through the process of reflexivity, or critical self-evaluation is essential. As a researcher who has a diagnosis of dyslexia and having only entered third level education as a mature man in 2010, I was in a unique position. I had the life experience of being different, of having dyslexia and being able to empathise with my research participants about navigating third level education.

The concerns around this influencing the findings and/or biasing the research are not grounded in fact. Although these concerns are recognised, valued, and acknowledged, using ethnographic interpretation and writing helps to bring these to the fore and to deal with them. Being a participant in this research can lead to a unique world view on the phenomena as we try to understand dyslexia through a prism of difference and how students with dyslexia navigate third level education. The analysis is written firstly through the lens of a researcher; however, it also includes the researcher as a character in the story. Nonetheless, the picture must always be very clear as to which hat is being worn and thus, reflection and acknowledgement are the keys. In the ethnographic literature, much attention is paid to the complexity of the role of the researcher as an observer, as well as the contextual understanding of potentially opposing perspectives between the researcher and the researched (Adler & Kwon, 2002, & Raheim *et al,* 2016).

Fortunately, being aware of these potential pitfalls and constantly reflecting on them, I was able to be a researcher and participant in the research project. Reflexivity is an integral part of ethical practice and ethnography and is concerned with thoughtful, analytic self-awareness of researchers' experiences, reasoning, and overall impact throughout the research process: "Reflexivity suggests that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research; they should hold themselves up to the light" (Cohen *et al,* 2003:141).

### Data Collection and Storage

The Access Office at Maynooth University very kindly gave me access to a 'LiveScribe' pen and notebook. This is a resource or support available to students with dyslexia who are registered with their office. It is a pen that interacts with a special notebook and can be used to record lectures, or in this instance, the interviews. All the research participants were informed that the interview would be recorded in advance of their participation and consent forms were signed. As the recording device used was a 'pen', it was non-intrusive and helped the research participants to relax more as sometimes an actual recording device or mobile device can be intimidating in an interview.

As per Maynooth University's data storage policy, all the research participants were made aware of this policy. The researcher, my supervisor and potentially the examining body, will be the only people who can have access to audio records. Materials will be safeguarded through stringent security protocols. Digital audio files and transcripts will be stored on the researchers encrypted and password-protected laptop and password-protected external hard drive also. Paper-based materials such as transcript printouts and rough field notes will be stored under secure conditions in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. They will be shredded by the researcher three years after the completion of the PhD. Three years after the research project is complete, all data will be personally destroyed by the researcher. All audio files will be overwritten, and transcripts deleted from the laptop and the hard drive. Maintaining ethical considerations relating to the research and constantly searching for ways of carrying out research the 'right' way is at the core of this study.

When considering the principle of informed consent, Halvorson (2005) recommends that there should be no coercion, participation is to be voluntary, and it is based on full and open information. Therefore, this research project has endeavoured to design consent procedures that are explicit, unambiguous, and accessible to all research participants. Maynooth University has a range of ethical guidelines and consent forms that can be followed, and they will ensure that proper ethical procedure is observed. However, I believe wise ethical research requires ongoing critical reflexivity and constant attention to the purpose and process of inquiry. This can expose people's vulnerabilities and requires sensitivity, attention, and empathy while maintaining a deep commitment to practices which place ethical obligations to participants above the goal of data collection. A list of useful supports (Appendix 4) and their contacts were made available to my research participants should they need additional support or counselling because they participated in this research project.

A brief introduction of my research participants and I follows on and then we explore the literature and theoretical framework used for my research. It will also highlight my own standing on this debate.

### *Introducing my research participants*

Smithwicks: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. Smithwicks studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family and throughout her extended family and dyslexia is often coupled with other neurobiological conditions. Smithwick's is employed as a social care worker in a residential setting.

Heffo: Is from Kildare and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. Heffo studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family, and she is employed as a social care worker in an intellectual disability day service setting.

Alex: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin as a part time student, on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. This is because Alex works full time in an education service for people with disabilities. She had studied nursing when she left school in England, however, this did not work out for her, and she blames her dyslexia as a significant contributing factor to this not working out. Alex is from the 30-40-year-old range and dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family. She is currently studying for her Master's in a university in Kildare and works part time as a youth worker.

Turbo: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. Turbo studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family.

Calloway: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is an only child. Turbo is from the 19–30-year-old range and studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. She is currently working in a childcare setting.

Rolling Stone: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. She studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her children, her immediate family and throughout her extended family and dyslexia is often coupled with other neurobiological conditions. Rolling Stone is currently considering further options in education, as she does not have the confidence at this time to find employment.

Ali: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 40–50-year-old age range. Ali studied on a level 8-degree course as a part time student as due to her dyslexia she left school very young and only returned as a mature student. She has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her own children, immediate family and throughout her extended family and dyslexia is often coupled with other neurobiological conditions. Ali is employed as a social care worker in a children's residential setting.

Kitty Kat: Is from Kildare and attended one of the third level institutions in Carlow, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. She studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family. Kitty Kat is employed as a social care worker in the role of home care visits.

AIB: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. She graduated with a Batchelor of Arts and dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family.

Herbie: Is from Kildare and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. She studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family and throughout her extended family and she is currently planning to attend postgraduate study.

Anne: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. Anne studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Her brothers and father have dyslexia.

Joy: Is from South Africa originally and now living in Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin. Joy studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. Dyslexia is prevalent within her own children and her immediate family. Joy is a full-time mother and is employed part time as a social care worker in a residential setting.

Summertime: Is from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin as a part time student, on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts. She has been educated throughout formal school in fee paying private schools, however, her dyslexia still impacts her and her self-confidence. Summertime works part time in a centre for people with disabilities. She had tried to study nursing when she left school however, this did not work out for her, and she blames her dyslexia as a significant contributing factor to this not working out. Dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family and Summertime is currenting employed in the addiction services.

The Driver: Is from Carlow and attended one of the third level institutions in Carlow, he then went on to study for a Masters in a Dublin university. He is from the 19–30-year-old range, studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts and a Masters in Disability Studies. Dyslexia is prevalent within his immediate family and throughout the extended family. The Driver is employed as a disability officer in a prominent Dublin university and is an advocate for people with dyslexia.

Winehouse: Is from Louth and attended one of the third level institutions in Dublin, she is from the 19–30-year-old range. Winehouse studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Arts and a master's in law. She is an only child; however, dyslexia is prevalent within her immediate family and throughout her extended family. She is employed within a dyslexia charity and is an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.

The General: Is from Carlow and attended one of the third level institutions in Kildare and he is from the 30–40-year-old range. The General studied on a level 8-degree course and has graduated with a Batchelor of Science. Dyslexia is prevalent within his immediate family and throughout his extended family, however, it is not diagnosed in his own children. He is employed as a manager in a respite service for adults with Autism.

Myself: I am from Dublin and attended one of the third level institutions in Kildare. I have studied a level 7 certificate, a Batchelor of Art, HDip in teaching, a level 9 master's in education and now a level 10 PhD. Dyslexia is prevalent in my family and one of my daughters also has a diagnosis of dyslexia. I have worked as a decorator; adult education teacher and I am currently working as a lecturer in Dublin University.

# Chapter 2: Dyslexia beyond Ableism

## *Introduction*

This thesis aims to develop a framework for approaching dyslexia that avoids both internalised and externalised ableism. This approach is developed through the current literature on neurodiversity and dyslexia as well as the experiences of my research informants who all have dyslexia and are attending or have attended third level education. All my research participants experienced difficulty in viewing themselves from beyond an ableist perspective. The neurodiverse approach highlights the fact that sometimes research participants' view, as well as society's view in general, does not always allow them to focus on their own differences and powers, and the potentials of their condition. One of the goals of this thesis is to develop and advocate for a framework for approaching dyslexia that avoids ableism and encourages an approach of dyslexia from a neurodivergence standpoint. Neurodiversity takes the view that all brain differences are normal, not deficits and that everyone experiences and interprets the world in unique ways. It also acknowledges that in some environments, neurodiversity may manifest as a disability as opposed to highlighting talents and that being neurodivergent can produce stigma around these differences.

This chapter reviews the literature which inspired me on dyslexia and its history (Kussmaul, 1878; Berlin, 1887; Hinshelwood, 1917; Orton, 1925; Shaywitz *et al,* 1992; Stien, 2013 & Le Floch, 2017). It discusses dyslexia in the context of the following conceptual traditions and pinpoints my positionality in relation to the literature. Critical Disability Studies (Tremain, 2005 & 2017; Carlson, 2009; Minich, 2016; Goodley *et al,* 2018*;* Ellis *et al,* 2018 & Andrews, 2019), Identity-first Language versus Person-first Language (Soloman, 2012; Nicolaides, 2012; Dunn & Andrews, 2015; Yergeau, 2018; Vivanti, 2019 & Bottema-Beutel, 2020), Neurodiversity (Singer, 1996; Cooper, 2006; Griffin & Pollak, 2012; Armstrong, 2012; Pino & Mortari, 2014; Lendre, 2019 & Clouder *et al,* 2020), Crip Theory (Goodley, 2003; McRuer, 2006 & 2012; Basso, 2009; Garland-Thompson, 2009; Cameron & Billington, 2017; Bone 2017 & Corrigan, 2019) Growth Mindset Theory (Ellis, 2005; Eide & Eide, 2012; Dweck, 2012; Yager & Dweck, 2012; Daeun, 2015 & Romeo, 2015), Dyslexia as a Neurobiological Condition (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003; Metha, 2011; Hudson *et al,* 2011 Shulman, 2013; Krishnan *et al,* 2016; Schiano-Ferrer & Martinez, 2018 & Kearns, 2019), and Sociocultural Condition (Paulesu *et al,* 2001; Pollak, 2005; Cresswell, 2007; Gee, 2014; Sefton-Green & Rowell, 2015 & Clouder, 2020).

My approach is situated in Critical Disability Studies and Neurodiversity, which call for an alternative view of ‘human being’ to conceptualise disability and ability as part of the human condition (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014; Dunn & Andrews, 2015 & Ellis *et al,* 2018).

The medical model of disability (which is examined later in this chapter) focuses on disability as an impairment and explores treatments (Murphy, 2008; Garrett, 2011 & Oliver, 2013). However, the social model of disability offered by Oliver (2013) defines the experience of disability as "an interaction between individual and social factors" (Oliver, 2013:1025). We need to be more diverse in the models we choose to use to incorporate aspects from both models; as it stands now, the medical model aims to fix the disability for the person to fit into society, whereas the social model aims to accept the person as they are and change society according to the needs of the person with impairments. Nonetheless, my research advocates that a more neurodiverse approach to brain differences be accepted as the 'norm' or an ability, as opposed to being labelled a disability. This chapter will explore dyslexia through time and examine dyslexia as a medical condition before moving onto dyslexia as a sociocultural condition and using a neurodiverse approach to view dyslexia.

### *Dyslexia Through Time*

The word 'Dyslexia' originates from the Greek word (*dɪsˈlɛksɪə*) meaning 'difficulty with words' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). However, dyslexia's appearance in society is by no means a recent phenomenon and was identified as early as the 19th century by Kussmaul (1878). Although the term dyslexia has come to prominence in recent years, Kussmaul researched adults with reading difficulties and neurological impairments and introduced this as 'word blindness'. He observed that several of his patients could not read properly, regularly used words in the wrong order and his work gained societal interest around people with reading difficulties. The term 'word blindness' was first replaced with the word 'dyslexia' a decade later by Rudolph Berlin (1887), who was an Ophthalmologist. Consequently, as Berlin was a specialist in the field of vision it led to the dominant view of the time that dyslexia was caused by a visual processing deficit. In 1917, Hinshelwood built on this tradition in his clinical research. He examined 'patients' who although not blind, were unable to read letters. His research discovered that these 'patients' also showed signs of what was described as 'signs of speech disturbance, such as verbal aphasia'. This further enhanced the dominant view that dyslexic difficulties were caused by visual processing deficiencies.

Pringle-Morgan (1896) published the first report on developmental dyslexia and put forward the theory that dyslexic difficulties were related to 'congenital word blindness'. From this period, studies started taking place around specific learning difficulties. Orton (1925) placed great emphasis on how reading difficulties arose from the dominant use of one side of the brain. In 1939, Dr Alfred Struss and R. Heinz Werner published their findings with children on a wide range of learning difficulties. Their work emphasised the variety of these problems and the importance of individually assessing each child's specific educational needs.

Hinshelwood's (1917) research focused on the eyes and one hundred years later, the eyes were also focused on to explain reading difficulties. Le Floch and Ropars (2017) "have identified a tiny yet crucial difference between the eyes of dyslexic and non-dyslexic people" (2017:2). This correlated with research conducted by Wilkins (2013) and Murphy (2018) which also found that many students with dyslexia have problems with seeing letters clearly and in the order they appear. Stein (2017) discovered that "these difficulties may be caused by abnormal development of their visual "magnocellular" (M) nerve cells" (:267). These nerve cells help to rapidly identify letters, their order and control eye fixations. Stein (2017) also found a malfunction in the development of sensory nerves which happens at the foetal stage and is said to cause eye convergence difficulties and inhibit steady eye fixation. Shaywitz, Escobar, Bennett, Fletcher & Makuch (1992) published their findings on a wide range of learning difficulties with similar outcomes and findings as Orton in his research in the 1920s.

In the mid-twentieth century, the medical model was broadened somewhat, in that specific learning difficulties no longer came under the sole jurisdiction of medicine. Educational and psychological research broadened our understanding of the condition. In Ireland today, dyslexia can often be described as a specific learning difficulty which makes it hard for some people to learn to read, write and spell correctly according to the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI, 2018). However, the DAI (2018) and European Dyslexia Association (EDA) (2019), suggest that dyslexia is a genetic condition which can begin during foetal development. Other research supports the concept that dyslexia is a continuum and cannot be defined or reduced into one definition. Higgins (2015) suggests no two people with dyslexia are the same and they have different processing techniques. Trafton (2016) found that a symptom of reduced plasticity can mean a decrease in the ability to adapt to repetition, both socially and academically. Nonetheless, Paulesu, Demonet, Fazio and McCrory (2001), identified culture and environment as potential factors influencing dyslexia.

### *Problems with the Medical Model*

The medical model treats disability as defects in need of treatment and in "doing so, it reinforces the able body as the norm and perpetrates stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities" (Guevara, 2021:275). Society has tended to communicate with people who have disabilities about their disabilities through messages that their bodies are defective, that they need to be fixed or cured, and that their inability to participate fully in society is imputable to them and to their disability (Gill, 1987; Oliver, 2013; Munzer, *et al*, 2020 & Guevara, 2021). This is often how people with disabilities are seen by society, as well as how people with disabilities see themselves and societies often over-emphasise a reliance on the medical model of disability, which has kept people with disabilities from being able to fully participate in society.

Within third level education the medical model is prevalent also, with dyslexia being treated as a disability which requires standardised supports for students with dyslexia to succeed. This model links a disability diagnosis to an individual and supposes that with medical intervention, or in my research participants case, a psychological diagnose, a disability can be diminished or corrected through curing or managing the disability. My research participants have expressed how disclosing your dyslexia and identifying with this model in third level education, can leave them vulnerable and exposed, whereby, each student is offered the same supports or within the constraints of the institutions funding, regardless of the recommendations of their individual needs in the report.

Ablism can also be rooted in the medical model as it highlights there is something wrong with the person that needs to be fixed. This will be expanded in greater detail in the 'Dyslexia as Socio-cultural Condition' chapter, as ablism can then be reinforced at a societal and cultural level.

## It's in the Jeans

The medical model of disability says people are disabled by their impairments or differences (Gill, 1987 & Munzer, *et al*, 2020). Nonetheless, dyslexia is also regarded as a neurobiological condition that is genetic in origin and is heredity. It is clear that individuals can inherit this condition from a parent as it is shown to run in families (EDA, 2017 & DAI, 2018). The EDA (2017) and DAI (2018) have further built on this tradition that dyslexia is genetic and can be inherited and Hudson, High and Al Otaiba, (2011), reported this finding in their research also. All my research participants reported their own children, siblings, family members and/or immediate family members, have a diagnose of dyslexia and/or another specific learning disability. We do know that a developmental strain of dyslexia is inherited; that it is only slightly more common in males than in females and that one is born with it (DAI, 2018 & EDA, 2018). The DRD 4 gene is known as the novelty seeking gene and has been identified in human evolution from over 10,000 years ago and genes associated with autism also go back to a similar time (Nuttle, Giannuzzi & Duyzend, 2016). Research suggests that genetic variants linked to autism and other neurodiverse conditions might have been positively selected during human evolution (Spikins, 2017). This can be because they contribute to exceptional memory skills, heightened perception, vision, taste, smell, a precise eye for detail and an enhanced understanding of systems such as animal behaviour, and these same characteristics are most likely still found in the gene pool today. According to Spikins (2017), "without that 'dash of autism' in our human communities, we probably wouldn't be where we are today" (:5). People with dyslexia can share a cluster of genes, which may account for the variations in the nature and extent of specific learning difficulties.

Dyslexia is not an illness or disease that can be treated medically, nor is it something that comes and goes; it is a cognitive difference and can be inherited through genes and DNA (The Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2018; The European Dyslexia Association, 2019). Schumacher, Hoffmann, Schma, Schulte-Korne, Nothen, suggest "a child with an affected parent has a risk of 40–60% of developing dyslexia. This risk is increased when other family members are also affected" (2007:289). Scerri & Schulte-

Körne observe an “individual’s risk of being affected increased, when other family members were already affected” (2009:181). Familial clustering in dyslexia was recognised some decades after the first description by Berlin in 1887 and we witness this trend within this research also. Pennington and Olsen (2005) and the HUGO Gene Nomenclature Committee (2004) also conducted research which found that dyslexia is genetic. They investigated families with dyslexia and “identified nine chromosome regions listed in which the presence of susceptibility genes is suspected” (HUGO Gene Nomenclature Committee, 2004:657). They argue that this is an example of the intersection between language as an evolved behaviour and literacy as a cultural invention. My research also highlights this finding through showing language evolving as a means of communication within a culture and the importance and value connected to literacy within Western societies.

Nonetheless, Pennington & Olsen (2005) found that “while there cannot be genes for reading or other relatively recent cultural inventions, there can be genetic influences on evolved cognitive and behavioural traits necessary for proficiency in such cultural inventions” (:456). However, recognising dyslexia as a neuro-developmental disorder has been contested by Paulesu, Demonet, Fazio and McCrory (2001) because it has “…variable and culture-specific manifestations” (:2165). Nonetheless, the experts do agree that there is no one underlying cause of dyslexia and prevalent research considers a phonological deficit as one of the root causes of dyslexia. Kelly (2018) suggests up to 80% of dyslexic cases display some degree of

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phonological deficit and up to 20% have a visual processing difficulty and some have both. Brain imaging suggests that people with dyslexia do not activate the left hemisphere (the language side) in the brain as much when reading as non-dyslexic readers and that there is less engagement of the areas of the brain which match letters with sounds (Lyon, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003 & Hudson, High & Al Otaiba, 2011). Leopold (2018) in his research, found that the role of the cerebellum, the part of the brain controlling balance is crucial and differences in this area make it difficult for children with dyslexia to acquire certain tasks automaticity and may further inhibit the development of language dexterity and motor skills.

There is no agreement that dyslexia can help explain differences in the way the brain processes information, and while there may be differences in the way in which the brain works, this does not imply any abnormality, lack of intelligence, disease, or defect (Richlan, Kronbicher and Wimmer, 2011 & Krishnan, Watkins, and Bishop, 2016). Although my research participants displayed excellent language skills, all of them also exhibited creative skills, outside the box thinking and other skills identified with using the right side of the brain more. The right side also initiates visual awareness, imagination, emotions, spatial abilities, face recognition, music awareness, interpreting social cues, and left-hand control according to research first conducted by Sperry (1967) and followed on by de Hahn *et al,* (2020).

Stein (2013) suggests that auditory and visual difficulties are caused by abnormal magnocellular development. According to Wilkins (2016), while reading the eyes seem to advance smoothly across the page, whereas in fact they are moving in a series of rapid jerks, usually alighting about one-third of the distance along each of the longer words in turn. Le Floch and Ropars (2017), also researched dyslexia as a visual decrepit and found that "for students with dyslexia, their two eyes are equivalent, and their brain has to successively rely on the two slightly different versions of a given visual scene" (:3). This also correlates with my research whereby the survey carried out on font styles supports this argument of visual difficulties when reading with a dyslexic brain. Although genetics is relevant here, it is not an integral part of this research. Nonetheless, due to the familial clustering and hereditary nature of dyslexia, it is worth discussing.

The DNA and genetic influence is seen in the different traits that make up dyslexia such as phonological, phonemes and, visual and brain processing differences. The research shows how this impacts not only brain processing but also, the make-up of a dyslexic brain in terms of left hemisphere activity and the differences between the eyes of a dyslexic and a non-dyslexic person. By viewing disability through the medical model, the power is transferred to the medical professionals to dictate the lives of people with impairments. This according to Cooper (2006) and Griffin and Pollak (2012), views the disability as a part of the individual which can directly disadvantage the person with the disability. My research also highlights how genetics, hereditary and familial clustering are prevalent in dyslexia and how the medical model of disability can impede students with dyslexia in third level education.

### *Dyslexia as a Neurobiological Condition*

Neurobiology is the study of how the brain works and of how the nervous system functions according to Raschle, Chang, and Gaab (2011); Shulman (2013) and Munzer, Hussain and Soares (2019). Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities, yet its brain basis and core causes are not yet fully understood even though we know that it is neurobiological in origin, meaning that the problem is located physically in the brain (Norton, Beach & Gabrielli, 2015). "Neuroimaging methods, including structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging, diffusion tensor imaging, and electrophysiology, have significantly contributed to knowledge about the neurobiology of dyslexia" (Norton, Beach & Gabrielli, 2015:73). Dyslexia is a specific learning disability, and it is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities (DAI, 2018 & EDA, 2019).

The World Federation of Neurology, (WFN, 2018) also recognises dyslexia as a neurobiological condition. Nonetheless, while dyslexia is recognised as a neurobiological condition and the problem is physically located within the brain, dyslexia has no relation to intelligence and/or lack thereof. The fact that dyslexia and intelligence are not connected is further cemented by my research participants as they have all successfully completed third level education, attaining a level 8 Honours Degree or a Masters qualification.

This is in contrast to people with a neurological problem, who very often suffer from an issue with the processing and functioning of certain activities and may never regain this ability. We also know that in a family where dyslexia is prevalent, other members of the biological family can be diagnosed with other neurobiological conditions also.

How one's neurobiological make-up and brain function in relation to dyslexia, are complicated matters. Brain-imaging studies (Metha, 2011; Norton, Beach & Gabrielli, 2015 & Munzer, Hussain and Soares (2019) show that, while reading, most people activate areas in the left temporal cortex and other regions of the left hemisphere. Readers with dyslexia, on the other hand, under activate these regions and as this research has revealed, students with dyslexia can then struggle with the demands of third level education due this underactivity of the left hemisphere. Nonetheless, my research participants have also shown how developing the positive traits of the right brain hemisphere, will enable you to achieve in third level education. Soriano-Ferrer and Martínez (2018) in their research through brain imaging reported that the "left hemisphere has been found to host neural networks involved in reading: an anterior network located in the inferior frontal gyrus (Broca's area)" (:51) and this is linked to articulation, silent reading, and naming.

Krishnan, Watkins, and Bishop (2016) used Serial Reaction Time (SRT) tests in their research, and they found that "the learning abilities of individuals with dyslexia" (:701), examined using SRT measures, "suggested that the automation of learning is impaired in this disorder" (Krishnan, Watkins, and Bishop, 2016:701). Research has examined perceptual impairments and problems with specific linguistic components, however, Krishnan, Watkins, and Bishop (2016) examined how dyslexia related "disorders have impairments in the process of language learning" (:702). Richlan, Kronbicher and Wimmer (2016) "indicated that adults with dyslexia show hyperactivity of the striatum" (cited in Krishnan *et al,* 2016:710) which was not so prevalent in children within their research, highlighting that an adult with dyslexia, can develop compensatory mechanisms.

During their formal school experiences, my research participants reported struggle after struggle in their formal school environments, however, as adults, they worked hard on developing compensatory mechanisms to enable them to cope and achieve in third level education. Although dyslexia cannot be 'cured', this shows early intervention and good instruction can assist in helping children with these issues and as adults with dyslexia, develop better coping mechanisms also. My research shows how students with dyslexia have difficulties in performing sequential procedural tasks and how this influences the learning environment. Yet, the participants also showed that when the environment is welcoming, inclusive, encouraging and embracing of dyslexia, students can navigate the difficulties and overcome them. Protopapas and Parrila (2018) used the analogy of learning to read and learning to sing, to highlight some sections of societies' views of and attitudes to dyslexia. If you can sing well, it is a gift and a "difficulty learning to sing is entirely unremarkable" (Protopapas & Parrila, 2018:2). However, dyslexia is manifested through a difficulty in learning to read despite adequate intelligence, conventional instruction, and sociocultural opportunity. Nonetheless, "being able to learn to read easily and well, is thought to be normal and expected, and a difficulty learning to read is considered a disorder" (*Ibid*) such as dyslexia.

This can then develop into negative identities, labels and, thus, shame for students with dyslexia, as shown in this research, and can further cultivate into "a political act with the power to include and exclude" (Leshota and Sefotho, 2020:1). This labelling or naming can then become "more than just an identity marker" (Lynch, 2016:208). My research participants have shown how they began to identity with these negative connotations and the impacts of this. The research has also highlighted when the participants began to disassociate from these identities and labels, it became that empowering and liberating moment which enabled the participants perform to their optimum.

Dyslexia as a neurobiological disorder is associated "implicitly or even explicitly, with a 'medical condition' or 'psychiatric condition' or 'psychopathology'" (Protopapas and Parrila, 2018:4). However, such associations are imperative as they legitimise the dyslexia condition and allow for accommodations and supports with dyslexia, nonetheless, it can also tie the name dyslexia into terminology such as 'vulnerable'. Several longitudinal studies have shown that reading difficulties can become chronic since they tend not to resolve in the long term. Therefore, "evidence of reading difficulties persisting into adolescence and adulthood has led to considerable advances in research into the manifestations and neurobiological substrate of dyslexia in adulthood" (Soriano-Ferrer and Martínez, 2018:51). A benefit of knowing what parts of the brain are activated during reading "is that this location-based information is now being used to develop new reading interventions that target the specific brain regions implicated in dyslexia" (Kearns, Hancock, Hoeft, Pugh & Frost, 2019:2). This research reported several key findings about the neurobiology of reading in students with dyslexia in that students with good and poor reading differ in their patterns of activation. This was in terms of "the degree to which they activate parts of the brain associated with reading, such as recognizing familiar print (the occipito-temporal region), linking letters and sounds (the temporo-parietal area), and processing phonemes (the inferior frontal gyrus)" (Kearns *et al*, 2019:17).

This highlights that a student with dyslexia shows less activation overall, and they also "show a different pattern of activation, their brains are not working more slowly" (Kearns *et al*, 2019:17) they are working differently. Krishnan *et al,* (2016) state that students with dyslexia; "appear to have difficulty extracting structure when asked to judge grammaticality novel sequences" (:710). Research by Sanfilippo, Ness, Rapport and Zuckerman (2020) highlighted the need for early interventions: "that early identification and screening are crucial to the prevention or mitigation of adverse secondary consequences of dyslexia" (Sanfilippo *et al,* 2020:7). These findings provide the basis for understanding dyslexia in terms of neurodiversity.

It also enables us to witness how dyslexia has come to be recognised as a neurobiological condition, how this knowledge has aided in correcting misunderstandings (such as dyslexia has something to do with intelligence) and how these neurobiological findings can provide the basis for a neurodiverse approach to dyslexia. My research participants have shown when this is adopted and implemented with diverse, inclusive, and welcoming teaching environments, learning happens. Neurodiversity and neurodivergence will be discussed in relation to my research in greater detail later in the dissertation.

Neurodiversity is the idea that our brains are diverse and that differences in our brains are just that, differences. This ties in with this research's argument that having a brain that works a different way should be viewed as a naturally occurring difference and not deemed to be a disorder, which is the view from the medical model. Operating under this medical model also relates to the term neurotypical. This is the idea that a brain works typically in the 'normal' way a brain should work or what is most accepted as normal in societal standards, of how a brain ought to work. Therefore, neurodivergent is a way of describing a brain that diverges from the societal version of how a 'normal' brain should work, and this includes the brains of those with dyslexia. This research will argue that it is important to understand how our brains work and incorporate brain differences into our thinking, rather than reverting to older ideas of these differences been disabilities.

However, it is also important to understand that although brains work in different ways, we must acknowledge that people with dyslexia have shortcomings that people who are considered neurotypical would not have. Nonetheless, people with dyslexia also have abilities that those considered neurotypical may not, and these also should be acknowledged. I argue this can further reinforce the acceptance of neurodiversity because as with most of what we experience in our lives, in our brains we also have strengths and weaknesses in different areas. The world that we live in can very often be geared towards neurotypical people because they are considered to be typical or normal. This supports the view that people with dyslexia have a deficit of ability in things, that neurotypical people process a 'normal' amount of ability in, thus, placing neurodivergence as a disability. No one underlying cause of dyslexia been identified as it has many facets, including variable and culture-specific manifestations, therefore the next chapter will examine the literature and theories surrounding neurodiversity and critical disability studies and dyslexia as a sociocultural condition.

### *Dyslexia as a Sociocultural Condition*

Sociocultural factors are customs, lifestyles and values that characterise a society and incorporate a combination of social and cultural factors. These are related to the different groups of people in society and their habits, traditions, and beliefs. More specifically, cultural aspects include education, language, religion, social organisations, material culture, values, and attitudes, to name just some. In many cultures, this perspective can affect how disability is perceived. Neurodiversity views 'disability' as the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. It also identifies that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Neurodiversity posits that these are "caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference" (Scope, 2016:509).

Macdonald (2019) suggests that research in the field of dyslexia has begun to use a range of models to interpret the social experiences of people living with this condition. "These models have developed from the discipline of Disability Studies, which defines a number of alternative definitions of 'disability' from the dominant medical classification" (Macdonald, 2019:1). My research argues from the position of neurodiversity and demonstrates how problems associated with dyslexia are explained due to structural and institutional barriers which leads to discrimination. My research participants discussed how it was environmental and attitudinal barriers which restricted and impacted on their experiences and hampered them from fully participating in third level education. “Hence, disability is a result of structural inequalities which are imposed on top of the person’s impairment, rather than a functional limitation of the body” (Macdonald, 2019:10). Paulesu, Demonet, Fazio and McCrory suggest recognising dyslexia as a standalone neurobiological disorder has been contested because it has “variable and culture-specific manifestations” (2001:2165). In some countries, “conditions such as dyslexia are not recognised as disabling, whilst in others, they are considered to be a mental disability suggesting that disability is culturally determined” (Clouder *et al,* 2020:759). “As a symbolic tool, language in particular, mediates the construction of attitude and belief systems that develop and perpetrate larger literacy narratives around struggles” (Kabuto, 2016:289).

