People Like Me:
Disability, Identity, & Experiences in Postsecondary Classrooms

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Abstract

Students with disabilities are pursuing postsecondary degrees in growing numbers, yet are still experiencing disparate educational outcomes when compared to their peers. Academic accommodations have been vital in supporting students with disabilities, but not all students choose to disclose and seek out formal supports. Less is known about classroom practices that support these students, regardless of whether they disclose a disability. Utilizing a narrative methodological approach, this study explored the ways in which 13 undergraduate students experienced their identities and disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments and their perceptions of the instructional practices that impacted their learning. The narratives revealed that students' identities were fluid and that disability was not experienced in isolation from other identities. Students' identities and disabilities affected their experiences in the classroom environment, and to a large extent, the way that they learned. Instructors, including their tone and messaging, were a significant source of support and at times also posed substantial barriers to students' academic success. The extent to which community had been fostered, opportunities were provided for peer engagement and interaction, and multiple options were given for learning and demonstrating knowledge also affected students' ability to learn and thrive in the classroom. Findings of this study support existing practices of Universal Design, although ideas for enhancing existing principles are also discussed. Implications for this study address the need for postsecondary institutions to focus on scholarship and practice to improve classroom experiences for students with disabilities, as well as to enhance instructor capacity to implement Universal Design.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In the last two and a half decades since the passage of the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States, colleges and universities have seen

substantial growth in the number of students with disabilities pursing college degrees

(Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). As of 2008, over 700,000 students with

disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Raue & Lewis, 2011) and

between the 2011-2012 academic year, students with disabilities comprised about 11% of

the undergraduate population nationally (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). The

landmark legislation of the ADA has been crucial in providing greater postsecondary

access to students with disabilities in the 25 years since its inception.

While substantial progress toward greater equity for students with disabilities has

occurred, much work remains to be done. Overall, students with disabilities are still less

likely to go to college, and those who do are less likely to persist to their degree than their

peers without disabilities (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014; Newman, Wagner,

Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). Additionally, some of the supports

provided by the ADA are not utilized by a large population of students with disabilities

because many do not disclose their disability once in college. Nationally representative

data from the National Longitudinal Transitional Study-2 (NLTS2) revealed that nearly

two-thirds of students who were identified as having a disability in high school do not

disclose their disabilities once they transition to college (Newman et al., 2011). Although

roughly 87% of these students received accommodations in high school, fewer than 20%

reported receiving accommodations from their postsecondary institution (Newman et al., 2011).

Students previously diagnosed with a disability may choose not to disclose to their postsecondary institution for a number of reasons. In some instances, students may no longer need additional accommodations or may have developed self-advocacy skills to succeed in postsecondary education without formalized support. At the same time, scholarly research also demonstrates that many students do not disclose their disability because they misunderstand their responsibility to disclose in college, lack knowledge about how to access services, fear stigma, and desire to shed or disassociate with their disability (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Getzel, 2008; Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009).

Regardless of whether a student discloses their disability, postsecondary institutions must be concerned about inequitable educational outcomes that continue to persist for students with disabilities. Higher education has a civic responsibility to advance social progress and prepare generations of leaders for participation in a pluralistic society (Hurtado, 2007). Addressing educational inequities for diverse student populations is core to meeting this mission (Hurtado, 2007) and students with disabilities must not be excluded from such discussions and efforts. While postsecondary institutions are legally mandated to serve students who disclose their disabilities through reasonable academic accommodations, lack of disclosure should not preclude students with disabilities from being supported in their academic pursuits. Postsecondary institutions must find new and innovative ways to support all students with disabilities, whether or not they disclose, to ensure equitable outcomes for this population.

This dissertation explores the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary classrooms, with the intent of shedding light on how students' identities and disabilities affect their experiences and perceptions of the classroom practices that support or create barriers to their learning, outside of formal academic accommodations. I will begin by setting the context around the legal definition of a disability and providing an overview of the historical and legal landscapes that have shaped the ways that students with disabilities are formally served in postsecondary education. I will then provide an overview of current disability representation in higher education, including new and emerging populations, and an overview of the purpose of my research.

Defining Disability

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended in 2008 (ADAAA), defines a person with a disability as having "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Definition of Disability, 2008, p. 7). Major life activities include "caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working" as well as a number of "major bodily functions" (Definition of Disability, 2008, p. 7). The legal definition of disability according to the ADA has changed over time through new legislation as well as litigation. Understanding the context of the legal requirements for postsecondary institutions to serve students with disabilities, as well as the historical context that has shaped the requirements for reasonable accommodations, is vital to understanding issues of disclosure,

accommodations, and classroom experiences of students with disabilities. The following section will discuss the historical legislation and legal frameworks that have determined how students with disabilities obtain services and how postsecondary institutions meet their needs.

Historical and Legal Context of Postsecondary Access

Legislative action mandating access to education for students with disabilities was spurred by the Disability Rights movement of the 1960s and began with the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Pfeiffer, 2003). This piece of legislation prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs receiving federal dollars (Section 504, Rehabilitation Act, 1973). Subsequently, public and private postsecondary institutions receiving federal dollars were required to comply with the new mandate, including those receiving federal contracts and grants and those serving students who were funded by federal loans (Jarrow, 1993). Shortly after, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, was passed to ensure free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for children with disabilities in primary and secondary education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). With the passage of the ADA in 1990, mandates of non-discrimination based on disability were extended to non-federal public and private sector entities (Jarrow, 1993). The ADA expanded the rights of people with disabilities to access and receive reasonable accommodations in employment and with regard to public services. The ADA also provided protection from harassment, as well as the right to sue the state or federal government for failure to comply with ADA guidelines (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2013).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, IDEA, ADA, and ADAAA continue to have significant implications for educational institutions and the ways in which students with disabilities receive accommodations and services. Under IDEA and the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), primary and secondary institutions are required to identify students with disabilities and provide them with free personalized support and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Institutions must also engage students in transition planning for postsecondary education beginning at age 16 (Prince, Katsiyannis, & Farmer, 2013). While these requirements hold true for primary and secondary education, IDEA and the Improvements Act do not have legal bearing on postsecondary education. Colleges and universities are instead guided by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, ADA and ADAAA. Under these mandates, postsecondary institutions are prohibited from discriminating against any qualified individual in providing access or participation in any program or activity on the basis of disability (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Postsecondary institutions are also required to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure equal and meaningful access in programs and activities for students with disabilities (Simon, 2011, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Programs and activities include, but are not limited to, academic courses, housing, athletics, food services, and transportation (Simon, 2011).

Unlike primary and secondary schools, postsecondary institutions are not required to provide FAPE or identify students with disabilities in the institution (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2011; Wolanin & Steele, 2004). The responsibility is instead shifted to students to disclose and provide documentation of a disability, as

well as to seek out services and accommodations (U.S. Government Accountability

Office, 2009). Additionally, if a student has not previously been diagnosed with a

disability, the student is obligated to seek out and pay for testing individually (U.S.

Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2011). Although the actual services

provided to students with disabilities vary by college and university, all postsecondary

institutions are required to have someone coordinate compliance with the ADA and the

Rehabilitation Act (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Postsecondary

institutions must also have a system in place to assess students' needs and ensure

accommodations have been implemented, as well as a formal grievance policy internal to

the institution (Simon, 2011).

Over time, legal cases brought to the judicial branch of government and the U.S.

Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) have shaped the way that

students with disabilities access and receive accommodations in higher education through

the mandates of Section 504 and the ADA (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2013). For

example, although Section 504 and the ADA prohibit discrimination and provide access

to higher education, students with disabilities must be otherwise qualified to be admitted

to the program and must meet established standards regardless of their disability (Myers,

Lindburg, & Nied, 2013). In the case of *Southeastern Community College v. Davis*

(1979), an applicant with a hearing disability was denied admission to a nursing program

because she could not safely participate in the program without substantial modification.

While Section 504 prohibits the discrimination of an applicant based solely on their

disability, the court ruled that the institution does not need to make substantial

modifications to a program because applicants must be otherwise qualified despite their disability (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2013).

Students with disabilities who meet the academic qualifications and give sufficient notice of their disability can be provided reasonable accommodations to fully access the postsecondary academic environment (Simon, 2011). Postsecondary institutions must provide reasonable accommodations and meaningful access, but the accommodations must not substantially or fundamentally alter the requirements or nature of the academic program (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Landmark, & Reber, 2009; Simon, 2011). For example, in the case of *Wynne v. Tufts* (1991), a student with dyslexia filed a discrimination complaint against the university for refusing to modify testing procedures. The court ultimately ruled in favor of the institution, which argued that modifying the test format would impact the teaching of critical thinking skills (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2013). This case further outlined requirements for institutions to show that a student's accommodation request was considered by officials with relevant expertise and duties, that the impact of the request and alternative accommodations was explored, and that the processes yielded findings that the requested accommodation would fundamentally alter the program (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Landmark, & Reber, 2009).

Institutions may explore academic adjustments, such as extended time on tests, audio recording lectures, or modification of evaluation methods, among other accommodations (Simon, 2011). Academic accommodations are selected based on a deliberative process, focusing on the students' needs and documentation of their disability while ensuring that the fundamental requirements are not altered (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Postsecondary institutions are required to

provide auxiliary aids, including interpreters, speech to text programs, Braille and large

print materials, as well as other software and adaptive equipment (Simon, 2011).

Institutions are not required to provide individual aides and services, glasses,

wheelchairs, personal attendants, or tutors to students with disabilities (U.S. Government

Accountability Office, 2009). Institutions must ensure that campus facilities are

physically accessible to students and subsume the costs of needed accommodations,

unless the financial or administrative burden is too great (U.S. Government

Accountability Office, 2009). Financial or administrative burdens must be determined

based on all available resources to the program or institution (United States Department

of Justice, 2010).

Similar to the kinds of services that students are provided, the actual process for

acquiring accommodations also varies by institution (U.S. Government Accountability

Office, 2009). Most institutions require documentation of a disability, often by a medical

professional, psychologist (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2011),

or vocational rehabilitation agency (Raue & Lewis, 2011). In the case of *Guckenberger*

v. Boston University (1997), the institution had instituted a requirement that students with

learning disabilities must be reevaluated every 3 years in order to receive services. The

court deemed this policy overly burdensome to students and noted that there was no

scientific evidence to support the need for the reevaluation (Simon, 2011). Litigation

regarding documentation requirements for students in postsecondary education also

prompted the United States Department of Justice to put regulations into place in 2011 to

specify that requests for documentation should neither be overly burdensome nor exceed

what is required under common practice (Simon, 2011). In revisions of the Department

of Justice's regulations, disability service providers may now also consider Individualized Education Plans from high school as evidence of a disability (Simon, 2011).

A disability is federally defined as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" (Definition of Disability, 2008, p. 7). The ADAAA widened the scope of who could be considered a person with a disability under the legal definition, with the addition of concentrating, thinking, and reading to the list of major life activities (Simon, 2011). With its passage, Congress acknowledged that the scope of who could be protected under the ADA had been unintentionally narrowed under recent litigation (Simon, 2012). Congress also shifted the focus in litigation to whether discrimination against a student had occurred as opposed to whether or not a condition qualified as a disability. This change affirmed the findings of *Bartlett v. New York State Board of Law Examiners* (1998), which declared students with learning disabilities to be disabled under the legal definition, regardless of whether they had adapted informal strategies to manage their disability (Simon, 2011). In sum, the court acknowledged that high performing students could be substantially limited by a disability. As such, they abolished the requirement for a student to be severely impaired to obtain services and supported the inclusion of episodic conditions such as mental health for protection under the law (Simon, 2011).

The expansion of what conditions legally qualified as a disability and 2011 court decisions to limit the requirements of unduly burdensome documentation of a disability arguably widened access for students with disabilities in higher education. Students who may not have qualified for services could now seek accommodations and could provide

documentation that previously might not have been considered acceptable, such as an

IEP. Legal changes, as well as earlier diagnoses and better support for students with

disabilities in primary and secondary education, may have a combined impact on the

increase in students with disabilities pursing higher education. Additionally, these

factors, among others, may also have impacted the changing landscape of the kinds of

disabilities that are now most represented nationally among students in U.S.

postsecondary education.

Disability and Demographic Representation in Higher Education

This section outlines what is known demographically about the makeup of

students with disabilities in the recent past and present day. Understanding the

demographics of students with disabilities in education is vital to exploring the current

experiences of this population in postsecondary environments. As noted previously, not

only have the numbers of students with disabilities pursuing higher education shifted over

time, so have the kinds of disabilities represented. The United States Government

Accountability Office (2009) has pointed to the shift in students reporting orthopedic and

mobility-related disabilities from over 25% of the population of students with disabilities

in 2000 to 15% in 2008, according to data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid

Study (NPSAS, p. 11). The largest proportions of primary disabilities reported in 2008

were mental health and psychiatric conditions, at 24%, as well as Attention Deficit

Disorder (ADD), at 19% (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009).

Conversely, data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

indicate that the most prominent disability types reported at postsecondary institutions

during the 2008-2009 academic year were specific learning disabilities (31%),

ADD/Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (18%), and mental health or psychiatric disabilities (15%; Raue & Lewis, 2011). Differentiation in these two data sets likely exists because of how disability type was reported (i.e., self-reports versus data reported from documentation at the institution; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Both data sets illustrate the high number of students with non-apparent (often referred to as "hidden" or "invisible") disabilities being served at postsecondary institutions. The data sets also reveal an unclear picture of who is being served. This issue is potentially compounded by low disclosure and reporting of a disability by students, as well as differences in how institutions categorize disability types (Belch, 2004).

