Dinner in the Dark: A Glimpse Into the Productivity of Emulation Experiences as They Relate to Building Empathy for Systems of Oppression

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the productivity of emulation experiences as they relate to building empathy for systems of oppression by utilizing Dinner in the Dark, a vision impairment simulation dinner, hosted by the Boston College Undergraduate Government of Boston College Council for Students with Disabilities, as a case study. Drawing from semi-structured qualitative interviews with 19 participants of Dinner in the Dark and field notes taken on site of both nights of the dinner, I find that developing empathy or experiencing an increase in empathy following Dinner in the Dark did not always necessarily translate into an inclusive and non-stereotypical understanding of the visually impaired disabled identity. In other words, although simulation may promote empathy, emulating a state of being that one is not naturally in possession of, especially if it is also for a brief period, may provide misleading information as well as prompt discrimination.

Keywords: Disability, empathy, emulation, simulation, systems of oppression, visually impaired

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Introduction

Dinner in the Dark is an annual event that is held by the Council for Students with Disabilities (CSD) under the Undergraduate Government of Boston College. It intends to provide an opportunity for BC students to emulate what it is like to be visually impaired. Dinner in the Dark serves as a case of empathy-building. While empathy-building activities aim to increase empathy by training skills such as perspective-taking, Weisz et al. (2021) address how empathy encapsulates more than just sharing and understanding others' feelings because it also reflects underlying motives that cause people to experience or avoid it.

The intentions behind the event are for students to be able to participate in an empathy-building simulation. However, event organizers found that some students were leaving the event infantilizing individuals experiencing blindness and discussing how "impossible" this state of being would be to navigate if this were to be a permanent status. As the Director of CSD for the 2023-2024 academic year, but a member of CSD from my freshman year who participated in *and* facilitated Dinner in the Dark, this disparity was what motivated the premise of this study. I am interested in how Dinner in the Dark contributed to empathy changes to better understand the specific state of being, ability, which is a status that is relevant to the system of oppression of ableism. This study serves to explore the productivity, or lack thereof, associated with emulating a state of being that one is not naturally in possession of as it pertains to the development or increase in empathy experienced.

Many researchers have championed the use of disability simulation activities because it is an "effective way to raise awareness about people with disabilities by engaging in their

viewpoints and real-life experience" (Jin et al., 2023, p. 162) to respond to the growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion. However, there are limited empirically reliable studies that comprehensively evaluate the implications of simulating physical, cognitive, and sensory disabilities. I suggest through my study that there is salience in properly analyzing the productivity and intentionality of pre-existing emulation experiences, and in this case, Dinner in the Dark. To address the gaps in the existing literature about the perceived and actual effectiveness and productivity of emulation experiences, I focused on a case study of an emulation experience that takes place at my campus, Dinner in the Dark. With my study, I aim to close this gap and take a step towards exploring the correlation of the development of empathy and an application of this empathy in the participants' day-to-day lives following the experience. I pose two research questions: 1. Is Dinner in the Dark able to develop or increase empathy in the participants for the visually impaired community? And 2. To what extent is Dinner in the Dark productive for educating people and influencing their perception of the lives of those who are visually impaired? I argue that to foster a more inclusive and diverse society that does not work to exclude individuals with disabilities, emulation experiences have to be accurate and not limiting so that disability awareness education can correctly promote an understanding of disability.

I found that all of the participants (19/19) reported that they experienced a positive change after participating in Dinner in the Dark, in terms of coming out of the event having learned something new or having their perspective on blindness expanded. However, I also found out that for many participants, even if the simulation event increased their empathy levels towards the visually impaired individuals in the disabled community, oftentimes, participants left misconstruing their only and subsequently challenging, "blind" experience as the entirety of

something as nuanced as the visually impaired disabled identity. Consequently, this had the opposite effect of humanizing and giving autonomy to the lives of disabled people with vision impairments, as they instead became relegated as solely individuals with the lack of the power of sight. For each participant, their experience in Dinner in the Dark informed thei'r actions moving forward, either by spurring within them a call of pity or a call for action.

Literature Review

Inequality and Empathy

Racism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, classism, and sexism are systems of oppression that are systematic, directional power relationships among social identity groups that serve to benefit one group at the expense of another (Shlasko, 2015). Oftentimes, these systems are multiple and interlocking and produce identities with nuanced experiences in systems of oppression. As it pertains to ableism, although people with disabilities make up more than one-eighth of the U.S. population, they are rarely integrated into sociological studies of inequality (Shandra, 2018). When compared to people without disabilities, individuals with disabilities are subjected to a disproportionately lower quality of life as evidenced by their lower levels of education, employment rates, household resources, and overall poorer health (Shandra, 2018). Namkung & Carr (2019) expand upon this notion and share that individuals who have functional limitations face all kinds of discrimination which manifest in their institutional and interpersonal lives in the U.S. Like other isms and systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender, disability has implications such as discrimination. Shandra (2018), however, hypothesizes that disability may fit less abstractly into sociological models unlike these aforementioned systems because depending on the nature of the condition, individuals with

disabilities can transition in and out of disability over the course of their lives: disability is not a permanent status for all.

Empathy is crucial, especially as it relates to systems of oppression like ableism, as social empathy aids in taking into account lived differences across cultures with a specialized focus on the experiences of oppression and marginalization; essentially, social empathy helps people gain a stronger sense of identity in the context of a larger society (Segal & Wagaman, 2017). Segal & Wagaman (2017) convey that with proper social empathy, individuals can reside in a society in which everyone has equal access to rudimentary rights, protection, and opportunities, which is reflective of a society filled with social justice. Coplan & Goldie (2011) explain that empathy has been pivotal in both simulations and scholarship as a mechanism in which individuals venture to engage with the mind-bodies of others. Krösl et al. (2023) reference empathy as a pivotal factor in not only understanding the lives but also the symptoms of people with disabilities. Empathy is to be distinguished from sympathy because "it is deeper than sympathy, the capacity to feel with the other, i.e., not the same feeling of the other, but rather a feeling of sorrow and care to the emotion of others" (Krösl et al., 2023, p. 4).

What is Emulation

Emulation, also known as simulation, is to be understood as different from copying. When we copy something, we are partaking in an act of mimesis, where what is regarded as authoritative is that which we copy, and to be deemed a good copy, it must be the closest to being "just like" its inspiration (Titchkosky et al., 2019). In contrast, simulations are explicitly geared towards not being the same as what they are trying to represent or replicate; they serve to answer the question of "What's it like?" instead of "What is it?" (Titchkosky et al., 2019). Simulation activities are to be distinguished from passive learning activities due to how they "allow learners

to bridge the gap between passive learning and direct personal experience" (Herbert, 2000).

