SELF ADVOCACY SKILLS AND ACCOMMODATION SERVICES FOR POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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TITLE: SELF ADVOCACY SKILLS AND ACCOMMODATION SERVICES FOR POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

The current iteration of United States federal disability law for postsecondary students with disabilities is implemented in ways that requires students to develop the ability to discuss their disabilities and assert their rights if they want to receive educational accommodations to support their academic success. Examining the implementation of these policies from an ecological systems and sociopolitical lens suggests that this approach assumes students with disabilities have developed self-advocacy skills during their formative years, and also places others in control of determining whether they receive educational accommodations and services, that by law they have rights to receive. Self-advocacy is a critical skill for effective communication, negotiation, and for individual assertion of needs, rights, and is linked to successful transition, persistence, and retention in college and academic performance. Because caregivers and teachers often advocate on behalf of students with disabilities in secondary education, students with disabilities may not have independently acquired the self-advocacy skills they need in postsecondary education. This cross-sectional study (n=103) explored the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of self-identified postsecondary students with disabilities and the ways students approach accommodations and support services at six postsecondary institutions within the United States. Data was analyzed for significant relationships through Spearman's rank-order correlation. Findings revealed the following five factors were related to the ability of students with disabilities to self-advocate: ability to identify disability and its characteristics; knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services, and disability law; self-determination; prior history of witnessing advocacy; and positive interactions with disability staff. The implications of the study will then be examined with an emphasis on future research, social work education, practice, and policy changes.

Keywords: academic accommodations, equity, postsecondary disability policy, self-advocacy, students with disabilities, transition to postsecondary education

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Dedication

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it." Proverbs 22:6.

In a world filled with people who can be cruel, I am grateful to have a family that reminds me of the good. To my loving parents (Eleanor and the late Robert), who through acts of love, humility, and perseverance showed me how to love and persevere, against all odds. To my biological sisters (Patricia, Jamedra, Lashay) + inherited sisters (LaToya, Jamila, Geraldine, Darelle, Shanon D.), and dearest cousin Lydia, thank you for reminding me that I can achieve anything. You have each in your own way, met me on the track and cheered me on. Collectively your strength and prayers have carried me through the finish line.

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Last, but certainly not least, this dissertation is dedicated to students with disabilities, both apparent and non-apparent; and to those of you who have ever felt unseen. Continue to advocate for what you want and need and know that I see you, and I am advocating with you!

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Tables and Figures

List of Acronyms/Definitions

Accommodations	Changes in how test is administered that do not substantially alter what the test measures; includes changes in presentation format, response format, test setting or test timing. Appropriate accommodations are made to level the playing field, i.e., to provide equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge
Active Enrollment	Registration in one or more classes in a matriculated program at a state-accredited postsecondary institution
Disability	In Section 504 and ADA, defined as impairment that substantially affects one or more major life activities; an individual who has a record of having such impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment
IEP	Individualized Educational Plan
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
Postsecondary Education	Academic, vocational, technical, business, professional, or other school, college or university or other organization or person-offering educational credentials or offering instruction or educational services for attainment of educational, professional, or vocational objectives
Public Law (P.L.) 101-336	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Legislation enacted to prohibit discrimination based on disability
Public Law (P.L.) 94-142	The Education for All Handicapped Children Act; enacted into law in 1975
Public Law (P.L.) 93-380	Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
Public Law (P.L.) 105-17, 101-476, and 102-119	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Amendments of 1990, 1991 and 1997
Public Law (P.L.) 93-112	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination due to disability by recipients of federal financial assistance
Public Law (P.L.) 106-402	

	Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975, reauthorized in 2000, empower individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to help shape policies that impact them
Rehabilitation Act of 1973	Civil rights statute designed to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination; purposes are to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion, and integration into society
Secondary Education	Public school grades kindergarten through 12th grade
Self-Advocacy	Ability to understand oneself, needs and rights, and articulate these needs to others
Transition services	IEP requirement; designed to facilitate movement from school to the workplace or to postsecondary education

General Information About Dissertation

This research represents my practice as an early career researcher, educator, practitioner and ally. Each identity is represented in this work and draws on my evolving interdisciplinary career portfolio. Blatt (1981, p. 184) highlighted; individuals are “defined” by the stories they tell of themselves as well as stories that are constructed about them. Often in research and construction of policy, stories are told about students with disabilities and the emphasis is from the voice of the professional, not the voices of the individual with disability (Blatt, 1981). As no research is ever completely free from bias (Wheatley, 2005), focusing on this concept has enabled me to examine the position from which my research and practice has evolved, and the knowledge and understanding that I bring which raises two critical questions for non-disabled researchers to ask ourselves, “How can we as a researcher in disability studies use our knowledge and skills to challenge the forms of oppression individuals with disabilities experience” and “As a researcher in disability studies, does our writing perpetuate a system of marginalization or challenge the system?”

In this paper, within a quantitative framework, I describe the importance of self-advocacy and the importance of the voices of individuals with disabilities to be heard, and the need for policy reform with individuals with disabilities at the forefront of these agendas. This research seeks to challenge systemic exclusion in higher education and challenges a student advocacy model that places sole responsibility upon individuals with disabilities.

Chapter 1 includes an introduction, including a brief description of the methodology; followed by background of the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, brief findings, and its’ connection to social work.

Chapter 2 presents the problem formation, content of the chapter includes differences between secondary and postsecondary education, postsecondary persistence and quality of life, history of disability and the role of self-advocacy, and an overview of policies governing postsecondary education. This chapter concludes with the role of the social work profession in supporting students with disabilities in schools, with a call to action for the profession to expand its efforts to include work with postsecondary students with disabilities.

Chapter 3 presents a review of empirical literature relevant to the variables of the study. Content of the chapter include methodology for the literature search process and criteria, and a discussion on the five themes that emerged from the search. Chapter 4 presents, analyzes, and summarizes theoretical and conceptual framework which underpins the research question and methodology, its application in schools and connection to self-advocacy.

Chapters 5 presents the research questions and related hypotheses and describes the methods and procedures employed in the study. Information included in the chapters are conceptual definitions, study design, and a variable chart.

Chapter 6 presents the research methodology, including sampling and data collection methods, procedures, measurement scales, data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

Chapter 7 will present the findings and descriptive information for each of the variables. Finally, Chapter 8, the discussion will focus on the findings of this study, limitations of the study and implications for future research in the following areas: social work practice, education, and policy. This chapter will conclude with a summary.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Postsecondary students with disabilities face challenges self-advocating and understanding the range of services available to them. This cross-sectional quantitative research study explored the factors that affect postsecondary students with disabilities self-advocacy skills, and the ways in which students approached accessing services, as evidenced through their perceptions (Creswell, 2009). Through an online survey, presented in tandem with a review of literature on the lived experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities, this study endeavored to examine whether students perceived themselves as being equipped with the skills necessary to self-advocate and navigate accommodations and support services.

This cross-sectional, exploratory study included a survey distributed to identified staff in campus support roles, disability, or accessibility service offices at six accredited postsecondary institutions, within the United States. The identified staff at each institution were requested to distribute the Qualtrics survey link to all active students enrolled at their institution, who met the criteria which included being enrolled in at least one class at their respective institutions, having self-identified with any disability, registered with their office, and receiving one or more accommodations. The study utilized thirty-nine descriptive quantitative survey research questions ranging from descriptive statistics, including information related to gender, ethnicity, disability type, type of institution, and year in college; to questions that related to students perceived knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, and perceptions of self-advocacy, in an effort to understand their lived experiences as a college student navigating their studies with a documented disability. Postsecondary disability laws require students with disabilities to self-advocate to access accommodations and support services. The findings of this study can serve as an important tool to inform postsecondary administration of the barriers that impact the success of students with disabilities, specifically as it relates to self-advocating and accessing services. The study findings also provide justification for creating opportunities to ensure students with disabilities have the skills needed to self-advocate which have implications for their academic success (Test et al., 2005).

Background

Despite the efforts of the office of disability or accessibility services on college campuses, many students with disabilities entering into postsecondary settings are not completing their education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018); students' limited knowledge of their disability and its characteristics coupled with limited knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, support services, and current disability laws, may contribute to these negative outcomes. Likewise, students who lack self-advocacy skills may also struggle to achieve postsecondary goals (McConnell et al., 2013; Test et al., 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Since the passing of federal legislation, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education for All Handicapped Children of 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requiring educational access and protection against discrimination, students with disabilities are entering postsecondary education at increasing rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Yell et al., 1998). According to a 2015-2016 report by National Center for Education Statistics, an estimated 19 percent of U.S. undergraduate and 11 percent of postbaccalaureate students reported having one of the following disabilities: learning, visual or hearing impairment, deafness, speech or orthopedic impairment, or health impairment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Though there are laws that govern accommodations and support services for students with disabilities in postsecondary education, many institutions are still not equipped to fully meet their needs (Government Accountability Office, 2009). As a result, persistence, and graduation rates for students with disabilities continue to lag behind their non-disabled peers (Government Accountability Office, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Schultz et al., 2015).

Studies have documented barriers to accessing accommodations and support services, including the need for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings to be self-determined to be able to self-advocate for support services. This notion is consistent with the demands of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Amendment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA-AA), which require students requesting accommodations to self-disclose and self-advocate, to access services; a skill they may not have learned during earlier years of their lives. However, many of these studies did not directly address the knowledge level students with disabilities have of their disability and its characteristics, institutional accommodation policies, support services, and of the law. Nor have studies directly addressed the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, which have implications for ones' ability to self-advocate (Test et al., 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The challenges that students with disabilities face when accessing accommodations and support services in postsecondary education have been well documented (Department of Education, 1998; Government Accountability Office, 2009; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Marshak, 2010; West et al., 1993). In a survey of 761 college students with learning disabilities, West et al. (1993) found over 86% of students reported encountering barriers to their education because of their disabilities. Though disability-specific, these barriers related to effectiveness, or a lack thereof on accommodation services they did or did not receive. Such barriers included: limited availability of tutors and notetakers for students with learning disabilities; difficulty in obtaining taped or Braille material, and/or other assistive equipment for students with sensory disabilities, to name a few.

Consistent with these findings, in a 1998 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, an estimated 98% of institutions with at least one student with a disability, reported providing a minimum of at least one support service. Reported services from these institutions included: “alternative exam formats or extended time (88%), tutors (77%), readers, notetakers, or scribes (69%), assistance with class registration or priority registration (62%), textbooks on tape (55%), adaptive equipment or technology (58%), and sign language interpreters (45%), and last, course substitutions or waivers” (42%; National Center for Education Statistics, 2000, p. 1). Although institutions reported providing at least one support service, Kurth and Mellard (2006) noted that 25% of students who received accommodations and support services reported they were not effective based on their individual needs. Finally, Marshak et al. (2010) reported that students identified the following barriers to accessing or receiving support services: a lack of understanding their disability and its characteristics, inability to explain their disability to others, and limited knowledge of what accommodations and support services were available to them based on their disability. Students also reported fear of being stigmatized or judged by others for receiving such services for their disability as barriers to access.

The vast aforementioned challenges ground the need for this study, which examined the factors that affect self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities.

Social Work Values and Anticipated Contributions to Practice

This study underscores the applicability of the National Association of Social Work (2021)’s values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, and advocacy, which are guiding principles for this study. The reauthorization of laws such as the Education for All Handicapped Children (now Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008, coupled with the varying ways in which educational accommodations and support services are implemented from secondary to postsecondary settings; further increases the need to explore the lived experiences of students with disabilities who utilize educational accommodations and support services to ensure greater access to, and full inclusion in postsecondary education.

The Role of School Social Worker

The role of school social worker does not traditionally exist at postsecondary institutions and schools of social work at the masters and doctoral levels, do not currently include content on accommodation policies, support services and disability law for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. A starting point for creating or incorporating such a role in postsecondary settings can first include infusing such content in social work education to increase knowledge and practice skills in this area for social workers as students enrolled in social work programs. Second, social work programs should aim to design and create field work opportunities for social workers as students in social work programs to gain firsthand experience in postsecondary settings. Additionally, as the range of needs among students with disabilities continue to change, a role such as postsecondary school social worker could include leading efforts in transition planning, serving as a liaison between service delivery constituents, which include high school support teams, campus disability service staff, parents, and policy makers; to ensure policies and structures change, to foster best practices. Finally, a postsecondary school social worker role could assist with not only educating students with disabilities themselves on understanding their disability and its characteristics; their needs, rights, accommodation policies, and the law; but also provide trainings on self-advocacy which would foster a comprehensive approach to continuity of care, student engagement and academic success.

From a policy perspective, social workers serving in advocacy roles can examine the sociopolitical constructs, and ecological systems, to assess whether policies are accessible to students with disabilities and there are no barriers to access. As this iteration of the law requires students with disabilities to provide evaluations that explain the need for accommodations and support services, a role such as postsecondary school social worker could serve as a gatekeeper, providing psychoeducational assessments for the purpose of designing individual education plans, in compliance with federal regulations at no cost to students and their families. Social workers in such a role can also advocate for and with students, for improvement of governmental and institutional policy, and the ways in which students with disabilities interact with these policies.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDY PROBLEM

Students with disabilities face real challenges understanding the range of services offered and accessing accommodations and support services in postsecondary education (West et al., 1993). Institutions have designated staff in disability service and/or accessibility offices, however students navigating a new environment for the first time with less institutional and perhaps familial support than they had in secondary settings, can be a daunting process and have implications for college completion (Lyman et al., 2016). A visual map of this process and its challenges can be found in appendix F. To access accommodations and support services, students with disabilities are solely responsible for initiating and ensuring their own postsecondary educational accommodations to be successful academically (Department of Education, 1998; Stodden, 2001). Thus, self-advocacy skills, the ability to understand oneself, and express one's needs, and to make informed decisions based upon those needs, is considered to be critical skills for students with disabilities to have in their postsecondary experience (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Harbour & Greenberg, 2017; Test et al., 2005). Literature surrounding postsecondary students suggests that self-advocacy skills are related to successful adaptation to college and academic performance; however, little is known about the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of this population (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Definitions

Disability defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) includes:

> "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment or being regarded as having such an impairment. *Physical or mental impairment* means any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more body systems, such as: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary,

> immune, circulatory, hemic, lymphatic, skin, and endocrine or any mental or psychological disorder such as intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disability. *Physical or mental impairment* includes, but is not limited to, contagious and noncontagious diseases and conditions such as the following: orthopedic, visual, speech and hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, intellectual disability, emotional illness, dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic), tuberculosis, drug addiction, and alcoholism" (Department of Justice, 2010).
>
> *Major life activities include*, but are not limited to:
>
> "caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, sitting, reaching, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, writing, communicating, interacting with others, and working; and the operation of a major bodily function, such as the functions of the immune system, special sense organs and skin, normal cell growth, and digestive, genitourinary, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, cardiovascular, endocrine, hemic, lymphatic, musculoskeletal, and reproductive systems. The operation of a major bodily function includes the operation of an individual organ within a body system" (Department of Justice, 2010).
>
> Self-Advocacy defined by Test et al. (2005) conceptual framework includes:
>
> "ones' ability to understand oneself, needs and rights, and can effectively communicate these needs to others. One can not only identify challenges and assess how to overcome such challenges but can also take on leadership roles in advocacy for others."
>
> Reasonable accommodations defined by Department of Education (2020) includes:
>
> "Modifications or adjustments to tasks, environment that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program and/or employment."

Differences between Secondary and Postsecondary Education

Secondary Education

The 1990 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 110-476) is a federal program that governs state and local aid for special education and the rights of students with disabilities, and their families (Department of Education, 2020). Secondary education terminology in this study refers to public school grades kindergarten through 12

(Department of Education, n.d.). Thus, public schools receiving federal funds are mandated to identify, evaluate, and provide reasonable accommodations and support services to students with disabilities, at no cost to students and their families.

During these formative years of K-12, students with disabilities are not only surrounded by a community of academic supporters who arrange their classes, transportation, and perhaps daily schedules, they are also provided with accommodations and support services with no requirement to self-disclose, initiate, or self-advocate to access services. Moreover, in this setting, students with disabilities can rely solely on their school-based support team, parents/caregivers for advocacy, and to promote their needs and rights. They are often told what their disability is, the specific support services needed to be successful based on their disability, and have their support team facilitate their accommodations, requiring little to no knowledge of their disability and its characteristics, their needs, rights, and types of educational accommodations available based on their disability.

Additionally, secondary students are provided with initial and triennial evaluations to track their progress at no cost (Department of Education, 2011). Finally, secondary schools are required under IDEA (P.L. 94-142) to create a transition plan before students reach age 16 to ensure they are prepared to transition into postsecondary education, employment, or vocational endeavors (Department of Education, 2007). It is therefore incumbent upon secondary stakeholders to ensure students with disabilities acquire self-advocacy skills before transitioning into more independent pathways to facilitate uninterrupted continuity of care.

Postsecondary Education

Research shows that transition planning for students with disabilities is integral for their success in postsecondary education (Daviso et al., 2011). Postsecondary terminology in this study refers to colleges, universities, or institutions of higher education. In postsecondary education, not only do the legal protections for students with disabilities change, to some degree; so, does the student's support system. Upon entering into postsecondary settings, students with disabilities must build and maintain their own support network, coupled with managing their financial aid, choosing a major and classes, managing course schedules, and perhaps arranging their own transportation to and from school, which may be an overwhelming task. For students to be successful at advocating, it is critical for transition planning to include a review of the law as it relates to institutional accommodation policies and support services and what changes (Department of Education, 2011; Department of Education, 2020).

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), which will be discussed in more detail later in the text, postsecondary institutions are not responsible for identifying students with disabilities and ensuring they receive effective educational support services. Rather, educational decision-making rights get transferred to the student, and students with disabilities themselves are solely responsible to self-disclose their disability, to disability service offices at their respective institutions, seek out and initiate support services. They must also initiate their request for support services upon enrolling at the institution to ensure the institution has enough time to review their requests and arrange for services (Department of Education, 1998). In many cases, provision of accommodation and support services are contingent upon getting evaluated at the student's own expense and providing the evaluation or appropriate documentation to disability service staff (Department of Education, 2011).

Unlike secondary education, triennial evaluations are generally not required by postsecondary disability service offices. Instead, in postsecondary education, as students with disabilities receive accommodations, they themselves must self-monitor the implementation of their effectiveness and present concerns to disability service staff for an academic adjustment, if needed (Department of Education, 1995).