The high representation of students with learning disabilities in education is documented in scholarly literature (Madaus, 2011), and is also reflected in data analyzed under IDEA, which identified learning disabilities as the most prevalent disability reported for students ages 6-21 in 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Yet, scholars also note the important growth in other populations pursuing postsecondary education, including students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and mental health disabilities (Madaus, 2011; Simon, 2011; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011). For example, in 2015, the American College Health Association surveyed 19,861 students (including undergraduate, graduate, and professional students) at 40 postsecondary institutions in the United States about their behaviors, habits, and perceptions of health-related topics. This survey revealed that 26.1% of college students reported that they had been diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental-health

related condition or disability within the previous 12 months. Anxiety and depression were the most commonly reported at 17.3% and 14.5% respectively.

Demographics Regarding Race and Disability. Racial demographic shifts in postsecondary education are also an important aspect of framing this research. National data indicate that the number of students of color enrolling in postsecondary education continues to increase (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). The NLTS2 indicates that enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary education did not differ significantly across race or ethnicity (Newman et al., 2011). Yet other national data sets indicate that White students represent a slightly larger percentage of students with disabilities in college. For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) found that White students represented a slightly larger percentage of the population of college students with disabilities during the 2007-2008 academic year, making up 66% of the population of students reporting disabilities even though they made up 61% of the general undergraduate student population more broadly (Snyder & Dillow, 2013).

Data and scholarly research have previously demonstrated that students from some underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are more likely to be served by the IDEA in the K-12 system (U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and be overrepresented in special education programs (Reid & Knight, 2006). Overrepresentation of these populations in special education has been thought to be due to misidentification of these students in the k-12 system and systemic racial and cultural biases (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Conversely, a recent longitudinal study by Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, Mattison, Maczuga, Li, and Cook (2015) found that students of color and English Language Learners are actually less likely to be identified as having a disability and are

subsequently underrepresented in special education programs in elementary and middle school. Much debate exists over what studies provide the most accurate picture of racial representation in special education programs. Either picture provides implications for higher education in serving students with disabilities who may also be underrepresented by race. Misidentification complicates the ability of students and postsecondary institutions to determine whether there is a need for formal accommodations in college and is also a problematic experience for the student. Students who have been correctly diagnosed with a disability and who are underrepresented based on race likely face additional barriers and stressors in the postsecondary environment, which are discussed further in the literature review for this study.

In sum, the representation of students with disabilities is growing and changing in several ways. Legal mandates and legislation have arguably widened access to services and accommodations to assist students in the postsecondary environment, but legal mandates have the greatest impact on students who actually choose to disclose their disability and utilize formal accommodations. As postsecondary institutions experience an increase in students with non-apparent disabilities, and potentially students who are underrepresented based on other identities, such as race and ethnicity, they will be challenged to equitably serve these populations, regardless of whether students choose to disclose their disability. Given that not all students seek out and utilize formal supports and accommodations, postsecondary institutions cannot rely on these services alone to ensure that students with disabilities are adequately supported. Greater attention must be paid to how students' identities and disabilities affect their experiences in the academic environment, whether or not they disclose and utilize accommodations.

Purpose of This Study

This study explores the ways in which students understand and experience their identities and disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments, as well as their perceptions of the instructional practices that benefit or create barriers to their learning. Little is known about if and how students make sense of their disability as an aspect of their identity, and the extent to which their identities affect the barriers that they experience in classroom environments. A growing body of literature has highlighted promising instructional practices that support student learning, regardless of identity and use of accommodations. Still, little is known about how students experience these practices and the extent to which they effectively address the barriers that students are encountering.

In this study, I utilized a narrative methodological approach to understand how postsecondary classroom environments can be shaped to be more equitable in supporting student learning. I engaged in this inquiry by answering the following research questions:

- How, if at all, are students' disabilities and other social identities salient to them in postsecondary classroom environments?
- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe support their learning?
- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe create barriers to their learning?
- To what extent do classroom practices and factors that support student learning align with or diverge from principles of Universal Design?

The following chapter provides context for this study through a review of relevant literature focused on students with disabilities in higher education. The literature review is first framed by a discussion of different models for understanding disability. This discussion is then followed by a review of research and scholarship examining individual student factors impacting postsecondary outcomes, student identity development, postsecondary institutional responsibility, and the potential role of Universal Design in teaching and learning for improving postsecondary outcomes. A brief summary of the literature is provided, followed by an explanation of the grounding assumptions for this study.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature explores the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, including their process of transition into college, decision-making about disclosing their disability, the unique barriers and supports that they encounter in higher education, and the ways in which other aspects of their identity add nuance to their collegiate experience. Additionally, this review explores theory on classroom-based practices that are intended to support students with disabilities whether or not those students are known to the institution. The literature included in this review was primarily found through searches utilizing EBSCO Host, JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar.

Due to the changing legal and political landscape of disability access in higher education, the literature included in this review primarily includes that which has been published between the years 2000 and 2016. Although significant scholarship and research around disability has occurred internationally, literature in this review comes primarily from the United States because the historical and legal context of disability access varies widely by country. Additionally, the literature review does not delve purposefully into scholarship focused on specific types of disabilities. Although issues and experiences of students with disabilities can vary widely by the type of disability, I decided to keep the literature review focused on disability as a broad category. This decision was made to provide parameters for the literature review and was also intended to capture literature that would be reflective of the participants of this study, who represented a range of disabilities.

Models of Disability

Scholars, researchers, and practitioners understand issues related to disability from a variety of frames. These frames, often referred to as *models*, are critically important to understanding the context of the literature surrounding disability. An early model of disability, dating back to the 1700s, yet still prevalent in current perceptions of disability, is the medical model (Evans & Herriott, 2009). The medical model focuses on the individual and posits that people with disabilities have a deficit that needs to be fixed, treated, or cared for (Knoll, 2009). This model surmises that problems experienced by individuals related to their disability reside with, and are a result of, some deficiency in the body (Knoll, 2009). The medical model also puts an emphasis on curing people with disabilities and returning them to a healthy state (Evans & Herriott, 2009). In the context of higher education, the medical model focuses on treating students and reducing their symptoms through medical interventions so that they can meet the expectations and behaviors set by their postsecondary institution (Evans & Herriott, 2009).

Somewhat similar to the medical model of disability is the functional limitations model. The functional limitations model focuses on the problem of a disability residing with the individual as opposed to with society (Evans & Herriott, 2009). This model focuses on the need for people with disabilities to make adjustments so that they are able to function and participate in broader society in a way that is considered "normal" (Evans & Herriott, 2009). In the context of higher education, the functional limitations model may play out in individual accommodations, in which changes are made for the individual without thinking about the broader environment or system that impedes access for people with disabilities (Evans & Herriott, 2009).

In contrast to the medical and functional limitations models is the social model. The social model frames disability in the context of the social and political systems that shape the construction of disability (Grue, 2011). This model conceptualizes disability as a part of the human experience and posits that the meaning of a disability is influenced and shaped by systemic factors (Grue, 2011). Essentially, the social model asserts that limitations faced by people with disabilities are a result of the constructed environment as opposed to their bodies or disability itself. Scholars have used the social model to look at potential barriers in the institutional environment that limit the participation of students with diverse abilities (Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004).