Maher & Haegele (2022) expand upon the definition of simulation by defining it as

"other-oriented perspective-taking, where a person represents another's point of view and thus

attempts to simulate the target individual's experiences as though they were that person" (p. 2).

Specifically, disability simulations are about non-disabled people and attempt to encapsulate the

disabled other to display and progress their empathetic imaginings (Maher & Haegele, 2022).

Maher & Haegele (2022) stress that visually impaired people must be at the center of the

simulation as the focus should be on doing simulations with visually impaired individuals rather

than about them.

The Promises of Emulation

Oftentimes, emulation experiences such as disability simulations are endorsed as tools to

facilitate pedagogical learning without the views of the people with vision impairment

themselves (Maher et al., 2022). Maher et al. (2022) conducted a study that used vignettes and

telephone interviews to elicit the views of nine people with visual impairments assessing the

value (or not) of simulating this impairment. One of the interviewees, Jade, was a proponent of

the uses of simulations for their ability to address one of the three emotions of fear, pity, and

disgust which exist as the major building blocks of the emotional infrastructure of ableism

(Maher et al., 2022). Simulations may elicit positive pedagogical developments such as

"increased clarity and precision of verbal instructions; use of pedagogical touch; knowledge of

how to adapt learning activities; and critical thought about the concept of educational inclusion"

(Maher et al., 2020).

Harris (2014) discusses how the oppression of certain groups can be largely understood

based on the two emotions of empathy and disgust; he notes that both emotions are heavily

influenced and affected by the perception of a group membership. Empathy specifically operates to encourage prosocial behavior within the group and disgust discourages prosocial behavior towards the out-group (Harris, 2014). Harris (2014) shares: "Since the perception of in-group and out-group membership has served as the basis for how disgust accentuates and how empathy collapses the borders between people, perception must therefore be altered" (p. 46). Harris (2014) proposes that the inclusion of more individuals into one's in-group will result in the following: "the negative effects of social disgust will be largely avoided and the potential positive effects of empathy will be communally enjoyed" (p. 46). Dinner in the Dark aims to help with just that; emulation events serve as a mechanism of dismantling the hatred individuals may possess for people not in their in-group, ultimately deconstructing systems of oppression.

Wright (1975) engages in a meaningful conversation on sensitizing outsiders to the position of the insider. Wright (1975) shares that the person is more likely to attribute their behavior to a result or product of their environment while the outsider is likely to do just the opposite: attribute his/her traits as the reason or source of that behavior. She outlines three approaches relevant to sensitizing individuals to the importance of the dichotomy between the inside and outside positions, especially as it relates to what she refers to as 'handicapping conditions': mine-thine problem, normalizing relationships by inviting in, and role reversal (Wright, 1975). Wright (1975) outlines that one way to approach the mine-thine problem is by asking participants (those who are handicapped in one way or another whether it may be physically, mentally, or emotionally) to write down what they think is their worst handicap, get paired with a different person, and then indicate which handicap he/she would rather have. This is to show that the insider vs outsider position comes with a different perspective involving different experiences, perceptions, and needs (Wright, 1975).

Furthermore, the second approach to sensitization that Wright (1975) details is called normalizing relationships by inviting in. Wright (1975) details one specific sensitization series in which a college senior was paired with a college freshman who lost all vision in grade school. They were tasked to watch television, listen to music, go watch a movie, attend a lecture and slide show, drink beer, play a pinball machine, attend a baseball game, go on a double date, go shop, fix an automobile, play basketball, go motorcycle, and play billiards (Wright, 1975). With the task of repairing an automobile, the subject admitted that he had a lot of worries not only because he was not sure what his visually impaired partner would be able to do at all but also because he thought he would get an injury from not being able to see the moving parts in the automobile (Wright, 1975). After entering into an intentional conversation with his blind partner, the subject was able to find out that his partner enjoyed working on cars and was able to collaborate efficiently to give him the agency to work on a plethora of tasks (Wright, 1975). Wright (1975) writes that the subject found the purpose of this particular approach to be to get past the stereotypes that surround the handicapped to let go of all prejudices; in other words, normalizing relations allows everyone to sensitize outsiders to the reality that the situation of the insider requires definition by themselves and nobody else.

Lastly, role reversal encourages exploring how an interpersonal helping relationship can accommodate the physical needs of a person with a disability. Wright (1975) cites a specific procedure with vision impairment as an example. If a pair of people were to take turns simulating being a blind person and being a sighted guide while taking a walk, both can experience the position of the insider and outsider consecutively (Wright, 1975). This juxtaposition makes the two sets of experiences more concrete and works to elevate the

awareness that comprehensive knowledge of both can have a positive impact on how help can be provided (Wright, 1975).

The Limits of Emulation

Titchkosky et al. (2019) discredit the potential of simulation activities to bring more meaning to the state of being blind, or otherwise disabled. Titchkosky et al. (2019) make a unique contribution in their suggestion that wondering about simulation can prove to be more transformative than actually putting it into practice. The reason why they uphold this belief is because of the power dynamics at play: "Those who simulate blindness are announcing I have sight; it is authoritative. Sight, thus, becomes the definitional power of all situations which suggests that blindness is the lack of such power. Those simulating blindness are feigning that the authoritative power of sight is natural" (Titchkosky et al., 2019, p. 127). Shlasko (2015) concurs with this idea and conveys that participants who already come into an emulation activity believing that there is a hierarchy of power experience the event as deepening or even affirming that belief. Even fearing or anticipating the occurrence of something can simulate simulation (Titchkosky et al., 2019).

Silverman (2015) expands upon the findings of Titchkosky et al. (2019) by suggesting tangible steps that can be taken to move past the realization that simulation practices may engender more harm than good. A possibility could be to incorporate training activities that reflect a mastery of blindness skills and cooperative contact with individuals who are blind (Silverman, 2015). Unlike other scholars, Silverman (2015) directly acknowledges that simulation does promote empathy. But he calls into question whether the simulations can inform people about the realities of blindness, which can contribute to paternalistic discrimination (Silverman, 2015). This paternalistic discrimination can stem from the fact that being blindfolded

in simulation events parallels the experience of first becoming blind, not the experience of being blind for many years (Silverman, 2015). For this very reason, Goodman-Deane et al. (2013) stresses the importance for designers creating capability loss simulators to be cognizant of what levels of loss are being replicated and how that can be linked back to the user population. French (2007) agrees with this statement and expresses apprehension about the failure of simulation exercises to proactively address either coping strategies and techniques disabled people develop while living with visual impairment or the cumulative social and psychological effects of encountering social and physical barriers throughout their lifetime.