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, P.L. 93-380), which protects the privacy of student education records, adds yet another layer of responsibility on students once they reach age 18. In fact, at the postsecondary level, unless permitted by the student, parents/caregivers can't access a student's record or check on students' progress the way they could throughout secondary education, nor are there IEP meetings to attend (Department of Education, 2021). Test et al. (2005) noted it is critical for postsecondary institutions to assess the level of which students with disabilities understand what changes legally, concerning their responsibility to independently seek, receive and navigate support services, and their readiness to do so.

It is often assumed that once a student reaches the age of majority (usually the age of 18 in some states), they will have acquired a level of independence, and unless otherwise noted, are equipped to make decisions independently (Department of Education, 1999). Once students enter into postsecondary education, they are considered an adult, whether despite their preparedness. While independence and decision-making are an important part of the lifecycle, and students should be included in decision-making about their lives; it is imperative to assess whether students have acquired these critical skills which have implications for quality of life and overall well-being (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Test et al., 2005).

Schlossberg et al's (2006) four tenets situation, self, support, and strategies that are associated with student success and the ability to adapt to change underpins the aforementioned concepts. Situation connects to the timing of events and students' ability to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. Self refers to one's understanding of their health, needs, self-determination, and outlook on life (Schlossberg et al., 2006; Test et al., 2005). Support, while not a one size fit all concept, allows one to reflect upon the help received or lack thereof from family, peers, and educational institutions and its impact on adapting to change (Schlossberg et al., 2006). Last, strategies help to understand three phases that occur within transitions that students will experience, “moving in”, “moving through”, and “moving out”, and how well they navigate each (Schlossberg et al., 2006, p. 3). These concepts will be briefly explored in the following section.

As students with disabilities move from secondary into postsecondary settings, they need to familiarize themselves with a new set of policies, structures, and demands of the new system. This is especially important because receiving support services require their active participation (Schlossberg et al., 2006). As students’ move through their postsecondary education, there is a need for a higher level of autonomy and perhaps advocacy which they may not have been prepared for (Getzel et al., 2001). As postsecondary institutions foster opportunities for students to become part of the decision-making process, allowing them to decide next steps, students will be more equipped to plan for life after college, (Schlossberg et al., 2006).

Postsecondary Persistence and Quality of Life

Postsecondary education provides students with the basic academic, social, and employability skills needed to be contributing members of society (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). If students with disabilities are not equipped or have a working knowledge of how support services are structured, they will find themselves at some point, ill-equipped to independently initiate an educational support plan which in turn, can impact their postsecondary persistence, and retention (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Test et al., 2005).

Students with disabilities contribute to the diversity of postsecondary education yet they face challenges in completing their education. Getzel and Thoma (2008) found that there was a decline from 30 percent to 26 percent from 1986 to 2001 in coursework completion for students with disabilities and earning a college degree dropped from 19 percent to 12 percent during this same period. Consistent with these findings, in a longitudinal study of 11,317 students, Wessel et al. (2009) examined the persistence to graduation rates of students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers. The findings revealed that students with and without disabilities had similar 6-year graduation rates, however 4-and 5-year graduation rates for students with disabilities were significantly lower than their peers without disabilities.

The relationship between earning a college degree, gainful employment in meaningful occupations and quality of life for students with disabilities has been well established (Dutta et al., 2009; Newman et al., 2011). Fleming et al. (2017) noted students with disabilities who do not attain postsecondary degrees experience low wages, inadequate health care, poverty, and unemployment (Fleming et al., 2017). This data is further supported by research findings from Braxton (2016) who found that the more postsecondary education a student has, the less likely they are to be unemployed. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), nearly two-thirds of all job openings in 2020 were projected to require some form of postsecondary education or training. Therefore, attaining a college degree for students with disabilities not only levels the playing field as their peers without disabilities, but also "expands their employment opportunities, future earnings," and quality of life (Fleming et al., 2017; Social Work Speaks, 2021, p. 251).

History of Disability and Self-Advocacy

Throughout history, individuals with disabilities have been expected to conform to or fit societal norms. Societal attitudes surrounding disability often determine the extent of someone's disability by its reaction to and how that individual is treated. For example, a person in a wheelchair may receive more attention for being disabled than a person who has a non-apparent disability, such as mental illness or a learning disability. Such stereotypes, resulting from assumptions of what disability is or isn't, often get magnified by behavior and language through social contagion (Lilienfeld, et al., 2014). The power of language not only influence societal attitudes, views, and behaviors but also, shape policy. It is in the act of looking back to gain a historical perspective on the gradual and progressive development of access and inclusion of individuals with disabilities, to make further progress and continue to shift societal norms.

During the earlier centuries, individuals with disabilities were treated poorly and inhumanely, as evidenced through the 1972 documentary by Geraldo Rivera: *Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace,* which shed light on the horrific conditions and abuse individuals with intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities endured while attending the Willowbrook State School (Lane et al., 2019). Willowbrook opened in 1942 and was a state supported institution located in Staten Island, NY; designed to only house 4,000 of its than, 6,000 residents. Many families entrusted the care of their children with disabilities to the Willowbrook State institution in hopes that they would be protected from harm and provided with adequate care, treatment, and education (Addessi, 2017; Lane et al., 2019; NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, n.d.). Instead, these individuals were severely abused, neglected, experienced, and witnessed violent acts, and were denied access to education, which violated their human and civil rights (Addessi, 2017; Lane et al., 2019; NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, n.d.).

The national attention and reaction to these horrific cases of inhumane treatment led to the closure of the Willowbrook State School in 1987, and the enactment of the following legislation: Protection and Advocacy System created by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975, reauthorized in 2000 [P.L. 106–402]; The Education for All Handicapped Children Act [P.L. 94-142] of 1975; and the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) of 1980; which were the first federal civil rights laws created to protect individuals with disabilities. This then led to the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Addessi, 2017; Lane et al., 2019; NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, n.d.).

Lilienfeld, et al. (2014) discussed the evolution of eugenics from centuries of viewing disabilities as a genetic flaw; supporters argued that individuals with disabilities were the cause of many social problems and, therefore, needed to be removed from society. Eugenics, defined as the selective "breeding" of individuals who had "desirable" hereditary traits, was a medical practice performed to prevent the transmission of "undesirable" hereditary traits through generations (Lilienfeld et al., 2014, p. 329). As a result of these negative societal attitudes, sterilization laws led thousands of Americans with disabilities who were considered mentally ill, defective, or disabled; and feeble-minded into the forced removal of their ability to genetically reproduce often without informed consent (Farber, 2008; Lilienfeld et al., 2014). Feeble-mindedness is defined by Lilienfeld et al. (2014) as ones' inability to make intelligent decisions.

The civil rights movement serves as an underpinning for challenging social factors that fostered marginalization, and also underpins the emergence of self-advocacy groups; paralleling a time when marginalized populations faced isolation in schools, discrimination based on sexual orientation, economic inequality, and restricted voting rights, to name a few (Lane et al., 2019). The harsh treatment that individuals with disabilities experienced while attending the Willowbrook State School, eugenics, and sterilization practices, spanning earlier centuries, empowered individuals with disabilities to fight against these inhumane practices and for deinstitutionalization.

The Independent Living Movement in the 1970s raised awareness that individuals with disabilities had a right to make decisions in their own lives and fully participate in society, similar to their non-disabled peers (Lane et al., 2019; Northeast Independent Living Program, n.d.). Consistent with this theme, also in the 1970s, the People First Movement raised awareness on the need for equal treatment and rights of individuals with developmental disabilities. The People First Movement also challenged the perceptions of others surrounding individuals with developmental disabilities' ability to successfully thrive in mainstream communities (Test et al., 2005). Moreover, Test et al. (2005, p. 43) underscored the notion brought forth by the Independent Living Movement, that placement in institutionalized settings not only dehumanized individuals but also furthered their dependence on others to communicate their needs and rights, which "negatively impact the autonomy of individuals with developmental disabilities."

The People First Movement shed light on the importance of, and the continued need for, collective advocacy, fostering self-determination, and self-advocacy skills among individuals with disabilities to contribute to their success and integration in society. While the collective advocacy of the aforementioned groups led to inclusive education and independent living, more intense advocacy is needed to continue the work of including individuals with disabilities in mainstream society (Lane et al., 2019; Scotch, 2000).

Policies Governing Postsecondary Education

As noted above, the evolution of disability history, the civil rights movement and policy in the United States promote human rights, which underscore individuals with disabilities are indeed contributing members of society (Lane et al., 2019). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement, which challenged the practice of segregation in educational facilities. This historical case not only highlighted the importance of advocacy but also serves as an underpinning in the fight for justice and continued equal access of individuals with disabilities (Thomas, 2009).

As mentioned earlier in the text, in earlier centuries individuals with disabilities were outcasts of educational settings with schools educating only one in five children with disabilities (Department of Education, 2020). The exclusion of students with disabilities from school can be traced back to an earlier reported legal case in 1893, when the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the decision to remove a student due to their poor academic ability (Smith, 2004; Yell et al., 1998). Consistent with this practice, in 1919, the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the decision to deny the admission of a child with cerebral palsy from public school because of the child's "depressing and nauseating effect upon the teachers and school children" (Brulle & Barton, 1980, p. 3; Smith, 2004). These two cases further confirm earlier century views and practices surrounding the marginalization and lack of access to education for individuals with disabilities. The need for reform in disability policy led to the creation of laws protecting the rights of students with disabilities in education Thomas, 2009).

Since the passage of federal legislation such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142); Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17); amended IDEA (1990, P.L. 101-476); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112); and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008 (ADA, P.L. 101-336), students with disabilities now have access to education, without facing discrimination. Under each aforementioned law, secondary and postsecondary institutions are required to provide students with disabilities access to education, reasonable accommodations, and support services to promote their academic success (Social Work Speaks, 2021; Department of Education, 2020). Although each law overlaps in their protections, there are differences in how services are implemented in secondary and postsecondary settings. For the purposes of this study, the following section will provide a brief overview of Section 504 and ADA and how they are applied in postsecondary settings.

Section 504. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act provides civil rights protections and requires K-12 schools to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students with disabilities within their jurisdiction (Department of Education, 2020). In postsecondary settings however, Section 504, along with Title II of the ADA are not required to provide FAPE (Department of Education, 2011). Instead, these laws mandate institutions to provide reasonable accommodations if students self-disclose their disability with disability service or accessibility offices at their institution, and request accommodations. The laws also prohibit institutions from discriminating against students because of their disability; "*no otherwise qualified handicapped [sic] individual in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his handicap [sic], be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance"* (American Psychological Association, 2012; Department of Education, 2020).

ADA. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act also require postsecondary institutions to provide services, facilitating equal opportunity and access for students with disabilities to participate in education (Department of Education, 1998). Conversely, though students with disabilities may be granted accommodations and support services, postsecondary institutions can deny their accommodation requests if "provision of the aid would cause undue burden" (Department of Education, 1998).

The major difference between Section 504 and ADA is that Section 504 applies to institutions that receive federal financial assistance, whereas the ADA applies to most schools, including those privately owned who are state and locally funded; not including schools that are “controlled by religious entities” (American Psychological Association, 2012; Government Accountability Office, 2009, p. 3). Though the laws that govern support services for students with disabilities are not perfect, they have provided opportunity for students with disabilities to participate in mainstream society.

Mcguire et al. (2006) highlighted barriers to access and inclusion for students using wheelchairs for mobility led to the implementation of universal design strategies in physical environments. Likewise, the Department of Education (2020) noted students who have learning difficulties and or a non-apparent disability now have access to accommodations and support services to foster their academic success. History documents the steady progression of bringing students with disabilities within the reach of achieving an education, that is equal to their non-disabled peers. More work to bridge equity gaps for students with disabilities is needed, to foster success and ultimately increased graduation outcomes (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

The Role of the Social Work Profession in Supporting Students with Disabilities

The literature on contributions of the social work profession in schools is limited, however social works efforts in schools began as an intervention in the early 1900s through the “visiting teachers” movement, which aimed to link home, school, and community together to provide support; and foster the continuity of care for students with disabilities (Kelly et al., 2016; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2012). Additionally, Wong (2013) noted social workers support in providing a range of psychoeducation and social service support for students with disabilities in schools through counseling, helped with the development of students’ social and emotional skills, and in relationship building with their non-disabled peers.

Likewise, social workers also supported teachers by partnering with parents and students, to strengthen their cooperation and communication (Wong, 2013).

Many schools today, experience the impact of social works efforts, backed by NASW (2021) policy statements, which underpins the professions continued commitment to support efforts to provide equal educational access for students with disabilities. The NASW (2021, p. 91) affirms that the "primary function for education is to prepare students for life tasks;" therefore, social workers should assist in efforts to ensure that students with disabilities attain full vocational and career skills to be sufficient in their varied roles.

It should be noted, however, that much of social works support in schools have "historically and traditionally been in secondary school settings" (NASW, 2012, p. 8). While the NASW (2015, p. 8) code of ethics mandate social workers to practice within their scope of practice and to be culturally competent in their work with clients across all settings; coupled with the mandate for school social workers to have "specialized knowledge and an understanding of historical and current perspectives of public-school education at the local, state, and national levels, including educational reform and legislation," this researcher highlights a lack of acknowledgement in NASW (2021)'s policy statements for content in the social work education curricula across master of social work and doctoral social work programs, on accommodation policies, support services and disability laws, as it relates to postsecondary education.

As discussed in the Introduction chapter, although the role of school social worker does not traditionally exist in postsecondary education, social workers are working in secondary educational settings, assisting students with disabilities who may wish to transition into postsecondary settings (NASW, 2012). Therefore, knowledge of institutional accommodation policies and the laws that govern support services for postsecondary students with disabilities not only enhances competencies for social workers in practice but can also empower social workers in continued advocacy for marginalized populations, specifically postsecondary students with disabilities.

It is incumbent upon social work practitioners to be fully equipped with this knowledge to expand the range of services that social workers could provide to students with disabilities as they transition into postsecondary education, which would foster a holistic approach to the academic success of students with disabilities (Social Work Speaks, 2021; School Social Work Association of America, 2013).

Conclusion

Federal disability laws and accommodation policies improves access for and impact the lives of students with disabilities. Because implementation of these policies varies from institution, and students' knowledge of these policies and ability to advocate affect implementation, the findings from this study provide recommendations for improvement of governmental and institutional policy, and the ways in which students with disabilities interact with these policies. Furthermore, law and policy are often written in complex terms, an important element is postsecondary institutions' partnership with students with disabilities to ensure they have a working knowledge based on their level of understanding (Test et al., 2005).

Much of the literature point to the need for students with disabilities to have self-advocacy and self-determination skills to persist in college (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Test et al., 2005). Consistent with this notion are the requirements of the law which require students to self-identify as having a disability and advocate in the face of the law; to initiate and access support services in postsecondary education (Department of Education, 2011). Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights that before students can achieve high levels of self-actualization such as self-determination and self-advocacy, their lower-level needs such as problem-solving, and coping skills must be met (Gorman, 2010).

Armed with the knowledge that implementation of accommodations and support services in postsecondary education is generally contingent upon students with disabilities' ability to self-advocate, it is critical to understand the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities.

The following review of literature provides a foundation for exploring the intersectionality between students' perceptions and experiences with navigating disability services and accommodations within postsecondary education and implications for program design considerations to support improved successful outcomes for those enrolled.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The general inquiry of this literature review will examine the experiences of postsecondary students navigating their studies with a documented disability. This literature review will begin with an outline of the search process and criteria for the general inquiry of the literature and will conclude with an examination of the five themes and one sub-theme that have emerged. The themes include the following: understanding the lived experiences of students with disabilities; perceptions of accessibility to disability services; other variables affecting students' perception of accessibility: perception of disability by others; perceptions of disability office staff; and outcomes for students with disabilities. This body of literature will contribute to the ongoing evaluation of postsecondary education as they continue to advance their agendas around supporting and improving the outcomes for students with disabilities.

Method

Literature Search Process

Two search processes were used to locate reviews of research or meta-analyses related to the study problem. First, electronic searchers were conducted in late summer 2021 and early spring 2022. YUFind, an EBSCOhost Discovery Service, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES and PubMed databases were used to conduct the searches. Keywords used in the searches for literature on lived experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education included *stigmatization of disability*, *equity in classroom settings*, *inclusion of students with disabilities*, *transition from secondary to postsecondary education*, *differences in accommodation process*, *financial obligation for campus support services*, *knowledge of disability and its characteristics* AND *self-advocacy* AND *self-determination*. Keywords used in the searches for literature on perceptions of accessibility to disability services included a combination of *student perceptions of accommodation implementation*, *classroom accommodations*, *adequacy of accommodation implementation*, *accessibility of accommodations*, *knowledge of accommodation policies and procedures*, *knowledge of disability law*, *negotiating accommodations*, AND *student training on accommodation policies and procedures*. Keywords used in the searches for literature on other variables affecting students' perception of accessibility, perception of disability by others, included *faculty awareness of accommodation policies*, *faculty willingness to implement classroom accommodations*, *faculty experiences implementing accommodations*, *faculty training on accommodation policies and procedures*, *peer support*, AND *administration awareness of accessible institutional accommodation policies*.

Keywords used in the searches for literature on perceptions of disability office staff included *knowledge of the law*, *experiences of faculty implementation of classroom accommodations*, *accommodation services*, *coordination of accommodations and support services*, *students' perceptions of accessibility of accommodations and support services*. Last, keywords used in the searches for literature on outcomes for students with disabilities included *academic performance and persistence*, *quality of life*, *graduation rate*, AND *employment outcomes*.

Second, once the reviews were identified and acquired through the process above, the reference list of all of the literature were screened for additional reviews or meta-analyses however, no new reviews were added to the original list of literature acquired through electronic searching. Considerations were made for locations outside of the United States. Inclusion criteria for the literature consisted of peer-reviewed literature that focused on lived experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities as it pertained to their readiness to self-advocate as they navigated their studies with a documented disability. The exclusion criteria consisted of literature that focused exclusively on secondary settings and book reviews.

Results

After filtering literature marked for exclusion, twenty-six journal articles were identified for this literature review. The five themes that emerged by review of the literature represent the range of experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities, which will be explored in the following section.