This highlights how dyslexia can be culturally embedded within thought and language and is an example of the intersection between language as an evolved behaviour and literacy as a cultural invention (Pennington and Olsen, 2005). Dyslexia as a social construct depends on socially generated interpretations as “society through language and its use continues to construct people, especially those perceived to have a lack or disability” (Leshota & Sefotho, 2020:6). This is mediated by sociocultural factors and how “various social actors interpret and then define their academic abilities” (Kabuto, 2016:301). Dyslexia is not obvious to society, however, the difference between someone who has dyslexia, and its characteristics are exposed within the cultural settings of third level education and its assessing methods. Nieminen has identified “assessment and grading practises as the weak link in how assessment supports learning, because students are positioned as passive objects of assessment” (2021:2). Ketterling-Geller, et al, (2015) suggested these traditional and culturally embedded methods of assessment can lead to discrimination against students with disabilities in third level education. Consequently, Boud, *et al*, (2018) suggests, understanding the cultural and social principles around assessment, and the impacts on those students with dyslexia, requires a comprehensive reframing. Therefore, the disadvantaged status of disabled people is the result of the interaction between impairments and, economic, political, cultural, and social factors (Burden, 2008; Boud *et al,* 2018).

The cultural influence of how dyslexia is understood and contextualised is important in this context. Determining the interface of dyslexia, language, and culture is subject to a wide range of factors. According to Anderson and Meier-Hedde (2011) these can be linguistic, psychological, educational, social, or even political. Burden (2008) suggested that cultural and structural biases which focus on difficulties rather than differences may result in ‘othering’ for people. Whereby people with dyslexia are treated intrinsically different from people without dyslexia as they can be perceived to be inferior. Examining the social construction of dyslexia is also important to appreciate the origin of disability and how it has evolved over time.

Understanding how dyslexia has evolved and is a product of social construction is “vital to assist practitioners and policy makers to fully comprehend the implications of these social pressures” (O’ Brien, 2018:101). Cultural factors influence how dyslexia manifests itself as Tan (2014) found the disorder affects the brains of Chinese and English speakers differently highlighting that "dyslexia is a part of culture" (Perfetti, Tan & Siok, 2006:345) and according to Maunsell (2020), “dyslexia is now a global issue” (:109). Dyslexia International (2017) found that dyslexia turns up in different countries and continents, different languages, and cultures and according to Peterson and Pennington (2012), dyslexia has been documented in every culture studied. The recent development of neurodiversity offers a much more diverse perspective than previous models of disability such as the social model of disability. Macdonald (2019) suggests a “neurodiversity approach develops radically different parameters than the previous sociological perspectives” (:4). From a neurodiverse lens, the concept of ‘disability’ is contested and as is the case with my research, it argues that the current and cultural view of ‘disability’ is replaced with the idea of ‘difference’: “neurodiversity conceptualizes dyslexia as a cultural phenomenon where individuals have been negatively labelled and excluded” (Macdonald, 2019:17). These exclusions are based on one’s differences, and my research also argues for the notion that dyslexia should be reframed as a positive learning variation and not always attached to a negative identity.

### *Neurodiversity*

The neurodiversity movement argues that certain diagnoses concerning the brain, do not reflect neurological disorders, but rather neurological diversities. They also lie at the "intersection of culture, mind, and brain as mind/brain discourses are taken up as cultural practice used in individual and collective identity formation as well as social and political action" (Kirmayer et al, 2020:14). This dissertation argues for a paradigm shift in how we approach and view neurodiversity and dyslexia. People everywhere admire honour, and encourage diversity in animals, nature, and our biosphere. Therefore, I would argue that neurodiversity should be acknowledged in the same manner that all cultural diversities and differences are, to include disabilities such as dyslexia. This research also argues that we need to start enabling people with neurobiological differences to be accepted for themselves to discover and celebrate their strengths and to find a place in society that values their differences. Diversity is usually referenced as sexual orientation or race, however, there is another type of diversity called neurodiversity and this is the concept that neurological differences among people should be recognised and respected. Diversity is a part of one's genetics and of one's evolution as a species and the genes for dyslexia are not errors, but rather are the result of variations in the human genome.

Judy Singer (1999), whose research includes studying Autism, came up with the term neurodiversity and rejected the idea that people with autism were disabled. Instead, the idea should not be to try to 'cure' people whose brains work differently, but to embrace them as part of the mainstream. Neurodiversity is an umbrella term for a range of different neurobiological challenges. These can be referred to as specific learning difficulties and development disorders which can include dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyscalculia, autistic spectrum, and Tourette syndrome (Clouder, Karakas, Cinotti, Ferreyra, Fierros & Rojo, 2020). There is no normal standard brain that exists to which all other brains can be compared to. The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioural traits should be regarded as part of a normal variation in the human population and viewed as having a brain that is wired differently (Clouder *et al,* 2020).

Neurodiversity is a concept that describes individuality and uniqueness in cognitive functioning and enables us to flip the dominant view of dyslexia as a deficit to a more neurodiverse approach to view dyslexia as a variation of the human brain. If we view dyslexia through a neurodivergence lens, it can then be accepted as a normal human difference, like all other human differences. According to Pino and Mortari (2014), an increasing number of students with disabilities are progressing into third level education internationally and Pollak (2005) and Griffin & Pollak (2012), suggest that those identified with a learning difference will carry some form of emotional 'baggage' connected to the diagnosis. In third level education today, dyslexia is considered the most common neurodiverse condition and Knight

(2018) discovered that more that 10% of the global population has dyslexia. These findings are also reflected in the third level education population in Ireland according to research by AHEAD (2021). Although neurodiversity should not impact on a person's progression to third level education, Hillier *et al,* (2018) suggest that the reality is otherwise, observing that "post high-school graduation remains bleak" (2018:20) for those students with dyslexia. In an Irish context, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) conducted research in 2021 around neurodiversity and students with disabilities attending third level education, and found similar results to Hiller, et al (2018).

The idea of neurodiversity has now been embraced across the world and this includes third level education in Ireland. The term is now used as a means of empowerment and to promote the positive qualities possessed by those with a neurobiological difference (DAI, 2017, EDA, 2018 & AHEAD, 2021). It encourages people to view neurobiological differences such as dyslexia, as natural and normal variations of human beings, highlighting the benefits and/or gifts of having dyslexia, as opposed to being considered as dysfunctional disorders and disabilities which comes under the medical model of mental health. This notion can also correlate with Nussbaum's (2011) ideas of 'basic human entitlements', whereby, people with dyslexia can flourish once these capabilities are recognised and cultivated. If we remain in the realm of praising achievement as overcoming disability, we are only teaching that disability is incompatible with success: "Only when we learn to view disability as a normal part of human diversity, will these harmful practices and inequalities cease. We cannot pretend to pursue a just and equal society if we continue to leave the largest minority behind" (Lendre, 2019:1).

### *Critical Disability Studies*

Critical disability studies refer to a diverse, interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches and its task is to analyse disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon (Vehmas & Watson 2014 & Schalk, 2018). A similar view is foregrounded by another school of thought: "Critical disability theory is an emancipatory and developing discourse" (Goodley, Liddiard, & Runswick Cole, 2018:206). Minich (2016) states it is also the "scrutiny of normative ideologies [that] should occur not for its own sake but with the goal of producing knowledge in support of justice for people with stigmatized bodies and minds" (2016:10). Critical disability studies also examines the devalued person and questions of power relations according to Tremain (2017) and how this is exercised through the discourse and embodiment of vulnerability. "If disability is a direct expression of power, as these theorists argue, then power and its effect on human life cannot be understood without treating disability politically and socially" (Tremain, 2017:86).

Critical disability theory can thus, "challenge traditional disability studies and engage in transformative, intersectional, and coalitional critical work" (Ellis, Garland-Thompson, Kent & Robertson, 2018:24). Garland-Thompson

(2002) evinces a valid point suggesting that disability is like gender, a perception that permeates all aspects of culture: "its structuring institutions, social identities, cultural practices, political positions, historical communities, and the shared human experience of embodiment" (Garland-Thompson, 2002:4). Consequently, disability and ability are essentially produced as opposed to discovered and this production transpires through a system of disability/ability and "disability theorists can employ this system as a category of analysis to help "denaturalize disability" (Garland-Thompson, 2002:6).

Schalk argues these points:

> By designating (dis)ability as a system of social norms which categorizes, ranks, and values bodyminds and disability as a historically and culturally variable category within this larger system, critical disability studies can better engage in conversations about the ways both ability and disability operate. (Schalk, 2017:6)

The benefits of critical disability theory does not merely accrue to the study of disability: "it connects with several philosophical concepts" according to Tremain (2015:8). Critical disability theory also challenges the marginalisation of the study of disability and according to Tremain (2017) it challenges the "ghettoisation within bioethics and its circumscription thereby, to the medical model" (:108). Society has a tendency to confine disability to certain categories and this often ties disability solely into the medical model, however, critical disability studies also challenges this notion. Erevelles and Minear (2010) suggests the comparison between race and disability studies and race theorists liken their oppression to disability. "In each case, rather than interrogate the relationship, each group borrows the other's oppressive associations in an attempt to explain its own oppression” (2010:217). However, analysis within critical disability studies hopes to move beyond the borrowing of oppressive associations to describe the intimate relationships among systems of oppression (Erevelles & Minear, 2010).

Michel Foucault’s work, especially its purchase in historicising concepts and analysing power, is trenchant in critical disability theory (as cited by Tremain, 2017). The concept of ‘biopower and the subject’ can be crucial in this analysis of disability and tie into Foucault’s central concepts of government, power, and control. Pithier and Devlin (2006) also argue that disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, rather “it is a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to” (2006:2). Tremain argues that “impairment is not natural, value-neutral, and objective but rather is historically specific and performative” (2017:115). The social model tends to strongly distinguish between impairment and disability (Tremain, 2017), and that impairment, like disability, is the product of power relations. This can lead to “the terminology of impairment itself, and the type or kind of distinctions among disabilities (for an example physical, or intellectual disabilities), to these power relations” (Tremain, 2017:115).

Carlson (2009) uses a Foucauldian genealogy to construct a history of intellectual disability, demonstrating that intellectual disability is contingent and constructed. Hamraie (2017) incorporates Foucault to outline her historical epistemological approach to disability and St Pierre and St. Pierre

(2018) use Foucault to situate Speech-Language Pathology as a governing discourse intended to bring speech under biopower. Feder (2014) regularly employs a Foucauldian approach, especially in analysing the family, gender identity, intersex issues, race, and shame surrounding the body, all of which tie into critical disability theory. According to Hall (2015), Foucault's refusal to engage in normative theorising has normative implications, "it allows one to see what has been obfuscated, for example, power's productive functions and thus, reframe ethics by overthrowing previous normative presuppositions" (Hall, 2015:162).

McHoul & Grace (2003) discuss using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as an approach and this concept is concerned mainly with the interactions of the three variables, namely Discourse, Power, and the Subject. Using this concept within my research, the Discourse is the 'dyslexic talk', the Power is the hold the 'dyslexic talk' has over people and the impact on self and the building of self-belief and the Subject(s), being my research participants. Dirth and Adams (2019) discuss how "the broader injustice of disability lies in the ableism of everyday life" (:274) and represents this as natural values and "prescribes them as lifestyles to which everyone, regardless of impairment, should aspire" (Dirth & Adams, 2019:274). My research has highlighted this concept also and throughout the dissertation, as we witness the way the discourse used around dyslexia can affect my participants, both positively and negatively. The power it can hold over a person and the impacts that can have on the persons concept of self.

### *Crip Theory*

Around 1971, a street gang emerged in Los Angeles called ‘The Crips’ due to their use of canes while walking. However, in the context of my research, I use the term ‘Crip’ as adopted by McRuer in 2006, which emerged within queer/disability studies as an adoption of the word ‘Cripple’. There is therefore still contention around the word ‘Crip’ for obvious reasons as Crip is an abbreviation of Cripple. In junction with my research, Crip theory is used in an attempt to raise awareness of the actual lives of students with disabilities, highlight the supports needed for them to experience third level education to its fullest and seeks to “challenge constructions of able-bodiedness and be politically generative through the fracturing of key systems of oppression” (Bone, 2017:1297).

According to McRuer (2006), Crip theory argues that we should view disability as an important identity variable that should be recognised through an “intersectional lens with all other identities, especially those that have historically been excluded or oppressed within larger society, as well as within disability culture itself” (Hanebutt & Muller, 2021:4). As stated already, instead of framing disability under a deficit or medical model of disability, which requires treatment, intervention, or a cure, my research posits that we align with how “disability studies and Crip theory allow for a more critical and expansive look at disability as an aspect of identity and culture” (Hanebutt and Mueller, 2021:5). My research argues that both Crip and neurodiversity theories have important impacts on the theory and practice of education, as both can work to simultaneously critique and change dominant perspectives of disability in education and in academic theoretical spaces (McRuer, 2006 & Hanebutt & Mueller, 2021).

Using these theories can challenge third level educational institutions, curriculum, and policy makers on the current models of education in place within third level education. This will enable these two concepts of inquiry and practice to reshape, challenge and develop towards a more just sense of disability to include more inclusive educational institutions. Crip is in the process of being reclaimed by people with disabilities and identifying as 'Crip', happens for many reasons. This can be to show pride in one's disability, raise awareness of disability and neurodiversity, advocate for inclusion and to avoid the ranking of disability.

Crip theory and practice entails sustained forms of coming out, and this is applied within my research when we see how my research participants engaged in this 'coming out' process, which will be discussed in greater detail in the findings chapter. It also highlights that another more accessible world is possible in which disability is no longer experienced as oppression and exclusion, or something to be ashamed of or hidden away (Schalk, 2017). Consequently, developing a new meaning for the word Crip as an insider term within disability rights movements to provide liberation, freedom and to support the notion of 'coming out'. Identifying as Crip is used to highlight the struggle for rights, equality and to resist ablism and oppression. It also allows us to move away from disability hierarchy and ranking and is valuable in disempowering the term, disability, of its historical pejorative usages. The use and reclaiming of the term Crip is not universally accepted by all people with disabilities. Others object to using it because Crip and cripple can still be used as a slur and is often reclaimed by those of privilege, often white and within academia, according to Sherry (2013). However, Gupta (2019) suggests that continuing to use the term Crip "continues to put people with disabilities in relation to able-bodiless" (:2) and this, it is argued can maintain harmful views of people with disabilities.

The binary between disabled/able-bodied as a construct is contentious, as the disabled persona helps construct the boundary of what constitutes normal: "Both constructs revolve around the dialectic between the "normal" and "abnormal", albeit with a certain difference in focus" (Mårtenson, 2013: 413). It is only possible to identify as 'normal' through not crossing these boundaries into the realm of disability. "Nearly everyone wants to be normal. Who can blame them, if the alternative is being abnormal, or deviant or not being one like the rest of us" (Warner, cited in McRuer, 2006:90). Kafer suggests that "deconstructing the binary between disabled and able-bodied/able-minded requires more attention to how different bodies/minds are treated differently, not less" (Kafer, 2013:13). Crip theory also exemplifies experiences of disability as it can help to "jolt people out of their everyday understandings of bodies and minds, of normalcy and deviance" (Kafer, 2013:15). Nonetheless, Crip can help students with disabilities develop a model of resistance for themselves and others to develop a more neurodiverse educational environment, and to show pride in all they are which includes their differences (disabilities), my research argues.

### *Disability Pride*

Disability pride promotes visibility and mainstream awareness of the positive pride felt by people with disabilities in their communities. It marks a break from traditional concepts of disabilities as shameful conditions according to research from Disabled World (2020). "Viewing disability as a deficit within a person which needs fixing, immediately positions the individual as 'other' in the sense of being 'wrong' in comparison with the majority" (Martin, 2012:15). The deficit view also operates within a framework of personal tragedy and the medicalisation of disability and adopts the viewpoint that disabled people may not have the capacity to take control of their lives and therefore, can become dependent on assistance from those without a disability. Furthering the need to adopt a more neurodiverse model of viewing 'disability' as a difference as opposed to viewing dyslexia as a deficit. The medical model tends to view the disability being in 'you', the person, whereas the social model and disability pride argues that disability can exist within the interaction between the individual and society (Gill, 1987; Munzer, et, al, 2000; Oliver, 2013 & Guevara, 2021).

To combat these negative and outdated notions, people with disabilities are “increasingly challenging the notion that their embodiment is inherently problematic and engaging politically with the social model of disability which locates difficulties experienced by people with impairments within the social arena” (Martin, 2012:14). This has been achieved through activism, people with disabilities assuming control over their own lives and viewing disability as difference rather than a deficit. Disabled World was set up by disability activists as a platform for people with disabilities to enable them to take pride in their diversities. Another aim is to advocate for an identity which is not just connected to a disability, although still recognising your disability is a part of you, however, to be able to identify as a person with lots of different parts. Disability Pride has been defined as accepting and honouring each person's uniqueness and seeing it as a natural and beautiful part of human diversity. It is also an integral part of “movement building, and a direct challenge of systemic ableism and stigmatising definitions of disability” according to Disabled World (2020).

People with disabilities, across all sectors of society are speaking about their experiences of disability and bringing new knowledge about disability into the arena. This is known as ‘Disability Culture’ and it is about pride, visibility, self-value, self-awareness, difference and highlighting the strengths of disability. According to Triano (2020): "There is a tremendous need to create a counter-culture that teaches new values and beliefs and acknowledges the dignity and worth of all human beings. Disability pride is a direct response to this need" (:6). Having pride and being visible with a disability will also shift the embedded cultural beliefs whereby, impairment is not just automatically viewed as a negative (Cameron, 2015).

Pride has interrelated meanings and serves numerous functions within society, on both a personal level (the self, possessions) and within our cultural belief systems (religion, morals). It has become a highly motivational tool within the disability community and enables people with disability to take pride in themselves and their achievements:

> It impels the individual to (i) perform actions or develop personal characteristics that other people value, (ii) transmit information about achievements so that others can register the new state of affairs, and (iii) take advantage of the increased valuation from others by e.g., demanding better treatment. (Westfield & Dillion, 2012:35)

This view of taking pride in your disability and using it as a motivational tool is also witnessed in my research through the participants and how dyslexia motivated them to achieve. When you look beyond the disability to view it as difference, the angle alters slightly, and people achieve more. This is opposed to the older traditional view and belief systems where disability brought shame on families. Shame is an affect that can be linked to individuals' social position and to the experiences that stem from it (Loveday, 2016). In terms of Bourdieu's (1997) habitus, it is one of the dimensions that becomes embodied in a hexis. This hexis relates to the concept of disability being a punishment or a curse for previous family sins (Bourdieu, 1977). Consequently, it has been fashioned not only by history and culture, but, also by dominant norms and values and it may be "the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence" (Amhed, 2004:107). This is believed to be the context in which the human emotions of pride and shame evolved (Tracy, 2016).

In the context of dyslexia, shame and pride play a large role within a student's experiences particularly around disclosure and 'being an academic'. As Keegan (2010) states: "where there's a secret [such as dyslexia] there's shame, and shame is something we can do without" (:21). The earliest models of disability, the moral and medical models, were both associated with negative and dehumanising language (Andrews, 2016) and hiding your difference rather than taking pride in that part of your 'self'. "Despite the evolution of terminology and advocacy efforts to avoid dehumanizing language, the general public and media continue to perpetuate negativistic vocabulary" (Andrews *et al*, 2019:112). This is where growth mindset (which will be discussed later in this chapter), plays a role for students with dyslexia to become more resilient and take pride in themselves and one's difference.

We have long since moved on from the concept where "disability is thought of as nothing more than a biological condition which automatically produces social misfortunes" (Ong-Dean, 2005:141). Instead, people with disabilities need to advocate for themselves and others for a more inclusive society and using a more neurodiverse approach whereby, disability as a difference can be a source of pride not shame. They should no longer "accept euphemisms that fracture our sense of unity as a culture" (Andrews *et al,* 2019:116), rather they should reclaim their identities and have pride in all the parts of their selves. This in turn will reduce and eliminate ableism, negative discourse around dyslexia and stigma around disabilities.

### *Ableism*

Thus far, the approaches discussed and reviewed in this chapter have all been leading up to a reframing of dyslexia in a non-ableist perspective, through using a neurodiverse approach. Ableism is a perspective on disability which assumes that disability is inherently abnormal; it is a perspective which leads to and naturalises various forms of discrimination based on ability. It operates from a belief system revering “a particular kind of self and body, which is portrayed as the perfect, species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human” (Campbell, 2009:5). This concept portrays disability as a diminished state of what it means to be a ‘human being’ and ableism can also be rooted in the medical model as it highlights this diminished state whereby the person needs to be fixed. Therefore, critical disability theory, using a neurodiverse model, aims to expose, analyse, and eradicate ableism, which is the discrimination in favour of non-disabled people.

Disablism emphasises discrimination against people with a disability whereby the belief can be that people with a disability are inferior to those without a disability or what can be perceived as ‘the normal’ people. The notion of prioritising what is perceived to be ‘normal’ while excluding what is thought to be ‘abnormal’, is challenged by critical disability theorists and my research. According to Campbell (2009): “ableism systematically interacts with other power structures that stigmatize to produce race, gender, sex, and disability" (:166) and Goodley (2014) refers to this social and political structure as disablism. Resistance to ableism is central to the tradition, development, and implementation of critical disability theory. "The denaturalization of disability is a key task of critical disability theory, in line with its critical heritage" (Tremain 2017:33). This work includes challenging the distinction between impairment and arguing alongside my research that impairment itself is socially constructed.

Denaturalising disability and impairment are part of the analysis, politicisation, and intersectional understanding of disability sought by critical disability and to analysis ableism to bring its impacts to the fore (Tremain, 2017 & Scuro, 2017). "Ableism is perpetuated by culturally shared norms and values, as well as ways of speaking and writing about disability and disabled people" (Bottema-Beutel, et al, 2021:19). These social processes culminate in, and originate from, societal expectations about the abilities required for granting individuals full social rights, agency, and even personhood (Bottema-Beutel, et al, 2021:19). The societal perceptions and views of some enable ableism and also self-ableism and this is witnessed in my research and discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

### *Dyslexia V Dyslexic*

The choice of words, phrases and conversational habits used to symbolise, describe, or refer to disability, raises important questions. The questions which arise are centred around being respectful and inclusive when referring to people with disabilities in our daily discourse and using the language preferred by the person with the disability. However, people should also be encouraged “to acquire skills for understanding various groups within their own culture, including people with disabilities” (Dunn & Andrews, 2015: 255). The participants in my research use both person first language (PFL) and identity first language (IFL) to describe their disabilities and self-designations. However, my research advocates for the use of a more inclusive discourse such as, person first identity language and this approach ties into using a neurodiverse model also. The ongoing debate surrounding this discourse centres on the concept of person first language, which is considered to be the language of empowerment and inclusivity, or identity first language, which is often viewed as the language of devaluing and dehumanising a person. To call someone a disabled person, a dyslexic person for example, is to use identity first language and it puts the disability first in the phrase. To say that they are for example a person with dyslexia, puts their personhood first, and their disability as just one element that makes up their whole personhood. The fact that the debate so often centers around intellectual disability is not accidental.

The relationship between a disability and a person who lives with it comes into greater relevance when it is part of their mental outlook and their brain's ability to understand the world. This had been highlighted within my research by my participants and we witness the effects of using language associated to dyslexia and the negative or positive impacts it can have, regardless of whether the language used is in the person first or identity first form. The use of person first language puts the person before the disability not like identity first language terminology which puts the disability as being the person. Vivanti (2020) explains using person first language is more appropriate as it is structured to emphasise "the person's unique combinations of strengths, needs, and experiences (both related and unrelated to their disability), by literally placing the person before the disability" (:1).

A person-first approach ties in with the neurodiverse model of disability as it presents disability "as a neutral characteristic or attribute, not a medical problem requiring a cure, and not a representation of moral failing" (Dunn & Andrews, 2015:258). Identity-first relates more to the medical model of disability whereby the discourse is related to the disability and identity first language also can be related to the moral model of disability through embedded cultural belief systems. These beliefs, embedded systems, and identify-first language use, often project an ableist point of view and can sometimes portray disability as an "inferior and pitiful state, portraying a society where people with disabilities were believed to be the result of sin, or in need of charity" (Dunn & Andrews, 2015: 258). Bottema-Beutel, Kapp, Lester, Sasson & Hand (2020) found that "what people say or write produces specific versions of the world, one's 'self', and others, and language conveys, shapes, and perpetuates ideologies" (2020:3). Being mindful allows for acknowledgement of the real-world implications and effects of our language choice and how it can “influence societal perceptions, public policy, clinical practice and research directions” (Vivanti 2020:1). Dyslexia is a ‘real’ phenomenon and is constituted from “social meaning, culture, language, and common [Mis] understanding”, according to Yergeau (2018:310).

Identity first language affects how people view people with dyslexia and disabilities, it encourages a mindset of association by disability and to imagine what it would be like if there was a non-disabled person. Nicolaidis (2020), further suggests it can encourage “family members to love an imagined non-autistic child that was never born, forgetting about the real person who exists in front of us” (2020:3). Neurodiversity, therefore, encourages the use of person first language and a more inclusive non disability associated discourse surrounding dyslexia should be encouraged as the ‘norm’. Person first language as a cultural norm should also be championed to “allow for greater opportunities for advocacy and force a shift in how the community at large views people with a disability” according to Crocker & Smith (2019:125). Incorporating this shift in how individuals with a disability are viewed has resulted in a change in language, “as language reflects how members of society view each other” (*Ibid*). My research has shown how using a more person first discourse in an educational environment has improved the educational experience for my participants. it has also highlighted how using identity first language and negative discourse can impact on the self and using Foucault’s (1977) discourse analysis highlighted the power ‘dyslexic talk’ held over my research participants.

*Stigma*

There is growing evidence that stigma around a learning disability, such as dyslexia exists (Denhart, 2008; Lisle, 2011; Cameron & Billington, 2015, & Stein, 2017). Major and O’Brien (2005) tell us that stigma “does not reside in the person but in a social context” (2005:395). We know that there is an underlying cultural and social stigma surrounding neurodiversity and disability. Another type of stigma which is very relevant to neurodiversity is courtesy stigma, this is when people who support stigmatised people end up being stigmatised by association (Heatherton *et al,* 2020:88). Associate stigma is also emerging, whereby, parents of students with dyslexia can blame themselves for the disability and several of my research participants remarked that this was the case with their parent/s who often blamed themselves for their child’s dyslexia. Research by Wiley and Vaughan (2020) explored this concept and reported about “the effects of condition and symptom severity on associative stigma of parents of children with ADHD, ASD, and dyslexia” (2020:271). The focus of stigma in this research project is more around self-stigma and public stigma, rather than parental blame.

Stigma is a complex issue, because it is often tied to deviance or difference and according to Minow (1985) and Norwich (2009), it can be termed a ‘difference dilemma’. This term describes a felt experience and patterns of social practice that emerge when difference arises and we try not to stigmatise due to this difference (Mueller, 2019:264). Goffman (1963) introduced stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' including on the grounds of 'abominations of the body' or 'blemishes of individual character" (:9). This remains relevant within dyslexia and the educational environment in Ireland today as my research informs us through labels, identities, and the characteristics of both a student and having dyslexia: "Disability as a marker of difference, then, has its own stigma attached and is found in the larger societal context from which students make sense of their labels" (Mueller, 2019:265).

Consequently, stigma can be present throughout the educational experience of students with dyslexia within third level education. Shifrer (2013) found that "educational expectations for students with a Learning Disability are lower" (:469) and fundamentally lead to stigma. Therefore, students with dyslexia must process and negotiate this stigma around their dyslexia and make "conscious and unconscious behavioural choices that, in big and small ways, serve to position their sense of themselves in relation to this stigma" (Mueller, 2019:465). Students can then take the knowledge of this stigma associated to their dyslexia and integrate it into their sense of who they are, both within their personal and educational experiences. Stigma can consist of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, power differential, and discrimination. This perception can then attribute any of the aforementioned to a student and their academic and/or social ability due to prejudices surrounding their abilities and intelligence, thus, leading to lesser opportunities. My research participants highlighted the existence of this within their educational settings, and according to Madriaga (2007), third level institutions can be "…one of the few spaces where a hidden disability, such as dyslexia, can be marked and negotiated by others" (Madriaga, 2007:402). These issues can often be a barrier for people with a disability when attending third level education.

Due to institutional structures, my research participants reported that "many people remain "cow tied" to outdated perceptions about people with disabilities and lack appreciation for their rich lives" (Dukes & Berlingo, 2020:16). Depending on how others view you, "students have to be flexible in how they use the label (dyslexia): sometimes hiding it, sometimes openly disclosing it, sometimes taking pride in it, sometimes feeling ashamed to take help for it" (Cameron & Billington, 2015:1362). This shame can be further compounded by the stigma around dyslexia and those who argue that it does not exist. Such as Macdonald who through his research suggests that contemporary education "has often exaggerated the 'dyslexic' problem" (2009:272). Mullins and Preyde suggest dyslexia is considered a hidden disability and as such "its validity is often questioned" (2013:147). Unlike students with a disability that is clearly visible, students with dyslexia report more negative experiences and stigma connected to their disability. The research participants in this project have also reported this phenomenon through accessing supports and disclosure of their dyslexia. This is mainly in the form of questioning the validity of dyslexia and its existence or whether students are just trying to gain an unfair advantage (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). This can then lead to the development of self-stigma and can be as a result of societal and cultural perceptions of being flawed, usually because of a personal or physical characteristic and this can lead to a form of social 'unacceptance'.

Research by Baine (2000), Corrigan (2004) and Stoeber and Roundtree (2021) found that self-stigma is a stronger deterrent for seeking help, such as seeking supports for your dyslexia, than other forms of stigma. Stoeber and Roundtree's (2021) research shows how self-stigma by students with dyslexia can impact on their experience of third level education, as they found students "that seek help are as less socially acceptable" (Stober & Roundtree, 2021:65). My research also showed this as the research participants struggled at times with their disability, retreated within themselves and began to initiate voice suppression (Basso, 2009). This can lead to self-stigmatising and unfortunately, shame comes hand in hand with self-stigma as the individual feels guilt over specific actions taken in their lives, connected to their dyslexia (Avery & Avery, 2019). Nonetheless, in my research we have seen how when students recognise, they may be in a fixed mindset caused by some or all of the above, acknowledge this and work towards engaging with a more growth mindset, they all achieved in their third level institutions.

### *Growth Mindset Theory*

One strategy being developed is leaving behind the concept of a fixed mindset and engaging with the concept of a growth mindset. Carol Dweck (2012) developed this growth mindset theory alongside her other primary research interests, which are in motivation, personality, and mindset development. Dwek (2012) and Daeun (2015) state that students with fixed mindsets adopt the idea that intelligence is fixed, feedback is criticism and understand intelligence and ability as static whereby success can only come from talent. If a student thinks they have a perceived low ability and chance of success, Daeun (2015) states that this can evoke 'learned helplessness', which is a fixed mindset. However, the opposite happens when a student perceives they have a good proficiency in the task and they have a high chance of success when completing a task, this is known as a growth mindset.

