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A Whole New World: Students with Disabilities Transition to Postsecondary Education

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A WHOLE NEW WORLD: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSITION
TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, there has been a steady increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education. With the postsecondary transition in educational supports from the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) in high school to ADA in college, there has been a lack of research related to the experiences of these students with disabilities while they are in college. Considering the changes in disability experience resulting from education policy changes from high school (IDEA) to college (ADA/Section 504), the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of first-year students with disabilities at four-year higher education institutions. This study utilized components from Disability Studies in Education approach, Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit), Acculturation, and Diverse Learning Environment frameworks in analyzing first-year students with disabilities' experiences.

Using a mixed-methods approach to investigate both attitudes and perceptions, the researcher conducted a survey of 63 students representing five colleges and focus group interviews with 43 students representing three colleges. Findings indicate that first-year students with disabilities are assimilating into the mainstream non-disabled culture in higher education. First-year students with disabilities heavily rely on adult's (parents or disability service personnel) knowledge in educational decision making. Additionally, the findings also highlight the impact of fee-based, specialized disability programs on first-year student experiences and perceptions of campus climate. This study contributes to the understanding of the conditions that support and challenge the higher education experiences of first-year students with disabilities. The findings also highlight a need for more research examining a broader range of disability categories and the intersection of disability and race.

DEDICATION

With the utmost sincerity, respect, and admiration, I dedicate my dissertation to:

Anna C. Whitaker
A true blessing from God who has shown unconditional love and support for all of my
endeavors over throughout the last 8.5 years.

Giavanna, Warren Jr., and Mila
My loving children who continually provide immense support and love to their daddy
regardless of the circumstance.

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children would be provided greater opportunities than they could have imagined.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Estimates of students with disabilities range from 11% to 15% of the population

of students who attend higher education institutions when considering both individuals

who disclose and those who do not to disclose their disability (Snyder & Dillow, 2013;

Higher Education Research Institute, 2011). [1] Both percentages represent a substantial

increase in students with disabilities in higher education institutions since the enactment

of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 (United States Government

Accountability Office, 2009). While, at one time, specific learning disability was the

prominent disability category among students with disabilities in higher education,

increases in psychiatric, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, health impairment,

mobility, and hearing impairment categories have closed the gap and resulted in a greater

variation of disabilities across campuses (Raue & Lewis, 2011).

Although more students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education

institutions, almost half of these students are not completing school and obtaining a

degree (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2010). Thirty-four percent of students

with disabilities complete a four-year degree in eight years (National Council on

Disability, 2015). A critical component affecting the success of students with disabilities

in completing college is their ability to use prior skills and knowledge to independently

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[1] Any reported percentage should be considered with a caution due to the unknown actual
number of students with disabilities on higher education campuses who choose not to
disclose their disability for a myriad of reasons (Collins & Mowbray, 2005, Marshak,
Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010).

research and locate educational supportive services (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Moreover, the transition of adapting to the differences in accessing educational supports and services for students with disabilities in high school and college can impact their retention rates (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002; Gil, 2007; Getzel, McManus, & Briel, 2005). Universities have employed a variety of approaches to serving students with disabilities that attempt to promote independence and self-advocacy (Rigler, 2013). Higher education disability personnel recommend using a combination of approaches that incorporate a balance of student independence and dependence as the most viable method in engaging students with disabilities to advocate for their educational needs (Rigler, 2013).

Students with disabilities' educational rights are protected from birth through the end of high school through a federal mandate called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (IDEA: P.L. 114-95). Students with disabilities in the K-12 system receive specially designed instruction with supports through IDEA to meet students' individual educational needs. IDEA provides students with educational benefits. IDEA was created to ensure students with disabilities attending public schools would have a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) with an evaluation conducted by a multidisciplinary team (e.g., parents, teachers, school psychologists) to determine eligibility for special education services. If the student is eligible, an individualized education plan (IEP) is developed to address their specific educational needs. IDEA supports educational experiences of special education students by providing them opportunities to demonstrate success within grade levels with ultimate postsecondary goals ranging from furthering education to living independently (Madaus, 2005: Wright & Wright, 2017). Specific mandated structures and supports are developed

by a plethora of adult stakeholders – including but not limited to parents, special and general education teachers, speech therapists, and guidance counselors – intended to help students succeed.

After graduation, students with disabilities enrolled at postsecondary education institutions transition to protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and requires educational entities to provide access to education to individuals who self-disclose and provide documentation of disability (Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA): PL 110-325 (S 3406).[2] The guidelines for initiation, implementation, and monitoring of educational supports are student-driven, unlike the adult-driven structure in early intervention through high school special education.

Despite the increase in percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education over the last two decades, limited research exists on their experiences in higher education (Kimball, Wells, Ostiguy, Manly, & Lauterbach, 2016). Higher education research focusing on student experiences incorporates disability as a secondary or tertiary variable while magnifying more well-known and studied identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender), while many studies exclude disability completely (Weidman, 1989; Perna, 2006; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012). Research focusing on students with disabilities in higher education has been concentrated within specialized journals while largely being absent from more prestigious empirical higher education

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[2] The Americans with Disabilities Act was amended in 2008 to broaden the definition of disability and expand the meaning of major life activity (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011).

journals (Pena, 2014). Given the increased number of students with disabilities attending college since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, coupled with the change in educational policy related to disability from high school (Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act) to college (ADA), this study plans to use an integrated approach to understand how first-year students with disabilities experience the college environment during their first semester.

This study is based on the acculturation model, with the understanding that educational organizations such as high schools and colleges have cultures that students transition between upon graduation. The study will borrow concepts from immigration research – such as acculturation coupled with the diverse learning environment model – for the purpose of enhancing the study of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings. This approach is intended to provide an explanation of how first-year students with disabilities experience the college environment during their initial semester and also the conditions or influences that are attributed to their experiences. Studies focusing on the first-year experience of students with disabilities will help to understand how these students experience college in light of these changing disability support dynamics.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the attitudes and experiences of first-year students with disabilities attending four-year higher education institutions in the United States. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the experiences of first-year students with disabilities attending four-year higher education institutions?
   a. What is the relationship between demographic variables (e.g. race, disability category) and student experience?

2. What are the conditions that support the experiences of first-year students with disabilities on four-year higher education campuses?

3. What are the conditions that challenge the student experiences of first-year students with disabilities on four-year higher education campuses?

Study Overview

In the following chapters, I discuss the relevant research, logistics, outcomes, and implications of this study. In chapter two, I review the literature on the notion of disability, including legal and educational definitions, conceptualizations, and manifestations. I provide historical background on the education policies related to students with disabilities. I highlight the contrast in disability educational experiences in high school and college. Next, I provide a synopsis of the disability studies in education (Gabel, 2005) framework used in this study that focuses on the educational experiences of students with disabilities from their perspective. In addition, I also highlight the Multi-Contexual Diverse Learning Model (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2011) to illustrate how various structures, interpersonal, intergroup, and intrapersonal dynamics within a higher education environment influence student navigation and outcome. Finally, I discuss using the acculturation framework for my survey instrument to examine the attitudes and beliefs of students with disabilities as they transition from the high school to college.

In chapter three, I provide an explanation of the study's methodology. I include details of this transformative mixed methods study that utilized surveys from five higher education institutions; and focus group interviews, individual interviews, and document interviews from three higher education institutions. I describe the survey instrument and

interview guides used with participants. I also highlight coding and statistical analysis procedures while presenting my findings framework.

In chapter four, I present the results of the survey and themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. Descriptive statistics and mean comparisons of demographic groups are highlighted. Some demographic groups (e.g., white, learning disability, high income) were significantly larger than other groups in their respective categories. Due to the sample not being representative – and in addition to limited research on the disability experience in higher education – rationale from disability researchers describing the importance of non-significant statistical data is also provided. The second part of this chapter describes six themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. The themes consist of supports and challenges that first-year students with disabilities are experiencing during their first semester.

In chapter five, I discuss implications for special education policy and practices, higher education practices, and other stakeholders that work with students with disabilities. I also share my suggestions for future research and discuss the limitations of my study.

This study elicited four important contributions to the study of higher education and disability studies. First, because the study uses disability as the primary identity for understanding student experiences in higher education (unlike previous studies), data from this study may be used in constructing higher education student development theories related to students with disabilities. Second, data from this study may provide parents and secondary education personnel with information to help prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary education environments. For example, special education

personnel will benefit from understanding how students with disabilities' use of self-determination behaviors learned in high school influences their educational experience. Third, the findings from this study will help higher education departments (admissions, retention, student affairs, and academic affairs) understand the first-year experience of students with disabilities, which could contribute to design and development programming for supporting students without disabilities entering college. Data from this research could be used in providing education for students about obtaining educational supports on campus. Lastly, this study provides data and information to the disability field: more specifically, the study of students with disabilities in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, the federal government defines an individual with a disability as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that significantly impacts the ability to function in daily life activities (42 U.S. Code 12101; US Department of Justice, 2009). These activities include but are not limited to social interaction, speaking, education, employment, walking, and eating. While the government provides a general definition for disability, some scholars have provided various interpretations of the definition.

Internationally, disabilities are viewed more as biological causes or deficits leading to obstacles in life experiences associated with the specific biological deficit. Harrington and Matthews (2000) and the World Health Organization (2008) view the term disability as broad and distinguish between disability, impairment, and handicap. They proposed that impairments were abnormalities to a system, structure, or appearance. Disabilities, according to Harrington and Matthews, were the functional consequences of the impairment. The disadvantages experienced by those with impairments and disabilities were called handicaps. According to this conception of disability, an individual with a learning disability would have an impairment of a neurological or cognitive structure, which causes an inability to learn and thus would handicap the individual in any situation that required learning.

There are two traditional models in conceptualizing disability: medical and societal. The medical model views disability from a pathological perspective that an individual has an impairment or illness and must be cured (by an expert) to be able to

fully function in society (Williams, 2001). The social construction model transitions the examination of disability from the individual to societal level (Jones, 1996; Evans and Herriott, 2009). Disability is seen as a construction of meaning derived from people who do not have disabilities. Society is seen as creating labels for intellectual performance and/or behaviors that are not considered normal. This model questions what is thought to be "normal" and focuses the responsible for "fixing" on society. During the last twenty years, another alternative for conceptualizing disability has emerged. The new conceptualization prioritizes the lived experience of the person with the disability.

In 1999, a shift began forming in conceptualization of disability and special education in research. One shift was highlighted by a divide in those who believed the special education system was sound (incrementalists) versus those who believed the system was broken (reconceptualists) and required reform (Andrews et al., 2000). Andrews et al. considered five key areas in which this divide was seen: conceptualization of disability, purpose of special education, beliefs about expected outcomes of special education, the current state of knowledge of special education practice, and necessary steps for improving special education. Incrementalists supported traditional research and practices associated with special education while reconceptualists believed special education should be viewed as not only enhancing education performance but changing educational barriers that limit students with disabilities' progress.

That same year, a group of disabilities researchers from around the world gathered at a disability advocacy conference to discuss new methods in conducting special education research. The group envisioned research spanning a variety of academic fields (e.g., social sciences, humanities) that would focus on examining the experiences

and potential of people in conjunction with disability issues (Gabel, 2005; Goodley, 2017). Dr. Susan Gabel, after this meeting, completed and submitted an application for a new special interest group in the American Research Education Association named Disability Studies in Education (DSE). This event marked the beginning of DSE as an approach to research with people with disabilities.

The DSE theoretical approach was utilized for the current study. This approach allowed for examination of the disability experience from the perspectives of students who had identified through disclosure to disability services that they had a disability (Gabel, 2005). Using this approach provided a glimpse into how students were navigating spaces and interpersonal situations on the college campus in light of the societal and ableist attitudes in education that have historically served as barriers (e.g., discrimination, refusal to help) for individuals with disabilities. A more in-depth analysis of the DSE framework can be found in the theoretical framework section of this paper.

Disability Education Policy Differences

From birth to age 21 (if still enrolled in high school), students with disabilities' educational rights are protected through a federal legislation called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (IDEA: P.L. 114-95). IDEA was designed to ensure students with disabilities attending public schools would have a right to be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team (e.g., parents, teachers, school psychologists) who determines their eligibility for special education services. If the student is eligible, an individualized education plan (IEP) is developed to address their specific educational needs. IDEA was designed to facilitate the success of students in the K-12 system with the ultimate goal of high school completion (Madaus, 2005). Specific

mandated structures and supports are developed by a plethora of adult stakeholders –
including but not limited to parents, special and general education teachers, speech
therapists, and guidance counselors – to help students succeed.

As discussed in chapter one, students with disabilities enrolled at postsecondary
education institutions, on the other hand, are protected through the Americans with
Disabilities Act of 1990/Section 504, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of
disability and requires educational entities to provide access to education to individuals
who self-disclose and provide documentation of disability (ADAAA: PL 110-325 (S
3406). There are two significant differences in how students with disabilities get support
at the college level.

First, students with disabilities must disclose to disability services personnel that
they have a disability to initiate the process of obtaining educational supports. In K-12
education, a variety of adult stakeholders may initiate the special education process.
Further, because of the nature of the services students receive, which often require them
to leave the general education classroom or have a professional provide individualized
support within the classroom, most students are aware of those who are identified as
having special needs. Autonomy and personal preference result in inconsistencies related
to the number of students who disclose their disability in college. Sixty-three percent of
students who received special education services in high school upon enrolling in a
postsecondary education institution believe they do not have a disability and thus do not
disclose. (Newman et al., 2011). In high school, the characteristics for identifying
disability are subjective and based on behaviors considered non-normative within the
school culture. Although students may not perceive themselves as having a disability

during high school, they must allow themselves to be labeled in order to receive educational supports needed to succeed. Many of these students choose not to be identified upon leaving this culture. The perceived stigma of an environment may also influence whether a student discloses their disability. Students with disabilities may fail to disclose if they perceive a stigma surrounding disability in their educational environment and may engage in behaviors on campus to make their disability less noticeable to others (Markoulakis & Kirsh, 2013; May & Stone, 2010; Stage & Milne, 1996). Disclosure can be more complex and contemplative for students with invisible disabilities (e.g., a learning disability) than with students with apparent or physical disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy).

Second, the educational supports and services offered through ADA in higher education are significantly different than high school. Students with disabilities in high school have specified and individualized plans co-created for them with specific academic or behavior goals; related service (e.g., occupational therapy), if needed; direct service (instruction) time; transition planning; and transportation. In contrast, in postsecondary education, students are entitled to have "reasonable" accommodations or adjustments to their education (e.g., additional exam time or special test location) in order to provide them with what is considered equal access to their college education as their non-disabled collegiate peers (Madaus, 2005). Development of individual goals and provision of related services such as speech therapy and occupational therapy are no longer required for students by the educational institution (National Council on Disability, 2015).

Table 1 shows the distinction between the experiences related to educational policies that students with disabilities experience in high school and college. The high school experience involves numerous individuals combined with structured supports, procedures, and processes that provide a specialized educational experience for students. The teams take initiative to design and develop a specialized plan on the student's behalf and student involvement is voluntary. On the other hand, the college experience for students with disabilities is predicated on the student taking initiative to disclose their disability, understanding higher education disability policies, and finding and utilizing educational supports. The student is responsible for seeking, initiating, monitoring, and ensuring implementation of the accommodations used on campus.

