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BY

Dr. Juanita Gamez Vargas, Chair

Dr. Courtney Vaughn

Dr. Siduri Haslerig

Dr. Junghwan Kim

Dr. Sara Ann Beach

DEDICATION

Jesus, I thank You for all of the grace and love You show me daily. Mom, Dad, Neil, and all of my friends and family, you are the reasons why I have made it this far. My journey has not been easy, but you have made it fun. I love you.

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Abstract

This transcendental, phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of undergraduate students with physical disabilities and their decision (or not) to become engaged in out-of-class activities. Schlossberg’s transition theory is provided as a lens for the study. Findings suggest students with physical disabilities who are engaged in out-of-class activities have mostly positive outcomes (development of friendships, increased networking opportunities), yet some students, regardless of whether their disabilities are visible or invisible, experienced stigma related to disability. Research on lived experiences of students with physical disabilities should expand to focus on more specific populations of students with disabilities in higher education.

Chapter I

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, more than 54 million Americans age five or older reported having some type of disability (Cooper, 2012). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) defines someone with a disability as:

> an individual who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, an individual who has a history or record of such impairments, or an individual who is perceived by others as having such impairments.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013) states that approximately 11 percent of undergraduate students report having a disability. However, many of these students do not persist to graduation. Several reasons have been cited for their not obtaining a college degree, including such issues as dismissal for poor academic performance, personal reasons, family responsibilities, and lack of campus assistance (Marshak, Van Wieran, Raeke, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010). Yet a history of challenges has not deterred students with disabilities from “knocking on the door of higher education” (Harbour & Madaus, 2011, p. 1).

This transcendental, phenomenological study addresses the lived experiences of 10 undergraduate students with physical disabilities and their engagement in out-of-class activities. Physical disabilities are often referred to as orthopedic impairments, and when they are severe, they can have a negative affect on educational performance (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2010). More specifically, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and examine the ways in which these lived experiences contribute to these students' retention, graduation, and future employment. This study will explore the following research question: For students with physical disabilities, what issues influence their decisions to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities and how do these issues influence their decision to remain in college?

This chapter provides an overview of several important educational policies and their impact on students with disabilities in higher education: the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the ADA, the ADA Amendments Act, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Additionally, this chapter discusses higher education institutions' responses to these policies and discusses the significance of the study within the research literature on higher education for students with physical disabilities.

Disability and Educational Policy

In the United States, several significant pieces of legislation affect the lives of people with physical disabilities, especially with regard to education. These laws are designed to combat discrimination, provide access to education, and improve educational opportunities.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifically Section 504, promotes rehabilitation, independent living, and employment of people with disabilities (Collignon, 1997). The law states that segregating or excluding an individual with a disability constitutes discrimination (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Section 504 also requires recipients of federal funds to make their programs and activities accessible and usable for people with disabilities.

Section 504 requires access to be significant. For example, a student who uses a wheelchair may be able to access a building with a ramp, but this access is not meaningful if she does not have a desk at the proper height for her to fully function in the classroom (Cooper, 2012). Section 504 also contests the assumption that the difficulties faced by people with disabilities, such as low educational attainment or unemployment, are the inevitable result of limitations stemming from the facility itself rather than societal barriers or prejudices (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Additionally, Section 504 ended the practice of counseling students with disabilities into particular majors or careers that were commonly considered “suitable” for them (Madaus, 2011).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

In 1975, Congress passed the Education of All Handicapped Students Act (P.L. 94-142), more commonly known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Turnbull et al., 2010). IDEA requires public schools to provide special education services to students with disabilities (Madaus, 2011). This legislation also requires schools to create individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities. IEPs include periodic assessments and the development of individual goals (Madaus, 2011). The law was originally intended to ensure that students with disabilities had the chance to benefit from education, and had the chance to benefit from education, and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA expanded the law's scope to make more students eligible for special education (Turnbull et al., 2010).

The Americans with Disabilities Act

Like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA in 1990 enhanced access to higher education for students with disabilities and prompted colleges and universities to improve their disability services. The ADA also increased public awareness of disability rights (Madaus, 2011). This law affords people with disabilities the same types of civil rights extended to women and racial minorities by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Cooper, 2012). The ADA deems actions discriminatory if they deny “equal opportunity to participate in programs, provide services that are not ‘equal to’ or ‘effective as’ those provided to others, and fail to provide reasonable accommodations” (Simon, 2011, p. 95). The ADA also disallows several other actions designed to discriminate against people with disabilities. Regardless of the intent, actions or inactions are prohibited if they discriminate against persons with disabilities (Simon, 2011). These obligations exist not only to eliminate disability discrimination, but also to provide reasonable accommodations. According to the Supreme Court, reasonable accommodations must be made to ensure access for individuals with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation is “an adjustment made to a course, program, event, service, job, activity, or physical space that enables individuals with disabilities to participate equally” (Myers, Jenkins Lindburg, & Nied, 2013, p. 7).

The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act

The ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 clarifies the language of the 1990 ADA in order to address the difficulty of interpreting the legal definition of disability (Heyward, 2011). Under the ADAAA’s new language, more people meet the legal requirement to be considered disabled, although case-by-case determinations must still be made (Heyward, 2011). In higher education, students with disabilities who wish to receive accommodations must provide their diagnosis as well as information about how their condition affects their education. However, students who do not provide an extensive account of their condition's manifestations are not necessarily denied accommodations (Heyward, 2011). When an institution becomes aware of a student's disability, it is required to provide reasonable accommodations (Simon, 2011).

Congress implemented several other changes to the ADA as part of the ADAAA; however, "both physical and communication access, as well as program access, remain key aspects to compliance with ADA and section 504 in postsecondary education" (Simon, 2011, p. 98). Universities and colleges must provide students with disabilities access to buildings and facilities on campus and off campus that are used for courses or extracurricular activities (Simon, 2011). According to Simon (2011), the term "program" includes "housing, club activities, field trips, food service, counseling, transportation, and athletics" (p. 99). Institutions must make reasonable accommodations "to provide equal opportunity for participation in courses, programs, and activities," although they are not required to provide personal services such as personal attendants, hearing aids, or eyeglasses (Simon, 2011). Tutoring is considered to be a personal service, so institutions need not provide tutoring unless it is provided to other students as well (Simon, 2011).

Institutions also must provide students with disabilities with auxiliary aids and services, such as qualified sign language interpreters, note-takers, qualified readers, Braille and large-print materials, screen reader software, and adaptive equipment software, among others (Simon, 2011). With regard to the communication needs and preferences of students with disabilities, institutions must also give primary consideration to the requests of persons with disabilities unless (the institution) requests another existing equally effective means of communication (Simon, 2011, p. 99). To ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in programs and activities, institutions are required to make academic adjustments, which may include time extensions for tests, assignments, or graduation; audio recording of class lectures and discussions; course substitution to meet degree requirements; and modified evaluation. Students are often expected to take responsibility for securing accommodations and for reporting when the accommodation is unsuccessful (Simon, 2011).

Institutions must also ensure access to technology for students with disabilities. When colleges and universities purchase technology for their institutions, this "creates an expectation that it will be accessible and suggests that the institution has the resources and expertise to fully consider the role of technology with regard to other aspects of its program" (Simon, 2011, p. 100). However, technology that enhances education for most students may create barriers and exclude some students from the opportunity to pursue higher education. Technology is constantly evolving, and institutions are expected to ensure that the technological changes they implement do not introduce new barriers to students with disabilities (Simon, 2011). In providing access to text, disability services providers must make print and alternative formats available.

ADAAA brought specific requirements to postsecondary education access for people with disabilities (Simon, 2011, p. 98). However, ADAAA is not the only law that addresses this issue. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA; P.L. 110-315) includes several conditions designed to increase higher education access for students with disabilities (Madaus, et al., 2012). The HEOA is a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) (Madaus et al., 2012), which changed the relationship between the federal government and institutions of higher education (Madaus et al., 2012). Its goal was "to improve educational achievement by making education accessible to qualified students regardless of economic status, ultimately improving the nation" (Madaus et al., 2012, p. 33). The HEA has been reauthorized eight times.

Organizational Responses and Practice

Organizations such as the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) advocated for a variety of provisions to be included in the HEOA (Madaus, & Kowitt, 2012). These provisions include an amendment to provide students with intellectual disabilities (ID) with access to federal work-study funds, Pell Grants, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2006; National Down Syndrome Society, 2008; Madaus et al., 2012). This initiative and several others were included in the final HEOA legislation (Madaus et al., 2012). These advocacy initiatives include demonstration projects (detailed in the following paragraph) for students with disabilities, an advisory committee on accessible materials, a national information center, HEOA amendments to other laws, and College Navigator, a database containing detailed information on institutions of higher education (Madaus et al., 2012).

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education awarded 23 grants to postsecondary institutions under a program titled “Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a High Quality Education” (Madaus & Kowitt, 2012). These projects “focused on including the development of effective teaching methods and strategies, transition practices and programs, distance learning initiatives, training for educators, education accessibility, and circulation of research related to serving postsecondary students with disabilities" (Madaus & Kowitt, 2012, p. 36). The grants required that teaching strategies developed during these demonstration projects be consistent with the universal design for learning (UDL) principles. The 2008 HEOA established the first legal definition for UDL, which incorporated the principles of representation, expression and engagement and emphasized reducing barriers with appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, while maintaining high expectations.

The HEOA formed the Advisory Commission on Accessible Instructional Materials in Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities to improve access to course materials for students who are blind or who have print disabilities (Madaus et al., 2012). This committee was "tasked with identifying best practices in collecting, maintaining, assisting, and disseminating materials in specialized formats to students with print disabilities" (Madaus et al., 2012, p. 37). The HEOA's provisions also amended other laws, such as the Education of the Deaf Act of 1986 (Title IX, Part A). The Secretary of Education was required by the HEOA to found a commission on the education of people who are deaf (Title IX, Part C, Sec. 913) and to provide competitive grants to support activities that enhance the lives of people who are deaf or hard of hearing (Madaus, 2012).

The commission was also required to increase public awareness of the accomplishments of people who are deaf or hard of hearing and encourage the integration of people who are deaf and hard-of hearing into mainstream schools, colleges, and universities (Title IX, Part C, Sec. 121 (Madaus et al., 2012). The HEOA also required the U.S. Department of Education to operate College Navigator, a web database that provides information regarding institutions of higher education, including the percentage of undergraduate students with disabilities who are registered with the office of disability services (Madaus et al., 2012). In addition to these initiatives, the HEOA addressed a variety of issues including the affordability of higher education, increased requirements for accountability, and better support for colleges with a significant proportion of minority students (Madaus et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

A study by the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) revealed that an estimated 60 percent of students go to college after high school. Overall, about one-third of them fail to finish within six years, but for students with disabilities, this figure is almost two-thirds (NCES, 2013).

Student affairs professionals have the opportunity to promote student engagement and improve experiences by embracing the constructs of self-determination and universal design (Korbel, McGuire, Banerjee, & Saunders, 2011). Student engagement can also be characterized as participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside of the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007, p. 44). Promoting student engagement and improving experiences are imperative due to the relationship between retention and wage-earning power (Korbel et al., 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau reported that only 45.6% of people with disabilities between the ages of 21 and 64 were employed in 2005 (Brault, 2008). Research shows that earning a college degree is key for employment, and 56% of workers need at least some college education for their jobs (Camevale & Fry, 2000). These statistics illustrate the importance of college for students with disabilities. Simply attending college does not guarantee success. Students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than their disengaged peers to persist to graduation (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Students with disabilities who do not participate in out-of-class activities are less likely to develop teamwork and leadership skills necessary for career success (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

Significance of the Study

Enabling students with disabilities to engage in activities encourages them to graduate from college, which in turn provides opportunities for successful employment outcomes. This investigation will provide student affairs practitioners and other college personnel with information on students' out-of-class experiences, specific ways to engage students with visible and invisible disabilities and thereby improve their experiences, retention, and overall outcomes. Fortunately, legislation and the disability rights movement have begun to change society's attitude regarding disability. Today, inclusive campus environments allow students with disabilities to "attend university events, discuss course content with a professor during office hours, or eat dinner with friends without prior planning or coordination" (Huger, 2011, p. 5). Inclusive campuses also allow students with disabilities the opportunity for greater academic and social integration. Students with disabilities also affect the entire community by increasing "all students' exposure to and interaction with peers with disabilities" (Huger, 2011, p. 5). A more diverse student body challenges assumptions and helps people overcome stereotypes.

This study contributes to the literature by providing students with disabilities the opportunity to share their experiences and help higher education professionals increase engagement opportunities and retention outcomes. It will address the following research question:

> What are the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and how do these lived experiences contribute to these students' retention, graduation, and future employment?

The study will also explore six research sub-questions:

1. What issues influenced the participant's decision to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities?
2. How have these out-of-class experiences influenced the participant's decision to remain in college?
3. What type of out-of-class activities has the participant experienced?
4. Why did the participant choose these activities?
5. What kind of experience has the participant had when engaging in out-of-class activities?
6. Have these out-of-class activities helped create a network of support for the participant's future employment opportunities?

Additionally, this research will determine ways to improve self- and other-oriented perceptions and attitudes of able-bodied college students toward college students with disabilities. Studying the lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities will benefit not only these students, but also students without disabilities. By learning from the experiences of students with disabilities, other students may learn more effective ways to communicate with and advocate for students with disabilities.

Student affairs practitioners are concerned with college students' development and growth (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). This study enhances students' exposure to and interaction with peers with disabilities. Learning from the perspectives of students with disabilities helps campuses reduce the stigma attached to disability, which in turn, helps colleges and universities become more welcoming and inclusive for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

This chapter provides background information about some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities. Additionally, it provides an overview of important mandated educational policies and laws that affect students with disabilities, introduces definitions of disability, and outlines the problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study. These components build a foundation for exploring how students with physical disabilities experience college out-of-class, what factors influence their decision to engage in out-of-class activities, and how these factors influence their decision to remain in college. This study provides a deeper look into the lives of undergraduate students with physical disabilities. Chapter II includes a review of the research literature on students with physical disabilities in higher education and outlines the history of oppression based on disability, including barriers faced by students with disabilities when engaging in out-of-class activities. In addition, Chapter II will introduce Schlossberg’s transition theory, which this study employs as a theoretical lens.