While many scholars have been critical of the medical and functional limitations models for their deficit approach to disability, the social model has also been critiqued for its predominant use in research focused on populations with physical disabilities and White men (Grue, 2011; Thompson, Bryson, & De Castell, 2001). Scholars have advocated for greater attention to the ways in which other aspects of identity intersect with disability (Thompson et al., 2001) and have called for the integration of intersectionality, critical race theory, feminist theory, and queer theory into conceptualizations of disability (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Ferri & Gregg, 1998; McRuer, 2003). These scholars position disability as a social construct, which moves away from problematizing disability as an individual deficit toward understanding disability as a structural and institutional issue (Ferri & Gregg, 1998; McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). Arguments have also been made that positioning disability as a social construction does not remove the reality of physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory characteristics that might actually be experienced by the individual in various

environments (Asch, 2001). These realities have been less often acknowledged in the social model of disability and overemphasized in the medical model (Grue, 2011).

Somewhat similarly to the social model of disability, the social justice perspective on disability focuses on changing the environment and structures that create barriers rather than factors related to the individual's condition (Evans, 2008). Slightly different from the social model, the social justice perspective focuses more on how the dynamics of privilege and oppression impact the experience of having a disability (Evans, 2008). The social justice perspective acknowledges and emphasizes the impact of other identities on the experience of having a disability, such as race, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Evans, 2008). The social justice perspective also focuses on eliminating ableism and reframing conceptualizations of "normality" with regard to mental and physical functioning (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 2007).

The models and conceptualization of disability are important to consider in examining the scholarly literature because they both subtly and overtly influence the ways in which scholars frame, approach, and study issues related to disability in higher education. While the literature integrated into this review does not focus on one single model of disability, the overall intent is to understand the institutional and systemic issues that influence postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Additionally, the conceptual framework generated from this review of the literature will be guided by the social justice perspective to focus on institutional responsibility for equitably serving students with disabilities, whether or not they disclose their disability.

Disability and the Transition to Postsecondary Education

As outlined in Chapter I, legal mandates providing access to education for students with disabilities shift the responsibility to the student for disclosure and seeking out accommodations in college. Subsequently, a wide body of literature has focused on students' preparedness to transition into higher education, persist, and earn their degree. Students' ability to understand the changes in legal mandates between high school and college and their responsibility to disclose and seek services are important aspects of an effective transition process (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Additionally, students' knowledge about their disability, level of comfort disclosing, and willingness to seek help contribute to successfully transitioning and persisting in college (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005, Getzel & Thoma, 2008,). The following section explores aspects of student development and responsibility in the context of the transition to college, academic success, and persistence to a degree. The translation of student development theory to students with disabilities as well as frameworks of self-determination and advocacy in enhancing postsecondary success is explored.

Student Development, Involvement, and Integration

Scholarship on students with disabilities' transition, success, and ability to persist has been looked at through an array of student development frameworks. This scholarship has been beneficial in highlighting how the experience of having a disability changes the way student development theory may apply to this population. For example, Hadley (2011) cited student development literature by Astin (1985), Tinto (1993), and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1983) in relation to the need for social and intellectual adjustment, separation and detachment from those from high school, and

acceptance of postsecondary expectations upon transitioning to college. Recognizing the complex nature of disability, Hadley noted that such tasks may be more complicated for students with disabilities due to unique social and academic challenges related to understanding how a disability will affect them in college. Students with disabilities also have the added expectation of developing skills to talk about their disability and seek out classroom accommodations in college (Hadley, 2011), an expectation that does not hold true for students from more traditional college-going backgrounds.

Hadley (2011) has also cited Astin's (1985) and Tinto's (1975, 1993) scholarship on the importance of student involvement and integration on campus as well as interactions with instructors. Tinto's Social Integration Model includes frameworks of academic and social integration. Academic integration focuses on students' perceived intellectual growth and satisfaction with the academic systems on campus, while social integration focuses on students' connections with peers and faculty, campus involvement, and perception of others within the community caring for them (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Hadley (2011) has asserted that integration and involvement may be particularly difficult for students with disabilities who need to spend extra time on their academic work or daily tasks, as well as for those whose disabilities affect their social interactions.

Aspects of integration have been linked to some level of college success for students with disabilities. For example, in a study involving 97 students with learning disabilities from one public postsecondary institution in the southwestern United States, DaDeppo found that social and academic integration, as defined by Tinto (1975, 1993), were predictors of intention to persist. In fact, integration was found to be a stronger predictor of intention to persist than past academic achievement (high school GPA and

SAT/ACT scores) and background characteristics (race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education level of mother). Past academic achievement and background characteristics were not found to be strong predictors of intention to persist. In sum, social integration in particular was found to be a powerful predictor of intention to persist for students with learning disabilities early on in their college career in this study. Neither academic nor social integration was found to be a predictor of academic success, which was defined by cumulative GPA.

Although frameworks related to involvement and integration may be useful for identifying aspects of a successful transition and intention to persist for students with disabilities, not all aspects of these theories may be directly translatable to students with disabilities. For example, Hadley (2011) notes that detachment from high school supports may potentially be more difficult for students with disabilities. Perhaps this separation could in some ways be detrimental to students who have a real need for these supports, despite their potential to interfere with integration. Additionally, some scholars have pushed back on theories such as Tinto's model of integration, particularly as they relate to underrepresented student populations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For example, questions have been raised about the extent to which experiences of marginalization on campus affect students' ability to be successful, and the extent to which participation in groups with cultural affiliations may impact integration of underrepresented students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These factors have often not been accounted for in studies utilizing Tinto's model of integration to understand the experiences of students with disabilities.

Self-Determination and Advocacy

Self-determination and advocacy have also emerged as important frameworks in the literature exploring factors related to success of students with disabilities in higher education (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Jameson, 2007). Self-determination and advocacy have been defined in a number of ways. For example, Wehmeyer (1996) defined self-determination as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions, regarding one's quality of life, free from undue external influence or interference" (p. 22). Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) distilled several major definitions by surmising that self-determination is "a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior" (p. 2).

Self-determination has been supported by many scholars and practitioners as a critical skill for succeeding in higher education and has been explored in different ways to understand its potential impact on student success in college. For example, Getzel and Thoma (2008) explored the skills related to self-determination and self-advocacy that students find critical to obtaining supports and staying in college. The researchers utilized purposive sampling to gather participants who had disclosed a disability and were utilizing services. A total of 34 students participated in this study; 47% identified as men and 53% identified as women. Of these students, 21 identified as White, 12 identified as African American, and one identified as Asian. Participants represented a range of both apparent and non-apparent disabilities. Focus groups were conducted at three community colleges and three universities in Virginia.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers defined self-determination as "being able to advocate for what you need, understanding your disability and how it impacts your learning, having self-confidence, being independent, and adjusting your schedule to make sure things get done" (Getzel & Thoma, 2008, p. 79). The researchers found that participants widely expressed the importance of self-determination skills in their ability to persist in college. Participants identified problem solving, goal setting, having an understanding of one's self and one's disability, and self-management as being core skills for effective self-advocacy. Being self-aware also surfaced as a core skill for staying in college, as well as having the ability to seek out services, develop on-campus support systems, and foster relationships with faculty and instructors.

