There are two major ableist DA’s to your performance:

First, while poetry has a lot of individual value, it is frequently inaccessible to many with learning disabilities. Whether it is a difficulty conceptually pictilizing concert metaphors and ironic disjunction or like my coach difficulty with meter and non-standard sentence structure, many learning disabilities make understanding and following poetry extremely difficult. There are ways that poetry can be used as method of personal liberation, even from learning disabilities, however, we should not force students to engage with it, especially as a survival strategy. It is those expectations that drive individuals with learning disabilities out of communities. Philip **Schultz [a Pulitzer Prize winning poet who struggles with dyslexia].**. “Words Failed, Then Saved Me.” Sunday Review, NYTimes. September 3rd 2011.

So this summer’s news that research is increasingly tying dyslexia not just to reading, but also to the way the brain processes spoken language, was no surprise to me. I found many ways around my dyslexia, but I still have trouble transforming words into sounds. I have to memorize and rehearse before reading anything aloud, to avoid embarrassing myself by mispronouncing words. And because learning a foreign language is sheer torture to dyslexics (even though it’s a requirement in many schools), to this day I can’t attend a High Holy Day service at my synagogue without feeling I don’t belong there, because I can’t speak Hebrew and must pretend to read my prayer book. When I did finally learn to read, my teachers didn’t have much to do with it. I was 11, and even my school-appointed tutors had given up on me. My mother read the one thing I would listen to — Blackhawk comics — over and over again, hoping against hope that by some leap of faith or chance I would start to identify letters and then learn to arrange them into words and sentences, and begin the intuitive, often magical, process of turning written language into spoken language. One night, lying in bed as she read to me, I realized that if I was ever going to learn to read I would have to teach myself. The moon glowing outside my window, I remember, seemed especially interested in my predicament, perhaps attempting its own kind of encouragement. Was it a dummy, too? I wondered. If only I could be another boy, a boy my age who could sound out words and read and write like every other kid I knew. I willed myself into being him. I invented a character who could read and write. Starting that night, I’d lie in bed silently imitating the words my mother read, imagining the taste, heft and ring of each sound as if it were coming out of my mouth. I imagined being able to sound out the words by putting the letters together into units of rhythmic sound and the words into sentences that made sense. I imagined the words and their sounds being a kind of key with which I would open an invisible door to a world previously denied me. And suddenly I was reading. I didn’t know then that I was beginning a lifelong love affair with the first-person voice and that I would spend most of my life inventing characters to say all the things I wanted to say. I didn’t know that I was to become a poet, that in many ways the very thing that caused me so much confusion and frustration, my belabored relationship with words, had created in me a deep appreciation of language and its music, that the same mind that prevented me from reading had invented a new way of reading, a method that I now use to teach others how to overcome their own difficulties in order to write fiction and poetry. (It’s perhaps not surprising that many famous writers are said to have struggled with dyslexia, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and W. B. Yeats.) We know now that dyslexia is about so much more than just mixing up letters — that many dyslexics have difficulty with rhythm and meter and word retrieval, that they struggle to recognize voices and sounds. It’s my profound hope that our schools can use findings like these to better teach children who struggle to read, to help them overcome their limitations, and to help them understand that it’s not their fault. We knew so much less when I was a child. Then, all I wanted and needed, when I learned so painstakingly to read and then to write, was to find a way to be less alone. Which is, of course, what spoken and written language is really all about. But poetry should be a matter of passion, not survival.