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Students with Disabilities

Deciding to enroll in postsecondary education is a goal of many students. However, the transition across academic systems for students with disabilities differs from those transitioning within mainstream settings. Student performance can be directly related to the continuity of academic service delivery and may relate to ones' independent knowledge of accommodation policies. Vickerman and Blundell (2008) noted that attitudes, experience, and personal knowledge of particular members of staff, rather than institutional policies, were indicative of a good experience in higher education for students with disabilities versus other students. Therefore, the benefit of considering the lived experiences of students with disabilities falls in the marked differences in experiences, and potentially outcomes, for these students compared to those that do not identify as having a disability.

Research that has sought to understand the lived experiences of the students with disabilities have varied vastly in approaches. While some studies have included small samples with a qualitative focus (Flink & Leonard, 2018; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Holloway, 2001; Swart & Greyling, 2011), many have used quantitative surveys to examine provision of disability services in larger, generalizable samples and still others use mixed methods for investigation (Dutta et al., 2009; Vickerman & Blundell, 2008). Regardless of methodological approach, results frequently focused on the importance of self-advocacy related skills for the student.

Getzel & Thoma (2008) conducted a qualitative study to identify skills that effective self-advocating students with disabilities use to ensure they stay in college and obtain needed supports. They also sought to identify the essential self-determination skills needed to remain and persist in college. Conducting focus groups of 34 two-and four-year college students with disabilities who were receiving supports and services related to their disabilities (and who were identified as having self-determination skills by staff in their respective disability support service offices), participants were asked exploratory questions such as “What experiences were critical to understanding your disability?” and “Did you review your own documentation to understand your strengths and limitations?”

Participants across focus groups believed that learning about themselves was critical to their success at college and emphasized that the individual with the disability understands his or her strengths and needs better than anyone else (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Some participants reported that they gathered information about their disability wherever they could find it, many resorted to the internet, doctors, and support groups (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). The authors reported use of “trial and error” to understand one’s disability as another theme that emerged across the focus groups. More specifically, one student in the focus group stated they had to retake a class with another instructor who was a better match for their learning style. Another student identified their strengths and weaknesses through exploring different study techniques. Last, a student commented “I would say it is hard at first, but it gets easier to self-advocate” (Getzel & Thoma, 2008, p. 81). While trial and error are a fundamental method of problem-solving and learning, Tannenbaum and Baldwin (1983) highlight students with disabilities often need guidance in understanding themselves, their strengths, and weaknesses in order to utilize appropriate strategies and advocate for academic accommodations.

While the study does rely on students specifically chose for their perceived self-determination skills by the disability services office, implications for the study is a move towards the importance of empowerment of the student.

Swart and Greyling (2011), in their qualitative study of 10 University students in Western Cape Town, investigated the lived experiences of utilizing campus services and supports as well as perceived barriers. Participant responses included recognition that the university is not solely responsible for their support, that they themselves know their needs and must take ownership of their experiences and communicate their needs to disability office staff to support the accommodation process. While the results are not generalizable to all students, it is worth acknowledging that, similar to Getzel & Thoma, Swart and Greyling (2011) noted transformative experiences of students being able to own their responsibility, in the process of self-advocating and self-empowerment; it can be argued, however, that this level of intuitiveness requires self-determination skills for this to happen, and the authors acknowledged that not all students in the study were able to achieve this level. Additionally, the study did not explore the participants' specific knowledge about disability laws and accommodation policies; the within study will explore the impact of this knowledge on utilization of self-advocacy skills.

The implications for the studies that focused on students' lived experiences involve not only a starting point in giving disabled students a voice but raises challenges for future researchers in capturing the voice without bias.

A frequent observation in the results is the need for the disability office itself to be more accessible, and specifically observation of a lack of knowledge on behalf of the student as to what services are available or how to access them (Dutta, 2009; Flink & Leonard, 2018; Holloway, 2001; Vickerman & Blundell, 2008). Although qualitative research may not be generalizable to a larger population, it is worth noting that among numerous studies, the theme of a lack of student knowledge in how to access what is needed is reoccurring, as far back as 20 years ago (Holloway, 2001). Additionally, it is worth considering the possibility of a stigma on ones' ability to use self-advocacy skills to access services; students have expressed that they did not register for assistance through their disability services office because they thought support would get in the way of having normal college experiences (Kim & Crowley, 2021). As discussed in the Study Problem chapter, the historical underpinnings highlight the stigmatization of disability. If students with disabilities associate seeking support with an abnormal college experience, what supports can disability services offices offer to help reframe this notion for students?

While many of the authors in these studies discuss the importance of higher education and postsecondary universities, colleges, and schools to provide opportunities for students to acquire this knowledge, it is important to do this in tandem with helping students learn the self-advocacy skills to use the knowledge once acquired.

Perceptions of Accessibility to Disability Services

Transitioning from high school to college requires that students with disabilities learn to shift responsibilities to meet the demanding requirements of postsecondary education. Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires schools to offer accommodations for eligible students with disabilities (Department of Education, 2011). These accommodations allow students with disabilities to fully participate in educational programs on an equal basis as their non-disabled peers. As observed through the literature in the previous section, at present it is vital for students with disabilities to learn and utilize self-advocacy skills to obtain the accommodations needed in postsecondary education. Therefore, it is critical to understand the perceptions of students access to accommodations and perceived barriers to this access.

West et al. (1993) surveyed 761 students with disabilities enrolled in public and private higher education institutions in Virginia to determine their levels of satisfaction with accessibility, special services, and accommodations at their schools, as well as identify barriers to postsecondary education and potential improvements in services. While the study is almost 30 years old, it stands out as one of the largest quantitative studies conducted. A total of 57 schools participated including 12 of the state's 13 public 4-year institutions, all 29 public 2-year community colleges, and 16 of 17 private colleges and universities.

Over 86% of respondents reported encountering physical and psychological barriers to their education because of their disabilities, including a lack of understanding and cooperation from administrators, faculty, staff, and other students (as would be echoed in Vickerman and Blundell, 2009); lack of adaptive aids and other resources; limited availability of tutors and note takers for students with learning disabilities; and for students with sensory disabilities, difficulty in obtaining a taped or Braille material, readers, sign language interpreters, and other assistance or equipment; and inaccessibility to buildings and grounds (West et al., 1993). The authors highlighted the importance of improving the delivery of services, as well as improving self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities, as a way to foster academic success.

Many students reported that they had been denied accommodations that have been specifically mandated by the Section 504 regulations, even after following their institutions' procedures for requests and grievances. The authors stated, “all too frequently, institutions gave priority to instructors [class rules] over the legal rights of the students” (West et al., 1993, p. 465). While this feedback does not speak for the majority, it is a concept worth exploring. It is also worth comparing this study to more current findings.

Herbert et al. (2020) identified a series of obstacles for students with disabilities that can interfere with obtaining a college degree. A series of focus groups (n= 26) were conducted to better understand the intersection of policy, university culture and resources, and their impact on the college experience. Analysis of student narratives revealed five themes: experiences with disability services office, faculty interactions, accommodations, awareness of university resources, and recommendations to improve disability climate.

Although students expressed positive experiences with disability office staff as being relatively straight forward and accommodating, students also expressed difficulty establishing and maintaining service eligibility, staff interaction conflicts, lack of inclusiveness regarding choice of services or accommodations available, and lack of support. Some students also commented that disability services office staff lacked knowledge in important areas such as how to use tutors and available assistive technology (Herbert et al., 2020). In terms of accommodations, the authors reported student comments, to be negative and often associated with complaints regarding the documentation and notification process, inability to sufficiently advocate for students in securing classroom accommodations and what students perceived as a lack of sensitivity regarding their needs (Herbert et al., 2020).

Again, although this study highlighted the need for faculty and staff training around disabilities laws, it was not clear whether the students themselves understood the disability laws and accommodation policy implementation policy at their institution. Given that a student’s individualized education plan (IEP) does not follow them from high school to college, disability services may also be cut off from students and families who cannot afford testing. Exploring this concept would have made the study stronger.

Kim and Crowley (2021) examined perceptions and experiences of autistic undergraduate students toward the disability support offices (DSO) of their U.S. higher education institutions. The findings showed that the participants appreciated receiving academic supports such as extended time on exams, being housed in single rather than shared rooms, and having opportunities to meet other autistic students. In contrast, some students reported negative experiences with DSOs, including a perceived lack of helpfulness when professors refused to grant requested accommodations. Additionally, some students felt DSO staff members lacked knowledge of autism or were inaccessible; still others felt that DSOs could not support them or were unable to access the documents required for registration (Kim & Crowley, 2021).

Bruce and Aylward (2021)'s qualitative study underscored the ways in which postsecondary disability rights may appear theoretically protected yet realistically elusive. The study documented the experiences of both students with disabilities and their professors in arranging academic accommodations, through exploration of student self-advocacy and how they shaped teaching and learning at three Nova Scotia Universities. The authors also highlight the complexities in understanding disability rights, navigating university process, and meeting expectations around student sharing of disability and accommodation information.

An interesting aspect of this study was that while some participants spoke of the need to hold others accountable for their rights recognition and protection, some noted that they were explicitly discouraged by the institutional tendency to minimize disability rights. Some students observed that claiming accommodations was mostly about students having to demonstrate deservedness (Bruce & Aylward, 2021). Participants expressed that the deadlines to apply for accommodations add pressure and lends itself to excluding students who do not meet the submission deadline, which for them translates to being “unworthy” of services. This burden of “proving” to have a disability contradicts the notion of asking for services that should be a right rather than privilege (Bruce & Aylward, 2021).

Intriguingly, Palmer & Roessler (2000) assessed students’ general knowledge of accommodation policy in their investigation of the effects of an eight-hour training program in self advocacy and conflict resolution skills designed to help college students with disabilities request classroom accommodations. Conducted in two-and four-year postsecondary settings, the study involved 50 students with disabilities certified by their institutions as needing classroom accommodations. After the training, the researchers implemented a Rights and Responsibilities: Disability Accommodation Knowledge Survey (RR-DAKS). The RR-DAKS was developed to determine the extent of students’ general knowledge of their rights and responsibilities related to academic accommodations as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as their understanding of institutional implementation procedures (Palmer & Roessler, 2000). Results supported the multivariate hypotheses that the treatment group would exceed the control group in (a) acquired levels of self-advocacy and conflict resolution behaviors, (b) general knowledge of rights and responsibilities for academic accommodations, (c) levels of accommodation requesting and conflict resolution self-efficacy, and (d) levels of social competence (Palmer & Roessler, 2000).

Marshak et al. (2010) found five major thematic categories for identified barriers to seeking and utilizing disability support services in college: (a) identity issues, (b) desire to avoid negative social reaction, (c) insufficient knowledge, (d) perceived quality and usefulness of services, and (e) negative experiences with professors.

Bolt et al. (2011) conducted a study investigating the perceptions of 55 college students with reading-and writing-related disabilities from 17 universities and colleges. Students completed the *Instructional and Testing Accommodations Survey*, which examined their perspectives on the types of accommodations they used during various educational experiences (Bolt et al., 2011). A variety of perceived barriers and facilitators to their use of accommodations was reported, including system-level variables, instructor knowledge and attitudes, and students' own self-advocacy efforts. This confirms the continuous need for students to learn self-advocacy skills as early as middle school. Ironically, to be eligible for participation in this study, the student was required to provide documentation of a disability that affected his or her reading or writing skills, including (a) a signed psychological report indicating that the student had a reading-or writing-related disability or needed accommodations due to a reading or writing problem, (b) an IEP from his or her K-12 educational experience that indicated reading and/or writing as an area of educational need, or (c) a checklist of the accommodation(s) he or she was allowed to receive that was completed by a college or university resource center for students with disabilities, which indicated the need for the accommodation(s) due to a reading or writing difficulty. The effort needed to provide proof to participate in the study inadvertently may be an indicator of self-advocacy skills, in that the student would have to secure this documentation to forward to the researchers.

Barriers to accessing services can be perceived for a number of different reasons, whether through stigma (Kim & Crowley, 2021), the inability to physically access accommodations (West et al., 1993) or even the time between high school and college (Herbert et al., 2020;

Salzer, 2008). Within all of these studies connected to barriers, there is still a lack of emphasis on assessing knowledge of the laws governing disability services in most studies; however, there is some assessment of the use of self-advocacy skills to addressed perceived barriers (Palmer & Roessler, 2000; West et al., 1993).

In a qualitative study, Pfeifer et al. (2021) expanded their prior work by characterizing the factors that supported or hindered self-advocacy for 25 STEM students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and/or specific learning disabilities at a public university in the southeastern United States. The authors noted that both internal and external factors served as a support or as a barrier to participants' self-advocacy; examples of such factors included: self-advocacy knowledge, beliefs, and identity; other individuals; logistics of accommodation implementation, and aspects of the STEM discipline (Pfeifer et al., 2021). Although the findings of this study revealed that many of the participants had sufficient self-advocacy knowledge, the authors reported that some were still in developmental stages (Pfeifer et al., 2021). For example, some participants were not aware that they could request adjustments to their accommodations, other participants were not aware that they could use accommodations during summer and/or online courses, and for their STEM/lab courses.

One of the interesting aspects of the study is the authors' focus on hidden disabilities, specifically ADHD and learning disabilities. Perhaps the students' challenge with professors around implementation of accommodations in the classroom stem from perceptions, or a lack thereof on what disability is, which complements the findings of several other researchers (Bruce & Aylward, 2021; Elacqua, 1996; Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004; Greenbaum et al., 1995; Marshak et al., 2010).

Overall, while this research focused solely on undergraduate students in STEM, the findings from Pfeifer et al's (2021) study highlight that need to further examine factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities.

Other Variables Affecting Students' Perception of Accessibility

Perception of Disability by Others

Deckoff-Jones and Duell (2010) examined whether the type of disability that students have and the type of accommodation that might be granted to them affect perceptions of the appropriateness of such accommodations. Participants consisted of 256 undergraduate students from a large northeastern public university, 38% of which identified as currently or previously having had a disability. Focusing on two types of accommodations that are commonly granted on university campuses: accessibility accommodations and academic accommodations, the researchers examined visible physical disabilities, invisible physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities. Interestingly, rather than report on their individual experiences, participants were asked to evaluate the written symptom descriptions of 8 hypothetical university students with disabilities to determine whether a series of 8 different accommodations would be appropriate for them. Results suggested that students with disabilities would be perceived differently by their peers based on the disability they have, its visibility, and the accommodation that they receive; similar results were noted by Elacqua (1996). These attitudinal barriers could make it harder for students with disabilities to integrate into the college social environment. Additionally, accommodations for psychiatric disabilities and invisible physical disabilities were less likely to be viewed as appropriate regardless of how well they addressed the symptoms of the disability.

Perception of professors' attitudes have also been shown to influence view of accommodations. Positive classroom experiences in college are critical to successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the campus community (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004). Elacqua (1996), Marshak et al. (2010) and Bruce and Aylward (2021) found in their participants' responses a stigma felt by students from their professors upon learning about their disabilities. Elacqua (1996) found that some students felt that requesting a classroom accommodation was stressful and that professors were not interested in learning about students with disabilities and available accommodations. Some reported that professors did not comply with the accommodation request, or broke confidentiality and singled the student out in class. Marshak et al. (2010) reported instances in which several students were confronted with situations in which a professor would not fully believe that the student truly had a disability (even though documentation was provided) or would not believe that the student's disability was the reason they missed a class. Bolt et al. (2011) found similar results in their study, citing instructor knowledge and attitudes as a perceived barrier to accessibility.

Perceptions of Disability Office Staff

A concept touched on briefly within this review but not yet explored in detail is the influence and importance of the disability office staff on both perception and accessibility of services for students with disabilities. Multiple studies reveal a theme of finding disability office staff lacking (Abreu et al., 2017; Kim & Crowley, 2021) although because of the qualitative nature of both studies it is difficult to generalize to a large population of students. Some students found that disability office staff showed more support for professors than students (Abreu et al., 2017).

Students citing positive experiences note strong feelings of acceptance by others (Graham-Smith & Lafayette, 2004; Mullins & Preyde, 2013). Graham-Smith and Lafayette (2004) surveyed students receiving accommodations at Baylor University asking what was most beneficial for them; responses were overwhelmingly in favor of a caring staff and a safe environment where the struggles of college life can be addressed. The authors highlighted "care" as an important aspect of service delivery. Care overcomes the sense of isolation and separateness that a student with disability feels and gives him/herself the permission to belong and succeed in what could be a frightening and challenging college environment for many. It is very important, however, to note that the researchers for this study did include the director and disability specialist of the disability support office. Not discrediting the survey or the positive experiences the students expressed, it is impossible to remove personal bias in the interpretation of these results.

Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are a growing population in postsecondary institutions, yet present poorer academic outcomes and graduation rates compared to students without disabilities. Abreu et al. (2017) examined the perceptions and experiences of 93 university student with disability support services, including how helpful they found the accommodations they were granted, how often and to what purpose they visited the disability services office. The researchers also examined the relationship between the number of visits to the disability office and grade point average (GPA). Participants reported a mean grade point average (GPA) of 2.96 on a 4-point scale. GPA, however, may be a limited indicator considering that multiple factors may influence and contribute to student success.

Reinschmiedt et al. (2013) investigated student satisfaction as an outcome, assessing satisfaction with multiple provided educational accommodations received through disability support services for students with disabilities. The population pertaining to this study consisted of all 455 individuals registered to receive disability support services from a mid-western postsecondary university. Accommodations receiving the lowest satisfaction scores were identified as (a) academic advisement and counseling, (b) assignment extensions/modifications, (c) taped lectures, (d) academic accommodation planning, (e) tutorial support/one-on-one assistance, and (f) classroom accommodations. The authors noted, however, that many of the lowest scoring incorporated a third party outside of the disability service office. For example, academic accommodation planning involves assistance from the student's academic advisor. A possibility to consider is that it may be less likely that a third party is trained on disability laws or policies and procedures surrounding accommodations yet is responsible for working with large cohorts of students with disabilities.

Schreuer & Sachs (2014) conducted a study to evaluate the inclusion and performance of students with disabilities in postsecondary education in comparison with a matched control group of students without disabilities. The study asked Israeli students with disabilities what personal accommodations and what universally available accessibility services they use and seeks their experiences of how useful they are. The study also examines the efficacy of the accommodations as well as through the broad picture of how the students perceive their academic and social participation (Schreuer & Sachs, 2014). The authors reported that use of accommodations positively correlated with all measures of participation: GPA; course density; participation in student experiences; self-assessed satisfaction with participation; and student perceptions of the College/University as a facilitating environment. Although the authors highlight accommodations were used by all of the participants in their study, this study raised two important questions: What constitutes an accessible campus from the perspectives of students utilizing accommodation services and offices providing services, and How can legislative demands assure universal access is met (Schreuer & Sachs, 2014)? These are important factors for postsecondary institutions to consider as they continue to assess their school climate improvement efforts and overall mission to support the academic success of students with disabilities.