Chapter II

Part of the literature review identifies laws that provide increased opportunities for success for students with disabilities. However, despite laws prohibiting discrimination in public and private settings, people with disabilities still experience lived oppressions (Charlton, 1998). Students may experience attitudinal and physical oppression on campus, structural oppression (e.g., inaccessible buildings), or a lack of appropriate classroom accommodations. This chapter presents a literature review of the history of treatment of people with disabilities in the United States and discusses types of disability oppression, barriers faced by people with disabilities, and college and university programs designed to foster the success of students with disabilities. Moreover, this chapter introduces the theoretical lens chosen for this study, Schlossberg's transition theory.

Disability History in the United States

In the United States, people with disabilities have often been treated inhospitably. Yet just after the country was founded, the Continental Congress voted to provide pensions for Revolutionary War soldiers with disabilities (Shapiro, 1993). This support reflects the nation's sense of gratitude toward soldiers who had become disabled while fighting on behalf of the country (Shapiro, 1993, p. 58). At that time, people with disabilities “were able to fit easily into society” because of society’s gratitude and appreciation for their military service (Shapiro, 1993, p. 58).

Early Educational Institutions for People with Disabilities

In the early 19th century, the School for the Blind (secondary school) and Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, were established (Ryan & McCarthy, 1994, p. vii). Although such institutions provided access to education for some people with physical disabilities, most states and cities had no such facilities; so most people with disabilities did not receive an education. In 1832, Samuel Gridley Howe founded the Perkins Institute in Watertown, Massachusetts to help blind youths attain work and live self-sufficiently (Shapiro, 1993, p. 58). Howe’s success in teaching Laura Bridgeman, a woman who was blind, deaf, and unable to speak as a result of scarlet fever, brought recognition to reformers who showed that people who were deaf and blind could be educated (Shapiro, 1993). Howe also attempted to train persons referred to as “idiots and feebleminded youth” in 1848; however, he learned through his efforts that mental retardation was not curable (Shapiro, 1993).

The Later 19th Century

As a result of the Civil War (1861-1865), massive numbers of soldiers became disabled. This led to advances in orthopedic medicine in the United States. However, it also led to increased levels of institutionalization of people with disabilities, and these institutions often became “places of abuse, isolation, and segregation” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 60). As the 19th century came to a close, societal hostility toward people with disabilities arose when social Darwinism and the eugenics movement raised questions about whether it was desirable for a society to include people with disabilities (Shapiro, 1993).

The 20th Century

After World War I (1914-1918), the United States addressed its obligation to help veterans with disabilities. In 1918, Congress enacted the first federal rehabilitation program, which provided funding for training (Ryan & McCarthy, 1994, p. vii). In 1921, the Veterans Bureau was established to care for wounded veterans (Shapiro, 1993). However, veterans returning from war were not the only U.S. citizens with disabilities. While the government and other charitable groups helped military veterans with disabilities, scattered groups of other people with disabilities gathered on their own to advocate for government assistance (Shapiro, 1993, p. 62).

In the 1930s, groups such as the League of the Physically Handicapped formed to protest the “discriminatory (employment) policies of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Emergency Recovery Act” (Altenbaugh, 2006, p. 717). Most members of the League of the

Physically Handicapped had post-polio disability, and a few had cerebral palsy (Shapiro, 1993, p. 63). The League organized sit-ins, strikes, and pickets to bring attention to the WPA’s discriminatory actions. League members met with WPA director Harry Hopkins to discuss being rejected for federal jobs because of their disabilities. Unfortunately, Hopkins denied any discrimination, and as a result, the League was unable to influence federal policy towards the disabled (Altenbaugh, 2006). The federal government did not create a permanent assistance program for adults with disabilities until 1935, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law (Shapiro, 1993).

During the 1930s, President Roosevelt was the country’s most famous person with a disability. His ability to walk was impaired after he contracted polio in 1921. Although Americans admired and accepted Roosevelt, he was viewed as “the cured cripple” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 62). He went to great lengths to hide the degree of his handicap (Shapiro, 1993). Although Roosevelt could not walk, most Americans were unaware of this, as he was never seen in public in his wheelchair. Roosevelt, his eldest son, and the Secret Service “devised elaborate ways to get him in and out of buildings” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 62). Fortunately for Roosevelt, it was possible to hide his disability because his time in office occurred before the age of television. As a result, Washington, DC, became a "wheelchair-accessible city—or at least the parts frequented by FDR—with ramps at the White House, Capitol, the War, State and Navy building, and St. John's Church across Lafayette Square" (Shapiro, 1993, p. 62).

Veterans with Disabilities

During the 1940s, the return of soldiers with disabilities from World War II resulted in a "renewed national dedication to helping this most highly visible population of disabled Americans" (Shapiro, 1993, p. 62). Congress passed the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944, which contributed to a dramatic increase in college enrollment (Madaus, 2011).

Disability Rights

The G.I. Bill and the subsequent influx of war veterans with disabilities into higher education had a tremendous impact on the development of disability services. Two other key circumstances also prompted greatly expanded services that had a major influence on the lives of people with disabilities: The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and federal legislation at the K-12 level (Madaus, 2011). The civil rights movement shifted the focus of disability rights from social and therapeutic services to political and civil rights (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the first civil rights law for people with disabilities, sparked controversy because of its financial costs. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) estimated that compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 would cost billions of dollars (Shapiro, 1993). Activists supporting the Rehabilitation Act staged demonstrations in Washington, DC, and at eight regional HEW offices. A sit-in at the regional HEW office in San Francisco continued for 25 days (Shapiro, 1993, p. 65). Protesters with disabilities risked both arrests and their health with civil disobedience tactics, but they surprised a nation with their power (Shapiro, 1993).

On April 28, 1977, four years after the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 passed, HEW Secretary Joseph Califano finally signed the regulations into action (Shapiro, 1993, p. 69). In addition, Califano signed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Shapiro, 1993). Even after these regulations were signed, however, the subject of cost came up repeatedly in public discourse (Shapiro, 1993).

Changes in the Workforce

However, in 1982, the Labor Department found that “50 percent of changes in the workplace [to accommodate people with disabilities] cost little or nothing” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 71). This information changed public attitudes toward employing people with disabilities and was a factor in increased employment rates (Shapiro, 1993). By the late 1970s and 1980s, independent living centers flourished, providing “a model of disabled people running their own self-help programs, making decisions for themselves” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 73). Disability rights activism continued through the 1980s and 1990s. However, despite the tremendous strides made for disability rights, various forms of oppression affect people with disabilities even today.

Types of Disability Oppression

Oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to varying types of degradation (Charlton, 1998). Disability oppression is multifaceted and complex, but it may represent only part of the oppression experience (Charlton, 1998). Despite laws designed to prohibit discrimination in public and private settings, people with disabilities still experience daily oppressions (Charlton, 1998). Several studies have shown that oppression of people with disabilities occurs in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings, such as higher education, the medical community, and the workplace. This section presents a review of research literature on the oppression faced by people with disabilities in these various settings. Not only is disability oppression prevalent in multiple settings; it has presented itself in different forms and created various barriers for people with disabilities. The final part of this literature review discusses the ways in which these barriers have affected students with disabilities.

Disability Oppression in Higher Education

Oppression of people with disabilities is sometimes referred to as *ableism* (Brown & Broido, 2014). In higher education, ableism can have powerful impact on the experiences of both students with disabilities and students without disabilities because it places a privilege on the "normative way to do things" (Brown & Broido, 2014, p. 187). Students with disabilities, like other underrepresented groups, "all [face] unwelcoming environments when initially entering higher education" (Brown & Broido, 2014, p. 187). The emotional experiences of college students with disabilities are often similar to those of students without disabilities (Myers, Jenkins Lindburg, & Nied, 2014). However, students with disabilities may experience more anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed about their transition from high school to college than their peers without disabilities. For these students, college is an opportunity to free themselves from certain elements of their disability, leave the high school experience, and start anew. For example, in college, students with disabilities no longer have to attend the individualized education program (IEP) meetings that were required during their K-12 education. Likewise, college students with invisible disabilities (disabilities that are not readily apparent to others) have the freedom to choose whether to disclose their disability. Students with disabilities who are labeled by faculty and peers often feel stigmatized, so those who wish to avoid being labeled "disabled" by peers and faculty may choose not to disclose their disability (Getzel & Briel, 2006).

Disability Stigma

Disability stigma is the most significant barrier affecting the success of college students with disabilities. Disclosing disabilities may result in negative stereotypes, lack of accommodations, self-doubt, self-pity, academic anxiety, and inappropriate judgments by classmates, staff, and faculty members (Trammell, 2007). Students with invisible disabilities may choose not to disclose their disabilities because of disability stigma, which refers to the "social, academic, and psychological consequences of disclosing a disability" (Trammell, 2007, p. 1). Students with disabilities are sometimes made to feel that they do not belong in advanced degree programs because they require certain services (Getzel, 2008). Despite stigma-related barriers, college attendance rates continue to grow among people with disabilities (Trammell, 2007).

Attitudes

University faculty and staff often are unfamiliar with their institution's disability services and lack an understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. This can foster inappropriate judgments and negative attitudes toward students with disabilities (Getzel & McManus, 2005; Scott, 1996). In a study on gender and attitudes toward people with disabilities, Vilchinsky, Werner, & Findler (2010) had 400 Jewish Israeli students without disabilities complete a Multi-Dimensional Attitude Scale Toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS). This quantitative study identified five factors affecting attitudes toward students with disabilities: “distancing behaviors, positive cognitions, negative emotions, interpersonal stress, and calm” (Vilchinsky et al., 2010, p. 163). Interestingly, the findings revealed that both men and women reported more positive cognitions and fewer distancing behaviors toward people using a wheelchair than toward those without disabilities (Vilchinsky et al., 2010, p. 163). However, a reasonable explanation for the findings may be that people try to block out the negative feelings they automatically possess toward people who use wheelchairs (Vilchinsky et al., 2010).

Positive cognitions or understanding toward people the disabilities may be attributed to a Freudian “reaction formation, an unconscious defense mechanism whereby a socially illegitimate impulse (to get away from a person with a disability) is transformed into an acceptable and valued-often times exaggerated-positive reaction toward him or her” (Vilchinsky et al., p. 169).

Oppression by the Medical Community

Despite the passage of laws designed to improve the lives of people with disabilities, oppression still exists, even in the medical community. Hayes & Hannold (2007) examined how medical professionals contribute to this oppression even though they are "uniquely positioned to promote empowerment of people with disabilities as active partners in their own healthcare" (p. 352). Hayes and Hannold identified three ways in which medical professionals contribute to the oppression of people with disabilities: "1. maintenance of a 'medical/knowledge power differential,' 2. reinforcement of the 'sick role,' and 3. objectification of people with disabilities" (2007, p. 352).

The power differential originated in the 19th century or even earlier, a time when medical professionals held a position of control and domination over people with between medical professionals and people with disabilities is the first method of oppression mentioned by Hayes and Hannold. The power differential arose at a time when medical professionals held a position of control and domination over people with disabilities, who were often kept in dependent roles even during adulthood (Hayes & Hannold, 2007). Some people viewed physicians as social control agents capable of "curb[ing] deviance and ensur[ing] social stability” by relegating people with disabilities to roles of dependence and powerlessness (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 357).

According to Hayes & Hannold (2007), the second method of oppression by medical professionals is reinforcement of the ‘sick-role.’ When a person becomes ill and seeks medical treatment from a physician, he or she may enter into a ‘sick-role.’ By seeking treatment, the patient looks to return to his or her normal routine (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 356). However, a person with a disability poses a dilemma because the disability cannot be cured or “made whole” (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 357. An assignment of a disability does not necessarily mean constant medical care. However, it was believed that the ill become passive agents who listen to “experts” because of their desire to meet normative expectations (Hayes & Hannold, 2007).

People who are labeled with sick-role status are associated with “passivity and powerlessness” (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 363). Medical treatment providers are responsible for decisions during the treatment process, and although patients may benefit from the treatment process, they are often passive recipients (Hayes & Hannold, 2007). Medical personnel often have the power to decide who has access to medical services and who gets certain medical treatment. In addition to the power to treat, physicians also possess the power to diagnose (Hayes & Hannold, 2007). Friedson (1970) and Schieff (1984) discussed the physician's power to diagnose as a key to defining illness as a "type of deviation" (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 357) Moreover, the power to diagnose has implications for what, if any, disability benefits a person is entitled to receive.

The third method used by medical professionals to oppress people with disabilities is objectification, which "reduc[es] the person to a dysfunctional body, denying the value of life as a person with a disability" (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 362). This focus on normality diminishes the valued of the lived experiences of people with disabilities.

Models of Disability

Hayes & Hannold (2007) also examined three models of disability: the biomedical model, the medical model, and the social model. According to Hayes & Hannold (2007), the biomedical model advances the idea that the body is a machine and the physician's job is to diagnose and repair broken machinery. The goal of a clinical encounter is to diagnose, so a plan is developed with the goal of "returning the patent to normal health and/or functioning" (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 358). However, a physician's diagnosis can deny the subjective experiences of people with disabilities, because physicians are focused on objective observation rather than patients' subjective reports (Hayes & Hannold, 2007).

Hayes and Hannold describe the medical model as being focused on "normality." This model's goal is to help people with disabilities live "normal" lives and achieve functional independence. Many people with disabilities claim that the medical model favors people with able bodies and reduces people with disabilities to dysfunctional (Hayes & Hannold, 2007). The medical model has enabled stigma and reduced the importance of the lived experiences of people with disabilities (Hayes & Hannold, 2007).

The social model differs from the biomedical and medical models because it focuses on empowering people with disabilities and enhancing "client participation, choice, and control" (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 366). Instead of "fixing" a person with a disability, or making them "normal", the social model emphasizes heath, wellness, and prevention of further illness or disability. Additionally, according to the social model, healthcare providers can empower people with disabilities rather than making decisions for them (Hayes & Hannold, 2007).

