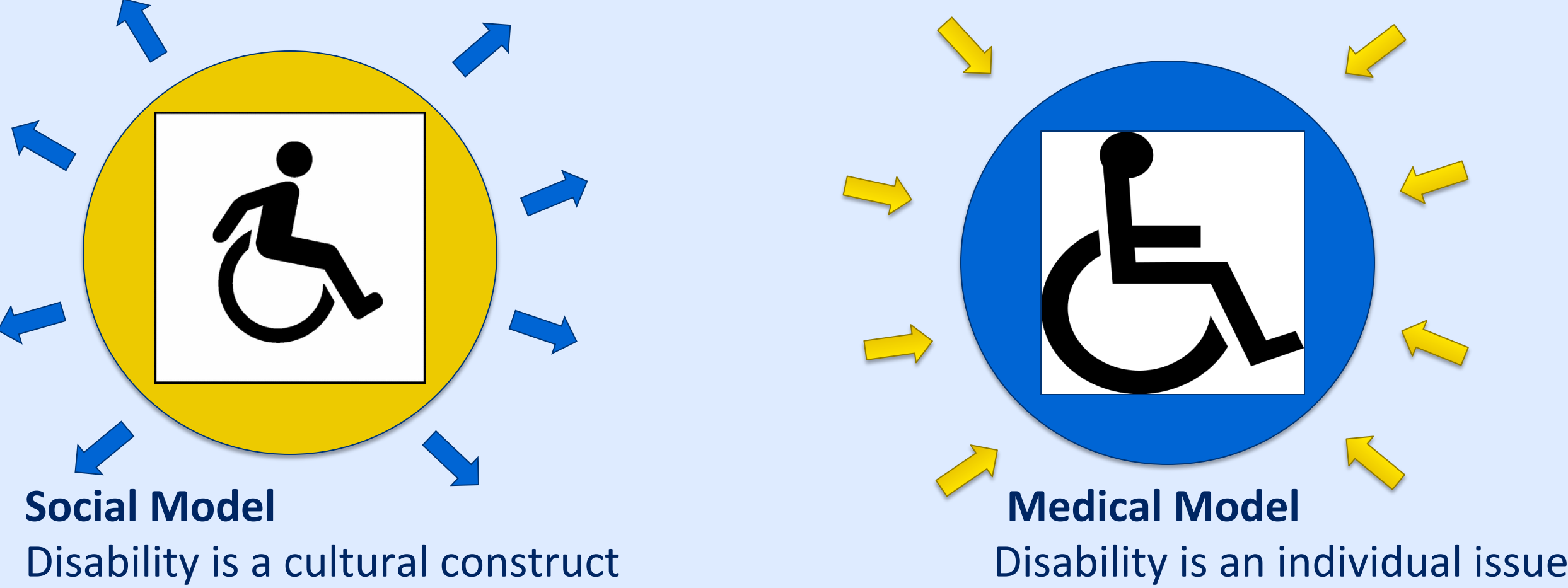


# Undergraduate Students' Reflections of Disability: Implications for Postsecondary Pedagogy

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## Introduction

- Disability Studies (DS) is a nascent field, which is witnessing an increase in postsecondary offerings of courses and programs of study (Jarman & Kafer, 2014). Instructors have the challenging task of introducing a critical perspective of disability to undergraduate students.
- Students can come from different majors and have varying degrees of experiences with people with disabilities. They may wrestle with the critical concepts discussed in a DS course.
- These courses require a teaching methodology that will encourage critical thought and facilitate a potential change in student disposition toward disability (Hulgin, O'Connor, Fitch, & Gutsell, 2011; Cypher & Martin, 2008; Paterson, Hogan & Willis, 2008).
- This study extends the literature about the experience of completing a DS course



## Theoretical Framework

### Transformative Learning

- Mezirow's transformative learning theory for adult learners suggests that previously regarded assumptions can be challenged, interrupted, and changed due to the intersection of critical reflection, discourse, and experiences (Mezirow, 1990).



### Exploring the Liminal Space

- Using transformative learning as a theoretical anchor, this study further examines the liminal space of understanding and meaning making within the context of disability concepts. Berger (2004) describes this phenomenon as "the edge of knowing." This study explores how the students make sense of disability and the processes they use within their written reflections.
- Malkki (2010) explores the mechanisms of reflection, determining it is a holistic process incorporating social, biological, and emotional components. The "comfort zone" and "edge emotions" are aspects, which contribute to the process of reflection.

## Research Questions

- How do undergraduate students make sense of and understand disability while completing a disability studies course?
- What pedagogical decisions made by the course instructors seem to promote undergraduate students' development of new understandings of disability?
- How do undergraduate students represent disability within their specific disciplines and what shifts occur throughout the semester?

## Methodology and Data

The analysis of the following data sources, over the course of one semester, has been completed:

- Pre- and post-course questionnaires (e.g., personal and professional experiences and perspectives of disability) completed by students during the first and last week of the course.
- Narrative reflection assignments completed weekly across the semester.
- Weekly observations of course lectures and in-class discussions of two discussion sections documented with descriptive field notes.

Qualitative, ethnographic, methods were implemented for this study. I observed the course over two semesters. The weekly observations included a full class lecture and two discussion sections.

- Open coding was completed to uncover potential themes and patterns within the data sources.
- Broad categories were determined through the process of axial coding (Creswell, 2012).
- A qualitative software program was used to provide additional insights regarding potential themes and patterns based on students' majors, types of experiences and heterogeneous groups.
- Data analysis is ongoing. Preliminary findings have been developed from the first semester of data collection and are continuing to undergo in-depth scrutiny as data are collected for a second semester with a new group of students.

## Preliminary Findings