Table 1

Differences in High School and College Disability Educational Culture

IDEA (K-12)	**Section 504/ADA (College)**
Focus on student **success**	Focus on ensuring student **access**
School's responsibility to provide evaluation and determination for special education eligibility.	Student's responsibility to disclose disability and provide evaluation paperwork.
Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with specific goals, accommodations and/or modifications, and other services to meet student's need educational needs.	Individuals must be able to talk about how their disability affects their ability to perform tasks.
Services are provided until student graduates or turns 21 years of age.	Focus on providing equal access to individual.
Provided with a team of school professionals and parent or caregiver to create support and structures at school.	Individuals are provided accommodations based on evaluation to complete desired task (employment, education, independent living).
Parent or caregiver has access to student records.	Written consent for parent participation or access to records is required.

Because ADAAA is comprised of regulations and not mandates (IDEA), there are no strict guidelines that constitute what "reasonable" accommodations are or how they can be used in postsecondary education. Organizations such as the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) outline best practices for the accommodation process at higher education institutions; however, the availability of and procedures to obtain these supports can be best viewed as arbitrary or institution-dependent (AHEAD, 2011). Consequently, there is a significant discrepancy in the percentage (80%) of universities that provide materials to support and encourage students with disabilities in self-disclosing their disabilities to the disability service personnel compared to the percentage (54%) of universities that provide materials and/or resources to support faculty and staff in working with students with disabilities (Raue & Lewis, 2011). There are specific strategies and processes (e.g., IEP transition) that are designed to prepare students with disabilities in high school for the demands related to the education policy shift after graduation, but the lack of integrity in implementation and inconsistency in which the processes are utilized in higher education have contributed to the poor outcomes of students with disabilities.

Postsecondary Education Transition

IDEA mandates that public schools begin preparing students with disabilities for their postsecondary aspirations typically in their first year of high school or at the age of 14 (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). This plan of action (called a transition IEP) should align with the student's postsecondary interests, and it is completed by the multidisciplinary evaluation team (parents, student, teachers, outside resources, etc.) prior to the student turning 16 years old. During this process, it is imperative for students to actively

participate and become aware of the differences between high school special education services and the services they will become eligible for, based upon their disability, upon enrolling in postsecondary education (Gil, 2007).

Special education professional organizations and education researchers have also developed guides and strategies specifically for the transition of special education students to career, college, and independent living. The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition, using the research of Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar (2013), developed a set of transition standards and competencies for educators in transitioning students with disabilities. These standards include (a) using valid and reliable assessments; (b) making sure that knowledge from generalized and specialized curricula is used to develop and improve programs and services; (c) continually facilitating and improving general and special education programs; (d) conducting, evaluating, and using inquiry to guide practice; (e) providing leadership, advocacy, and creation of positive environments; (f) using foundational knowledge of ethics and practice; and (g) collaborating with stakeholders.

Kohler (1996) identified five areas of emphasis for effective postsecondary transition outcomes as part of the Taxonomy of Transition programming. They include student development, family involvement, program structures, interagency collaboration, and student-focused planning. Kohler's work has become known as the Taxonomy of Transition programming. Kohler, along with Gothberg and Coyle (2017), reviewed and revised the original taxonomy to further define the constructs using positive postsecondary outcome research. The revised taxonomy (Taxonomy of Transition 2.0) includes student-focused planning, family involvement, interagency collaboration,

program structures, and student development. The Office of Special Education Programs, in an effort to improve postsecondary transition and outcome of students with disabilities, launched the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). This 10-year longitudinal study examined the transition planning and postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities in all 12 special education disability categories.

Participation in the IEP transition process may provide students with the ability to develop self-determination skills that will assist them in advocating for themselves in postsecondary education institutions (Wehmeyer, Argan, & Hughes, 1998; Field, Martin, Miller, Ware, & Wehmeyer, 1998). Although IDEA mandates the transition IEP, schools that also implement student participation in the process are likely to create a college culture in which the student takes responsibility for his or her education (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Parents believe high schools are responsible for their disabled children acquiring self-determination skills by allowing students to participate in IEP transition meetings (Grigal, Nuebert, Moon, & Graham, 2003). Mastery and utilization of these skills can help strengthen the ability of students with disabilities to distinguish accessing services in high school from accessing services in college (Morningstar et al., 2010).

Self-determination.   Although not found to highly correlate with postsecondary enrollment outcomes in the research conducted by Test et al. (2009), most disability research has deemed the development of self-determination or self-advocacy skills during high school as a critical component in access and success in postsecondary education (Camarena and Sargiani, 2009; Bae, 2007; Chambers, Wehmeyer, Saito, Lida, Lee, & Singh, 2007; Fowler, Konrad, Walker, Test, & Wood, 2007). Wehmeyer (1992, p.305)

defined self-determination as "the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices regarding one's actions free from undue external influence or interference." It is a combination of demonstrating autonomous behavior, understanding self-actualization, and implementing self-regulation strategies (Wehmeyer, Argan, and Hughes, 1998). Due to its popularity in disability research, it has also, at times, deviated from the original meaning and thus resulted in various interpretations when not well-defined (Chambers et.al., 2007).

Self-determination has been viewed as a prerequisite to developing self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is the ability to understand your disability and educational needs, assertively communicate with others, and transfer skills from an individual to group context (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005). In a study by Getzel and Thoma (2008), students with disabilities in postsecondary settings believed using self-advocacy skills resulted in productive outcomes with professors in understanding their educational needs and supports. However, self-advocacy skills developed in students with disabilities in high school may not always translate to postsecondary education settings. Disability services personnel believe many students with disabilities transitioning from high school are ill-prepared to navigate postsecondary educational environments effectively while lacking sufficient self-advocacy skills (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

Stakeholder involvement. Parental and teacher involvement can influence the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills during the postsecondary education transition process. Despite the low percentage of students with disability enrolled in college, many parents of students with disabilities in high school aspire for their children to undertake some type of higher education upon graduation (Grigal &

Neubert, 2004). Parents believe that obtaining a degree from a postsecondary institution can serve as the catalyst for their children being able to live independently (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001).

For optimal parent or family involvement, educators need to use collaborative approaches that acknowledge the household culture of the family. By utilizing this approach, K-12 educators can gain insight into potential cultural differences and "make allowances for differences in perspective when responding to the family's needs" (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012, p.19). Students have reported greater life satisfaction and a better probability of postsecondary education success with consistent, meaningful family participation during the postsecondary education transition process (Waithaka, Furness, & Gitimu, 2017). While families are sometimes omitted from the educational stakeholder group, family involvement is essential to students with disabilities' development and utilization of self-advocacy skills in higher education.

Teachers not only acknowledged the importance of teaching self-determination skills to students with disabilities in high school but also reported high levels of frequency in engaging in activities that promoted these skills (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Browder, Wood, Test, Algozzine, and Karvonnen (2001) suggested that pre-service teaching programs should consider implementing courses that highlight strategies designed to familiarize aspiring teachers with self-determination strategies to use when teaching students with disabilities. Regardless, all stakeholders should continuously communicate and define roles in the transition process to ensure that the student's educational needs are being met while adequately preparing them for postsecondary education (Levinson, 1998).

Predictors of postsecondary success. Students with disabilities often enter high school with postsecondary educational aspirations but graduate with a diminished confidence level for entering higher education environments (Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005). While there may not be a single, solidified reasoning that explains this phenomenon, comparisons between disability and educational experience may provide insight. Students with disabilities in high school are less likely to enroll in academic or college prep courses and also have lower rates of attendance (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; Horn & Berktold, 1999). Although an IEP is utilized to address educational needs, students with disabilities have limited to no access to other education resources or supports that promote enrollment in postsecondary education institutions (Flower, McKenna, Haring, and Pazey, 2015).

This research is consistent with the systematic literature review of correlational studies conducted by Test et al. (2009) that measured secondary school predictors of postsecondary education enrollment for students with disabilities. They found that participation in an inclusion learning environment with non-disabled peers was found to be most highly correlated with postsecondary outcomes. Inclusive learning environments were synonymous with the terms "regular academics" (Baer et al., 2003), "regular education placement" (Blackorby, Hancock, & Siegel, 1993), and "inclusive placement" (Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2015) found in the literature. Additional – though more moderate – predictors of postsecondary education enrollment outcomes were paid employment/previous work experience, transition experience (which will be discussed in another section of this paper), and vocational education (Test et al., 2009).

Identity Intersectionality and Postsecondary Education Outcomes

The examination of the relationship between secondary educational experience and postsecondary educational outcomes for students with disability provides a single perspective into understanding higher education equity. When considering other demographic identities, identifying single attributes that affect postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities is a more nuanced process (Newman et al., 2011). Factors including but not limited to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parent involvement, and household educational attainment can not only impact students with disabilities' enrollment in postsecondary education but also affect their outcomes after college (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Students with disabilities residing in high income households (more than $50,000 annually) were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education institutions than students with disabilities residing in low and/or middle income households (Newman et al., 2011). The intersection of race and disability in higher education is difficult to examine given the overrepresentation of white students with disabilities in postsecondary education institutions (Reid & Knight, 2006; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). This may be related to the notion of white students being diagnosed with disabilities (e.g., Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) that are seen as suitable for higher education (Blanchett, 2010). In contrast, African American students are more likely to be diagnosed with behavioral and emotional disabilities (ED) or severe cognitive deficiencies (intellectual disabilities or ID) with a dismal prognosis for either enrolling in postsecondary education (11% enrolled in four-year institutions for ED, and 7% enrolled in four-year institutions for ID, respectively) or completing high school (Trainor, 2008).

Students with disabilities living in a household with a parent who has obtained at least a bachelor's degree were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education than students with disabilities living with parents who did not complete high school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). This relationship may also be attributed to the knowledge parents gained by attending college and thus used to actively participate in academically preparing their child for postsecondary education (Horn & Nunez, 2000). While socioeconomic status often correlates with postsecondary enrollment, more research is needed to gain insight into how socioeconomic status along with other demographic factors individually, and in aggregate, contribute, if at all, to students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary institutions (Kimball et al., 2016). There are a plethora of variables (e.g., transition planning, self-determination, teacher involvement) within the high school disability experience that are seen as necessary in preparing students with disabilities for college. Before considering the impact of these variables in college, it is important to understand the experiences of students with disabilities on higher education campuses.

Postsecondary Educational Experience

Through perseverance and continuous support, some students with disabilities are able to overcome potential obstacles in high school and enroll in a postsecondary educational institution. The environment (academic and social) can have both desirable and undesirable influences and thus affect the educational experiences of students with disabilities. Several environmental factors that shape the postsecondary education of students with disabilities are highlighted in the following sections. First, there will be a discussion of the definition of culture in the context of higher education. Next, the notion

and impact of disability stigma in the context higher education will be examined. Then, an explanation of how students with disabilities access support services in higher education will be offered. Finally, the academic experiences (e.g., faculty interactions, accommodation use) of students with disabilities will be discussed.

College Campus Culture

Research examining higher education institutional dynamics affecting students has interchangeably used terms such as "campus climate," "environment," and "culture" to describe this concept (Rankin & Reason, 2008). For the purposes of this literature review, college culture will be defined as the beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, behaviors, and practices of members (students and employees) at a higher education institution (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988; Tierney, 1988; Baird, 2005). There are several widely used college culture models (e.g., Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2008) that address and measure the postsecondary educational experiences of underrepresented populations including students with disabilities. Given the unique experience of students with disabilities in higher education and the variations across and within disability categories, these models have not adequately addressed the relational dimensions of their educational experience. The relational focus can be specific to the students with disabilities population and provide valuable insights to colleges and universities as they create, optimize, and examine educational practices associated with their respective missions (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015; Trammel, 2009; Kimball et al., 2016).

Optimal higher education environments for students with disabilities have been described as respectful and inclusive (Paul, 2000); friendly and accepting (Baird, 2005);

having positive influences from staff and faculty (Collins & Mowbray, 1995); and supportive and destigmatizing (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002). These descriptors, combined with the autonomous nature of higher education institutions, result in a variety of cultural differences across universities depending on mission, as well as access to and allocation of educational supports (Collins & Mowbray, 2005). Two-year higher education institutions, also known as community colleges, are sometimes viewed as more accessible to students with disabilities.

Overall, there is a lack of understanding related to the specific postsecondary educational experience of students with disabilities and college campus culture (Lombardi, Gerdes, & Murray, 2011). Current conceptual models fail to examine the relationship between disability and college culture. For example, with the rising popularity of e-learning platforms over the past several years in higher education, there are still pervasive challenges with accessibility of web content for students with disabilities (Harper & DeWaters, 2008; Lin, 2007).

Stigma and Higher Education

The notion of stigma has had a variety of conceptualizations in research. Goffman (1963, p.3) defined stigma as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that reduces the bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one." Stafford and Scott (1986) defined stigma as a characteristic that is contrary to the norm of a social unit. Jones et al. (1984) conceptualized stigma as the relationship between an attribute and stereotype where stigma is an individual having the attribute that is deemed to be undesirable by society. A criticism of stigma is that researchers often omit the language of the population being stigmatized and incorporate the language of the general

population. Fine and Asch (1988) found five assumptions related to disability stigma. Their assumptions included that disability was located solely in biology, problems of the disabled were due to a disability-produced impairment, disabled people were victims, disability was central to the disabled person's self-concept, and disability was synonymous with needing help.

Stigma related to disability and in the context of higher education can be defined as the unintended academic, social, and/or psychological effects of disclosing a disability (Trammell, 2009). Universities can produce stigma through academic and social contexts. Students are expected to learn, and those perceived as being less academically successful or needing accommodations are stigmatized. College is also a community in which students develop friendships and work collaboratively with peers. Higher education has often subscribed to the social construction model of disability resulting in disability stigmatization, which has contributed to disability being considered as a social identity within higher education identity theories (Jones, 2013; Hurtado et al., 2012). The manifestation of disability stigma on higher education campuses influences the perceptions and behaviors of all students (Henry, Fuerth, & Figliozzi, 2010; Myers & Bastian, 2010). The potential loss or acquisition of social status may influence the behaviors related to disability stigma on higher education campuses (Link & Phelan, 2001). College students without disabilities may attempt to alleviate their own awkwardness or confusion in social situations by shifting the focus to students with disabilities. Fear of losing status in social groups may result in discriminatory behaviors toward students with disabilities by their non-disabled peers. The perceived undesirable experiences related to the disability identity may contribute to the negative stigma

associated with disability in higher education settings (Dunn & Burcaw, 2013; Tinklin, Riddell, & Wilson, 2004; Trammell, 2009).

Higher education environments with a stigma toward disability can lead to students with disabilities to view themselves as incapable of academic success and as possessing inferior skill sets when compared to their non-disabled peers (Markoulakis & Kirsh, 2013; May & Stone, 2010). Some students may make changes to their behavior or actions in the classroom to make connections to their disability less noticeable (Stage & Milne, 1996). For example, if a student has a question about a topic being discussed in class and no other students have asked questions, the student may not ask the question. Students with disabilities may also view the culture of a college with a disability stigma as unwelcoming (Olney & Brockelman, 2005). Instruments such as the Postsecondary Student Survey of Disability-Related Stigma (PSSDS) have been created to measure the level of disability-related stigma on college campuses, but overall there are few assessments tailored specifically for the student with disabilities college experience (Trammell, 2009). Trammell measured the disability stigma related to academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and global awareness of 121 college students across three campuses. The results indicated that students experienced stigma across all areas with the most being stigmatized about their status with peers. Students were found to be less interested in global issues related to disability. Additional quantitative research and development of disability specific instruments, along with thorough qualitative approaches gaining in-depth insight, are needed to fully understand the factors that affect the relationships (academic, social, psychological) of students with disabilities on college campuses.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who enroll in higher education institutions and who provide documentation of their disability are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations through designated personnel in the disability services office (Madaus, 2005; Colvert & Smith, 2000). A reasonable accommodation can be defined as an adjustment to education that provides students with disabilities the same access to their environment and curriculum as students without disabilities (ADA: P.L. 101-336). Reasonable accommodations typically include, but are not limited to, extended test time, separate test location, auxiliary aids for technology, and service or emotional animals. College personnel must review accommodations throughout the student's educational experience to ensure these educational supports continue to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities as they matriculate (Stodden, Roberts, Picklesimer, Jackson, & Chang, 2006).