Hsiao et al. (2017) used a qualitative case study to describe a collaborative decision-making process for developing effective academic accommodations for a music major with a disability, whose prior accommodations suggested by Disability Support Services failed to address her needs. The study used a single case-study design to investigate the "particularity and complexity" of a unique case to represent commonality (Hsiao et al., 2017, p. 5). Through multiple sources of information, including interviews and a review of case reports, weekly logs, email correspondence, results of psychological testing and academic portfolio contents, the researchers identified four themes: resistance to the unknown, the language of negotiation, the decision-making process, and transformation (with three sub-themes: from fear of stigmatization to self-advocacy, from resentfulness to acceptance and commitment, and from reaction to pro-action). "Nancy," the identified student, found that the prior accommodations suggested by the disability services office (including extended time on examinations and assignments, a reduced-distraction testing environment, and support with note taking) failed to address the barriers she encountered with a fast-paced, traditional instructional approach that adopted only a single-modality assessment method (Hsiao et al., 2017). Although results from this study cannot be generalized to the greater population, it does highlight the need for collaborative process and feedback loop. By implementing a collaborative process, institutions of higher education can better meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Black et al. (2015) also identified situations in which the accommodations provided may not be functionally appropriate; although their study failed to discuss the negative effects students experienced academically as a result of receiving inadequate accommodations, their study of 15 students of varying disabilities revealed similar results to many of the previous studies including a feeling of a lack of preparedness from office staff and faculty.

Conclusion

While a great deal of valuable research has been conducted in an attempt to better understand the lived experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, little research has been done to explore factors that affect self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, when compared to the number of research studies focused on the development of transition plans, transition programming, specific skills necessary for successful transitioning of students with disabilities, in postsecondary settings. Within this systematic review of literature, a number of themes have emerged. One common theme found is, despite legislation, students with disabilities continue to face issues of social equity within classroom settings at postsecondary education institutions. Students frequently feel misunderstood by their faculty in the classroom and spotlighted or alienated among their peers. Additionally, disability offices may lack an understanding of the services needed to meet the nuances of the individual disability of the student, alienating them further. Studies indicated perceived pleasant interactions with staff, but instances in which staff have been unprepared or untrained to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Further, there is a common theme among the literature which highlights students with disabilities' want more information about their rights and the accommodation processes. However, though there are studies that discuss these concepts, there is limited research addressing the general knowledge that students with disabilities, themselves have of their rights and responsibilities related to academic accommodations as defined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act-Amendment Act, as well as their understanding of institutional implementation policies and procedures of such accommodations; and how lack of knowledge impacts self-advocacy, and ultimately academic success.

Although Offices of Disability or Accessibility Services on college campuses have attempted to provide accessible services and facilitate accommodations for students with disabilities, there remains a concern. Much of the research on this population utilized qualitative methods to explore the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education; using a quantitative method approach might yield important, generalizable results in gaining greater knowledge of the needs of students with disabilities.

An important theme that can be found throughout all of the literature, and even within participation in the studies themselves, is the need for self-advocacy. Researchers have identified that a student's ability to self-advocate is detrimental to the success of the student with disabilities in postsecondary education (Test et al., 2005). The participants in these studies voluntarily participated which may speak to a desire for change in the service delivery system, and a recurrent theme is the understanding that the student is ultimately responsible for access to the services needed to thrive. Implications for collaborations between social work practice and institutions of higher education disability service offices can be further explored. The dissertation study described here aimed to address the gap in the literature about factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities and the ways in which they navigate accommodations services with a documented disability.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An innovative combination of theoretical perspectives informs this research study. In order to orientate the reader to these perspectives, the following sub-sections will define and discuss each theoretical perspective and its relevance to the study. Review of the framework begins with a brief overview of three models of disability, leading into the overarching fourth perspective suggested by Scotch (2000) of the sociopolitical construct of disability. Although there are inherent flaws within each of the models of disability, for the purposes of this study, the sociopolitical perspective serves as an underpinning for understanding the critical importance and continued need for advocacy for students with disabilities. Following the discussion of the disability models, at the heart of social work practice and its connection to the school environment, Bronfenbrenner (1997)'s ecological systems theory will be discussed.

Finally, this chapter will conclude with an exploration of the conceptual framework for self-advocacy by Test et al. (2005) as it relates to the impact of self-advocacy skills on the success of students with disabilities, which underpins the importance of social workers joining leadership in postsecondary education. These frameworks diverge in their approaches which introduces variability, building a comprehensive picture of understanding the person-in-environment perspective, and the role systems play in mitigating or increasing self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Disability As a Sociopolitical Construct

From a social constructionist point of view, "disability" is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon, not reality in that much of what is believed about disability stem from meanings constructed by individuals without disabilities (Jones, 1996), not necessarily a biological fact of disability that exists. However, disability is a biological fact of life that many individuals must navigate; minimizing these factors silences the voices and dehumanizes individuals with disabilities. Smart & Smart (2006) discussed there are many models for understanding disability, including biomedical, functional, environmental, and sociopolitical, each which presents a disparity in their definitions of what disability is.

Biomedical Model

As discussed in the Study Problem chapter, for centuries, disability has predominately been viewed as a genetic flaw, which led to eugenics and sterilization practices (Lilienfeld et al., 2014). The biomedical model has been the dominant approach to understanding disability, which viewed individuals with disabilities as dependent, abnormal, deficient, and less able than individuals without disabilities. This model proposes that the problems to be addressed by disability services are found solely within the individual (Smart & Smart 2006; Gilson & Depoy, 2000; Social Work Speaks, 2021).

Functional and Environmental Models

Recognizing the biological factors noted above, the functional and environmental models highlight how individuals with disabilities "interact with both their disability and their environment" (Smart & Smart, 2006, p. 32). These perspectives highlight that the cause of disability is not found solely within the individual, rather "the environment impacts the disability" (Smart & Smart, 2006, p. 32). Adapting these perspectives allows institutions to adapt the environment and its functions to fit the needs of individuals with disabilities, rather than expecting individuals with disabilities to fit into structures already created.

Sociopolitical Model

The sociopolitical perspective will be explored in terms of the way it relates to the education of students with disabilities. The sociopolitical model highlights that disability "is not viewed as a physical or mental impairment, rather as a social construction shaped by environmental factors, including cultural attitudes and social behaviors" (Scotch, 2000, p. 214). While these concepts reflect narrow assumptions about what constitutes the normal range of human functioning thereby minimizing the notions that impairments and disabilities do in fact exist; it should be noted that the sociopolitical model highlight there are varying ways of thinking about disability and presumptions that flow from these views. Values that underpin this perspective are imperative to understand to continue shifting societal norms and impact policy change.

According to Scotch (2000, p. 215), transformations in federal disability policy which rejected a "primarily medical/clinical model of disability leading to the development of the sociopolitical model" provide direction for future advocacy and political action. It should be noted that the sociopolitical model offers a lens that brings a clearer understanding on the relationship between an individual's impairment and the environment, and how they interact with each other. The social aspect of this model sheds light on societies continued marginalization of individuals with disabilities, which perpetuates barriers (Scotch, 2000). In other words, students with disabilities should not be expected to adapt to a defined institutional approach or structure; rather institutions should adapt their approaches and structures to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Politically, Scotch (2000) noted as a result of collective advocacy in the 1990s the creation of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act emerged, providing individuals with disabilities better access to and inclusion in employment and higher education. However, since the passing of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, educational gaps for today's postsecondary students with disabilities persists and have not been at the forefront of political agendas. Therefore, in order for students with disabilities to gain better access to accommodations and support services, and improved educational outcomes, the barriers they face must be highlighted and placed back on political agendas in present day to foster change (Scotch, 2000).

Within postsecondary education, although the establishment of laws prohibits discrimination against students with disabilities, the expectation that these students follow procedures to secure accommodations and support services to fully participate in their educational programs, while their non-disabled peers can fully participate without adhering to these procedures, creates barriers of equal access and issues of equity in classrooms (Scotch, 2000). Students with disabilities, once they are accepted at their institution, must self-disclose, and register with their respective disability or accessibility service offices as having a disability and seek accommodations and support services. As discussed in the Study Problem chapter, to "qualify" for services, the student must provide appropriate documentation in the form of an evaluation from a clinical professional documenting that they not only have a disability, but also "need" services. The sociopolitical model would suggest that the requirement to "apply" to receive support services one need in itself creates a barrier for students with disabilities (Getzel & Thoma 2008; Scotch, 2000).

Additionally, as discussed earlier in the text, disability service professionals determine reasonable accommodations for the student, which are determinations largely based on an evaluation provided by way of a clinician to the student; often not including what the student feel they need to succeed (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). As such, clinical professionals, while often not part of the postsecondary setting, become the gatekeepers of services postsecondary students with disabilities ultimately receive. This approach results in the student having to fit “into” plans created for them rather than fostering opportunities for them to be part of the decision-making on the creation of their plans.

Last, accessing the clinical professionals requires a level of self-advocacy and access that the student may not have. It is imperative then, to understand the role systems play as postsecondary students with disabilities navigate these complex structures; a concept that will be explored in the following section.

An Ecological Approach in Schools

At the heart of social work practice, ecological systems theory allows one to understand how varying environmental systems surrounding students and the daily interaction among these can affect student development and influence their functioning (Evans, 1996). Throughout their lifespan, students will encounter five systems, microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). When an institution considers the ecological theory as a guideline for campus climate intervention, there needs to be a focus on strengthening supports and minimizing barriers within each ecological system to foster student success.

The microsystem consists of the student’s family, caregivers, and peer groups. This may be the most influential system in a student’s life because it is where decisions are made that affects a students’ life whether they make decisions personally or not. This is also likely where the student may first learn of self and their disability which will shape how they view themselves, their lives, and needs, and how to interact with social groups and the world in which they live. This is also the system in which they may begin to develop self-advocacy skills

(Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Daly-Cano et al., 2015). In the microsystem relationships are considered bi-directional, in other words behavior within ones' microsystem is mutually influenced, children react to parents, similarly parents react to children. For example, within the familial context, the presence of a child with a disability can have multiple and profound effects not only on the family, caregivers, and peers but also, the child. Some families may adapt successfully to the child's disability while others may not. Likewise, lack of support from family and peers can negatively impact a child's development and acceptance of self, disability, and ones' ability to self-advocate (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Understanding how students perceive this system is integral to their success in adapting to a new environment.

The mesosystem is an interconnected system of the microsystem in that students may witness their parents and/or caregivers advocating on their behalf. For example, in secondary school settings, parents and/or caregivers are often part of the school-based support team advocating alongside teachers for accommodations and support services on behalf of the student. In this instance, students are witnessing advocacy, which may influence their development of independently self-advocating in their postsecondary school setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). In this environment, students have opportunities to communicate outside their home allowing autonomy and self-advocacy skills learned in their microsystem to potentially unfold. However, the school environment presents a set of demands that many students may not face in their home environment and therefore may not feel they have autonomy over their outcomes in school or be empowered to self-advocate. If a student is not empowered at home to accept oneself, and taught about their disability and supports needed, they may have difficulty self-advocating for services they need when transitioning into postsecondary settings (Test et al., 2005). Hadley (2007) proposed that the development of autonomy happens as students disengage from familiar support networks. Therefore, it is important that the skills of self-determination be taught and modeled at home as research shows, it is considered a key component of transitioning (Wehmeyer, et al., 1998).

As the laws that govern accommodations and support services differs from secondary and postsecondary settings for students with disabilities, the *macrosystem*, helps to understand how laws and policies impact students with disabilities and influence how they are treated (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). In general, students with disabilities have had their disability defined for them, in school settings they are told what accommodations they are eligible to receive, and need based on their disability, they are told what supports they need to thrive and what a successful student is, often without input from them (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). While legislation provides access to education for students with disabilities, the way in which support structures are set can also limit their abilities. For example, there are various accommodations that students with disabilities can receive, these include but are not limited to, extended time on tests, alternative test formats, readers, note-takers or scribes, adaptive equipment, and technology (Department of Education, 2020).

Each postsecondary institution has its own guidelines for accommodation implementation. It should be noted, however that while section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires postsecondary settings to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, institutions can also deny requests, for which students can appeal (Department of Education, 2020). Therefore, as students receive approval of their initial accommodations it is critical for campus disability service offices to ensure students are fully aware of the steps involved in appealing and/or requesting an adjustment or additional support services that are not included on their initial accommodation letter to limit barriers to academic success (Department of Education, 2020; Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Test, et al., 2005).

If students with disabilities are not part of the decision-making process or have knowledge of policies and procedures for requesting additional accommodations, they may not be prepared to self-advocate which may have implications for their academic outcomes (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Test et al., 2005). The importance of this point was amplified in a study by Troiano et at. (2010, p. 40) which examined the connection between students' use of academic supports, their grade point averages, and graduation rates. Findings from this study predicted "68% graduation for students who had consistent attendance, and higher-grade point averages as a result of frequently utilizing academic supports." On the contrary, the authors reported the largest group of students in their study who had grade point averages below 1.5 inconsistently utilized academic supports (Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) discussed that the exosystem consists of settings that do not involve the student as an active participant but still affect them. In other words, while students with disabilities are not often at the table when political agendas are developed and reviewed and legislation are passed, the resulting legislation impacts them. As discussed in the Study Problem chapter, in K-12 settings, students can rely on their school-based support team to provide evaluations and arrange accommodations and support they need, without their input. This structure changes drastically after leaving high school. A systems approach to prepare students for a more self-directed path, where skills in both self-determination and self-advocacy are needed, is critical to the transition process. This shift of responsibility from the school to the student will require students with disabilities to utilize self-advocacy skills that the current law assumes students learned in earlier years of their lives. Research shows that many college students do not engage in fundamental forms of self- advocacy such as self-identification, requesting accommodations, or seeking services (Daly-Cano et al., 2015), yet as they enter postsecondary education the responsibility to receive services lies solely in their hands. This concept will be further explored in the following section.

Finally, the chronosystem helps one consider the events and transitions that occur in a student's life over a period of time, and how these events impact their postsecondary experiences. For instance, student's may not fully understand the role of professors in implementing their accommodations in the classroom, and consequently, fail to consider professors as a resource for academic success. In addition, professors may experience challenges in efficiently engaging students with disabilities, which can deter students with disabilities and hinder their self-advocacy (Pfeifer et al., 2021; Schlossberg et al., 2006).

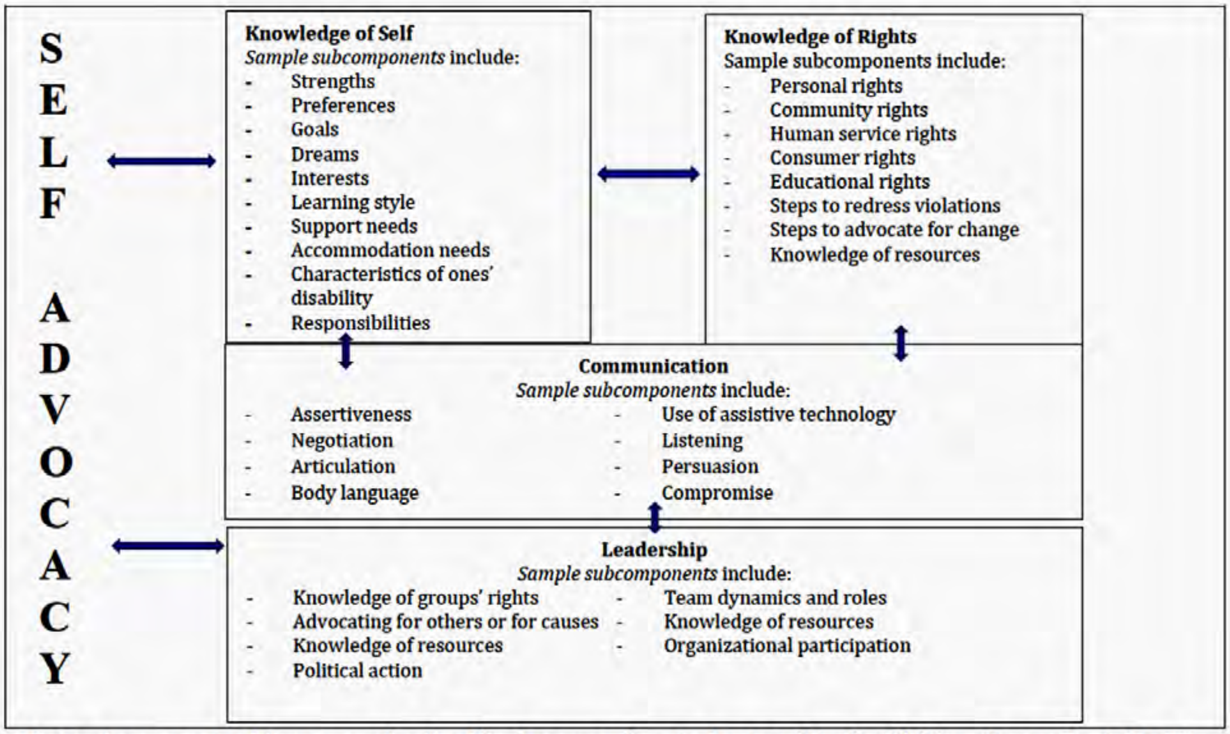
Just as history informs the present, the two aforementioned examples provide opportunities for exploring students' experiences in classrooms, and how these experiences may promote or hinder their success. As is seen through the ecological systems theory, there are many systems that postsecondary students with disabilities interact with, each with its own set of structures and nuances. It is critical to understand the role each system plays in the development of students' self-advocacy skills.

Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy in Schools

This final section will explore the conceptual framework of self-advocacy from the perspective of postsecondary students with disabilities. Within the practice of social work, fostering self-determination and advocacy usually emerges in the interaction between the therapist and client, where the therapist empowers the client to find ones' voice, to create their own narratives and become experts in their own lives (National Association of Social Workers, 1999). When thinking of student development, the conceptual framework of self-advocacy developed by Test et al., (2005, p. 45) shown in figure 1 below, discusses the importance of students having “knowledge of self, knowledge of their rights, communication, and leadership skills.” Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was created to ensure that services are provided to students with disabilities, at the same time, the law is implemented in ways that students in postsecondary education must self-advocate to access services. This model described that knowledge of self and knowledge of rights are the foundations of self-advocacy. Only when students understand who they are as individuals, their disability, needs, rights and various processes they must navigate, they can then communicate their needs to others.