While self-determination and advocacy were identified in this study as important skills for college success, less is known about how the collegiate environment impacts students' ability to enact self-determination and advocacy, and what impact that has on their willingness to seek out services and disclose their disability. Additionally, there has been some criticism of the focus on self-determination, advocacy, and students' responsibility to seek out services in postsecondary education. For example, Trainor (2002) has raised questions about whether constructs related to self-determination are as effective for historically underrepresented and underserved populations, such as students of color and English Language Learners. Trainor has questioned the extent to which benchmarks of self-determination, such as financial and residential independence, are applicable measures of success for all students and has advocated for the use of theory related to intercultural communication, cultural studies of child development, and parental interaction in self-determination models.

Additionally, Trainor (2002) asserted that studies on self-determination often do not identify the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of participants and do not break out the results by demographic characteristics to explore the impact of race and ethnicity. Trainor has argued that values related to self-determination, such as independence and equality, may feel uncomfortable to students and parents from collective or hierarchical cultures. Differences in these communities can include greater interdependence between family members and perceptions of professionals as being of a higher status than one's self. Trainor asserted that the voices and perspectives of students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically underserved backgrounds are missing in the literature related to self-determination. Overall, further research is needed to better understand how aspects of students' cultural identity influence their transition process and how their needs related to self-determination may differ from dominant cultural groups who are most often reflected in the literature on this topic.

While skills such as self-advocacy, self-determination, the ability to integrate to campus, awareness of one's disability, and understanding of one's legal responsibility to disclose to obtain accommodations are important components for success in college, national data demonstrates that many students choose to remain unidentified in their institutions. Research is limited in understanding how frameworks of integration, self-determination and advocacy, and self-awareness apply for students who choose not to disclose their disability. Perhaps some students with high self-determination or advocacy may choose not to disclose because they have the resources and supports to succeed without accommodations. Still, the research is very limited in understanding the connection between self-determination and students' willingness to disclose their

disability and seek accommodations. Scholarship focusing on disclosure is vital for shedding light on students' experiences in higher education and the reasons they may or may not choose to seek additional support through accommodations. The next section of this review will explore literature surrounding the decision-making process and experiences of students with disabilities related to disclosure and seeking accommodations.

Disability Disclosure and Seeking Accommodations

Academic accommodations are a legal right for qualified students with disabilities in postsecondary education and a core aspect of the support system for this population in higher education. Most postsecondary institutions have an office on campus specifically identified to serve students with disabilities and determine reasonable academic accommodations (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Landmark, & Reber, 2009). At most institutions, students with disabilities provide documentation to their disability office and then are typically given an accommodation letter to give to their instructors in order to utilize their accommodations in each of their courses (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Though students may choose to disclose their disability to the disability office, they may not necessarily choose to ask their instructors for accommodations.

A study by Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, and Floersch (2013) provides insight into the decision-making processes of students with disabilities related to asking for and utilizing classroom accommodations. Kranke et al. (2013) conducted an exploratory study of factors that influenced students' disclosure of their non-apparent disability, as well as their delay in disclosure when seeking classroom accommodations. Participants were recruited through an online survey at a private, Midwestern 4-year

university. A total of 17 students were enrolled in the study. Participants were interviewed twice per semester for a total of four semesters. The researchers noted that not all participants were interviewed the same number of times because some participants dropped out or left the institution within the 2 years that the study was conducted. The majority of participants identified as women (76%) and White (82%), and reported being diagnosed with a mood disorder (82%) or, in two cases, ADHD.

Data were gathered through use of the *Subjective Experience of Medication Interview* semi-structured interview instrument. Based on their interviews with the 17 participants, Kranke et al. (2013) identified three pathways through which students disclosed their disability to seek classroom accommodations. The first pathway was immediate disclosure in which students revealed their disability to their instructor right away out of fear that their disability would eventually have a negative impact on their academic performance. The second pathway was delayed disclosure, in which students chose not to disclose their disability until they began to struggle in class. In the third pathway, students chose not to disclose their disability at all.

The researchers explained the first two pathways using Zubin and Spring's (1977) Stress-Vulnerability Model, which posits that individuals have a certain threshold of vulnerability that results from a variety of factors, including trauma, familial experiences, or presence of a disease. The extent to which individuals are pushed past their threshold when faced with challenges that are "endogenous" (biological or neuropsychological) or "exogenous" (related to life events) will determine the extent to which they experience functional limitations (Kranke et al., 2013, p. 38). Students who disclosed their disability immediately and followed the first pathway exhibited concern that they would reach a

threshold of stress that would cause them to experience functional limitations. In the second pathway, students thought they were able to manage their disability and that disclosing their disability would also lead to greater stress because of potential negative perceptions of their instructor. Students in the second pathway ultimately decided to disclose their disability at a point where functional limitations of their disability began creating stress beyond what was initially manageable.

The Stress-Vulnerability Model did not explain the third pathway. In this pathway, Kranke et al. (2013) surmised that internalized stigma related to students' non-apparent disability kept them from disclosing to their instructor. The researchers related this pathway to the Adolescent Mental Health Stigma Model (Kranke, Floersch, Kranke, & Munson, 2011) in which individuals become aware of stereotypes that others might have about mental illness, begin to recognize differences between themselves and their peers, and then attempt to conceal their disability from others. Students choosing this pathway may eventually decide to disclose their disability if the consequences for not seeking accommodations become greater than the fear of experiencing stigma. The researchers asserted that these experiences may be valuable in increasing students' self-efficacy and the ability to handle potential stigma. Students who have positive experiences when they disclose their disability may be more likely to proactively seek out assistance in the future.

In an effort to better understand the meaning of disclosure for students with disabilities, Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, and Lan (2010) explored the accommodation-seeking strategies of academically successful students at a public Southwestern university. Participants were recruited through mass emails sent by the campus disability

services office to academically successful students who were at least juniors in class standing and who were registered with the office. The researchers utilized an interpretive framework and conducted semi-structured interviews with five participants. Demographic information related to the race, ethnicity, and gender of participants and the criteria for identifying "academically successful" students were not identified in the study. Participants had both apparent and non-apparent disabilities.