The interaction between campus culture and stigma can play a significant role in the willingness of students with disabilities to seek accommodations from their higher education institution (Barnard-Brak, Davis, Tate, & Sulak, 2009). The utilization and implementation of accommodations can have a significant impact on their educational progress while in school (Hadley, 2007). Although AHEAD (2011) outlines best practices for the accommodation process at higher education institutions, the availability of and procedures to obtain these supports can be best viewed as institution-dependent. In a survey of 1500 disability coordinators, Tagayuna, Stodden, Chang, Zeleznik, and Whelley (2005) found that although the use of accommodations had increased over the years, the type of accommodations and process to obtain accommodations is considerably

different at each institution. Due to the inconsistencies across universities, students with disabilities need to consider the process for obtaining supports when they choose the college or university that best fits their educational aspirations.

The intersection of accommodations and the classroom experience can oftentimes be a significant obstacle for students with disabilities to navigate. Higher education faculty can be a barrier to students with disabilities' progress due to rigid expectations and limits on accommodation use (May & LaMont, 2014). Most faculty have limited to no experience in working with students with disabilities and often have not participated in trainings about disabilities (Leyser, Vogel, Wyland, & Brulle, 1998). For instance, Hill's (1996) study found that students with disabilities are of the opinion that faculty should have trainings to understand the implications of disability and avoid the one-size-fits-all approach in their instructional practices. While there is an abundance of K-12 pedagogical research (e.g., Swanson & Hoskyn, 1999), with special education students, there is limited research examining effective teaching practices for students with disabilities in higher education.

While some faculty report not having experience teaching students with disabilities, some of their personal beliefs and biases related to understanding and learning are enacted in their instruction, causing anxiety and rejection for students with disabilities (Hart & Williams, 1995; Schelly, Davies, & Spooner, 2011). According to Ginsberg and Schulte (2008), faculty who subscribe to the social construction model are more willing to provide accommodations and support for students, while those who view disabilities through the medical model lens engage in behaviors that treat students with disabilities as having fewer abilities than their non-disabled peers. Course syllabi created

by faculty often omit language addressing accommodations, or use general language that casts disabilities in a negative light (Broadbent, Dorow, & Fisch, 2007). The literature regarding faculty attitudes examines beliefs related to good practices, but there needs to be more discipline-specific research to gain further insight into the attitudes and practices of academic departments with students with disabilities (Higbee & Goff, 2008).

Retention

Retention can be defined as the ability of a higher education institution to keep students from the time of enrollment until graduation (Tinto, 1990). Tinto's model of student departure is one of the most researched and discussed retention models in higher education literature (Milem & Berger, 1997). In his model, Tinto describes the drop out process as longitudinal and encompassing the interplay of social and academic system interactions of individuals prior to and during college and their influence on student goals and commitment to the university. According to Tinto, an individual's background characteristics (individual attributes, pre-college experiences, and family background), combined with their goals and commitment to the college, influence their academic and social experiences while determining the likelihood of the student remaining at or leaving a university.

Tinto's model does not fully explain how interpersonal experiences of students may influence their departure from schools (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Berger and Braxton (1998) found that organizational attributes influence the interpersonal experiences and student retention, especially in the initial year of enrollment. The current study adopts similar thinking that characteristics of the university have a reciprocal relationship with student interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences.

Retention of students with disabilities. After examining the retention and student attrition research of Tinto (1975), Astin (1970), Spady (1970), Bean and Metzner (1985); and others, Belch (2004) identified four factors (belonging, involvement, purpose, and self-determination) specific to the retention of students with disabilities in higher education. Retention of students with disabilities is dependent on an educational environment that encompasses not only academic achievement but also encourages the creation of an inclusive, connective atmosphere that promotes a sense of belonging. Each of these four factors will be analyzed in turn.

Sense of belonging. Strange (2000) identified the condition for attaining a sense of belonging for students with disabilities as an educational environment that the student considered physically and psychologically safe and inclusive. A sense of physical safety was based on infrastructure addressing apparent disabilities while psychological safety was tied to balance between the individual (e.g., disability identity) and the dominant characteristics (e.g., academic freedom) of the campus. Students with disabilities are often at risk when they enter college due to the unique exceptionalities when compared to the dominant group of students (Jones, 1996). If the college environment is perceived to be unwelcoming to individuals who may learn differently, students may deem it unsafe. Vacarro, Daly-Cano, and Newman (2015) described a sense of belonging for students with disabilities as a complex process with intersectionality occurring between developments of social relationships, mastery of the student role, and advocacy for one's educational needs.

Involvement. Student success can be heavily influenced by involvement in curricular and extracurricular activities that provide valuable learning experiences (Astin,

1993; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1993). Involvement in these activities contributes to students with disabilities being able to relate to non-disabled peers on campus, thus improving sense of belonging and probability of remaining on campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1995). Students with disabilities have to consider the implications of disability stigma, which may prohibit them from disclosing their disabilities to non-disabled peers. Students may hesitate to disclose in order to avoid any potential harm to their social status and retain a perceived higher status in the social hierarchy. While there has been a continual push to examine inclusive practices within the classroom, out-of-classroom involvement can lead to greater satisfaction related to the college experience while promoting opportunities for meaningful leadership positions (Kuh et al., 1991).

Self-determination. Wehmeyer (1992) defined self-determination as "the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices regarding one's actions free from undue external influence or interference" (p.305). It is a combination of demonstrating autonomous behavior, understanding self-actualization, and implementing self-regulation strategies (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). Utilizing self-determination skills was seen as a foundation in helping students with disabilities develop role clarity related to being a college student (Vacarro, Kimball, Wells, & Ostiguy, 2015). Understanding the strengths and weaknesses related to one's own disability, being able to communicate them to college personnel, and understanding – and utilizing – accommodation procedures are important components for ensuring the educational success of students with disabilities in higher education institutions (Belch, 2004).

While the retention literature identifies what is needed to keep students with disabilities in higher education settings, it does not discuss what is happening as students with disabilities navigate their college campuses (i.e., the students' own experiences). Although Vacarro et al. (2015) attempted to examine student experiences related to sense of belonging, the study had a small sample size. The following section provides theoretical frameworks that may be helpful in providing explanations for the potential changes in experiences as students with disabilities transition from the changes in educational support structures in high school to college.

Theoretical Frameworks

In 2000, a group of 30 disability researchers gathered to discuss new, innovative methods in conducting research that focused on individuals with disabilities in the education context (Gabel, 2005). They wanted to move away from traditional special education research. The field of Disability Studies in Education was formed as a result of this meeting. The primary focus of disability studies in education (DSE) is to "deepen understandings of the daily experiences of people with disabilities in schools and universities, throughout contemporary society, across diverse cultures, and within various historical contexts (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, p.41, 2008).

A core value of DSE is to ensure pluralism by using an "open inquiry" approach to research from a multitude of diverse perspectives (Taylor, 2006). Linton (1998) distinguished between the notions of disability and impairment. Disability was viewed as a product of collective practices (social, culture, political, economical) and not as concrete as the medical model that viewed disability as something abnormal within an individual that needed to be fixed by someone with medical or psychological expertise,

whereas impairment was connected with "variations within human existence" (Linton, 1998, p.2).

DSE is focused on "generating knowledge about how macro level processes – such as societal attitudes about diversity – intersect with disability issues as well as how better to understand the ways that race, class, gender, language, culture, and sexual orientation shape the experience of disability" (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). At the apex of the disability experience is navigation through an ableist society. Ableism is a preference for non-disabled experiences and discrimination against those believed to be disabled (Campbell, 2009; Wolbring, 2008). In addition to discrimination, ableism also contributes to what characteristics and behaviors are valued by society. DSE examines how the meanings, interpretations, and constructions of disability within an ableistic educational environment influence exclusionary practices (Rao & Kalyanpur, 2015).

Despite the history of systematic oppression with people with disability, research on it has been relatively sparse in comparison to other racial, gender, or socioeconomic status marginalized groups in the United States (Davis, 1997; Fleischer & Zames, 2001). There is even less research on the intersectionality of these variables (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Meekosha, 2006). To fully understand lived experiences, research must account for the intersection of multiple identities within individuals and groups (Crenshaw, 1994; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Utilizing intersectionality within the DSE framework allows for researchers to examine how different identities complement and serve as barriers to one another (Goodley, 2017). For example, how disability, race, and gender support or contradict one another.

The failure to incorporate identity intersectionality into research to account for differences within groups perpetuates continued tension between single identity groups (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). There is a considerable need for research that highlights how identity intersection influences desirable and undesirable collective and individual experiences (Cho et al., 2013). The DSE approach provides a shift in attention from the marginalized identities or others to the problems of the dominant or ableistic (Campbell, 2008). Examples of identities that share marginalized spaces include people with disabilities, people of color, women, queer people of color, and people of low socioeconomic status. Examples of identities that share dominant space include ableist, heteronormative, adult, white European and North American, high socioeconomic status. Using the DSE approach helps to provide narratives of marginalized identities that may be in opposition to traditional narratives from the dominant perspective (Baglieri et al., 2011).

DSE research was designed for students with disabilities to describe and share their stories, obstacles, supports, and experiences (Broderick & Ne'eman, 2008; Davis & Watson, 2001; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006; Rodis, Garrod, & Boscardin, 2001). A core belief of DSE that is contrary to traditional scholarship is that objective or neutral research studies are impossible. All research conducted by individuals is influenced by intentions, experiences, theories, culture, or values (Gadamer, 1975). All research analysis procedures (qualitative and quantitative) include methods that were developed by individuals based on some form of ideology (Baglieri, et al., 2011). Therefore, all claims and conclusions from research contain some form of subjectivity within the study.

A benefit of using the DSE approach is the ability to remove language and meanings related to the disability experience constructed by people without disabilities that is seen in traditional disability models such as the medical and social construction models (Ferri, 2015). Using the disability studies in education model will provide data to be analyzed through student perceptions while highlighting societal supports, barriers, and identity intersections with disability that have shaped the college experience.

To further examine the intersection of race and disability, a synthesis of disability studies and critical race studies theoretical frameworks has resulted in the formation of DisCrit (Disability Critical Race Studies). DisCrit "seeks to understand ways that macro level issues of racism and ableism, among other structural discriminatory processes, are enacted in the day-to-day lives of students of color with disabilities" (Connor, Ferri, Annamma, 2016, p.15). DisCrit focuses on the interdependence of racism and ableism and how the dynamic perpetuates marginalization of people. Whiteness and ability are viewed as normative and perceived differences from those social constructs result in a judgment of deficiency and placement into a lower hierarchical category (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Watts & Erevelles, 2004).

DisCrit would explain the dynamic of students of color with disabilities as students being inferior to both white students with and without disabilities and also to students of color without disabilities (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). This framework rejects the self-contained and segregated learning environments for special education, which are often occupied by an overrepresentation of students of color (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). DisCrit views this as the product of disability not being viewed as a socially constructed difference and that segregation would not be the

resolution of other identities (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). For society to embody

diversity, according to DisCrit, it would have to get rid of policies that perpetuate

normality or normative thinking, eliminate barriers that disable people, and focus on

learning from the experiences related to discrimination of marginalized populations

(Annamma et. al., 2016).

Multi-Contextual Diverse Learning Environment Model

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977, 1979) developed an ecological model of human

development that showed how people interacted with their environments as they grew.

The ecological model provides an illustrated depiction of nested structures of the

environment within each other from the perception of the developing person experiencing

them (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The interactions go from the innermost level or

microsystem (closest to person) to the outermost level or chronosystem (furthest away

from person). The growth process was believed to be affected by informal and formal

relationships of the person within and between nested structures.

The ecological model provides insight into the dynamics (ranging from micro or

individual level to macro or university level) that occur simultaneously in the high school

and college environment for students with disabilities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research

(Dey & Hurtado 1995; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Guardia and Evans 2008;

Outcalt and Skewes-Cox, 2002) has continued to utilize the ecological model in

examining the dynamics related to diverse identities of college students and their

interactions in higher education institutions.

Students with disabilities in high school have contrived, structured experiences

within all levels of the ecological model. This controlled experience is attributed to

implications of IDEA, which provides specific criteria for meeting special education needs (Madaus, 2005). Parents, teachers, principals, other school personnel, outside providers, and (sometimes) the student collaborate to create and control optimal educational experiences at each level (e.g., interactions with non-disabled peers at student level). The team, in support of the student with the disability, is legally (through IDEA) responsible for controlling his or her educational experience.

The Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) model suggests that college students' educational experiences are influenced by the relationships within and between their identities and educational environment. The DLE was designed to consider campus climate and practices in understanding student outcomes in higher education (Hurtado et al., 2012). An illustration of the model can be found in Figure 1.

It was one of the first higher education conceptual models to extend beyond campus climate by indicating that curricular and co-curricular activities have an influence on educational experiences of identity groups (Kimball et al., 2016). It identifies five factors (historical, organizational/structural, compositional, psychological, and behavioral) that have an influence on the experiences and successes of students, staff, and faculty.

Multi-Contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments
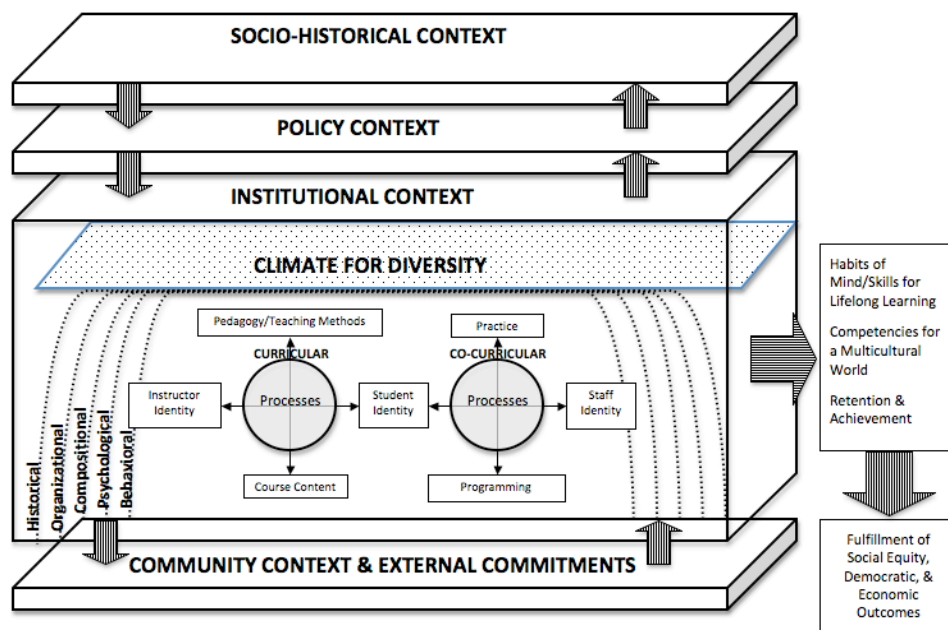
Source: Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C.L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2011). A model for diverse learning environments: The scholarship on creating and assessing conditions for student success. [In press]

Figure 1. Multi-Contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments. This model is based on the research of Hurtado et al. (2012) and shows the dynamics within the nested systems of spheres of interaction that students experience on higher education campuses. It was seen as more explicit than previous models in addressing the influence of multiple contexts and identities on student experience in higher education.