French, like Silverman (2015), takes an additional step and proposes steps that should be taken in lieu of simulation events. French (2007) champions the use of disability equality training, specifically one that is run by disabled people themselves. Kiger (2007), also in conversation with Silverman (2015), says that while he does not explicitly state that disability simulations increase empathy, he argues that they can be effective if executed properly. However, Kiger's (2007) suggestions that certain ethical precautions need to be taken, the activities need to be well designed, and the simulation exercises have to be closely linked to social and behavioral science theory are pretty vague suggestions that ultimately fail to create more productive pathways of accomplishing what simulation events aim to do.

Nario-Redmond & Oleson (2016) discuss that there should be alternatives that should strongly be considered in place of traditional disability simulations, which not only reinforce outdated and ableist ideas but also fail to properly elucidate disability as both a lived experience and a cultural identity. To prove this, Nario-Redmond et al. (2017) conducted two experiments. Experiment 1 randomly assigned 60 undergraduate students with and without disabilities to stations simulating dyslexia, hearing, or mobility impairments, while Experiment 2 had 50

undergraduate students complete low vision, hearing impairment, and dyslexia simulations. Both tested pre- and post-examinations regarding factors such as attitudinal barriers (Nario-Redmond et al., 2017). The results of both experiments unanimously landed on the conclusion that simulating disabilities fails to ameliorate attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Nario-Redmond et al., 2017). This ultimately undermined efforts to improve integration, even though participants were reporting more empathetic concern and exhibiting an understanding of what the disability experience is like (Nario-Redmond et al., 2017).

The effectiveness of emulation events is sometimes not as pronounced, which speaks to neither their dangerousness nor their productivity. Hollo et al. (2021) join in on the conversation regarding whether disability simulation activities are effective and who they are predominantly employed by. Hollo et al. (2021) discuss one research study in particular in which their primary goal was to assess the impact of activity using low-vision goggles to simulate visual impairment for undergraduate students pursuing special education. Specifically, in a cluster-randomized trial with eleven classes, a total of 248 students and related professionals were randomized to participate in either an experimental condition (lecture and simulation) or a control condition (lecture only) (Hollo et al., 2021). During the lecture, students simply received rudimentary information about visual impairment along with a video (Hollo et al., 2021). In the experimental group, students were able to practice guiding and being guided by the low-vision goggles (Hollo et al., 2021). At the end, all of the students were allowed to complete three Likert-type surveys along with a quiz and the results indicated that while the students in the experimental group showed higher levels of interest and enjoyment, there were no statistically significant differences in attitudes towards individuals with visual impairments, confidence or self-efficacy for working with students with visual impairments, content knowledge, or perceptions of activity usefulness

(Hollo et al., 2021). Hollo et al. (2021) uniquely came to the conclusion that because there is positive engagement with no signs of harm, disability simulation activities should neither be promoted nor denigrated. However, the ambiguity surrounding their productivity could decrease their appeal in general.

Case and Method

Dinner in the Dark

Dinner in the Dark has been a legacy event of the Undergraduate Government of Boston College Council for Students with Disabilities (CSD). Every school year in November, undergraduate students at Boston College are encouraged to sign up for the event, which typically takes place on two different weeknights. This year's Dinner in the Dark marked the first time that it was in collaboration with the Carroll Center for the Blind, located in Newton, Massachusetts. The Carroll Center for the Blind has been serving individuals of all ages and all stages of vision loss for over eight decades. They work to improve lives with vision-related problems and have pioneered multiple innovative services, allowing those who are either blind or have low vision to operate in their everyday lives with autonomy (The Carroll Center for the Blind, 2024). Notably, 25% of their staff are blind or visually impaired, and some of the services that they provide include vision rehabilitation, vocational and transition programs, assistive technology training, and recreation opportunities (The Carroll Center for the Blind, 2024). The Carroll Center for the Blind was able to utilize their presence at Dinner in the Dark to spread awareness about the work that they do as well as grant BC students the opportunity to be in the presence of those who possess vision impairment as a lived experience.

Interviews and Observations

Once the sign-up went live, participants (either freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior students at BC) were granted a spot on either Night 1 or Night 2 of Dinner in the Dark on a first-come, first-served basis. On Night 1 of Dinner in the Dark (November 8th), there were 26 Boston College student participants, excluding clients and employees from the Carroll Center for the Blind. On Night 2 of Dinner in the Dark (November 13th), there were 27 Boston College student participants. A Google Form was sent to the Disability Services Office (DSO) November newsletter, the CSD Instagram, the Undergraduate Government of Boston College Instagram, as well as word of mouth and through professors who told students who were in their disability-related courses. From the 53 total student participants, I recruited a total of 19 participants who were all contacted via email. The participants who attended either night of Dinner in the Dark were sent an email inquiring if they were interested in partaking in a Zoom interview for approximately 20–30 minutes.

I thought that semi-structured interviews would be ideal as they would allow participants to share what led up to, occurred during, and followed their Dinner in the Dark experiences through a predetermined set of open-ended questions, but also allow me to explore specific themes and responses as they would come up naturally. While I did welcome deviation from the questions listed in the interview guide, I did make sure to be intentional about being able to cover the following topics of interest across all interviewees: what made them sign up for the event, if they had any previous experience with disabilities, if they ever participated in an emulation experience beforehand, whether they had any criticisms of the event, and what they thought were perceivable changes about themselves following the dinner. (Consult the appendix for the full interview guide.) The field notes that resulted from observing Dinner in the Dark allowed me to gain a more sincere understanding of how this emulation experience panned out for individuals

in the context of a group setting, whether it was with the group of people participants were sitting with at their table or the collective group present at the event.

The 19 interviews began taking place in December 2023 and lasted until March 2024. All of my interviews were conducted on Zoom and were audio and video recorded. I decided to conduct my interviews on Zoom in hopes that it would be more appealing for participants to participate. Zoom is also accessible for users with visual impairments because it ensures that its products are operable and perceivable for users with visual impairments. Specifically, their products support common screen readers such as NVDA, JAWS, VoiceOver, and Android Talkback. As the researcher, I provided informed consent forms to obtain the interviewees' voluntary participation in this research the day before when their interviews were to take place. Additionally, right before the interview took place, I briefly discussed the contents of the informed consent form and asked the participants if they had any questions before beginning. In terms of confidentiality, all interviewees have their identities protected throughout the thesis. To ensure that the information they provided could not be linked back to them, I refer to them by the number in which they were interviewed.

On both nights of Dinner in the Dark, there were employees of the Carroll Center for the Blind who were paired with a member of the CSD to facilitate and moderate the discussions that were taking place at each of the round tables. Outside of the interviews, I also took field notes on both nights of Dinner in the Dark. I had the opportunity to act as a moderator at one of the six tables and had the unique experience of not being blindfolded while most of the participants were. The nature of the information I gathered in the course of such observations pertained to the verbal comments students made at their respective tables either to the other individuals at the table or in response to the questions that the facilitators at each table asked which touched upon

how being blindfolded affected their interactions with the people around them, if they found anything particularly difficult about this experience, and if there was anything they learned about blind culture from this event.