By developing this multicomponent conceptual framework, Test et al. (2005) noted that educational institutions can use this framework to better support students with disabilities. As communication is strengthened, students can become partners in developing a plan and requesting adjustments, where needed (Schlossberg et al., 2006; Test et al., 2005). Last, students can take on leadership roles and advocate for others once they have gained full understanding of themselves, their needs and can negotiate their own support plans, effectively advocate for themselves (Test et al., 2005).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy



Knowledge of Self
Sample subcomponents include:
- Strengths
- Preferences
- Goals
- Dreams
- Interests
- Learning style
- Support needs
- Accommodation needs
- Characteristics of ones' disability
- Responsibilities

Knowledge of Rights
Sample subcomponents include:
- Personal rights
- Community rights
- Human service rights
- Consumer rights
- Educational rights
- Steps to redress violations
- Steps to advocate for change
- Knowledge of resources

Communication
Sample subcomponents include:
- Assertiveness
- Negotiation
- Articulation
- Body language
- Use of assistive technology
- Listening
- Persuasion
- Compromise

Leadership
Sample subcomponents include:
- Knowledge of groups' rights
- Advocating for others or for causes
- Knowledge of resources
- Political action
- Team dynamics and roles
- Knowledge of resources
- Organizational participation

Note. A conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities. From Test, D. W., Fowler, C. H., Wood, W. M., Brewer, D. M., & Eddy, S. (2005 p.49). *Remedial and Special education*, *26*(1), 43-54.

Conclusion

Over the last 30 years, through the passing of legislation requiring access to education for students with disabilities, the United States have made great strides. However, just as systems and individual needs are continually changing, there is a need to revisit policies governing support services to ensure policies are in line with the varying needs of students with disabilities in present day.

Reflecting upon the aforementioned theories and concepts, one can visualize the person-in-environment framework. From a larger social standpoint, the sociopolitical model of disability encourages activists to continue advocating for social and political change, bringing issues of social equity for postsecondary students with disabilities back to the political forefront, to ensure students have equitable outcomes which match their non-disabled peers (Scotch, 2000).

The school as an ecosystem not only sheds light on various systems students with disabilities navigate and how each can affect their success, but also helps to understand the bureaucracy of policies that are set in schools and their effects both in proximal and distal ways. Finally, the conceptual framework of self-advocacy offers a way of understanding the impact that knowledge of self, and policy that govern support services not only fosters opportunities for students to interact in their environment, but also empowers them to do so. It is critical then, for institutions to facilitate practices where students with disabilities can strengthen their knowledge of self, and policy to foster success.

The framework and concepts discussed in this chapter are fundamental to the values and goals of the social work profession, which support the need for social work leadership roles in postsecondary education to address equity gaps and outcomes for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RELATED HYPOTHESES

The research question for this study was developed based on existing literature on the subject of range of support services and accessibility of institutional accommodation policies, and self-advocacy, and asked What factors contribute to higher levels of self-advocacy for students with disabilities in postsecondary education?

Research Hypotheses

The study explores the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities using the following hypotheses:

H_1: Students who express greater ability to identify their disability and its characteristics will have greater self-advocacy skills

H_2: Students who express greater knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services and disability law will have greater self-advocacy skills

H_3: Students with higher levels of self-determination will have greater self-advocacy skills

H_4: Students who express more of a prior history of witnessing advocacy will have greater self-advocacy skills

H_5: Students who express more positive interactions with disability staff will have greater self-advocacy skills

Utilizing cross-sectional survey questions, the purpose of this study is to identify, assess, and describe the factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities from their perspectives, in order to gain deeper understanding of their experiences navigating their educational programs with a documented disability.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the structure and methodology that was employed to answer the research question. The first section will provide an overview of conceptual definitions utilized in the study. These will be followed by a discussion of the study design, outline of the sampling method, and process for data collection; and analysis based on the hypotheses. Additionally, a table of hypotheses in which variables are labeled and operationalized with their accompanying method of analysis will be outlined. Finally, ethical considerations will be discussed, including potential risks to the participants.

Conceptual Definitions

The term disability in this study includes but is not limited to “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a history or record of such an impairment, or being regarded by others as having such an impairment” (Department of Health and Human Services, 2006, p. 1). Identification of disability refers to knowledge of disability type and its characteristics. Knowledge of institutional accommodations policies, services and disability law refers to student awareness of the support services available and accessible at their respective postsecondary institutions as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Self-advocacy, as defined by the Person-Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition (PCAST) project (Freeman, n.d.), refers to student’s self-reflection and person-centered experiences to improve ones’ ability to understand and define essential knowledge and skills that allow them to express what they need to be successful now and in the future.

Self-determination is broken down into three overarching components: thinking, doing, and adjusting and will be defined through the American Institutes for Research (AIR)'s Self-Determination Scale as Capacity and Opportunity (Wolman et al., 1994, p. 5). Wolman et al. (1994) defines Capacity as "students' knowledge and ability to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated behavior." Opportunity is defined as students' ability to use their knowledge and abilities. Capacity and opportunity and the conditions that underlie them (knowledge, ability, perceptions, and opportunity at school and at home), are the basis for the AIR self-determination scale (Wolman et al., 1994, p. 5). Witnessing advocacy refers to instances in which a student with disability has seen a parent/caregiver, advocate, teacher, etc., advocate on their behalf for their needs or wants. Interactions with campus disability staff refers to students with disabilities in-person visits to campus disability or accessibility service offices, for the purpose of self-disclosure of their disability, applying for accommodations and support services and offering feedback on implementation of accommodations.

Research Design: Quantitative Method

This dissertation adopted a cross-sectional quantitative positivism paradigm which allowed the researcher to explore the perceptions of postsecondary students with disabilities. This approach ensures the researcher is not influencing or being influenced by students' perceptions when measuring and analyzing causal relationships between variables (Creswell, 2009; Sale et al., 2002). Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the expanding body of literature addressing the relationship between multiple factors that may contribute to the self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. It should be noted, however, that correlation does not imply causation. In other words, while variables may be related, it does not mean that one caused the other (Cook & Cook, 2008, p. 101). For example, a student may have knowledge of institutional policy but lack self-advocacy skills. However, Lilienfeld et al. (2014) argue that correlational research allows researchers to determine the strength of each relationship; and given that correlational research occurs in real-life situations, the data can be applied to everyday encounters without manipulating the process.

As the background for this study highlighted a gap identified in the literature surrounding the perceptions of postsecondary students with disabilities on factors that affect their self-advocacy skills and implications for accessing accommodation and support services, the descriptive nature of quantitative survey research informed the research design. The results of this study may inform educators about a number of factors that affect self-advocacy skills and accessibility of accommodation services for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings; and contribute to the design of future studies that may address the question of correlation.

Sampling and Data Collection Methods

Sampling Method – Setting and Participants

Purposive and convenience sampling procedures were used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling involves the researcher strategically identifying and selecting a sample of participants' that have experience and knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This method was used to ensure there was a representation of the population the researcher examined. The target population for this study included active students enrolled in six postsecondary accredited institutions in their respective states at varied levels including, freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students, who self-identified with any disabilities, registered with and received one or more educational accommodations through support staff or campus disability service offices, in the United States.

The researcher chose the six postsecondary institutions out of convenience based on known contacts and/or popularity of student support services.

Putnam (1981, p. 3) defines a postsecondary educational institution as an "academic, vocational, technical, home study, business, professional, or other school, college or university or other organization or person-offering educational credentials or offering instruction or educational services for attainment of educational, professional, or vocational objectives; and are classified as either "public or private, nonprofit, and proprietary two or four-year schools, who offer associate, bachelor's, master's or doctor's degrees." For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines active enrollment as matriculation in a state-accredited program with registration in one or more classes at a postsecondary institution.

Heppner & Heppner (2004) discussed the importance of using power analysis to determine the ideal sample size to adequately test a null hypothesis. An a priori power analysis was completed using Stata to determine appropriate sample size using an R-Squared test of all coefficients in a multiple linear regression test, $\alpha = .05$, $r^2 = .25$. Results indicated a number of 56 participants to achieve a power of .90 and yield significance, based on five covariables. A total number of 103 student participants were recruited for this study, which exceeds the minimum size needed.

Data Collection Procedures

To assess the order of questions and to identify and address any issues that could affect the actual survey, the researcher conducted a pilot study from December 2021 to January 2022 with six individuals from varying backgrounds who were not being recruited for the main study. Hassan et al. (2006) noted that piloting a study with a population not being recruited as part of the sample lessens bias in results. On average, pilot participants completed the survey in 10 minutes. By conducting this small pilot study, the researcher was able to test research protocols, the survey questionnaire to ensure it accurately addressed the research question, and reordered questions in a cohesive way. The researcher was also able to "assess recruitment processes and strategies in preparation for the larger study" (Hassan et al., 2006, p. 70). Results from the pilot study revealed minor issues with the ordering of questions on the questionnaire. For two of the items, there was a discrepancy in how the question about disability type was asked which overlapped with another item which asked about accommodations and support services. This caused lack of clarity for some of the pilot participants, however, the questions for the main study were corrected based on this feedback. Though there are likely to be unforeseen difficulties, the researcher took all precautions to ensure feasibility of the measurement instrument.

Upon completion of the CITI Ethics Training on conducting Human Research (Appendix A) and receiving approval from the researchers' institutions Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted twenty postsecondary institutions to gauge interest in participation. Of the twenty schools, six expressed interest and ability to have their students participate and required an additional Institutional Review Board or Research Committee Review. As the researcher received review board approval from each of the six institutions to conduct research, the researcher sent an official IRB approved electronic outreach email request for recruitment participation (Appendix B) to identified staff in support, disability, or accessibility service offices and/or roles at each of the six postsecondary institutions. It should be noted that one of the institutions did not have a disability or accessibility service office, rather students who attend this institution receive accommodations upon enrolling. Therefore, a designated administrator at this institution received and reviewed the recruitment material. Email addresses of the identified staff were retrieved from individual schools' websites and from the researchers list of network contacts.

Recognizing the timing of the recruitment process, which began at the start of the spring 2022 semester for many of the institutions, the researcher sent a follow up email request (Appendix C) to staff a few weeks after the initial launch of the survey requesting their assistance with resending the survey to student participants, and two weeks before the close of the survey. This was done to reach the sample size.

The initial email to staff contained information about the study, instructions, and an introductory letter (Appendix D), along with the anonymous Qualtrics URL link to the survey (Appendix E) that they were instructed to email to their list of students who met the study's criteria. Prior to accessing the survey, student participants were instructed to review and complete the electronic copy of the informed consent. Student participants had one attempt at completing the survey and could opt-out at any time throughout the survey. Responses were managed through Qualtrics.

Informed Consent

Following the review of the introductory email that student participants received from staff at their respective institutions, the student participants were instructed to click the link in their email or copy and paste the URL link into a preferred web browser to review the informed consent. They were required to consent to their participation in the study before beginning the survey. Through informed consent, the students were informed that no identifiable information would be collected, about the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, and of their right to discontinue participation in the study at any point during the survey, without fear of any penalty nor impact to the services they receive at their institution. Student participants were also informed that while the data would be retained for at least three years as per the IRB guidelines, the survey will remain anonymous, and confidential, and their responses to the survey will not be traced to them.

Accessibility of Survey

The survey design was assessed for accessibility using an accessibility checker feature housed in Qualtrics and was manually checked by the researcher. Qualtrics uses WCAG 2.0 and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act for criteria on accessibility to ensure that web content is more accessible to individuals with disabilities (Qualtrics, 2005). The survey met the guidelines on accessibility.

Nonresponse Bias

Nonresponse bias occurs when utilizing self-administered online surveys, as some participants of the selected sample are “either unable or unwilling” to complete the survey; and as it pertains to colleges students; “many are inundated with surveys” (Couper, 2000, p. 473; Sax et al., 2003). Considering these challenges, additional measures to address the nonresponse that would inherently be present in utilizing this method was taken. Such measures included shortening the survey questions for readability and length; ensuring survey accessibility on various technological devices; and ensuring confidentiality by not requiring students to indicate self-identifiers, such as name of institution, student ID numbers or their names (Sax et al., 2003). While nonresponse bias is a significant concern, Heppner and Heppner (2004) highlight the advantages of online surveying which include but are not limited to, researcher access to a larger, diverse sample, including participants that reside in other states, and their ability to complete the survey at a time most convenient for them. Likewise, collection of data can occur at any time without requiring the researcher to be present.

Measurement

With increasing focus on improving self-determination and self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities in postsecondary education, the need for a reliable measure for self-determination and self-advocacy arose. As a result, the researcher adapted the PCAST self-advocacy and AIR self-determination scales for readability, length and use with postsecondary students with disabilities. The modified scales were piloted, as noted earlier in the text, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the reliability of both the modified PCAST Self-Advocacy and modified AIR Self-Determination Scales, which will be discussed in the Findings chapter.

PCAST Self-Advocacy Scale. Measures involved assessing students' beliefs about themselves and their ability to understand and define essential knowledge and skills that allowed them to express what they need to be successful (Freeman, n.d.). The initial PCAST scale consists of two parts, which include a combination of 16 open and closed-ended questions. Due to the nature of this quantitative study and lack of appropriate instruments for measuring the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities, the researcher modified the PCAST self-advocacy scale for readability, length and use with postsecondary students. The final modified version of the PCAST Self-Advocacy instrument included a total of 10 items, with nine attributes consisting of: (a) ability to talk to staff in the disability service office, and other support staff (5 items), (b) ask for specific help from faculty (1 item), (c) share information during evaluation or assessment for disability/impairment/condition (3 items). The instrument was tested for the validity and reliability for this purpose.

AIR Self-Determination Scale. Measures Capacity and Opportunity. The initial AIR Self-Determination instrument consists of three sections, which included a combination of 30 closed and open-ended questions (Wolman et al., 1994). Due to the lack of appropriate instruments for measuring the self-determination of postsecondary students with disabilities, the researcher modified the AIR self-determination scale for readability, length and use with postsecondary students. The final modified version of the AIR Self-Determination instrument included a total of 10 items, with three attributes consisting of: (a) staff in disability service office listen to and understand what is needed (2 items), (b) faculty encourage starting on goals sooner (1 item). The instrument was tested for the validity and reliability for this purpose.

The following remaining variables were measured utilizing a series of questions constructed by the researcher, asking students to rate their perceptions of content in each of the following areas: knowledge of disability and its characteristics, knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services, and disability law, history of witnessing advocacy, and interactions with disability staff.

Data Analysis

Data from each participant who participated in the study was downloaded in SPSS and uploaded to Qualtrics and reviewed by the researcher to gather the overall sense or meaning of the data. All participant information remained secure and confidential throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Results from the sample was first analyzed descriptively. The data is described by location, institution type (private or public), year in college, student's gender, race, ethnicity, and type of disability. Overall demographic questions were asked to gain an idea of the sample population characteristics. Multivariate analysis was used to examine the relationship between multiple independent variables in connection with self-advocacy skills. Inferential analysis was performed using the statistical analysis software STATA. Tests included

Spearman's rank-order correlation to examine correlations within these relationships. A list of hypotheses and variables is detailed in Table 6.1, below.

Table 6.1: Hypotheses and Variables

Hypothesis	Variable Code	Variable Name	Operational Definition	Level of Measurement	Variable Type	Analysis Method
H_1: Students who express greater ability to identify their disability and its characteristics will have greater self-advocacy skills	KD	IdentityTotal	Questions asking students whether they feel they can fully identify their disability and its characteristics.	Continuous	IV	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation
	SA	SelfAdvocacy	Statements that demonstrate student skills in expressing what they need to be successful now and, in the future.	Continuous	DV	
H_2: Students who express greater knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services and disability law will have greater self-advocacy skills	PKA-PSL	PKAPSL	Statements to which the students rate their perception of knowledge of policies, their rights to institutional accommodation, services, and disability law implicitly or explicitly, communicating their needs, or making decisions independently.	Continuous	IV	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation
	SA	SelfAdvocacy	Statements that demonstrate student skills in expressing what they need to be successful now and, in the future.	Continuous	DV	
H_3: Students with higher levels of self-determination will have greater self-advocacy skills	SD	SelfDetermination	Statements that document students' ability to express their needs, interests, set and initiate goals, and take action to meet goals.	Continuous	IV	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation
	SA	SelfAdvocacy	Statements that demonstrate student skills in expressing what	Continuous	DV	

			they need to be successful now and, in the future.			
H_4: Students who express more of a prior history of witnessing advocacy will have greater self-advocacy skills	WA	WitnessAdvocacy (A), Witness Advocacy(B)	Statements that document students' experiences witnessing past advocacy through parents/guardians, teachers, mentors, social workers, disability staff.	Continuous	IV	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation
	SA	SelfAdvocacy	Statements that demonstrate student skills in expressing what they need to be successful now and, in the future.	Continuous	DV	
H_5: Students who express more positive interactions with disability staff will have greater self-advocacy skills	IDS	IDS	Statements that document students' perceptions of their experience interacting with disability services staff.	Continuous	IV	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation
	SA	SelfAdvocacy	Statements that demonstrate student skills in expressing what they need to be successful now and, in the future.	Continuous	DV	

Ethical Considerations

Participants were presented with an informed consent upon accessing the survey and was required to consent to their participation in the study before beginning the survey. A sample of the consent form is included in the Appendices section of this dissertation (Appendix D). Included in the consent form is information concerning confidentiality and the retention of data, along with the voluntary nature of the survey. The IRB agreed the study posed minimal risk to participants. The benefit to students of participating in this research study may include further understanding of accommodation terminology and processes, in addition to their understanding of self-advocacy skills. According to Sax et al. (2003), web-based questionnaires and surveys have ethical complications. Despite the best effort of the researcher, it is "impossible to guarantee complete anonymity and confidentiality" of data transmitted over the internet (Umbach, 2004, p. 28). To limit risks, no identifying data was requested, collected, or retained for the survey, including participants' names, student identification numbers, contact information, or specific higher education institutions that they attend. Only general descriptive information was collected. The study was submitted to the WCG Institutional Review Board for initial approval, along with the Institutional Review Board or Research Review Committee for each of the six postsecondary institutions included in the study, prior to any data collection. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS

This cross-sectional exploratory study examined factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities. The participants in the study were college students who identified with visible and/or non-apparent disabilities who had been enrolled in at least one course at either a private or public, two-or four-year institution within the United States during the spring semester of 2022. According to Stevenson et al. (2016), students with disabilities who are prepared to self-advocate in the postsecondary settings have improved self-advocacy skills. Therefore, it was important to explore the perceptions of students with disabilities themselves, in attempt to better understand their perspective on what affects their ability to self-advocate. The research question that this exploratory study was designed to answer asked what factors contribute to higher levels of self-advocacy for students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with disabilities are legally entitled to reasonable accommodations in postsecondary educational settings, yet as discussed in the Study Problem chapter, many postsecondary institutions are not prepared to meet their needs. Accommodation policies in postsecondary education require students with disabilities to self-advocate and arrange for their own support services. Given the increasing enrollment yet low completion rates for this population, understanding how these students perceive the factors that affect their self-advocacy skills is important. A more concentrated focus on this population of students can be beneficial to disability and/or accessibility service offices who prepare these students for postsecondary education and life after, which have implications for sustainable employment, earning potential and quality of life. It was the purpose of this quantitative study to examine the factors that affect postsecondary students with disabilities' ability to self-advocate as well as their readiness to self-advocate.