The current study focuses on the policy contextual influences on the higher education experiences of students with disabilities. This study will examine student the perception and behavior dimension of being a student with a disability on a higher education campus. The psychological dimension will assess the degree to which students with disabilities perceive discrimination on campus while the behavior dimension will consider formal and informal interaction of students with peers or groups (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Hurtado et al's (2012) DLE model also allows

students to identify where perceived occurrences or engaged interactions occur. Curricular environments are considered any interaction or perception that is related to the classroom while co-curricular environments are anything outside of the class that can be considered campus facilitated.

Examples of environments or situations that can influence students with disabilities' higher education experience have been highlighted in the disability research. They include faculty attitudes (May & LaMont, 2014), the accommodation process (Hadley, 2007), and an inclusive campus environment (Baird, 2005), and stigma (Henry, Fuerth, & Figliozzi, 2010; Myers & Bastian, 2010). The current study utilized Acculturation tenets in understanding the attitudes and beliefs of students as they were transitioning to the new disability culture of college as a result of changes in education policy. The Multi-contextual Diverse Learning Environment framework will be utilized in framing the perceptions of the conditions that support and challenge student experience in the higher education environment.

Acculturation

The Acculturation framework was used for survey identification and analysis for this study. Although this framework was limited in capturing attitudes related to identity at one point in time, I believed using this framework and survey would be valuable in understanding the attitudes of students as they were experiencing the change in education support structure (culture). More specifically, using this framework to develop a survey would help capture the beliefs of students related to the change from the structured, special education environment of high school to the unstructured, autonomous disability environment of a higher education institution through the lens of acculturation.

Acculturation is the process of understanding what happens at the intersection of two cultures (Berry, 2005). In relation to the current study, acculturation is viewed as the intersection between high school and college disability experience. The following diagram depicts the thought process and utilization of strategies that individuals from one culture employ as they come into contact with a new, dominant culture. More specifically, as students with disabilities transition from the special education experiences of high school to the disability experiences of college, marked by student initiation and control of support process, what strategies are they choosing to use? This process for students would begin during consideration of disclosing disability to disability services for an intake meeting to discuss the acquisition of accommodations.

Maintain Cultural Identity?

		YES	NO
Relation with	YES	Integration	Assimilation
Other Groups?	NO	Separation	Marginalization

Figure 2. Berry's acculturation model. This model is based on Berry's (1997) and Berry and Sam's (1997) research suggesting that non-dominant groups, when encountering a dominant group, choose acculturating strategies based on their attitudes toward the receiving culture and their cultural heritage. The strategies include assimilation (acquires the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture), separation (rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), integration (acquires the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture), and marginalization (rejects the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture).

Acculturation can be involuntary for immigrant groups of people (e.g., refugees) or voluntary for other groups (e.g., Chinese communities in the United States) (Berry 1990). Voluntary acculturation provides the non-dominant culture choice for what to adopt or what not to adopt related to the dominant culture. Involuntary acculturation

results in the non-dominant culture having little or no choice in adopting dominant culture values. For students with disabilities transitioning to higher education, this experience could be viewed as voluntary acculturation because higher education is not mandatory and students must also disclose to initiate the educational support process. During the acculturation process, individuals consider how they desire to be associated with their own group and the other more dominant group (Berry & Sam, 2016). For example, during the transition from high school to college, students with disabilities will consider the extent to which they will embrace their disability identity (through disability disclosure and interpersonal interactions with other students with disabilities) and how they will interact with students who do not have disabilities.

Adaptations can be psychological or socio-cultural (Ward, 1996). Psychological adaptations refer to internal feelings and emotions (e.g., well-being, self-esteem). Socio-cultural adaptations are the competence to engage in daily living activities. For students with disabilities transitioning to higher education, this refers to their educational adjustment. The method of adaptation is considered an acculturative strategy or attitude.

Acculturation strategies or attitudes are defined by the preferences and behaviors of individuals or groups who are acculturating (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry, 1997). It provides insight into "how" people are experiencing the shift in culture. The use of acculturation strategies can be influenced by the individual's or group's value of their identity and preference for interacting with the dominant group, as well as the disproportionate power of the dominant group (Berry & Sam, 2016). For first-year students with disabilities, these attitudes and behaviors can provide a lens to examine how students experience the changes in educational environments in light of the changes

in disability legislation. These strategies or attitudes include integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

Berry (1997) identified four specific strategies individuals or groups use to adapt to new cultures or experiences: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation refers to individuals' abandonment of their original cultural values and adoption of the dominant cultural values and norms in their new experience (Samnani, Boekhorst, & Harrison, 2012). Integration refers to a combination of adopting some cultural values of the dominant culture while retaining some cultural values of one's original culture. Separation refers to the avoidance of the dominant cultural values while retaining one's original cultural values. Finally, marginalization refers to the avoidance of both one's original culture and the dominant culture, resulting in isolation from both cultures. For the current study, the terms inclusive (integrate), conditional (assimilation), exclusion (separation), and alienation (marginalization) are used to align terms associated the study of individuals with disabilities in the context of education.

Acculturative Stress

During the process of acculturation, an individual or group, usually in the non-dominant culture, can experience mental health problems as a result of the contact between the two cultures (acculturation). Berry (1970); Berry and Annis (1974); and Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987) used the term acculturative stress to describe this negative experience. Acculturative stress is physiological, psychological, or social stress attributed to the acculturation process. Individuals or groups experiencing acculturative stress may engage in depressive and isolating behaviors.

The magnitude of acculturative stress varies between individuals; it is contingent on which acculturation strategy is being implemented and one's ability to manage stressors related to the acculturation process (Williams & Berry, 1991; Dona & Berry, 1994). Individuals using integration as an acculturation strategy will experience less acculturative stress than individuals using assimilation, separation, or marginalization strategies (Krishnan & Berry, 1992). College culture, disability stigma, and access to educational supports all have the potential to positively or negatively contribute to acculturative stress experienced by students with disabilities.

Using the Acculturation Model as a lens to examine students with disabilities educational experience during the transition from high school to college will provide insight into how students are adapting to the initial change. It will provide useful information to understanding students with disabilities' attitudes toward non-disabled students and if students are experiencing acculturative stress related to the transition. Acculturation survey or questionnaires will allow for this study to examine the higher education transition experiences of a large sample of students with disabilities.

This study will examine the perceptions of first-year students with disabilities as they navigate through the intersections of nested systems (Multi-Contextual Diverse Learning Model) in higher education. Student experiences will be captured through their own words and from their perspective (Disability Studies in Education). Acculturation will be used for the purpose of creating a survey to capture student attitudes (at one point in time) related to their transition into higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study employed a transformative mixed methods design (Creswell, 2013). This design was able to incorporate facets of the convergent mixed method approach using a survey and case study design to examine the experiences of first-year students with disabilities in college. The purpose of the survey was to measure the beliefs and attitudes of students with disabilities during their initial transition from high school to college. Survey research (Dilman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014) allows for first-year students with disabilities (SWD) to directly report their attitudes; it not only elicits a frequency of responses but also responses that vary across demographic variables including but not limited to race, sex, and household education attainment. An exploratory case study design (Yin, 2013) was used to provide an opportunity for the experiences of first-year SWD to be examined in natural college environments. Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to provide insight into the conditions on college campuses that influenced student or disability director/coordinator experiences.

The original intent of this research design was to conduct an explanatory mixed methods approach in which responses to the survey would be used to create an interview guide for further use in follow-up student focus group interviews. Due to the lack of survey respondents at the time of the individual and focus group interviews, the research design was revised to a transformative mixed method approach to understand the experiences of the first-year students with disabilities and a potential need for a call of

action. This new research design incorporated facets of the convergent mixed method approach with quantitative and qualitative data being collected simultaneously.

This study was considered insider research because I shared the identity of being a student with a disability in college with participants. A benefit from being an insider to the group was the level of openness of participants in the focus group interviews. Participants are more likely to share their experiences with those who they believe share similar experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Although similar, it was important to separate my own experiences and analyses from the participants to ensure clarity in researcher and researched roles (Kanuha, 2000). Reviewing my analytic memos, member checking, and working with my co-chairs helped me in this process. This was the most difficult part of the methodological process because I had to continuously and consistently utilize strategies to ensure the most objective analysis possible with the understanding that complete objectivity in any qualitative research is unattainable.

My educational and professional experiences in both school and working with students with disabilities have been predicated on the goal of obtaining autonomy. While in school, I have sought out resources, had discussions with faculty and staff, and participated in planning activities that promoted independence for students with disabilities. One of my assumptions in approaching this research was that students needed to display autonomy in experience after receiving the intense support in high school. I believed students would have difficulty accessing services and understanding the differences between utilizing services and supports for disabilities in the high school and college environments.

Procedure

During the spring and summer of 2017, I identified 10 potential research sites across the United States for the study. I sent the initial email to each institution during May soliciting participation in the study and contact information for follow-up questions, while also requesting the email be sent to a more appropriate person at university, if necessary. Of the three initial responses, two institutions rejected my invitation and one institution requested a follow-up phone meeting. I sent follow-up emails to the remaining seven institutions in June and also participated in a phone meeting. There were no email responses and I attempted to call each institution while sending another email in July. I also was contacted by the institution that had participated in the phone interview via email to be told the university would not be participating in the research. In August, due to the lack of responses and rejections from three universities, I revised the potential sample for the study and sent emails to five additional institutions familiar to me; these institutions were located in the northeastern, midwest, and southwestern United States.

Survey

I received responses from five institutions agreeing to participate in my study contingent on my adhering to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes on the home and participating institution campuses. I completed the IRB application during September of 2017 and was provided with letters of support from the five universities. IRB was approved on all campuses in October of 2017. I contacted a designated disability person on each campus via email or phone to discuss solicitation of participants for the study. Due to confidentiality laws, I was not allowed to have access to any SWD list on participating campuses. A link to the survey was sent to each contact person for

review to ensure the survey database met accessibility requirements for SWD on their respective campuses.

After each contact person replied and stated that the survey was accessible, I provided each contact person with an email solicitation to participate in the study. The next week another email was sent with an informed consent page and a link to the survey to be distributed to all first-year SWD. The survey was distributed to all first-year SWD registered with the disability service office by the designated contact person in the middle of October. After providing consent and clicking the web link, students completed a 5-7-minute electronic adapted version of an acculturation survey with their preferred technology device and in any environment. Students who consented to taking the survey were provided with an option to be entered into a raffle to win one of twelve $25 gift cards. Survey responses from each higher education institution were monitored by the researcher and tracked using Qualtrics software. Follow-up emails to elicit more participation were sent to contact personnel twice in November and once in December before the semester break. The survey yielded a response rate of 15% (63 of 399).

Focus Group Interviews

During the beginning of November, I emailed contact people on three campuses in the Northeast to solicit help with obtaining participants for focus group interviews and inquire if they would be willing to participate in an in-person individual interview. All three contact people were willing to participate in this stage of the study and agreed to help me recruit participants. These institutions were chosen based upon their timely response to solicitation for focus group interviews and flexible scheduling. I emailed a solicitation flyer to each contact person to distribute to first-year students registered with

the disability service/resource center on campus. Two of the contact persons suggested phone correspondence to better understand the sample I was looking for. After the phone conversations, the contact people said they would begin recruiting students. The third institution emailed and said they said they had already identified several groups of students and had enough confirmations for several focus group interviews. All institutions had students confirmed for in-person focus groups at the end of November prior to Thanksgiving.

I traveled to conduct focus groups at the beginning of November. I conducted focus group interviews at each of the three institutions across three consecutive days, driving to each institution. On the day of the focus group interviews, the contact person met with me prior to the first group to provide a list of names and times for each group, a space to conduct the interviews, a tour of the disability service space, and an opportunity to answer any questions I had. During each group, I began by passing out informed consent documents to students for review and signature. I reviewed the documents with students and asked if they had any questions or needed anything clarified. After signing the consent forms, each student was provided with a $10 gift card. I asked for verbal participation to record the interview and proceeded to conduct 30-45 minute interviews with each group. After each focus group interview, I completed analytic memos.

After I began preliminary analysis, I discovered that there were significantly fewer students of color in the sample. I identified the students of color from focus group interviews who consented for follow-up interviews. As part of the focus group interview, all students were provided with an option to consent (in writing) for a follow-up interview for more data or clarification. I emailed six students and also elicited help from

disability service personnel to help contact students. Five students participated in brief follow-up interviews in virtual or telephone format about their experience and perceptions of why the participation of students of color participation was low. I took notes to identify themes between participants.

Instruments

The survey used in the current study was adapted from two acculturation surveys (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) designed to examine cultural heritage. The scale was intended to measure the acculturation attitudes (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) of first-year SWD as they are transitioning from the high school to college. This adapted version consisted of 37 items.

The first section consisted of two scales consisting of eight items each that covered topics such as disability or non-disability preferences in friend choice, behavior, campus involvement, and identity. Items were generated in pairs with regard to topic, with one item in each pair referring to disability culture and the other item referring to non-disability culture. Examples of items in this section included the extent students agreed with the following statement "I prefer to have friends who do not have disabilities" and how often students reported engaging in the statement "I prefer to participate in non-disability programs and activities at my university." Each item had four possible choices ranging from low identity (1.00) to high identity (4.00). The sum of the total items for each scale indicated student acculturation attitude toward disability and non-disability cultures. Higher scores represent higher identification with the particular

culture identified in the item. Examples include "I prefer having friends who have disabilities" and "I behave in ways that are not associated with my disability."

The next section contained four items that measured students' comfort in disclosure of disability and the degree to which they believed they understood their disability. Examples of items in this section included "to what extent students were comfortable in disclosing their disability to someone that did not have disability" and "to what extent students agreed that they understood how their disability impacted their learning." Comprehension of disability items were rated using a four-point likert scale and ranged from strong agreement in understanding disability (4.00) to strong agreement in not understanding disability (1.00). Disclosure items were rated using a four-point likert scale and were reverse scored with scores ranging from extreme comfort (1.00) to extreme discomfort (4.00). Total scores for the disability culture and non-disability culture scales yielded acculturation scores ranging from Marginalization (1.00) to Integration (4.00).

The final section of the survey consisted of 25 demographic questions (some with clarifying follow-up items) to obtain background information about participants. These items contained questions related to participant disability identification, socioeconomic status, prior use of IEP in high school, race/ethnicity, gender, attendance to summer transition program, and enrollment in specialized disability program, among others. Examples of some of these items include "Are you enrolled in a specialized disability program?" and "What was the highest education degree earned in your household?"