Data Analysis

During the interviews, I took notes and organized them by question so that I could roughly estimate when keywords and phrases that I wrote down could be found in the scope of the whole interview. After all 19 interviews were conducted, I thoroughly read over all of my interview notes to look for recurring themes that pertained to, for example, what participants felt like it would be like navigating the real world following the event, their self-perceived changes in empathy, and other general changes they've noticed after participating in the emulation experience. After obtaining the data from the interviews, I utilized an inductive method to analyze them. Specifically, I utilized a combination of a narrative content analysis and a thematic content analysis. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) share that thematic content analysis, a descriptive qualitative approach to data analysis, typically focuses on analyzing narrative materials of life stories, which utilizes description and interpretation to guide the analysis process. The thematic content analysis allowed me to identify my overarching impressions of the interviews and search for common themes in an organic manner. Following through with this process aided in discovering recurring patterns across the data set. Additionally, the narrative content analysis allowed me to make sense of the individual stories of my interview respondents.

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Results

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A Walk Through Dinner in the Dark

The event took place in the Walsh Function Room, located in Walsh Hall on the lower campus. Upon arrival in the hallway area, before participants are escorted into the room, they are

asked to first sign in and are then handed a blindfold to put on themselves before they are escorted in through elbow-guiding. How this specifically works is that the person who is being guided must hold the arms of the guide slightly above their elbow. The person who is being guided walks slightly behind and to the side of the guide. Because the participants are blindfolded before they enter the Walsh Function Room, the experience "starts" before the actual dinner begins.

The Walsh Function Room is intentionally set up with six roundtables with eight seats to foster an adequate dining space for intimate conversations at each. At each table was one employee of the Carroll Center for the Blind, at least one member of CSD, and a couple of BC undergraduate students. Together, the representatives from the Carroll Center for the Blind and CSD curated a list of questions beforehand to facilitate the reflections at each table following the dining experience. Participants were encouraged to reflect on aspects such as how the social part of dinner made them feel, how being blindfolded affected their interactions with the people around them, and what some of their thoughts were while they were eating during the event. I talk about the specific commentary and conversations that were had in the following sections. When the group reflection was over, participants were given the option of taking off their blindfolds or keeping their blindfolds on and being guided out of the room to conclude the event. While there are similar events under different names that take place nationally, Dinner in the Dark is an event that is unique to Boston College.

Greg Donnelly, the President and CEO of the Carroll Center for the Blind, addressed the participants and informed them of the work that the Carroll Center does before dining began. Along with the team members from the Carroll Center for the Blind and CSD, the Boston College Dining and Catering team was immensely pivotal to the facilitation of the dining portion

as they brought out the appetizer (salad and bread and butter), entree (a Thanksgiving-themed plate), and dessert (carrot cake) individually to each participant after each course wrapped up. Following the dining portion, Nikole Claudio, former director of CSD, went up to the podium to deliver some closing remarks as well as moderate conversation about how the experience was.

The Promises of Emulation

I thought that one of the most straightforward ways for me to begin to evaluate the productivity of emulation experiences was to directly ask the participants of Dinner in the Dark to address the crux of my thesis inquiry. All of the participants (19/19) reported experiencing some sort of positive change, meaning they came out of the event having learned something new or had their perspective on blindness expanded.

This change, however, was not necessarily always perceived in their change in empathy, as Interviewee #1 reported that while her empathy levels had not changed, her ways of approaching individuals with disabilities had. She noted being more intentional about not asking individuals with disabilities if they needed help and found herself letting them take the reins. She described an incident in which her roommates and her visited Starbucks and encountered an individual in a wheelchair. "I was watching as this person came in and got himself through the door. He gets his drink and turns around to leave, and there are three people who ask, 'Can I help you?' 'Can I open the door?' and he's like, 'Nope, I got it; I'm good.' My roommates tried to jump because he was putting his drink down to click the button and grab the drink again, so he was taking a second, and my roommates were trying to jump to help. I stepped back and thought, 'Yeah, you got it.' When my roommates asked me why I didn't do anything, I said, 'Because he said he got it, and I'm not going to assume that just because he's in a wheelchair, he can't do this.'" She explicitly acknowledged that if this were a situation she would have been in a few

years ago, she would have handled the situation very differently, and it would not have reflected a sense of willingness to give the man in the wheelchair autonomy.

Despite all interviewees reporting that they had undergone some sort of positive change, out of the 19 interviewees, only 2 other individuals other than Interviewee #1 were able to back up their claims that empathy levels had allowed them to understand their visually impaired identity more comprehensively. Interviewee #2 didn't simply report that she had been more conscious of disability following Dinner in the Dark but was able to share that it has contributed to her desire to conduct more research with Professor Jenna Tonn, especially as it pertains to the interconnection of disabilities and engineering. Specifically, as someone who works at the Hatchery, Boston College's first university makerspace, she demonstrated interest in making sure that the Hatchery could follow through with its mission of being accessible for both individuals with no experience in construction and those who have accessibility needs pertaining to disability. After Dinner in the Dark, Interviewee #2 talked to her bosses about the accessibility of the space but had to face a lot of realizations, like the machines being very high fidelity. However, she still took it upon herself to email Nikole after the event so that she could come in and do a tour of the space and provide feedback. She shares, "The making and creative aspects of the space should be accessible to anyone, no matter what ability status they have." She proposed striving towards a working environment in which some tables could be height-changeable and restructuring the paths to be less narrow.

While Interviewee #4 did not necessarily correlate their change in self with a change in empathy levels, they shared that the experience affirmed for them everything they already believed. They are experiencing this change through being more apprehensive while walking around campus, and more specifically, how they visualize spaces. They shared that an

organization they were a part of recently held an event in the O'Connell House located on the upper campus and shared that now, reflecting on their location choice with the whole team, they know that future events should be held on the main campus for accessibility purposes as the upper campus is not accessible for, for example, wheelchair users. Furthermore, they shared that for next year's formal planning, they have already put in a conscious note to potentially make the lights less flashy so that they are more sensory-friendly. When participants shared that they now had a greater understanding of the disabled identity following Dinner in the Dark, especially through the empathy that they gained, it was important to cross-check this understanding into real-life applications.

During the course of the interviews, each participant was asked whether or not they had criticisms pertaining to this event. Interviewee #9 shared that there are more advantages to holding events like Dinner in the Dark, especially considering the fact that everyone is a consenting party. She shared that she could see why people would say it is insensitive, but it was important to take into consideration that professional administration [the Carroll Center for the Blind] was there. Interviewee #10 acknowledged that this could have been a "cancellable" event, but it was not because clients and employees of the Carroll Center for the Blind were there. She stated that there are benefits to this dinner that outweigh the concerns, and it was important that there was input from the community that faces these issues.