If students with dyslexia remain in this fixed mindset, they will allow avoiding challenges, giving up easily and continue to view feedback and effort as fruitless, to become their norm and allow the success of others to threaten them (Dweck, 2012). It can lead to the perpetrating of disablism by themselves and educators which can contribute to some students not being academically challenged and educators can "perpetuate disablism by not academically challenging students" (Madriaga, 2007:403). Consequently, this fixed mindset can result in students with dyslexia "having low expectations and aspirations, inhibiting their life choices" (Elliot & Grigorenko, 2014:42).

Disablism can be defined as discriminatory, oppressive, abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others and may involve prejudice, stereotyping, or 'institutional discrimination' against disabled people. My research has highlighted how the participants often remained in a fixed mindset and enabled this disablism to become their norm and it was initiated by both themselves and their institutions. However, my research has also foregrounded that when the participants acknowledged they were in a fixed mindset and developed their own strategies to move into a growth mindset, adopt and implement these new findings, academic achievement followed.

A growth mindset is the opposite of a fixed mindset and can help a student with dyslexia in third level education to evolve away from a conceptually ableist and deficit-orientated attitude and mindset. When my research participants adopted a growth mindset it played a pivotal role in their student experience as a "student's belief about intelligence has important consequences for how they experience school and how they respond to setbacks and adversity" (Romeo, 2015:1). Valorisation of one's ability and the confidence shown in students that they can achieve is a major bonus in a student's trajectory, especially at third level: "When students believe intelligence is something that can be developed, they value learning and mastery" (Romero, 2015:2). The growth mindset perspective is important because it argues that in spite of the challenges confronting students with dyslexia, if we as educators can prepare them with the optimum mindset to better manage the demands of education, a better student experience happens, which in turn enables greater learning.

According to Paunesku *et a,l* (2015): “it is possible to promote a growth mindset by teaching students about neuro-science evidence showing that the brain is malleable and gets stronger through effort, trying new strategies, and seeking help when necessary” (:4). Consequently, this research would indicate that if a student with dyslexia in third level education can practice a growth mindset, this can enhance their learning experience. This is achieved through noting your improvements and creating positive feedback loops that encourage you to continue learning and improving (Yeager and Dweck, 2012). A challenge for the growth mindset approach is the broad scope of the theory's applicability. Nonetheless, the growth mindset approach offers strategies beyond addressing feedback to promote well-being, resilience, and perseverance for all students (with or without dyslexia).

As discussed earlier, difficulties such as reading speed, note taking, spelling, proof-reading, data entry, mathematics, examinations, and memory retrieval are all common characteristics of having dyslexia. However, the individual with dyslexia equally presents outstanding practical strengths, such as problem-solving skills, spatial acuity, perception of overall picture or ‘outside the box’ creative and visual thinking, teamwork, social skills such as empathy, compassion and patience, strategy development and end goal orientation. My research has highlighted these common binaries and characteristics of having dyslexia and studying in third level education and the research participants have shown how leaving behind a fixed mindset and embracing a growth mindset, enables for greater success.

The metaphor of using a telescope (Edie & Edie, 2012) can help understand the view from a fixed and growth mindset. Looking through the smaller lens of the telescope gives a limited view, or a fixed mindset, whereas viewing through the bigger lens, or using a growth mindset, expands the world dramatically: "The concept of dyslexia is a human invention; and like a telescope it can either expand and clarify our view of individuals who struggle to read and spell or, used 'the wrong way around', it can cause our view of these individuals to shrink" (Eide & Eide, 2012:7). Therefore, understanding dyslexia through the lens of neurodiversity, we expand our view, help students to expand theirs, and move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. This idea in operation, is witnessed within my research as we view the participants engaging in this process and seeing the success they achieved when they did.

### *Dyslexia in Third Level Education*

Dyslexia represents the most frequent self-declared neurobiological disability in third level education in Ireland. Approximately 15,846 students who are studying in third level education in Ireland are registered with a disability (AHEAD, 2021). From this population, 44% identify with a Specific Learning Disability and this is the largest category within the undergraduate student population. In third level education, students with a specific learning disability such as dyslexia, may suffer from difficulties with their academic work and thus, lead to anxieties, and internalised ableism according to research by Couzens (2015). The dyslexia label and having dyslexia is perceived both negatively and positively within third level education and can often be viewed through an ableist lens. Cameron (2007) states disablist attitudes and practices are perpetuated, both consciously and unconsciously, in education and in wider society. This can then tie into the view of the medical model which sees disability as a defect with the individual. Unfortunately, the medical model is still apparent in education, whereby students require a formal and official label to be able to access supports (Garrett, 2011, Järkestig Berggren *et al,* 2016 & Byrne, 2018). Within a third level education setting, stairs and having no ramps can be an obvious visible structural barrier, however, attitudinal barriers can be more subtle (Mullins & Preyde, 2013 & Byrne, 2018).

An example of a disabling and disablist attitudinal barrier can be the societal and cultural attitudes towards people with dyslexia (Hoong Sin and Fong 2008, Murphy 2008, Cameroon, 2011 & Byrne, 2018). These, and similar perceptions, can be held by someone within university admissions, and/or academic staff. Prior to a potential student with dyslexia even thinking about third level education, barriers are often unwittingly created by teachers, parents, careers advisers and others who assume that certain professions and/or third level education is not for them (Cameron 2008, 2011 & Byrne, 2018).

Research by Madriaga (2007) found that “their impairments remain invisible to university administrators and academics” (2007:401) and Byrne (2018) discusses how outdated attitudes towards dyslexia "among university staff still prevails" (Byrne, 2018:1). This, according to Martin (2012), “illustrates the position that disability, in social model terms, is a socially constructed condition which is external to and imposed upon individuals who have impairments” (2012:15) and these barriers are in the shape of physical and attitudinal obstacles. Mullins and Preyde’s (2013) research found that students with dyslexia experienced the presence of “social and organisational barriers that makes the university experience difficult” (Mullins & Preyde 2013:147) for them. These unconscious and conscious ableist actions can be negated through adopting a neurodiverse perspective, which opens doors for students with dyslexia as opposed to imposing limits on their opportunities, as is highlighted in my research. A third level educational institution “which facilitates and develops a culture with a sense of belonging amongst diverse students is arguably the antithesis of that which creates a sense of ‘othering’” (May and Bridger, 2010:36).

Through research and developing awareness of dyslexia, educational legislation is now entering conversations around screening, treatment, and educator training for dyslexia (Youman & Mather, 2018). Third level educational institutions need to develop "teacher preparation programs to provide information about identification and intervention aligned with recommendations from the International Dyslexia Association" (Worthy et al., 2018:127). There is no universal agreement around the construct of dyslexia, its challenges, and what separates dyslexia from other kinds of decoding issues and Ellis (2014) argues that after decades of searching for unique traits:

> Researchers have been unable to find consistent signature patterns or processes in reading, phonological skills, spelling, brain structure, or brain function that distinguish readers identified as dyslexic from other readers with decoding challenges or from younger, typically developing readers with the same level of reading proficiency. (Citied in Worthy et al., 2018: 129)

My research also highlights this, and how dyslexia can occur on a continuum, and will not be 'outgrown' or cured.

In a survey conducted by the International Dyslexia Association (2016), student teachers criticised how dyslexia was addressed in their teacher training education. Moats (2014) and Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, and Joshi (2014) found that a large portion of educators possess a limited knowledge of language constructs and Worthy *et al* (2018) "considered this point vitally important in addressing dyslexia" (:130). Gibbs and Elliott (2015) interviewed educators and they reported that educators stopped short of saying they were not prepared for teaching students identified as having dyslexia. This is not to state that educators in third level education are not competent and skilled in their professions. It highlights that third level education in Ireland, is not fully equipped to meet the needs and supports for students identified as having dyslexia.

Within my research I have highlighted that this is another layer of training that needs to be given to all third-level staff to best meet the needs of students with dyslexia and other neurobiological conditions to ensure a fully inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, Miciak and Flecher (2020) found there is little evidence for the specificity of dyslexia interventions, "as students with word reading and spelling problems with and without other proposed markers of dyslexia respond similarly to these interventions" (Miciak & Flecher, 2020:352). Consequently, this highlights the urgency for a review of the dyslexic-specific interventions and supports and the development of a new and improved framework. It also highlights how this could support a more ableist outcome for students with dyslexia in third-level education and further enhances the need to adopt a more neurodivergent approach, which is being advocated for by this research.

Although third level educational institutions vary worldwide, "one set of practises can be globally identified among almost any of them, assessment accommodations" (Nieminen, 2021:2). Nonetheless, these assessment-related accommodations are largely uncontested, and their validity is rarely questioned. Griful-Freixenet *et al,* (2017) suggested research within third level education focuses on accessible and inclusive teaching practices, yet researchers and educators rarely contest assessment accommodations. This leaves sparse research which focuses on assessment accommodations for students with dyslexia, and if they ‘work’. Lovett and Lewandowski (2014) expressed surprise at how rarely the status of these assessment accommodations in third level education are questioned and iterate the need for critical elaboration on what exactly is meant by ‘working’. The focus on assessment seems to foster and promote an ‘Assessment for Learning’ model according to Wiliam (2011) and Bould *et al,* (2018). Notwithstanding, Nieminen (2020) posits that third level education research has "identified assessment and grading practices as the weakest link in how assessment supports learning, because students are positioned as passive objects of assessment" (2020:2). These accommodations, however, are tied into the medical model and require medical documentation from students with a disability to gain compensation (Järkestig Berggren *et al,* 2016). What is needed is a comprehensive reframing of assessment-related accommodations (Bould *et al,* 2018) and this will help understand their social and cultural premises and implications also. My research also emphasises the need for a reframing of accommodations in relation to assessments to support students with dyslexia with their learning.

The dyslexia diagnosis alongside accommodations for students in third level education with dyslexia, will always be needed. Nonetheless, "it is almost impossible to achieve a curriculum that tackles the needs of all learners without the co-occurring generation of barriers" (Nieminen, 2020:6). Moojen *et al* (2020) found that regardless of how highly educated individuals with dyslexia where living, even under optimal personal, educational, cultural, and socio-economic conditions, the third level educational environment still proved to be a challenge for them (Moojen, 2020:136). Despite inclusivity being central to an educational institution's mission statement, most institutions are at different stages in the journey.

Ryder and Norwich (2019) found the current literature contains little wide-scale systematic research on lecturers' awareness of dyslexia and "of their attitudes towards, and their understandings of students with dyslexia and the related characteristics associated with dyslexia" (Ryder & Norwich, 2019:162). Small research projects have been conducted around this topic also, however the findings are very limited according to Ryder & Norwich (2019). Mortimore (2013) discusses those lecturers also who professed to having a limited knowledge of dyslexia and conceived it as a medical deficit, despite their institutions' official commitments to the social model. Past research has focussed on the "barriers created by the negative 'disablist' attitudes of many lecturers" (Ryder & Norwich, 2019:164). My research can help to put these negative concepts and perceptions into a broader perspective and highlight a "less pessimistic view of the prevalence of unhelpful attitudinal factors" (Ryder & Norwich, 2019:164).

Continuing with the current model which includes structural, institutional, and attitudinal barriers, alongside staff who need more supports and training, only leads to what Basso (2009) terms as voice suppression. This idea of academic imprisonment through voice suppression, is further illuminated through Basso's (2009) concept of 'ordeals of language' which involves conflicts between private and public voices. This also ties into the issue of shame around dyslexia. When the relationship between a person and their dyslexia brings about 'shame' and 'shaming' relations (Wundt, Frazer & Freud), it invokes 'self-suppression of voicing' and shame. "An ordeal of language occurs when one's voice is affected by powerful others" (Rodriquez & Webster, 2012:305) and this creates a moment of what Carrithers (2009) describes as vicissitude. All these aforementioned theories are relevant to adopting a more neurodiverse approach to how we view dyslexia. They all represent and advocate for dyslexia as difference and advocate for the awareness, acceptance, empowerment, and inclusion for people with dyslexia.

This chapter has taken us on a journey through the history of dyslexia and how it presents today. It has reviewed the relevant literature on dyslexia as a medical and sociocultural condition and how it is a genetic condition also. We see from the above how third level educational institutions, when they continue to use the current models in place for disability, inclusion, and education, they continue to reproduce ableism, prejudice, and the view of dyslexia as a hindrance and deficit. These concepts then impact on a student with dyslexia's experience of education. I advocate for viewing dyslexia as a difference and as a different way of learning as opposed to a deficit. This chapter argues for a neurodiversity approach within third level education, which involves accepting that there are variations in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, and attention. It welcomes the viewpoint that brain differences are normal, rather than deficits, and that neurodiverse people experience, interact with, and interpret the world in unique ways. This approach does not reject the fact that people with dyslexia may have difficulties in performing certain tasks such as reading and writing but asserts that these problems are counterbalanced by unique talents associated with the condition compared to their neurotypical counterparts (Grant, 2009:35).

The next chapter will report on the themes that emerged from the data collection, it will examine the institutional and attitudinal barriers students with dyslexia have to overcome. Following on from this, the dissertation highlights how my participants overcame these barriers and succeeded. Then it explores how dyslexia impacts on the self and the implications of disclosing dyslexia, and how my participants identified with dyslexia while in third level education.

# Chapter 3: Barriers: There to Get Over

The following chapters relay my research participants experiences of having dyslexia while studying in third level education. It will be seen that they provided unique accounts of their personal journey with dyslexia and the various ways in which they adapted to overcome associated challenges. This is told through their own words and their life experiences of studying in higher education with dyslexia as: "narrative and related writing genres may actually offer more accurate, hence, more scientific, means for us as scholars to convey the full range of human experience" (Gottlieb, 2015:742). My aim is to give an insight into the research participants experiences of the barriers encountered by students with dyslexia in third level education, the disclosure process and its effects and the discourse around dyslexia. Nonetheless, this research shows how, in spite of all these barriers, by using a neurodiverse approach and when the right inclusive learning environment is enabled and provided, students with dyslexia can achieve success on a par with their peers.

The transition from a formal school setting to a third level education institution can be a dauting prospect and experience for all students. However, according to O'Byrne, Jagoe & Lawler (2018): "a lack of research has been undertaken in Ireland regarding students' experience of dyslexia, and the move from second to third level" (:1031). In formal school there are smaller classes of up to 35 students in a classroom and they tend to use a more banking style of education according to Freire (1970). This is when educators 'spoon feed' the information to students who are then expected to deposit the knowledge in their memory bank and use a 'regurgitation' method to lodge the information onto exam papers for their assessments. Formal school also involves more teacher student interactions, support and guidance, your own desk space when in a particular class and mostly, more resources are available. Whereby, third level education is a much more self-directed learning environment, with much larger groups in lecture theatres and a greater emphasis placed on the 'self'-navigating through the process.

When my research participants transitioned to third level, they encountered rooms that held from 80 to 400 students, a theatre that spanned over two floors of the university and they were given lectures on topics for 45 minutes, directed to the resources connected to this lecture and expected to go away and continue the learning process, independently. Some of these universities were multi-campus and the students were expected to find their way to classes in different venues. Although inductions and resources are provided, this adoption can be a more difficult process for any student with dyslexia or another neurodiverse difference. All students encounter barriers, obstacles, and difficulties during their third level educational experiences; however, my research has identified how students with dyslexia can experience these in different ways through institutional and attitudinal barriers. This chapter examines the barriers encountered by my research participants during their third level education journey. One of the main issues identified by my research participants was the lack of knowledge around dyslexia and how it affects learning by academic staff and the participants peers. Nonetheless, it also highlights how no matter what the barrier may be, by using a more neurodiverse approach and with the proper resources in place, students with differences will achieve academic success on a par with their peers.

The number of students attending third level education with disabilities is steadily growing according to AHEAD (2017; 2019; 2021). However, the number of students with disabilities who obtain their final higher education degree does not match this increase according to Griful-Freixenet, Struyven, Verstichele & Andries (2017). That research also found that students with disabilities fall significantly behind grade-level peers in terms of academic success, as they have double the risk for academic dropout compared with students without disabilities (Griful-Freixenet *et al,* 2017:1627). Approximately 40 percent of undergraduate students with dyslexia achieve a 2:1 or above, compared to over 50 percent of non-dyslexic students, according to Richardson (2015).

The deficit view of dyslexia can hamper the "progress of scientific discovery and constrain best practices to the detriment of the overall well-being and growth of students with dyslexia" (Rappolt-Schlichtmann, Boucher and Evans, 2018:866). This model and view is adopted in the formal school setting and my research participants experienced this on many levels. Dyslexia is described as a neurobiological condition (Cameron and Billington, 2015), but the deficit model often enables ideas around dyslexia to become ambiguous because: "understandings of dyslexia are often impoverished, misleading and incorrect" (Elliot & Grigorenko, 2014b:579). My research participants said the discourse and explanations they encountered while attending formal school was constructed around what Cameron and Billington (2017) describe as loaded and confusing and what Bone (2017) described as constructions of able-bodiedness. This allows for dyslexia to be then viewed as a deficit or 'something wrong with someone' as opposed to a more neurodiverse approach, whereby, nothing is wrong, it is just a difference. The deficit view can then create a certain perspective or allow a particular attitude to develop and thus, a barrier is created.

Several of the participants stated that teachers in formal school perceived them as lazy, class clowns, not trying hard enough, and identified them as "having low expectations and aspirations, inhibiting their life choices" (Elliot, 2005:402). Students who have dyslexia often experience high levels of frustration and poor performance in their formal schooling however, the person and/or teacher can often assume that the student is just low in academic ability:

> "I always just thought like I was the class clown and stuff, because that's what they [teachers] told me" (Smithwicks).
>
> "I think people's perception on dyslexia is so different. People don't know how to handle it" (Kitty Kat).
>
> "If anyone has got dyslexia [in school], they kind of look at them as if they are stupid, they look at them like they can't think" (Joy).
>
> "I received no help while in formal school and was always being left to fend for myself" (Alex).
>
> "They [teachers] just left us alone to do what we wanted" (Callaway & Turbo).

This then can lead to lower expectations, have impacts on their 'self' (which is discussed in an upcoming chapter), and this can be carried forward by both staff and students into the third level setting. This enables the creation of institutional and attitudinal barriers, ableism, stigma and much more. Pino & Mortari also found that "undergraduate students with hidden disabilities, including those with dyslexia, felt they needed additional support to meet the demands of independent learning in university" (2014:3). The transition from formal education into third level education can be fraught for students with dyslexia, particularly the emphasis that is placed on self-directed learning according to Jacobs *et al,* (2020). Interestingly, the most important source of barriers to academic success that my research participants reported they encountered, relate to the current established models of supports, accommodations, assessments, identity, and the attitudes of staff and peers (Griful-Freixenet *et al,* 2017:1627).

### *Attitudes*

Currently, there is very little research on "lecturers' awareness of dyslexia and of their attitudes towards and opinions about dyslexic students" (Ryder & Norwich, 2019:162) in third level education. Students with dyslexia pose a particular challenge to academic staff because their difficulties are hidden. "The possibility of meeting the needs of students with dyslexia and enhancing their learning potential is, therefore, contingent upon the choice of the student to self-identify as having a diagnosis of dyslexia" (Pino &

Mortari, 2014:347). These findings also highlight the need to provide adequate training for third level education staff around dyslexia as it highlighted those lecturers "identified major problems in recognizing dyslexia, estimating the severity of the disability, and uncertainty about what would be the best form of support" (Schabmann *et al,* 2020:275).

> "Yeah, I think there are intolerant lecturers that I've found very difficult, I was a stranger to them, and they didn't know I was trying or things like that" (The General).
>
> "The lecturers say those who have dyslexia can come for a word in private, but it was so hard for me to present myself because of how I felt" (Joy).
>
> "There's a lot of lecturers that are like "I want an essay style, I want this many paragraphs, I want spellings and all like it's an honours degree, we want it like this" and you're like so that's an added stress before I even try to retain the information going in" (Smithwicks).

Pino & Mortari (2014); Griful-Freixenet *et al,* (2017); Jacobs *et al,* (2020) and Schabmann *et al,* (2020) in their research suggest that students with dyslexia were less likely to report a positive attitude with their institutions or a positive relationship with their faculty lecturers and department and my research has found this to be the case in a lot of instances. The General, Heffo, Summertime, Joy and most of the research participants have spoken about how certain teachers had caused issues for them either through a lack of understanding of dyslexia and/or a teacher's embedded beliefs around dyslexia. In this research project, the knowledge lectures had on dyslexia, and it impacts appeared to come from personal experience of family, friends, or students with dyslexia. There was no evidence of any formal training or awareness campaigns around dyslexia from their institutions for academic staff. These erroneous understandings of the diverse “behavioural characteristics and aetiological assumptions currently related to the dyslexia label” (Ryder and Norwich, 2019:161) could have serious and lasting implications for students with dyslexia and their studies.

However, when teaching staff had any awareness of dyslexia, it usually connected to a more positive experience for students with dyslexia and created a learning environment more willing to accommodate them. Heffo revealed: “I don't know if they had a good knowledge, but they really went out of their way to make my learning, my life a little bit easier” and this really helped her to excel in third level as opposed to the negative experiences encountered in formal school. Ali stated: "most the lecturers, they seem to know about it [dyslexia] already like” and Winehouse and AIB also commented on the positive outcomes when their lecturers had a knowledge of dyslexia and its effects. It appeared most teaching staff’s knowledge seemed to connect with the medical deficit model of disability, despite most institutions’ official commitments to a more social model. This can lead to ableism and the binary divide between dyslexia and non-dyslexia and disabled versus able-bodied (McRuer, 2006).

Byrne (2018) discusses how outdated attitudes towards dyslexia in third level education and among university staff is still prevalent thus, highlighting what Madriaga (2007) also found some fifteen years, indicating the slow progress. This, according to Martin (2012), further “illustrates the position that disability, in social model terms, is a socially constructed condition which is external to and imposed upon individuals who have impairments" (:15) and these barriers can be in the shape of institutional and attitudinal barriers. Mullins and Preyde's (2013) research found that students with dyslexia experienced the presence of "social and organisational barriers that makes the university experience difficult" (:147) for them. These unconscious and conscious ableist actions can be negated through adopting a more neurodiverse approach, which can open the doors for students with dyslexia as opposed to imposing limits on their opportunities.

Within the context of third level education, we need to promote an awareness of the struggles of students with dyslexia and the individual struggles they face attending third level education. Promoting this ethos and adopting a more neurodiverse approach will ensure overcoming barriers, avoid discriminatory practice, and help to develop a culture of inclusion. The benefits of inclusive practice are broad and have the potential to minimise disadvantage for many people with and without impairments (May & Bridger, 2010). A third level educational institution "which facilitates and develops a culture with a sense of belonging amongst diverse students is arguably the antithesis of that which creates a sense of 'othering'" (May and Bridger, 2010:36).

Attention to dyslexia in educational legislation is entering conversations around screening, treatment, and educator training for dyslexia (Youman & Mather, 2018). Third level educational institutions need to develop "teacher preparation programs to provide information about identification and intervention aligned with recommendations from the International Dyslexia Association" (Worthy *et al,* 2018:127). There is no universal agreement around the construct of dyslexia, its challenges, and what separates dyslexia from other kinds of decoding issues.

Therefore, education and training for educators and academic support systems on dyslexia, what it is and how best to support those with it is imperative. In a survey conducted by Toste (2016) and the International Dyslexia Association, student teachers criticised how dyslexia was addressed in their teacher training education. Moats (2014) and Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, and Joshi (2014) found that a large portion of educators possess a limited knowledge of language constructs, which is considered important in addressing dyslexia (Worthy *et al,* 2018:130). Gibbs and Elliott (2015) interviewed educators and they reported that teachers stopped short of saying they were not prepared for teaching students identified as having dyslexia. This is not to state that educators in third level education are not competent and skilled in their professions. Rather it highlights that third level education in Ireland, is not fully equipped to meet the needs and supports for students identified as having dyslexia. This research would argue that there is another layer of training that needs to be given to all third-level education staff to best meet the needs of students with dyslexia and other neurodiverse differences to ensure a fully inclusive institution of education.

Furthermore, Miciak and Flecher (2020) suggest there is little evidence for the specificity of dyslexia interventions, "as students with word reading and spelling problems with and without other proposed markers of dyslexia respond similarly to these interventions" (2020:352). This highlights the urgency for a review of the dyslexic-specific interventions and supports and the development of a new and improved framework. It also highlights how this could support a more ableist outcome for students with dyslexia in third-level education and further enhances the need to adopt a more neurodiverse perspective, which is being advocated for by this research.

Research by Riddick and English (2006); Mortimore (2013); Evans (2014) and Ryder and Norwich (2019), found that some lecturers viewed reasonable adjustments for students with dyslexia as an example of "academic 'dumbing down' and questioned the right of dyslexic students to be at a university in the first place if they lacked the expected standard of skills" (Ryder and Norwich, 2019:162). These standard skills were articulated earlier, however, to refresh can consist of, but are not limited to, reading, writing, memorising, recalling new information and comprehending text.

For my research participants, internalising these doubts about their academic ability manifested as a fear when in a lecture hall or tutorial class, notably around when they were asked a question or encouraged to articulate their thoughts on a particular topic for fear of appearing a bad academic or unintelligent. Public shame and the fear of losing face in front of peers and lecturers and the private shame of not feeling good enough will increase and can then become “connected to fears of a loss of self and a loss of identity coming from dis-connection from a group” (Basso, 2009:124). Lecturers might ask a student with dyslexia a question in a lecture hall or tutorial room and the student is expected to articulate their work in the ‘expected academic’ language, however, due to their dyslexia they may not meet these expectations and this fear and shaming exacerbates.

> “I'm just like oh my god, oh no, I don't know anything and when they do ask me a question I just sit there and don't say anything, even though I know I want to say it I just cannot say it, even if I have the right answer, I just don't say it and I just sit there awkwardly while everyone stares at me” (Anne).
>
> “I am embarrassed that the lecturer is going to hear me talk” (Smithwicks).
>
> “No, no [shaking her head, nervous laugh and making a funny face] I wouldn’t really answer questions in class” (Calloway).
>
> “I wouldn’t answer questions in class or anything like that, I think I’m just slow, I can’t actually talk that well” (Turbo).

For a student with dyslexia, this is a common occurrence, especially when the performance or function involves reciting, recalling and articulating information in front of a lecturer and/or peer. For the person or student with dyslexia involved in this moment, the ‘self’ belief of doubt, fear and shame sustains this and transforms them from well-developed student into a state of high anxiety, whereby the basic psychological processes like the discerning differences between similar words, sounds and/or symbols and the oral expression of ‘what you know’, become mammoth tasks.

These are teaching methods that have been used in third level education for centuries and it is through a lack of awareness and training that these methods continue to be used. The idea behind it is to make the room more inclusive and encourage all students to speak in front of peers, especially those identified as ‘shy’. However, this research has highlighted the negative effects of these methods and how this can impact students with dyslexia. People with dyslexia experience challenges their peers, lecturers, academic administration staff and leaders may find difficult to understand.

In addition, people with dyslexia face internal barriers and internal conflict daily as they navigate the educational space in pursuit of furthering their personal and professional self. That said, rather than focus solely on the “negative aspects of lecturers’ lack of awareness and disablist attitudes” (Ryder & Norwich, 2019:163), which other research highlights, this research views the lack of awareness on the institutions inability to provide adequate training and information as opposed to any prejudice or preconceived ideas. All my research participants complimented their lecturers for their efforts in understanding dyslexia and their individual good will and personal interests in all their students. According to Beckett & Darnell (2020): “further barriers faced by participants were attributed to a lack of awareness of others” (:53).

An awareness of the implications that having dyslexia and how this affects “both study skills (concentration, organisation, revision and so forth) and presentation skills (completion of assignments within academic language and structures and without grammar, punctation and spelling errors)” (Beckett & Darnell, 2020:53) is important for everyone to be aware of.

Being in a classroom or lecture hall and having to read aloud or answer a question in front of peers can be a daunting prospect for most students, however we have witnessed how this can impact a student with dyslexia when the questions are from a lecturer, this next piece will highlight how this can impact when the above actions involves their peers.

My research has found that having dyslexia can make it harder to navigate through third level education as opposed to having an obvious disability and the challenges that it brings within a third level educational setting can be difficult for peers and academic staff to comprehend. With dyslexia, academic abilities are constantly questioned and speaking in front of peers is avoided, for fear of 'looking stupid'.

> "I dunno, I just feel like people are going to judge me for just having it" (Anne).
>
> Heffo's peers commented to her that: "she was stupid [not dyslexic]" "I just kind of laughed it off, I don't tell them".
>
> Summertime will only ask a question when she is certain how to put it "if it's wrong, I'm like, I'm not sure what way to look".

The word dyslexia can conjure up people's cultural and societal perceptions of what dyslexia means. Dyslexia holds many cultural perceptions, expectations, hardships, vicissitudes, unanticipated and beyond normal routine events which test the limits of our personal and cultural resources. Within an educational setting, dyslexia can often be marked and negotiated by others and variations of how peers perceive dyslexia mean students have to be flexible in how they use the word dyslexia. My research participants were often 'slagged' by their peers when they tried to explain the difficulties they faced, and where very often called “stupid” and “thick” by their peers for not being able to articulate their words correctly.

### *Accommodations/Supports*

It is important for a student with dyslexia to carefully research where they chose to study as it is likely that there are differences for students regarding the amount and kind of support offered to students with dyslexia between institutions. Dyslexia support at university is particularly important: “since most assessments within third level education is related specifically to literature searching and essay writing which can be a struggle for many students with dyslexia, even if student knowledge and understanding is evident” (Beckett & Darnell, 2020:52). According to AHEAD (2021) in the academic year of 2019-2020 in third level education in Ireland, “only 7.5 per cent of the new entrant population registered with the disability support services” (2021:62). The importance of a ‘holistic model’ of support been fostered within an education institution and promoted by staff who understand literacy difficulties, empathise with the challenges they face, and operate within a wider framework of provision (Olisa *et al,* 2010), is vital.

At present, all educational institutions provide support on some level for students with dyslexia. However, this research has highlighted the need to improve these supports and make them more accessible. Issues associated with dyslexia are not just limited to reading, writing, memorising, recalling new information and comprehending text. The classic accommodation given to students with dyslexia is support in writing assignments, extra time for exams and the use of a laptop, a typist and/or a reader. These are precious and must stay: however, we need to assist students to receive the full value of these supports and maximise their usefulness. The low engagement with these supports from my research participants because of the cultural perceptions surrounding them, is discussed here also.

> "In [our] college, you're not even aware of what supports are available to ye, I don't even know who looks after it", "like I mean where I fall down with my dyslexia it's not really an area that can be helped with supports, I don't think" (Summertime).
>
> "I was taken out for support for my spelling when I needed help with reading. This caused me unnecessary embarrassment and shame" (Summertime).
>
> "Extra time on exams, that was it" (The Driver).
>
> "Like I heard people say oh so and so is in a special room for their exams like it is made easier for [that person], so I think that was a bit of stigma there. (AIB)
>
> "If I had known earlier, I could have sought support earlier and perhaps I might have been more successful" (Alex).
>
> "It was so weird that was like, had no support there. I had a laptop that they gave me, but I had nobody with me to help me use it" (Kitty Kat).
>
> "Because of my low esteem I didn't even go there [to supports], I kind of juggled my way myself" (Joy).