Sample

I initially intended to identify three four-year higher education institutions with different approaches to serving students with disabilities from which I could draw a sample. Each university's type of approach would be categorized to mirror the K-12 least restrictive environment codes for intensity of service that move from need for least amount of special education service (Level A) to most restrictive amount of service (Level C). The first level of approach to servicing disabilities on campus (Level A) is providing a disability services office. The second level of approach (Level B) is providing a disability services office and also a disability specialized program on campus (e.g., Autism program). The third level of approach (Level C) is providing an exclusively disability higher education environment. The utilization of the level of approach conceptualization was adapted from the level of service models used in K-12 special education instructional practices in which direction of levels goes from most inclusive (A) to most exclusive (C).

Due to a lack of responses for participation in the current study from identified higher education institutions with varying approaches to servicing students with disabilities, I had to revise the intended sample. I identified universities I had prior relationships with, and the universities were willing to participate in the study contingent on the study being approved by my home and participating universities' Institutional Review Boards. As a result of this revision, the sample for this study transitioned from purposeful to convenient.

Participants for both the survey and focus group interview sample were first-year students with disabilities on five four-year higher education campuses in the northeastern

and southwestern United States. For the survey, a convenient sample comprised of individuals in their first year of college who had a documented disability or disabilities and had registered with their campuses disability services center (DSC), sometimes called a disability resource office. Individuals who had withdrawn or transferred during a previous semester and were still considered to be in their first semester did not meet the qualifications for the survey. Students who had participated in a summer transition program, on the other hand, qualified to participate in the study.

Participating Institutions Profile

The current study consisted of participants from five fully accredited higher education institutions within the United States representing the Northeast, Southwest, and Midwest geographic locations. Enrollment at institutions ranged from 2,200 to 30,000 students. Tuition ranged from $20,000 to $48,000. The number of incoming freshman ranged from 700 to 5,300 students. The racial makeup among institutions was predominately white. Although each university did have a specified office that served students with disabilities, personnel and types of services varied across institutions. Disability services staff size ranged from two to 21. A complete demographic profile of each institution can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participating University Profiles

Institution	Location	Type of University	Enrollment	Number of First-Year Students	Tuition	Specialized Disability Program	Racial Profile	Survey	Focus Group	Disability Services Staff Size
Great Lakes University	Northeast	Private	3,000	701	$48,000	Yes	72% white; 23% non-white**	Yes	Yes	6
Central University	Northeast	Public	4,000	791	$20,000*	No	82% white; 18% non-white	Yes	Yes	2
Home University	Northeast	Private	2,200	701	$50,000	Yes	60% white; 18% non-white**	Yes	Yes	5
Midwest University	Midwest	Private	4,500	N/A	$40,000	Yes	47% white; 53% non-white	Yes	No	4
Southwest University	Southwest	Public	30,000	5,300	$26,000*	No	35% white; 60% non-white	Yes	No	21

* in-state tuition
** remaining percentage is "unknown"

Table 3 provides demographic information specific to first-year students with disabilities at three of the five institutions. Information was unavailable at the time of reporting for Midwestern and Southwest Universities. The data indicates that first-year students were predominately white, primary category of learning disability, and mostly attended private high schools.

Table 3

First-Year Student with Disabilities Demographic Profiles

Institution	Sex		Race		Disability			High School	
	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Learning Disability	Psychological Disorder	Medical-related Disability*	Private	Public
Great Lakes University**	31	33	55	9	44	N/A	N/A	29	35
Home University	N/A	N/A	50	11	38	5	18	49	12
Central University	16	19	30	5	19	9	7	N/A	N/A

Note. Where "N/A" is listed, no data was available for the institution.
* Includes physical disabilities
** This university had 20 students who were autistic

Research Participants

The survey sample was comprised of 63 respondents. The majority of the survey respondents were female (n = 41), and age ranged from 18 to 41 years (mean +/- standard deviation (SD) = 19.3 +/- 3.4). A total of 43 participants (68%) had graduated from a private high school, while 42 participants (66%) had an individual education plan (IEP). The most common disabilities reported in the survey were a learning disability and health impairment/disorder, which comprised of 73% (31 learning disability; 15 health impairment/disorder) of the sample. Ninety percent (47 European; 10 Asian) of participants identified as White/European or Asian American for their race/ethnicity. Fifty-seven participants (95%) were full-time students, with 14 students (23) identifying as first generation. There were 44 (70%) respondents who attended a private higher education institution, and 20 (32%) respondents whose household income prior to attending college was at or greater than $110,000. Sixteen respondents (27%) of respondents had attended a summer transition program for incoming students with disabilities, while 22 students (37%) were enrolled in a specialized, fee-for-service disability program at their college. A full description of survey participant demographics can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Survey Participant Demographics (n=63)

Variable	n	%
Biological sex		
Male	19	31
Female	41	65
Intersexed	1	1
No Answer	2	3
Age		
18	41	65
19	11	18
20-22	6	9
24-26	4	6
41	1	2
Race/Ethnicity		
Native American	1	1
White/European	47	75
Black/African American	3	5
Latinx	3	5
Asian American	6	9
More than one race	3	5
Primary Disability Category		
Autism	9	14
Intellectual Disability	2	3
Learning Disability	31	49
Health Impairment	15	23
Physical Disability	1	2
Psychological Disorder	3	5
Speech Impairment	1	2
Hearing Impairment	1	2
Type of University		
Private	44	70
Public	19	30
Household Income		
Under $29,999	7	11
$30,000-$49,999	7	11
$50,000-69,999	11	18
$70,000-$89,999	7	11
$90,000 or above	31	49

Variable	N	%
IEP in High School		
Yes	42	67
No	21	33
Household Education Attainment		
High School Diploma or below	14	22
Associates Degree	5	8
Bachelor's Degree	18	29
Master's Degree	18	29
Doctorate or Professional Degree	8	12
Enrolled in Specialized Disability Program		
Yes	23	37
No	40	63
Type of High School Attended		
Private	18	29
Private Disability	2	3
Public	43	68

The focus group interviews (nine) were comprised of 43 first year students with disabilities representing three higher education institutions (two private and one public) in the northeastern United States. A description of each institution can be found in chapter four. Overall, there were 22 female and 21 male participants. Four focus groups were comprised of students who were enrolled in their university's fee-for-service disability program. The focus groups were predominately white, with 38 of 43 (88%) participants identifying as white. Learning disability was the prominent disability category, with 30 participants (70%) identifying as having some form of disability that impacted learning. Forty students (93%) had an IEP in high school. There were 19 students (44%) that had attended a summer transition program for students with disabilities during the previous summer. A description of focus group participant demographics can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Focus Group Participant Demographics (n=43)

Variable	n	%
Biological Sex		
Female	22	51
Male	21	49
Race/Ethnicity		
White/European	37	86
Black/African American	3	7
Asian American	1	2
Latinx	2	5
Primary Disability Category		
Autism	6	14
Psychological Disorder	5	12
Physical Disability	1	2
Health Impairment	2	5
Learning Disability	29	67
Enrolled in Specialized Disability Program		
Yes	20	47
No	23	53
Type of University		
Private	30	70
Public	13	30

Data Analysis

Survey data were downloaded from Qualtics software in a secure server into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. Data were checked for accuracy and corrected where applicable (e.g., if participants were asked to enter biological sex but entered "man" or "woman" instead). Approximately 4% of the sample had at least one missing data point. Data were examined for patterns, and median imputations were used where missing data were random. A total of two participants had random missing data, and four data points were imputed using this method.

Descriptive analysis of data and variables were conducted to determine their distribution and central tendency. Due to overrepresentation within the variables of race/ethnicity, disability category, household income, and highest household education attainment, I recoded these variables to merge categories for a cleaner analysis. To compare groups, two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with an alpha level of 0.05. Cross tabulation analyses were also conducted to compare results between variables using an alpha of 0.05.

For my initial round of coding of the focus group interview transcripts, I utilized In Vivo coding. This coding allows for the researcher to use the participants' own words to enhance and deepen the understanding of their perspectives (Saldaña, 2015). I re-listened to all focus group interviews and wrote down words for each transcript. This initial round of coding led to 75 codes. Understanding that coding usually is conducted in more than one round, I synthesized some of the codes together and came up with 40 codes. For my second round of analysis, I utilized values coding techniques. This method helps to reflect "the attitudes and beliefs of participants, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2015, p.131). Using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, I read each focus group transcript and begin to merge the codes from the initial round of coding with the value codes from the second round of coding. This resulted in 27 codes, 13 categories, and 8 themes. For example, during the In Vivo process the following codes were lumped together for the code of Support because students were discussing how their colleges supported them: *helped, benefitted, positive, extra time, note-taker, counselor, summer transition.* The second round of value coding synthesized these codes with value codes into the *disability support* category under the *specialized*

disability program theme. Categories examples included *self-determination,*

postsecondary education, and campus climate. An example of the coding analysis can be

found in Table 6.

Table 6

Coding Example

Theme	Category	Code	Example
IEP Transition Process	Self-Determination	Parent Involvement	"I sat in on most of my IEP meetings but my mom did most of the talking."

Analytic memos were conducted after analysis of each transcript. These memos

helped to keep track of the researcher's thoughts and interpretations through analysis

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The memos served as a method of triangulation for codes

gleaned from interview transcripts. The process of coding, reflecting and analyzing, and

then re-coding helped to refine my results by removing and editing current codes, as well

as challenged my preconceptions of potential data trends and allowed results to emerge

from the data itself (Saldaña, 2015). This type of repeated analysis led to code-level

augmentations in an attempt, again, to allow the data trends emerge from the data itself.

For example, analytic memos led to some of the following study changes:

- 1/6/18 Code Deletion of *Disability Category Identity*: This did not come

  up much, if at all, in the word search, and was also due to the over-

  representation of certain categories.

- 1/23/18 Code Addition of *Parent Involvement:* There were numerous

  direct and indirect statements and comments that students made about

their parents' involvement in their education, although I initially did not

believe parent involvement would be high.

Emergent themes from the focus group interviews were used for member

checking. Students were able to provide feedback on themes and thoughts about

participating in the study. Transcripts were sent to two to three people in each focus

group. At least one person in ten of the eleven groups responded with no edits provided. I

also sent a synopsis of my analysis of the transcripts to students. Students provided minor

edits that centered around understanding researcher terminology.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Although more rigorous statistical tests yielded no statistical significance, descriptive statistics provide useful information that describe first-year students with disabilities attitudes during the postsecondary education transition. There were 63 first-year students with disabilities that gave consent to participate in the survey phase of this research study. The sample consisted of 41 females and 19 males, and one intersexed student. Thirty-one students reported having a learning disability and 15 students identified with having a health impairment or disorder. Twenty-two students were enrolled in specialized, fee-based disability programs at their university. There were 44 students enrolled at private higher education institutions and 19 at public higher education institutions. Forty-seven students came from a household income of $50,000 or higher. There were 44 students from households with a person who held at least a bachelor's degree.

Forty-two students had an IEP in high school. There were 49 students that lived on campus and 13 students who were considered commuter students. Twenty-two students were employed while attending school. The sample included 43 students who attended a public high school and 16 students who attended a summer transition program prior to the fall semester. Complete participant demographic data from this study can be found in Appendix C.

Table 7

Overall Student Acculturation Ratings

Domain	Mean	Standard Deviation
Disability Culture	2.41	0.71
Non-disability Culture	3.20	0.60

To answer the first question of how first-year students were acculturating to higher education, means and standard deviations were utilized to provide results. Overall, results indicated that first-year SWD in the study reported using assimilation attitudes during their first semester transition into higher education. Students reported a higher identification with the non-disability culture and a lower identification with the disability culture. Students are using separating attitudes to distance themselves from the disability culture.

Sixty-two percent of students agreed that it was important for them maintain an identity of a student without a disability. In addition, 97% of students reported engaging in behaviors that were perceived to be of the mainstream campus culture. When asked about peer preference, 51% of respondents reported preferring peers that did not have disabilities while only 22% reported a preference of peers with disabilities. Fifty-three percent of students indicated they would never participate in disability-related campus programming while only 3% reported the same for non-disability-related campus programming.

The survey results indicated students possessed characteristics related to self-determination. Students reported comfort in disclosing their disabilities as indicated by 74% of students reporting they would be comfortable with disclosing to someone without

a disability, while 87% reported being comfortable in disclosing to someone with a disability. Students also reported comprehending the educational manifestations of their disability. Eighty-six percent of students reported understanding how their disability impacted their social experiences, compared to 97% of students who reported understanding how their disability impacted their learning.

Table 8

First-Year Student with Disability Self Ratings

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Impact Learning	3.49	0.62
Impact Social Interactions	3.25	0.86
Disclosure to person with disability	1.62	0.77
Disclosure to person without disability	1.97	1.02

Results also indicate that, overall, students report high understanding of how their disability impacts their learning and their social interactions. First-year students report knowing how their disability influences both academic and social situations. Overall, students report being comfortable in disclosing their disability to people. Students reported feeling more comfortable in disclosing their disability to someone with a disability than someone that did not have a disability.

Table 9

Disability Culture Comparison

Disability Culture Demographic	Mean	Standard Deviation
Specialized program	2.67	0.88
No specialized program	2.20	0.55

To answer the research question if differences existed in acculturation between demographic variables, mean comparisons were conducted with independent variables (i.e., demographic categories) and dependent variables (i.e., disability culture, disclosure). Students enrolled in specialized disability programs reported higher levels of identification toward the disability culture than students who were not enrolled in specialized disability programs. Students enrolled in specialized programs are provided with more intensive disability-related supports during their experience. Students in specialized programs reported a greater understanding of how their disability impacted their learning than how their disability impacted social situations. Specialized programs highlight more academic supports for services than non-academic supports.

Students not enrolled in specialized programs reported being more comfortable in disclosing their disability to someone with a disability than students enrolled in specialized disability programs. Both students enrolled in specialized disability programs and students not enrolled in specialized disability programs reported moderate comfort in disclosing to someone who did not have a disability.

Students who resided in homes with household income under $69,999 reported stronger agreement in understanding how their disability impacted social situations than

students who resided in households with incomes over $70,000. Students residing in higher income households reported being more comfortable with disclosing a disability to someone with a disability than to someone without a disability. Students residing in lower income homes reported similar ratings in disclosing to someone with a disability and to someone without a disability.

Students with health disorders/impairments reported being more comfortable in disclosing their disability to someone without a disability than either students with learning disabilities or students from all remaining disability identities. Students who attended summer transition programs reported higher identification with the disability culture than students who did not attend a summer transition program. Students who did not attend a summer transition program reported higher identification with the non-disability culture than the disability culture.

Females reported feeling more comfortable in disclosing a disability to someone without a disability than males. Females reported higher understanding of how their disability impacts their learning than males.

Quantitative research that does not have statistical significant results can still determine if evidence is strong, weak, or inexistent in addressing research questions (Carver, 1978). Higher education quantitative research has heavily relied on the statistical significance while ignoring results that are not significant but still provide information (Smart, 2005). Statistical findings, whether significant or not, should be reported when the results can have practical implications for underrepresented groups (Vacarro et al., 2015). These findings can also provide direction for developing future quantitative studies that can meet the typical requirements of the quantitative research field. Rios-

Aguilar (2014) provided the term "educational significance" to emphasize to researchers that any statistical findings can be beneficial when addressing the experiences or opportunities of marginalized groups.

The results of the survey indicate that students with disabilities desired to interact and engage in activities that were believed to be non-disability related. Although wanting to engage in non-disability activities with non-disabled students, students were generally comfortable in disclosing their disability on college campuses. Students were found to understand how their disability manifests in both learning and social settings.