Hayes & Hannold (2007) suggested replacing the biomedical and medical models, which assign a deviant, stigmatized identity to people with disabilities, with a socio-political model, which recognizes the need for medical services and treatment, but rejects the need for normalization. A paradigm shift that "prioritizes disease/healthcare management, wellness and prevention of further disability as opposed to treatments aimed at curing disability, will greatly facilitate the empowerment process" (Hayes & Hannold, 2007, p. 369).

Workplace Oppression

In addition to oppression imposed by the medical profession, people with disabilities also experience workplace oppression. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) were designed to remove barriers to employment and encourage employers to increase the number of employees with disabilities (Robert, 2003). Robert's study used in-depth interviews "to gain a deep and multi-textured understanding of the experiences of employees with disabilities" (Robert, 2003, p. 140). Two hundred and forty-three government employees with a variety of disabilities volunteered for the study, and 50 were selected for interviews, including 33 women and 17 men (Robert, 2003, p. 142). The study's findings identified several different types of disability oppression.

Alienation and Physical Segregation

Several interviewees in the study "experienced alienation from co-workers, supervisors, and the public through physical segregation and social isolation." The most common form of alienation experienced by co-workers was physical segregation. Robert reported that some work units were designated for employees with disabilities (2003, p. 146). These work units, referred to as “dumping grounds” by employees with disabilities (Robert, 2003). These were places where people with disabilities were invisible, such as back rooms of offices tucked away from public view (Robert, 2003). Some of the participants also said they felt social isolation and had little to no contact with other co-workers (Robert, 2003).

Harassment

Harassment was the experience reported most commonly in the interviews. Participants also said that some of them had experienced harassment at work and had been subject to “jokes, needling, name-calling, mimicry, innuendo, rumors, rudeness, sabotage, inappropriate questioning, and insensitive remarks” (Robert, 2003, p. 148). In another example, an employee who used a wheelchair was subjected to remarks about “their wheels” and “speeding” (Robert, 2003, p. 148). Employees with less visible disabilities also experienced discrimination (Robert, 2003). A woman with lupus said a male co-worker accused her of having a sexually transmitted disease (Robert, 2003, p. 148). Supervisors also made insensitive comments toward employees with disabilities (Robert, 2003).

Additionally, supervisors and co-workers held employees with disabilities responsible for their own disabilities (Robert, 2003, p. 152).

In conclusion, Robert (2003) recommended that disability rights activists remain militant in fighting oppression in capitalist workplaces.

Barriers to Success in Higher Education

People with disabilities have experienced disability oppression in a variety of different settings and in a variety of different ways. In higher education, students with disabilities often experience disability oppression. Disability oppression manifests itself in a variety of forms such as institutional barriers, personal barriers, and barriers to retention. These barriers are discussed in this chapter.

Institutional Barriers

A study by Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, and Lan (2010, p. 412) revealed that a lack of understanding by institutions of higher education is a significant barrier to student success. In this study, students with disabilities cited a lack of understanding by institutions of higher education as the most common barrier to success. Rao (2004) concluded that faculty and staff "need to be better informed about disabilities and students with disabilities" (p. 197). However, even when an institution provides faculty members with information about disability issues, this does not necessarily mean that the institution is committed to the engagement and success of students with disabilities. Universities that embrace the letter of the law may show evidence of “a [stigmatizing] philosophy that may not be verbalized on the campus but is felt and observed and ultimately limits the success potential of a college and its students” (Kurth & Mellard, 2006, p. 83). On the other hand, universities that have considered the whole picture of student life have embraced the spirit of the law (Kurth & Mellard, 2006, p. 83). Embracing the spirit of the law is important for the success of students with disabilities because faculty members “often rely on disability support services for information” (Yunkis & Bernstein, 2017, p. 7).

Personal Barriers

Personal barriers may include self-esteem issues, a desire to avoid negative social reactions, insufficient knowledge, perceptions that available services are unhelpful, and negative experiences with professors (Marshak et al., 2010).

As previously discussed, stigma can have a negative effect on the self-esteem of anyone who faces it, and it is a major issue that many students with disabilities confront when deciding whether to use accommodations (Marshak et al., 2010). Many of these students experience stigma by faculty and peers because of the difficulty of explaining their specific needs in postsecondary settings (Murray, Lombardi, Bender, & Gerdes, 2012, p. 281). Students with disabilities may also fear that students without disabilities resent their use of the accommodations available to them (Marshak et al., 2010, p. 154). Other students may have a difficult time explaining their disability (Marshak et al., 2010, p. 154). For example, disclosing “may be comfortable and therapeutic [for some students] . . . yet an awkward and even intimidating experience for another” (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010, p. 413).

Some students with disabilities have been the targets of prejudice and have experienced interpersonal and environmental factors resulting in non-acceptance in social endeavors. This can inhibit their subsequent social engagement (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Barriers to Retention

Retention studies identify several factors that affect the retention of students with disabilities. Belch (2004) identified self-determination as a key issue that affects the retention rates of students with visible and invisible disabilities. Getzel (2008) found that students with disabilities who had self-determination skills were more likely to adjust to and remain in college. To develop students’ self-determination skills, Getzel recommends that student affairs practitioners assist students with disabilities to become involved in or organize support groups with other students with disabilities and/or disability advocates (Getzel, 2008, p. 211). An increase in self-determination skills may also help students develop the self-confidence to succeed in higher education. Self-confidence is important because many students with disabilities do not become involved in campus activities or get accommodations because they are “embarrassed about having a disability” (Getzel, 2008, p. 210). Likewise, students with disabilities often feel a stigma effect when they disclose their disability. This affects both students with visible disabilities and those with invisible disabilities. Social distancing and discrimination may offset the potential benefits of disability disclosure. The stigma of disability can lead to a lack of involvement and belonging and thus reduce retention rates (Getzel, 2008).

Existing University Programs for Academic Success

Based on multiple barriers facing students with disabilities, many universities have developed programs to enhance these students’ academic success. The University of Washington has implemented one of the leading programs, called DO-IT, which stands for “Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology” (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009, p. 156). Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, DO-IT provides trainings, videos, and other materials to assist students with disabilities in the transition from high school to college. This program also assists faculty members who are interested in making their classrooms more inclusive for students with disabilities. DO-IT's delivered activities also include programming to promote disability awareness, employment access, adaptive computer technology, and universal design, which make the classroom accessible to everyone (DO-IT programs and resources).

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) also has implemented a program to assist students with disabilities by expanding services in cooperation with the disability student services (DSS) office. After an evaluation of the existing services, VCU designed a supported education model to "provide supports within the existing DSS structure on campus, using both university and community resources. This enables students to receive services as part of their typical experience on campus" (Getzel, 2008, p. 214).

VCU's supported education model has three stages: direct coaching, consultation, and monitoring. In the first stage, direct coaching, students with disabilities meet with staff to discuss their experiences. Working with staff, each student identifies the specific services and skills they need to address academic difficulties and develops a plan to acquire these supports. In the second stage, students consult with a staff member once or twice a month to ensure that they are making progress toward their plan and to modify it if needed. The third stage consists of monitoring, wherein students contact staff members as needed and provide updates on their progress. Students may obtain services and support when needed (Getzel, 2008, p. 216). Although these supports appear to be effective in supporting academic success, they do not emphasize the importance of getting involved in campus life outside of class. Although academics are assuredly important, they do not constitute the entire college experience.

Engagement of Students with Disabilities

Research indicates that students with disabilities do not persist at the same rate as students without disabilities (DaDeppo, 2009). However, little is known about the factors that lead to this discrepancy (Kimball, Wells, Lauterbach, Manly, & Ostiguy, 2016). Much of the literature is focused on academic success, access to accommodations, and efficacy of accommodations (DaDeppo, 2009; Wessel, Jones, Markel, & Westfall, 2009). Students with disabilities constitute an understudied population (Pena, 2014), and few research projects have focused on their engagement experiences, which are strongly associated with retention, even though it is known that students are more successful when they are engaged in a variety of academic and nonacademic endeavors (Kuh, 2007). Despite strong evidence about the importance of out-of-class engagement, campuses often dedicate significantly fewer resources for programs that engage students out-of-class (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Theoretical Lens

Students with disabilities often face difficulties when transitioning to higher education. Many of these students are leaving home for the first time and do not have the skills necessary to advocate for themselves. As a result, they are likely to have difficulty when they begin their college journey. Because these students' transition to college is affected by many different factors, Schlossberg's transition theory is an effective lens for student affairs professionals to use in examining the experiences of college students with disabilities. Schlossberg's transition theory "includes an examination of what constitutes a transition, different forms of transitions, the transition process, and factors that influence transitions" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 214). Transition is defined as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33).

Goodman et al. (2006) stress the role of perception in transitions, noting that a transition exists only if the individual experiencing it identifies it as a transition. Coping with a transition is a process that extends over time (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). The time needed for a successful transition varies with the individual and the transition (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). Transitions can lead to growth; however, decline is also possible, and transitions may be viewed with ambivalence (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). According to Goodman et al. (2006), transitions can be characterized as a series of phases: “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out.” Four major sets of factors, known as “the 4 S’s,” influence a person’s ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). A person’s effectiveness at managing transition depends on his assets and liabilities (Evans et al., 2010, p. 216). The assets-to-liabilities ratio explains “why different individuals react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 57). A person’s appraisal of a transition is an important determiner of the coping process (Goodman et al., 2006).

The 4 S’s—situation, self, support, and strategies—provide a framework that can help student affairs professionals better understand the challenges facing college students with disabilities. When considering the different *situations* of college students with disabilities, it is important to determine the trigger (i.e., the cause of the transition, such as leaving home for the first time), the person’s skills in self-advocacy and time management, and the issues raised by creating a new identity for one’s self. The transition’s timing must be viewed in terms of the individual’s social clock and whether the timing is favorable for a transition. For instance, consider a student with a disability who is less socially adept than other 18-year-olds because her parents and teachers were overprotective. The timing of her own social development might make it difficult for her to transition to college right out of high school. Control of a situation depends on the person’s perception. Is he in control of his reaction to it, or is the situation controlling him? The college experience may be the first time that a student with disabilities has control over important decisions. Other important factors are role change, duration, and previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment.

Personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources are important in relation to *self* and one’s ability to cope with transition (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217). Students with disabilities, like the general student body, enter college from diverse backgrounds. It is important for student affairs professionals to consider these characteristics. Some students with disabilities may be facing unique challenges related to health, culture, gender, age, and socioeconomics. At the same time, these students may have psychological assets such as optimism, self-efficacy, resiliency, commitment, and spirituality that aid them in overcoming obstacles (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217).

Support is critical to the transition process. In Schlossberg’s model, “support” refers to social support, and four types are cited: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217). In transitioning to college, students with disabilities may be leaving their family, friends, and significant others for the first time. They may doubt their ability to make new friends or to succeed in an unfamiliar environment. Student affairs professionals can assist students with disabilities by providing them with affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217). Simply reassuring students with disabilities that they belong at the university may give them the confidence needed to pursue their goals, while others may need feedback to motivate them (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217).

Strategies for coping responses fall into three categories: “those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217). The individual may also employ four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Evans et al., 2010, p. 217). Student affairs professionals may encounter students who have recently become disabled, such as a soldier returning from war. Other students may be experiencing health problems for the first time in their lives. In these situations, the students may not have the coping skills needed for these transitions. Student affairs professionals need to be prepared to provide information to students who are coping with various transition issues.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a literature review addressing the history of people with disabilities in the United States, an overview of the barriers that people with disabilities face in a variety of settings, and evidence for the importance of student engagement. Additionally, this chapter explains Schlossberg’s transition theory as a lens that student affairs professionals can use in helping students with disabilities who are experiencing difficult transitions into higher education. Chapter III will introduce the methodology and research design used during this study.

Chapter III

The methodology best suited for this study was transcendental phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994). The research questions center on out-of-class experiences of students with physical disabilities. Therefore, this approach will assist student affairs professionals to have a greater understanding of undergraduate students with physical disabilities. In this chapter, transcendental phenomenology is explained in detail, including the procedures that were conducted to properly execute the study.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology is the specific qualitative approach chosen for this study. Transcendental means that "everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Transcendental phenomenology is described by Moustakas as:

> a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness…and seeks to identify presuppositions and put them out of play. (p. 50).

By using transcendental phenomenology, the research focused more on the experiences of the participants rather than what the researcher interpreted as their experience (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, transcendental phenomenology centers on what can be discovered through reflection by the researcher on objective acts and their objective correlations (Moustakas, 1994). Reducing the experience to the essence of "what" the participants experience and "how" the participants experience is accomplished through a specific form of intentionality as proposed by Husserl, known as noesis and noema (Moustakas, 1994).

The noesis refers to "the act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering or judging-all of which are imbedded with meanings that are concealed and invisible from consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). In other words, meaning making out of experiences must be recognized and articulated. The noema is that which is experienced, the "what" of the experience; whereas, the noesis is the way in which the "what" is experienced (Idhe, 1977). In this study, the noema represents the lived experiences of 10 undergraduate students with physical disabilities, and the noesis is my understanding of their experiences and how I make meaning (reflection) based on my experiences as a person with a physical disability.

Transcendental phenomenology's procedures consist of discovering a phenomenon to study, bracketing one's experiences, and collecting data from several participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Bracketing one's experiences is known as Epoche, a Greek word meaning "to refrain from judgment, to abstain or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Epoche necessitates "a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

In addition to Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction also facilitates derivation of knowledge. Each experience is considered for itself. The phenomenon is "perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The constituents, variations of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors, and shapes are described completely.

During Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, researchers "derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon, the constituents that comprise the experiencing consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The process involves repeatedly looking and describing with reference to picture or qualities such as the colorful and bland; high and low. The process of Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction "involves a pre-reflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and thematic" Moustakas, (1994, p. 91).

The steps of Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction include bracketing (the focus of the research is placed in brackets), horizonalizing (statements are treated equally), horizons (actual meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon), clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon.

The step following Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction is Imaginative Variation. Imaginative Variation attempts "to grasp the structural essence of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). According to Husserl (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 35), the function of Imaginative Variation is to arrive at "structural differentiation among the infinite multiplicities of actual and possible cognitions, that relate to the object in question and that somehow go together to make up the unity of an identifying synthesis." Moustakas (1994) described Imaginative Variation as

> a systemic varying of possible structural meanings that underlie textural meanings, recognizing the underlying themes of context that result in the emergence of the phenomenon, considering universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts in reference to the phenomenon, and searching for the exemplifications that show the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon. (p. 36).