This chapter contains the results of statistical analyses of data received through Qualtrics Survey Software. A total of 143 responses were received from Qualtrics. However, after the removal of blank and incomplete surveys and irrelevant responses (i.e., participants who indicated they did not have a disability and therefore were exited from completing the survey), 103 responses remained for analysis. The researcher used Stata 17 to conduct the quantitative analyses (Statacorp, 2021).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 7.1 presents detailed information related to the ethnicity/race responses of the participants (n=103). It should be noted that the question was a multiple response question, allowing respondents to select more than one answer. Three individuals answered with multiple responses. Individuals were also allowed to select other as their response and to write in an answer; written responses included Caribbean and Human.

Table 7.1

Frequency/Percentage Table for Ethnicity/Race Responses

Response	*n*	*% of responses*
Asian	6	5.50
Black/African American	8	7.34
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin	8	7.34
Middle Eastern/North African	5	4.59
White	77	70.64
Other	2	1.83
Prefer Not to Disclose	3	2.75
Total	109	

Table 7.2 presents detailed information related to identified gender of the participants (n=103), again captured in a multiple response question. Two participants answered with multiple responses. The most frequent response from participants was female, with 66 participants identifying as such.

Table 7.2

Frequency/Percentage Table for Gender Identity Responses

Response	*n*	*% of responses*
Female	66	62.86
Male	31	29.52
Transgender	3	2.86
Gender Queer/Fluid/Agender/Nonconforming	5	4.76
Total	105	

Table 7.3 provides information related to the specific year in college for participants and type of college participants were attending. The largest group of participants were juniors (n=36), although there is a good representation of most available levels. Graduate school students are the least represented at only 6.8 percent of the sample. Additionally, most students who responded attend private four-year colleges or universities (n=73, 55.30%).

Table 7.3

Frequency/Percentage Table for Year in College and Institution Type

Variable	*n*	*% of responses*
Year/level in college		
Freshman (1st year, up to 29 credits)	12	11.65
Sophomore (2nd year, 30-59 credits)	23	22.33
Junior (3rd year, 60-89 credits)	36	34.95
Senior (4th year and beyond, 90 or more credits)	22	21.21
Graduate school/program or higher	7	6.80
Don't know/Not sure	3	3.03
Total	103	
Type of Institution		
Public two-year college/university (i.e. “Community College”)	15	11.36

Public four-year college/university	44	33.33
Private four-year college/university	73	55.30
Total	103	

Finally, information related to categorization of student-identified disability can be found in Table 7.4 below. This information was also captured in a multiple response question. Capturing this information with this type of question is vital, as many students identify with more than one category of disability. In fact, a total of 70 participants identified with multiple disabilities. Participants were again given the opportunity to enter a text response if their preferred choices were not listed. Text responses included auditory processing disorder (described by three participants), ADHD/ADD (described by three participants), autism (described by two participants), depression and anxiety, epilepsy seizure disorder, sensory, gastrointestinal/IBS, and other cognitive disability.

Table 7.4

Frequency/Percentage Table for Identified Ability/Condition/Disability

Response	*n*	*% of responses*
Chronic Medical Condition	22	12.72
Deaf	2	1.16
Hard of Hearing	4	2.31
Learning Disability	59	34.10
Mental Health Condition	45	26.01
Motor Impairment	8	4.62
Physical Impairment	7	4.05
Speech Impairment	5	2.89
Visual/Print Impairment	5	2.89
Other	13	7.51
Not Sure	3	1.73
Total	173	

Creation of Additional Variables

The independent and dependent variables represented in the hypotheses were created from ~~of~~ responses to multiple questions in the instrument. To aid in conceptualizing those variables, several new variables, representing totals, were created to assess multiple instrument questions as scales. The following variables were created.

Self Advocacy

The scale used to assess Self Advocacy skills on the current instrument was a modified version of the PCAST Self Advocacy Scale, as discussed in the Methodology chapter. The original scale was scored as a total, with 60 total points out of 12 close-ended questions. The higher the number, the more effective the participants self-advocacy skills. After assessing for reliability (detailed in the following section), the questions on the modified survey were scored similarly for each participant, with 50 total points out of 10 questions. Values were assigned for responses to generate a score for each participant, identical to scoring on the original PCAST scale: very difficult = 1, difficult = 2, neutral = 3, easy = 4, very easy = 5. A new variable, Self Advocacy, with the total scores for Question 24.1 through Question 24.10, was generated. This new variable was used as the dependent variable in the analyses of all five hypotheses. Summary statistics for this new variable can be found in Table 7.5, at the end of this section.

Identity Total

The concept of identification of disability and its characteristics was represented by several statements on the survey: Question 7 (I requested educational accommodations at my institution), Question 8 (I am receiving/have received educational accommodations related to my disability), Question 9 (I feel confident identifying my disability and its characteristics to the Disability Services Office), Question 10 (I independently self-disclosed my disability with the Disability Services Office) and Question 11 (I am satisfied with the educational accommodations that I am receiving related to my disability). Questions 7, 8 and 9 allowed participants to respond with Yes, No and Not Sure; Questions 10 and 11 allowed participants to respond in a Likert-type scale of five gradations, from Strongly Disagree through Strongly Agree.

To facilitate an overall score related to disability identification, Questions 10 and 11 were assigned scores from 1 through 5, 1 representing Strongly Disagree and 5 representing Strongly Agree. Responses to Questions 7, 8 and 9 were adapted to the same scale, with yes rated as 5, no rated as 1, and not sure treated as a neutral response (neither Agree nor Disagree).

A new variable, Identity Total was generated with the total scores for Questions 7 through 11. This new variable was used as the independent variable in H_1. Summary statistics for Identity Total can be found in Table 7.5, at the end of this section.

Perception of Knowledge of Accommodation Polices, Services and Disability Law

The concept of Perception of Knowledge of Accommodation polices, Services and Disability Law (labeled PKAPSL for brevity) was represented by four statements on the survey: Question 12 (As a result of the information I received from the Disability Services Office Staff at my institution, I have a better understanding of the college's educational accommodation policy), Question 13 (If my request for educational accommodations is denied, I feel competent identifying steps in making an appeal), Question 14 (I can competently list and discuss the institutional accommodations I need to be successful in my studies), and Question 15 (I can negotiate changes to or request additional support services not approved in my initial educational accommodation plan). All questions allowed participants to respond in a Likert-type scale of five gradations and were assigned an equivalent value: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5. The four questions were assessed to determine whether they could be considered a scale measuring PKAPSL. Results of the reliability assessment can be found in the following section, but the questions were deemed reliable to be considered a scale measuring the above concept.

Assigning values as described above allowed a generated score related to the concept of PKAPSL, scored from 5 through 20. A new variable, labeled PKAPSL, was generated with the total score for each respondent. This variable was used as the independent variable in H_2. Summary statistics for the newly created variable can be found in Table 7.5 below.

Self Determination

The scale used to assess self-determination ability on the current instrument was a modified version of the AIR Self Determination Scale, as described in the Methodology chapter. The original scale was scored as a total, with 120 total points out of 24 close-ended questions. A higher score indicates stronger self-determination ability. Results of the reliability assessment can be found in the following section, but the questions were deemed reliable to be considered a scale measuring the above concept. The questions on the modified survey were scored similarly for each participant, with 50 total points out of 10 related questions. Values were assigned for responses to generate a score for each participant, identical to scoring on the original AIR Self Determination scale: never = 1, almost never = 2, sometimes = 3, almost always = 4, always = 5. A new variable, Self Determination, with the total scores for Question 25.1 through Question 25.10, was generated. This new variable was used as the independent variable in H_3. Summary statistics for this new variable can be found in Table 7.5, at the end of this section.

Interactions with Disability Staff

The concept of Interactions with Disability Staff (labeled IDS for brevity) was represented by three statements on the survey: Question 18 (I feel competent in my ability to contact the Disability Services Staff if I needed their assistance to further my educational needs), Question 19 (Disability Services Staff provide me with sufficient information about my accommodations), and Question 20 (I am satisfied with the support services I receive from the Disability Services Staff at my institution). All questions allowed participants to respond in a Likert-type scale of five gradations and were assigned an equivalent value: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5. The three questions were assessed to determine whether they could be considered a scale measuring IDS. Results of the reliability assessment can be found in the following section, but the questions were deemed reliable to be considered a scale measuring the above concept. A new variable, labeled IDS, was generated from the totals of Questions 18, 19 and 20 for each participant, with a minimum score of 3 and a maximum score of 15. This variable was used in the analysis for H_5. Summary statistics for this variable and all generated variables can be found in Table 7.5 at the end of the section.

Witnessing Advocacy

The concept related to witnessing advocacy was measured via two questions. Question 16 (I have attended Individualized Education Plan/IEP meetings with caregivers and teachers) and Question 17 (I have seen adults work with others to support my educational needs), labeled as Witnessing Advocacy(A) and Witnessing Advocacy(B), respectively. Both questions were measured with Likert-type scales and were assigned a value based on response: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5. The questions were initially examined to see whether they could be treated as a single concept; the value for Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .49$. With a value less than .6, it is difficult to conclude that there is an acceptable level of reliability, and previous literature notes the difficulty in using alpha to evaluate scales of two items (Eisinga et al., 2013); therefore, the questions were evaluated individually to understand their relationship with the dependent variable. Summary statistics for both questions can be found in table 7.5 below.

Table 7.5

Descriptive statistics for Independent & Dependent Variables Used in Hypotheses Testing

Variable Name	*n*	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Kurtosis	Skewness
SelfAdvocacy	103	36.9	7.35	37	3.10	-.31
IdentityTotal	103	11.1	1.92	12	4.11	-1.25
PKAPSL (Perceived Knowledge of Accommodation polices, Services and Law)	103	15.0	3.34	15	3.38	-.60
SelfDetermination	103	38.5	6.38	39	3.23	-.56
IDS	103	12.7	2.65	13	5.43	-1.51
WitnessingAdvocacyA	103	3.3	1.50	4	1.62	-3.12
WitnessingAdvocacyB	103	3.8	1.14	4	3.21	-.89

Reliability Analysis

Modification of PCAST Self Advocacy Scale

As previously noted, the original scale consisted of 12 close-ended questions, with a possible total of 60 points. The higher the number, the more effective the students' self-advocacy and self-determination skills. The modified scale included 10 questions, edited for readability and relevance. Questions related to the modified PCAST Self Advocacy scale were assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha = .88$. Based on the value of alpha, the modified scale was considered a reliable measure of self-advocacy. As mentioned in the previous section, a new variable was then created based on this measure of reliability.

Modification of AIR Self Determination Scale

The original AIR Self Determination scale consisted of 24 close-ended questions, with a possible total of 120 points, as mentioned in the previous section. The modified scale included 10 questions, edited for readability and relevance. The 10 questions related to the modified AIR Self Determination scale were assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha = .82$. Based on alpha, the modified scale was considered a reliable measure of self-determination. As mentioned above, a new variable was generated.

Creation of PKAPSL

As discussed in the previous section, PKAPSL was conceptualized through four questions on the created survey. To understand the covariance of the four questions, and whether the questions could be treated as a scale that measures PKAPSL, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess for reliability, $\alpha = .74$. The value of alpha indicated that the four questions as a conceptualized scale could be considered to measure PKAPSL. A variable that captured the total score of all four questions was generated, as indicated in the previous section.

Creation of IDS

IDS was conceptualized through three questions on the survey, as detailed in the previous section. To understand the covariance of the three questions, and whether the questions could be treated as a scale that measures IDS, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess for reliability, $\alpha = .89$. The value of alpha indicates that the three questions as a conceptualized scale could be considered to measure PKAPSL. A variable that captured the total score of all three questions was created, as indicated in the previous section.

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the research findings, there were several conclusions that could be drawn to answer the research question which asked what factors contribute to higher levels of self-advocacy for students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

H_1: Students who express greater ability to identify their disability and its characteristics will have greater self-advocacy skills.

To test this hypothesis, Identity Total was used as an independent variable to represent the concept of identification of disability and related characteristics, as mentioned in the previous two sections. In this hypothesis and all that follow, Self Advocacy was used as a dependent variable, as the total score from the modified PCAST Self Advocacy scale.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between Identity Total as an independent variable and Self Advocacy as a dependent variable. Spearman's correlation is used as a non-parametric measure of correlation when values for the variable are not normally distributed, as is in the above case for both the independent and dependent variables, as indicated in Table 7.5 (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011). The coefficient, reported as Rho(þ), ranges from -1 to 1, with .01-.19 considered no relationship, .20-.29 considered a weak relationship, .30-.39 considered a moderate relationship, .40-.69 considered a strong relationship, and .70 and greater considered a very strong relationship (Leclezio, Jansen, & De Vries, 2014). Spearman's rank-order correlation indicates a significant strong positive correlation between both variables, þ(103) = [.41], $p < .001$. Based on the results of the correlation the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted: students who express greater ability to identify their disability and its characteristics appear to have higher self-advocacy skill scores.

H_2: Students who express greater knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services and disability law will have greater self-advocacy skills.

As previously indicated, PKAPSL (Perceived Knowledge of Accommodation polices, Services and Disability Law) was utilized as an independent variable to represent the concept of knowledge of institutional policies, services, and Disability law. Spearman’s rank-order correlation was conducted to evaluate the relationship between PKAPSL and Self Advocacy, due to the absence of normal distribution for both variables. A significant strong positive correlation was observed between PKAPSL and Self Advocacy, þ(103) = [.52], $p < 001$. Based on these results, the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted: students who express greater knowledge of institution accommodation policies, services and disability law appear to have greater self-advocacy skill scores.

H_3: Students with higher levels of self-determination will have greater self-advocacy skills.

To test this hypothesis, the created variable of Self Determination was used as a representation of the concept of self-determination, measured by the modified version of the AIR Self Determination Scale. Self Advocacy continues to be used as the dependent variable. As both variables are not normally distributed, Spearman’s rank-order correlation was utilized to analyze the relationship between the two variables. Utilizing this test for significance, a significant strong positive correlation was observed, þ(103) = [.67], $p < 001$. Based on these results, the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted: students with higher self-determination levels appear to have a greater self-advocacy skills score.

H_4: Students who express more of a prior history of witnessing advocacy will have greater self-advocacy skills.

The concept of witnessing advocacy was measured via two questions. Question 16 (Witnessing AdvocacyA) asked respondents about participation with adults during IEP meetings; Question 17 (Witnessing AdvocacyB) asked participants about witnessing adults advocating on their behalf. Information for these questions can be found in Table 7.5 above. Both variables are not normally distributed, therefore Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to evaluate both relationships with the dependent variable, Self Advocacy.

Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between attending IEP meetings with adults (Witnessing AdvocacyA) as an independent variable and Self Advocacy. It was observed that there is no significant relationship between the two variables, þ(103) = [-.018], p=.85. In this case, the null hypothesis has to be accepted. As it relates to looking at this one concept in relation to self-advocacy, there was no significant relationship: students who attended IEP meetings in secondary education with parents/caregivers and teachers did not appear to develop self-advocacy skills as a result of attending these meetings.

Spearman's rank-order correlation was also used to evaluate the relationship between seeing parents/caregivers and teachers (Witnessing AdvocacyB) and Self Advocacy. In this case, there is a significant positive relationship of strong strength, although it is on the border of moderate and strong, þ(103) = [.40], p<.001. In this case, the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted in connection to Witnessing AdvocacyB. In relation to this particular concept, there is a positive relationship between seeing adults advocate on your behalf and development of self-advocacy skills.

Based on the information above, it is helpful to consider whether the concept of witnessing advocacy can be evaluated through seeing parents/caregivers and teachers advocate alone. If seeing parents/caregivers and teachers advocate is an adequate measure of witnessing advocacy, then the null hypothesis can be rejected, and it can be assumed that students with a prior history of witnessing advocacy have greater self-advocacy skills scores. If attending IEP meetings with adults in secondary education is necessary to fully understand the concept of witnessing advocacy, then the null hypothesis has to be accepted.

H_5: Students who express more positive interactions with disability staff will have greater self-advocacy skills.

The concept of Interactions with Disability Staff is represented as IDS, as mentioned in the previous two sections. Therefore, IDS was used as the independent variable to test this hypothesis, with Self Advocacy as the dependent variable. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used as a nonparametric measure to assess this relationship, and a significant positive relationship of moderate strength was found, þ (103) = [.39], $p < .001$. Based on this test of significance, the null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted: students with more positive interactions with disability services staff have greater self-advocacy skills score.

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

While statisticians widely use Pearson correlation coefficient to measure the strength of the linear relationship between normally distributed variables, however when variables are not normally distributed or the relationship between the variables is not linear, it may be more appropriate to use the Spearman correlation coefficient method (Schober et al., 2018). Therefore, Spearman's correlation coefficient was the chosen method of analysis for this study because the variables were not normally distributed. Spearman's correlation coefficient "is not a measure of the linear relationship between two variables, in fact, it assesses how well the distribution of the data can describe the relationship between two variables, without making any assumptions about the frequency distribution of the variables (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011 p. 88)." Contrasting Pearson's correlation coefficient, Spearman's correlation coefficient "does not require the assumption that the relationship between the variables is linear, or that the variables be measured on interval scales; instead, variables can be measured ordinally" (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011 p. 88; Schober et al., 2018).