To gain further insight into the dynamics related to the first-year experience of students with disabilities on college campuses, I obtained qualitative data from three campuses. The findings revealed contradiction between what students reported and their lived experiences on campus.

Qualitative Findings

In this section, I discuss the results from the focus group student interviews about first semester experiences on three higher education campuses in the northeastern United States. A synopsis of the answers provided by each group allowed me to analyze the perceptions of students with disabilities' higher education experiences. In analyzing their perceptions of their postsecondary education transition experience, several themes emerged as conditions that influence their initial experiences on higher education campuses. Conditions included participation in a specialized disability program, disability services personnel, parent involvement, high school preparation, self-determination skills, faculty interactions, and campus climate.

The following sections will expand on each of these conditions. Student perceptions related to the supportive and/or challenging aspects of each condition will be provided for a complete analysis.

Specialized Disability Programs Supports Transition

Five of the 11 focus groups (20 students) contained students who were enrolled in specialized college programs for first-year students with disabilities. For an additional $2,000-3,000 per semester, students were able to take advantage of a plethora of intense educational supports to help them during the transition to college. These programs were designed for SWD but used alternative terminology for the program name (e.g., "First-year Success"). Program components included but were not limited to priority registration, specialized summer transition program, advisor/learning specialist, personal development skill workshop, test and note-taking strategy seminars, and self-advocacy skill training.

Program Advisor/Counselor

> It's really awesome to talk to your advisor…We just talk about life and stuff and how it is in college. She helps me with papers, and organize my schedule. It really does help and I always look forward to our meetings. (Great Lakes University student)

Students perceived the greatest asset of the program being the advisor/specialist. This person was assigned to students to develop plans to meet their specific needs. The specialist provides assistance in creating schedules for students, academic feedback, troubleshooting academic and nonacademic situations, organization, and serving as a liaison to faculty during initial contact. Most students had scheduled appointments with their advisors at least once a week and up to, at most, three times a week. Students commented how they appreciated having someone to confide in, brainstorm with, or just

to talk about life with. Other student insight included statements such as, "I think the ability to go to someone to talk about your problems and academic situations is really helpful for anybody, especially for people with disabilities in their first year (Home University Student)."

Impact of Specialized Program

When asked what their experience would be like without the specialized first-year program, students described more difficulty in their adjustment to academics. Students discussed the positive impact they've had in their education when someone consistency guided them while monitoring their progress and how lost they would be on their own. Many students did not think they would have made it through the semester or thought they would have had to miss the spring semester off due to academic probation. As one student said, "I definitely think it would be harder. I wouldn't have gotten the tips I got in staying organizing in my academics, so I don't think I would be doing as well."

Most of the attributions were connected with their experience with having weekly meetings with a program advisor. Other thoughts from students included "If I didn't have someone, like, come check in on me…I probably would have been failing," and "I definitely think it would've been harder for me. He [advisor] has definitely helped me with, like, advice and stuff on what to do… He is the main way that I actually keep track of my grades."

Summer Transition Program

> I'm ahead of them in terms of being organized and planning my things, meeting with teachers, knowing everything to do, highlighting the syllabuses, all of that type of stuff. Like, I have like a leg up on them. (Home University student)

As described above, the summer transition program, according to students, provided the benefit of having a preview of academic life on college. Students perceived

the experience as an introduction to how professors teach, what studying looks like, and

how the accommodation process works. The experience allowed for an easier transition

at the beginning of the semester. Students received preparation in self-advocacy, time

management, organization, and study skills while being introduced to supportive services

such as tutoring and writing centers. As one student from Great Lakes University said:

> I definitely think the class, like the most helpful part of the summer program was just like being able to like get settled a little more, and get into groove just checking the boxes that you know you need to check before you're like ... Welcome week when everybody showed up it was crazy, and to transition into that, it would have been a lot different and more difficult.

The summer transition program, however, did not provide students with a realistic

college social experience. The program required students to remain on campus at all

times while participating in mandatory off-site excursions to such places as malls or

parks. Staff monitored student interactions and ensured students were in their dorms at a

specific time every night. Students believed the program needed to provide a full

academic and social college experience and allow them independent navigation on and

off campus. Students voiced displeasure in being confined to campus and having to ask

permission to go places. According to a Great Lakes University student:

> I had to ask permission to leave campus, we didn't really get to ... I mean, we were like dragged along on, like, these… forced activities to, like, the mall and stuff, even if, like, I had no reason to go to the mall or desire. Even if I didn't have any money, we had to go on these activities.

They thought they would be able to do whatever they wanted during the time they

did not have class or scheduled activities. The program provided scheduled, mandatory

off-campus group activities. Even if students had family or relatives close to campus,

they were still unable to go and visit with them while enrolled in the program. Another

Great Lakes University student said, "The one thing I did not like is they restrained us

from going places ourselves, because I have family here and I wasn't allowed to see them during the program." Disability services directors were not available to support or refute this claim.

Parent Partnership is a Plus

"They're the ones who are paying for my college, so I have to show (give) them access to everything." (Central University Student)

Prior to conducting the focus groups, I assumed that students would independently engage in college experiences. Considering the notion of self-determination, I believed that parents would be present but more in a consultative role, if needed. During my college experience, I valued the sense of independence I had and spoke to my parents on seldom occasions. I was surprised to learn of the frequency and intensity of involvement by parents in everyday student experience across all institutions. Participants saw this relationship as a significant support to their first-year experience.

When students were asked if their parents were given written consent to have access to their academic and financial records, there was a resounding response of yes. Parents played a key role as a support in the everyday experience of students at all research sites regardless of enrollment in specialized program. Forty-one of 43 students indicated that they had given written consent for their parents to have access to all educational records. Of the two who had not given consent, one student said although he didn't give consent, he still had weekly check-in sessions with his parent. The other student was a non-traditional first-year student in her late twenties. As one Home University student commented, "Yeah, I'd say I'm dependent on them and they care about what I'm doing and they wanna make sure I'm succeeding and stuff."

Parents were perceived as supportive guides in the students' education experience. Students stated their parents were entitled to access to their records due to financial support or due to their close-knit, caring relationship. Parents provided frequent check-ins to participants to ensure they were prepared for classes and also to monitor academic progress. One Central University student said, "If I have a test, she'll help me make a study guide for myself, and she'll read it off to me. I'll tell her my grades; she'll go look at them."

Some students also mentioned providing access to their parents so that parents could advise them in obtaining supports for their academic endeavors. Parents were considered substitute university academic support personnel for students' written assignments; they also assisted in monitoring academic progress. Students who didn't have enough time to go and find support on campus utilized their parents as liaisons in attempting to obtain the necessary education support (i.e., accommodations, test prep strategies) through disability services or the specialized disability program. For example, one Home University student stated, "My parents are very involved. They want to know everything. I don't mind giving them access. My mom is a huge advocate for my learning…She's pretty knowledgeable of what I need and everything, so she's pretty involved." By keeping in constant communication with their children, parents helped students to stay focused on everything they needed to do at college.

Decision Making

The extent of parent involvement had been continuous throughout the students' educational career. Parents attended and meaningfully participated in meetings by advocating for students both in elementary and high school. This experience helped lay a

foundation of trust and security between students and parents that remained after graduation from high school. Students listened to their parents' advice and followed parental instruction during both the college selection process and first-semester experience. Students noted how their parents always had their best interest in mind. For example, one Central University student shared:

> My mother found out about it… She's always been always someone who's looked out for me…taken into account that I have learning differences. She encouraged me to go here, and be part of the program, so, that's how I got here.

> A Great Lakes University student said:

> I was officially enrolled at a school in California, but then very last minute my mom texted me one day and was like 'You're going to [school student currently attends]'… I was like 'What?!' I had no idea about this school. She was like, 'Yeah, they have a really good program for your disability' and that it would be better for me if I was here so I can get help.

> Students utilized parents' knowledge in making decisions related to enrollment in

college. This was especially true for participants who were enrolled in specialized disability programs. They reported that their parents found the programs and told them they should go. One Home University student said, "I was applying to some colleges and my mom was kind of like, 'Hey, [student's current university] has an LD program, you should go there...' and I was like, 'Okay.'"

Students were very comfortable with the level of participation of their parents and viewed the dynamic as normal. They saw their parents as the ultimate support for any component of their experience.

Faculty Support is Inconsistent

When asked about interactions with faculties on campus, there was a stark difference in interactions with faculty if students were enrolled in specialized programs compared to students who were not enrolled in specialized program.

Students in specialized programs reported desirable interactions with faculty in either discussing their disability or attempting to obtain accommodations. Faculty were considered supportive, personable, and flexible in their willingness to accommodate students in the classroom. One Home University student said, "I'd say my interaction with my professors are for the most part really positive…Professors here are really flexible so we might as well use them for resources." Students described going through the process of talking to the professor while giving them the accommodation form from the disability service office. Students in specialized disability programs perceived the small student population on campus as being conducive to their positive experiences with faculty interactions, access, and support. One Great Lakes University student commented that "They [professors] are very accommodating and very nice, and then since this is a small school, they're very personalized so they care if you succeed and they don't see you as just a number."

Students not enrolled in specialized disability programs, on the other hand, reported faculty interactions as a serious threat to their educational success. Faculty were reported to be inconsistent in their provisions of accommodations for students with disabilities and unwilling to consider any flexibility in their approach regardless of student need, as summed up in a Central University student's comment:

> It's everything online has a specific time you have to turn it in, so the professor said he can't just change that for one student….and it had to be done at that time or if you weren't finished, that was the grade you got.

Another Central student described a situation in which the faculty forced the student to take an exam on information she had missed although she had an excused absence letter. This student described speaking to the professor,

> I just realized all the information [for a quiz] that you're giving me right now is from what I missed… She's like, "Oh, yeah." She asked me, "Do you want to take it later?" then she says "Oh, wait, no, you saw the quiz. You have to take it now." I'm thinking, "Now, I just gave you a note that covered me for that absence…and now you're telling me I have to take a quiz on the information that I don't have yet…" I asked how bad I did after class… She's like, "Oh, I can't tell you because there's other students that still have to take it, because of illnesses and disabilities and stuff."

Professors were reported to use one-size-fits-all approaches to class project, assignments, and exams with rigid guidelines. One Home University student said, "My professor said (reviewing her syllabus), you can only miss two classes and it doesn't matter if it's an excused absence or an unexcused absence… It's written right in my disability form that I might have to miss more than that." Students not in specialized disability programs perceived faculty as not understanding their disability or manifestation in the classroom and lacking sympathy to their learning needs. Faculty attitudes were perceived as a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach to instruction. Students did not believe faculty cared about their academic progress or well-being. Faculty perceived student difficulties as a result of poor work ethic.

According to these students, faculty also viewed utilization of educational supports as "advantages" or methods of academic "cheating." Faculty thought they would be providing unfair privileges instead of supports that students needed to access the curriculum. Students also believed that faculty often made sudden changes to class structure or schedule without considering the needs of students with disabilities in the class. Students did not mention or discuss making any attempt to self-advocate during

interactions with faculty related to using accommodations. When asked why they did not

self-advocate, students not in specialized programs stated they were under the impression

that faculty made the ultimate decision. One Central University student said, "I have

asked the professors for more time… It depends on the professor whether or not they give

me extra time …because sometimes they don't really do it because they say it's not fair to

all the other students."

Students reported that faculty instruct and behave as if students who have

disabilities do not exist in their classrooms. Students questioned faculty's training and

education related to academic instruction of SWD. They believed that faculty should

have been trained to understand different student learning styles. One Home University

student commented "I feel like, when becoming a teacher [professor], don't they learn

about ... Don't they have to take psychology?… Don't they have to know not everyone's

brains work the same?" This knowledge, students believed, would lead to a variety of

instructional approaches to mastering academic content. Faculty would be able to develop

alternative strategies and methods for students to use, thus providing a more improved

academic outcome. A Home University student provided an example of faculty relying

on one strategy for mastery of content. As they described,

> I told her "Your slides aren't helping. I read the textbook like you said, is there
> anything else that can help me understand this?" She was like, "No, you have to
> read the slides." I was expecting for her to at least know a little bit more. I
> reminded her that I have that learning disability. She was like "Whatever, you just
> have to do it the way I do it."

Inadequate High School Preparation

Overall, most students indicated that their respective high schools failed to

adequately prepare them for the college experience. The academic experience in high

school was viewed as easy, with students reporting getting high grades in both general

and special education courses through their senior year. According to students, due to their disability, they were often discouraged from taking advanced placement courses by their special education case managers even if the students showed initiative to enroll in the classes. Students were under the impression that case managers believed that the student's disability would make the courses challenging. Recounting an experience from high school, a student from Home University stated, "I have slow processing so I wasn't able to take any advanced classes like honors. They said, 'You can't take it because you have slow processing, you can't take AP courses'… They kinda made the judgment for me." Currently taking college courses, students believed that having been persuaded not to take challenging courses in high school resulted in them missing a critical opportunity for college academic preparation.

The number one recommendation by students for their high schools and students with disabilities planning to attend college was to provide students with more challenging academic courses through either Advanced Placement classes or dual enrollment in community colleges. Students believe taking these courses would give them the tools for an earlier postsecondary education transition to college academics and skills they need to utilize to succeed. It would lessen the trial and error that many students experienced during their first semester. As one Great Lakes student noted in his recommendation for students with disabilities in high school desiring to go to college:

> I would say try and take one or two AP classes, because I wish I would have done that, because those AP classes really help you transition to college…I think that my high school could have pushed me to go to higher level classes. I did all [standard] academic classes all four years and I think I would have benefited from taking one or two APs.

There were four students who attended small, private disability-specific high schools in different states who believed they were sufficiently prepared for college. These

students discussed supports such as having specific courses related to the transition

process and interactions between and within student groups. One Great Lakes University

student said, "I was absolutely prepared for what would be ahead of me. In fact, there

was a class that I had in high school called Post-Secondary Planning." The small

population of the school provided a familiarity and continuity with peers and school staff.

The schools also provided opportunities for students to practice skills or join specific

student groups to enhance certain skills that would be useful in college. As one Great

Lakes University student recalled,

> Some of the other ways that my high school really shaped me to the person I am
> is the clubs that I was heavily involved in, in all four years…That has definitely
> prepped me for the real college world. It's definitely helped me identify who I am
> personally and bringing awareness on my disorder, which is autism.

IEP Transition Process

Students who had IEPs in high school perceived the process as overbearing and

inconsistent. Special education teachers and case managers perpetuated the dependency

of students by helping them too much or making decisions without their input. One

Central University student said,

> I had a certain IEP teacher that I would go to and he was not exactly helping me
> and giving me ways of what I can do independently by myself to make me better.
> It was more of, like, he was always helping me almost too much to where it's not
> going to help me at all for college.

> Another student from Great Lakes University described a similar experience:

> I also felt isolated because every period I had to meet my special ed teacher and
> some of them attended class with you, and they would write down your notes, and
> I feel like they were almost kind of babying you.

> Teachers were also perceived as being careless in communication and forgetting

the needs of students. These dynamics were seen as influencing students' autonomy that

they now experience in college. Many statements related to student experiences used

words such as "made" and "forced." Students perceived high school as a place where they engaged in little to no decisions about their daily education experiences such as taking notes, choosing classes, or joining clubs.

In conjunction with the high level of parent involvement, I was eager to learn if students had developed self-determination skills. I was surprised to learn about the experiences students had with special education transition teams and how little they were able to articulate about their disability, manifestation, and rights. This was in direct contradiction to the survey results in which students reported high levels of knowing how their disability impacts their learning and social situations.