In the final step of the phenomenological research process, the structural essences of Imaginative Variation are combined with the textural essences of the Transcendental-Phenomenological reduction. This is conducted to "arrive at a textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated" (Moustakas 1994, p. 36).

Research Design

The strategy for focusing on lived experiences of undergraduate students with physical disabilities included in-depth interviews with 10 participants. The rationale for the study resulted from a lack of literature emphasizing the voices of students with physical disabilities and the importance of positive experiences and outcomes for college students with physical disabilities.

Site Selection, Population, Participants, and Sampling

Site Selection

The study occurred at the University of Oklahoma (OU). The chosen site provided convenience for the participants and myself. Because I am a student with a physical disability, travel was a physical hardship. In addition, the chosen site provided a safe location that put the students at ease for interviewing. Approval from OU's institutional review board (IRB) was secured. Proper documentation, such as informed consent, was provided to ensure the safety and anonymity of participants.

Population

Undergraduate students with physical disabilities who were registered at OU’s Disability Resource Center (DRC) were eligible to participate in the study. The study involved 10 participants. Age, race, and gender identity of the participants were not key factors in the study. If the participants met the previously discussed criteria and were at least 18 years of age, then they were eligible to participate. The DRC assisted in recruiting eligible students. Consent forms were provided to potential participants. The participants were informed of the study’s purpose and informed that there were no risks for being involved in the study. Potential participants were offered a $20 gift card as compensation for their participation in the interview.

Participants

The participants included eight women and two men. Each participant shared lived experiences as a person with physical disabilities. Three of the 10 participants have invisible disabilities. Table 1 summarizes the participants’ demographics.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Disabilities	Class
Katya	Female	25	Blind	Senior
Tim	Male	28	Quadriplegia	Sophomore
Melinda	Female	30	Type I diabetes, bipolar disorder, hypothyroidism, mitochondrial myopathy, depression	Senior
Diana	Female	22	No hands	Senior
Justin	Male	20	Cerebral palsy	Sophomore
Marty	Female	20	Depression, anxiety, knee pain	Sophomore
Lana	Female	21	Hearing impairment	Junior
Anna	Female	22	Retinitis pigmentosa	Senior
Leslie	Female	19	Club foot, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder	Freshman
Katie	Female	20	Postural orthostatic tachycardia	Sophomore

Katya. Katya is a 25-year-old female. She is driven to be successful despite being blind. Katya does not want to be someone who sits at home and does nothing due to her disability. She is a friendly, talkative person, who is very appreciative of the support her family and her guide dog provide her.

*Tim***.** Tim, a 28-year-old male, is quadriplegic. Despite being injured in an accident 10 years prior, Tim decided to return to school to earn a degree. He expressed the frustration he experiences as a person with a disability. Despite the frustration he experiences with daily challenges related to his disability, Tim is determined to better his life.

Melinda. Melinda, a 30-year-old female, has multiple disabilities. Her disabilities include type I diabetes, mitochondrial myopathy, bipolar disorder, and depression. Despite the challenges presented by her various disabilities, Melinda is focused on graduating from college.

Diana. This 22-year-old female was born with “no hands.” Her positive attitude has helped her overcome obstacles she faces as a person who was born without hands. Her experiences as a college student with a disability have increased her desire to make a positive impact on social justice issues related to disability.

Justin. Justin, a 20-year-old male, has cerebral palsy. He uses a motorized wheelchair and he requires help from an aide to live in on-campus housing. Although his disability greatly affects his life, Justin is determined to earn a degree and better his future.

Marty. Marty is a 20-year-old female, who has knee pain, depression, and anxiety. She has a strong desire to advocate for others and raise awareness about disability issues.

Lana. Lana, a 21-year-old female from Cairo, Egypt, describes her disability as a “hearing impairment.” Communication can be difficult for Lana due to her hearing difficulties. However, Lana considers herself to be very social. She is involved in many on campus activities.

***Anna*.** Anna, a 22-year-old female, has retinitis pigmentosa. Her disability is a degenerative condition, which affects her vision. Anna's experiences of the college student with a disability have helped her develop skills to self-advocate and a desire to advocate for others with disabilities.

***Leslie*.** Leslie, a 19-year-old female, has both a visible and invisible disability. Leslie has a clubfoot and ADHD. Her clubfoot affects her ability to easily navigate a college campus. Leslie describes herself as shy when it comes to her disability. Her engagement in out-of-class activities is limited, but her roommate has helped her become more involved.

***Katie*.** Katie, a 20-year-old female, has dysautonomia, an invisible disability, which causes her significant fatigue. She missed many activities in middle school and high school while her disability was being diagnosed. Katie discussed wanting a new beginning when she began college. Katie is involved in many activities and she is determined to make a difference for college students with physical disabilities.

Sampling

My mobility difficulties affected the sampling strategy because I needed to consider proximity. Therefore, the study used purposive convenience sampling, even though this could result in "the expense of information and credibility” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). Sampling was conducted with the assistance of DRC personnel, whose support enabled me to secure participants who met the required criteria in an effective, unobtrusive, and practical manner.

Researcher Positionality

Improving the experiences and outcomes of college students with disabilities was very important because previous literature indicated that students with disabilities have a lower graduation rate than students without disabilities. Although I was one of the students with physical disabilities who did graduate from college, my early college experiences and especially my transition to college were difficult. Many students with disabilities have faced barriers to success**.** The results of this study will provide student affairs practitioners with knowledge to better assist students with physical disabilities as they transition to college. Students can persist and have better college experiences and successful outcomes.

Moustakas (1994) recommends the process of Epoche, which is “setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter a new into consciousness, and to look into them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). As a researcher with a physical disability, I had to remind myself to set aside presumptions. My experience reflected Moustakas’s (1994) musing:

> The challenge of Epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is forcing consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner. (p. 86).

Data Collection

To collect appropriate data, I conducted in-depth interviews with participants. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, one-on-one, and in person at the DRC. However, one interview was deemed inaudible during the transcription process and the interview was re-scheduled. The interviews were structured as an “informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). The design of the interview protocol was structured as a long, semi-structured interview, which is an appropriate data collection tool for transcendental phenomenology.

Transcription

As part of the informed consent form, I asked participants whether they were willing for their interview to be audio-recorded. The use of an audio recorder helped me capture words I may have missed during the interviews. IRB-approved employees at the OU’s Center for Educational Development and Research transcribed the interviews.

Member Checking

After I received the transcripts, I reviewed for typos and made slight editing changes. I sent a copy of the appropriate transcript to each participant for review. I encouraged them to make any edits or deletions. I wanted them to review for accuracy, thereby establishing trustworthiness. Only one participant asked for changes due to concern that some comments would compromise anonymity. I agreed to make the adjustments to the participant’s transcript.

Narrative Analysis

The narrative data were analyzed through a process of capturing important statements or quotes and comparing the statements until themes emerged (Creswell, 2014). The results of the transcriptions from each of the interviews were analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994, p. 120-121) modification of van Kaam’s (1959, 1966) method of analysis of phenomenological data. This phenomenological process began with Horizonalizations. Horizonalizations are listings of every relevant expression taken from the participants’ interviews. Through this process of elimination and reduction, invariant constituents are discovered. Invariant constituents are horizons of the experience. However, to be considered a horizon of the experience, each expression on the list of horizonalizations must capture “a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it" and must be relevant enough to be pulled out and labeled (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). If these criteria are met, then the expression is considered to be a horizon of the experience. Horizons are then labeled. If horizons are repetitive or unable to be given a proper label then they are removed. Strike through lines will show which horizons are eliminated. The constituents are then themed and presented in outline form. This is accomplished after ensuring that the interviews and constituents correspond.

After the data analysis occurs, a textural description (what participants experienced), a structural description (how the participants experienced it in terms of conditions, context, or situations), and a combination of textural and structural descriptions are developed to express the meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2014).

Textural descriptions contain the participant's exact words. The textural descriptions are step three of the process. The accounts of each participant are narrated but not analyzed during the textural descriptions. Textural descriptions of each participant will be presented in Chapter IV.

Structural descriptions differ from textural descriptions "in that they look underneath what exists, underneath the 'what it is' that the participants are describing" (Blake, 2007, p. 43). Structural descriptions are step four of the process. Composite textural and composite structural descriptions of the participants result in a synthesis of the experience representing the whole group (Blake, 2007). Structural descriptions will be included in Chapter IV.

Conclusion

Chapter III explains the selection of transcendental phenomenology as a way to explore why students with physical disabilities do or do not have successful transitions to higher education and why they choose or do not choose to become involved in out-of-classroom activities. In-depth interviews were conducted to allow participants to tell their stories. Chapter III also provides detail on the design and explained the process in carrying out the research. Chapter IV will provide an analysis of the participants' interviews and reveal the findings of the study.

Chapter IV

The purpose of the study is to shed light on the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and examine the ways in which these lived experiences contribute to these students' retention, graduation, and future employment. After introducing the overarching research question and six research sub-questions, the textural and structural descriptions for each participant are provided. To answer the research question and research sub-questions, an understanding of each participant's life before and during college must be understood.

Textural descriptions provide an intimate look at what the participants with physical disabilities experience. A composite textural description will combine the participants' experiences into a comprehensive textural description. Structural descriptions will explain the themes uncovered in the participants interviews and provide a better understanding of why the participants choose to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities. A composite structural description will incorporate the participants' structural descriptions into a group description of their experiences. A textural-structural synthesis will follow to integrate the meanings of the participant's textural and structural descriptions of their lived experiences. The narrative analysis will provide answers to the research question and research sub-questions.

The overarching research question is:What issues influence students with physical disabilities' decisions to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities and how do these issues influence the decision to remain in college? The six research sub-questions are:

1. What factors influenced participant's decision to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities?
2. How do these factors influence the participant's decision to remain in college?
3. What type of out-of-class activities did the participant experience?
4. Why did the participant choose these activities?
5. What were their experiences in participating in these outside activities?
6. Did these out-of- class activities help create a network of support for the participant's future employment opportunities?

Textural Descriptions

Textural descriptions focus on "what" each participant has experienced. Textural descriptions consider every detail of a phenomenon. The following section explores the experiences of each student with a physical disability both before and during their time as a college student.

Katya's Textural Description

Katya's experiences as a person with a disability began at birth. "I'm blind. I read Braille." Although her parents and other adults treated her well, her peers often treated her poorly. Katya described mistreatment from her classmates:

> I got bullied from the time I was 11 to the time I was 16 or 17, and by bullied, I mean verbally called names like a female dog. You know what word I am implying. I also got called a piece of s-h-i-t.

Katya also experienced physical abuse. She had things thrown at her and she also had many other difficult experiences:

> And, I have been tripped, hit, punched, kicked every day. Like, when I was in junior high, (students) made it a regular thing to take my cane away and beat me with it.

Despite being bullied growing up, Katya attempted to become involved in various activities. She played the piano from the age of six until the age of 10. Her parents told her they wanted her to quit since she did not want to practice. Katya said, however, that the reason she did not practice was because she spent her time studying:

> From the time I was in fifth grade until the time I graduated, my routine is… I would go to school and then I would go home at four in the afternoon and I would start doing homework I would stop around six or 6:30 for, you know, 20 minutes for dinner and I would pick right back up again and I wouldn't be finished until midnight or one every single day since I was 10.

She desired to be involved in various out-of-class activities in junior high and high school. Katya said that her attempts to run track and participate in cycling were not met with many opportunities:

> When I was in ninth grade, I wanted to be on the cycling team and then we even got me a racing tandem because I love that, um… And I found a partner and I was able to practice with the cycling team but they weren't able or willing to enter me in any races. Um, they couldn't find any tandem bike races around so I was, I would say it was maybe a less than half-hearted effort made by my community to really include me in stuff.

One of Katya's favorite hobbies was listening to football games with her father. As a high school senior, Katya and her father offered to broadcast high school football games on the Internet. Her high school principal thought broadcasting games was a good idea. Katya described her broadcasting experience with her father:

> My dad was the play-by-play and I did the color commentating but that was an extra-curricular activity that I did because I created my own opportunity. You know what I am saying?

Katya's blindness did not impact her ability to broadcast games with her father. From the time she was a young child, she listened to games with him. Katya explained:

> Okay, so I know the terminology. So, like if somebody on the radio tells me, like gives me the play-by play on the what is happening on the field I know so much about the game that I can analyze it.

For three years, from her senior year of high school through her sophomore year of college at the University of Texas-Arlington (UTA), Katya broadcasted games with her father.

After graduating from high school, Katya began college at UTA. Through her freshman year, Katya used a cane to navigate everywhere. Katya was nearly hit by cars and bicyclists on and around campus. She then decided she needed a guide dog. “I have a yellow lab guide dog from Guide Dogs for the Blind in California,” Katya said. Her guide dog has been with her for six years. Though Katya’s guide dog helped her become more independent, she still faced challenges related to her disability. She attempted to become involved in out-of-class activities while at UTA. Katya said:

> I’m a Christian and I tried to get involved in some different religious ministries on campus but they were not very accepting of my disability or in some cases of my dog, or events were just not made accessible. So I wasn’t, I didn’t really get involved in much.

Katya was a double major in Russian and French. She explained that UTA refused to accommodate her disability needs. UTA did not provide her with accessible textbooks or accommodate her needs for certain required classes. She also described a negative experience with her professor:

> My old Russian professor in Texas told me I wasn’t worth the time it took to teach me and that I would never make an A and that I would never get a degree and that blind people didn’t deserve to be in college. I am not joking. He really said that.

Katya left school in 2014, but she was determined to continue pursuit of her degree. She stated:

> I quit three hours short of my degree. I quit. I walked away and I came to OU because I didn't want to give up on an education and I didn't want to have someone else dictate my, the outcome of my life.