Even the mostly always positive Winehouse could not put a positive spin on the systems of supports available to scholars studying in universities with dyslexia. "I don't think there's a lot of formalised support and I think dyslexic people have to be fighters in that, I think a lot of the time they go through it tough" (Winehouse). Smithwicks never utilised the supports much as she knew they would not benefit her, however; she received support and a smaller room with extra time, "doing the exams, I never done the exams in the hall, yeah, I got to do them here, in the small room" (Smithwicks).

Winehouse and Smithwicks spoke about how the smaller room scenario presented enquires from their close peer groups about why they missed their exams. When they explained they did their exams in a smaller room because of their dyslexia, the mood changed. They felt "funny, I felt like they looked at me differently, as if I had something" (Winehouse). They also explained how they met new friends in this arena where they developed little sub-cultural groups of the 'disabled', "I'd see other people from the smaller rooms on the campus and nod, as if we knew what was going on" (Alex). Smithwicks also spoke about how institutions form new communities and force disclosure through the supports at exams. "In the exams you happen to bump into each other, and it was kind of almost like oh' oh, I know your dirty secret you know mine, so we kind of thought, the special room gang" (Smithwicks). This can also create what Riddell and Warson (2003) term as 'social discomfort' for students with dyslexia and fuel a lack of understanding around these additional difficulties they may face.

My research also raises the argument of the value of the supports offered, the usefulness of the technology provided, the need for training around this and why the supports differ so much between different institutions. The dyslexia diagnosis alongside accommodations for students in third level education with dyslexia, will always be needed. Nonetheless, "it is almost impossible to achieve a curriculum that tackles the needs of all learners without the co-occurring generation of barriers" (Nieminen, 2020:6).

Although each institution is unique, it is suggested by Henderson (2017); Byrne (2018); Cowen (2018) and Beckett & Darnell (2020) that supports in third level education are not adequate at all. Henderson (2017) found that students with dyslexia did not seek out support in their first year of study and that they were more likely to seek support during the second/third year of study, this was because they tried to maintain a non-disabled student identity. AIB supported this notion when she told us she was ashamed of her dyslexia and never sought support, however, after her 'coming out' moment, "I had no issues as I wasn't ashamed of it [dyslexia] anymore" (AIB). Byrne (2018) likened this in his research to the evidence relating to negative perceptions of and inadequate support given by academic staff. According to Cowen (2018), due to the negative perceptions regarding dyslexia, students tend not to seek out support or ask for help until they have reached a tipping point in their academic journey. Mortimore (2013) states: "even where the learning support systems were praised, students described a 'glass wall', an invisible barrier, between institutional disability services and academic departments" (:39). "Many faculties do not tackle the learning needs of the students with disabilities because they feel ill equipped when teaching them" (Griful-Freixenet, Struyven, Verstichele & Andries, 2017:1628).

The informants spoke about the assistive technology and the frustration it caused them and the complete waste of time it could be trying to master language to text software provided to students with dyslexia by the university Access offices. Students talk into the laptop/computer microphone, it recognises the voice, writing style and types up what is said: however, this very often does not happen. This exacerbated the frustration of learning modern technology and moved informants to internalise ableism:

> "I just wanted to bounce that laptop of the wall; it was pure hell engaging with it" (The Driver).
>
> "I deleted it from my laptop, there is no easy way [laughs]" (Rolling Stone).
>
> "I struggled with all the reading, writing and technology when I first went to university and trying to 'get it right'" (The General).
>
> Smithwick's never used the assistive technology supports as knew she "would not be able to do it" (Smithwicks).

On reflection, these are very telling statements and indicates the absence of understanding around assistive technology and replaces the idea it is meant to assist the learning journey, rather than hinder it.

"In higher education two models of disability are prevalent, 'disorder' and 'difference', which each differentially conceptualise dyslexia and the nature of supports required" (O'Byrne, Jagoe & Lawler, 2018:1031). The onus is always on the student to disclose their dyslexia to receive learning support within third level education. Academic staff and in particular, lecturers, play a key role in supporting students as: "They may provide formal (e.g., compensation measures in exams, permission to use technical supports like spell-checkers, etc) or informal (social) support to help students manage the challenges of studying with dyslexia" (Schabmann *et al,* 2020:275). My research also found that rather than providing exam support (although I am not dismissing this vital support), the need to promote course and content support, such as, prior access to lecture slides and notes is crucial. This assists in delivering an intervention that is more focused on the process of learning itself (Schabmann *et al,* 2020:279), as opposed to exams which tend to focus on the end and formal assessment of the learning process as opposed to learning as a continuum.

Everyone has their own unique way of learning, and depending on the subjects being taught, educators should choose different methods to deliver their content and give all students equal opportunities to succeed (AHEAD, 2021). My research highlights how important it is to provide appropriate support, making information equally accessible to all learners, by presenting the same content in varying material, as this helps to reduce and eliminate barriers in learning. In other words, it is about designing educational institutions and products to be used by all people and developing an ethos around teaching to meet the needs of every student. Universal Design for Learning is one of these models of teaching which has been defined as a framework that "proactively builds in features to accommodate the range of human diversity" (Griful-Freixenet, Struyven, Verstichele & Andries, 2017:1629). It allows educators to anticipate different students' needs before lectures and before any issues arise, rather than modifying materials as an afterthought (Mole, 2013). The Universal Design for Learning model encompasses three broad principles: representation (the 'what' of learning), action and expression (the 'how' of learning) and engagement (the ‘why’ of learning) (CAST 2011), which, aligns for a more inclusive educational institution.

### *Assessment*

Continued support for students with dyslexia while studying in third level education is vital and needs reviewing and updating, my research has highlighted. Most assessment within third level education in Ireland is related specifically to literature searching and essay writing “which can be a struggle for many students with dyslexia, even if student knowledge and understanding is evident” (Beckett & Darnell, 2020:53).

Teaching staff should be encouraged to assess students with dyslexia’s work for the content of the written work (the salient points of their work) rather than penalise them for the likely grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and presentation of information, which are core characteristics of a student with dyslexia’s work, Pino and Mortari (2014) have suggested. Because of poor spelling accuracy and handwriting fluency, assessments can appear weaker for students with dyslexia. The third level institutions in this research allowed my research participants and other neurodiverse students, additional time to complete exams or allow additional time to submit assignments. Assistive technology such as text-to-speech, LiveScribe pens and concept mapping software are available from institutions access officers to assist with the written assessments and presentation, and laptops, readers and scribes or typists are offered to assist students with dyslexia in their written exams.

However, there is limited literature exploring the adoption and usefulness of these technologies from the view of the student themselves (Beckett & Darnell, 2020) and my research has highlighted how this is often not the case and more assistance is required to show students how to navigate this technology. I stated myself the frustration of trying to navigate new technology with my broad accent and how I wanted to throw my laptop out of the window. Granic and Marangunic (2019), suggest the uptake and benefits of these assistive technologies and their use in assisting with assessments for students with dyslexia remains largely unknown. Nonetheless, Pino and Mortari (2014) found that when computing packages were used by students with dyslexia and they developed a certain masterly, the assistive technology proved a successful support mechanism and assisted them in their assignments. However, my research has shown that students with dyslexia can benefit from access to lecture slides and other resources in advance of their lectures, as it allows them time to digest and understand the subject content, rather than meeting it for the first time in the lecture and losing their place and thus, becoming confused.

Although third level educational institutions vary worldwide, "one set of practises can be globally identified among almost any of them, assessment accommodations" (Nieminen, 2021:2). Dyslexia is not obvious to society, however, the difference between someone who has dyslexia, and its limitations are exposed within the cultural settings of third level education and its assessing methods. Nieminen has identified "assessment and grading practises as the weak link in how assessment supports learning, because students are positioned as passive objects of assessment" (2021:2). Ketterling-Geller *et al,* (2015), suggested these traditional and culturally embedded methods of assessment can lead to discrimination against students with disabilities. Consequently, Boud *et al,* (2018) suggests, gaining an understanding around the cultural and social principles of assessment and their related accommodations, and the impacts on those students with dyslexia, will highlight why a comprehensive reframing is required.

> "I was finding it really hard, but then I was doing assignments of 4,000 words" (Anne).
>
> "Academia relies so heavily on written communication, but yet it's the biggest barrier and `obstacle, for a person with Dyslexia" (The General).
>
> "I didn't use my spelling and grammar wavier or exam times, because I wouldn't tell anyone" (Alex).
>
> "I didn't bother either [with assessment supports], I always felt stupid, so what's the point, I'm not going to learn anyway" (Heffo).

These assessment related accommodations are largely uncontested and/or their validity questioned. Griful-Freixenet *et al*, (2017) suggested research within third level education focuses on accessible and inclusive teaching practices, yet researchers rarely contest assessment accommodations. Nieminen, argues that third level education research has "identified assessment and grading practices as the weakest link in how assessment supports learning, because students are positioned as passive objects of assessment" (2020:2). These accommodations, however, are tied into the medical model and require medical documentation from students with a disability to gain compensation (Järkestig Berggren *et al,* 2016). "So, because my diagnosis had run out, I learned for the first time that you had to keep it up. Which, I thought was ridiculous, because it’s not going away” (The Driver), on learning his diagnosis had ‘run out’ and that he needed a new one.

### *Fonts*

Words with regular stripes take longer to read, even by fluent and non-dyslexic readers and my research will argue that striped fonts such as Times New Roman and Arial take longer to read than other less striped fonts, such as Verdana. My research has found that the default fonts used in our technology and those chosen by our universities and other post formal school educational institutions, can create barriers to learning. These font styles Arial, and Times New Roman, are the recommended styles to use for any written continuous assessments and presentations by third level education institutions. The style these fonts are manufactured in is a contributor to an unnecessary barrier to both reading and writing for students with dyslexia in third-level education. The closeness and straightness of the lines within these fonts, (Arial and Times New Roman) cause the eye line to falter and this is more prevalent for a student with dyslexia than a student without dyslexia according to a survey I carried out (Murphy, 2018) as part of this research.

I found that institutions advise us when writing up assignments to use font style Aerial and Times New Roman. There's a lot of lecturers that are like "I want an essay style, I want this many paragraphs, I want spellings and all like it's an honours degree, we want it like this [in a certain style] and you're like so that's an added stress" (Smithwicks). "All essays should be typed using Times New Roman…" (Department of Anthropology, Maynooth University, 2020:4) and "The font Times New Roman or similar… Arial, should be used" (Department of Humanities, TU Dublin, 2020:12). However, I found that when my students read particular words in Times New Roman with lots of m's, commitment or w's, windows, they imagined those words as being in italics or a different font than the rest and they get 'lost' while reading (Murphy, 2018). The thought being how the computer designs the lines on words and how this affects a student with dyslexia's eye while reading.

I conducted a survey with 273 students registered on a Level 8-degree course on these font styles and the results will correlate with this argument. The fonts used in the survey were the two styles, Arial, and Times New Roman which our third-level education institutions 'recommend' we use, the Microsoft Office package default font style, Calibri and the one I prefer to use, Verdana. The results confirmed that the two compulsory fonts were the least favoured and due to the design of Verdana, it scored the highest favourite font. Verdana was preferred by 78% of the students surveyed as their preferred font to read and the general comments were because it "was easy to read" and "I never lost my place". Words with regular stripes take longer to read, even by fluent readers. Fonts such as Aerial and Times New Roman are the fonts used for academic writing in Irish third level education institutions: however, when reading these recommended fonts, they can appear to be close and jumbled. The Verdana font is considered a 'Humanist *Sans Serif'* specifically designed for on screen display (Microsoft, 2020) and preferred by most of my students in my research (Murphy, 2018). I would argue that students should be entitled to use fonts like Verdana as their preferred font if it enhances their learning experience.

Confidence, self-belief, and the good/bad academic binary are re-occurring issues that emerged for my research participants. This involved self-questioning themselves and their academic abilities which can lead to the suppression of their voices, and this can then become the unconscious norm for students with dyslexia in education, thus, invoking what I term as 'academic imprisonment'. "Suppressed voices result from self-censorship, the idea that what others think of one is more important than one thinks of oneself" (Basso, 2009:122). For my research participants, this can manifest as the fear and freedom to say what you would like to in a lecture hall or tutorial class for fear of appearing a bad academic or unintelligent, or 'looking stupid' in front of one's peers and lecturers and all this in turn will initiate what Basso (2009) calls voice suppression.

Because of previous experiences and the trauma encountered and all this linking to the barriers discussed above, my research participants developed a form of voice suppression which ultimately can lead them into academic imprisonment. These activities can lead to voice suppression and invoke ordeals, "in the sense of a severely difficult or painful experience that tests a person’s character or endurance” (Basso, 2009:123). In Ireland, we claim to be free and mostly we have freedom to move, purchase, educate, work and more. Nonetheless, one can become trapped in systems of oppression created by people, environments, and by the barriers created by these, and trapped by themselves. They create ‘self’-oppression through fear, shame, and experience, arising out of a moment. For my research participants, with dyslexia, this moment occurs as a ‘performance’ in an educational setting and/or involving peers and educators, or what Carrithers (2009) terms as ‘vicissitude’.

The characteristics of having dyslexia such as difficulties with pronunciation, articulation and memory retention, and the cultural ideologies of ‘being a good academic’ collide to create that moment of vicissitudes (Carrithers, 2009). This is a moment in life when a change in circumstances is encountered which is typically unwelcome and generally has an unpleasant outcome. This concept examines the idea of human expectations, vicissitudes, and the ruin of expectations. This occurred when my participants encountered an unexpected event in education around academic performance and/or their dyslexia and how that has affected them across their academic experiences. This is because an ordeal of language occurs when one’s voice is affected by powerful others, according to Basso (2009). This can happen when there is a change in a student’s circumstances in their educational experience, which is unexpected, unpleasant, and unwelcome, this event happens and ruins the expectations of what is expected of you in that moment. A lecturer might ask a student with dyslexia a question in a lecture hall or tutorial room and the student is expected to articulate their work in the 'expected academic' manner. If the student does not meet these expectations, this can initiate voice suppression, shame, fear, and embarrassment from the ordeal and the vicissitude, and the student may never speak in front of their peers and/or educators again (Rodríquez & Webster, 2012).

This self-suppressing of the voice invokes the quietening and then non-use of one's voice to avoid uncomfortable circumstances and removes one's ability to engage as a full academic. This, I would argue, imposes what I call a type of academic imprisonment and lessens the experience of third level education for students with dyslexia. This can lead to poor academic performance, lower self-concept, self-esteem issues, and often to poor social relationships. Students experience anxiety-ridden scenarios when they engage in similar performances. For the person or student with dyslexia involved in this moment, the 'self' belief of doubt, fear and shame sustains this and transforms them from a well-developed student into a state of high anxiety.

Students spoke about previous experiences of being 'encouraged' or even 'forced' to answer questions in classes and how these experiences have embedded those emotions of fear, shame, doubt, and a lack of self-belief. Reaffirming how this acts as a critical impact on the student's academic experiences.

> "I love learning, I'm a real school person. I just find it really hard; it sounds good in my head, but it comes out different, sounds horrible on the page" (Anne).
>
> "Whenever I was asked a question in class, I just froze, I wouldn't answer questions in class, I think I'm just slow" (Smithwicks).
>
> "No, no [shaking her head, nervous laugh and making a funny face] I wouldn't really answer questions in class, after school, no way" (Calloway).
>
> "I overthink it and then I panic like I know the answer and then I just sit there" (Turbo).
>
> "Even though I know I want to say it I just cannot say it, even if I have the right answer, I just don't say it and I just sit there awkwardly while everyone stares at me" (Ali).
>
> "I'm just like oh my god, oh no, I don't know anything and when they do ask me a question I just sit there and don't say anything" (Anne).

This is a site of complicated interpersonal realms of activity between the public realm and private realm. The idea of your feelings, emotions and subjectivity in the private realm and the interactions in lecture halls and tutorial rooms with their embodied cultural and social norms, in the public realm. In our private realm we remain convinced that whereas we know what to say, the subconscious intervenes with the traumatic memory to protect, and this allows the inner voice to advise on saying nothing. This self-suppression of their voices allows students with dyslexia to manage the ordeals of language, vicissitudes and voice suppression and the trauma experienced, thus never allowing it to happen again.

Consequently, this 'ordeal of language' legitimises the suppression of their voice and the feelings and emotions connected to these and can also cement the notions of low self-belief, doubt, fear, and shame. Having dyslexia can be a site of oppression as dyslexia is not visible, therefore, no allowances can be made unless it is disclosed. However, when the relationship between a student and their dyslexia brings about 'shame' and ‘shaming’ relations, it invokes self-suppression voicing and shame. When this happens often enough, where once they were unanticipated feelings, now the more these feelings are evoked, the more familiar they become and the more they initiate voice suppression, and this greatly impacts on their ability to speak in front of their peers.

Shame and shaming surfaces within the private realm, the ‘self’, social events, and social media, whereby the public shame and shaming occurs within lecture halls, classrooms, laboratories, group work sessions and assignments, and through others viewing grades which are published on student platforms. Although student grades are connected to a unique student number, releasing grades this way starts conversations either in person or on social media platforms to discuss ‘what you got’. “Even when I was in college, I found it so hard, even feedback [on my assignments] really put me down even in college” (Joy). Public shame and the fear of losing face in front of peers and lecturers and the private shame of not feeling good enough will increase the self-suppression of the voice and your feelings of shame and imprisonment.

This voice suppression can and ultimately will, become connected to fears of a loss of self and a loss of identity and then disconnecting from your group. When a culture views something in society as an implicit prohibition, an act, a behaviour, or an utterance that is culturally repulsive, shame and shaming can be invoked. This shame is then linked to a social position and the effects or experiences that may stem from it. Students with dyslexia often impose this taboo on ‘their self’, by the ‘self,’ which then manifests ‘defence mechanisms’. There is a need to highlight dyslexia as a multitude of issues exacerbated in an academic environment which results in a student with dyslexia having to develop strategies and a growth mindset in order to overcome this taboo and exit their form of academic imprisonment.

When academic imprisonment is initiated, the basic psychological processes like the discerning differences between similar words, sounds and/or symbols and the oral expression of ‘what you know’, become mammoth tasks. Ultimately the suppressed voice becomes embedded in the memory of the event and the ordeal of language. COVID-19 took us to the online arena and online teaching allowed the enablement of this voice suppression and made it much easier to remain in the realm of this imprisonment. These spaces of non-human contact and non-face-to-face interactions, allowed students with dyslexia who were initiating voice suppression, access to this academic imprisonment. Online teaching providing plenty of hiding spaces and opting out methods. Camera and microphones easily turned off, poor internet connectivity, sound issues and many more things enabled students who wished to avoid the pitfalls of vicissitudes and ordeals; however, it only exasperated the effects of voice suppression and academic imprisonment. Further invoking internal conflict because of private feelings of not being good enough to be an academic and perpetuating this self-imposed prison sentence.

This section has highlighted how the developmental possibilities and concepts surrounding taking part in third level education can produce voice suppression which contributes to academic imprisonment. Society's expectations of the characteristics an academic should process can also be inflexible, particularly in Western cultures where literacy and education hold cultural 'weight' and cultural status. If students accept any of these above, they will contribute to the suppression of their own voices and this can contribute to academic imprisonment, spread fear, shame and self-doubt, and contribute to poorer academic performances. Voice suppression inhibits the learning experience and initiates internal conflict between the individual and public realms. Conflict can then occur between one's own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and subjectivity and the lecture halls and tutorial rooms and this b rings shame and introduces a humiliating relationship between the student and their dyslexia.

The longer a student with dyslexia engages with all that I have discussed, it will ultimately allow voice suppression to embed itself, whereby you can end up trapped for life in your academic prison. Although all the above barriers that are consciously and unconsciously in place and can ultimately lead to what I would term as academic imprisonment, my research participants overcame these barriers and succeeded in their third level educational endeavours. The next chapter will explore the positives and strengths associated with dyslexia and argue that a shift in mindset from the deficit view toward the neurodiversity view is required to build the capacity of students with dyslexia to thrive in learning and life. Dyslexia in education is a complex space however, my participants succeeded, not in spite of their dyslexia, but, in partnership with their dyslexia and their unique strengths.

# Chapter 4: How they got over their barriers

> Yeah, and I had a little bit of an advantage because I could remember what a page looked like, a bit of a photographic memory. So, I used to do this huge, big em like an A3 size spider diagram. So, I'd be walking around the college with them. I find my spider diagrams a massive help, especially colour coded. Yeah, but it had to be done in like number coded and like colour coded then I'd remember that word was that colour and then, boom, I would be able to remember it in the exam. (AIB)

The experiences discussed in earlier chapters of neurodiverse students in the third level institutions in my research are sobering and highligts that transitioning from formal school to third level education is challenging for most students and receives little if any support. However, as Vincent et al. (2017) highlight, "the perceived sense of difference which is a prominent part of the self-concept of neurodiverse students makes their transition overwhelmingly challenging" (:310) and many students consequently feel out of place. Aside from their engagement with academic expectations, "their entire university experience, including management of change, negotiation of social interactions and striving to achieve a degree of independence, is clouded by past experiences and apprehensions" (Kwon, Kim & Kwak, 2018:3).

These past experiences invoke voice suppression, academic imprisonment, and as a result of these past experiences, prevent or delay students disclosing their learning difficulties, resulting in an even poorer university experience according to Anderson, Carter, and Stephenson (2018). The above finding has also reflected on how traditional teaching and assessment methods can create barriers for students with dyslexia and how they can penalise neurodiverse students. This can then "create academic demands and workload that is unbending, and risks attrition and failure"

(Clouder, Karakas, Cinotti, Ferreyra, Fierros & Rojo, 2020:772). With all that said, and in spite of all the barriers that can be in place for students with dyslexia, my research participants all succeeded in completing their academic journeys.

### *Coming Out*

One of the hardest stops on this educational journey is the ‘coming out’ process or disclosing one’s dyslexia and deciding who to tell and when to tell them. All my participants spoke about this process and the need for third level institutions to find and encourage safe ways for students with dyslexia to disclose. This will allow them to access their learning needs, assistive technology to suit their specific requirements, identify the accommodations best suited for them and to put in place a relevant support system. Disclosure is one of the underlining aspects of having dyslexia that causes most problems. While attending university, my participants stated that embracing their difference and telling others about it was an extremely difficult process; nonetheless, when they did begin embracing their dyslexia, it was like a “coming out” according to AIB. We often relate the term ‘coming out’ to sexual orientation, however, the idea of ‘coming out’ is also relevant to my research project as the participants complained about informing people of their dyslexia and the enormous stress on someone when their dyslexia does come into the public view.

This this can manifest itself through the fear of answering questions in public places like lecture halls and tutorials and how the ‘coming out’ can be forced through this act and can hinder their difference being embraced by the ‘self’. The idea of ‘coming out’, either to yourself through a diagnosis, informing family and friends or informing Access officers to avail of supports can be daunting. Many of my research participants spoke of their relief upon diagnosis and how it confirmed for them their issues were because of dyslexia and not related to intelligence. The notion of ‘shedding their skin’ and revealing a new self to the world, is rarely associated with disclosing dyslexia.

Nonetheless, this proved to be a pivotal moment for my participants and showed that it can be as powerful as in other communities when they reveal this new self. It also led to a cathartic moment for most of them as they began to accept who they are, embrace it and this led to them coping with third level education better. Fear is one of the inhibitors of ‘coming out’ as being a person with dyslexia and bullying, stigma, ‘slagging’ and labelling are just some associations of this fear. When I questioned the research participants further about this coming out process or disclosing their dyslexia, they all expressed how it enabled them to ‘move on’, which helped them to embrace their studies and assisted them to achieve success.

> “Even my family said to me I literally went from one person to a completely different person when I left school and went to college” (AIB).
>
> “It's about you as a person and how you deal with the situation out in the real life [when you tell]. But it's fine” (Heffo).
>
> “The way you deal with it [disclosure] is important” (Alex).
>
> “I was like, I don't mind spelling, I have dyslexia. I was diagnosed with it, but I never notice it. That's been my life” (The Driver).

> "You know when you're having as I call it a dyslexic day. I find that difficult to get past and I often wonder what it would be like to have a non-dyslexic day, and I wonder what others think" (Ali).
>
> "Yeah, so you are doing a lot more work than other people, yeah, you can't take the notes, multi-task, see it is a big struggle trying to listen and write at the same time, but its who I am, and I just tell people" (Smithwicks).
>
> "To separate me from it, to deny my disability, is to deny me, I don't care" [who knows] (Rolling Stone).

I asked my research participants to give one piece of advice to first-year students with dyslexia in third-level education and they all said to disclose as soon as they felt comfortable to, and to access the supports available in their institutions. The benefits of 'coming out' on the self and disclosing your hidden disability far outweigh not telling and keeping it secret. The more dyslexia was faced up to and accepted by the participants, the easier the experience of third level education became as it was one less barrier to overcome by my participants and it also helped the participants face the academic challenges head-on. When the participants 'came out' they found their voices, and this helped to 'provide a key' to unlock their academic prison. They also suggested that when they feared 'coming out' (Clarke & Dirkx, 2008 & McRuer, 2012) and disclosing their dyslexia, it often involved the oppression of their 'self' and raised awareness within them to closely monitor their own actions, all of which will initiate voice suppression and thus, academic imprisonment. However, when the participants stated that they began to recognise it (dyslexia), acknowledge it, and learn how to learn with it, their studies became easier, and they exceled.

One strategy developed by the participants was leaving behind the concept of a fixed mindset and engagement with the concept of a growth mindset

(Dweck, 2012). When my research participants recognised the concept of a fixed mindset and understood that intelligence is not fixed, they were able to embrace all the positive outcomes from using a growth mindset. This helped the participants to evolve away from a conceptually ableist and deficit-orientated mindset: “Students learn to accomplish tasks by any means necessary for example through developing alternative strategies” (Talcott, cited in Galluzzo, 2019:3). The participants also acknowledged that through hard work, incorporating feedback, accepting help, and developing and using effective strategies, enabled them to view third level education as an exciting environment for growth, challenge, and opportunities to develop mastery (Yeager and Dweck, 2012). My research participants expressed that using these strategies allowed themselves to break down barriers for them and turn their third level educational journey more into “a motivating and engaging place” (Romero, 2015:2).

> “Yeah, so I suppose you do have to work much, much harder than other people and I suppose you are putting in a lot more work” (Callaway).
>
> “I have learned to learn around it” (The General).

Richardson (2015), and Cowen (2018), highlighted those students with dyslexia do not score as high in their degrees as students without dyslexia. Richardson (2015) also found the treatment of students with dyslexia is likely to vary between individual lecturers and institutions and Mortimore (2013) has suggested that some lecturers viewed dyslexia as a disability that is used to gain an unfair advantage. There can be scant regard for the difficulties students with dyslexia often face around assignments and Smithwicks’ lecturer told her: "I want an essay style, I want this many paragraphs, I want spellings and all like it's an honours degree, we want it like this, just adds to the stress" (Smithwicks). However, my research has shown that this traditional method of providing accommodations and traditional teaching methods for students with dyslexia can be hit and miss and provide a barrier as opposed to being a help. My research has also highlighted how this can create accommodations within third level education that produce extra visibility around disabilities and accommodations can leave students feeling exposed (Nieminen, 2020). The traditional supports offered by most third level institutions are invaluable to students with dyslexia, however, what is needed is a comprehensive reframing of assessment-related accommodations (Bould *et al,* 2018) and this will help universities to understand their social and cultural premises and implications also: “Well, within disabilities in general, I think there is no lack of awareness. But that be dyslexia, I think there is a complete lack of awareness” (The Driver).

When an institution moves away from the model of making individual reasonable adjustments towards inclusive education, it can begin to provide all students with an equal chance of success as it can make third level institutions more accessible and places of success as opposed to places of failure. This can be implemented in numerous ways, for example, “through the institution’s attempts to make learning resources accessible through recorded lectures and handouts uploaded online; online tutorials that leverage technology and making information available in a range of formats" (Collins, Azmat & Rentschler, 2019:1480). My research participants also acknowledged that they spent more time learning and completing academic tasks than those without a diagnosis of dyslexia. Nonetheless, my participants overcame these obstacles by developing various learning strategies such as highlighting notes, recording lectures, and rote learning of exam answers (MacCullagh *et al,* 2017). This happened by them using both auditory and visual formats (multi-modal strategies) and when information was presented by lecturers in an easy-to-understand format, this also assisted in enhancing the participants experiences.

> If it's dumbed down enough that, for you is basic for you to understand it and some of the books tend to be wordy and complicated. Where I find the lecturers really just saying how it is, this is what we are talking about, this is what I mean, this is what that means, if you think about it like this it is a lot easier understood when it's a lot more basic" (Summertime).

My participants also resonated with the research of MacCullagh *et al,* (2017) and identified various personal strengths they had developed "because of the difficulties resulting from dyslexia including deep approaches to learning, enhanced communication skills, self-awareness, and resilience" (O' Byrne, Jagoe & Lawler, 2018:1040). They also acknowledged that while dyslexia is a lifelong condition, when you change your view and outlook of it from a negative to a more positive one, accept and embrace dyslexia, you increase your chances of succeeding in third level education, as shown by my participants.

Inclusivity and acceptance for neurodiversity in third level education is increasingly recognised as fundamental for promoting 'individuals' educational careers, "not only for their own benefit but also for the positive impact that integration has on society as a whole" (Redpath *et al,* 2013, 1334). Accepting who you are to yourself and using this as a motivator to succeed is also vitally important. We witnessed this in my research of participants' experiences on their third level educational journeys and how that moment of acceptance can enhance their experiences and help them to 'come out' and achieve. I jokingly used the fairy godmother analogy of 'taking it away' to test this resolve of acceptance and once again the answer highlighted the importance of accepting who one is. It is important to note that none of the participants expressed any wish for their dyslexia to be removed or were under any illusions that they somehow could be 'cured' by me or others, as dyslexia is an integral part of their psyche and being.

> "I think it would confuse me to take it away, yeah like I think I have gotten so used to my way of learning" (AIB).
>
> "Yeah, like there's times that say I've been talking to my partner, and I've had to add something up or figure something out and he'd be like you did that so complicated, yeah? Yes, you could have just done this, but I obviously had to learn it my own way and it wasn't complicated to me, it was just me". (Rolling Stone)
>
> "I didn't understand how, as I think it would mess me up more, yeah well because it's actually a part of you isn't it"? (Herbie).
>
> "It's just me, its part me, that's the person I am" (Heffo).
>
> "How I could live without dyslexia, I've had it since 'forever', 'remove' it, how could we. Dyslexia is in everything I do" (Winehouse).
>
> "I would keep it of I could take it away from my daughter" (Joy).
>
> "Sure, how could someone take a piece of you away, something that has been there since the start" (Turbo).
>
> "That was kind of it. I'm happily skipping along through life, never contemplating that I had any difficulty with learning, just thought I'm obviously not as bright as some people, that's all there is to it. But, anyway, I've accepted it and I decided look, it's me and that is that" (Alex).
>
> "I've heard this before, it's part of me, I've learned to live with it" (Summertime).
>
> Still, it's just me now, I never thought of it, not having dyslexia like" (Callaway).