Second, the linguistic use of body in your own words as opposed to just your cards involves a micro aggressive retrenchment of the holistic delusion which eliminates disabled people from your movement. Thought of the ‘black body’ rarely pulls up a mental picture of a black women in a wheel chair, but a differently colored Vitruvian Man. This also turns the solvency for other liberatory movements. Creamer[[1]](#footnote-1) Betcher offers us some openings, some possibilities for conversational intersection. Her appeal to flesh, rather than to body, is one such space [for conversational intersection]. Two important claims are embedded in her argument against body. The first is that the use of body invites, as she writes, “the hallucinatory delusion of wholeness” (108). In other words, body has been taken to be another (disembodied) ideal that no one can attain. The second, related but yet somewhat different, is that we too often take body to be a generic term, leading to what Betcher describes as “naturalization or normalization.” In this way, the term body had been taken as shorthand for “normal body,” requiring a signifier for other kinds of bodies (“disabled body” being one example among many). I would argue that these two errors are interrelated, as we all have neither ideal nor normal bodies, and yet that they must be unpacked or challenged from slightly different perspectives. A corollary here might be found in other areas of feminist discourse where both the ideal woman and the generic woman have had to be deconstructed—the first to show that women were, in fact, human, living, people; the second to highlight ways in which the assumption of a generic type acts to “white”-wash or erase critical differences between and among these human, living, people. I find the lens of disability to be a promising way to challenge both the ideal body and the normal body. Clearly, this is significant for people who already wear the label of disability, as we are often identified as those whose bodies are least normal—and, from this position on the margins, we can first make appar ent and then challenge the assumptions of the center. Yet it is also important to recognize that this is not just a project for or of people “with disabilities.” Here I find Sallie McFague’s proposal of attention epistemology to be helpful: “the kind of knowing that focuses on embodied differences.” Betcher makes a similar claim when she invites us to focus on “that which we know to be true of lives” (108). The illusion of the ideal body and the distortion of the normal body begin to fade away as we begin to see bodies (or flesh) with new levels of complexity, observing that normal only exists in our imaginations, and recognizing ourselves as having limits and “leaky bodies and boundaries.” Once we recognize that limits are unsurprising, we can then begin to move not only to a perspective where we embrace (value, accept, respect) the idea of having limits (as individuals and as communities)—whether or not we claim disability as a label—but can also notice ways in which these limits might embrace us, acting to make and unmake issues of identity, relationality, space, and place. As I have argued more fully elsewhere, a limits perspective has profound implications for theology and ethics, as well as self- and communal understanding. And again, while clearly there is relevance here for and within the discourses of disability theology, it is not hard to recognize the ways in which the embrace of limits can engage other conversations, such as those emerging within postcolonial theory, as they declare danger in binaries and dualisms and seek new ways of under standing and being.

These linguistic considerations matter. Lydia **Brown** [I am autistic, disabled, and proud! I have a variety of experience in grassroots organizing, public policy advocacy, and outreach on disability rights issues. Policy Analyst for ASAN. “Violence in Language: Circling Back to Linguistic Ableism.” 2/11/2014. AutisticHOYA. <http://www.autistichoya.com/2014/02/violence-linguistic-ableism.html> As important as it is to recognize and uncover the violence of linguistic ableism (how ableism is specifically embedded into our language), it is also critical to understand why this is important. (And this is where those who jump the gun and leap to accusations of pedantic, holier-than-thou, smug language-policing or censorship have not yet come to understand why this page, and those like it, need to exist.) Linguistic ableism: a) is part of an entire system of ableism, and doesn't exist simply by itself, b) signifies how deeply ableist our societies and cultures by how common and accepted ableism is in language, c) reinforces and perpetuates ableist social norms that normalize violence and abuse against disabled people, d) actively creates less safe spaces by re-traumatizing disabled people, and e) uses ableism to perpetuate other forms of oppression. Language is not the be all end all. This isn't about policing language or censoring words, but about critically examining how language is part of total ableist hegemony. This is about being accountable when we learn about linguistic ableism, but it is also about being compassionate to ourselves and recognizing that to varying extents, we have all participated in ablesupremacy and ablenormativity. This is about understanding the connections between linguistic ableism and other forms of ableism, such as medical ableism, scientific ableism, legal ableism, and cultural ableism. Language reflects and influences society and culture. That's why students of any foreign language often study the cultures where that language is dominant. (And that's not to dimiss the many valid criticisms of the ethnocentrism and colonialism in much area and language studies programs.) Language isn't important for silly semantic reasons, but because it cannot be separated from the culture in which it is deployed. Feminist theory, queer theory, and race theory have all analyzed how sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, binarism, and racism are embedded in language. This is the same process.

1. Deborah Beth Creamer[Creamer is the author of Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities(2009), a book that encourages thought in new ways about categories like ability and disability.] *Embracing Limits, Queering Embodiment: Creating/Creative Possibilities for Disability Theology.* Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 123-127 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)