Katya initially came to OU in the fall of 2014 as a non-degree-seeking student. She was unsure what accommodations she would receive. Katya said, "Just because the law says you are entitled to something doesn't mean that is what people are going to give you or do, so I wasn't very trusting, I wasn't sure." Her decision to come to OU proved beneficial. Katya decided to re-take several Russian courses, which would have transferred to OU from UTA. She had more accessible textbooks at OU than UTA. She felt she would learn Russian better by repeating language classes at OU. Katya related her decision to re-take Russian courses:

> I would have probably could have finished it sooner, but I would have probably not done well in my classes because I would not have had the foundation I needed but because I started, I made all A's so...

Though her classes became more accessible after transferring to OU, she still faced accessibility challenges. While on campus, Katya could not see fliers, signs, or other announcements about activities. For example, she missed Homecoming events. She could not see what was going on around her, although she could hear them.

Katya's textural description revealed important themes: (1) depression and (2) advocacy.

Tim's Textural Description

In the first semester of his freshman year at OU in 2006, Tim pledged to a fraternity. He also had a girlfriend. Tim's life was changed forever when he was in a horrendous car accident in December 2006. He suffered a broken neck and severed his spinal cord, which resulted in quadriplegia (paralysis from the chest down). After the accident, Tim went through extensive and difficult rehabilitation for several months in Houston. Tim recalled his feelings following the accident. He stated:

> Well, I mean there's a lot of emotions. So, right after the accident I felt l like my life was pretty much over, especially considering I was like in a hospital bed for three months or something and so I couldn't really see like future. I mean, I was still with my girlfriend, but she is obviously back home. So, um, I'm in this place and one of the things I hated about it is it is kind of similar to a hospital.

He felt that the staff was inconsiderate of his space. "They would just come into your room with like, zero regard for whatever."

Tim said that the hardest part of adjusting to life with a disability was difficulty going places. "I tend to not go places," he said. Before the accident, Tim was able-bodied. In high school, he played a variety of sports. He played football and baseball and he was also on the weightlifting team.

Returning home to Oklahoma after rehabilitation in Houston, Tim not only continued his physical therapy, he faced other challenges adjusting to quadriplegia and he was angry after the accident. He explained:

> I was like very pissed off during the whole, all through the beginning, until I broke up with my girlfriend. I don't know when I stopped being pissed off at the world but um I was just like angry all of the time.

A manual wheelchair became Tim's source of mobility. He also had to learn a new way to drive with the aid of hand controls in his car since he could no longer use his legs to press the pedals. Tim struggled to become independent. He said, "I didn't really put an effort into trying to be independent, but I do think it takes like a long time to like learn how to do everything." In 2012, six years after his accident and leaving college, Tim began thinking about returning to college. Tim discussed his reasons:

> I had my first ideas of like, okay, I need to do something this is like not working I can't just like sit around and play video games. So, like on top of like playing video games occasionally, I would also like make an effort to like learn something every day.

After spending 8 years away from school, Tim decided to return to college. He began taking online classes at a for-profit college. The next year, Tim took online classes at Fort Hays State University.

Nearly 10 years after his accident, Tim returned to OU in Fall 2016. He lived in an on-campus apartment by himself. Tim encountered difficulty navigating campus in his wheelchair. Manually rolling his wheelchair causes him great fatigue.

Tim's textural description uncovered important themes: (1) isolation, (2) perseverance, and (3) accessibility.

Melinda's Textural Description

Melinda was diagnosed with Type I diabetes when she was 10 months old. Her parents helped her learn to manage her diabetes. Melinda's parents provided a letter to her teachers to inform them of their daughter's diabetes. She was an active child who spent a lot of time with her older brother whom she considered to be her "best bud." Melinda believed her diabetes might have impacted her physically in elementary school. She said she would have "extra running days," which were really difficult for her. She played softball through the fourth grade and she also spent a lot of time with her family doing outdoor activities such as camping. In middle school, Melinda decided to pursue percussion instead of softball for a few reasons, but mainly because she became more passionate about music. Melinda also played in the marching band. However, she injured her back while carrying heavy instruments. Although the injury forced Melinda to quit marching in the band, she played snare drum from the stands. Melinda continued with percussion through the remainder of high school and she performed timpani on a European trip and with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

These experiences helped her meet a percussion professor who inspired her to major in Music Education and Performance. During Melinda's freshman year, she said other students in the music program were informed about her back injury and told not to let her lift anything heavy by a faculty member. The experience of having someone tell others about her disability impacted Melinda greatly. She felt violated by someone else disclosing her disability. Melinda voiced her frustration about the incident:

> Huge, it messed me up. I didn't know any… Obviously, I didn't know anything about disability services. I didn't know about equal rights. I didn't know anything like that. And it helped basically I started having nervous problems, like I was playing relatively easy music and playing it fine and thinking that I sucked at it. My self-esteem was destroyed. Basically it was eating away at me physically without me knowing it. And it didn't help when they were teaching a technique that required you weren't allowed to move your arm while you played, which is impossible I mean if you move your wrist up and down like you're hitting a drum you'll feel in your arm that there's movement, you have to do this no matter what. If you don't, you're like gonna hurt yourself. So, I hurt myself with the technique they were teaching.

After injuring her wrist, Melinda decided to change her major to astrophysics. Melinda fell on campus, which resulted in her decision to leave school so she could care for her health. From 2007 until 2012, Melinda spent time away from college dealing with a variety of health issues, including depression, hypothyroidism and mitochondrial myopathy.

Melinda returned to OU in Spring 2012. She was involved in Civic Orchestra and played the bass drum. After having disagreements about the music program, she became multidisciplinary studies major.

Melinda's textural description uncovered important themes: (1) depression and (2) lack of awareness of disability services on campus.

Diana's Textural Description

Diana was born with "no hands"; however, she does not know the specific name of her disability. She said having no hands in a two-hand world is challenging. Diana has a younger brother whom she considers protective of her. She also had only a few friends because she considered herself to be the "different one."

As a child, Diana discussed feeling self-conscious about her disability. She would attempt to hide her disability by wearing sleeves. Diana also attempted to avoid going to certain places. "If we were going someplace really crowded, sometimes I'd try to avoid it." Her mother wanted her to try prosthetics. Diana said, "I was definitely encouraged by my mom. Encourage is a light way to put it, more like pushed to do it." She discussed prosthetics. She chose not to use prosthetic hands because she would require further amputation to her arms. Diana said, “It was just something I was not interested in.” She said that she sometimes felt patronized by her classmates in elementary school, middle school, and high school. In regard to-out-of-class activities, Diana played soccer growing up, but she decided to quit the sport. She explained:

> I think that in my head I was like, thinking you know, working my body physically in that way wasn’t for me. I had different… I think if I could go back in time, I probably would have made a different choice.

Diana experienced condescending behavior from some students and she said that in terms of activities, she felt left out. Although Diana experienced some negative treatment from other students, she met a core group of four friends in eighth grade. Diana said, “We’re still friends to this day.” She said she was fortunate to have friends who were able to help her when she needed it. Diana had a difficult time asking for help when she was younger. “I was very, you know, stubborn and prideful. I wanted to prove that I could do it, I felt like I had to,” she said. Diana had to learn to do things in ways that worked for her.

Diana was not sure about college as an option because of her disability. “It made me question it,” she said. Diana wondered if she would be able to handle moving out and living alone. Before graduation, her high school guidance counselor discussed the services for students with disabilities provided by the OU DRC. Diana decided to attend a university close to her home. During her freshman year at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), Diana described an orientation process where students with disabilities and faculty members would meet each other before the semester began. She enjoyed the smaller atmosphere at UCO and was involved in a campus organization called "Students for an Accessible Society." Diana explained her desire to quickly become involved in the campus organization. She said:

> Right away, like right away, I definitely had this sort of activist call. And then… so we held movie nights and trying to improve accessibility on campus.

Diana's textural description uncovered important themes: (1) advocacy, (2) activism, and (3) anxiety.

Justin's Textural Description

Justin was born with cerebral palsy. He uses a motorized wheelchair for mobility. Justin said his parents were very inclusive and made sure he was able to do what he wanted. He participated in several activities, including go-carts and four-wheelers. However, Justin said that he was not very involved in high school activities because there were not a lot of options available to him. Justin said he had several acquaintances growing up, but he only has a few close friends.

Justin said he always envisioned himself attending college, but he was not sure how to get there. He said the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitative Services helped him understand what he needed to do to receive services and how to go to college. He said, another agency, the J. D. McCarty Center also had a big impact on his journey to college. The J. D. McCarty Center introduced him to two social workers during his senior year of high school. The workers helped Justin formulate a plan to attend college. Justin recalled:

> They took me to meet with people at University. [A social worker] also coordinated with my parents and let them know what they needed to do may help me get all of those things like that because my parents never went to college, so they were really – J. D. McCarty was a really big help in actually getting me into college.

Justin said his decision to attend college was driven, in part, by his cerebral palsy. “There was really only kind of one choice (to attend college) if I wanted to make any kind of livable wage and not be, you know, not live off disability for the rest of my life, you know.”

When Justin began his freshman year at OU, he said his transition to college was scary. Fortunately, he was reunited with a childhood friend at OU, which made his transition to college less difficult. Justin’s friend did not return to OU the following year. Despite missing his friend, Justin said he was trying to “branch out a little bit.” Justin said he was open to becoming more involved in on-campus activities such as Disability Inclusion and Awareness (DiNA), a student-led organization. Justin stressed that his main focus is on academics. “That is the whole reason why I’m here, to get an education.” He said other reasons for not becoming more involved in on-campus activities are his personality and his disability. Justin said he is slow to warm up when it comes to meeting new people. “I am also very, I wouldn’t call myself not interesting, but slow to warm up.” Justin said his disability stigma has been something he has dealt with his entire life.

Justin’s textural description uncovered important themes: (1) advocacy, (2) isolation, and (3) stigma.

Marty’s Textural Description

Marty has multiple disabilities including anxiety, depression, and knee pain. She said, “I’m currently working on getting a diagnosis for chronic pain problems.” Her disabilities affected her sleep schedule. “Because I had to have 10 to 12 hours of sleep, I couldn’t go out with friends or because I would have to do, get homework done,” Marty said. Marty’s disabilities did not stop her from becoming involved in high school band. She played the saxophone for the concert band in the spring and she was the drum major in the marching band during the fall. As a drum major, Marty knew others were relying on her and she did not want to let them down. As a result, her depression and anxiety worsened. In addition to depression and anxiety, Marty began experiencing knee pain during her freshman year of high school. The pain made it very difficult for Marty to stand for the entire practice and perform her duties as a drum major. She would often conduct the marching band from a chair during practice. During marching band performances Marty said, "I just stood up and dealt with it." Marty explained that most of her teachers were very understanding about her disability in high school. During her sophomore year, one of her teachers "was of the mindset that yelling was a good way to persuade students, so she would daily." As a result, Marty's depression worsened. When the teacher would yell, Marty would leave class and cry in the bathroom. Marty said that even though her teacher told her she was doing well in class, she began cutting herself. Her parents sent her to different counselors for a few months and "all of them were pretty awful," Marty said.

Marty remained in band, yet she self-harmed herself "pretty consistently" throughout the remainder of high school. Marty completed high school and was a National Merit Scholar. She wanted to attend private school or an Ivy League school, but because her education would be paid for, she decided to stay in state and attend OU. Marty did not have any close high school friends with her when she transitioned to college. Marty defined friends as:

> People that I can call on to take me to the hospital if I need it or

> just someone I can go to, kind of like with anything just to check, you know, that we can keep up with each other outside of whatever brought us together.

Marty met several acquaintances due to her participation in student organizations such as the Association of Women in Computing (AWC). Marty said involvement with that organization and others were really helpful to her. Marty said she did not consider mental illness as a disability when she came to OU. After telling a professor about her anxiety and depression, the professor suggested she explore what the OU DRC had to offer her. She took the professor's advice and registered with the DRC at of the first semester of her freshman year. Marty became involved with the student organization called Disability Inclusion and Awareness (DINA) after attending a symposium during the fall of her freshman year. She began helping the organization's president develop a proposal to improve campus for students with disabilities.

Marty's textural descriptions uncovered important themes: (1) depression, (2) stigma, and (3) advocacy.

Lana's Textural Description

Lana is an international student from Egypt. She describes herself as having a hearing impairment. She was diagnosed with her disability when she was six years old after her parents noticed she was having difficulty responding to them and to her teacher. Lana said her teacher thought there was something wrong with her and told her parents, “There is something wrong with the way she looks. There is something wrong with her eye.” The teacher thought she had a mental disability. Her intense look on her face was Lana concentrating on reading lips and straining to hear people. After several visits with multiple physicians, Lana was diagnosed with hearing loss. She received her first hearing aid at eight years old. Lana’s parents were surprised by her diagnosis since she was a social child. However, her ability to hear has become worse as she has grown older. Lana recalled, “When I was a kid, high socializing ---- like just playing with other kids, but now when I ---- ---- adult I can hardly hear anyone saying anything. That’s how I actually know I’m getting worse.” Although Lana’s disability has become progressively worse, her desire to pursue a college degree has not diminished.

As an international student, Lana spent her first year of high school in Cairo and the last two years of high school in Norway after learning about a scholarship opportunity from United World College on the social media website Twitter. After receiving her scholarship to the high school in Norway, Lana was unsure about her transition from Egypt to Norway. She was concerned about the language barrier at her new high school. The school is an English-speaking school, and Lana’s native language is Arabic; however, she learned English as a student in Egypt. Lana said the school had a three-week period before school started, during which new students could learn about the school to better assist the their transition. While in high school in Norway, Lana helped children in a refugee camp by playing soccer with them as part of a school activity. She also was involved with a school welcoming committee.

Lana was told by several international students who were a part of the program in Norway that OU was an excellent option for her. She said older students informed her, "OU is a nice place." She chose OU. She based her decision on what she learned from other students and the incentives OU provided for her. Lana's transition to the United States has been challenging for her due to various misconceptions. Lana occasionally encountered awkward situations, yet she was not deterred from becoming involved at OU.

Lana participated in several different student organizations including United World College group for international students and Disability Inclusion and Awareness. Lana also attended several other events put on by different organizations. Lana said, "If they put on a fun event, I go." Her involvement helped her meet four of her closest friends and it helped her become more confident when talking in front of groups. Lana also developed connections with "professors and other staff members" at OU including interaction with a University Vice President.