Despite being advertised as an empathy-building experience, I was curious as to whether participants thought that the predominant point of Dinner in the Dark was an educational event or an empathy-building event. 63.2% (12/19 participants) believed that it was an empathy-building event, and 26.3% (5/19) expressed that it was an educational event. The remaining 10.5% of participants (2/19) voted for both because they believed that to build

empathy, you have to learn and engage in this educational framework. Both sides provided compelling accounts; Interviewee #4 argued that Dinner in the Dark was an empathy-building event because if it was purely an educational event, this immersive experience could have been replaced by, for example, a slideshow. They found themselves learning through feeling and practice, which made it an experience involving the opportunity to build empathy. Interviewee #9 shared that she thought it was an educational event because of the Carroll Center for the Blind's involvement in the dinner. She added that even though it was an educational event for her because she found herself empathizing with their community, empathy was what stuck with her and left lasting impressions after the experience was finished.

Greg Donnelly, the President and CEO of the Carroll Center for the Blind, came to speak on both nights of the dinner and shared with the participants fast facts about the center, one of which was that "a middle-aged, homeless client completed our Independent Living Program and is now gainfully employed and living independently in her first apartment." Client impact stories like this one helped break down stereotypes that those who were visually impaired are not immobile or incapable individuals, but ones that are capable of doing the same things sighted people are. He stressed the importance of events like Dinner in the Dark in making those realizations more attainable and widespread.

Interviewee #10 detailed that before the event she didn't realize how hard it was navigating around as a visually impaired individual because they navigated around with such grace. But this difficulty translated into admiration rather than anything pejorative: "Walking out of the event I don't feel sorry for them [visually impaired individuals], I recognize that we all have different abilities and different strengths and bring something different to the table. And a lot of us have challenges that we face, but I think that with the people from the Carroll Center

talking about not feeling bad for them, I think that's something that was key. And more emphasis on difference than disadvantage."

The Pitfalls of Emulation

Because Dinner in the Dark only offered a glimpse of what it would be like to be visually impaired in a dining setting, I asked the interviewees what they thought navigating the real world would feel like in a few words or phrases. Words that came up a lot for many interviewees were: deadly, dependent, overwhelming, difficult, and adaptability. Interviewee #10 shared that she could not even imagine what it would be like full-time. Notably, these adjectives were all pretty pessimistic perceptions of the visually impaired identity.

Despite all interviewees reporting that they had undergone some sort of positive change after attending Dinner in the Dark, out of the 19 interviewees, only 3 participants were able to talk in detail about how they put what they learned from the event into practice in their day-to-day lives, while the others were not. For example, Interviewee #3 shared that her levels of empathy have increased. She claimed that she left the event having understood how to approach an individual with a disability after attending Dinner in the Dark and said everyone should be thought of as equal. However, in sharing how this event had humanized individuals with disabilities for her, she was unable to shed light on any difference other than how she was encouraged to view visually impaired people as "normal" people.

Interviewee #8 brought into question whether Dinner in the Dark brought more attention to the lives of the visually impaired community or served as an opportunity for individuals to become aware of their own privileges as they relate to their ability status. After sharing that his empathy levels had changed after attending Dinner in the Dark, he proceeded to discuss the following: "I really realized how physically able I am." Interviewees #11 and #16 shared that one

of the most predominant ways in which they channeled what they experienced from Dinner in the Dark was through the amount of time they dedicated to thinking about how the lives of the visually impaired are disproportionately affected by norms in society, which we don't think twice to challenge. However, it is questionable whether or not being able to "think more" about a certain community can be equated to exhibiting more understanding about their inner workings as it relates to their identity. While a good number of participants shared that the biggest change they perceived about themselves was their level of awareness regarding the visually impaired community, the majority of them were unable to share how *exactly* they were able to embody this new mindfulness.

A primary concern that was being voiced by some of the participants in Dinner in the Dark was how limited the exposure was. Interviewees #10 and #12 mentioned the importance of the one-hour simulation not serving as an end-all-be-all or, in other words, giving off the impression that it fully encapsulates the lives of the visually impaired. Interviewee #12 expressed: "I mean, obviously, it's dangerous because you're emulating it for one specific scenario in a very controlled environment and in a very safe environment. You can't really generalize the experience to a lot of other aspects of the life of someone who's visually impaired. But I think it's still a good glimpse into the world. It's tough if someone goes into it and says, 'Oh, this was doable. I can totally see someone being visually impaired and carrying out daily activities.' Obviously, there's so much more that a visually impaired person has to go through than just dinner. But also putting yourself in that shoe—I don't want to say dangerous, but I guess it is a very tiny portion of the visually impaired experience." Furthermore, Interviewee #17 disclosed that he liked the idea of the event even though it was not a good representation of what

blind people go through. But he clarified that as long as people knew that this one-hour experience did not speak to the entirety of the experience, it was tolerable.

Prior engagement with disabilities could have been a confounding factor for the development and increase in empathy instead of the actual emulation experience. In other words, there was no real way of measuring if the change in empathy in the participants was due to the actual emulation experience, Dinner in the Dark, since empathy could have already been present. The first question I typically asked interviewees was if they could tell me a little bit about what made them sign up for this event. Everyone's answers seemed to fit into one of the following categories: DEI requirements for UGBC, wanting to partake in advocacy for communities they are not a part of, interest in the event through word of mouth or social media, involvement within CSD, and wanting to experience something new due to curiosity.

Some individuals's desire to partake in advocacy for communities that they were not a part of was a striking and notable reason for why they wanted to attend Dinner in the Dark. While individuals who referenced their interest in advancing disability advocacy may not have directly been involved within CSD, their previous experience with disabilities in general gleaned insight into the presence of advocacy and demonstrated interest through less traditional but personal avenues. For example, Interviewee #4 shared how they grew up around disability their whole lives with an autistic non-verbal brother. They also attended specialized summer camps that they were sent to because of their brother's high support needs. Additionally, Interviewee #7 shared her interest in getting more involved in the UGBC side of disability advocacy and how that spurred her to want to come to the event. Despite sharing her wanting to get further involved through student government, she had a stealthy amount of exposure to disability: "Students with disabilities have always been a really important part of my life. My brother has autism, and he

always has spina bifida and a neurological seizure disorder, so I've been involved with disability advocacy basically my whole entire life. And last year, as part of PULSE, I was a job coach, so I worked with the supportive employment program and was a job coach for four different people on BC's campus." In the same vein, Interviewee #9 communicated that Dinner in the Dark was a great event to bring awareness to herself and other people. But just like Interviewees #4 and #7, she almost seemed to disregard the valuable exposure she had gained from the family members she disclosed had mental disabilities: "Definitely familial mental disabilities. I've been close to that and I think that's where I got my desire to see the world from other people's perspectives and understand other people."