> "I have learned to learn around it, the way you are, so I think I'd have to nearly go back to day one and you'd have to re-learn again. All over again, no I'll keep it" (The General).
>
> "I have no issues having dyslexia, or letting people know and yes, I'm keeping it" (The Driver).
>
> "Look it's a huge struggle, dyslexia and learning in university with it, but I accepts it's mine and my dyslexia stays" (Smithwicks).
>
> "Look, it's a gift and a curse, but I've learned to live with it" (Kitty Kat).
>
> "I could not be 'me' without dyslexia!" (Winehouse).

Some of these statements show how accepting one's dyslexia enables this 'coming out', taking pride in their dyslexia (Disabled World, 2020) and then the 'moving on' moment. However, it also highlights again how associated stigma can be the cause of internalised ableism (Wiley & Vaughan, 2020). We also briefly see a time when Summertime experienced trauma in relation to her dyslexia, vicissitudes occurred and caused trauma. The body still remembers a traumatic experience, which can relate to a negative moment associated with their dyslexia. This can initiate a different reaction as "the traumatic event and its impact on their life today" (Botsford *et al*, 2018:2) and it is still very real to them. Among my research participants, those who were diagnosed early in their school years and are in the 18–30-year-old age bracket, appear to have accepted having dyslexia much easier. They are of the view that their dyslexia is more accepted by their peers, who understand that they think differently and are not inferior, it is just part of who they are.

No matter how many negatives or difficulties my research participants encountered on their journeys or what other previous research has discovered on dyslexia, very few people wanted to take their dyslexia away.

This reinforces the notion that no matter how ‘broken’ or disabled the ‘self’ may appear to others, when the person with the disability accepts their ‘self’ as the best form of themselves, anything is achievable, and we have witnessed this happening. Dyslexia is an embedded part of their lives which helps to shape who they are, and this section has shown how accepting a disability and embracing it can lead to a more positive educational experience. It is not an attempt to underplay the impacts and effects of having dyslexia. However, it highlights how acceptance and developing strategies can be the key. By using a neurodiverse approach and recognising education and life can be tough with dyslexia, it allows one to step out of the shadow of dyslexia and into the light to master newfound strategies and techniques.

Acceptance of dyslexia and all the difficulties it can present and taking pride in the difference were pivotal moments in overcoming any barriers to my participants’ education. Changing one’s mindset and developing personal coping and study strategies also enabled the participants to succeed in their studies. My research participants have shown that by using dyslexia as a motivator rather than a de-motivator, success happens. “Rather than being an obstacle to progress, the label can offer hope to the child or adult who is affected, coupled with increased (rather than declining) motivation” (Snowling, 2015:20) and this my research has shown is achieved through acceptance of one’s dyslexia.

My research participants stated that they can often spend much more time learning various and different learning techniques, than students without dyslexia, which again highlights how dyslexia can impact students in various ways (Cameron, 2016). They also identified as a barrier, that it was often hard to see the 'bigger picture' and for them to keep motivated to ensure they reached their goals. Visualisation has been rising in popularity over recent decades, particularly in the field of sports: however, it has also been used in education to help set goals and achieve academic success (Opila, 2019). Time management, planning and goal setting are strategies my research participants have developed in 'getting over the barriers'; however, they also had to develop skills to keep themselves motivated to achieve their success.

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), "much has been learned about two major types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, especially within the framework of self-determination theory" (:1) and it can enhance development and wellness, which can have strong implications for education. Adefila, Broughan, Phimister, and Opie (2020), suggest that this involves "three basic psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence and satisfying these essential needs enhances holistic well-being and self-motivation" (:3). Keeping motivated can be difficult, however, when it is considered to be intrinsic or inherent, it can be used it as driving force to achieve success. My research participants have demonstrated this in their studies and used concepts such as, 'seeing themselves with their degrees' and 'telling' themselves they can do it. Acceptance of dyslexia and developing your own coping and learning strategies have also been seen to help with intrinsic motivation. This places the emphasis on "people's inherent motivational propensities for learning and growing, and how they can be supported" (Ryan & Deci, 2020:4). This also assumes that students will be "inherently prone toward psychological growth and integration, and thus toward learning, mastery and connection with others" (Ryan & Deci, 2020:8). All of these strategies require work and constant monitoring as these particular traits are not automatic and require supporting and developing.

As mentioned earlier, Adefila *et al,* (2020) suggest these three fundamental traits are autonomy, competence, and relatedness and using these enabled my participants to develop the feeling of mastery, alongside a sense that one can succeed and grow. Nonetheless, people with dyslexia who master their learning and personal challenges need to keep practising them as: "they tend to forget skills they appear to have mastered more quickly than others if they don't practice them" (Eide & Eide, 2011:28). Autonomy requires the student with dyslexia to show initiative and take ownership of their actions. It is supported by experiences of "interest and value and undermined by experiences of being externally controlled, whether by rewards or punishments" (Ryan & Deci, 2020:8). Competence is "best satisfied within well-structured environments that afford optimal challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for growth" *(Ibid)* and my participants alongside myself have shown how a well-structured environment can and will enhance success in third level education.

Relatedness concerns a sense of belonging and connection and this is vital and is facilitated by conveyance of respect and caring according to Ryan and Deci (2020). The need to seek and maintain interpersonal relationships is a basic need for all human beings as we “have a powerful need to belong” (Cohen, Cun & Sznycer, 2020:1). That is why the need to affiliate with others and to be accepted by them is a major source of human motivation. Individuals seek out groups with which they share commonalities and where they feel they can relate to someone who is like them. If any of these three basic needs are not initiated, if can be seen as damaging to motivation and wellness and motivation can be lost or lessened. Extrinsic motivation concerns behaviours driven externally, by such things as imposed rewards and punishments, focusing on approval from others: “ego-involvement in which self-esteem is contingent on outcomes and internal rewards of self-esteem for success and by avoidance of anxiety, shame, or guilt for failure” (Adefila *et al,* 2020:4). How students adapt to circumstances in their immediate environment depends on which factors are within their control as the motivation to act is governed by self-interest and competence. This idea influenced my research participants’ motivation to disclose their dyslexia and where that disclosure should extend to, whether that be to disclose their dyslexia on campus, or if they wanted their course lecturers to know about their dyslexia, but not their peers. “It is important to acknowledge that disabled students are not a homogenous group, they will be motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic goals" (Adefila *et al,* 2020:5) and taken these into consideration are essential when students have dyslexia.

> "There's good and bad. It's definitely affected me I would say more on the negative way, but then I try to be somewhat positive and be like, it's who I am. I wouldn't have the drive and the ambition. I might not have gotten my degree. So, to be thankful for that aspect of it" (Kitty Kat).
>
> "But I also think we do have to confront the horrible things like I think I speak to people sometimes and they say 'Oh the gift of dyslexia' and this big gift thing and it annoys me because you can be gifted in playing the piano and not have any downsides, a gift is something that has no drawbacks, you know and dyslexia has lots of brilliant, brilliant things and you are all these things and I have loads of great things that I have, and I wouldn't take my dyslexia away but I also have days where I can't read a line in front of me and that's scary and it's horrible. How do you get over that" (Winehouse).

When my participants engaged with visualisation, goal setting and developed motivational techniques, we have seen how it helped with both human motivation and flourishing, alongside motivations to achieve in their studies and gain success in one's academic course.

This piece challenged the participants to engage in deep thought about their dyslexia and ownership of the difference, plus engaging with the notions of visualisation, goal setting and motivation. One of the goals of this thesis was to identify how dyslexia can be a different way of learning as opposed to a life limiting disability and to highlight how not just in spite of their dyslexia, but in partnership with their dyslexia, my research participants succeeded. Famous people with dyslexia and what they are famous for, helps to dispel the myths around dyslexia, ability, and intelligence, and opposes notions that dyslexia can be the 'Elephant in the room'. However, this can be a demotivator at times, as opposed to a motivator as Winehouse explains: "My mam and teachers and everyone would point out famous dyslexic people to you and they were all creative or artistic and stuff and I honestly would regularly be like I'm going to wake up one day and the thing I have, the talent whatever or whatever it is, is going to be there, just wake up and it'll be there" (Winehouse) or Keith who states: "I was always waiting [to be able] to bang out a Picasso like De Vinci" (Keith).

According to Leshota and Sefotho "culture shapes us into who we are, and we, in turn, constructs culture" (Leshota & Sefotho, 2020:4). Therefore, disability is a culturally mediated category, whereby the meanings of the disability are shaped by the norms of the culture in which they exist. It also highlights the need for people with dyslexia to move away from the barriers discussed in this chapter and embrace new and emerging approaches such as a neurodiverse approach, which this research is advocating for. Failure to adopt this positive framework, will allow for third-level education institutions to persist with an ableist framework. This ableist framework I will argue, leads to barriers for students with dyslexia in third-level education and initiates ordeals of language, voice suppression and thus, academic imprisonment.

## Chapter 5: Telling, Discussing and Identifying with Dyslexia

### *Telling*

> I think disclosure is when you disclose, when you are in a very vulnerable position, because you've took your whole like armour away and you spend your whole life, I found, having dyslexia, I found I spent my whole life building the armour up, the protection all around me and then all of a sudden for me to disclose you're nearly naked, in the middle of the college, that's a very difficult position to put yourself in. (Smithwicks)

Disclosure is a moment or action of making new or secret information known and is often when people ‘disclose’ something which they may be ashamed of or have kept secret for a period until an event force’s them to disclose or they “feel obliged to open up about it” (Brown & Leigh, 2018:982). After their dyslexia was exposed, my research participants expressed that quite often their achievements became a part of or because of their dyslexia, which invoked shame, and enabled internalised and externalised ableism. However, this again highlighted how this moment above can invoke freedom, resilience, and the forming of new personhood, through disclosing and acceptance of their dyslexia. Joy was born in South Africa and discovered she had dyslexia at secondary school in her homeland and reported very negative reactions when she disclosed her dyslexia to people there. This reaction of people who knew about her disability in South Africa prevented her from disclosing her dyslexia when she returned to education in Ireland.

Several research participants also reported encountering struggles within groupwork sessions around comprehending tasks and articulating the information they needed to impart. They chose not to tell anyone about their dyslexia for fear of "people judging them for having it" (Anne) and the shame of "oh she has dyslexia, she's very bad and she's stupid" (Joy). A lot of the participants were cautious about revealing their dyslexia status and did not state it as a fact, instead choosing to reveal snippets of it: "I wouldn't refer to me-self as having trouble with it, so you mask it a little bit, it's almost kind of giving a little bit out there so people don't look at me and think, yeah, yeah" (Smithwicks). As a result of earlier experiences around telling, students with dyslexia can either delay or prevent themselves from disclosing their dyslexia, which according to Anderson, Carter, and Stephenson (2018), results in an even poorer university experience.

For my research participants it became a drip-feed disclosure on a need-to-know basis; preferring to take ownership of their dyslexia themselves. At times the participants manifested this as an internalised weakness and took ownership of dyslexia before others could judge them, always being cautious not to show their dyslexia to anyone they might not have wanted to know about their dyslexia.

> Because rather than them telling you, you're telling them you know, so it's like a half disclosure - yeah - you don't disclose fully but you disclose a little bit and then if that's not working for you, you might disclose a little bit more - yeah - so until eventually, you have to say the whole thing. (Smithwicks)

The research participants also spoke about how disclosure can be forced upon you through the need to access supports and several of my participants explained how teaching staff would suggest those with disabilities should 'come and see them' after class. Issues arose for many of my participants around managing the manoeuvres incorporating disclosure in their institutions. Joy was uneasy about approaching her lecturers to disclose as they were asked to present in a very public way which she felt left herself completely exposed: “Because even as the lecturers say those who have dyslexia can come for a word in private, but it was so hard for me to present myself because of how I felt, maybe it was the fear, maybe it was the low esteem, maybe it was my confidence I couldn’t tell anyone” (Joy). Consequently, through the disclosing process, students with dyslexia are forced to continuously “re-format and re-evaluate their notion of the private and the public” (Manderson *et al*, 2015:183).

Ms Winehouse, The General and The Driver all spoke about having no issue with disclosing their dyslexia during their time in third level education. However, their experiences of the workplace were quite different and highlights the disclosing issue is not confined to education alone: “I remember I got a call from quite a prestigious Dublin law firm actually; I had disclosed, and she was just the most patronising person I'd ever come across, she was just short of being like, now you did this Degree, now aren't you a great girl, getting this far” (Winehouse). The General agreed with this when he disclosed his dyslexia to work colleagues and their reaction was quite negative and he stated: “like I do feel that they probably view it as an excuse, you know, so I am probably not going to bring it up again, yeah, I probably won’t do that again”. The Driver explained he never had any issues disclosing his dyslexia in the educational world however, it was not disclosed in his working world until he deemed it necessary: "But I think in the employment world, I would be more agile, so, during the application process, I said no" (The Driver).

According to Boxall *et al,* (2010) and Brown and Leigh (2018), students with dyslexia may be nervous about how their peers and lecturers may perceive their dyslexia. There is evidence that dyslexia can be viewed negatively within third level education and according to Hiscock and Leigh (2020), people within academia are less likely to disclose their dyslexia than people in the general population. "Even discussing with other people that you have dyslexia it would be so difficult to even tell a friend of yours that you have dyslexia because of the experiences [in school] which you have gone through" (Joy). Several of my research participants expressed similar issues that influenced their decisions for disclosing or not disclosing as they also found that a certain attitude towards their dyslexia still exists among certain lecturers and their peers (Byrne, 2018). Research from AHEAD (2019) suggested students with dyslexia were less likely to report a positive attitude with their institutions or a positive relationship with their faculty lecturers and department. The interpersonal and cultural politics of disclosure are important within the field of education where it is becoming relevant for students with dyslexia to disclose their intimate physiological diagnosis to avail of supports within their third level institutions. My research participants also described the difficulty in having their dyslexia accepted upon disclosure due to cultural perceptions of dyslexia being viewed as a mental deformity and/or an excuse to get extra help or exemptions. Upon disclosure a negative cultural perception can develop which in turn initiates internalised ableism (McRuer, 2012 & Mueller, 2019). “People in my secondary school they would be like why aren't you doing Irish, and I would go because I'm dyslexic and they would say oh you're stupid and all this” (Anne). Smithwicks also discusses these perceptions around when you disclose and how they can leave you with the feeling of being stupid and how internalising this feeling acts as a self-imposed barrier and self-identification label. “Well, I think I 100 percent, I should have told people that I had it, but I think I have made myself look more stupid as I've gone the whole year without telling anyone” (Anne). However, Joy likens disclosing as a form of oppression or academic imprisonment: “But that is what happens, absolutely you get pushed down so much it is nearly like a type of oppression because you are oppressed, and you are put down or dumb or stupid or something” (Joy).

Students with dyslexia will receive accommodations in their educational institutions only if they disclose their disability (Keenan *et al,* 2019). Nonetheless, many of my research participants failed to disclose their dyslexia as they often lack the self-awareness, self-advocacy skills, or self-confidence to tell others about their disability in order that they can receive supports to successfully navigate their new environment. My participants discussed the fact that having dyslexia and due to it not been visible, can make “it easier for these students to be treated normally” (Mullins and Preyde, 2013:147). “I dunno, but I know they're not going to, I just feel like they will, I just think people will look at me differently” (Anne). Manderson, *et al* (2015) likened this to ‘strategic telling’ whereby disclosing becomes a performative act, “comprising or informing a personal narrative, conveying a secret does not simply reveal what was hidden; it reveals the politics behind it” (2015:182).

There can be psychological and emotional benefits for students with dyslexia disclosing to peers, lecturers, and support services. AIB would advise any student starting college with dyslexia to bring this fact to the attention of the access office immediately to avail of all the supports. However, the rewards associated with disclosing dyslexia have often been in the form of extra time in exams and certain extra supports nonetheless: revealing these things can sometimes have consequences within your social groups. All that said, the consequences of disclosing can be positive in the form of accommodations and support both from the institutions and your social groups and families. When AIB decided to inform people of her dyslexia she made: “significant growth in social self-esteem, followed by academic self-esteem, and engaging available supports during third-level education helped [her] develop ever higher self-esteem”. Mullins and Preyde (2013) state that although there are several accommodations available to students with dyslexia, there are also “several barriers to accessing services” (:148). Many of these were highlighted by my research participants in the form of a lack of funds, access to experienced staff, and procedures for disclosing your dyslexia, or the processes around identifying students with dyslexia and "the attitudes of faculty and staff towards students with disabilities" (Mullins & Pryde, 2013; Byrne, 2018).

Several of my research participants chose not to disclose and to navigate third level education as a 'normal' student. However, acting 'normal' does not make the invisible disability disappear; moreover, it presents difficulties, complications, and implications when one constantly attempts to conceal dyslexia. This developed from a learned cultural perception of what dyslexia meant during my research participants experiences of navigating life with dyslexia. Cambell (2009) suggests we are pressured externally into "being perfect and meeting specific criteria, a particular kind of self and body" (:5) and this can create a reluctance to disclose anything which may be perceived as not matching this persona. Several of my participants reported that during their schooling, people with reading and writing difficulties were viewed as less intelligent and/or 'stupid', 'dumb' or 'thick'.

As my research participants discussed, it is vital that third level educational institutions provide pathways to encourage students to disclose their dyslexia, assess the learning needs that suit them and put in place the relevant support mechanisms (Taylor *et al,* 2016; DuPaul *et al,* 2017b). Winehouse says she feels there is a "certain amount of privilege and responsibility on those of us who have gone through third level education to fight the fight for those with dyslexia, highlight the challenges faced by students with dyslexia and help future students to overcome these challenges". The research participants' experiences of disclosing their dyslexia, then being given labels, and the impact of this and how they experienced the discourse around dyslexia will be examined in the following sections.

### *Discussing*

> I spoke to this person and had this conversation and that person said. Well, I always kind of looked on myself as having dyslexia, but now since starting' talking to you I actually think I am dyslexic because, and it was a fabulous point I thought. dyslexia impacts on every single thing I do in life, it's there all the time, talking writing reading, finding my way around, going to different places. dyslexia is in everything I do, yeah, so actually I am dyslexic. (Winehouse)

Discourse is the exchange of ideas through conversation and widely used within academia between professors/lecturers and their students. For my research participants, the word 'discourse' also refers to sets of received ideas, authoritative attitudes, knowledge constructs, labels and identity categories, which can suppress voices, and aid in the construction of cultural perceptions around the term 'dyslexia'. "I grew up not thinking that I was stupid, but I was never thinking I was as clever as anybody else" (Winehouse). When my research participants were taken out of classes for supports and then returned to class, negative discourse was often bandied around from their peers, often exposing the students with dyslexia to negative comments, slagging, and that 'word in the ear', such as stupid, thick, dumb, (to name but some), which remains with the student and its impacts are felt throughout their educational journey. That word is often spoken by their peers or lecturers however, the impacts of the discourse can remain with the student with dyslexia as a barrier within their educational experience. Andrews (2016) suggests that the earliest models of disability, the moral and medical models, were both associated with negative and dehumanising language: "Despite the evolution of terminology and advocacy efforts to avoid dehumanizing language, the general public and media continue to perpetuate negativistic vocabulary" (Andrews *et al*, 2019:112).

Dyslexia can be described as a neurodiverse difference (Clouder *et al,* 2020) but the discourse surrounding dyslexia can often become ambiguous due to a lack of understanding of what dyslexia is. My research participants discussed how the discourse they encountered while attending formal school was constructed around what Cameron and Billington (2017) describe as loaded and confusing: "If ever anyone has got dyslexia, they kind of look at them as if they are stupid, they look at them like they can't think" (Joy). When The Driver was in school, he also mentioned how the discourse and culture around dyslexia was nearly always a negative; "For me, in terms of when I was growing up, it was looked upon as being stupid" (The Driver). Research by Bone (2017) described how discourse is used in terms of constructions of able-bodiedness as opposed to acceptance of difference. Ali remembers being "like stupid, people always said I was stupid" and The General gave us a small insight into how he experienced dyslexia at school: "When I was growing up in school, teachers just said that I was stupid". Many informants remembered negative discourse and being called or [felt] stupid by teachers and peers.

Many of my participants internalised this discourse and unconsciously carried the effects into third level education. Nevertheless, these experiences helped the participants to develop and build resilience alongside a positive attitude towards their dyslexia and to engage in a more positive discourse also. Heffo observed how the discourse around her dyslexia always appeared as negative until her diagnosis, which was similar to a 'light bulb' moment. When she switched the discourse from negative to positive, it gave her the legitimacy to rethink her own 'self', she stated: "like I have a reason, like I'm not so stupid" (Heffo). For my research participants, positive discursive associations to their diagnosis of dyslexia were vital in legitimising dyslexia for them and helping to assist educators in understanding the effects of the discourse around dyslexia (Protopapas and Parrila, 2018). This also highlights the emotions that can connect to discourse through the experiences of my participants and aligns with what Clarke and Dirkx (2009) found: "The complexity of our relationships between our psyche, our body and the social and cultural contexts that shape and form the lives of learners" (:89). This can also encourage and help the participants understand this experience, which can allow them to own and integrate these feelings and emotions.

For this research project, The Ethical Approval Committee changed my application from level 1 to level 3, which incorporates research with ‘vulnerable’ people. I challenged this change, as not one of my research participants uses dyslexia and vulnerability in the same discourse. This then invoked unconscious thoughts and memories of external ablism to arise, which assumes dyslexia is inherently abnormal (Campbell, 2009). Such grading and levels of assumption could be interpreted as discrimination based on ability (Bonaccio; Connelly; Gellatly; Jetha & Martin, 2020). Winehouse commented after her encounter with the consent form: “I imagine it's hard for you to get a rapport after that cause they are a bit on guard” (Winehouse). The discourse around people with dyslexia and the use of terminology such as ‘vulnerable’, caused some concern to my research participants. Nonetheless, it is a step away from the discourse of the previous century where people with dyslexia were often termed ‘idiots’ and ‘morons’ (Rose, 1985). It is also a move away from some of the discourses and words used to describe my research participants dyslexia during their formal schooling experiences using the ‘dumb’ or ‘stupid’ discourse.

Although it is culturally and socially acceptable to have a diagnosis of dyslexia it does not appear to lead to a smoother or more positive learning experience, (Cameron & Billington, 2010; AHEAD, 2017; Byrne, 2018 & Moojen *et al*, 2020). Many people and students with dyslexia lead full lives and achieve high outcomes in universities: however, their experiences of third level education can be shaped by how they engage and converse around the discourse they encounter around their dyslexia.

We witnessed in an earlier chapter how the discourse around identity language, person first language and identity first language, can influence internal and external ablism. This also highlighted how the discourse of dyslexia, for my research participants, centered on how the discourse labels a person with dyslexia and how those people with dyslexia identified with their dyslexia. Terminology and labels should be used sensitively and acceptable to those involved in daily discourse and it is a responsibility of all to learn these skills to create a more diverse discourse (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). The participants in this research use both person first language and identity first language in self-determination and daily use, highlighting our need to be diverse when conversing about dyslexia. Using this identity language, a picture emerged of my participants, labelled, yet still finding their way through third-level education by immersing themselves in discourse to justify their choice as to how they self-identify; in that, do they describe themselves as having dyslexia or being dyslexic? The impacts of this are also examined in the chapter titled, 'The Self, Dyslexia and Education'.

I link this concept of other people using language about one's dyslexia to what Usher and Perez (2014), suggest as the analysis "of 'interpretive repertoires' or 'discourses', sets of statements that reflect shared patterns of meaning" (:219). This idea examines conversational analysis and practices of how individuals use everyday conversation to construct a common-sense view of the world. Focusing on the action orientation of talk and text in social practice: ‘what is the text doing’, rather than ‘what does the text mean’ or ‘what is the text saying’? (Potter, 2012). A fascinating interaction then occurs between the person (other) speaking with authority about [you] having dyslexia or being dyslexic and the receiver [you] of this information being the only person with the authority to speak on the subject. Witnessing this social interaction through discourse between an expert on dyslexia (the person who has dyslexia) and a perceived expert (the person who does not have dyslexia), takes the form of how language can be managed, and also shows us “what people can do with language” (Potter, 2004:203).

This type of discourse can often strip a person of their individual set of ideas around their diagnosis and instead inflict a set of statements and an array of subject positions on the student with dyslexia. These can then become “a product of social factors, of powers and processes, rather than an individual’s set of ideas” (Hallway, 1983:231), unless the student adopts a more neurodiverse approach to the discourse around dyslexia. This can be understood better when AIB speaks of how she defines her dyslexia now as opposed to previously and how she ‘plays’ with language and highlights through her educational journey, how her discourse around dyslexia has shifted to a more person first language form:

> I think after college I am kind of more inclined to say a person with Dyslexia because of what we have learned in college, person first so I would be more inclined to think that way you know and as well I'm not like ashamed of it now so I kind of see it in more of a positive way, yeah cause I would have seen it as like, a bit issue like I say to myself that it doesn't necessarily hold me back. (AIB)

My research participants also deemed discourse as constitutive of social life with the power to establish or organise day-to-day events, which can often lead to expert positions within the discourse being formed. They can then situate themselves as the ‘expert’ doing the labelling and the person with the diagnosis becoming the ‘patient’ and the object of their expertise. The Driver recognised how this social interaction works and how discourse can influence situations and therefore, positions himself as an expert on this matter too: “I know the power of words. So, I am very aware of that sort of thing” (The Driver). My research participants differed in their opinions on how the discourse is used, and how words create positions in conversations and everyday ‘speak’. This also foreground how discourse can shift people’s positions and influence conversations with respect to the question of person first language versus identity first language debate within the field of disability. “Oh, I’m a person with dyslexia” (Heffo); and so much more”. “I actually think I am dyslexic” (Winehouse); “I am more inclined to say a person with Dyslexia” (AIB).

We have witnessed the emotional effects or ‘scars’ of discourse which can influence a student with dyslexia’s third level education experience/s, and this tends to be sometimes misunderstood in third level institutions. This can then impact on the self, self-esteem, self-concept, academic performance and how students with dyslexia construct their self-perception in third level education. Most participants had some negative experiences around their dyslexia and discourse in mainstream education, with both peers' and teachers who had limited knowledge of dyslexia. The General ('thick'), Heffo ('stupid table'), Summertime ('not as good as others'), Joy ('stupid'), and most of my research participants have spoken about how certain teachers had caused issues for them either through an educator's lack of understanding of dyslexia or their embedded beliefs around it. Educators are often recognised as significant others who contribute to a student's self, either positively or negatively and this highlights how a person of influence (a teacher) or a peer's (fellow student) use of discourse can impact on someone with dyslexia's educational experience.

Today, we have a clearer knowledge of dyslexia and better training in awareness of dyslexia in an educational context (Collinson & Penketh, 2013). Research from Kishore *et al,* (2020) has concluded that happiness can be thought of in the way we act or what we do and how we think in relative terms to it (:4870). Consequently, when the research participants experienced positive discourse at university, it usually correlated with 'happiness' and high self-esteem. This also involved reflection and looking within themselves for the real value of life to seek happiness, self-fulfilment and be successful in their studies. Or perhaps we should adopt the positive approach of Alex who stated she is "happily skipping along through life, never contemplating that I had any difficulty with learning". To understand discourse and power clearer, McHoul & Grace (2003) suggest exploring a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as an approach.

Besides focusing on the meaning of a given discourse, the distinguishing characteristic of this approach is its stress on power relationships according to Magalhaes and Sanches (2010). This is then concerned mainly with the interactions of the three variables, namely Discourse, Power, and the Subject. As referred to in an earlier piece, using this concept, the discourse is the ‘dyslexic talk’, the power is the hold the ‘dyslexic talk’ has over my research participants and the impact on self and building self-belief and the Subject(s), being the research informants. We witness in this findings section how these three variables can also be expressed through language and behaviour, and the relationship between language and power. This surfaces regularly when we witness how the discourse influences how my participants behave in certain educational and social interactions while in their level education institutions. It is also evident how over time, the power of the language used in certain interactions in education retains its hold over my research participants.

My participants expressed how this discourse boxed them into sub-cultural student groups where having dyslexia was a member requirement. This leads to discourse around the underlying identifiers of dyslexia like bad short-term memory recall, struggle with academic theories and language, pressure in tutorials and lectures, which in turn feeds into the discursive conversations on these students’ academic abilities. The power aspect surfaces through how the discourse impacts on one’s ‘self’, self-esteem, and confidence. Anne (one of the ‘subjects) explained how the discourse around dyslexia in her university made her fear telling anyone in case it "made myself look more stupid" (Anne). The General described how he protected his 'self', "what I did in school was I made myself invisible". Joy's confidence was affected through discourse because "you never even felt confident to say listen, guys, I'm dyslexic".

Despite nearly 25 years between Riddick's (1996) work and my research, the results are surprisingly similar. Consequently, this infers that the discourse around dyslexia and in third level education has remained almost static indicating that change is very slow. Riddick (1996) in his research found that most students experienced feelings of being "disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, fed up, sad, depressed, angry and embarrassed by their difficulties" (1996:129). This corresponds with my research, 25 years later. The slow implementation of change also: "highlights the role of politics, including powerful ideological discourse and its strategic deployment by powerful actors" (Barlow & Thow, 2021:2).

As chunks of speech, cliches and pre-formulated concepts, discourses can be powerful and, although often used habitually, can contain ideological pre-suppositions and unexamined biases. This research finding has highlighted and argued that discourses can add labels and identities, cause victims to suppress their voices, impact self-confidence and self-esteem, impede learning, and aid in the construction of negative cultural perceptions around dyslexia. The participants also explained how the discourse around dyslexia often caused them to suppress their voices and the lack of self-belief also affects them participating fully in lectures and tutorials. Nonetheless, the research has also shown that although dyslexia can become embroiled in this negative discourse and it can have everlasting affects, it also enables one to develop, build and incorporate resilience.

Discourse was also used by my participants to construct their own identity and advocate to build a new positive cultural perception of dyslexia. Although discourse can stain, label, attach meaning and suppress the voices of those affected (Basso, 2009), when my participants adopted a growth mindset and used a neurodiverse approach, any internalised negatives were overturned to incorporate and develop resistance to this discourse.

### *Identifying/Identified*

> So, I don't know if I have this ingrown thing that I think being dyslexic is awful, to be honest with you I think em you're a dyslexic person is very degrading. I've loads of other things going on, it's a characteristic of yourself it's not em it’s not being given this title, it's a characteristic, just a part of ye only a piece of you, it's not the whole you. Dyslexic, it's like the way people used to say so and so is a retard, well actually on paper you are retarded, in certain areas, you feel like you are going to get a stamp on your head going bang, retarded, labelled for life! (Summertime)

The theme of identity recurs in this thesis and identity refers to either an individual or social category, defined by membership rules and characteristics attributes and behaviours. My research participants reported through discourse and disclosing dyslexia, they became labelled as belonging to a social category which often has links to negative connotations. Caskey, Innes, and Lovell (2018:78) found that challenges are experienced by adult students in both social and educational contexts who identify as having dyslexia. Identity can be viewed as, who a person is and the qualities and characteristics of a person or group that make them different from others (Cambridge, 2020). There are three identities connected to having dyslexia according to de Hass (2020). One group identify as being differently enabled and focus on strengths, advantages and the ‘superpowers’ that having can dyslexia bring. The next group tend to identify as being disabled and view their dyslexia mainly as a limitation. Lastly, there is a group of dyslexics that sees themselves as socially disabled. These people would probably identify with the social model of disability and movements like Neurodiversity (de Hass, 2020). Alongside my research, this group are advocating for and creating awareness that the combination of barriers in society and individual attitudes create a disabling experience, particularly in education.