Lana said her involvement with different out-of-class activities helped her cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which she has had to deal with since one of her classmates was killed in Egypt.

Lana's interview uncovered important themes: (1) anxiety, (2) isolation, and (3) a desire to be involved.

Anna's Textural Description

Anna has retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative disease she inherited from her father. The disease impacts her vision in a variety of ways. She has no peripheral vision and she cannot drive. She cannot go out alone at night. Anna also has difficulty walking up stairs. Her vision decreased in the past year. She described the challenges associated with her vision:

> I noticed that my eyes had severely dropped and that just meant that I had to increase my ------ I needed a bigger computer like now I have a monitor for my computer. I zoom in and people like to laugh. They're like wow that's a really big font and I'm like, I can't live without it. I need it.

Anna does not blame people for laughing. She said, "I can't really fault them for something they don't know anything about." Anna did not allow her disability to keep her from being involved in out-of-class activities in high school. She participated in color guard from her sophomore year until spring of her senior year. Anna said, "My parents were always pretty big advocates for me and pretty much willing to do anything to make sure I was normal."

After high school, Anna attended Northern Michigan University. Anna chose Northern Michigan since she had family ties to the area. She said, “My mom’s from Michigan, so I was a legacy in some sense. I just really liked it up there.” At Northern Michigan, Anna joined a sorority. She transferred to OU after her freshman year because there was not a lot for her to do in Michigan. Anna described not being able to do various outdoor activities such as hiking. She also mentioned having to ask friends to help her with errands. When Anna transferred to OU, she was able to use ride services such as Uber to get groceries. In addition to improved accessibility, Anna chose to transfer to OU over schools in her native Texas because she wanted to be a trailblazer and do something different.

Anna was a member of a sorority. She also served as vice president of the University Communications Association. She lived on campus. Anna said it was easier to navigate due to the proximity of buildings and size of campus. She also said it was easier to make friends while living on campus. She also worked at the DRC on campus. Her work there raised an awareness of the disability services available to several of her sorority sisters and opened a pathway for them to seek services at the DRC.

Anna’s textural description uncovered important themes: (1) advocacy and (2) accessibility.

Leslie's Textural Description

Leslie has a clubfoot and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She participated in sports despite her disabilities. Leslie played soccer and she also participated in gymnastics. Additionally, ballet was one of Leslie's favorite activities despite her clubfoot. She was involved with ballet throughout elementary school even though she had difficulty pointing her toes because of her clubfoot. The inability to point her toes frustrated Leslie. She eventually quit ballet. Leslie was active with Girl Scout until her freshman year of high school. At times, Leslie was frustrated because of her clubfoot She said, 'I was just like, embarrassed about being different." Leslie was bothered when she would have to miss gym class to do physical therapy. Gym class was one of her favorite activities. Leslie also began playing in the orchestra in the fourth grade. She began playing the violin, but started playing the viola in fifth grade. Leslie said, "I played that all through secondary education." Though she actively participated in a variety of activities growing up and was supported by many of her classmates, Leslie felt uncomfortable at times. "Probably not because of my foot. I would say, sometimes telling people about my ADHD makes me feel self-conscious," she said. Leslie said she felt she was stupid because she did not get into a "PEAK" class that was considered to be for gifted children. Leslie's twin brother was in the class and when she did not get into “PEAK,” she blamed her brother.

Although she faced challenges based on her disabilities, Leslie said she never doubted she would go to college. She said her mother would have preferred her to go to a smaller campus. However, Leslie chose to attend OU due to the reputation of the English Department’s Creative Writing program. The size of the campus has made it difficult for her physically. “It does get tiring though. Walking. It’s hard to walk all the way to Campus Corner, and it’s…there’s not much driving access,” Leslie said. Her freshman roommate, whom she knew from high school, helped her transition to OU. Leslie shared:

> Like, if I say I don’t want to walk somewhere, she’s really cool with it, and she suggests other places for us to eat. I get migraines a lot, so she’s always cool with the light, just turning it down, and just letting me sit there in the dark, she comes in a lot and has the lights off, she says, you’re like a vampire. That’s what she’s accused me of.

She said her freshman year was stressful because “I do feel like there is a lot going on and I do feel like it’s hard to tackle it all.” At the urging of her roommate, she joined the OU fishing team. She thought about joining other organizations, but Leslie does not like meeting new people. She said she is shy because of her disabilities. “It probably stems from it… stems from being afraid that people will judge me differently because of that and then it snowballs into being afraid that people are judging me for everything I do," she explained. Leslie considered herself "a one-friend kind of person." She said, "I tend to hang out with people I know." Leslie said she does not know if she will become friends with members of her fishing group since they are older than her. She said she does not know if she will become involved in activities out-of-the classroom unless she meets people in her English classes. "Those are people I think I would enjoy talking to," Leslie said.

Leslie was not initially interested in becoming involved in activities. She said, "I feel like I'm a lot different from other girls. I don't like to go dance, I don't like to go party…" However, Leslie commented that becoming more involved on campus would be good for her mental health. She felt that if she didn't become more involved in activities her anxiety would increase and she would become more self-conscious.

Leslie's interview textural description uncovered important themes: (1) self-consciousness and (2) stigma.

Katie's Textural Description

Katie's disability is dysautonomia, also referred to as postural orthostatic tachycardia. It is an invisible disability that affects her autonomic nervous system. She was diagnosed with the disease in middle school. Katie's disability caused her to miss significant portions of her sixth and seventh grade years. Her disability impacted her high school participation too. Katie said, “When I got to high school, I never went a full week of school.” Fortunately, her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) enabled her to have flexible attendance. Katie’s disability prevented her from becoming very involved in extracurricular activities in middle school and high school.

Her medication helped her control symptoms, which have included fatigue, low blood pressure, dizziness, brain fog, and temperature sensitivity. Her parents, especially her father, managed her accommodations during her public school years. Katie remarked:

> Still to this day [Dad] has stacks of files of my medical records that he takes to every single meeting over my medical condition. My parents arranged and accompanied me to my first accommodations meeting at OU. I think the biggest thing for me was knowing that there was a disability resource center available and that would help me, make you know and equitable change where I could you know make it in higher ed without feeling I am not doing anything and feeling out of the loop as I did in middle school and high school. I could make my own schedule and that was like, the biggest factor for me.

Katie’s disability did not prevent her from being involved in numerous campus organizations and activities. Katie said her involvement with so many different organizations resulted from her “wanting to start fresh” and be engaged as much as she could when she came to OU.

Katie interview uncovered important themes: (1) stigma and (2) advocacy.

Composite Textural Descriptions

The experience of living with physical disabilities, whether visible or invisible, presents challenges for these college students daily. The participants discussed a variety of reasons that affected their decision to engage in out-of-class activities. Although it was not talked about early in the interviews, stigmas were discussed. Being seen as differently in others' eyes and concerns that participants' physical disabilities could be misconstrued as a mental disability eventually came to the surface. Depression was a common theme. Even though several participants hid it well, depression figured prominently in the course of their lives. Anxiety was frequently mentioned. Accessibility to campus activities could be a help or hindrance. Some participants were actively engaged in activities through information from the DRC or friends, while others struggled to find their way around campus to specific activities.

Advocacy, in the form of self, parents, or mentors, gave many participants the confidence to engage in activities out of the classroom. Every participant exhibited great perseverance by taking on the challenges presented by college every day.

Structural Descriptions

Structural descriptions involve "continuous acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting" to determine structural meanings

(Moustakas, 1994). They are the “why” of the textural descriptions. Structural descriptions are considered the beginning of evaluation (Blake, 2007).

Katya’s Structural Description

Katya’s experiences revealed structures of depression and advocacy, which impacted her decision to become engaged in on-campus activities at OU. Being blind did not stop Katya from pursuing her educational goals.

Depression

Katya experienced depression and suicidal thoughts. She explained:

> Well, I will put it this way. So I dealt with depression for a lot of years and, um, for a while, I mean I didn’t even talk about it with my family, but I mean for a while I was suicidal when I was in junior high. Because I mean if you are told every week, every single day, that you don’t deserve to live, well, that is going to impact a 14-year-old’s self-esteem, right? I mean, obviously, I am fine now, not like that now obviously. I am 25, you know, we are fine now, but you know a 13-year-old a 14-year-old kid, you know, going through that every day, you are going to feel awful. I, my self-confidence was zero and so when I graduated high school, I mean, I went to college because that’s what you did. That’s the thing you do. You gotta go to college. I didn’t want to end up like the blind people that just sit there and collect Social Security and do nothing with their lives. I mean I wanted to do something, so um…

Advocacy

While Katya was growing up, her family strongly advocated for her. Originally a kindergarten teacher, Katya's mother switched careers to become a teacher for blind children after Katya's birth. Katya was really grateful when she spoke about her parents and her brother. Katya described herself as an extrovert, but she also talked about being very shy when she transferred to OU. She said, "You are lucky if you got three words out of me in a day…"

Her Russian professor took an interest in her as a student and helped her become more confident. Katya explained:

> He started making an effort to pull me out of my shell and he would pull me aside and help me learn Russian, but then he would always give me advice on how to live life be a better person because he knew I was struggling and like, he got me to open up.

Katya became excited when discussing her Russian professor. She considered him to be her mentor. She expressed:

> He, he basically, is the one person outside of my family, who basically told me that I deserved better than to live life in mediocrity. Because of him, like, I have decided, I didn't want…I put down my tough exterior and decided to open up and I got involved first in the Russian community and that's helped me to make other friends that go to OU and I have gotten involved in various other communities at OU.

Tim's Structural Description

Tim's discussion of experiences revealed structures of isolation, perseverance, and accessibility. These structures affected his decision to engage in out-of-class activities.

Isolation

Tim’s sense of isolation extends to the classroom. Wheelchair seating limits his access to other students. Tim described the classroom setting:

> I have classroom friends. It’s kind of hard, so I’m sitting in the back of the room like hundreds of kids. So not really an opportunity to make friends with any unless you can talk to people, but I don’t like really get to choose who I am sitting next to either.

Perseverance

Nearly a decade after suffering a broken neck and then going through extensive rehabilitation, Tim decided to return to OU. He said, “I had my first ideas of like, okay, I need to do something. This is like, not working. I can’t just like sit around and play video games.”

Accessibility

Tim’s decision to become engaged in out-of-class activities is affected by time and location. He said, “I think it is more of, um, do I want to spend time doing this? Like, how big of a pain in the ass is it going to be?” Tim said, “If it were less out of the way, I think I would have to do certain things.” Tim also became frustrated when talking about getting to campus and about the challenge of getting around campus in his wheelchair. “The bus is easier to get to campus because I can just wheel on the bus and go, but yeah… The wheeling from campus to (the DRC) is like insane," he said.

Tim made the effort to attend student association meetings for Management Information Systems and "Lunch and Learn" meetings to network with business leaders. Fatigue and accessibility issues affect his ability to attend out-of-class activities.

Melinda's Structural Description

The structures she revealed during interview are depression and a lack of awareness of disability services, which affected her involvement in out-of-class activities at OU.

Depression

Melinda's interview emphasized her love of music and the love for her father and their special bond. Her disabilities and health issues presented challenges for her regarding the pursuit of her musical passion. After taking time away from OU to focus on health issues, Melinda returned to school in 2012. However, she was dealing with depression, which was affected by her father's declining health and being away from music. Melinda clearly loved her father and music. She discussed a 2015 hospitalization for depression related to the music program. Melinda also dealt with the death of her father in January 2016. She cried when reminiscing about him. It was clear how much she loved him. She expressed determination to finish her degree in multidisciplinary studies especially after her father bought her a “snoopy drum” as a graduation present.

Lack of Awareness of Disability Services

Melinda’s structure of lack of awareness of disability services also greatly affected her ability to participate in on-campus activities. Before OU, Melinda was unaware of the availability of disability services. Early in her freshman year, Melinda disclosed on an information form that she had a back injury. This was revealed to members of the marching band. She was greatly distressed that others were aware of her back condition. Melinda said, “It messed me up. I didn’t know …anything about disability services. I didn’t know about equal rights. I didn’t know anything like that.”

Melinda sporadically attended OU over the course of several years. She mentioned that professors and instructors offered her accommodations in the classroom. She resented the help since she had not formally registered with the DRC. In 2016, Melinda took a job with the DRC as a student employee. This helped her to socialize with others and learn more about what services the DRC provides.

Diana’s Structural Description

Diana’s interview revealed structures of advocacy, activism, and anxiety, which influenced her decision to become involved in out-of-class activities. Unsure of the specific name of her disability, Diana described her disability as having “no hands.”

Advocacy

As discussed earlier, in her senior year of high school, Diana’s school guidance counselor discussed the importance of disability support services in college. The structure of advocacy was evident when Diana began college at UCO. She talked about meeting other students with disabilities and professors at UCO at an orientation that took place the weekend before school began. Diana met faculty members and “you knew everyone on a first name basis.” She immediately became involved with a student organization called “Students for an Accessible Society.” Diana really seemed to enjoy discussing her time at UCO, however, she decided to transfer to OU because she “wasn’t super happy with the English department there and I heard it’s a lot better at OU, so… I transferred.”

Activism

When discussing her transfer to OU, she passionately described wanting to make a difference. The structure of activism became very clear when Diana began talking about her desire to impact campus climate. She said:

> So in the beginning, I was like alright let’s change this. Let’s come in, let’s do something. Over time though, I just started to feel kind of isolated. And there wasn’t that sense of like, disabled

> community on campus. I guess that's how I would answer that. I don't want to put you down because I love it here, but yeah…

She was involved with the Association of Students with Disabilities (ASD), the Black Student Association (BSA), Women's Studies Association (WSA), and the English Department Association (EDA). Diana said her disability definitely influenced her decision to engage in a variety of out-of-class organizations and activities. She emphasized the impact of her disability on her decision to become engaged:

> Hell yeah. I wasn't sure if you know, would people like me? Would I get in the way? I was always really afraid that I would get in the way or if they had to make special accommodations, oh no…I wanted to be able-bodied, but disabled at the same time.