Notably, 6 out of 19 interviewees (31.6%) were members of CSD, either as members of the executive board or as general members. This statistic could have discouraged accrediting Dinner in the Dark as the rationale behind a participant's newfound perception of blindness, especially if the audience members were predominantly CSD affiliates who were already well-versed, or at least more up-to-date, on disability-related topics. It is worth thinking about the value of emulation experiences that draw in an audience that is not already part of the in-group. One may argue that the people who "need" DEI events like Dinner in the Dark, the ones who do not have personal exposure to disability, are not the ones who are attending this event. Interviewee #5 agreed with this sentiment and expressed that he wishes that more people on the campus of BC would be receptive to this event and also that those who are ignorant need to be the ones who need to attend these events. However, Interviewee #7, on the contrary, commended the event and offered no criticisms, in particular applauding how the event was able to attract such a diverse group of people. Because a lot of the participants come from backgrounds where they have this experience with disability in one capacity or another, there

seemed to be an inflated or overstated sense of success regarding the impacts of Dinner in the Dark.

Out of the 19 participants I interviewed for the thesis, only 4 (21.1%) reported having previously participated in an emulation experience. Interviewees #7 and #17 shared that Dinner in the Dark was not the first time they participated in an emulation experience pertaining to disability. Interviewee #7 shared that in his freshman year, he engaged in a CSD-sponsored mini-golf emulation activity. He explained that to mimic what it was like to play golf with dwarfism, the mini golf course would have mismatched clubs to play with because, when you have dwarfism, you tend not to have perfect-sized tools to work with. As a result, Interview #7 discussed having to hit the golf balls with a club that was not the correct fit in terms of length, range, and grasp, all while on his knees. To impersonate those with an amputee, other participants impersonating this specific state of being had to play golf with one arm. Additionally, Interviewee #17 shared how, before college, he had a recollection of participating in blind baseball. Similar to Dinner in the Dark, participants were blindfolded and had to draw on their auditory senses to gain a sense of where the ball was in relation to the baseball field and which directions to run in to reach the bases. These examples spoke to the existence of other instances of emulation experiments as they pertain to the system of ableism. However, notably, when these 2 participants were recounting details from these events, they noted that they didn't remember too much from the event other than a few specific details. I wondered if this potentially spoke volumes about the ineffectiveness of emulation experiences if there were no self-perceived long-term benefits in the picture. It is worth considering if emulation experiences need to be uniformly successful in order for them to be deemed reputable.

Discussion

Connections to Theory

This study aimed to provide a glimpse into the productivity of emulation experiences as they relate to building empathy for systems of oppression. I found the disparity between all the participants reporting that they experienced a positive change in themselves following Dinner and the Dark versus the words used to describe what it would be like to navigate the real world to be significant. I argue that if Dinner in the Dark was a productive emulation experience for these participants, as they reported, they should have been able to come out of the experience exhibiting the understanding that vision impairment does not restrict autonomy but actually allows them to develop an additional set of mechanisms to navigate society. One particular participant expressed that they were always skeptical of events like Dinner in the Dark because nobody should feel bad for people with disabilities; one should feel bad that the world isn't built for people with disabilities.

I had to be apprehensive about participants who reported that their empathy levels had changed and was not quick to equate that to them being able to translate their empathy into something tangible, for example, through how their ways of approaching the visually impaired community have changed. The same applied when participants told me that they gained a new sense of respect for the visually impaired community. I was curious how this newfound sense of respect led to changes in their everyday lives and reflected a sense of genuine care for the community at hand.

At Dinner in the Dark, when participants were being guided to their respective tables, I would hear comments like the following: "Oh, you are walking way too fast; oh my goodness, this is so intimidating already; this feels so different; oh god, I feel so vulnerable and exposed already; can you slow down a bit; this is a lot more difficult than I thought it was going to be; am

I at the table yet; is the chair in front of me; and am I sitting down correctly?" Once participants were seated and sedentary at their respective tables, they seemed to soak in their opportunity to almost recuperate and gain their footing again. When tasked with eating for the first time after being blindfolded, participants made varying comments, like, "Oh god, I probably look like such a mess right now trying to eat, and I probably look so stupid right now." These are the exact initial impressions and biases (because of how difficult individuals found their dining experience) that could have been diverted if it weren't for the fact that Dinner in the Dark was focused on the onset of being blind.

To add to this point, Interviewee #8 shared that he thought Dinner in the Dark was an educational event, and not necessarily an empathy-building experience because sighted individuals know what challenges people with vision impairment may experience, but do not know what vision impairment specifically entails. Interviewee #8's point of view confirmed that Dinner in the Dark may have been focused on the stark differences between what a visually impaired and sighted person experience and reaffirming the bias that vision impairment is arduous, rather than elucidating the nuances of vision impairment and outlining what it specifically entails besides being different from being sighted.

My study gives validation and support to Silverman's (2015) point that simulation practices may engender more harm than good, especially if the simulation is emulating what it is like to become first blind and not be blind for several years. My study supported Maher & Haegele's (2022) point that a key criticism of the simulations is that the experience of complete blindness was too sudden: "In other words, the use of blindfolds, if anything, may have (or not) authentically replicated a specific moment in time if someone suddenly became completely blind but did not authentically replicate losing some or all sight over a longer period, which was much

more likely to happen" (p. 13). Participants had no choice but to rely on touch as their most reliable sense because it at least allowed them to feel the different textures of the food while navigating an experience they never had before.

Similarly, my findings regarding the implications of the monolithic and curated visually impaired dining experience of Dinner in the Dark aligned closely with the thoughts of the interviewees who were a part of Maher et al.'s (2022) study. Nancy, an interviewee with low vision, shared: "I think a lot of people who don't have any visual impairment kind of assume that if you have any type of blindness, that just means you can't see anything and it's just dark. And that's mostly not the case. Even people who are completely blind still often have light sensitivity and can see shadows and figures based on the light. So I think the manipulation of different visual impairments is important because it puts it into perspective a little bit more. Just give them a little bit more education on the spectrum of visual impairment" (Maher et al., 2022, p. 653).

It could be beneficial to look into ways to emulate experiencing blindness over time, as it would make the experience not only more authentic but also more manageable for sighted people (Maher & Haegele, 2022). Especially taking this aspect into consideration, my study urges Goodman-Deane et al. (2013) to reevaluate the productivity of capability loss simulators. This should be done in order to address the dichotomy in their belief that capability loss simulators are an "effective method of helping people to understand the impact of capability loss," (Goodman-Deane et al., 2013, p. 347) despite calling them brief and only targeting some of the functional effects of capability loss.