Based on the findings, the researchers identified three accommodation-seeking strategies utilized by successful students: scripting of disclosure and accommodations requests, negotiating accommodations as opposed to reporting noncompliance, and downplaying one's own disability status (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). The strategy of scripting out requests for accommodations involved the students deciding beforehand and practicing how they would discuss their disability when requesting classroom accommodations from faculty. Scripting practices varied in how much detail the student would provide to share with the instructors, but students had this information decided ahead of time and had scripted it out to some extent. The researchers noted that this strategy may be effective in enhancing the comfort and probability that a student will actually go on to request accommodations.

The strategy of negotiating accommodations as opposed to reporting non-compliance was discussed as focusing more on effectively completing coursework than focusing on negative experiences with the accommodations process. The researchers asserted that this behavior indicates a goal orientation toward seeking accommodations, although they also acknowledged that participants expressed fear of retribution related to reporting faculty resistance to complying with their legal obligation to provide

accommodations. Downplaying a disability was identified as a broader strategy related

to the experience of being a student with a disability in college. The researchers asserted

that this strategy is commonly utilized among students with disabilities in order to make

others feel more comfortable and to gain peer acceptance.

The findings from this study by Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) provide several

important insights into how students with disabilities successfully disclose and ask for

classroom accommodations. Additionally, a few other important issues should also be

highlighted from this study. First of all, students must first develop a level of comfort

talking about their disability in order to approach faculty members about their

accommodations. As noted earlier, many postsecondary disability offices give students a

letter outlining their accommodation to give to their instructor. While students do not

need to disclose their specific disability when giving their letter, approaching faculty

about accommodations can feel like a very revealing and uncomfortable conversation for

many (Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, & Floersch, 2013). Conversations of this

nature are not often required of students without disabilities (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010).

Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) surmise "The academic accommodations process for [students

with disabilities] steps out of the realm of typical interpersonal discourse as the process

requires disclosing what would normally be personal and privileged information to an

essential stranger, a faculty member" (p.413). While some students may feel that this

kind of disclosure provides a sense of relief in feeling that they do not need to hide a

disability, for others it can feel like a conversation too risky to have with an instructor

(Kranke et al., 2013).

A second important insight from this study by Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) is that students felt fear of retribution if they reported faculty for their resistance to provide accommodations. Instructors are legally obligated to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. Yet, compliance and appropriate implementation of accommodations does not always happen. Although some students may be able to individually navigate these issues and it can be important for them not to focus too much on negative experiences with faculty, students' agency to ensure they are being treated fairly and receiving the accommodations legally granted to them is also critically important. Instructors play a critical role in the process of implementation of accommodations and can have a varying impact on disclosure and classroom experiences for students with disabilities. The following subsection explores the complexity of faculty and instructor interactions and their impact on students and the accommodations process.

The Role of Faculty and Instructors

While both disability offices and instructors play a vital role in ensuring access and legal compliance with accommodations, some researchers have demonstrated that students and postsecondary professionals have varying perceptions about supports for students with disabilities. One study that demonstrates this kind of disparity is that of Wilson, Getzel, and Brown (2000). Their study explored the perceptions of students with disabilities, as well as faculty and staff, regarding unmet needs and levels of satisfaction of this population at Virginia Commonwealth University. In phase one of the research study, interviews were conducted with the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) staff. During the second phase of the study, a direct-mail survey was

sent to 532 students who had received services from the campus OSSD. The survey return rate was 12%. The majority of student participants identified as women (67%) and had a learning disability or ADD/ADHD (53%). In the third phase, scripted interviews were conducted with 49 "key informants," who included faculty, staff, and administrators who represented various roles and units (Wilson et al., 2000, p. 39). The demographic characteristics of the OSSD staff and key informants were not indicated.

While the findings indicated little difference between students, faculty, and staff with regard to programmatic recommendations and unmet needs, students overwhelmingly indicated that there was little, if any, commitment to them from the university (Wilson et al., 2000). In contrast, faculty and staff indicated that the university was putting forth a significant amount of effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment for students. Student participants also expressed a perception that faculty lacked knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity about their needs. Despite this sentiment, students indicated that faculty more than any other group on campus had the most significant impact on their ability to be academically successful. The findings of Wilson et al.'s (2000) study reveal a potential gap in perceptions of students and instructors, as well as institutional staff, about the effort to address and reduce barriers for students with disabilities. The study also highlights the critical role that instructors play in enhancing access and students' ability to be successful.

As noted in this review so far, previous negative interactions with instructors regarding accommodations, fear of stigma, and students' own awareness and determination skills all influence their disclosure and perceived barriers in the academic environment. A recent study by Hong (2015) highlights the complex interplay of these

factors on students' postsecondary experiences. Hong (2015) utilized a self-determination framework to explore the experiences of college students with disabilities by asking them to journal about the barriers that they encountered over 10 weeks of an academic semester. This study was conducted at a small suburban college on the East Coast. Participants were 16 students who were recruited by email and had identified that they had received services through the campus disability office. The majority of participants identified as women (75%). Reported disability types varied significantly. Other demographic details, such as race and ethnicity, were not reported, though Hong notes that the university demographic is primarily first-generation students from working-class families. The researchers asked students to submit weekly reflective journal entries on their positive and negative experiences related to college and their disability.

Hong (2015) identified four themes from the data analysis: Faculty Perceptions, Fit of Advisors, Stressors, and Quality of Support (p. 213). Faculty Perceptions of students with disabilities was the most frequently cited barrier by the participants. Hong noted that student participants wrote journal entries of feeling judged or humiliated by their instructors. Within this theme was a subtheme of students perceiving that their instructor would have lower expectations for them or assume that they were not capable of success if they made their need for accommodations known. As a result, some participants expressed reluctance to give their instructor an accommodation letter until a major exam or the end of the semester was approaching. Additionally, Hong found that some students thought their instructors did not believe in them and treated them differently as a result of making their disability known. Another subtheme within faculty perceptions was Past Experiences. Within this subtheme, participants expressed concern

about approaching their instructors as a result of negative experiences of asking for accommodations in the past, including in high school.

In the second theme, Fit of Advisor, the participants cited concerns that their advisors lacked knowledge about guiding them appropriately in their coursework and their responsiveness to student needs. Participants also expressed concerns about disability personnel within the Quality of Support Services theme. Within this theme, participants indicated that the disability personnel were not helpful or approachable. Participants expressed feelings of being conflicted about using disability related services and confusion about the process and their eligibility to receive services. The researchers also noted that participants were not always sure they needed the support or accommodations and wanted to prove that they could perform like other college students.

In the theme of Stressors, students expressed difficulties in the physical environment, such as paying attention in class while tuning out outside noise, constraining tics while taking tests, and using medication to controls symptoms or dealing with subsequent side-effects. Within this theme, Hong (2015) also identified a sub-theme of Mental/Emotional Struggles, in which participants expressed a desire to be self-reliant and sufficient, which sometimes impacted their decision not to seek help. Hong noted that students did motivate themselves through self-affirmations, though also struggled with limitations and weaknesses related to their disability. Participants also expressed desire to blend in with their peers and to not be associated with a disability identity. Hong identified a subtheme of Social Stigmatization in which participants expressed a fear that peers would feel they were getting special treatment, that they were using their disability as an excuse, or that they would be ostracized from their peers.