Anxiety

The structure of anxiety was revealed when Diana expressed disappointment about her experience when helping at a Women's Studies Conference. She felt that others weren't interested in assisting her to find ways she could help. She said people at the conference would give her "the look and there's the hesitancy." Despite some difficult experiences, Diana said she would have been "miserable" without being involved in out-of-class activities and organizations. She said, "Even though I had some spotty experiences, I really enjoyed my time here." Diana overcame her anxiety about her disability and used campus and family supports to become an activist with disability issues.

Justin's Structural Description

Justin's interview revealed the structures of advocacy, isolation, and stigma related to engagement in out-of-class activities. Justin explained that his disability, cerebral palsy, affects him greatly. He explained:

> It impacts how you can dress, it impacts how I wake up in the morning, you know, and it impacts how I take a shower, how I go to the bathroom-I can't do any of that myself. I mean I can shower myself, but…. Things like that and… But yeah man, it affects everything about me.

Advocacy

Justin said he knew he would go to college, but he was unsure how he would get there. He said that a few state agencies like the JD McCarty Center and the Oklahoma Department of rehabilitative services helped him get into college. While grateful for the assistance of state agencies in helping him to get into college, Justin said college was necessary. He said, "There was really only one kind of choice if I wanted to make any kind of livable wage, and not be, you know, not live off disability for the rest of my life, you know."

Isolation

Justin said he was interested in becoming involved in campus activities, but he was focused on academics. "I put that before everything and that could possibly have led me to be a little reclusive."

Stigma

He also expressed concern about the stigma that people might believe he was cognitively disabled, in addition to being physically disabled. He was continually frustrated that he had to face frequent misconceptions regarding his disability.

Marty's Structural Description

Marty's interview revealed structures of depression, stigma, and advocacy.

Depression and Stigma

As a freshman at OU, Marty's self-harming (cutting) continued to the point that she required hospitalization. She said, "I just took it one step too far and …after that I started counseling here … and after that it was just personal resolve." Marty said her involvement with on-campus activities and organizations was influenced by her disabilities. Marty said she was not sure if she was considered a student with a disability when she came here. She said, "I did not think mental disabilities counted." Marty explained:

> There were times when I'd be too anxious to go to meetings or I'd go to meetings and then mid-way through it I'd start to panic." She explained, "It might have been that I talked to a professor. Say, like hey, I have depression or anxiety or sometimes there might be… need to step out of class and they might've suggested like you should get registered in the DRC.

Marty realized that she had an invisible disability and that she needed accommodations. Marty credited her service dog with helping her anxiety lessen. Her service dog "learned a variety of tasks including… like depression therapy, nervous tick interruption. We're working on anxiety alerts," Marty elaborated.

Advocacy

Marty's realization of her need for disability accommodations has influenced her out-of-class advocacy for other students with all types of disabilities. Marty was a National Merit Scholar and she majored in Computer Science at the OU. During her freshman year, she became heavily involved with various organizations, such as the Association of Women in Computing, Women in Society, Disability Inclusion and Awareness, Secular Sooners and the Student Association of Computation Machinery. Marty explained:

> I came in with the mentality that freshmen year, let's just like, stick my foot in as much as I can and see what's available. Keep myself busy so I don't get lonely and things like that and then throughout the years, I figured I'd be able to- I'd prune back and get on like the executive boards like the ones I cared about and then really work through those.

Lana's Structural Description

Lana's interview revealed core structures of anxiety, isolation, and a desire to be involved.

Anxiety and Isolation

Lana’s hearing impairment caused difficulties in communication with professors and classmates at OU. She explained:

> People just assume I don’t understand English and …you know that American assumption if you don’t know English you are not smart. That might be one of the main problems related to my disability.

She described feeling isolated when her hearing aid stopped working for two days and she could not communicate with classmates, friends, and professors. Lana mentioned struggling with some social difficulties as well. She said, “Sometimes, people think you’re not socially… social.” Lana mentioned the challenges of being in really loud places and having difficulty communicating with other people. Sometimes, she would not respond to people because she could not hear them. She said that some people told her she was not smart. That really bothered her because they equated intelligence with disability.

Desire to be Involved

After graduating from high school, Lana received a scholarship from OU as part of the United World College program. She chose OU after she had heard about it from students who were already attending classes there and she wanted to attend a large university. Lana wanted to become involved with out-of-class at OU activities and get to know more people despite being hard of hearing and being from another country. She said, “Yeah, it’s a weird thing about me.” Lana became involved in the United World, the group of international students who came to OU as a result of the United World College program. She began attending Disability Inclusion and Awareness meetings during her freshman year. Lana said, “I was looking to make the situation better for other students.” She said she talked about her disability for the first time at those meetings. Lana also mentioned supporting other campus groups and meeting four of her five best friends in those groups. Being involved on campus has helped her to manage her anxieties.

Anna’s Structural Description

The structures revealed in Anna’s interview are accessibility and advocacy.

Advocacy

Anna’s decision to attend college was motivated, at least in part, by her father. Anna said, “I always knew I was going to college. It was either that or my dad said I live at home and work at McDonald’s and that didn’t work for me so…” Anna considered herself to be “a small-college girl.” She was uncertain whether or not would be able to succeed due to her disability. She chose to leave her native Texas and attend Northern Michigan University, a school her grandmother had attended.

Accessibility

After her freshman year, Anna decided to transfer since there were not many things to do. She said, “There is no way for me to get anywhere and it was kind of… It was a multitude of things. I love my friends, I liked, I really like school for the most part.” Anna transferred to OU for several reasons. She wanted a place that had good disability resources and she wanted to go to a school that had football. She also wanted a school where she could transfer to the sorority she was involved in at Northern Michigan University. At OU, Anna’s parents helped her become involved with the campus’s Disability Resource Center (DRC). Though grateful for her parents’ involvement with her transition to OU, she expressed frustration when she felt like they did not allow her to advocate for herself.

Advocacy

Anna worked as a student employee at the DRC. When talking about her work experience in the DRC, she explained how much she loved working at the Center as a student employee. The job helped her realize her career path and that she wanted to be an advocate for others.

Anna’s experiences with her disability have not only led her to ask for help, they have also helped her develop skills to assist other students with disabilities.

Leslie's Structural Description

Leslie's interview revealed structures of self-consciousness and stigma.

Self-Consciousness

Leslie said she really does not like meeting new people. "It probably stems from it …stems from being afraid that people will judge me differently because of that (disability) and then it snowballs into being afraid that people are judging me for everything I do," she said.

Stigma

Leslie discussed the stigma of her disabilities. She felt embarrassed that she did not "have the same foot as everyone else had." She said, "There are a lot of stigmas that disabled people are stupid, and I don't like to be seen as stupid or less than a person."

Katie's Structural Description

Katie's interview revealed structures of stigma and advocacy.

Stigma

Katie discussed the struggles of an invisible disability. During her interview, Katie explained how difficult it was for her to deal with physical struggles while not knowing her diagnosis. She expressed frustration due to missing a lot of class time in middle school because of the fatigue related to her disability. Katie was relieved when her medical condition was diagnosed. “The biggest thing was like, I can tell people I have this now. I have a diagnosis and I don’t have to be like I don’t know what is wrong with me,” Katie said. She also spoke passionately about her desire to be more than just the “girl who slept in.” She expressed:

> I have seen from others it’s harder to get involved with things that have the word disabilities in them if yours is invisible because you… sometimes they just don’t want to like associate with that word. But, I was totally fine with it because I didn’t see it as like you know having as big of a stigma as other people did. I was more just like, yeah, that’s what it is.

Advocacy

Katie discussed how her father has remained a very important advocate for her. “Yes, my dad was a huge, huge just like advocate, he still to this day has stacks of files of my medical records that he takes to every single meeting over my medical condition,” Katie said.

Katie made the decision to attend OU based on the physical proximity to her family home. Katie’s struggles with getting her disability diagnosed in middle school and high school and her father’s support sparked a desire for her to become involved when she began school at OU. She explained:

> I have always been a very perfectionist, high-achieving type of person, but I kind of left it just in academia and then when I came to OU and realized I wanted to start fresh and with that fresh start I was like I want to make a name for myself, but not as much make a name for myself as just like get involved.

Her transition to OU afforded her a new beginning. Katie registered for accommodations at the Disability Resource Center and became more open about her disability. Katie also expressed a strong desire to increase awareness about a variety of disability issues on campus.

Composite Structural Descriptions

The study's main research question is: What issues influence students with physical disabilities' decisions to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities and how do these issues influence the decision to remain in college? The participants in this study conveyed their need to better themselves by becoming gainfully employed. Some stated that out-of-class activities were a way for them to prepare for the future by networking at campus events to set up potential job opportunities. Two others talked about wanting to get a "fresh start" and becoming as involved in as many activities as they could. Two of the participants were focused solely on academics, finding that the physical demands of extracurricular activities were too much for them to handle. Some participants complained about the inaccessibility of buildings. Most of the participants expressed hesitancy about becoming involved in out-of-class activities because they were unsure about how others would react to their disabilities. Others referenced a lack of awareness of activities as reasons why they did not become engaged in out-of-class activities.

Textural-Structural Synthesis

The participants revealed daily struggles with physical difficulties. As a group, the participants experienced isolation, depression, bullying, anxiety, and self-consciousness. Participants also exhibited the perseverance to want to do more with their lives. They did not want to be defined by a disability. Attending a university with availability of out-of-class activities was important to five of the participants for their social lives. It also affected their future opportunities for employment. Not all chose to engage in out-of-class activities, but for the majority of participants it proved beneficial. Appendix D shows the themes reflected by each participant in the textural and structural descriptions.

Narrative Analysis

This transcendental, phenomenological study addressed following research question: What are the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and do these lived experiences contribute to these students' retention, graduation, and future employment? The study also explored six research sub-questions during the course of each participant's interview.

Research Sub-Questions

The following section addresses the research sub-questions, which are answered with narrative support.

1. *What issues influenced the participant’s decision to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities?*

Several participants cited advocacy in a variety of forms as an important reason why they chose to become involved in out-of-class activities. Anna, Diane, Marty, and Katie expressed a desire to advocate for other students with disabilities. Katya credited her mentor for encouraging her to become involved in the Russian Club.

One participant, Tim, cited that he had difficulty accessing events on campus as a reason why he choose not to engage in certain out-of-class activities on campus. In contrast, Anna talked about an increase in available services and an increase in opportunities for out-of-class engagement as reasons why she chose to transfer to OU.

Katya discussed not becoming involved in out-of-class activities at OU because she was unaware of details about them. She heard events were happening, however, since she was blind, she could not read e-mails, flyers, or posters about the on-campus events. Other participants said that just having someone invite them to a meeting or event helped with engagement in activities. Leslie partly attributed the appearance of her clubfoot as a reason not to participate in extra-curricular events.

2. *How have these out-of-class experiences influenced the participant’s decision to remain in college?*

Katya said, “I do best when I have opportunities to have connections with people. All the friends that I have are because of theses connections I have made in these extracurricular activities. It was would have been much harder for me just living successfully in Norman and being successful at OU if I hadn’t had the community connections.”

Diana said that if she had not engaged in extracurricular activities, she would have finished at OU but would have been miserable. “I would have pushed myself to finish but I don’t think I would have been happy,” she said.

3. *What types of out-of-class activities has the participant experienced?*

The participants were involved in a variety of activities: Student Associations such as Disability Inclusion and Awareness, Greek life, cultural clubs, religious organizations, and clubs related to their field of study. Katie, who was actively involved in her sorority and the student organization Disability Inclusion and Awareness, was also a member of the college bowl executive team. She described the college bowl team as a “pop culture trivia event.” She said, “I love it. I love trivia. Like, that is my thing.”

4. *Why did the participant choose these activities?*

Several participants cited friends or mentors, personal interests, and just deciding to dive in to campus life. Marty initially chose groups related to her interests in industrial engineering. After self-identifying as a person with a disability, Marty joined Disability Inclusion and Awareness. She explained, “I wanted to speak out about my experiences, so other students might feel more comfortable with their disabilities.” She also said, “Club participation is most valuable for employment when in a leadership position.”

Leslie became involved with OU fishing team. She said, “I really didn’t want to, my roommate loves fishing with a passion I have never seen before…she was so excited I couldn’t say no. So now, I am with the OU fishing team.”

5. *What kind of experience has the participant had when engaging in out-of-class activities?*

The participants had positive and negative experiences regarding their out-of-class activities. Katie’s experiences have been very positive. She is extremely active in many organizations. Her involvement has helped her develop advocacy skills needed to promote disability inclusion on campus. Lana has made many friends as a result of her involvement with campus activities. She said that these events made her more confident because she was able to walk into a place and meet new people.

Diana discussed a negative experience she had while volunteering at a conference. She felt people were judging her because she does not have hands. “You know the look…and there’s the hesitancy,” Diana said.

6. *Have these out-of-class activities helped create a network of support for the participant’s future employment opportunities?*

The participants who engaged in out-of-class activities were hopeful that the networking opportunities they had engaged in would lead to future employment. Katie said she got involved with things that she was passionate about and not involved with things because they are resume builders. Her out-of-class activities have led her to recognize that she wants to combine accessibility issues with her major in industrial engineering. She received an internship with a major company that she attributed to her campus involvement.

The six research sub-questions illustrate the lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities or illnesses. They help to answer the overarching research question: What are the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and do these lived experiences contribute to these students’ retention, graduation, and future employment?

Many of the participants who chose to engage in out-of-class activities expressed an appreciation for opportunities to meet new friends and network for possible employment in the future. Each participant expressed at least some desire to engage out-of-class, with the exception of one participant who seemed to participate grudgingly in a campus job. She described being urged to get a job. Overall, the participants, despite facing various challenges related to their physical disability or physical disabilities reported positive experiences related to being engaged out of class.

Additional Findings

When analyzing the interviews, the findings revealed that one participant expressed frustrations about the lack of awareness of available disability services. Another surprising finding was that one of the students with physical disabilities was not presented with accessible communication to alert them of upcoming campus events. Additionally, every participant who had an invisible disability described feelings of uncertainty. One participant did not know if her disabilities were actually disabilities. Another participant expressed was unsure how other people with visible physical disabilities would view her. I anticipated that participants who had visible disabilities would be more likely to talk about how others' perceptions of their disabilities.