However, the findings of my study was in disagreement with the argument that if there are individuals with lived experience at the experience, the emulation can prevent participants from, for example, jumping to conclusions about the visually impaired. Jade, an interviewee who

was completely blind, explained that if people with visual impairments are at the simulation, it would be beneficial in that participants could ask questions about any points of confusion instead of expressing that they can't partake in the experience or that they are too scared (Maher et al., 2022). At Dinner in the Dark, there were clients *and* employees from the Carroll Center for the Blind as well as members of CSD. However, while the comments were not explicitly made at the dinner, participants expressed in the post-experience interviews that they thought that living with a visual impairment in the real world would be deadly, dependent, overwhelming, difficult, and would most certainly require adaptability.

While none of the participants at Dinner in Dark took off their blindfolds during the simulation, Interviewee #12 shared that it was reassuring that he knew the blindfold was temporary and if he wanted to, he could technically take it off. The ability to take off the blindfold takes away from the emulation experience and solidifies for sighted people that the experience is temporary and subsequently, not a permanent status of ability they have to get accustomed to. My study recognizes Maher et al.'s (2020) concerns when thinking about the ethics that are involved with simulations. While Maher et al. (2020) did list several positive pedagogical developments through the implementation of simulation experiences, they acknowledged limitations with emulation experiences as well, especially when it comes to vision impairment. Maher et al. (2020) expressed skepticism about the extent to which the non-disabled self is truly able to empathize with the disabled other through embodied simulation because of the ability for the blindfold to be taken off. Notably, this act elucidates the ease and freedom sighted people have in transitioning out of visual impairment. The "simplistic" and monolithic nature of vision impairment that was conveyed through Dinner in the Dark could contribute to

the propensity for not just sighted individuals but people without disabilities to speak and act on behalf of people who do possess disabilities in general.

Nikole Claudio shared closing remarks at the end of each night of the event and started off by saying how she was so glad that so many students came out to Dinner in the Dark because it shows how dedicated everyone was to learning about a new perspective, which isn't easy if it's something one has never done before. In one segment, she recounted: "So, one big takeaway I was just hoping to have everybody get from this evening was a focus on empathy rather than sympathy because, coming to this event, you might think we're doing this because we're supposed to feel sorry for blind people, but that's not what it's about because a disability is just like any other demographic: gender, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status. Just getting an idea of something and what it may be like in order to have more of an understanding of how things can be made to be more accessible to everybody." I hope this study showed that having chosen to focus on such a limited part of the visually impaired disabled identity led to the opposite of what Nikole proclaimed Dinner in the Dark was intended to do.

Limitations

The research study came with limitations. As the sample size was small, with 19 interviewees, due to the intentional and purposeful approach to selecting participants, the findings of this study would not be generalizable to a larger population. This study also does not encapsulate a diverse group of interviewees as I only reached out to BC students who participated in Dinner in the Dark. As the clients of the Carroll Center for the Blind only attended Night 1 of Dinner in the Dark, I had trouble getting their contact information and scheduling interviews. The research would have been amplified by these clients, as I think that they could have provided invaluable insight from their perspective as individuals with the lived

experience of vision impairment that is at the crux of this thesis as it relates to discussing the implications of emulating a state of being that one is not naturally in possession of.

Specifically, this insight would have provided a gateway into thinking about how "accurate" Dinner in the Dark was, as this dinner only offers a glimpse of what it would be like to be visually impaired in a dining setting. I would have also been curious to see what kind of criticisms they had of running events like Dinner in the Dark. I was also interested in seeing whether the responses provided by the participants of Dinner in the Dark (those who were curious about emulating what it would be like to be blind) and those who attended Dinner in the Dark visually impaired (the clients) would or would not have been in communication or disagreement with each other. This would have provided further literature on comprehensively assessing how our understanding of isms and systems of oppression are shaped by our ability to simulate them as an example of empathy-building. Is there such a thing as creating the proper space for empathy-building if we run the risk of oversimplifying or generalizing such a nuanced state of being not just as it pertains to the dining setting but outside of dining?

Implications for Future Research

If I had more resources to conduct this study, I would have liked to study other emulations pertaining to other systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, and sexism, among others. In a similar manner to Dinner in the Dark, I would have tried to gauge if individuals thought there were tangible changes found within themselves and their actions that they were able to perceive after participating in the activity. Studying other emulations could prove to be helpful to use as a point of comparison with the case at hand. For example, I am curious to see if individuals would be more or less apprehensive of emulation events pertaining

to, for example, racism and if there is a fundamental difference in sensitivity when it comes to emulating a racial status in comparison to an ability status.

Hopefully, this study helped advance the general understanding of the intent and motivating factors behind emulation experiences. This study also begins to elucidate the damaging effects that can appear when proper analysis is not conducted, assessing whether the intended impacts of emulation experiences are actually found amongst participants. For this very reason, there is a need for future research to dive into both the perceived and demonstrated strengths and or weaknesses of simulation from the perspective of people who are visually impaired themselves. Future research should continue to investigate this question and adequately examine how other emulation experiences, as they relate to different systems of oppression, have carried out such experiences and analyze how the impacts of each compare to the ones shared by the 19 interviewees of Dinner in the Dark.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Dinner in the Dark has been a legacy and trademark event of the Boston College Council for Students with Disabilities since November of 2019 and held on a yearly basis, up until this current academic year, there has been little discourse or attempt to find a way to properly gauge the "effectiveness" of this emulation experience. I argue that empathy emulation experiments as it relates to ableism amongst the different systems of oppression are worth implementing and investing in. However, this study aims to demonstrate the imperativeness of critiquing established programs in an effort to confirm that such events are delivering what they are intended to do: inform individuals who are not part of the in-group about the realities of, in this specific case, blindness. Being cognizant of this consideration makes it possible to know that the Dinner in the Dark can be ameliorated in future years by

making adjustments in how, for example, the experience simulates emulation from the perspective of a visually impaired person who has accrued certain skill sets over years of navigation to help them maneuver this ability status, in comparison to simulating the onset of first becoming blind. Of course, the process of learning, adapting, and implementing these skill sets will require proper investment of resources and time. However, by showing the willingness to critique emulation experiences, this study prioritizes truly understanding a state of being that one is not naturally in possession of at the core of a proper emulation experience. Because it is only then that we can subvert harmful narratives about, for example, the lives of visually impaired people and partake in experiences where productive and not passive empathy emanates.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE: SERVICE PROVIDER

Audio File ID: _____

Pre-Interview Checklist
[ ] Provide and review information/fact sheet
[ ] Verbal consent to participate in interview
[ ] Verbal consent to audio record the interview

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND SCRIPT

Note: Interviewers are welcome to deviate from this guide in good faith. Also, the PI may edit this document throughout the study. Be sure you're using an up-to-date version of this guide. Interviews are open-ended, but the interviewer should stay generally focused on issues concerning empathy.