Conclusion

It should be noted that with the exception of one concept of the two concepts related to witnessing advocacy in this study, the proposed hypotheses were statistically significant. Use of Spearman's correlation coefficient not only strengthened the data but have also increased confidence that true positive correlations were found. The following chapter will discuss these results by comparing them with previous findings within the literature, considering the theoretical framework in understanding the significance of these findings, and propose implications for these findings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

Students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education at increasing rates yet continue to face challenges understanding the range of services offered, accessing accommodations and support services, and completing their postsecondary degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; West et al., 1993). A possible explanation for this may be due to a lack of self-identification and advocacy upon enrolling in postsecondary education, and postsecondary institutions being ill-equipped to meet their needs (Government Accountability Office, 2009; Newman et al., 2016). The ability to self-advocate in postsecondary education has proven to be necessary for students with disabilities to access needed services and complete their postsecondary education (Test et al., 2005). This final chapter connects findings from the study with factors that affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disability, underpinning concepts derived from theory and existing literature. Implications and contributions will also be discussed, as will opportunities for future research.

Research on the experiences of postsecondary students with disabilities and academic success, particularly the factors that affect their self-advocacy skills, is limited. While much of the current literature focuses on students with learning disabilities and their ability to self-advocate, the purpose of this cross-sectional quantitative study was to examine the perceptions of postsecondary students with both visible and/or non-apparent disabilities of the factors that affect their self-advocacy skills and implications for accessing accommodations. The research question for this study asked what factors contribute to higher levels of self-advocacy for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The findings suggest that the following five factors affect the self-advocacy skills of postsecondary students with disabilities: ability to identify disability and its characteristics; knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, services, and disability law; self-determination; prior history of witnessing advocacy; and positive interactions with disability staff. These findings are a beginning step toward better understanding how these critical factors influence student behaviors in postsecondary education.

Following an analysis of the data, three significant concepts surrounding self-determination were highlighted within the findings: the link between self-determination and self-advocacy, importance of acquiring self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and last importance of including students with disabilities in planning for their lives. Each concept will be discussed in more detail below.

Knowledge of Self and Self-Advocacy

Research shows students with disabilities enter postsecondary settings lacking an understanding of how their disability affects their academic performance (Getzel et al., 2005). As a result, students with disabilities may not be prepared to advocate for the accommodations and supports needed to be successful in postsecondary education. The first hypothesis of the study was intended to confirm Test et al's (2005) conceptual framework that students with disabilities who have knowledge of self, are more equipped to self-advocate for what they need and was significant. In fact, the findings of this study revealed there is a correlation between the following concepts and higher self-advocacy skills: participants' who had knowledge of their disability and its characteristics; independently self-identified to disability services staff at their respective institutions; requested educational accommodations related to their disability had higher self-advocacy skills.

The Intersection of Institutional Accommodation Policies, Services and Disability Law

Additionally, the study's hypothesis also intended to confirm other concepts in Test et al's (2005) conceptual framework of self-advocacy, which proposed that students with disabilities who have knowledge of their rights and can communicate their needs and wants to others, are more equipped to self-advocate and was significant. The findings of this study suggest this is true. Participants who had knowledge of institutional accommodation policies, support services and disability law had higher self-advocacy skills. Participants who had knowledge of their rights to request an adjustment to their educational accommodations had higher self-advocacy skills. Last, participants who had knowledge of the process for appealing accommodations that were denied had higher self-advocacy skills. It should be noted that requesting an adjustment to accommodations requires students to independently assess the effectiveness of accommodations and support services, and self-advocate for additional services, if needed. For example, a student who is visually impaired and receives an accommodation to take notes in Braille may feel this accommodation is inadequate. As a result, the student may advocate for an adjustment to include the use of a tape recorder. Likewise, a student who requested accommodations that were denied would self-advocate by submitting an appeal. This study's findings highlight students' ability to self-advocate in scenarios like these.

Understanding Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

One of the recurring themes within the findings of this study involved the relationship between self-determination and self-advocacy. Wolman et al. (1994) noted that self-determined individuals are able to identify their needs and interests, set goals and exert their self-advocacy skills at home and at school with faculty and disability services staff. The study's hypothesis that students with disabilities with higher self-determination levels will have greater self-advocacy skills and was significant. Previous studies that focused on sub-groups of students with disabilities, such as those with learning disabilities, found the relationship between self-determination and self-advocacy to be important. This study examined these findings for a more diverse group of disabilities. The findings of this study demonstrated there is a correlation between being empowered to independently set and achieve goals and make decisions for ones' life and increased self-determined behaviors. The following section will explore these findings in more depth, including the link between self-determination and self-advocacy, importance of acquiring self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and importance promoting inclusion of youth in planning for their lives.

The Link between Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

Could you enjoy a job that you did not choose, but one that the system chose based upon what society felt was best for you? Or eat from a menu that was prepared without consideration of your likes and dislikes? For many years, individuals with disabilities experienced this limited autonomy, and to some degree, this is still true today (Lane et al., 2019). History has shown the power of self-determined behavior and advocacy which led individuals with disabilities to fight for equal rights and access, fair treatment, and control over their lives; instead of having others make decisions for and about their lives, without their input. Since the reauthorization of disability laws in the 1990s, self-determination and self-advocacy has been at the forefront of best practice in providing services for students with disabilities (Zubal-Ruggieri & Smith, 2003). The findings of this study demonstrated that students with disabilities who have autonomy over their lives and independently make decisions have higher levels of self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

Importance of Acquiring Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills

Although strides have been made, literature continues to document poor educational and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. As mentioned above, Martin et al. (1993) noted that many students with disabilities leave secondary education with a lack of understanding of their needs, interests, or plan for their future. A possible explanation may be due to students with disabilities not being self-determined (Wehmeyer, 1992). Wehmeyer (1992, p. 55) posed the following questions for educational institutions to consider: “How can students with disabilities learn to plan for their future when they are not included in the planning process?” Likewise, “How can self-determination be considered important when input from students with disabilities are not factored into the planning?” This notion was affirmed by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states children have the right to express, be heard and to have their views taken into consideration when planning for their lives (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

The development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills is a process that begins in childhood at home and continues throughout adulthood (Cobb et al., 2009; Shogren et al., 2015). In fact, Dunn and Thrall (2012) noted that self-determination and self-advocacy skills can be taught as early as age five. While these skills are important for all individuals to learn, for students with disabilities they are critically important. It is often assumed that this population cannot think for themselves, leading well-intentioned parents/caregivers feeling the need to “protect” students with disabilities by making decisions for them and not with them. The findings of this study confirmed that there is a correlation between opportunities for students with disabilities to take agency over their own lives and increased self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

Since self-determination skills are most effectively learned and developed by practicing them, students with disabilities should be given opportunities to use their decision-making skills (Doll et al., 1996). The importance of fostering these opportunities both in and out of school can help students effectively deal with everyday life situations.

Promoting Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Planning for their Lives

This final concept further explores the link between self-determination and self-advocacy, and the importance of including students with disabilities in planning for their lives. Within education, inclusion has been normatively accepted as best practice yet students with disabilities are often excluded from the very conversations that determine their lives and futures. Conversations about their disability, needs, educational plans, types of accommodations, and even what schools they attend down to the jobs they can obtain, are conversations that often happen around and not with them. Powers et al. (2005), noted that decision-making is often made with little buy-in from students with disabilities, themselves. This, and many other concepts were further explored by Twenge (2017). However, for the purposes of this study, the concept of obtaining buy-in from teens as it relates to decision-making about their lives will be discussed.

In her quest to understand "iGen" teens, Twenge (2017), sought to understand why there was a decline in the percentage of teens working. Through an exploration of one teen's lived experience, the teen expressed that her parents simply did not want her to work in high school. This student believed her parents lack in including her in the decision-making about her life in high school impacted her ability to find a job while in college because she "lacked experience" (Twenge, 2017). In fact, when the student finally landed a job, she expressed that she was fired due to "lack of professional conduct," skills she would have likely learned in earlier years if her parents had allowed her to work (Twenge, 2017). This example highlights the importance of getting young adults' buy-in on decisions made about their lives. It also underscores the importance of teaching teens higher level skills, such as self-determination and self-advocacy, which have implications for their quality of life (Twenge, 2017).

While the teen referenced above did not identify as having a disability, this lesson of including young adults in the planning for their lives is a valuable one to consider. The findings of this study underscore this concept and sheds light that students with disabilities become more self-determined not only by gaining skills in areas like goal setting or decision making but also by family members and educators fostering opportunities for them to utilize these skills, which have implications for their well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Leeson, 2007; Prilleltensky et al., 2001).

Much of the literature points to the need for students with disabilities to have self-determination and self-advocacy skills to persist in college (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Test et al., 2005); therefore, as the main stakeholder in education, there is value in including young people in aspects of planning and hearing their unique perspectives on the matters that affect their lives (Cobb et al., 2009; Halpern, 1994; Wehmeyer, 2002). Although the findings of this study confirm a clear link between self-determination and self-advocacy, we do not know whether it is sufficient to teach self-determination without self-advocacy, or whether individuals acquire one skill when the other skill naturally develops.

The Impact of Witnessing Advocacy for Students with Disabilities

The phrase "you don't know what you don't know" applies particularly well to the fourth hypothesis which projected students that have a prior history of witnessing advocacy would have greater self-advocacy skills. The concept was represented in two ways. The research examined whether attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings with caregivers and teachers increased the self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities and whether witnessing adults work with others to support their educational needs increased their self-advocacy skills. The findings of this study suggest that while one concept may be related to self-advocacy, the other may not be.

Attending Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings with caregivers and teachers was not significantly related to increased self-advocacy skills. A possible explanation may be due to the nature of IEP meetings, specifically student participation in these meetings. Although secondary schools are mandated to include students and parents in these meetings, the level to which students participate is not always clear. In a study examining 399 IEPs across two school districts in the Western half of the United States, Powers et al. (2005), noted that while IEPs were signed by 75 percent of students there was low participation from students creating their own goals. Likewise, Williams & O'Leary (2000) found that one-third of schools did not invite students to IEP meetings. Attempts have been made to examine student engagement in IEP meetings with varied results, from very little encouragement to engage to student-led IEP meetings (Allen et al., 2001; Martin et al., 2004). Engagement is also defined differently throughout research but if it is considered active participation in the IEP meeting, it may be possible that a student could not participate but actively observed others participate and witnessed this advocacy. However, without engagement it is possible that the lesson of advocacy may not be received.

Further examination of whether students are actually attending IEP meetings and aware of its process is critical in understanding the relationship between attending IEP meetings and the development of self-advocacy skills. Additionally, understanding student perceptions of their experiences attending IEP meetings with their parents/caregivers should also be explored as this may have implications for their engagement and the development of self-advocacy skills.

The second concept of witnessing adults work with others to support educational needs appears to be positively correlated with increased self-advocacy skills. An explanation for this relationship may be found in the research of Kimball et al. (2016), which directly connected learned advocacy through role modeling in early childhood. The microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory framework is where the child has direct interactions with family and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), but can also be where the child has most of the direct experience that shapes their development. It has been researched and well-established that the microsystem includes interactions within their school system (Humphrey et al., 2013; Kamenopoulou, 2016; Patrikakou, 1996) and the microsystem in this study has been applied to students in a college setting (Small et al., 2013). Milsom (2007, p. 273), in discussing the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary settings, noted, "in theory, transitioning into an environment (microsystem) that requires familiar skill sets should be less challenging than transitioning into an environment in which new and possibly more advanced skill sets are needed." In this situation, witnessing advocacy at home or earlier years in school provides the student with the ability to utilize familiar skills learned through observation of adults within their microsystems role modeling skills related to advocacy.

It would be helpful to expand on this concept in future research, concentrating on creating an operational definition for witnessing advocacy. Understanding the function of both the microsystem influence on the student as well as the interaction of the microsystems at the mesosystem level may indicate areas that can be strengthened to contribute to overall self-advocacy skills. It would also be beneficial to consider the sociopolitical model of disability in understanding witnessing advocacy, learning more information about how the student observed others defining the abstract concepts of ability and disability through their actions, words, and interactions in IEP meetings.

The Interaction of Students with Disabilities Office Staff

The final hypothesis noted a relationship between interactions with disability office staff and its impact on self-advocacy and was significant. The findings of this study, which identify a positive relationship between the two variables, complement the findings of Herbert et al. (2020) indicating that students generally rate their interactions with the disability services office as positive. Because of the current status of the law requiring students to advocate with this office, positive interactions may be vital to their success. As a correlation, the significant relationship can be examined in two ways. The findings seem to indicate that increased self-advocacy skills can lead to stronger, productive, more positive interactions with disability office staff; however, it may also be possible that positive interactions with disability office staff may lead to increased self-advocacy skills, possibly due to the student feeling encouraged and empowered in the interaction.

As in the previous theme, and as discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter, the interaction is indicative of the strength of the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and the inclusion of the college setting within that system. The direct interaction with students allows for a strong impact on the college experience, including their academic success.

The Sociopolitical Model of Disability and Response Bias

As discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter, the sociopolitical model considers disability as a social construct. Scotch (2000, p. 214) noted that disability “is not viewed as a physical or mental impairment, rather as a social construction shaped by environmental factors" Within this understanding, the significance of the positive interactions with disability staff for students may speak to an interaction free from stigma, in which the student feels able to use their understanding of their disability to ask for the appropriate services. Further research may highlight whether students identify stigma from disability staff as well as from other members of the postsecondary community. It would also be useful to understand the perceptions of disability service staff themselves in these interactions, a proposition which will be discussed further below.

Other areas for further exploration of this study's findings are related to understanding the context of the specific interactions with staff. The precise ways in which students interact with the disability service office (whether in-person, online or by phone) the types of concerns brought to the staff, and the number of interactions to resolve a concern may allow more nuance to conceptualizing these interactions while highlighting the exact advocacy skills being utilized. Kim (2022) explored the attitudes and knowledge of college disability support staff towards students with autism. A survey of 153 support staff found that quality of contact with the student was a significant factor in positive attitudes towards students with autism. West et al., (1993, p. 465) examined students' perceptions on accessibility to disability services and noted "all too frequently, institutions gave priority to instructors [class rules] over the legal rights of the students."

This highlights the importance of the interaction but may put the burden of the positive interaction back on the student with disability, a student who may be lacking in self-advocacy skills. To that end, training for disability staff that stresses both productive interactions and encouraging, empowering interactions may be warranted.

Study Limitations

Research studies have limitations inherent in their design. This study had several significant limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small and drawn from only six postsecondary institutions in the United States. A larger and more geographically diverse sample that spans a region of the country or even nationally is recommended. Ideally the experiences of students with disabilities, both apparent and/or non-apparent, at various postsecondary education institutions should be examined and compared.

Another potential limitation is that the study only included those who are known to disability offices as identifying as a student with a disability. Students with disabilities who were not known to the disability office were not included. This makes it challenging to consider the perspectives of students who lack the self-advocacy skills even to self-identify to campus disability service offices. Understanding students' perceptions is important for two reasons; it can help campus disability service offices strengthen practices, and design strategies to reach students with disabilities who may not have self-identified for fear of being stigmatized; or who may not have developed self-advocacy skills. It can also help in the development of best practices in making policies more accessible to students based on their level of understanding.

The accessibility of online surveys should be further examined; while this researcher had taken all measures to foster accessibility, two of the survey questions were initially flagged in the Qualtrics database for meeting Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act criteria on accessibility, but not the WCAG 2.0 AA criteria, and were corrected. This study recruited postsecondary students with disabilities who received accommodations and support services at six institutions within the United Sates. Although majority of the institutions had campus disability services and/or accessibility offices that students engaged with to initiate and arranged accommodations and support services, one institution did not have a disability service and/or accessibility office. Rather, students enrolled at that institution received accommodations and support services, with no requirement to self-advocate or initiate a request to access services.

Given the differences between institutions and how accommodations and support services are implemented, it may be helpful to explore these processes before designing survey questions to ensure its applicability to participants' completing the survey. For instance, while all participants in this study were able to successfully complete the survey, some of the questions that referenced disability services and/or accessibility offices did not apply to settings where some participants were enrolled. Considering this important factor when designing survey questions can reduce response bias and skewness in data.

Finally, the presence of social desirability response bias cannot be discounted in the data collection. The study's survey was shared with participants by support, disability and/or accessibility services staff at their respective institutions. While participants were informed that their survey was anonymous and their responses could not be traced back to them, social desirability may still have affected responses. In their respective qualitative studies, Abreu et al. (2017) and Kim and Crowley (2021) noted that students found disability office staff lacking in their positive interactions and overall support to students. However, findings of this study instead revealed students had positive interactions and experiences with support, disability and/or accessibility services staff at their respective institutions.

A possible explanation for the above theme may be due to students' social desirability in responding to a survey that was distributed by staff who facilitated their support services (Hunt, 2006). In fact, one participant requested an opportunity to speak with the researcher in-person or via Zoom to share their experiences in more detail. Due to the nature of the chosen research design, the request was not honored. Additional research may involve conducting a quantitative survey that allow for random qualitative follow up with a select number of student participants' and perhaps distribution of the survey from the researcher and not the disability office staff.

Implications and Areas for Further Research

The findings of this study revealed that majority of the participants exhibited high levels of self-advocacy, though some participants reported they lacked knowledge of their disability and its characteristics and understanding the range of services and policies governing their support services, which contributed to lower self-advocacy skills. Overall, the findings of this study demonstrated that participants were able to properly acquire accommodations and support services and monitor its effectiveness. It should be noted that each institution who participated in this study varied in how they implemented disability services, and the types of documentation students must provide to initiate and access services. The findings of this study also demonstrated that there are challenges that make the process of self-advocacy difficult. Deficits include students with disabilities not fully understanding the range of services and accommodations available to them, and institutional accommodation policies.

Recommendations for Social Work

Social Work Education

Disability impacts millions of adults and students in the United States. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) estimates that nearly 26 percent of adults in the United States have some type of disability. It should be noted that social work faculty may be among these large numbers. In a 2019-2020 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, 7.3 million students with disabilities aged 3-21 received special education services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Likewise, as mentioned earlier in the text, 19 percent of undergraduate students self-identified as having a disability, and 11 percent of postbaccalaureate students reported having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). It should be noted that social work students may be among these large numbers. While these are known percentages of students with disabilities, the causes for the gap in their educational outcomes remain unknown. The findings of this study demonstrated there is a need for the voices of students with disabilities to be heard to help with better understanding their perceptions of the factors that impact their success.