Current and past negative interactions with faculty as a barrier was a significant theme within this study. In fact, only one student wrote about a positive experience approaching an instructor about accommodations (Hong, 2015). Hong also summarized that lack of self-awareness and determination were two consistent findings within this study. Hong asserted that within each of the themes students identified instances in which they struggled to recognize their needs, make sense of their identities, and identify actions for navigating the system of higher education. Hong noted, "Despite their disabilities, these students longed to be integrated like everyone else and live up to traditional expectations of college students" (p. 222). While Hong links the findings to student development theory regarding integration and determination, this study also raises important questions about the role that identity play in students' struggle to seek services and access accommodations in the classroom environment. The following subsection explores the issue of identifying as a person with a disability and impact of identity on disclosure and other postsecondary experiences.

The Role of Identity

Data from the NLTS2 indicate that over half of students who had been identified as having a disability in secondary education did not consider themselves to be a person with a disability after entering into college (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). Additionally, research by Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, and Dugan (2010) has demonstrated that identity, or lack of association with a disability, may impact students' decision to disclose a disability. Marshak et al. (2010) explored the barriers that students faced in disclosing their disabilities and seeking accommodations at a mid-Atlantic state university of medium size. Participants were recruited through

convenience sampling; letters were sent out to students who had registered with the campus disability services office. Of the 16 students who participated in this study, the majority of participants identified as women (80%) and all participants identified as White. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each student.

While participants reported negative interactions with faculty members as a significant barrier in disclosing their disability, participants most frequently cited issues related to identity and perception of negative social reactions as barriers to their disclosure. Issues related to identity included intentions to shed disability-related stigma from high school, aspirations to become self-sufficient with regard to their disability, and desire to separate their disability from their identity. Issues related to perceptions of negative social reactions included fear of being singled out and experiencing resentment from peers. Participants also identified barriers related to having limited knowledge about what services were available to them, experiencing problems related to their accommodations, and uncertainty about how to explain their disability.

Students' struggles with stigma, as well as understanding their disability, including if or how disability fits into their identity, surface as themes across research and scholarship about the experience of having a disability in college. Although national data indicate that many students do not identify with a disability, leaving disability out of scholarly discussions on identity development, or assuming that disability is not a part of students' identity, would further a deficit and medical model approach to understanding disability. Research examining disability identity development and its impact on students' postsecondary experiences in general has been very limited. In fact, the concept of identity and how disability fits within the construct has been widely debated

across areas of scholarship (Shakespeare, 1996; Watson, 2002). Shakespeare has noted

that the medical model of disability has typically positioned disability as a factor that

would create negative associations of one's self-identity due to having to come to terms

with a limitation. Shakespeare has asserted, "this is reinforced by segregated education,

negative images, cultural representation, absence of positive role models, social treatment

of disabled people" (p. 105). The various models of disability discussed early on in the

literature review, including the medical, minority, and social models, have positioned

disability in different ways, from an identity or aspect of self to be ashamed of, to

disability identity as a collective experience of an oppressed group (Shakespeare, 1996).

Scholarship on some groups, such as the Deaf community, has positioned disability in the

context of a cultural affiliation, somewhat in line with the minority model of disability

(Peña, Stapleton, & Schaffer, 2016)

The field of disability studies has discussed disability as a shared experience

(Watson, 2002) and one that fosters affinity or pride with having a disability (Putnam,

2005). Other scholars, such as Olkin (1999), have conceptualized disability as a

continuum in which some groups of people may not identify with a disability, including

those who do not actually have a disability or those who have a diagnosis but do not

identify as someone with a disability. A third group includes people who do identify with

their disability and have a strong association with or active role in disability communities

and disability rights. Although an array of perspectives exists on disability identity,

including what constitutes disability as an identity and what disability identity looks like,

there are very few models of disability identity development.

One example of a disability identity development model is that of Gibson (2006), which focuses on people with early onset disabilities. Gibson's model is laid out in three stages. In the first stage, called Passive Awareness, a disability does not play a role in one's life and the social implications of a disability identity are denied. In the second stage, Realization, people come to terms with their disability and may experience feelings of self-hate and concerns about how they are perceived by others. In the third stage, Acceptance, people do not see their disability as a negative attribute and may begin to socialize with others who have disabilities and get involved with advocacy. Although similar themes emerge in relation to Olkin's conceptualization of a continuum, Gibson's model is situated in a stage development in which a person with a disability may reach a final stage in which they accept their disability and begin to become involved in disability communities.

Within the student affairs literature, Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) have noted that identity has been broadly defined as "one's personal held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation)" (p. 577). They add that identity is also understood as "socially constructed; that is, one's sense of self and beliefs about one's own social group as well as others are constructed through interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations" (p.577). Research on disability identity among college students is quite limited. Peña, Stapleton, and Schaffer (2016) have argued that much of the research on students with disabilities has looked at the participants as an aggregate group and has not split out populations by specific disabilities to look at the unique experiences of different groups. They have noted, for example, that lived experiences of students with visual

disabilities may differ from students with Autism. Peña et al. have argued that student affairs professionals must look at disability identity through an intersectional and critical lens, noting that other disciplines, including disability studies, have positioned disability in isolation from other aspect of identity and have not necessarily considered how the intersections of other aspects of identity influence students' experience.

Although not explicitly focused on disability, a beneficial model for considering the intersections of identity, including disability, is the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI), developed by Jones and McEwen (2000) and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007; see Figure 1). The MMDI features a center core that represents inner aspects of identity, including personal attributes and characteristics. Outside of the core are intersecting circles with dots representing various aspects of social identity, for example, race, sexual orientation, ability status, and gender identity. The dots rotate on the intersecting circles and become closer to the core when that particular facet of identity is salient to the individual and move further from the core when they are not salient. Around the intersecting circles of social identity is a larger circle that Jones and McEwen (2000) conceptualized as contextual influences that might also be present and influential on the individual. The contextual influences include family background, cultural experience, and sociocultural conditions.
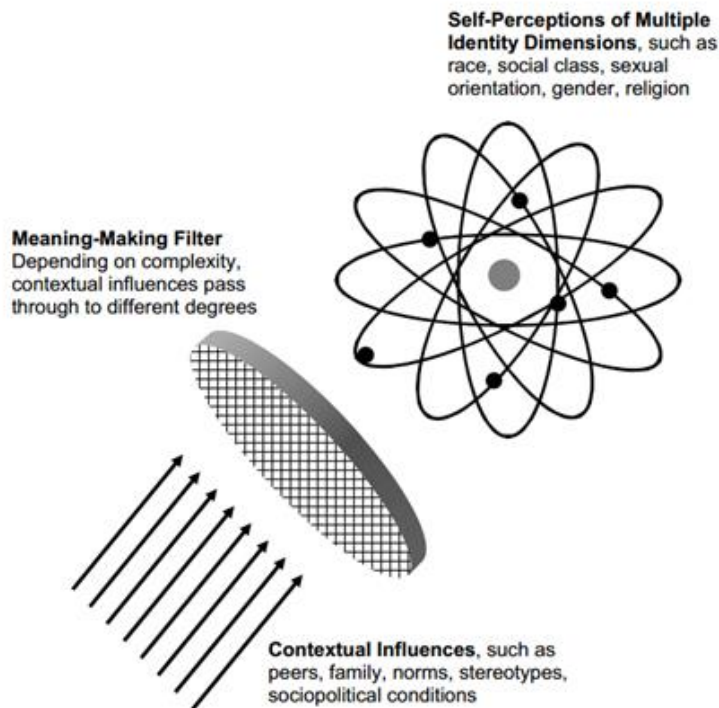
Figure 1. Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes et al., 2007)