1. Can you tell me a bit about what made you sign up for this event [Dinner in the Dark]?

2. Do you have any previous experience with disabilities?

3. Have you ever participated in an event that emulated a state of being that you were not naturally in possession of?

4. What are some of the particular challenges you thought you would face participating in Dinner in the Dark? Did these challenges come up during the event, and if so, how did you navigate through them?

5. Considering some of the challenges we just discussed, what are some changes you'd like to see made, if any, on the campus of BC to accommodate for these differences?

6. This experience only offered a glimpse of what it would be like to be visually impaired in a dining setting. What do you think navigating the real world would feel like?

7. Do you think the predominant point of Dinner in the Dark is an educational event or an empathy-building event?

8. What are your criticisms of this event, if any?

9. What do you think is the most predominant change you have perceived about yourself before and after this event? More specifically, do you think your levels of empathy have changed?

10. Are there some topics of concern or interest that we didn't discuss today that you think are important?

11. Do you have any final questions for me?

Thank you for your time.

Post-Interview Checklist
[ ] Do NOT attach names/contact info of recommended participants
[ ] Attach handwritten notes

Keep these documents and the corresponding audio file secure until data is transferred to PI's office and shared drive.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH

STUDY TITLE: Dinner in the Dark: A Glimpse Into the Productivity of Emulation Experiences as They Relate to Building Empathy for Systems of Oppression

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Heidi Yun

You are invited to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. This document explains information about this study. You should ask questions about anything that is unclear to you.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the productivity of emulation experiences as they relate to building empathy for systems of oppression. This research will advance sociological research on the ability of emulation experiences not only to engender empathy but also to give individuals the opportunity to be in their shoes and possess a state of being that they are not naturally in possession of. Dinner in the Dark is an annual event that is held by the Council for Students with Disabilities under the Undergraduate Government of Boston College. It intends to provide an opportunity for BC students to emulate the experience of vision impairment. You are invited as a possible participant because you are a student who will be participating in Dinner in the Dark.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: INTERVIEWS

If you decide to participate in an interview for this study, you will be asked to take part in a 20-30 minute conversation with Heidi Yun following Dinner in the Dark. The interviews will take place on Zoom. I will ask questions about your experience preceding, during, and following with Dinner in the Dark.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: OBSERVATIONS

Heidi will observe participants at the actual Dinner in the Dark event as well as when they are

entering the Walsh Function Room (where the event will take place), during the actual event, and conversations that take place following the event during the speaker portion.

<u>CONFIDENTIALITY</u>

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file. {(If applicable) – The researchers may provide to a professional transcription service the audio recordings of interviews but only after removing from the recordings the participant's name and any other actual, individual identifiers.} The Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. State or federal laws or court orders may also require that information from your research study records be released. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that identifies you unless you give your permission, or unless we are legally required to do so.

As with all research involving human subjects, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised/breached. However, the research team is taking precautions to minimize this risk. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information from confidential interviews will be used. I will not publish the real names of confidential interview participants.

Confidential data, including audio recordings and interview transcripts, will be kept in locked offices and on password-protected computers and shared drives.

Confidential data for this project will be kept indefinitely so long as an institutional review board has approved the PI's storage and analysis procedures. Otherwise, the data will be permanently destroyed.

If you change your mind regarding participation, you may contact the researcher and ask her to remove your information and recordings to the study.

INVESTIGATOR CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Heidi Yun via email at yunhj@bc.edu or phone at 201-615-8833.

IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boston College Office for Research Protections at (617) 552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEW

May I have your permission to record this interview?

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DINNER IN THE DARK FACILITATORS AND SCRIPT

Please get to the Walsh Function Room at 5:30pm and plan to stay until 7:15pm

BEFOREHAND

(1) After arriving at 5:30, pop into the dining room and introduce yourself to the catering workers and make sure that they know what is going on and field any questions that they have.

(2) Stand outside of the main door of the Walsh Function Room as you wait for participants to arrive.

- <u>At least 2 facilitators:</u> Checking people in via the Google Form

    - Ask the participant for their name and make sure that they are on the list for that night.

    - Ask the participant if they signed up for a vegetarian option. If yes, direct them to the facilitator handing out the white cards.

- <u>At least 1 facilitator:</u> Standing by the door to the dining room and handing out white allergen cards to those who need it.

    - For the participants you give the cards to, tell them to place the card in front of them once they are seated at their table so the server knows they will be receiving the white allergen cards.

    - **Make sure that nobody goes in and that the door remains closed so that nobody can see the setup in the dining room!

- After arriving at 5:30, pop into the dining room and introduce yourself to the catering workers and make sure that they know what is going on and field any questions that they have.

WALKING PEOPLE IN

- One facilitator should remain by the door to welcome people in and to also catch any participants arriving late.

- Bring participants to seats at random. Try not to sit with friends together!

DURING THE MEAL

- Make sure that people are keeping their blindfolds on.

AFTER THE MEAL

- Once everyone has finished eating the last course, we will go into the reflection portion of the event led by Nikki.

- Once the group is done with the reflection questions and discussion, you can give them the option of either:

    - Taking off their blindfolds

    - Keeping their blindfolds on and be guided out of the room

Script:

Heidi: Hello everyone! My name is Heidi and I am serving as this year's Council for Students with Disabilities Director. Welcome everyone to Night 2 of CSD's annual Dinner in the Dark event! Here's how this event will work: Tonight everyone will be served a Thanksgiving themed three course meal consisting of an appetizer, entree, and dessert. We ask you to leave your blindfold on throughout the entirety of the event. The entire purpose of this event is to experience what it is like to eat a meal without vision, so taking your blindfold off will ruin the experience.

Christina: Tonight we are joined by members of the Carroll Center for the Blind located in Newton, MA. At each table you will find a facilitator that is a member of the Council for Students with Disabilities as well as a facilitator from the Carroll Center for the Blind. They will be moderating and facilitating conversations at each table so please feel free to join in on the conversation.

Heidi: And of course, while you are eating, talk to the people around you and enjoy the delicious food! We will have a reflection with the entire group at the end of the meal with a special guest speaker as well.

Christina: But before we officially begin, we would like to invite Greg Donnelly from the Carroll Center for the Blind to share a few words.

Greg: [introductory remarks]

Heidi: Thank you so much Greg. And with that, we are ready to begin Dinner in the Dark! Facilitators please feel free to start the conversation. Hope you all enjoy yourselves!

Christina: As you guys remain blindfolded and finish up your entrees/start your desserts, we would like to invite Nikki Claudio, a graduated BC student and past CSD Director to the podium to help us engage in a conversation about your experience tonight!

Heidi: Thank you Nikki for wrapping up our Dinner in the Dark event for us. That being said, I hope you guys are leaving this event more knowledgeable on how the typical dining experience is not monolithic and how we can all work towards making these spaces more accessible. Hope you guys enjoyed this event - thank you!