If a student with dyslexia identifies with the negative characteristics of dyslexia, it can often lead to internalised ableism (Martin, 2012). However, if a student with dyslexia embraces the dyslexia label, builds resilience and coping strategies, and uses a neurodiverse model (Robertson, 2008; Griffin & Pollach, 2012; Clouder *er al.,*2020), third level education can be a better experience. Identities are formed and developed through individual dynamics, social environments, and historical development and this links in with how social interactions and relationships are crucial in the development and growth of human beings and being human (Tracy, 2016).

When one attends a third level educational institution and identifies as a student, it is accepted that you possess certain characteristics to be an academic and thus when performing this act, the student will require that others who observe: “take seriously the impression that is fostered before them” (Goffman, 1952:10). It this is a negative impression because of one’s dyslexia, then the student can often be identified as less of an academic than a student without dyslexia. For a student with dyslexia, this negative identity can then become a stumbling block of having dyslexia in third level education. These educational and societal interactions drive the development of beliefs of the self within one’s lecture and tutorial groups. This can then create conflict within the self, whereby one needs to decide whether to risk exposing a lack of characteristics that identify students as being an academic or suppress your voice, which leads to a vicissitude (Carrithers, 2009).

Identifying as a person with dyslexia is made harder with the lack of a ‘set’ group to align with or any collective group formed by other members with dyslexia which can then cause internal conflict and develop feelings of not belonging. Belongingness is the human emotional that develops through a need to be an accepted member of a family and/or group of people, similar to you. “Whether it is family, friends, co-workers, a religion, or something else, people tend to have an 'inherent' desire to belong and be an important part of something greater than themselves” (Allen, 2020:5). Such aspirations strengthen the need for students with dyslexia to view dyslexia beyond ableism, develop growth mindsets and use a more neurodiverse model to identify more positively with dyslexia. When this new outlook is adopted, it helps to successfully develop psychological strengths (Ryan & Deci, 2020) to help achieve success, alter one's identity to incorporate this strength to deal with new setbacks and challenges, arising from new interactions and experiences with others. This can help to develop or hinder a cohesive sense of self because of these interactions (Opila, 2019). A person with dyslexia being unable to perform academic tasks in what education and societies perceive to be the 'correct way', impacts on his or her educational experiences and can have a negative impact on self-identity in third level education. "I think we are trying to whitewash struggle a lot now and we don't want to tell parents that their kids will struggle" (Winehouse).

Waxman suggests (1992) that acceptance of one's identity builds a refusal and fosters the resilience not to stay in that disabled place (Waxman, 1992:7). Neurodiversity is advocating and attempting to change the culture and societal perspectives of identities which once labelled people who have disabilities with such terms as 'disabled,' 'impaired,' 'incapacitated,' 'retarded', 'limited', to name just some of the negative labels used throughout history and can still today be a factor in the lives of those living with a disability. Using a more neurodiverse model (Clouder *et al,* 2020) to identify with dyslexia will identify any negative effects, challenge historical and traditional views on disability and engage in transformation (Ellis *et al*, 2018). People with disabilities have a unique worldview expressly because of their disabilities and acknowledge disability as a natural part of their human experience. “I think it's more so cause a lot of people try and I think hide it whereas I got to the point where I almost make it known” (Smithwicks). Therefore, Hanebutt and Mueller (2021) suggest that we need to “allow for a more critical and expansive look at disability as an aspect of identity and culture” (:5). My research participants identified the portrayal of their personal strengths, skills, and alternative learning strategies, which underpinned a neurodiverse or difference perspective of dyslexia as opposed to a ‘disorder’ approach (Griffin & Pollak, 2012). Consequently, my participants felt that although they may learn differently, their dyslexia is only a part of their identity.

Accepting dyslexia as a part of one’s identity is a huge step in moving forward both in your personal and social life. It will also help to foster a healthier relationship between one’s identity and the institution one has attended or is currently attending. My research participants showed that when you are accepting of your dyslexia and identify dyslexia as being intrinsic to your makeup and an essential and absolute part of your ‘self’ and ‘being’, it can lead to a more positive educational experience. My research participants identify with having dyslexia, however, revealing this identity depends on whether they are in the public or private domain and to whom they are disclosing. This allows my participants to have control over who knows and thus their identity is not framed solely in terms of dyslexia: “I would really strongly identify with it [dyslexia] because I think it shapes a lot of who I am, it shapes a lot of how I think, obviously how I learn” (The General). The Driver suggests that in his experience his identity is being framed solely by his dyslexia and he feels he is pigeon-holed in education because of this identity: “I've got lots of different parts and one of them parts is dyslexia, so it's like that's all I am, I'm pigeonholed as dyslexic and that's how they [his university] identify me” (The Driver).

Labels such as dyslexia can identify one as ‘abnormal’ and this can be hard to embrace positively as something to apply to oneself. We need to develop inclusive and neurodiverse friendly spaces for “revamping, experimenting, rejecting and adopting terminology which is utilised to create identities” (Goodley, 2003:120). Internal ableism and cultural perceptions of when one identifies with dyslexia need to be resisted and changed. Even those who are diagnosed with dyslexia can internalise ableism and use language that identifies dyslexia as a negative label. Nonetheless, when we allow and support negative labelling, it can contribute to a form of oppression for people with dyslexia and assist in maintaining certain existing inequalities.

The literature and my research participants’ experiences provides evidence that identifying as having dyslexia can contribute to a “marginalised identity and can manifest as stigma associated with the identity” (Evans, 2013:362). When a student identifies with dyslexia, alongside some of the issues around the difficulties associated with dyslexia, it can impact on their learning experiences, due to the lack of awareness of dyslexia. Nonetheless, when one identifies with the many famous people who identify as having dyslexia, it can help students with dyslexia to identify with the positive aspects of the difficulty and allows my research participants to aspire to be or do anything they want. As Ms Winehouse explains: “My mam and teachers and everyone would point out famous Dyslexic people to you about how they were all creative or artistic and stuff” (Winehouse).

Even in today's ‘informed’ society, we are still lacking awareness around dyslexia, its causes, and effects and it can often be portrayed as a problem with intellect as opposed to a neurodiverse difference. Macdonald (2009); Ellis *et al.,* (2019) and Nieminen (2021); have shown that some academics in the UK and USA have dismissed the validity of the impairment as a stand-alone impairment. Institutions and educational departments term students with dyslexia vulnerable however, these types of labelling and identities are unhelpful and can impact on my participants third level educational experience. Reid questions if we can even: “Encapsulate the features and feelings that accompany dyslexia in a single statement” (2016:2). AHEAD (2021) found that most people with a hidden disability had a negative view of the labels and identities attributed to their dyslexia. “I always associate myself as being a bit stupid, but that's just my schooling you know (Summertime).

Colella, (2001); Paetzold *et al*., (2008) and Miciak and Flecther (2020); discuss how other people can make assumptions on people with dyslexia and how others might assume the person is only trying to gain special privileges: “People with disabilities are often labelled ‘The Other,’ somehow separate from people who are not considered to have disabilities”

(Cunningham, 2009:100). Students who have dyslexia often experience high levels of frustration and poor performance on their educational experiences however, the teacher can often identify that the student is just low in academic ability and this label follows them throughout their educational journey. Nonetheless, this can be a very unstable piece of ground to stand on, the ground of how people with dyslexia manage their identities across all their educational, social and employment situations to avoid any negative connotations from this identity.

It is imperative, however, that recognition and awareness of the unique challenges related to dyslexia are highlighted and raise awareness of the effects that these negative identities can have on students with dyslexia. Students with dyslexia in third level education experience challenges their peers, lecturers, academic administration staff and leaders may find difficult to understand. In addition, people with dyslexia face negative identities and labels which contribute to internal barriers and internal conflict daily as they navigate the educational space in pursuit of furthering their personal and professional self, often burdened by these identities: "I don't think that I'm particularly embarrassed about it now, like it's never anything to be ashamed of or wouldn't be [like a burden]. It's something you should be proud of yourself" (Heffo). The General just used techniques to avoid being labelled or even being identified with dyslexia in the class. He spoke about how he learned how to just blend in. "No one missed me when I wasn't there. I missed school for days and no one even missed me"

(The General). Consequently, reiterating how dyslexia can sometimes still remain invisible to university staff and re-enforce these outdated attitudes and identities which can still prevail within third level education institutions today (Byrne, 2018).

Another issue around having to identify that you have dyslexia, which my participants stated caused untold worry and anxiety for them, was being asked by lecturers to approach them after lectures in very public spaces to inform them of their dyslexia, which put the students in an uncomfortable position. This telling can have effects on the self and implications with one's educators and peers and can lead to further anxiety-ridden scenarios while in education. All my research participants who had support during their education exhibited a negative attitude of the supports they experienced: "No one ever said anything but, you felt it, it was the way people viewed it if that makes sense, I heard people say oh AIB is in a special room for their exams like it is made easier for that person, so I think that was a bit of stigma there" (AIB). They talked about the supports being senseless, useless, and identifying you as different which tied you into a social identity and cultural perception of what you and dyslexia are.

One of the accommodations granted to students with dyslexia is extra time in exams and the use of smaller rooms to complete those exams. Winehouse and Smithwicks spoke about how the smaller room scenario identified them as different and brought unwelcome enquiries from their close peer groups. They also explained how they developed little sub-cultural groups of the disabled who identified with new friends from these rooms: "I'd see other people from the smaller rooms on the campus and nod, as if we knew what was going on" (Alex). This can also create what Riddell and Warson (2003) term as 'social discomfort' and Smithwicks informs us how those students who attend the smaller rooms often identify with each other outside of the exam room: "We would see each on the campus…the special room gang" (Smithwicks). In line with research on university-based samples conducted by Collins, Azmat & Rentschler (2019), whose study highlighted that their participants experienced low self-esteem, and a diminished academic self-concept and this notion is found and highlighted in my research also. This correlates with my research which also found that this can be as a result of "continuing misconceptions and negative connotations surrounding the label of dyslexia" (Collins, Azmat & Rentschler, 2019:1480).

To finish on a positive note however, Winehouse explains how education gave her a 'shield' and the skills to resist negative identities:

> I think that I could have very easily have been someone who was completely ignored and completely robbed of their opportunities by a system which does not support them, and I could be also afraid to tell people that I am dyslexic because the horror of being [identified] thought of as stupid, but I don't have to worry about that cause education gave me a shield. (Winehouse)

My research also shows through the experiences and narratives of my research participants that when they accepted dyslexia and adopted a more neurodiverse model it helped them to form their own 'shield' and make the most of the opportunities they were presented to them on their third level education journey.

# Chapter 6: The Self, Dyslexia and Education

For most students who enter third level education, “there has likely been a history of difficulty with learning beginning with childhood, and may include struggles with reading, writing, and spelling as well as negative emotional experiences” (Nalavany, Logan & Carawan, 2018:18). A host of emotions were used by my research participants to describe their educational experiences with dyslexia including disappointment, frustration, embarrassment, shame, sadness, depression, anger, and low self-esteem (Glazzard, 2010). “You lose your self-esteem; your self-esteem becomes so low because you lose interest in going to school” (Joy). Emotional states such as enthusiasm and anxiety also influence self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997:106) and despite being well qualified, if inhibiting personal emotional factors come into play, they can impact on students with dyslexia’s idea of their self (Nalavany, Logan & Carawan, 2018:18). The self can be explained as that set of characteristics, such as personality and ability, that are not physical and make that person different from other people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Therefore, self-efficacy can be a student’s perception of their capability to perform in a given setting (O’Brien, 2020) such as third level education. Self-concept can be the idea of the’ self’ which is constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others, whereby self-esteem is often regarded as “a measure of how far an individual’s perceived self-image lives up to their ideal self” (O’Brien, 2020:3).

These concepts are all used interchangeably by my research participants to construct their idea and their view of the self in third level education. These can all impact both positively or negatively on the educational journey of students with dyslexia, their self-confidence to perform certain academic tasks in education, self-esteem or how individuals feel about themselves and can also influence motivation and ability to engage in and execute specific activities. If students have a high opinion of their self, they are more likely to expect that they will succeed at third level education. However, "if they have a low level of self-efficacy pertaining to a particular task, they will not believe they can be successful and may not try or they may approach the task with anxiety" (Nalavany, Logan & Carawan, 2018:22). "What is the point, I can't do this you know it just doesn't work for me" (The General). My participants views and construct of the self were often not based on actual performance but upon perceived performance. Nalavany *et al,* (2018) also suggest that "opportunities for personal mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, encouragement from peers, and 'affective' or emotional states" (:23) can all influence this construct of self and impact on their experiences in third level education. Negative messages from those who are respected or in authority can lead to anxiety and can result in poorer performances thus, reinforcing low opinions of the self.

The impact on the self is a theme which emerged in my research, as were affective factors such as self-esteem and self-concept and how they relate to students with dyslexia and the relationship between “dyslexia and socio-emotional issues” (Riddick, 2010:37). Socio-emotional in the context of my research relates to a student with dyslexia initiating, cultivating, and responding to teaching staff and their peers in order to form relationships with them (O’Brien, 2020), be they ephemeral or long-standing while in third level education. According to O’Brien (2020), self-efficacy is the level of confidence one experiences when completing a particular task whereas self-esteem is often regarded as “a measure of how far an individual’s perceived self-image lives up to their ideal self” (:3). Humprey (2002) found that much of the research in education highlights the fact that students with dyslexia often view themselves in a negative way, resulting in lower levels of self-esteem and self-concept.

Research from Glazzard (2010); Armstrong and Humphreys (2012) and O’Brien (2019), also suggests that these affective factors relate to students with dyslexia and very often impacts on their well-being. “It’s the confidence thing” states Joy, where having dyslexia can knock your confidence (McCullagh, 2019) and at times you are not sure how much of it is you letting yourself down versus the dyslexia ‘thing’. My research alongside the findings cited above, found the specific characteristics associated with having dyslexia are not fully understood or addressed in third level education. Novita (2016) examined the impact of dyslexia on well-being in an educational setting with students who had and did not have dyslexia and also found that there was a correlation “between lower levels of self-esteem and self-concept in the group with dyslexia as compared with classmates without dyslexia" (Novita, 2016:281). "I found even with exams like not only do I have the stress of the exam and stuff but then I'd be stressed out about the fact that I am embarrassed [about my dyslexia]" (Smithwick's). "Academia relies so heavily on written communication, but yet it's the biggest barrier and `obstacle for a person with Dyslexia" (The General). My research participants also exhibited higher levels of general anxiety and lower self-esteem in certain educational contexts (Novita, 2016:284), although, not generally in other environments such as their living environments.

If you want to be something or someone or even if you want to be associated with something, you may have to act or dress in a certain way and have certain characteristics to identify with that group. As a student in third level education, it is accepted that one would have certain attributes around language, reading, writing, and articulating skills (to name but a few). Nonetheless, Gee (2205) suggests that people build identities "…not just through language but by using language with other "stuff" that isn't language" (:20). Students with dyslexia can often display a lack of these characteristics associated with being an academic and thus, identities are formed or reformed. "I don't read them books I'm not going to put myself through that, I know what my weakness and strengths are like I just don't put myself in a situation like that, hurts too much" (Summertime). This also highlights how dyslexia produces marked effects on one's self-concept and one’s self-esteem and my research participants also related feelings of isolation or being teased or bullied. “Well, at least I have an excuse. ‘Cause I used to get bullied and get called stupid. I’d be like, ‘At least I have an excuse. What’s your excuse?” (Kitty Kat).

The self can be constructed as multi-dimensional and hierarchical, and distinct individual identities emerge from these whereby personal ideas of the self are formed. “It's just, mentally I'm fine, emotionally I’m fine and physically I'm fine. Yeah. It's just not an actual disability, just a different way of learning” (Heffo). It is recognised and accepted that the self is not a unitary construct and students can have high opinions of their abilities, for example in sport or artistic ability or a low opinion of competence in other areas such as academia.

> “So when I was struggling in school I was still good at something else and then things that related to it so I did debating and things like that and it was a nice, it gave me a lot of things and I think that's nice for someone’s self-esteem with dyslexia, you know, that they have, it could be football, it could be you know basketball, anything that's just a little bit separate to school that you are good at” (Winehouse).

My research participants displayed this hierarchy when several of them remarked how they were skilled at practical subjects such as Engineering, Construction and Technical Drawing, but fell down on subjects that required writing, reading and articulating skills. One example of this was when The General built this hierarchy of importance, citing the Social Policy side of his degree as being more practical and he stated: “I found the policy a bit easier, the language was more-straight forward, it was easier to find answers in the text” (The General). However, the other part of his degree was in Anthropology, which he found hard because of the academic language used in the subject "I found the Anthropology part of my degree a fraction harder on that front because of the language" (The General). Pollak (2005) suggests using a five-element framework to define self-image and identity: "the biological, the cognitive-experimentalist, the experiential, the psychodynamic and the social constructionist perspective, each of which can be related to dyslexia" (:51). In the context of studying with dyslexia, this perspective offers us valuable insights into how beliefs built through social discourse can impede a student's learning and affect their sense of identity. Students with dyslexia can internalise the limiting and negative experiences of having dyslexia and this can ultimately affect engagement and experiences in third level education. It almost does knock your confidence a bit, it's almost like I've almost felt like going into exams that I've already failed before you've even gone in, so your confidence and self-esteem gets knocked really badly and kind of like with the mentality of I only need 20%" (Smithwicks). This can lead to them developing strategies and protective mechanisms, while still continuing to doubt their abilities because of these embedded, negative views of their 'dyslexic self'.

People use terms and labels to identity or dis-identify themselves and others as belonging to specific groups and negotiate the emotions connected to this process. Individuals seek out groups with which they share commonalities and where they feel they can relate to someone who is like them (Gee, 2014). However, when students developed a negative association with their dyslexia the challenge is then to dis-identify with the developed limited sense of self. This can in turn affect confidence on every level, which leads to students with dyslexia often using this persona of their 'self-esteem' for judgements of their self and self-worth. "I knew it was new for everyone else coming in but like I was always behind like everyone else was that little bit quicker" (Ali).

When my research participants identified and made a connection between a "positive view of dyslexia and a positive identity with self-esteem" (Pollak, 2005:51), it helped to improve their cognition about their dyslexia which led to improved perceptions of self. This can lead to increased awareness of one's strengths and weakness, which will enhance self-esteem. It can also dispel the cultural perceptions that people with dyslexia tend to have lower self-concept and self-esteem levels than those without difficulties (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2001).

> "It didn't feel like I'd struggled. I'd watched other people who had dyslexia really struggle and I thought, that's the struggle of dyslexia. What I had was putting in a bit of extra time, cause I wasn't as able as other people. That's it. Different people have different levels, and I was just not as good as those people. (Alex)

My research participants were honest in their assessment of self, self-esteem, and the effects of the discourse, diagnosis, identity, and the lack of awareness dyslexia had on their third level educational journey. As Joy states: "You lose your self-esteem; your self-esteem becomes so low because you lose interest in going to school". We witness the emotional 'scars' caused by dyslexia and its misrepresentation by others and how this brings up feelings of disappointment, frustration, shame, sadness, anger, and their embarrassment caused by having dyslexia. “For me, in terms of when I was growing up, it was looked upon as being stupid, like stupid, people always said I was stupid” (Ali). Nonetheless, my research participants overcame these difficulties through developing strategies, employing a growth mindset, building resilience, and engaging with the supports available to them. AIB learned to ‘handle’ having dyslexia when it impacted herself. Her confidence, and her self-esteem is better since she embraced it: “I'm not like ashamed of it now so I kind of see it in more of a positive way” (AIB). This led to my participants developing a more positive and able version of their self and helped them achieve success in their studies.

The ongoing argument on whether dyslexia exists as a disability (Elliot & Gibbs, 2008 & Stien, 2017) or not can influence how one views their self and can have impacts on self-esteem and self-concept. Unlike other arguments around similar leaps of faith, there is scientific and psychological evidence for the existence of dyslexia. When something cannot be seen, it needs to be proved and argued for its existence and this often had an impact on my research participants as they strove to ‘prove’ the difficulties presented were as a result of dyslexia and not because of laziness or some other reason. “I was a complete stranger to them, and they didn't know I was trying or things like that and I think it was definitely something that was a bit like umm, oh, you're getting help, where are you getting it from” (Winehouse). This notion of whether dyslexia exists (Stein, 2017) or if it should even be recognised as an independent Specific Learning Difficulty (Rice and Brooks, 2004 & Elliot, and Gibbs, 2008), suggests the term dyslexia is more about having a meaningful term for people with reading difficulties, as opposed to recognising it as a disabling condition. This creates difficulties for people with dyslexia in third level education to overcome, having to justify the very existence of dyslexia as a 'real' learning difficulty and not just a myth or urban legend which in turn has implications on the self. Another reason for students having to argue for dyslexia's existence is with so many presenting characteristics of dyslexia and no 'one fits all' solution, that rather than existing as a discrete entity; dyslexia can occur along a continuum and varies in severity (Talbot & Kerns 2014).

Generational embedded perceptions of dyslexia also still exist today, and these cultural perceptions can influence people's perceptions of students with dyslexia, and this can often impact the self. Dyslexia can remain invisible to university administrators and academics and outdated attitudes still exists among the academy (Madriaga, 2007 & Byrne, 2018), which can also cause untold worry and anxiety for students with dyslexia. "I think there are intolerant lecturers that I've found very difficult" according to Winehouse, Callaway stated that, "They just left us alone to do what we wanted" and Turbo's experience was that "No one [teachers] bothered with us; we weren't worth it".  Students with dyslexia make up 10 percent of the university student population however, this research highlighted that the above referred to outdated attitudes towards dyslexia, still exists in third level education. Depending on how others view you, “can also mean that students have to be flexible in how they use the label: sometimes hiding it, sometimes openly disclosing it, sometimes taking pride in it, sometimes feeling ashamed to take help for it” (Cameron & Billington, 2015:1362). This shame is further compounded by stigma around dyslexia and those who argue that it does not exist, and Macdonald has also suggested that contemporary education “has often exaggerated the ‘dyslexic’ problem” (2009:272).

Mullins and Preyde (2013) suggest dyslexia is considered a hidden disability and as such "its validity is often questioned" (:147). Unlike students with a disability that is clearly visible, students with dyslexia report more negative experiences and stigma connected to their disability. This is mainly in the form of questioning the validity of dyslexia and its existence or whether students are just trying to gain an unfair advantage, and this can often lead to the development of self-stigma and can be as a result of societal and cultural perception of being flawed usually because of a personal or physical characteristic. When an individual self-stigmatises due to their disability two sources have been identified. Firstly, the myths and damaging reputation society can place on individuals because of their dyslexia and the shame they feel due to lack of support and then secondly, self-understanding (Stoeber & Roundtree, 2021:65). “I heard people say oh so and so is in a special room like it is made easier for that person, so I think that was a bit of stigma there" (AIB). This identity then manifests as "stigma associated with disclosure or when accessing academic supports" (Evans, 2013:362). Consequently, it can encourage students to question and alter the culturally embedded perceptions and negativity which often surrounds dyslexia and those who learn and view the world differently. To minimise ableism, we need to acknowledge disability as a normal part of human diversity, an identity like any other, rather than a deficiency or inferiority. "Because we are afraid the word struggle scares people, oh, we're going to have to struggle, not everything will be a struggle, but there is a struggle involved and I think that you can't sugar coat that for people" (Winehouse).

Elliott (2005) argues that dyslexia does not exist and suggests that the term is an emotional construct. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) opposed this claim and voiced concern that it has taken decades for dyslexia to be accepted as an original condition and not an excuse for poor reading and writing (BDA, 2005). "I grew up not thinking that I was stupid, but I was never thinking I was as clever as anybody else, I was just not as good as those people" (Alex). Nonetheless, Yergeau (2018) states that dyslexia is 'real', and we must be mindful of the misunderstandings surrounding dyslexia to assist students with dyslexia to navigate third level education and to minimise the impacts on their self. By using a more neurodiverse model, we can acknowledge dyslexia exists and recognise that education can be tough with dyslexia. However, this perspective allows one to step out of the shadow of dyslexia and into the light to master newfound strategies and techniques, which will help to improve the notion of the self, self-esteem, and self-concept.

> I love this question [are you dyslexic or do you have dyslexia], it's amazing, I would say I am Dyslexic, yeah, I think having something is weird like you have cancer, yeah, I think it's a weird thing, but just for me, I wouldn't say, I'd say I'm Dyslexic but I don't know, I understand that the way that that sounds that it's so intrinsic to me but I think of it as intrinsic to me and kind of inalienable from who I am, that's the way I describe it, but I 100% get people saying I have Dyslexia, or I am a person with Dyslexia or all those things because for other people it mightn't play such a huge role or it mightn't be, they see it as like being separate to themselves, but I'd say I'm Dyslexic like I'd say I'm ginger or I'm pale you know. (Winehouse)

Another impact on my research participants self was identified around the language that is often used when people refer to dyslexia, difference, or disabilities. The questions which arise are centred around being respectful and inclusive when referring to people with disabilities in our daily discourse and acknowledging their own self-designations. The ongoing debate surrounding this discourse centres on the concept of person first language which is considered to be the language of empowerment and inclusivity, or identity first language which is considered the language of devaluing and dehumanising a person. The use of person first language puts the person before the disability as opposed to identity first language terminology which puts the disability as being the person (Vivanti, 2020). Language is complex and complicated, particularly within the disability community and when we are conversing about dyslexia it can cause both external and internal conflict as we try ‘to say the right thing’ and use the ‘correct’ language around dyslexia. “I do say 'I'm dyslexic', I do. But now you say it like that I get why people would say I have dyslexia. But then I do say it both ways. I think it depends on who I am around” (Kitty Kat).

When we examine the preferences of individuals with disabilities and the impact of language on them, it should not only clarify the prevalent desire of individuals with disabilities regarding which language to use, however, it should also guide us on future use of their desired terminology: “The ultimate change agents should be the individuals with disabilities who are ready to insist that their voices be heard” (Crocker & Smith, 2019:129). Using person first language places the person first and disassociates the disability as the primary defining characteristic of the person, this research argues. Consequently, viewing the disability as one of several characteristics of the person rather than the defining feature of that person. “Dyslexia impacts on every single thing I do in life, it's there all the time, talking writing reading, finding my way around, going to different places. Dyslexia is in everything I do, yeah, so actually I am Dyslexic” (Winehouse). In a society that can often perceive disability as dehumanising, “advocates wanted those around them to recognize that having a disability does not, in fact, lessen your personhood” (Ladau, 2015:3). “I would really strongly identify with it [dyslexia] because I think it shapes a lot of who I am, I think it shapes a lot of how I think, obviously how I learn” (General).

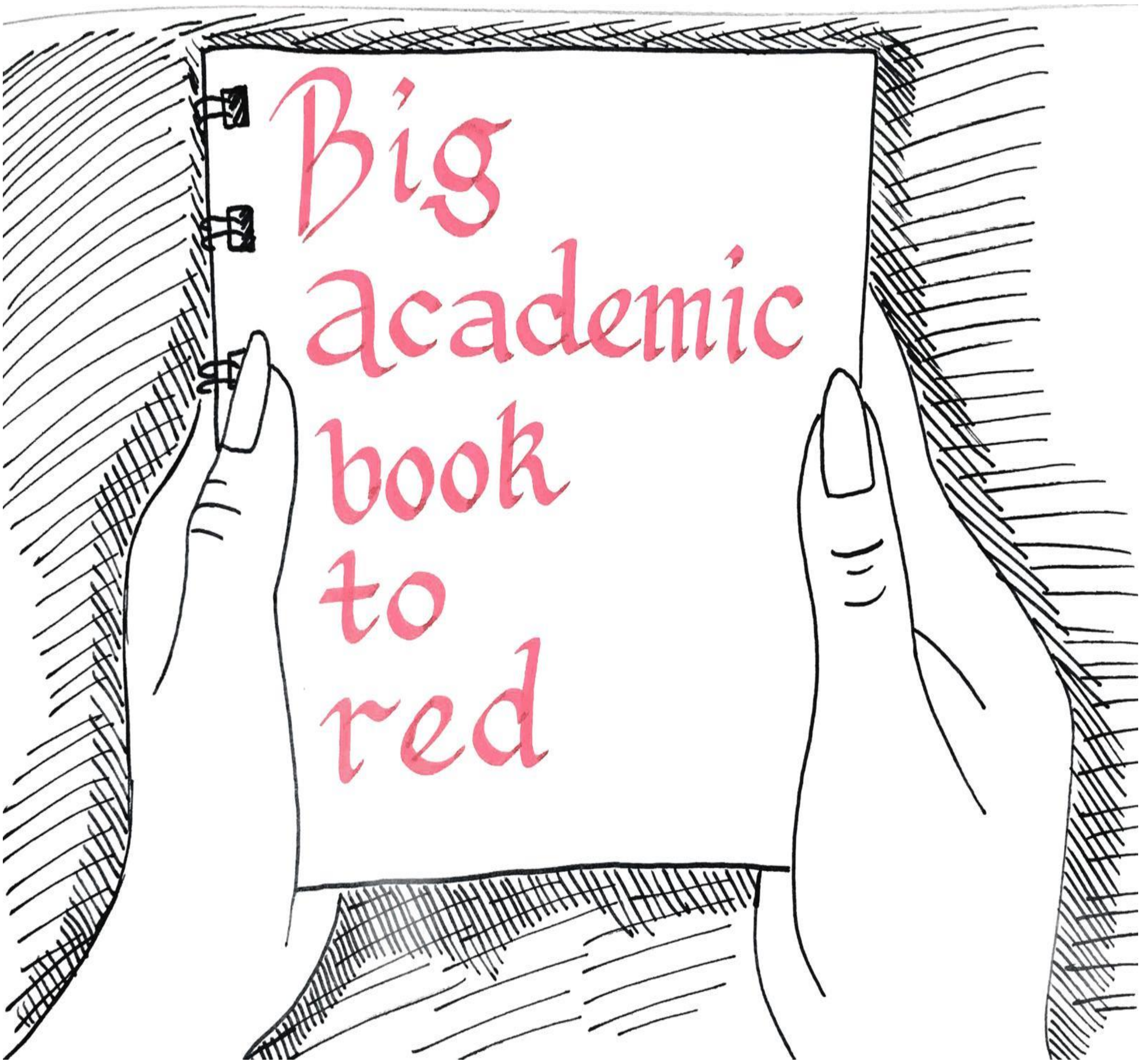
This research argues that identifying as dyslexic in an educational setting in Ireland appears to pigeonhole you and frames you solely through the lens of your disability. “I've got lots of different parts and one of them parts is dyslexia, so it's like that's all I am, I'm pigeonholed as dyslexic and that's how they identify [me]" (The Driver). The cultural identity of dyslexia as a negative and the impacts this has on a person needs to be resisted and changed. Rather than identifying dyslexia as a disability or a problem, activists need to continue to raise awareness of what dyslexia is and acknowledge it as a different way of learning. The use of negative self-designations aids a negative cultural identity for dyslexia and this impacts on the private thoughts of a person with dyslexia, which will ultimately impact of one's view of the self. When my research participants gained an awareness of what dyslexia meant to them, they further developed a positive identity of their self. This enabled the participants to develop resilience and provided a deeper knowledge and understanding around these labels connected to their dyslexia. Neurodiverse students entering third level education have to assume adult roles and construct new social identities. "Difference (otherness) is a prominent part of the self-concept of neurodiverse students leading to different perceptions of self and their learning difficulties" (Kwon *et al,* 2018:7). When my research participants displayed a positive acceptance of their difference, it shifted the focus to emphasise their strengths to overcome difficulties and promoted positive actions, such as disclosing difficulties to teaching staff (Habib *et al,* 2012). "Students with dyslexia can exhibit low levels of self-efficacy a quality that together with resilience is essential to success for dyslexic students" (Murphy, 2019:22) and despite dyslexia making their lives more difficult in education, students can perceive that their dyslexia can give them strength to assist in overcoming their difficulties.