Conclusion

Chapter IV provides a deep look into why the participants chose to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities. The textural descriptions ("the what”) introduced each of the participants and explained some of their experiences as a person with a physical disability or physical disabilities. The structural descriptions (“the how”) examined some of the participants’ reasons for engaging in out-of-class activities with rich quotes to support themes uncovered in the textural descriptions. Chapter V will provide a discussion, implications for future research, and a conclusion to this study.

Chapter V

The purpose of the study was to shed light on the out-of-class lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities and examine the ways in which these lived experiences contribute to these students' retention, graduation, and future employment. Chapter I defined physical disabilities and provided a historical overview of educational policies and their impact on students with disabilities. It also provided the significance of the study. Chapter II provided a review of the literature on people with disabilities in education and it explored Schlossberg's transition theory to better understand the challenges students with physical disabilities may experience when transitioning to college and making the decision to engage in out-of-class activities. Chapter III explained transcendental phenomenology as the methodology chosen for this study. The chapter also provided a detailed explanation of the research design of the study. In Chapter IV, the research question (What issues influence students with physical disabilities' decisions to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities and how do these issues influence the decision to remain in college?) and six research sub-questions were answered:

1. What issues influenced participant's decision to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities?

2. How do these factors influence the participant's decision to remain in college?
3. What type of out-of-class activities did the participant experience?
4. Why did the participant choose these activities?
5. What were their experiences in participating in these outside activities?
6. Did these out-of-class activities help create a network of support for the participant's future employment opportunities?

The participants' interviews, which were analyzed in Chapter IV, addressed the above research sub-questions. The answers to the research sub-questions helped address the overarching research question. The themes revealed in Chapter IV, which ranged from stigma to accessibility affected the participants' decisions to engage in out-of-class activities. In this chapter, I will provide recommendations for further research; implications for practice with an emphasis on some of the themes revealed in Chapter IV (advocacy, self-advocacy, stigma, and accessibility) will also be provided. Additionally, I will provide suggestions for higher education professionals, and conclude with my own thoughts.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research fills a gap because little scholarly work exists on physical disabilities (Gelbar, Madaus, Lombardi, Fagella-Luby & Dukes, 2015), not from personal perspectives. It also provided an opportunity for the voices of students with disabilities to be heard. This study is significant because previous disability research is usually *about* students with disabilities (Myers et. al, 2013). This study focuses on lived experiences out-of-the classroom. Although this study focused on undergraduate students with physical disabilities, more research needs to be conducted regarding students with physical disabilities and their decisions to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities. Graduate students with disabilities, racially diverse students with physical disabilities, women with physical disabilities, men with physical disabilities, international students with physical disabilities, students with invisible disabilities and any emerging populations of students with disabilities need further exploration on the impact of out-of-class engagement.

Implications for Practice

In this study, undergraduate students with physical disabilities discussed their decision to become engaged (or not) in out-of-class activities. Each participant revealed challenges, which affected their involvement in activities outside of the classroom. All student affairs professionals, no matter what university employs them, should consider the findings discussed in Chapter IV. These findings can be generalized across higher education. The prevalent themes of advocacy, self-advocacy, stigma, and accessibility need to be considered when designing out-of-class programs and activities for students with physical disabilities.

Advocacy and Self-Advocacy

Students discussed receiving support that positively affected their lived experiences. Nearly every student emphasized the importance of family as advocates in their lives. Only one of them, however, specifically mentioned a mentor outside of the home. This participant credited her mentor for helping her feel important. Her mentor encouraged her. She cited her mentor for helping her to decide what she wants to pursue in her life. Student affairs practitioners should work with the campus disability services office to develop programs for students with disabilities to be mentored by faculty members, staff members, or other students. A mentoring program could help students understand their importance, their worth, and their significance to the campus community. Additionally, mentors could help students develop the skills needed to become self-advocates.

A mentoring program for students with disabilities could not only positively affect the students themselves, it could also encourage faculty members and staff members with disabilities to be more open about their disabilities. Three students mentioned either thoughts of suicide or actually hurting themselves. A mentor for students with disabilities could encourage students with similar thoughts to seek counseling if and when these thoughts occur. Going beyond classroom accommodations and offering a mentor who could share their experiences with the student with a disability could increase retention, graduation, and future employment opportunities.

Six participants expressed unique experiences related to advocacy and/or self-advocacy. Some of them developed self-advocacy skills needed to successfully transition from high school to college. They learned advocacy skills from their parents, while other participants learned to advocate for themselves as they learned from their own personal experiences. Professionals in disability services offices should work with student affairs and academic affairs to develop procedures and accessible materials, which assist students with physical disabilities and physical illnesses to become more comfortable self-disclosing their disability or illness. Some students may choose not to disclose their disability. However, they should develop the skills to confidently discuss what their disability is and how their disability or disabilities affect them emotionally, physically, and mentally if they choose to self-disclose.

One participant became very angry when discussing how an instructor told her classmates about her health struggles without her permission. She mentioned the word “violated” when discussing the situation. Disability services professionals should develop accessible materials, which can be distributed by faculty and staff across campus because students may be unaware that the campus disability services office even exists.

Stigma

Four participants mentioned the word *stigma* when discussing his or her disabilities. Student affairs professionals should collaborate with disability services professionals to develop training sessions for students with and without disabilities, faculty, and staff about disability and the negative impact assumptions can cause. Students with all types of disabilities and illnesses should be considered when developing the training sessions. Students with disabilities should be included as part of the training sessions. The students can be presenters or facilitators during the training sessions. Regardless, students should have the opportunity to participate in the trainings and have their voices heard.

One of the participants mentioned how he worried about others assuming he was not intelligent because of his disability. Another participant expressed that she was concerned about stigma related to her disabilities. She discussed shyness as a reason why she did not become very involved in activities during her freshman year. Stigma is not limited to how an able-bodied person views someone with a disability. One participant, whose disability is not visible, discussed apprehension. She feared other students with disabilities and without disabilities would not believe she had a disability. Educating the entire campus body about visible disabilities and invisible disabilities is important for the reduction of stigma.

Accessibility

Two participants mentioned accessibility as a reason for choosing to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities. As discussed in previous chapters, several laws such as the ADA have been put into place to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against on the basis of disability. However, students with physical disabilities and illnesses still face challenges on college campuses. Universities with larger campuses need to consider location of campus disability services. One participant discussed the difficulty of meeting me for an interview, which took place at OU's Disability Resource Center. Perhaps a more centrally located office would make it easier for students with mobility difficulties to access available services.

Another participant mentioned accessibility as the reason why she transferred from her previous university to OU. She had not been accommodated with accessible textbooks at her previous school. After transferring to OU, she received more adequate accommodations but still experienced difficulties related to her awareness of out-of-class activities on campus. She expressed disappointment about not knowing when and where events were happening. She was blind; therefore, she was unable to read flyers that were posted about events. Student affairs professionals need to work with their disability services office and information technology office to ensure accessible options for students with visual disabilities are provided. Making sure websites and emails that advertise events are accessible to students with disabilities is a necessity. The participant said she would have been more involved had she known when and where certain events were taking place.

When possible, student organizations should have events at centralized locations. Two participants expressed how difficult it was for them to move around campus quickly. Reducing distances a student with and mobility disability has to travel could increase participation in out-of-class activities. One participant specifically discussed that he thinks about how difficult it might be for him to physically go to a location before he attempts to go there. He also discussed how he quit going to a student organization's meetings because they were held in an inaccessible classroom. Student affairs professionals should strongly encourage the student organizations to hold meetings in accessible locations. If space is limited, student organizations should notify students as quickly as possible so students can make have enough time to make arrangements to attend scheduled meetings.

Suggestions for Higher Education Professionals

The themes revealed in Chapter IV and addressed above should be considered when developing future programming for and about students with disabilities. Below, I provide suggestions for campus climate for students with disabilities.

Educating the Campus Community

Education about disabilities should extend beyond the classroom. The responsibility to educate should not be the sole responsibility of students with disabilities. Education should extend to students who live on campus or off campus, students who participate in Greek Life, and students who are involved in campus activities and/or campus organizations, faculty, and staff. Education about disability issues needs to become all-inclusive. Disability education would likely develop more advocates and reduce stigma about disabilities, which could improve campus climate.

Additionally, students who become disability advocates on campus are likely to be advocates after they graduate. This advocacy could lead to more job opportunities for students with disabilities after graduation.

Students who become disability advocates could become employers in the workforce. These employers would become less likely to discriminate against someone with a disability during the hiring process.

Career Opportunities

One participant discussed his desire to network at out-of-class events put on by a student association related to his major. Student affairs professionals should collaborate with the campus career office to set-up events for students with disabilities to speak with companies about opportunities for employment after graduation. Setting up these opportunities should include reaching out to see if the company has summer internships for students with disabilities. An internship could allow the student to see how the company accommodates their needs and if the company's climate toward disability issues is acceptable.

Recruitment

Students with disabilities should be recruited like any other student who desires come to college. Student affairs professionals should work with the campus recruitment office, disability services office, and diversity office to develop effective ways to consider the university as an option to further education. There are challenges involved with recruiting students with disabilities because of the need to protect privacy. However, campus recruiters can highlight the efforts being made to accommodate and include students with disabilities in all aspects of campus life.

Disability Theories

Student affairs professionals may encounter students with disabilities who are unaware of campus services available to them. They may also encounter students with disabilities who would rather talk to them as opposed to a family member, a friend, a roommate, classmate, instructor, or someone else on campus. The student might be experiencing a situation related to their disability that they have never encountered before. Student affairs professionals should familiarize themselves with theories related to disability. Theories such as Schlossberg's transition theory can be helpful to understand what a student might be going through. Understanding the "4 S's" (self, situation, support, and strategies) can help student affairs professionals better understand how to assist a student with a disability. Even if the student affairs professional feels ill-equipped to assist the student themselves, understanding theories related to disability issues can help the student affairs professional know where to direct the students.

Conclusion

I have cerebral palsy. I have experienced challenges, both in the classroom and out-of-class. Growing up, my parents were my voice. They are my heroes. Mom and Dad fought for my brother and me at every turn.

When I went to college, I was lost. My heroes were no longer down the hallway, ready to help me if I needed it. I thought I was ready to leave home and go to college. I was smart. I had the grades and I tried hard. The reality, however, was not something I was prepared to handle.

My disability was obvious. There was no hiding my wheelchair. For some reason, I became self-conscious. I cared a lot about what people thought about me. In my mind, I felt like I had to prove I belonged in college. I struggled. The campus was large and the people were unfamiliar. I needed to ask other people for help. I needed to be able to confidently explain my disability, but I could not. I needed to be a self-advocate, but I was not. However, after struggling in the classroom and struggling to find my place outside of the classroom, I learned through experience. It took time, but I learned to speak with fellow students, faculty, and staff about issues related to my disability. Eventually, I made lifelong friends from my time in the residence halls, in the classroom, and out-of-class. However, it took time. I went from a shaky student academically and socially to a doctoral candidate. I hope this research helps lessen some of the challenges students with disabilities face.

Students with all types of disabilities have a voice. Some struggle to find it, as I did. I hope anyone who reads this dissertation appreciates the stories of these undergraduate students with physical disabilities. I wanted to give a platform to these students and allow them to share their experiences. Whether you are a higher education professional or an aspiring disability advocate, I hope you truly listened to each student’s voice. Remember their stories and continue to make positive change in higher education your community, and beyond.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter/E-Mail Text

Hello, I am Brad Mays from the Adult & Higher Education Program and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Understanding Experiences of Undergraduate Students with Physical Disabilities in Higher Education to Improve Engagement. This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma. If you have a physical disability and you are an undergraduate at OU, you are a candidate to participate in this study. You will be compensated for your time. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. If interested in becoming a participant, please contact me at 918-766-4577 or boomerbrad@ou.edu for more information.

Thank you,

Bradley Mays

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Are you involved in campus organizations or other outside of the classroom (Student Life)? If so, which ones?
2. What issues influenced your decision to engage (or not) in out-of-class activities?
3. How do these issues influence your decision to remain in college?
4. What type of out-of-class activities did the participant experience?
5. Why did you choose these activities?
6. What were your experiences in participating in these outside activities?
7. Did these out-of-class activities help create a network of support for the participant's future employment opportunities?

These questions are the initial interview questions. Other questions will likely arise during the course of the interview.

Appendix C: Informed Consent

701-A-1

Signed Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Brad Mays from the Adult & Higher Education Program and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Understanding Experiences of Undergraduate Students with Physical Disabilities in Higher Education to Improve Engagement. This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma. You were selected as a possible participant because you have a physical disability and you are an undergraduate at OU. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to share their experiences and assist professionals in student affairs and higher education to increase engagement opportunities and retention outcomes.

How many participants will be in this research? About 10 people will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will participate in a long, one-on-one in-depth, semi-structured interview about your experiences out-of-class as an undergraduate student with a physical disability.

How long will this take? Your participation will take 1-3 hours depending on length of your responses to the interview questions.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will receive a $20 gift card for your time and participation.

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institution Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don’t have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. The data you provide will be destroyed unless you specifically agree for data retention or retention of contact information at the end of the research. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree to being quoted directly. ___ Yes ___ No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material.

I agree for the researcher to use my data in future studies.

___Yes___ No ___Yes ___ No

IRB NUMBER: 0797

IRB APPROVAL DATE: 09/28/2017 IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 08/31/201

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording. ___Yes ___No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher would like to contact you again to recruit you into this research or to gather additional information.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future. _____ I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at 918-766-4577 or boomerbrad@ou.edu or Dr. Juanita Vargas at 405-325-3680 or jgvargas@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research*.*

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)	Print Name	Date

Appendix D: Themes from Participants' Descriptions

The table below shows the themes reflected by each participant in the textural and structural descriptions.

Table 2: Themes from participants' descriptions

	Katya	Tim	Melinda	Diana	Justin	Marty	Lana	Anna	Leslie	Katie
Isolation		x			x		x			
Perseverance		x								
Accessibility		x						x		
Depression	x		x			x				
Lack of awareness of disability services			x							
Advocacy	x			x	x	x		x		x
Activism				x						
Anxiety				x			x			
Stigma					x	x			x	x
Desire to be involved							x			
Self-consciousness									x	