Self-determination is believed to be a critical component of the IEP transition process. These skills provide students with the ability to self-advocate for their educational needs while understanding their disability. It was evident from the all the student focus groups that students did not understand the difference between special education processes in high school and disability support processes in college. Most students who had IEPs in high school used IEP terminology to describe the process of getting supports in college. When asked about the difference between obtaining services in high school and college, two of 43 students were able to partially describe differences. Most students restated what they had been told in high school about college. Students expressed frustration with their high schools and perceived their high schools as escorting them out the door after graduation without any concern for their postsecondary education future. As one Central University student commented, "I feel like my high school just gave me my IEP and said, 'Good luck!'"

There was also a lack of knowledge of how disability services worked for both students that were a part of the specialized disability program and those who were not. High school special education teams and processes were seen as not educating students how to access supports after graduation. As one Home University student said, "They didn't really teach me how to really approach the disability services and really how to use them properly." Another student from Great Lakes University noted, "I felt like it didn't really prepare me for the independence part, in terms of self-advocating for my disability and IEP." Considering the parent-student dynamic, I wonder to what extent – or if – the lack of self-determination skills utilized independently by students will influence students' experiences as they continue in college.

Students in specialized disability programs knew of the services they received but were unaware that they could advocate or have discussions to obtain more accommodations if they believed it would be beneficial to their education. While some of this may be related to disability services staff serving as intermediaries to students in faculty interactions, I believed students would have better understanding due to the intense supports received through the program. I was surprised to learn this was not true. One student from Great Lakes University said, "I'm a little unsure because I think I can advocate for what I may need but I'm a bit uncertain to what degree I will need to self-advocate." Students in these programs were able to talk through the steps of the process but did not provide any evidence of fully understanding tenets of ADA/Section 504. To them, they met with someone, filled out a sheet, and took it to a professor.

Students not in specialized programs knew basic information, such as that they had to meet with disability services director and give them their IEP to get

accommodations. Students did not understand the range of accommodations they could request and viewed that as a sign that they needed to make improvements in their academic skills. Even when students did have accommodations, they did not always understand their rights or strategies to advocate when professors were not allowing them to use documented supports. One Great Lakes University student said, "I have it on the paper that the disability center gave us saying that I can use [a calculator], but still some of the professors are like, 'No, you're in college. You should be able to add in your head.'"

Navigation Using Strategic Disclosure

One of the most interesting findings in this study was the altered perception students had of the campus climate. When asked how disability was received on campus, all students indicated that their colleges were very receptive to individual and group differences, including disabilities. Statements such as "My university is a very welcoming community. They take pride in saying that the gates are always open to anyone, and that's very vital" were consistently echoed across all groups. Students' view was that everyone treated everyone the same and no one cared about or made judgments based on particular identities. One student said, "In high school, most kids who have disabilities are bullied for it, compared to here [college]. They're a lot more understanding." There was plenty of support on campus and everyone was willing to help each other out. Stark comparisons were made between high school and college environments, with students favoring the perceived nonjudgmental higher education environment.

There was a significant shift in perception during the conversation when students were asked questions about their disclosing their disability on their campus. Prior to questioning, students lauded how their campuses were inclusive of everyone and how no one cared if you had a disability, your race, or any other identity. Their perceptions painted the picture that differences were not seen as negatively impacting the college experience.

However, when the topic shifted to reactions students received from disclosing or how they perceived disclosing, they illustrated an environment of uncertainty. Students' disclosure of their disability was context dependent, and they disclosed only for certain reasons. They were selective when deciding who to disclose to and viewed having the disability as a personal attribute that didn't need to be shared. A student from Central University shared, "I just don't ... Yeah, no, I don't feel like sharing it. That's just something I tell close friends and family." The perception of how students believed they would be received was contradictory with the behaviors students engaged in. Even when opportunities arose to discuss implications of their disability and need for educational supports, students chose to provide alternative explanations to close friends. They preferred to use alternative explanations as a way to protect any perceived potential altering of their relationships. One Great Lakes University student said,

> I told my roommate that I had priority registration. He asked why and I had to think of some weird reason… I mean, I don't think it's necessary that my roommate, my friends, like, I mean, we all like each other, we... They like me for who I am.

Some students related the preference of not disclosing to negative experiences or barriers encountered in high school. Not disclosing provided students with opportunities to continue navigation in college while bypassing potential barriers that challenged

progress. One Home University student said, "I don't really want to tell people because I don't want people to feel like they need to treat me differently because of my disability."

The topic of disclosure began to highlight occurrences of disability stigma experienced on the college campus. These occurrences were present in both academic and non-academic contexts and were mainly voiced by students not in specialized disability programs. Perceived bullying was committed by both peers and professors. Students perceived the insensitivity or negative interactions as a result of a lack of education or willingness of peers to understand student disabilities. One student from Central University provided an example of an encounter she had when students asked about her necklace for her medical condition. She said, "I told them that I had Type I diabetes and they heard the word 'diabetes' and they were like, 'Oh, well you know, if you ate better and you exercised you wouldn't have that.'"

When asked if student-led organizations or campus activities related to disabilities would help improve their experience on campus by bringing awareness or education, students believed that such activities and groups were unnecessary. Students had concerns that their participation in such groups would result in forced, unwilling disclosure, and they also were concerned about what disability categories would be represented by the group. They were unsure how such a group would impact members' experience or the campus environment. One student from Central University stated, "They kind of can't make a group out of it without giving away that we have disabilities, if we don't want certain people to know." Identification as a student with a disability had the potential to create more obstacles for students in their navigation of the college environment. Students believed having a disability-related student organization did not fit

within the realm of their current education experience, although they admitted that there was a general lack of disability awareness and education among students, staff, and faculty.

Intersection of Race, Disability, and Socioeconomic Status

When reviewing the sample of participants in both the survey and student focus groups, it was evident that there was low participation by students with disabilities who did not identify as white. I sought six students of color with disabilities from student focus groups in an attempt to gain insight into student perceptions of why they participated and their ideas why lower numbers of students of color with disabilities might participate in higher education research.

Five of the six students responded and participated in a brief follow-up interview. These students included three students who identified as African American or Black, one international student who identified as Latina, and one student who identified as Asian. Four students identified as having learning disabilities, and one student identified as being autistic. Four of the five students were in fee-based programs at private universities, while the public university participant's mother was a faculty member at the student's school. Two of the students admitted to not really thinking about the intersection of race and disability until participating in the follow-up interview. The students never considered any connection between the race and disability identities. Upon reflection, both students stated they intended to further examine the dynamic now that it was brought to their attention.

When asked why they chose to participate in the study, students discussed close relationships with disability services staff and a desire to help support the office any way

they could. Students also talked about "embracing" their disability and their need for educational support throughout their education. Students were asked how their experience in K-12 education influenced the embracing of their disability. Students discussed having access to resources including technology, small class sizes, and school support staff as helping them to manage their perception of their disability. Students talked about discussing their disability in different high school experiences and how that has helped them to be comfortable in talking about their disability in situations such as in the focus group or when getting disability services in college.

Students expressed appreciation for their schools and were aware that their other high schools may not have the same resources, thus influencing the degree to which students of color with disabilities were able to embrace their disability. One African American female student from Great Lakes University commented that "some schools don't get the same funding as other schools." Students were aware of the potential impact of low education funding.

Students believed disability-related stigma existed in high school, especially with students of color. They commented how disability was seen as something wrong and how students of color might avoid getting special education services, thus influencing their perception of disability. The isolation from peers in high school and medical model thinking of students that something is wrong with a person if they have a disability further exacerbate their rejection of the disability identity. Due to their high school experiences, students believed students of color may not be willing to identify and participate in disability research in college. One African American student from Great Lakes University said that students of color with disabilities his school were often "too

good to show that they had a disability and embarrassed to go to special education class."
When asked to elaborate on the statement, the student indicated that students were
embarrassed and did not want to be made fun of by peers for going to special education
class. They suggested the potential to relive such experiences may have been a deterrent
to other students from participating in research. An Asian student from Great Lakes
University offered that "students of color with disabilities might not feel secure and
confident if their personal information is exposed."

All students mentioned the absence of people of color working in the disability
industry or being portrayed in media about disabilities. Students were asked about their
initial reaction to participating in research about disability with an African-American
male. There were follow-up questions related to the racial identities of individuals that
have worked with them or their families in K-12 education. Three of the students
expressed concerns of not seeing – or rare occurrences of interacting with – students of
color with disabilities in their educational experiences. One African American male
student from Central University said, "I don't think I've ever seen a Hispanic student
with a disability." Students discussed being accustomed to disability educators being
predominantly white and believed that may influence people of color's comfort with
disclosing their disability or participating in research.

Students were surprised yet excited when they entered the student focus group
and saw the race of the researcher and identification with a disability. The African
American student from Central University said, "I felt amazed that a person of color was
bringing support to disabilities and it was incredible." Students were confident that the
representation of more people of color in education would result in an increase in

willingness of students of color with disabilities to participate in disability research. The African American male from Great Lakes University commented that "If there's more men of color [in education], students of color would be more willing to accept and embrace their disability."

Finally, all students indicated that involvement of parents for students of color with disabilities in K-12 education may influence their willingness to participate in research in college. All five students expressed gratitude for the continuous advocacy of their parents during their educational career. Students perceived parents as protective forces who held schools accountable for their educational success by ensuring that their needs were being met. One international, Latinx student from Great Lakes University said, "Maybe their parents are not educated about disabilities and have not attended meetings. I wouldn't expect those students to be comfortable with their disability." Three of the five students had transferred secondary schools at least once due to parents believing the prior school was unable to meet the student's needs.

Summary

The survey data indicated that first-year students with disabilities in higher education environments are choosing to identify more with mainstream culture than disability culture. Students also report knowing how their disability manifests in different educational settings and being moderately comfortable disclosing to individuals with and without disabilities. When considering demographic differences, students enrolled in specialized programs identify more with the disability culture than students who are not enrolled in specialized disability programs. Students in these programs discussed having

more frequent opportunities to discuss their disability college experience with program personnel.

Parent involvement, accommodations from specialized disability programs, and specialized disability program participation acted as supports for students' experiences. In terms of parent involvement, students benefitted from parents' advice, direction, and academic monitoring; they also appreciated being able to not only ask them questions but to have regular conversations about everyday topics. Specialized programs were also supportive in helping students interact with faculty and resulted in students having positive experiences and perceptions of campus climate. Utilizing accommodations such as priority registration, extra time, and note-taking in specialized programs supported student academic experiences.

Obstacles to positive first-year student experience included unaccommodating faculty (for students not enrolled in specialized programs), limited high school academic preparation, inadequate special education transition processes, and perceived disability stigma in the college environment. Students not enrolled in specialized disability programs encountered academic difficulties as a result of the unwillingness of faculty to provide them with educational supports. High school experiences were viewed as not preparing students for college because of limited opportunities for decision making in class choice, note-taking methods, etc.

Initially, students described their campuses as inclusive to all students. Upon further questioning, students revealed concern with protecting the disclosure of their disability. When asked directly by friends or classmates why students receiving educational supports (e.g., priority registration), students provided alternative

explanations instead of discussing reasons related to their learning or disability. When asked how they believed peers would react upon disclosure of their disability, students did not believe it would be a problem or alter their relationship, but students wanted to share their disability identity at their own discretion.

Considering the disproportionate underrepresentation of students of color with disabilities in higher education research and the current study, brief follow-up interviews were conducted with five students of color with disabilities. Students were encouraged by family and educators throughout their schooling to be proud of their disability and open to receiving all supports. Access to resources including tools and personnel in high school, along with family involvement, helped shaped their perception of disability and enabled their successful navigation through the educational system. The support students received through K-12 schooling and parent involvement throughout their education helped to ensure they were in environments that met student needs. Parent involvement in concert with socioeconomic status provided students of color with disabilities the opportunity to be removed from environments with barriers (e.g., lack of resources, perceived inadequate special education services) to schools that were able to provide students with more intense support and increased chances for postsecondary success. This dynamic continued in college as the majority of students of color were enrolled in specialized programs.

In examining both the survey results and focus group findings, to successfully navigate college, students are assimilating into the mainstream population. Students have trusted networks of individuals they consult when situations require self-determination skills. Students who can afford to enroll in a specialized program are afforded less

interaction with potential barriers during the postsecondary education transition process than students receiving general disability services. Although they perceived the college environment as inclusive and their peers as accepting, students engaged in strategic, discretion-based disclosure of their disability.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

As universities continue to promote inclusive, social justice language in practices and mission statements, higher education educators have an obligation to understand the experiences of students with disabilities on college campuses. Having this understanding would enable higher education institutions to proactively develop better support structures, processes, and services to address the disability experience.

The current study sought to examine the postsecondary education transition of first-year students with disabilities at four-year higher education institutions. Students' acculturation attitudes in transitioning from changes in education policy were assessed and students were asked what barriers and supports contributed to their experience during the transition.

The study concluded that students are utilizing trusted networks of support to successfully navigate the college campus. Adult involvement in the form of university personnel or parents is a critical component that helps and manages student educational experiences. Faculty are inconsistent (dependent on student enrollment in specialized disability program) in their flexibility, understanding, and willingness to provide academic supports to students with disabilities. Students use strategic disclosure techniques to avoid potential discrimination and other undesirable experiences (negative peer interactions) in the education environment that may prohibit success. Access to financial means provided protection of students of color from the historical marginalization of the racial and disability identities.

It is interesting among the findings of the study that perceptions of a welcoming climate did not automatically result in disability identity disclosure by students. Students were willing to disclose in specific environments that they perceived as supporting their experience. This phenomenon of using strategic disclosure techniques is consistent with previous research that found that individuals with hidden disabilities considered the saliency of their disability identity during interpersonal interactions before making a determination to disclose (Ryan, Bajorek, Beaman, & Anas, 2005; Goldberg, Killeen, and O'Day, 2005). Students in the study may have been engaging in these practices and behaviors to avoid any potential adverse results that could hinder their navigation of their higher education institutions. Similar to Goode (2007), Ryan et al.'s (2005), and Cain's (1991) research conclusions, students also may have been withholding disclosure to protect current relationships and social or academic statuses within the non-disabled culture of their universities.

Student justification for selective disclosure of disability identity ranged from the disability being something personal to the topic not being relevant in interpersonal conversations. Due to the various dynamics that can influence their experience on higher education campuses, students with disabilities are continuously doing a cost-benefit analysis of disclosure (stigma management) that results in a constant internal dialogue that consists of questioning who to tell, when to tell, and how much to tell (Trammell, 2009; Kerschbaum, Jones, & Eisenman, 2017; Seelman, 2017). Perceptions of discrimination within the campus, in addition to previous undesirable disability experiences in education, may also contribute to student thought processes and interpretations when considering disability disclosure (Hurtado, et al., 2012; Baglieri et

al., 2011) By strategically disclosing, students can appear as part of the mainstream group and avoid the discrimination they might otherwise face due to disability stigma (Stage & Milne, 1996; Narui, 2011). Students also were able to obtain educational supports and utilize support networks that were vital in providing increased opportunities for success in their higher education experiences (Goldberg et al., 2005). Disclosure was easier in social and academic environments that advocated for, promoted, or discussed the disability experience.