This thought process empowered my research participants to play an active and engaged part in the processes surrounding the creation of their disability and how they identify with it: "It also suggests that this kind of student-centred discussion of disability is not only possible, but essential towards building understanding of the impact of adult perceptions and societal stigma on students' lives" (Mueller, 2019:279). Nonetheless, although each of my research participants are the authors and are the representatives of their own 'stories', Mueller (2019) argues that they are in no way independent in meaning making around those stories. A societal process of building, refining, and improving its outlook on disability and dyslexia is what now needs to be implanted in order to nullify the stigma surrounding dyslexia and the impacts of this on the self.

Most students perceive dyslexia as more of a positive because it gives them unique skills and most would not take it away, as it is an integral part of their self. However, it is acknowledged that students with dyslexia will have to work harder on the characteristics of dyslexia, which are the opposite of the characteristics of how society perceives what a 'good academic' should be. This can identify them as being different and needing supports and Alexander-Passe (2015) highlighted that due to this, many students avoid reporting their dyslexia to avoid negative social perceptions, even though they were aware that their academic work could suffer. In Irish society today, most people are familiar with the term dyslexia, however, different views and opinions exist regarding development and the impact on individuals’ lives. Researchers, policymakers, access officers and professional bodies need to be more open to learning and distributing of funding and knowledge around the dyslexia experience, in relation to new and emerging research and discoveries in the field. Dyslexia can occur along a continuum; therefore, the support should be flexible. The idea of dyslexia as a specific reading disability informs the basis of research into the neurobiology of dyslexia and how dyslexia is diagnosed, to include the provision of supports for students. These findings indicate a need for the revision of the concept of dyslexia. No two people with dyslexia have the same processing techniques (Higgins, 2015) and dyslexia cannot be outgrown; however, dyslexia can improve with structured practice and students can develop ‘coping’ strategies (DAI, 2018), as this research has shown.

## Chapter 7: One Picture = Thousand Words

This section of the research is designed for impact and accessibility as it perceives the effects of having dyslexia through the prism of difference for research participants while studying in third-level education. This is presented by using few words and through images drawn by Tegan Murphy.



The Impacts of Dyslexia, a Visual, images by Tegan Murphy (2019)

### *The Impacts of Dyslexia, a Visual*

When we consider the word impact, we usually associate it with two or more objects coming forcibly into contact with each other. Dyslexia can have a strong effect on your experience in third level education due to the very nature of academia and the manifestation of the traits associated with having dyslexia. The identifiers of being dyslexic range hugely however, reading, writing, time management, concentration, short term memory issues (to name just some), are pivotal skills needed to succeed in academia. When these two objects, academia and dyslexic traits collide, two objects come forcibly into contact with each other, and this impact causes effects on informants. Each informant expressed serval ways which dyslexia impacts and/or effects them while partaking in the world of academia. Listening to their narratives was impacting on me, (the researcher) and I felt that no matter how much I wrote, I could not see my words doing justice to their explanations.

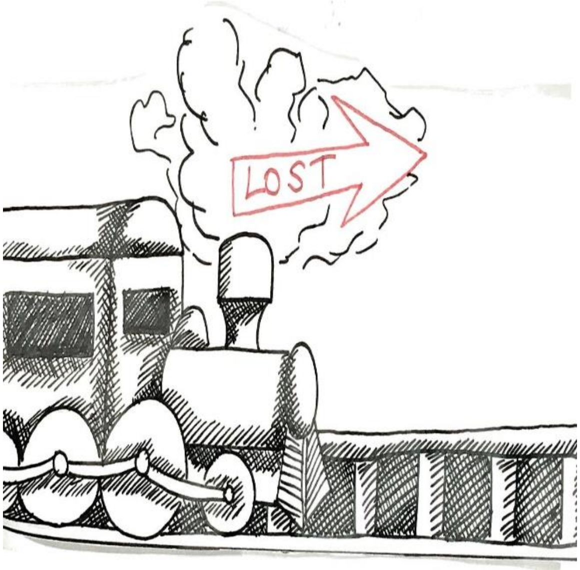
It was in this moment that I decided to include some images to represent these impacts that were expressed by my research informants. Again, I felt that I would not be able to draw very good and do this idea the justice it deserved. Reflecting on this notion of using images, I contacted each of my research participants and asked them to draw one image which would represent dyslexia to them. Unfortunately, none of them appeared to want to partake in this as like me, they felt their artistic skills would embarrass them. I decided then to enlist the assistance of my 19-year-old daughter who was in the final year of formal school and is a budding artist. After contacting my research participants and gaining their consent for this to happen, we came up with a plan together. They consented to me choosing the artist, while identifying the words to accompany the images we decided to use. I gave my daughter, Tegan, a word document which used numbers to identify the research participant for me and a list of the words they used to describe the impacts of experiencing third level education while having dyslexia. Tegan then drew images to mirror the words I gave her, and the results are below in this chapter. Each participant received a scanned image of the sketches used in conjunction with their words and the feedback was very positive.

Words have this incredible power in which they can move us and impact on us greatly. Nonetheless, through using images it can provide us with a visual representation of the impacts of having dyslexia and studying in third level education which enables us to better understand the research participants experiences. One picture is worth a thousand words and in Western culture, most of us have heard the proverb, ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, which I have adopted here. Images are a powerful method of allowing you to use your imagination to help you to interpret 'what you see', regardless of the language you speak. It also allows the viewer to attach feelings, emotions, reasons and empathise with the message they interpret from the image.

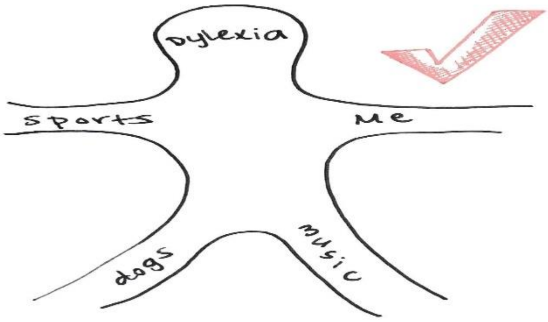
For this chapter I have decided not to include any theoretic background however, to just include a couple of sentences from the participants referring to the impacts of dyslexia on each of my research participants in third level education. Thus,

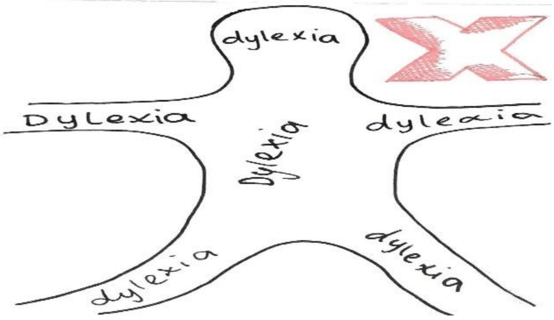
**Ultimately, allowing the images to 'tell' the story**

Anne:



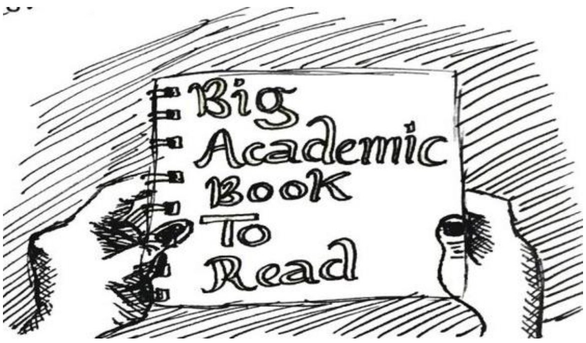
Describes the impacts on her when reading or trying to understand academic information as the following: When I read a page, I begin great and I tend to get completely lost, I lose my train of thought. She also states very clearly that her "dyslexia is only a part of her not the whole of her".





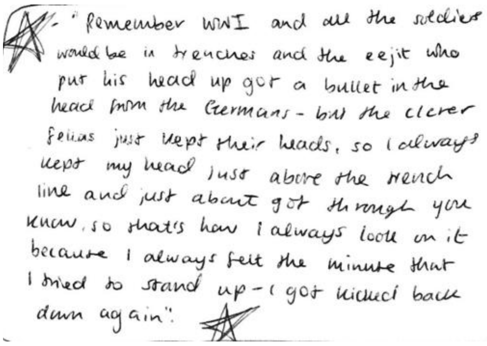
Joy:

Speaks about the lack of supports in both Africa and Ireland for her during her educational experience. For this reason and due to the stigmatisation, she received upon disclosure in Africa, Joy kept her dyslexia a secret. She was ridiculed as being stupid and bad in Africa also. When Joy read the academic book, "It would feel like the page had no beginning, middle or end and then it be like the page would cover my face".



Keith:

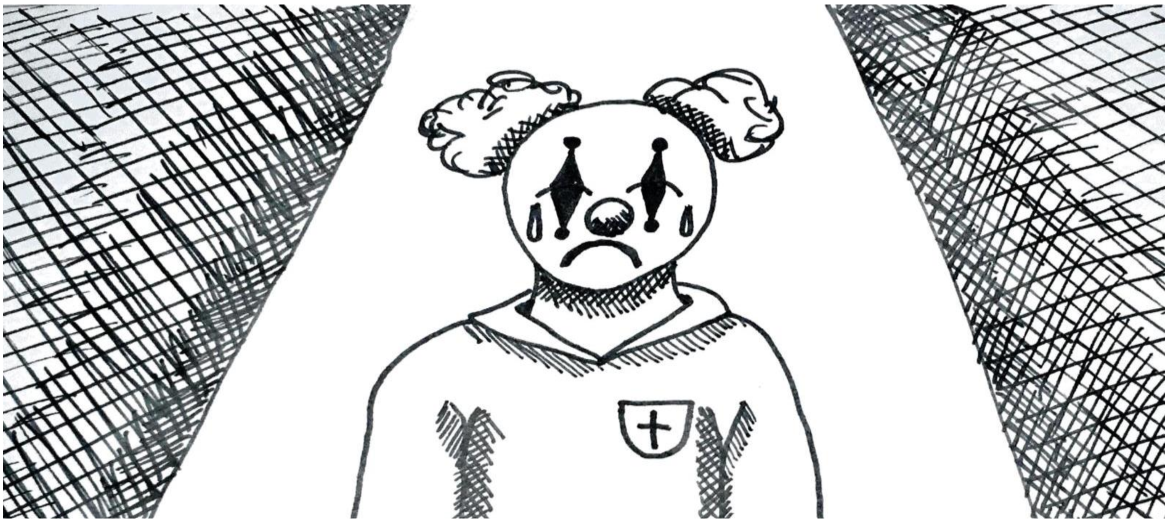
Keith also spoke how he was ridiculed in formal school for his inability to pronounce words and for his reading in class. This left a lifelong impact on him, and he remained fearful of that type of exposure all his life. He likened this to the experience of being a soldier in the First World War trenches.



- "Remember WWI and all the soldiers would be in trenches and the eejit who put his head up got a bullet in the head from the Germans - but the clever fellas just kept their heads, so I always kept my head just above the trench line and just about got through you know, so that's how I always look on it because I always felt the minute that I tried to stand up - I got kicked back down again".

Keith speaks about how when he reads the big academic book, he loses his way, the words appear to jumble up and leap from the page and ends up falling asleep.

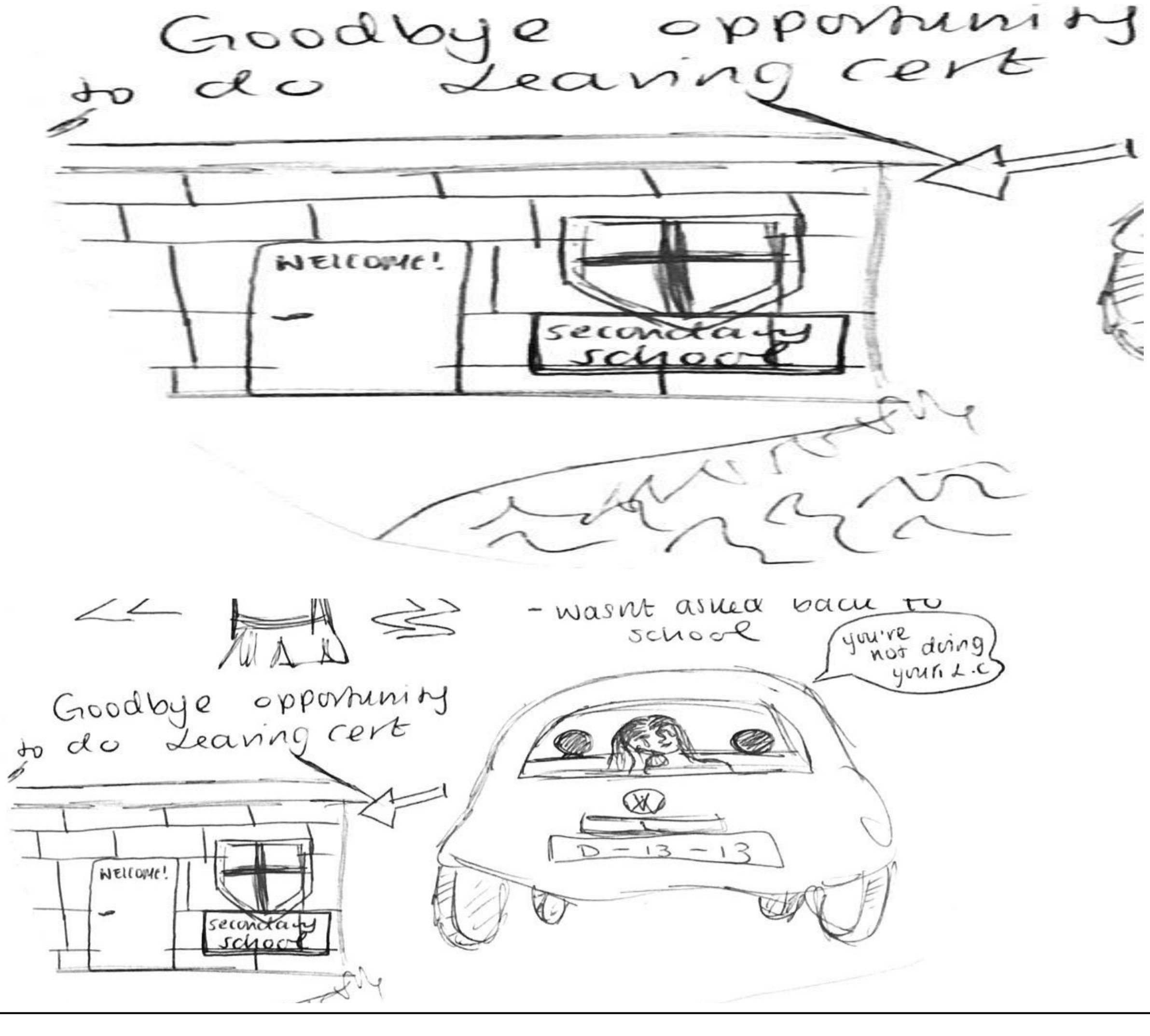
Smithwicks had very similar experiences in formal school, and both used different techniques to cover up what she described as her inabilities. "I just acted the class clown to distract the spotlight from me". Unfortunately, Smithwicks suggested this put her in a" box, which she never got out of".



Ali:

Similarly, to Smithwicks, Ali played the class clown to avoid the spotlight:

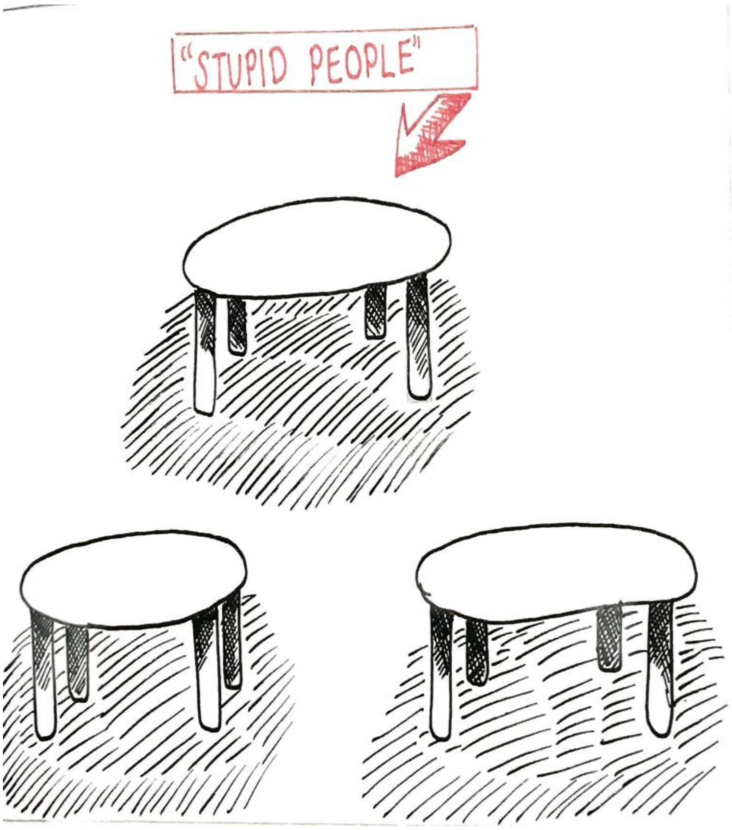
Ali also felt she was let down by the formal schooling system in Ireland and feels to this day, a sense of loss after not been allowed do her leaving certificate. She felt dismissed, stupid, no one helped her, she just felt lost, "didn't do learning, didn't understand school:



Heffo:

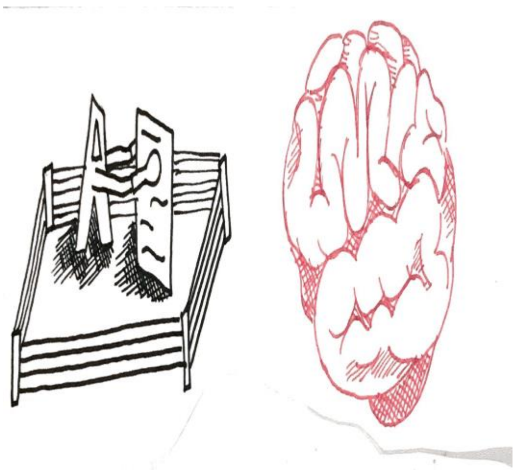
“I always felt stupid because of my dyslexia, we got no support either”:

I mean in school I was made to sit on a table with other kids who had problems, it was called the stupid table".



Driver:

I hated school too, always felt different, I acted the class clown and got through by messing, “I was always fighting the system, my brain was fried in school, I was always behind, couldn’t keep up”:



AIB:

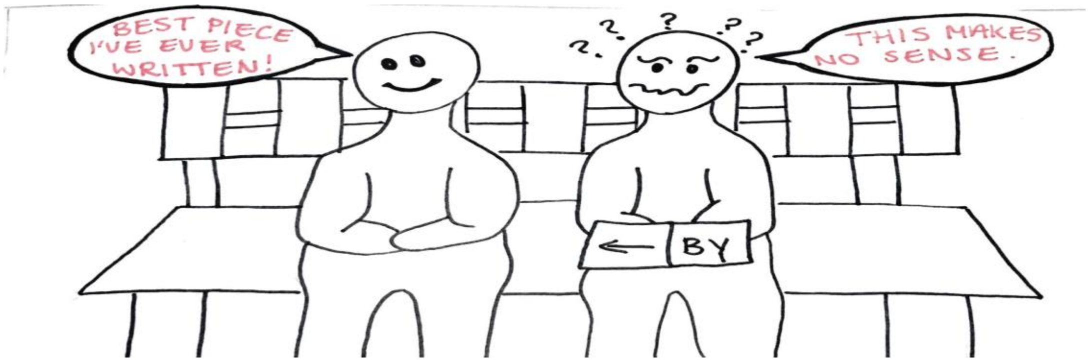
I always felt different in school and never settled in formal school however, college was like “a coming out for me”:

" even my family said do me I literaly went
from one person to a complete different person
when I left school and went college".

For me also, the words always seemed to jump off the page at me:

Rolling Stone:

When I wrote or read or tried to explain to people, it always made sense to me…



Herbie:

"I was always trying to make things perfect":

Yet my short-term memory is very bad, "we would be on the group chat talking about an assignment and I wouldn't be able to remember even doing it, like"

Rodgers!

I know right :)

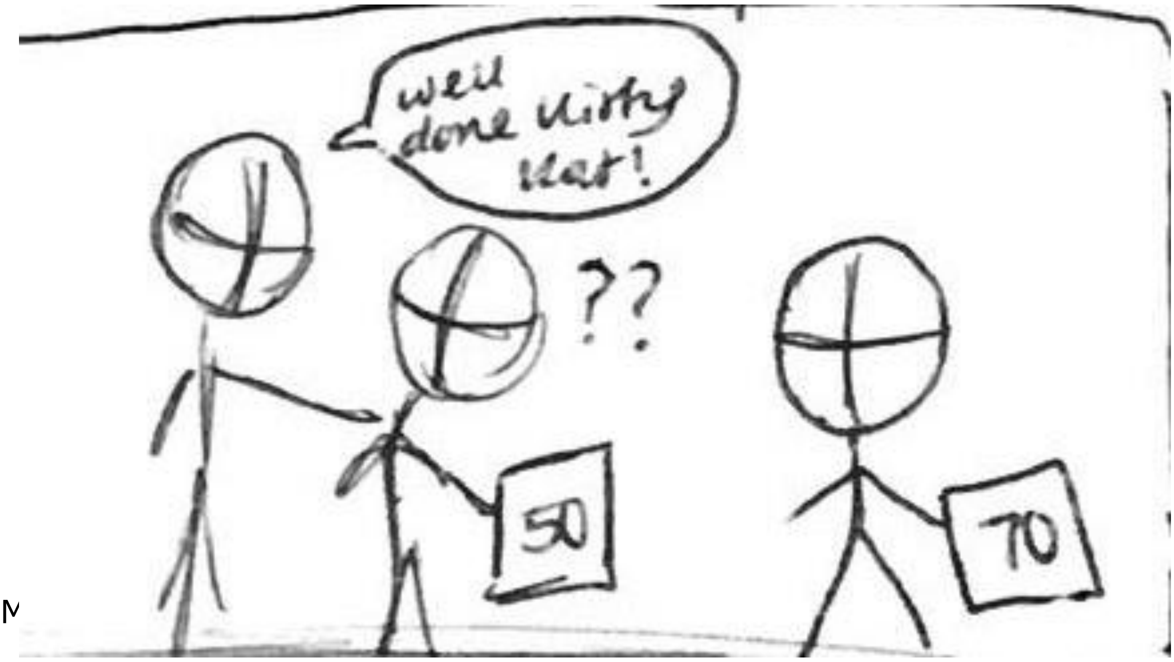
lads, did we even did Rogers?

ye, de other day

Kitty Kat:

When the psychologist told my mother I had dyslexia, I thought it meant a brain tumour. My mother had explained it to me: "He said there's something wrong with your brain, like a blockage that won't let you learn".

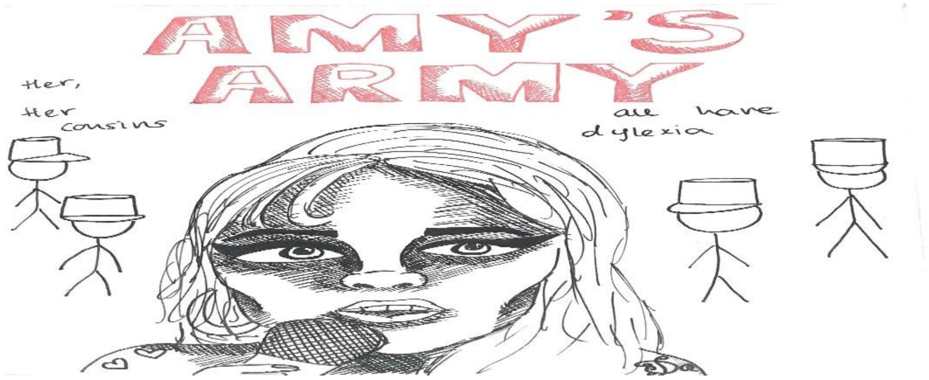
Kitty Kat also felt resentment from her friends when she was awarded a first-class honour for her degree, “because they did not get one”. Even when she got lower marks than them, there were condescending comments, “well didn’t you do great”:



M

Winehouse:

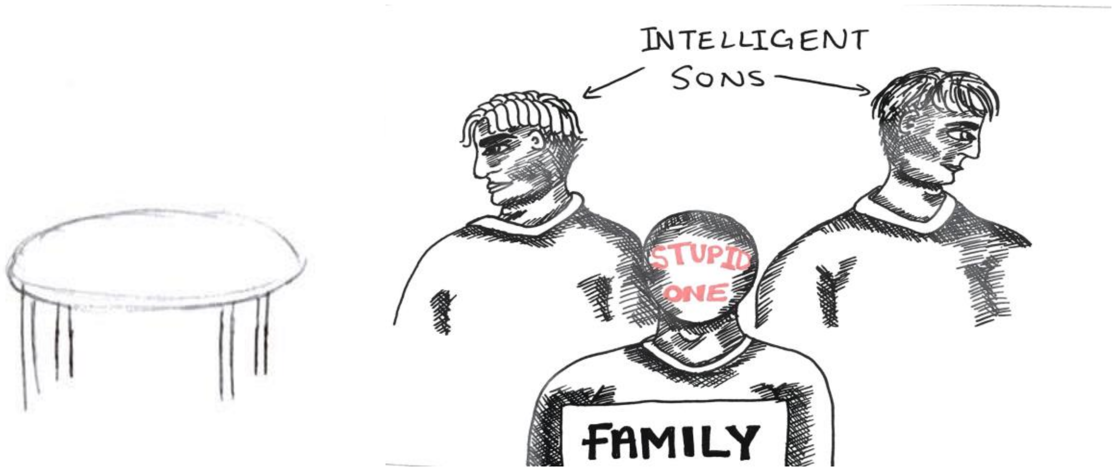
Tells us about how all her cousins have dyslexia “we’re like a little dyslexic army”.



However, Winehouse also explains how it manifests like a “fog coming over your eyes and you can’t see”. She also states how it takes away education and your need to prove something to everyone through education.

The General:

Spoke about how he coped with dyslexia in that he became an introvert whereby he blended into the background so much, that when he did not come into class, he was not missed. He also spoke about his dyslexia and how he identified as the 'stupid' one in his family:

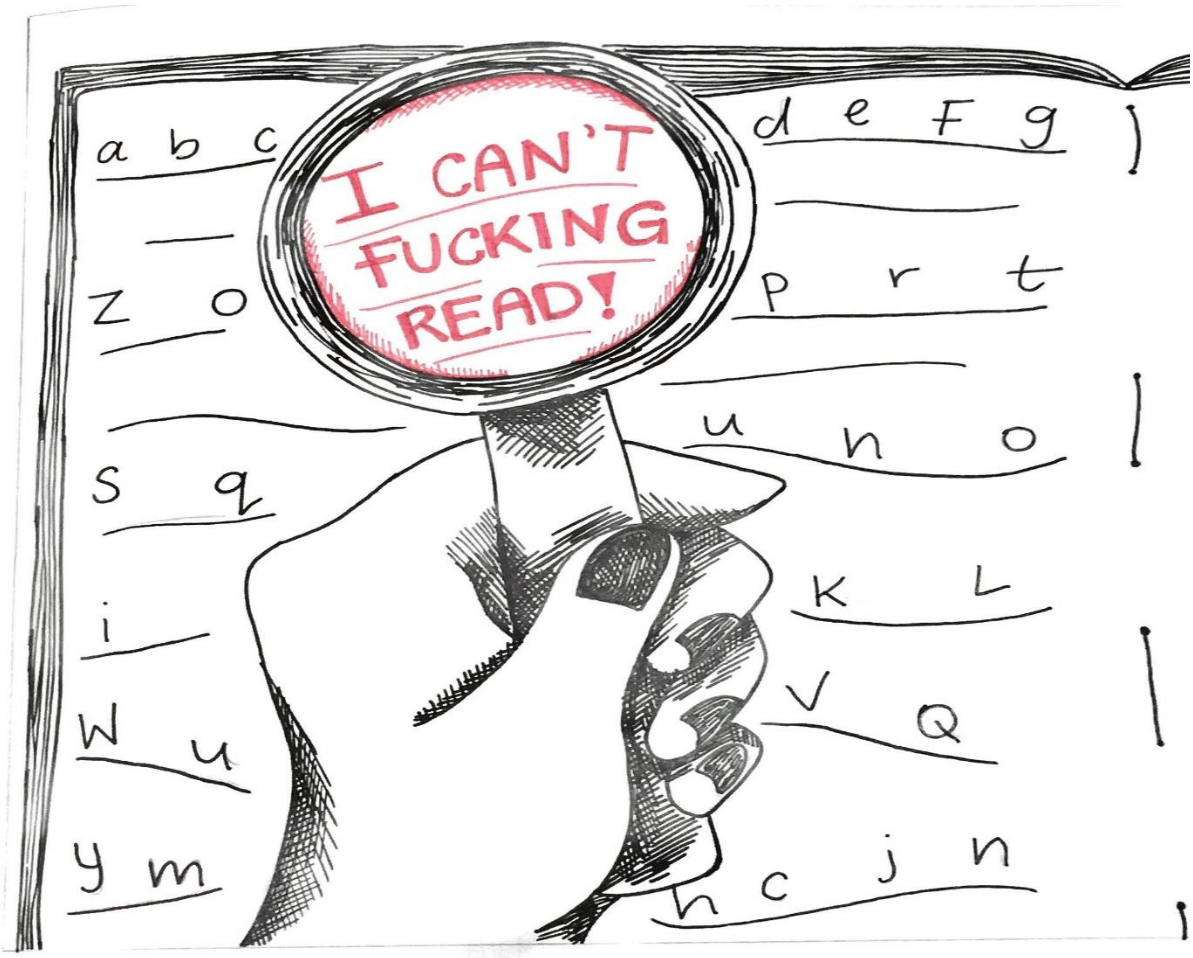


Alex:

Tells how she always knew she had something wrong, and it came as no surprise when she found out.