History has shown that individuals with disabilities were often excluded from decision-making, yet they live with the outcomes of decisions made by others whether positive or negative. The strength of the social work profession lies in its commitment to promote its values, dignity and worth of the person, self-determination, and advocacy, which challenge oppressive practices and policies reinforcing oppression and marginalization.

As the needs of students with disabilities and policies continually change, social work education can be viewed in the context of opportunities for lifelong learning. Opportunities for lifelong learning enables social workers to refresh their knowledge and skills to continually provide relevant and effective services, and advocacy for marginalized populations (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Additionally, opportunities for the voices of faculty with disabilities to be heard, can shed light on how stigma prevents some from being open about their conditions.

Social Work Practice

The aforementioned challenges highlight the need for interventions to address the educational gaps and outcomes for postsecondary students with disabilities. From a practice lens, a possible intervention could be to expand the role of school social workers to postsecondary education. Although research on social workers contributions to students' educational outcomes is limited, and the role of school social worker does not traditionally exist in postsecondary education, social workers interact with college-aged students in a variety of ways. This knowledge can help social workers in a variety of practice settings to support their clients. Alvarez et al's (2013) findings may offer an additional perspective on why this designated role may be a step towards helping to improve the educational outcomes for postsecondary students with disabilities. In their study examining data from the IES, National Center for Education Statistics from 100 largest school districts in the United States during the 2008-2009 academic year, Alvarez et al., (2013) found districts that employed school social workers positively influenced the number of students who completed high school. Although these findings speak to secondary settings, they may be a starting point for considering similar strategies and efforts for postsecondary settings.

Social workers are trained to work with varying populations and utilizes multilevel systems approach to practice and facilitate interventions. Expanding social work education content across Master of Social Work and doctoral social work curricula to include disability laws and postsecondary accommodations and support services, can further support social workers multilevel practice approaches within postsecondary settings.

Social Policy

Despite the passing of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Amendment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which mandate postsecondary institutions to provide services to students with disabilities, many students with disabilities face challenges accessing accommodations and support services and completing their degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). A possible explanation for this may be due to the fact that institutions are not fully equipped to meet their needs (Government Accountability Office, 2009). In general, policies governing support services for postsecondary students with disabilities have not been on political agendas since the 1990s (Scotch, 2000). This may speak to the immediate need for revisions in disability policy both at the institutional and governmental levels.

Section 504 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 apply to both secondary and postsecondary settings. Although there are differences in how secondary and postsecondary institutions implement accommodations and support services it is critical that assessment of these differences be examined to ensure differences are not perpetuating gaps in educational outcomes. For instance, Section 504 requires secondary schools to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities. Secondary schools, themselves, must identify students' and their needs and arrange services. However, postsecondary schools are not required to provide FAPE or identify students who may need services. Rather, postsecondary schools are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments, "if" the student self-identifies as having a disability, initiate the request to receive accommodations, and in most cases, provide appropriate documentation proving the need for said accommodations (Department of Education, 2011).

The need for students with disabilities to "prove" their need for accommodations and support services that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, says they are already eligible for, may be contributing to the aforementioned postsecondary challenges (Scotch, 2000). Possible changes to these policies may include removal of the sole responsibility for postsecondary students with disabilities to self-identity and initiative a request to receive services. In other words, as students move from secondary to postsecondary education the process for how accommodations are implemented should not change. Students should receive uninterrupted support services without having to “ask” for it. Rather than placing the sole responsibility on students, postsecondary institutions should be required to identify students and provide services, based on their needs.

Additionally, postsecondary students with disabilities must submit appropriate documentation in order to receive approval of accommodations, which is often an added expense for students and their families. Possible changes to this policy may include requiring postsecondary institutions to provide psychoeducation evaluations to students, at no cost. Moreover, although the traditional school social worker certification is limited to K-12 settings, policy developing and including specific social work leadership roles in postsecondary education may bridge the access gap and address some of the aforementioned challenges (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). Social workers are multilevel practitioners, who are equipped to assess and create psychoeducational plans to support students’ success.

Finally, social workers pursuing campus policy and climate change can help postsecondary administration dismantle hidden oppressive practices and build a system of continuity of care promoting social justice, inclusivity, accessibility, and equity for all students.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are firsthand accounts from postsecondary students with disabilities on the factors that affect their self-advocacy skills. Findings of this study show there is a positive correlation between the following factors and increased self-advocacy skills: knowledge of disability and its characteristics, knowledge of institutional accommodations, support services and law, self-determination, witnessing adults advocate on your behalf and positive interactions with disability office staff. The findings of this study serve as an impetus toward making the effort to foster continued opportunities for students with disabilities to acquire and maintain these skills. There is a clear indication social work educators perceive a role for the promotion of advocacy, and future research can include a practical investigation of how teaching these critical skills is being implemented.

While there was confirmed correlations among all hypotheses, the concept related to attending IEP meetings with adults and the development of self-advocacy skills was not significant and should be further explored. Future research can examine the quality of IEP meetings, and whether students had positive or negative experiences. Exploring these factors may have implications for students with disabilities ability to self-advocate.

Considering the aforementioned implications and limitations, this study seeks to contribute to the body of literature to support raising awareness on factors that impact students with disabilities ability to self-advocate in postsecondary education. The findings from this study can add to the body of literature to support the necessity of the office of disability services to increase program planning and evaluation to further promote equity, use of access both educationally and applied for students with disabilities themselves, to be educated around institutional accommodation polices, support services, and disability law. Additionally, future studies may consider exploring best practices of social workers in collaborating with the office of disability services in implementing accommodations, self-determination, and self-advocacy training (Charlton, 1998). Research shows there is a clear link between self-determination and self-advocacy, and while the findings of this study revealed that participants had increased self-advocacy skills, this does not account for other moderating factors, such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, etc., which should be further explored.

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Appendices

Appendix A: CITI Ethics Training Completion Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 29-Jul-2021
Expiration Date 29-Jul-2023
Record ID 43724982

This is to certify that:

Latoya Attis

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Research
(Curriculum Group)
Group 2. SOCIAL / HUMANISTIC / BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH
(Course Learner Group)
2 - Refresher Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

WCG IRB

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

20217123
#32993710.0
IRB Approved at the
Protocol Level
Jan 17, 2022

Appendix B: Recruitment Participation Request for Campus Disability Services Staff (Sent via email)

Yeshiva University
WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Dear Director:

As a doctoral student at Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, I am seeking to understand the lived experiences of college students navigating their studies with a documented disability at your institution. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that affect self-advocacy skills of students with identified disabilities in college.

I would appreciate it if you would send the enclosed email and survey link to all students who have registered with your office and are currently utilizing accommodations in support of their academic success. The Institutional Review Board commissioned by Yeshiva University has given permission to conduct the research in this study. An informed consent is attached at the beginning of the survey which explains the student participant's rights and an explanation of the study. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

There are no identifiers on the survey and the participant's identity is anonymous.

Please see the email and survey link below to share with the students who have registered with your office and are receiving accommodations and support services. I appreciate your participation and assistance.

Sincerely,
Latoya Attis, M.S. MFT, M.Ed

Appendix C: Follow-Up Recruitment (Email to Campus Disability Services Staff)

Subject: Self-Advocacy Survey - We care for your students experiences.

Dear [First Name],

We recently sent you an invite to our [Survey_Link] to be shared with students who have registered with your office and are receiving accommodations and support services to share their experiences.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Student feedback matters to us, and your assistance with resending the link to your registered students will help with the researchers data collection.

If you have questions at any time about the study or its procedures, you may contact the student researcher, Latoya Attis or the research chair, Dr. Shannon Lane at the contact information below.
Thank you,
Latoya Attis, M.S. MFT, M.Ed

Shannon Lane, PhD

Appendix D: Introductory Letter to Student Participants (Distributed via Email by Campus Disability Services Staff)

Yeshiva University
WURZWEILER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Dear Student:

My name is Latoya Attis. As a doctoral student at Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, I am conducting a study to examine self-advocacy skills of students with identified disabilities in college. I am asking you to take a few minutes to complete the survey.

The survey will first ask you to provide background information about yourself, but you will not give your name. The rest of the survey questions will relate to your experiences as a college student navigating your studies with a documented disability.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Aggregated results of this study will be published with no identification of individual respondents. Your participation is completely **voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and your individual responses to the survey cannot be traced to you.** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts expected with these procedures. **Additionally, your responses to the survey will not impact the services you receive at your institution in any way.** The data collected will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Access to general survey responses will be limited to the research advisor and/or public officials presenting legal authority for such access. You can discontinue participating in the study at any time without fear of any penalty. However, since individual responses are anonymous, your completed data cannot be withdrawn from the study after it has been collected.

The ethics of this research project were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board commissioned by Yeshiva University. If you believe there has been any infringement of your rights as a research participant, you should contact the IRB at clientservices@wcgirb.com or 855-818-2289.

To qualify, participants will be:

- pursuing a 2 or 4-year degree
- actively enrolled in one or more classes
- registered with the accessibility/disability service office
- receiving educational accommodations from your institution towards supporting your academic success

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the student researcher, Latoya Attis, or the research chair, Dr. Shannon Lane, at the contact information below. Yeshiva University does not have any information regarding your identity, so you do not need to identify yourself.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Latoya Attis, M.S. MFT, M.Ed

Shannon Lane, PhD

Sincerely,
Latoya Attis, M.S. MFT, M.Ed

○ Yes, I consent

○ No, I do not consent

At this point, your continued completion of the survey tool will reflect your consent to participate in this research project. To participate please click on the enclosed link.

Appendix E: Survey Questions

For the following questions, select the answer that BEST describes you.

1. **Race/Ethnicity:** Which of the following categories best describe you? (Choose all with which you identify)
   - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Black or African American
   - ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
   - ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
   - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other racial, ethnic, or other identity: ______________
   - ☐ I prefer not to disclose

2. **Gender Identity: Which of the following categories best represents your gender identity?** (Select all that apply)
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Trans
   - ☐ Genderqueer / Genderfluid / Agender / Gender nonconforming
   - ☐ Another Identity: _______________

3. **Level: What is your year/level in college?**
   - ☐ Freshman (1st year, up to 29 credits)
   - ☐ Sophomore (2nd year, 30-59 credits)
   - ☐ Junior (3rd year, 60-89 credits)
   - ☐ Senior (4th year and beyond, 90 or more credits)
   - ☐ Graduate school/program or higher
   - ☐ Don't Know

4. **Select the type of institution you are attending.**
   - ☐ Public two-year college/university (i.e. "Community College")
   - ☐ Private two-year college/university (i.e. "Community College")
   - ☐ Public four-year college/university
   - ☐ Private four-year college/university

5. **Ability/Condition/Disability: Mark all conditions that apply to you:**
   - ☐ Chronic Medical Condition
   - ☐ Deaf
   - ☐ Hard of hearing
   - ☐ Learning Disability
   - ☐ Mental Health Condition

☐ Motor / Mobility Impairment
☐ Physical Impairment
☐ Speech Impairment
☐ Visual and/or Print Impairment
☐ Other Impairment / Disabling Condition: _____________
☐ Not Sure
☐ None

For the following questions, select the answer that BEST represents your level of agreement with the statement:

6. I requested educational accommodations related to my disability at my institution.
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

7. I am receiving (or have received) educational accommodations related to my disability at my institution.
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

8. I feel confident identifying my disability and/or explaining its characteristics to the Disability Services Staff at my institution.
☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

9. I independently self-disclosed my disability with the Disability Services Office at my institution.
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not Sure

10. I am satisfied with the educational accommodations that I am receiving related to my disability at my institution.
☐ Strongly Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

11. **As a result of the information I received from the Disability Services Office Staff at my institution, I have a better understanding of the college's educational accommodation policy.**
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Strongly Agree

12. **If my request for educational accommodations is denied, I feel competent identifying steps in making an appeal.**
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Strongly Agree

13. **I can competently list and discuss the institutional accommodations I need to be successful in my studies.**
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Strongly Agree

14. **I can negotiate changes to or request additional support services not approved in my initial educational accommodation plan.**
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Strongly Agree

15. **In my educational history before college, I have attended IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings with my parent/caregivers and teachers related to my previous educational accommodations.**
    - ☐ Strongly Disagree
    - ☐ Disagree
    - ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
    - ☐ Agree
    - ☐ Strongly Agree

16. I have seen adults work with others to support my educational needs.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

17. I feel competent in my ability to contact the Disability Services Staff if I needed their assistance to further my educational needs.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

18. Disability Services Staff provide me with sufficient information about my accommodations.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

19. I am satisfied with the support services I receive from the Disability Services Staff at my institution.
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Self-Advocacy Scale

Choose the answer that BEST describes your ability to perform each of the following actions or activities:

1. **Explain the concept of “Self-Advocacy”.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

2. **Talk to disability services staff about college and career planning.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

3. **Ask for specific help from faculty.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

4. **Express when you are frustrated**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

5. **Share information when being evaluated or assessed for your condition/impairment/disability.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

6. **Understand the results of the evaluation/assessment of your condition/impairment/disability.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

7. **Tell others your educational goals.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

8. **Explain to others how to best support your educational goals.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

9. **Contact and talk to those who can help you with your goals after graduation.**
   Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

10. **Lead part of a meeting regarding your educational goals and/or accommodations.**
    Very Difficult Difficult Neutral Easy Very Easy

Self-Determination Scale

For the following questions, choose the response that BEST relates to how often you relate to each statement:

1. **I know what I need, what I like, and what I'm good at.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

2. **I set goals to get what I want or need. I think about what I am good at when I do this.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

3. **I figure out how to meet my goal; I make plans and decide what I should do.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

4. **I like to check on how well I'm doing in meeting my goals.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

5. **If my plan doesn't work, I try another one to meet my goals.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

6. **Disability staff at school listen to me when I talk about what I want, what I need, or what I'm good at.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

7. **Faculty at school encourages me to start working on my goals right away.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

8. **Disability staff at school understand when I have to change my educational accommodation plan to meet my goals. They offer advice and encourage me when I'm doing this.**
   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

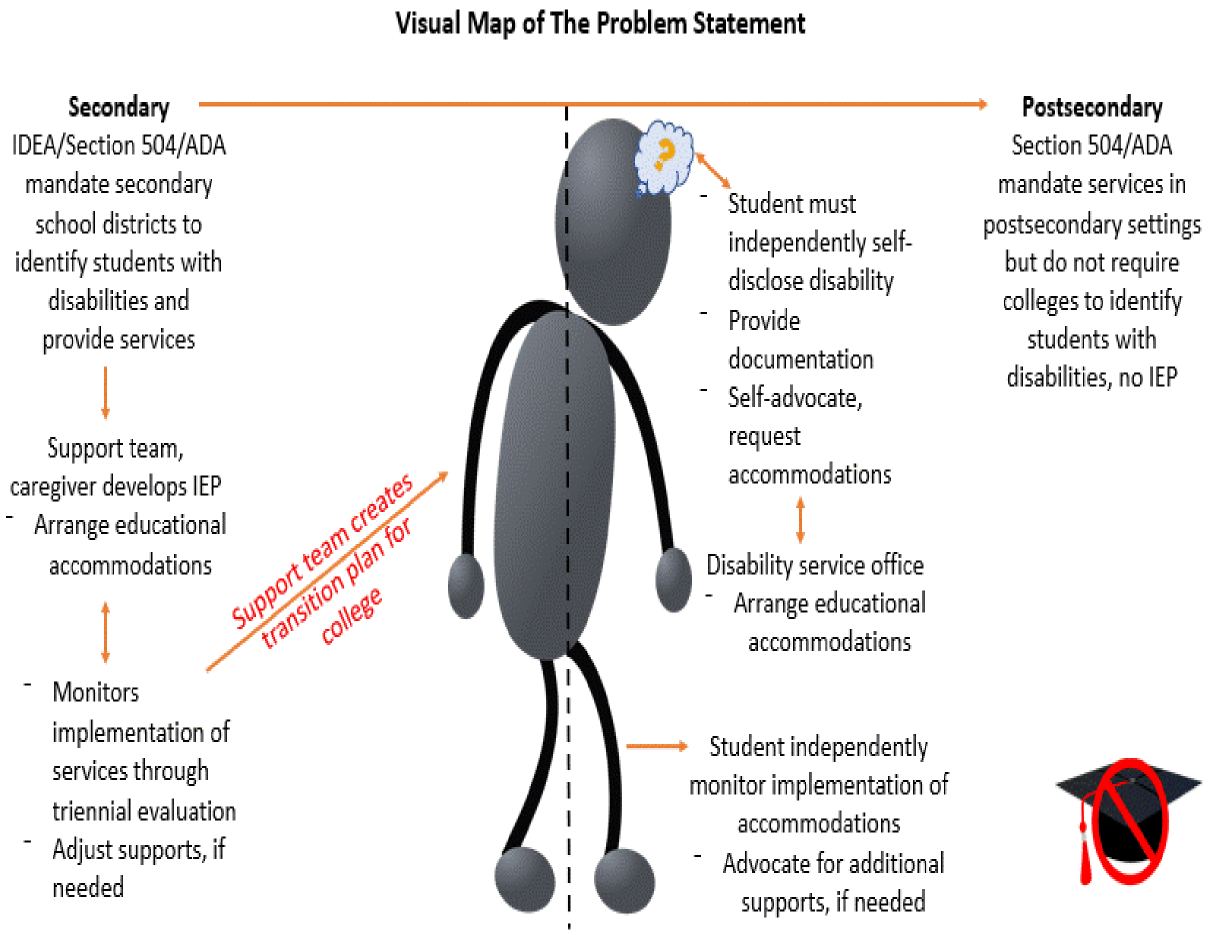
9. **People at home listen to me when I talk about what I want, what I need, or what I'm good at.**

   Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

10. **People at home understand when I have to change my plan to meet my goals. They offer advice and encourage me when I'm doing this.**

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Appendix F: Visual Map of The Problem Statement



Visual Map of The Problem Statement

Secondary

IDEA/Section 504/ADA mandate secondary school districts to identify students with disabilities and provide services

Support team, caregiver develops IEP

- Arrange educational accommodations

- Monitors implementation of services through triennial evaluation
- Adjust supports, if needed

Support team creates transition plan for college

- Student must independently self-disclose disability
- Provide documentation
- Self-advocate, request accommodations

Disability service office

- Arrange educational accommodations

Student independently monitor implementation of accommodations

- Advocate for additional supports, if needed

Postsecondary

Section 504/ADA mandate services in postsecondary settings but do not require colleges to identify students with disabilities, no IEP