Contrary to previous research (Bae, 2007; Cobb, Lehmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Alwell, 2009) related to utilization of self-determination skills, students in the current study experienced educational success in using collaborative approaches with parents or disability staff. Students used these human resources to assist in making decisions, setting goals, and obtaining advice in situations that required advocacy. Unlike Morningstar et al.'s (2010) study that found that postsecondary education disability offices needed to provide more support for students due to inadequate high school preparations, parents were perceived as integral pieces that helped to lessen the potential negative impact of being ill-prepared while helping promote educational success of students during their first semester. More systematic approaches to training incorporating the parent-student relationship of first-year students with disabilities may be a critical component in helping them distinguish between high school and college education support processes (Shogren, 2011).

Contradicting the results of previous studies in which success in college was linked with acquisition and *independent* utilization of self-determination skills (Vacarro et al., 2015; Oertle & Bragg, 2014; Lombardi, Murray, & Kowitt, 2016), students in this

study utilized self-determination through their collaborative partnerships with adults (e.g., parents, university disability services staff). Parents and disability advisors in special programs served as collaborators and intermediaries for students in their interactions with university personnel (e.g., faculty, disability services staff). With the increase in attention toward time management, decision making, and assessing situations, students utilized this direct support and advisement to successfully navigate the college environment (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). The results are consistent with Shogren, Wehmeyer, Lassman, and Forber Pratt's (2017) notion of shared decision making in which parents support students in balancing the demands of the environment (e.g., the need to make decisions in key life domains) with the contextual factors associated with the environment (i.e., personal and environmental factors that mediate or moderate the demands of the decision).

Educators at both high school and college levels also need to consider cultural implications related to the notion of self-determination. Self-determination is based on the Eurocentric conception of the self and family unit (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). This special education phenomenon wasn't designed to consider cultural values and differences. Definitions of what a successful adulthood is may also be a point of contention between family and educational cultures (Morningstar, 2014). The inability to account for cultural values can prevent meaningful participation by families, which is considered a strong indicator of success through the postsecondary transition process (Wehmeyer, Morningstar, & Husted, 1999; Kim & Morningstar, 2005). This may contribute to parents of students of color with disabilities participating less in educational activities than parents of white students with disabilities (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-

Vasquez, 2001). Parent involvement during the secondary transition process is believed to positively impact students' postsecondary transition outcomes (Waithaka et al., 2017). The low numbers of students of color with disabilities in the study support Shogren's (2011) conclusions about the variations of self-determination across cultures and how research on students with disabilities needs to address and account for its diverse population.

Implementing cultural reciprocity in special education practices can provide a mutual understanding of cultural values and beliefs of the family and those of educators, which can positively impact the development of transition plans and understandings of self-determination (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999; Wehmeyer & Powers, 2007). Educators also need to not only explain what they are doing but why they are considering actions and the potential impact of those actions on students. Educators also need to be aware that culturally diverse families often receive services from agencies that may not typically be invited to transition meetings (Thoma, Agran, & Scott, 2016). Ensuring that all stakeholders have a shared understanding and shared (student-centered) goal can strengthen the transition process and improve outcomes.

Another interesting finding in this study was the continued involvement of parents in educational decision making in and out of the classroom. This finding may provide rationale for the claims made by higher education disability personnel in Janiga and Costenbader's research study (2002) that attributed undesirable experiences of students with disabilities in situations requiring advocacy on their relationships with parents. Higher education disability personnel may need to find ways to embrace this dynamic

and consider the ultimate goal of student success in higher education. Students in the current study viewed parents as consultants that checked grades, reviewed papers and homework, reasoned through situations with students, and consulted with disability services staff. Parent involvement was perceived by students as a positive influence on student experience and an assurance that students would have the appropriate tools to ensure their needs were met while on campus (Smith, English, & Vasek, 2002; Valle, 2018). Consideration of reconceptualizing what promotes students with disabilities' success may be needed in light of this dynamic. Although considered a component of success in the postsecondary education transition, increased parental involvement in higher education also has the potential to slow students' development of self-awareness, self-advocacy, and self-determination.

To address this dynamic, university disability services or programs can implement strategies into student orientation and transition programs to include the student-parent relationship. Understanding the context of the relationship that typically occurs well before arrival on campus, activities can be developed that provide parents and students with effective strategies for using during the transition process (Hamblet, 2017). For example, when parental involvement has previously resulted in successful educational outcomes, that relationship would be encouraged with the hope of replicating a positive college experience (Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002). Societal advancements in technology (e.g., texting, Facetime) can provide instant educational support from parents for students in potential challenging situations that would have previously required students to make independent decisions. Partnerships between colleges and K-12 school districts are essential to ensure school districts have a direct access to the most up-to-date

practices used in higher education (Plotner, Mazzoti, Rose, & Carlson-Britting, 2016).

Capacity building efforts that are mutually beneficial to universities and school districts

are not always simple to facilitate and should be approached by both education

administrations with buy-in from educators and staff (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013).

This study also pointed out that students with disabilities without intensive, fee-based university supports believe faculty need further education and training related to disabilities. The finding is similar to previous research that suggested the lack of training in faculty resulted in negative outcomes and experiences for students with disabilities on higher education campuses. (Hart & Williams, 1995; Schelly et al., 2011). There is a still a belief by faculty that providing accommodations for students provides unfair advantages or help and that all students should have equal academic experiences (Riddell & Weedon, 2014).

As a result of this finding, I concur with Hurst's (2006) conclusion that all faculty and staff should have mandatory training in disability. Prior research studies conducted by Murray, Lombardi, and Wren (2011) and Zhang et al. (2010) demonstrated that faculty who participated in disability trainings were more knowledgeable and sensitive in their responses to students with disabilities' needs. One example for implementation would be having newly employed faculty attend a training (similar to student orientation) run by specific university administrators (i.e., disability services or others with disability knowledge); topics to address would include definition of disability, categories of disabilities, statistics on students with disabilities in higher education, information about the accommodation process and legal implications, and a dialogue for new faculty to ask questions. This type of training could provide faculty with an understanding of the

barriers that students with disabilities face in their higher education experience. (Moriña, Cortés-Vega, & Molina, 2015).

Faculty are a critical point of contact for students and are imperative to implantation of a university's inclusive practices. Several research studies (Debram & Salzberg, 2005; Healey, Jenkins, Leach, & Roberts, 2001) have proposed training and professional development guides for faculty on higher education campuses, although more discipline- and department-focused trainings are still needed (Higbee & Goff, 2008). This finding is also consistent with conclusions from previous research examining student recommendations of ideal faculty and perception of higher education academic instruction (Moriña et al., 2015;Hill, 1996). Curricular and instructional adjustments made by faculty as a result of training may not only improve relationships with students with disabilities but also have the potential to benefit all students on campus (Jacklin, Robinson, O'Meara, & Harris, 2007; Shaw, 2011; Yssel, Pak, & Beilke, 2016).

Postsecondary education recruitment efforts have typically focused on students with learning disabilities (including ADHD), the K-12 special education category with the best probability for postsecondary education success and highest concentration of students identifying as white (Deford, 2006; United States Department of Education, 2016). Students of color have high concentrations in special education categories with poorer postsecondary transition success (e.g., black students are the highest proportion of students served under the emotional disability category).

The absence or underutilization of cultural reciprocity in K-12 special education practices contributes to misclassification of students of color in special education and inappropriate placements (e.g., self-contained classrooms); these, in turn, contribute to

the dismal postsecondary opportunities and outcomes for students of color with

disabilities (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Wagner & Newman, 2012; Newman et al. 2011;

Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). More research is needed to further address this dynamic in

K-12 education.

The conclusions in this research continue to support previous research (Collins &

Mowbray, 2005; Hong, 2015; Newman & Madaus, 2015) that suggested that classroom

experiences, behaviors, and perceptions of students with disabilities interact during their

higher education experience. The interaction of these dynamics, combined with the

allocation of supports to provided educational access for students with disabilities,

influences perception of campus climate. Students who were enrolled in special programs

with intensive support perceived educational experiences as positive, thus providing a

more optimistic campus climate experience than students who received standard

disability services.

Any chance of removing disability stigma on college campuses and promoting

positive experiences for all students with disabilities is contingent on changes to thinking

and expectations by all stakeholders, with and without disabilities (Harper & Hurtado,

2007). Disability should be positioned within diversity and multicultural strategic plans,

initiatives, and practices in both student and academic affairs. Universities must be

willing to not only acknowledge diversity but provide ample opportunities for

collaboration at all stakeholder levels to encourage a more inclusive culture that is

aligned with the demands of today's society (Alt, 2017; Kahn & Agnew, 2017).

Higher education institutions should ensure that first year students are provided

with opportunities to enroll in first-year experience courses to gain insight into different

resources on campus, develop interpersonal skills, and learn about different student leadership roles as they begin their journey in postsecondary education (Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017). Development of peer mentorship programs for students with disabilities can provide a positive influence on the campus climate for both students with and without disabilities (Ryan, Nauheimer, George, & Dague, 2017). Students can develop mutual appreciation for one another through successful educational experiences and interactions.

The current study's results were in opposition to previous research conducted by Bialka, Morro, Brown, and Hannah (2017) that suggested that student organizations associated with disability services provided better social experiences for students. Students in the current study perceived such organizations as unnecessary and potentially causing undesirable experiences due to group disclosure of disability. As students continue in their higher education experience, disability services personnel may be able to educate students about how organizations affiliated with disability services have the potential to provide a bridge that fosters positive social integration experiences between students with and without disabilities (Bialkaet al., 2017). These organizations can help address the barriers of students with disabilities on higher education campuses while also promoting the integration of the disability identity. Students in the current study did not believe that there was a need for such an organization and perceived that their campuses embraced inclusion although their preferences and behaviors for successful navigation on the college campus implied exclusivity within their environments.

Limitations

There were several limitations when considering the results of the study. The positionality of the researcher can be considered a limitation. My education experience was highlighted by my desire to independently find my resources and supports on campus. I desired to distance myself from my parents (education context) upon graduating high school. I have also worked in the special education industry where the goal is for students to display independent thinking and communication related to their disability. Contrary to the desirable side of insider research, I had difficulty removing my bias during analysis. At times, I used deficit-driven language and interpreted student experiences using my own experience. To remedy this limitation, I utilized analytic memos, member feedback, and worked with my dissertation chairs to ensure the participant voices and stories were accurately shared.

The sample also serves as a limitation to the current study. The sample included students who had disclosed their disability to the disability services office on campus. Research (Newman et al., 2011) has suggested that 70% of students who received special education services in high school do not disclose their disability upon graduation and that 9% of students with disabilities who enroll in college register with disability services after the first semester. The sample included a limited number of students of color with disabilities or those identifying as having a physical disability. As a result, the sample was not considered to be representative of the disability population and results of the study cannot be generalized.

Data collection techniques utilized for this study could also be viewed as limitations. Focus group interviews are subject to groupthink strategies to responses, and

students may have indicated agreement or disagreement with the group while holding

opposing perspectives. The survey used in this study was not developed for measuring

the attitudes during transition from high school to college of students with disabilities.

Construct validity was threatened as a result of adapting the survey from immigration

populations to students with disabilities. The survey was able to capture attitudes related

to identity at one point in time. Identity is a fluid construct and attitudes can shift multiple

times within situations and experiences.

The research design was also a limitation for the current study. Due to a low

number of survey respondents and limited time to conduct my study, I was unable to

analyze the survey results prior to conducting the qualitative portion of my study. This

resulted in my interview guide being developed through designing questions from higher

education disability research related to supports and challenges instead of forming

questions through survey results. I had to revise my research design to a concurrent

transformative mixed method study.

To address these limitations, I worked with my dissertation chairs and committee,

used member checking strategies with focus group participants, kept analytic memos of

progress, consulted with disability services staff, and examined disability services

documents in an attempt to triangulate information. Regardless of efforts to ensure

objectivity, I understand that neutrality is impossible in research.

Future Research

There are a multitude of directions for future research. One potential focus is on

the conceptualization and development of the disability identity. There has been limited

research conducted that addresses this phenomenon, which can help educators provide

more meaningful and disability specific interventions to assist students in their experiences (Forber-Pratt, Lyew, Mueller, & Samples, 2017). Many of the models that have been developed have not accounted for different forms of interpersonal interactions experienced by individuals with disabilities and have not included an equal representation of all disabilities (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017). Therefore, larger scale studies would help to contribute to development of more reliable models.

Future studies should examine the experiences of students of color with disabilities in higher education as there has been minimal research on this topic. This recommendation is consistent with the suggestion of Thoma, Agran, and Scott (2016), who identified six studies over a 24-year period that were specifically focused on the postsecondary transition experiences of black students with disabilities. Qualitative studies with students of color would provide a deeper understanding of their perceptions during and after the transition process. This research could also provide insight into identity studies: more specifically, intersectionality. Discrete approaches can be used to examine marginalization of groups at the intersection of race and disability (Connor, Ferri, & Annnamma, 2016).

With the variations across disability categories, future research will also need to address different disability category group experiences in higher education. There is a plethora of specialized disability programs for Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Learning Disabilities in higher education degree and certificate pathway programs. More research needs to be conducted with other types of disabilities (e.g., medical disorders, Traumatic Brain Injury) to determine what types of supports can help students on higher education campuses. With the increase in veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder

attending colleges, this information could provide valuable contributions to their post military transition plans.

Future research could also examine and compare the higher education experiences of individuals with apparent or physical disabilities and those with hidden disabilities. It would be interesting to gain insight into how students with apparent disabilities experience college environments with not having the choice to disclose. Also, what is their perception of the hidden disability experience in higher education? Using the Disability Studies in Education approach, more data can be provided that address the lived educational and accessibility related experiences of students with apparent disabilities that influence their lives.

A final recommendation for future research is comparing the conceptualization and implications of K-12 and higher education disability categories. It would be valuable to explore and examine the perceptions of educators related to the perceived meanings of emotional disability and mental health in an educational context.Postsecondary outcomes are dismal for students who are diagnosed as having an emotional disability, many of whom are students of color (Xie, Sen, & Foster, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). They are less likely to graduate and have higher rates of incarceration (e.g., School-to-Prison-Pipeline). On the other hand, in higher education, there has been more awareness and attention toward the mental health needs and support of students experiencing depression, anxiety, and other psychological related disorders, many of whom (similar to participants in this study) are white. Research should examine the perceptions and attitudes of educators that are associated with the use of both terms in the K-12 and higher education environments.

Conclusion

The results from this study provide an important perspective on the higher education experience – that of first-year students with disabilities. In considering the increase in student population, the history of disability discrimination, and disability stigma, their views are imperative for all educators. The results suggested that engaging in collaboration with parents, utilizing strategic disclosure ,and having access to financial means (to enroll in specialized disability programming were pivotal supports in students' overall experience. Perceptions of faculty were contingent on if students were enrolled in a specialized disability program (positive) or not enrolled (negative). High schools and special education transition processes did not prepare students for the college experience. Access to financial means provided students of color with a pathway through education that was free from the potential effects of disability and racial marginalization.

It is time to acknowledge that education is a continuum and that the influence of dynamics for students with disabilities isn't isolated to one faction of the education experience. If inclusivity is valued in education, then new conceptions of disability, disability as identity, and intersectionality in the K-16 continuum must be developed. Although no educational system can be designed without some form of human subjectivity or bias, , consistency in structures, supports, and resources developed utilizing cultural reciprocity are needed to address the needs of students with disabilities across all grade levels. This newly constructed system will have to potential to provide students with learning environments that promote equitable diversity and education opportunities while giving students increased chances for positive outcomes while living optimal lives.

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