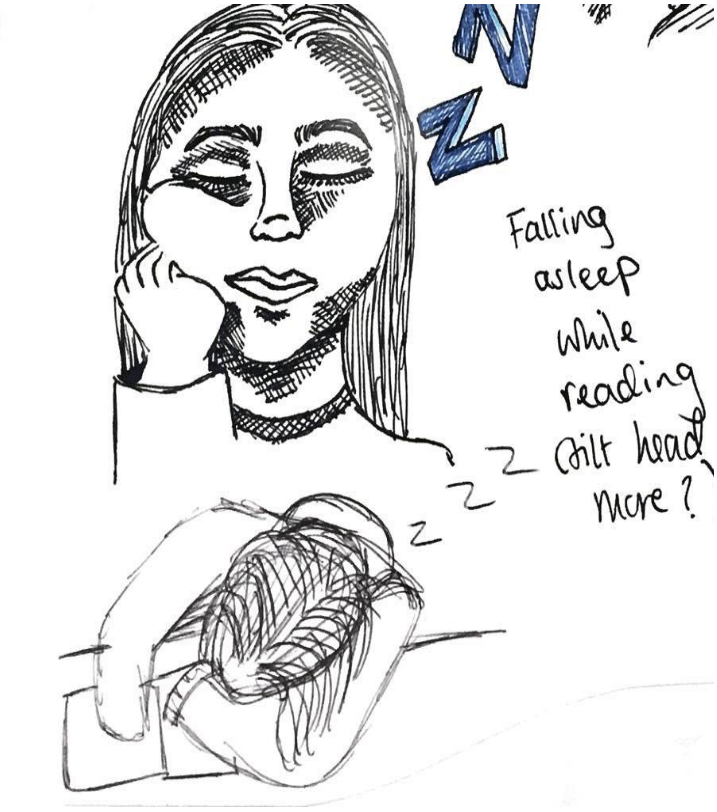
Summertime:

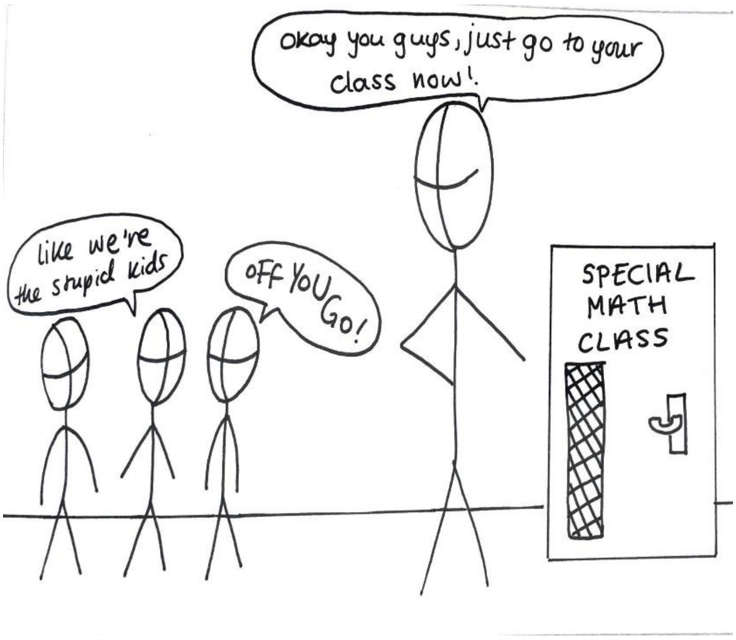
Spoke about how she became a professional 'hider' concerning attendance and assessments. She also tells us how even after so much private education, she still can’t read. Rather, she can read, however, just words, not to comprehend.



Turbo:

Finds herself falling asleep as she reads academic work, I just can't stay awake.





Callaway was made to feel stupid, especially been taken out of class for 'special class'

While discussing the impacts dyslexia can have while studying in third level education, all my research informants expressed a similar feeling. Either having the degree or be on the way to obtaining one, helped enormously with the positive development of the 'self'.

" being able do prove through education, takes away concept you are stupid":

## Chapter 8: Incorporating Change to Alter the Current Mindset

A fundamental right in Ireland is that regardless of ability, everyone is entitled to a full and inclusive education. The Special Education Act (2004): "Establishes that people with special educational needs have the same right to avail of and benefit from education as children who do not have those needs". This is, of course, a premise that is in no way different from what is 'encouraged' by many other countries around the world, who hold third level education in high esteem. Over the last ten years in Higher Education in Ireland, students with disabilities registering with the support services has risen by 226 per cent (AHEAD, 2021). From those students who registered to access supports, 36 per cent had a specific learning difficulty, and dyslexia comes under this category. The report also highlighted the number of students accessing supports had risen due to the increasing numbers of students with disabilities attending third level education. As a result, there is also a 45 per cent increase in the ratio of students per disability support staff member over the last eight years (*Ibid*). However, "a significant percentage of new entrants have a disability but do not disclose and register for support" (AHEAD, 2021:4). According to AHEAD (2021), in the academic year of 2019-2020 in third level education in Ireland, "only 7.5 per cent of the new entrant population registered with the disability support services" (2021:62).

This research has highlighted how students with dyslexia experience third level education as individuals with what is termed as a disability or as a ‘student with a special need’; nonetheless, I also wanted to alter what are sometimes negative societal connotations, cultural perceptions and how education can sometimes view and ‘deal’ with dyslexia. My research encourages a culture of full inclusivity within third level education and the following recommendations support this assertion in the following ways.

The need for more qualified staff to work with students as a support network is vital. In most third level institutions, overwhelmed staff deal with large numbers of students with disabilities, often on their own or with a team which lacks the necessary supports and funding. Thus, the implementation of a state-wide awareness and educational campaign around dyslexia, neurodiversity and inclusiveness is recommended. University staff and academic staff need to be given continuous professional development on dyslexia and other neurodiverse differences, what they are, what they are not, how it affects a student’s educational experience and what can be done to develop a more inclusive classroom. The need for additional funding is a must, so as to provide the latest technology and staff training to ensure a more inclusive and neurodiverse environment, which will enhance students with dyslexia’s educational journey.

Some of the barriers highlighted in my research are the impacts on the self, self-confidence, and self-esteem, which in turn have been shown to be inhibitors to successful studying. My research also highlighted the difficulties my research participants had with note taking, comprehension and memory recalling of specific subject-related academic language from lectures and tutorials. “It’s hard in lectures to catch everything because your brain is going even little things like you’re writing a word and then you’re going what’s this, what’s that, then they move on to something else and I’m lost” (Callaway). One way to assist with this can be through companies like Livescribe, Google and Dragon, among others, who are all striving to improve technology for students with specific learning difficulties. As discussed earlier, an example of new assistive technology is the LiveScribe Pen, which can record lectures accompanied by a connected notepad to enhance searching back through one’s lecture notes. Despite this ‘pen’ being an important resource for students with dyslexia, my research has also highlighted the inequality across the third level education institutions as not all access offices receive enough funding to supply pens to their students, highlighting just one example of how funding can be so sparse.

The classic accommodation given to students with dyslexia is support in writing assignments, extra time for exams and the use of a laptop, a typist and/or a reader. These are precious and must stay: however, we need to assist students to receive the full value of these supports and maximise their usefulness. For this to happen, third level education needs to deliver training workshops and develop community-based links with external organisations which will assist with these programmes for students with dyslexia. External organisations such as The Dyslexia Association of Ireland deliver workshops, in-house training, and practise-based training programs for educators to develop inclusive classrooms and resources for their students. Third-level educational institutions should conduct writing workshops for students with dyslexia on academic writing, referencing, structuring work, exam study and time management. Although these are provided at present in most third level institutions, and most education establishments cover these in the curriculum for most first-year undergraduate programs, students with dyslexia need more than the hour lecture which covers so much at once. They could be offered as an extra resource for students to avail of and if time and funding constraints prevent this, a recorded version of the classes could be an option. My research participants have highlighted the need for extra sessions delivered by staff with the proper training, support, and resources put in place. The benefits of such additional funding and thereby staff training and technological supports can negate some of the barriers experienced by students with dyslexia. This can enhance the development of new skills which will provide these students with the tools to unlock their personal academic prison cell and help them develop their own writing styles and the confidence to find their voice, both academically and socially. My research has shown that currently, nearly all the supports can be rendered invalid because students are embarrassed to speak to the support team, and this has been shown to reinforce the stigma around having dyslexia. By adopting and intensifying this strategy in the first year of students’ studies, these skills can be developed and honed, and future studying becomes easier, ensuring a more level playing field. Without a doubt this add-on support and accommodation approach is vital for students with dyslexia.

Several recommendations have arisen from my research and my participants' experiences around some of the teaching methods used in third level education and some of the rules surrounding assessment. Of specific interest was that the insistence on using particular fonts such as Arial, Times New Roman and/or Calibra for academic writing was found not to be inclusive or sustainable. While it is recognised that order and structure are part of academia, such persistence does not allow for other variants of fonts that are more accessible for students with dyslexia, such as Verdana. Given the substantial rise in students with dyslexia now attending third level, and perhaps more importantly, the number of students that do not seek support from the access office, such small changes can have a significant effect on the learning experience of students with dyslexia.

Another area of change that is recommended is teaching staff releasing material prior to lectures to ensure students with dyslexia (and all students) have ample time to study the material before class, thereby ensuring greater accessibility and participation. This model of practice can be contentious as there is evidence showing how providing material beforehand can impact on class attendance and participation. However, third level education follows a model of independent learning and part of this includes agency over contribution and participation. Thus, to restrict access based on students' perceived attendance and participation also goes against the dominant model of student-centred learning, which promotes inclusivity for all learners.

A common theme that emerged from my research which correlates with previous studies (Cameron, 2016; MacCullagh, 2017; Obrien, 2019), was how my participants perceived they had to spend more time learning and completing academic tasks than those without a diagnosis of dyslexia. As mentioned earlier, various learning strategies were adopted and different learning techniques were present among my research participants, especially when they adopted and became confident in using multi-modal methods. However, a learning strategy that negates affective learning for those with dyslexia is the notion of 'making' everyone speak or needing all students to 'make an attempt' to engage in lectures and tutorials and can act as an exclusive practice rather than an inclusive one. My research shows how this creates vicissitudes, 'ordeals of language', and thus, invokes voice suppression and academic imprisonment. Although COVID-19 had no impact on this research, it later showed how unseen events can exacerbate these issues further and posed further challenges to educators as classes were moved online. This further reiterates the need for continuous upskilling and education to ensure whatever/wherever the learning environment may be, policy makers, funders and anyone involved in third level education must assist and prepare educators to ensure the learning environment is inclusive.

The Universal Design Learning model which is underpinned by the three Universal Design Learning principles of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2011; AHEAD, 2021) promotes an inclusive model for students of all abilities and provides high quality individual supports for those students who need them and is the recommended model under which third level education should align themselves to. Universal Design Learning ensures support services are funded "to engage in delivering quality-assured reasonable accommodations, and to collaborate across campus and promote more inclusive practice in the mainstream delivery of programmes" (AHEAD, 2021:5). This model was developed using the voices of students, academic staff, management, and student support staff which ensures their three principles underpin the delivery of the program or as Franklin phrased it: 'Involve me and I will learn'.

My research has highlighted that when we incorporate some or all of this framework, it can and will improve and optimise teaching and learning for all students. The Universal Design Learning model was developed based on extensive research and scientific findings into how humans learn (CAST, 2011; AHEAD & 2017 & 2021). It involves the use of teaching methods designed to remove any barriers to learning and build in adjustability and flexibility for all student's strengths and needs. Universal Design Learning aligned strategies are instructional methods and tools used by educators to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to learn. These guidelines enable educators to select strategies that remove barriers in instruction so that all students can achieve their learning goals and also incorporate disability support staff and students with disabilities on planning boards.

Research by AHEAD (2021) shows a significant number of new students with a disability did not disclose and register for disability supports in their first year in third level education and my research supports this finding. This research recognises that disclosure of a disability is complex and the need for disclosure must be examined and made 'safe'. Some of the reasons provided in this research for not registering with access offices to avail of supports were, no real supports, a desire for independence, and/or reasons related to the perceived stigma experienced by some individuals engaging with support services after disclosing their dyslexia. Notwithstanding the above, further research and engagement with those students is needed to learn why they did not and do not register for supports. The disclosure of any disability, condition, diagnosis, or something that hinders and/or affects a person, needs to be made safe and free of repercussions. We need to bring awareness of the negativity that is connected to disclosing dyslexia in education by peers and staff to begin to provide these safe and inclusive spaces. Discourse is perhaps one of the areas where a lot of work needs to be done in relation to educating the general public, teachers, students, family members and friends around the language we use. This can be achieved through training on language and its effects, examining people's values, beliefs, and prejudices with regard to people with dyslexia. This will help raise awareness and mindfulness around what we say and how we say it and the impacts this can have. We are reminded of the negative language around racism, sexism, and how it influences people, and this research demonstrates we need to be equally aware of the discourse that surrounds and informs our engagement with dyslexia and how it creates ableism or exclusion. These disclosure and discourse issues will also create stigma and self-stigma, which my research has demonstrated and highlighted the effects of these on the 'self'. Through the research participants experiences in learning, we witness how fear engulfs the self and influences the learning experience in third-level education, with this fear fuelled through difference, discourse, disclosing and the stigmatisation that is often attached to 'being' a person with dyslexia.

My research has highlighted how the discourse around dyslexia can affect people and it has untold emotional implications and effects and imposes seen and unseen stigma. This stigma imposes restrictions on people with dyslexia whether they disclose or not, which leads to fears manifesting, which in turn, contribute towards imposing sanctions on the self. Suppression of one's voice is a sanction and thus impacts self-esteem and self-confidence. Embracing the current drive to improve technology in both the manufacturing and accessibility of these technologies is vital and forging the right connections between academia and the greater public to highlight dyslexia and its impression on students, will enhance the learning experience for students like my research participants. Third level education needs to recognise and implement peer-led and reviewed research findings to enhance future teaching and learning environments for students as this will create more inclusive third-level education institutions for students with dyslexia.

## Conclusion

Using the noun ‘conclusion’ implies, that this is the end of the journey. However, rather than this being the end, it is hoped it will be the beginning of raising awareness of the phenomena of studying in third level education with dyslexia. This research project examined how students with a diagnosis of dyslexia navigated studying in third level education in an Irish context. The experience of being a student and the expectancy that brings, alongside the characteristics of having dyslexia and the issues surrounding this, were also explored. Seventeen participants, which included myself, took part in the project. The research was conducted using ethnography, as this methodology was well-suited for rooting an analysis of dyslexia as a lived reality and allowed me to discover “what people do and the reasons they give for doing it” (Compte & Schensul, 2010:6) in relation to studying with dyslexia. A large portion of the literature on dyslexia can tend to focus on the negative and what cannot be achieved in education, therefore suggesting that dyslexia is problematised and a person with dyslexia is perceived as been a suffering ‘being’ in need of interventions and accommodations. Although I found this to be true, my research explored dyslexia using the metaphor of a prism and viewing dyslexia as a difference rather than a deficit.

My research discovered lots of barriers that were in place from the institutions where we studied, the imbedded experiences of having dyslexia and studying, perceptions, prejudices, teaching staff, peers, attitudes, and society’s expectations of students with dyslexia were also explored.

However, despite all these negatives, my research has proved that when the learners accepted dyslexia as an integral part of their self, developed a more growth mindset as opposed to remaining in a fixed mindset, and viewing dyslexia through a neurodiverse lens, success followed. Overcoming these barriers involves not only a mindset change by my participants, but a mindset change by teaching staff, policy makers and third level institutions.

I also examined how these relationships are perceived and highlighted how they are changing (albeit at a slow process) based on processes of social stratification and universities' policies. These relationships were shown to be imbued with practices of reciprocity and exchange and impacted on both students and others. The impacts on the self and the view that having dyslexia is associated to vulnerability was also explored. Interestingly, the everyday agency my research participants practiced altered this sense of vulnerability. These everyday agency practices helped them to build resilience and assisted in creating a more enjoyable university experience on a more level playing field. It also allowed a deeper meaning of my participants' experiences of having dyslexia in third level education to gain these personal insights. My research also sought to make the familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar, in order to assist us in gaining a deeper understanding of experiencing dyslexia through the prism of difference.

This research has highlighted how dyslexia can be likened to a prism, as dyslexia can be viewed as either a medical condition, a deficit or disability, a neurobiological condition, a sociocultural condition, a difference, or a neurodiverse phenomenon, depending on who is doing the viewing. The concept of a prism of difference also revealed that my participants have the possibility of developing multifaced intersecting identities and of experiencing third level education in a more positive way.

My research highlights how the person we are is a composite of different parts. Distinctions of difference are often assumed, whereby we assume that we understand how the difference is constructed, what are the impacts and what it means to study with a learning difference (Zinn *et al,* 2005). However, these differences are often misunderstood, and my research has found how this can lead to ableism, discrimination, stigma, along with attitudinal and institutional barriers to learning. Looking through this prism allows me to see exactly what my research participants and I went through, in what amounts to a process of disentanglement. This process involved determining the different strands of our identities and facing the battle of inventing and reinventing our 'selves'.

Dyslexia is often portrayed as a negative and we have seen how this can create a self-image of being defeated, of not being able to do what other people can do, which often overshadowed the achievements of all my research participants, whose successes were interwoven with their 'deficit'. The classic example of this was when Winehouse was not successful in applying for an internship and she was told “With all that [dyslexia], look how far you have come”. I also highlighted that when a person is willing to disclose their dyslexia and it is disclosed in a safe environment and free from negative outcomes, alongside a neurodiverse approach which embraces dyslexia as a different way of learning and not a life limiting disability, success is achieved. All my participants informed us how these negative portrayals, perceptions and cultural misconceptions of dyslexia are further cemented by the discourse and the disclosure process in third level institutions. Following on from this, my research has highlighted how these concepts have several impacts on the self, self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ways it can affect how students with dyslexia perform in certain arenas. This in turn will then invoke vicissitudes, ordeals, voice suppression and in turn my participants often retreated to what I termed as their personal academic prison.

One of the main themes to emerge from my research was the barriers which are in place for students with dyslexia. These barriers can be consciously or unconsciously erected and come in the form of both institutional and attitudinal biases, and they can manifest through the discourse on dyslexia and the disclosure process, interacting with the supports and the accommodations from student services in various third level institutions. Barriers are in place through a lack of awareness around the characteristics of dyslexia by university and academic staff and through student’s peers. Third level education is also implicating certain policies and procedures around assessments, writing criteria and teaching methods and this research has highlighted how this can embody and manifest in the third level institution as barriers for my research participants.

Low opinions of the self was identified in my research as a central barrier to reaching one's full potential. Self-awareness was very important, and this notion was mentioned by many of my participants who highlighted the importance of accepting who you are: "Everyone is different like you define different ways of coping with it [dyslexia] for yourself" (Turbo). The image of the prism helps us to see the different parts of a person not as being distinct, but in a continuous spectrum and this challenges the notion that difference is a binary system comprising rigid dichotomist entities, arguing instead that it is "multifaceted, complex, always changing, and infinitely sociocultural" (Slesaransky-Poe and García, 2009:204). The data highlights that when my participants and I accepted our dyslexia as a unique and integral part of our being, viewed dyslexia as a difference rather than a deficit, and as several participants referred to it, experienced their 'coming out', a great deal could be achieved.

This acceptance then became a powerful and empowering moment for my participants and invoked a kind of liberation. Part of this liberation is empowering one's 'self' and this empowering process of finding oneself through the perspective of a prism helps to form a part of that liberation. After this liberation, my participants showed how having dyslexia helped them to be much more creative, display their thinking outside the box skills and this creativity is also displayed in the dissertation through using images and poetry. Rather than promoting dyslexia through 'rose tinted' glasses to promote that all is comparator, my research highlights that studying with dyslexia can be done and successful studying can be achieved.

My research concludes, therefore, that studying with dyslexia is not all bad and by moving out of a pre-existing fixed mindset to a more growth mindset will allow one to view dyslexia and studying in a new light and to do things in a different way: this is what being neurodivergent can lead too. I highlighted how my participants achieved this adaptation, told their stories through personal embodied experiences, and awarded us invaluable insights into how dyslexia manifests and affects people with dyslexia from their 'first-hand' inside out experiences. My participants identified and highlighted their array of personal strengths, skills, and alternative learning strategies, underpinned by a neurodiverse or difference perspective of dyslexia as opposed to a 'disorder' approach (Griffin & Pollak, 2009) and ultimately, they acknowledged that dyslexia is a part of their identity.

A vital part of this research is that it demonstrated how people with dyslexia can and will succeed in third level education, regardless of encountering the barriers identified within my research. From analyzing the data and my participants' personal experiences of studying in third level education, my findings show how one can succeed with dyslexia, not despite dyslexia or the systemic barriers in place, but in partnership with them all and by adopting a neurodiverse approach. This will then increase the opportunities for people with dyslexia and enable them to become the experts that can teach us how to create a more inclusive and diverse learning environment. One of the challenges for students with dyslexia is to dis-identify with a fixed mindset which promotes a limited sense of ‘self’. This can be created by the destructive emotions associated with dyslexia and how it impacts on the educational experience. It is also imperative to work alongside disability advocates, disability study academics and disability activists to maintain awareness and to embrace the belief that there is nothing wrong with having a disability. However, what we always need to challenge is the notion there is something wrong with how people with disabilities are treated.

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## (Appendix 1)

### Students with dyslexia and how they navigate third level education

Project information

***What the research is about….***

This research will explore the relationship between dyslexia, identity, and stigma.  It is looking to uncover how a diagnosis of dyslexia impacts on the identity of an individual and whether or not stigma is associated with such a learning difficulty. The research wants to uncover how students with dyslexia experience third level education and interact with the supports in place in their institutions.

***Why the research is needed….***

Socio-cultural theory suggests that a person's "sense of identity will inevitably be affected by what is valued in their society and culture" (Burden, 2008:188). In Western societies, "literacy is a highly valued skill or commodity" (Burden, 2008:188). In an Irish context, third level education is highly valued. If students identify dyslexia as a limitation, according to Bandura (1997), it becomes a barrier to successful learning and has a negative effect on their identity, which in turn impacts on them socially, academically and culturally. The British National Cohort (1988 & 1994) studies indicated that developmental difficulties were indicators of later feelings of depression, particularly in women and employment difficulties in men. The research will explore the connection between third level students with dyslexia and the ways in which this can and does affect a person's sense of identity.

In addition, the research hopes to contribute to a greater understanding of the role of supports for students with dyslexia in third level education.

***Who will be involved?***

The research will be carried out with existing and graduated students from third level institutions in Co. Dublin and Co. Kildare. It is envisaged that I will source at least 8 students from four different universities and Institutions of technology in two different counties.

***What's involved?***

One–to-one interviews with each participant and then a period of time 'hanging' with my research participants in their everyday academic lives. Hanging out (some time in your shoes) or me participating and observing you in your everyday interactions while you are in college will take place for a period of up to two hours at a time, over five different days. This is entirely at your discretion and can be more or less that the time stated and there is absolutely NO obligation to participate in this at all. Your participation at any level which suits you is very much appreciated. You are also under NO obligation to continue the process and you can withdraw at any time. It is envisaged the researcher will conduct these research methods with at least 32 participants. Following the initial gathering of ideas and experiences about dyslexia and third level education, the information will be sorted into themes and the findings of the research will be presented to the participants to check for accuracy and to provide an additional opportunity to add to the research.

### *What will happen to the information?*

Information will be held in confidence, names and all identifying details will be changed from the transcribed interviews and the data will be retained for ten years as requested by MU Research Integrity Policy. Audio tapes will be held securely until they are transcribed by the researcher. The audio files will be uploaded to an encrypted, password protected laptop and will be destroyed three years after the research has been fully completed. Computer files containing research transcripts will be deleted and all paper-based records will be shredded by the researcher within this time frame. The researcher will return to participants to seek their consent if the data gathered during the research enquiry is to be used for publication. Your participation at any level which suits you is very much appreciated. You are also under NO obligation to continue the process and you can withdraw at any time. The research is anonymous, and you can withdraw your consent at any time up until the work is published and you have the right to access your data at your discretion. The research and its findings will be written up in a Doctoral thesis, in further publications such as academic journals and will be presented at relevant conferences. If you have any questions about the research, you are welcome to contact either the researcher Keith Murphy, or my supervisor, Dr. Steve Coleman at:

| | |
|---|---|
| Keith Murphy | Dr. Steve Colman |
| keith.c.murphy@mu.ie | steve.colman@mu.ie |

(Appendix 2)

# PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

## ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW

## Students with dyslexia and how they navigate third level education

I, (full name) ………………………………… received information on the study and I understand what the research is about. I understand that I will be taking part in a one to one 60 / 90-minute discussion with the researcher Keith Murphy, who will also 'hang' with me during an agreed period of time in my college. I understand what 'hanging' out with entails and that it will take place for a period of up to two hours at a time, over five different days. I realise it is at my discretion and it can be more, or less than the time stated and there is absolutely NO obligation to participate in this at all. I understand that I am under no obligation to continue the process and I understand I can withdraw at any time. I know that the information I have given will be written up in a Doctoral thesis and included in published materials and relevant conferences. I know that my real name will not be used and other details that identify me will be changed to ensure confidentiality. I understand that I can decide what questions I want to answer and up until the point where my contribution has been anonymised, I am free to withdraw from the research.

I understand that the data gathered will be kept securely by the researcher for three years and that at that point it will be destroyed, audio files will be overwritten, computer files will be permanently deleted, and all paper-based materials will be shredded by the researcher.

Please tick the box below to ensure complete understanding of the process:

I understand what is meant by:

The Information Sheet ☐

The Interview ☐

Hanging Out ☐

Time of Hanging ☐

Out Limits of Confidentiality ☐

Retention of Information ☐

Withdrawal at any Time ☐

Your Participation ☐

**Full Name:** ___________________________

**Signature:** ____________________________

**Today's Date:** ___________________

**Researchers Signature:** ___________________

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

## (Appendix 3). Font Style Test Sheet and Project Information Sheet

The window was committed to opening from the inside out and not the outside in. the willows blowing in the winds meant the window could not be opened by our mum. Mummy was not home therefore could not accommodate the window opening. She was off playing backgammon with commandeer in Arrowwoods as it was the commencement of the month. Mammy played in Willowoods at the end of the month also.

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## (Appendix 3) Font Style Project Information:

*You cannot read unless you can see text, however, seeing text is more complicated than it appears.* Wilkins, A. (2013). The Dyslexia Handbook. Essex. University of Essex. keith.murphy.2010@mumail.ie

Dear student,

I am currently undertaking a PhD in Anthropology in Maynooth University and I am also registered with the MAP office. My topic is 'navigating third level education with dyslexia' and I wondered if you could spare 10 minutes of your time to read a short piece for me please. The content is not relevant, it is just the font styles I am interested in. if you would like to partake, fill in the document under the fonts and return to ME please, or if you require any further information, please contact me on the email address below.

While attending the European Dyslexia Associations conference in October in Munich, I attended a lecture giving by Professor Wilkins from Essex University. He had some very interesting research and findings on reading font styles and people with dyslexia. The piece below is a snapshot of his research, I decided to put this to the test, and I wondered would you like to help me please. Third level institutions insist we use font style Aerial (A) and Times New Roman (TNR). I always find when I read particular words in TNR with a lot of m's, commitment or w's, windows, that I imagine those words to in italics or a different font than the rest and/or they are floating on the page which makes my eyes go funny. I have included a couple of sentences in different fonts and I wondered if you had time and would not mind, just reading it and seeing if you have feelings and/or thoughts on this and jotting them down under each one, please feel free to also state your favourite font. Appreciate your time and feedback. I hope all is good and thank you Keith.

## (Appendix 4) List of Useful Support Contacts

### Dyslexia Ireland

Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI) works with and for people affected by dyslexia, by providing information, offering appropriate support services, engaging in advocacy and raising awareness of dyslexia.
Tel: 01 877 6001 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)
Website: info@dyslexia.ie

### ITT Counselling Service

Like everyone else students can and do run into problems which they cannot resolve for themselves. Settling/resettling into the Institute, personal relationships, not being sure of what is expected of you, family worries, low mood, shyness, academic pressures etc. may worry you. It is important to tackle problems before they become so big that they will interrupt your Institute career. It is important to seek help in time. To help you the Institute provides a confidential Student Counselling Service.
Tel: 01 404 2635 (By Appointment)
(Website): counselling@it-tallaght.ie

### Maynooth University Counselling Services

The Student Counselling Service is a professional, confidential counselling service provided to all registered students of Maynooth University. Counselling provides the opportunity for any student to discuss in private any concerns which may be impacting on academic performance or personal health and well-being. Counselling is generally offered on a one to one basis, is short-term in nature, is strictly confidential and is provided free of charge.

Self-referral to the Service is welcomed and encouraged.

Tel: 01 708 3554 (By Appointment, or a daily drop in service 1pm-2pm)

### NALA

The National Adult Literacy Agency is a national organization that is committed to making sure that people with unmet literacy and numeracy needs can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.
Tel: 01 4127900
Website: http://www.nala.ie/

## Citizen's Information Centres

Citizens Information provides information on all aspects of Public Services and entitlements for citizens in Ireland. It takes a personal approach to the presentation and delivery of information on public services and the social and civil rights of everyone in Ireland. This is a free and confidential service and you can choose to drop in to a CIC near you.

LoCall: 1890 777 121 (Monday to Friday, 9am-9pm)
Website: www.citizensinformation.ie

## SHINE

Shine supports people with mental health problems and their families and friends. The information helpline is open every day from 9am to 4pm and can provide general information, a listening ear and specific information about Shine services.

Lo-call: 1890 621 631
Website: http://www.shineonline.ie/

## Mental Health Ireland

A national voluntary organisation who campaign, advocate, undertake research and provide an information service.

Mensana House, 6 Adelaide Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: 01 284 1166
Email: info@mentalhealthireland.ie

## National LGBT Helpline

The National LGBT Helpline is a non-judgmental and confidential service providing listening, support and information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, their family and friends, and to those who are questioning if they might be LGBT.

Tel: 1890 929 539 (Mon to Fri 7 - 9pm & Sat to Sun 3 - 6pm)
Website: http://www.lgbt.ie/default.aspx

## Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)

FLAC is an independent organisation dedicated to the realisation of equal access to justice for all. To this end it campaigns on a range of legal issues but also offers some basic free legal services to the public. FLAC currently concentrates its work on four main areas: Legal Aid, Social Welfare, Credit & Debt and Public Interest Law

Tel: 1890 350 250

## Images of Field Sites

dyslexia
association of ireland

ITT

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