        Abes et al. (2007) expanded on the MMDI by adding added a meaning making filter, positing that the contextual factors surrounding the core and circles of social identity would first pass through an individual's meaning-making filter. It is through this filter that the influence of outside contexts is determined. Depending on the complexity of the meaning-making filter, the authors surmised that individuals could determine the extent to which contextual factors influence their identity. Jones and McEwen (2000) have noted that this model "reflects an acknowledgment that different dimensions of identity will be more or less important for each individual given a range of contextual influences" (p. 411). In this way, Jones and McEwen's model is very much different from a stage model, which position identities as static and in isolation of one another. When considering identity development related to disability, contextual factors, including

familial experiences and the postsecondary educational environment, may impact how salient students' disabilities are to their identities. The MMDI also provides a relevant framework for exploring how other aspects of students' identities might influence their experience of having a disability, which will be explored in the following section of this literature review.

Two gaps must be acknowledged about the literature on disclosure, instructor role, and identity presented thus far. First, some students with disabilities may identify and take pride in their disability, feel agency in advocating their needs and talking to faculty, and involve themselves in promoting practices that reduce barriers for other students with disabilities. This perspective of pride and agency has not been widely portrayed in the literature so far. Second, the majority of research cited so far includes participants who are primarily White or whose demographic makeup is not explicitly broken down. Scholars have demonstrated that having additional identities that have been historically underrepresented in higher education can add additional stressors as well as nuance to the experience of being a college student with a disability. The following section examines the experiences of students with disabilities who are also underrepresented based on other aspects of their identity.

Disability Experiences and Underrepresented Identities

Although the body of research focusing on college students with disabilities and the intersections of other aspects of their identity is quite limited, there are a few studies that explore this nuance, particularly related to race. One such study is that of Banks and Hughes (2013), which explored the experiences of undergraduate African American males who had been labeled as having a disability. Banks and Hughes connected Du

Bois' (1989) concept of double consciousness to African American students with disabilities who face marginalization based on their race and perceived ability. The researchers utilized the theoretical frames of disability theory and critical race theory as foundations for interpreting the data in their study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 12 participants through contact with the director of the disability services office at a mid-Atlantic Historically Black University. Participants had documentation with the disability services office for a range of disabilities, including cerebral palsy, anxiety disorder, and a learning disability. The researchers conducted 90-minute semi-structured, phenomenological interviews with each participant.

The researchers found that participants with apparent and non-apparent disabilities experienced social consequences as a result of negative cultural narratives about multiple aspects of their identity. These cultural narratives often perpetuated stereotypes associated with their race, gender, and disability. For example, participants talked about negative cultural messages that conveyed intellectual inferiority due to their race and the fact that they had a disability. Additionally, the researchers cited an example of a participant who encountered perceptions that he had been shot, as opposed to having a permanent disability, due to stereotypical associations with his race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Regarding language and associating oneself with a disability, the researchers found that participants with non-apparent disabilities rejected the label of disability and opted to use language of having a "cognitive difference" (Banks & Hughes, 2013, p. 374). Participants with apparent disabilities adopted the label of disability but pushed back on the cultural narratives that came by association (Banks & Hughes, 2013). For

example, one participant spoke about adopting the label of disability to disprove the cultural narrative that students with disabilities were not capable of being successful in college. Participants practiced resistance against negative cultural narratives through the development of positive counter-narratives, such as having individual resilience and advocating for themselves when seeking classroom accommodations (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

The findings of Banks and Hughes' (2013) study help to illuminate the ways in which layers of race and gender change or add nuance to the experience of having a disability. The researchers pointed to the ways in which race and ethnicity can intensify negative perceptions of incompetence that are often inherent with having a disability. The findings also revealed that African American males with disabilities were often facing stereotypes about multiple aspects of their identities. For example, participants indicated that faculty members often held low expectations for their performance, based on stereotypes about their race, gender, and disability.

McDonald, Keys, and Balcazar (2007) also focused on cultural narratives of disability in their study of experiences of low-income African American and Hispanic people with learning disabilities. Their exploratory study looked at dominant cultural narratives of disability, the intersection of these narratives with race, ethnicity, and gender, and the impact of the cultural narratives on the participants. McDonald et al. cited Rapport (2000) in defining cultural narratives as "stories communicated to individuals through socialization channels such as schools and mass media and often convey pejorative stereotypes about sociopolitical minority groups" (p. 146). Thirteen students were selected from two community colleges to participate in this

study. Participants identified as African American and Latino/a; six participants identified as woman and seven identified as men. Participants were selected and recruited by faculty, members of institutional disability services offices, flyers, and former special education teachers. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with the participants; three students participated in both focus groups and interviews.

McDonald et al. (2007) found that dominant cultural narratives delegitimized the reality of participants' learning disabilities due to the invisible nature of their disability. The researchers asserted:

The relatively invisible nature of learning disabilities in tandem with widespread misunderstanding of their nature likely helped create cultural narratives that question whether learning disabilities actually exist or whether the label is employed as an excuse to avoid working hard or for poor performance (p. 153).

The findings revealed that cultural narratives of learning disabilities reinforced stereotypes of these individuals as having low intelligence. Conversely, the invisibility of the participants' disabilities also enabled them to "pass" as nondisabled to avoid possible negative stereotypes or exclusion by people of their same race and gender (McDonald et al., 2007, p. 146). The researchers noted that the negative consequence of this invisibility "may be the integration of disability shame into their self-concept, rather than disability pride, thereby reducing the individual's ability to develop a positive self-concept that fully incorporates all their personal characteristics" (McDonald et al., 2007, p. 157).

Participants in McDonald et al.'s (2007) study expressed challenges with regards to their masculinity and femininity in relation to cultural narratives of their

disability. Males in this study believed they did not live up to society's expectation of being a man because of their disability, while women thought that society pitied them more than women without disabilities. The findings indicated that participants practiced forms of resistance to negative cultural narratives by removing themselves from environments that were oppressive, practicing self-motivation, and purposefully developing positive personal narratives.

Research focusing on the intersection of other aspects of underrepresented identities reveals that additional barriers and stigma may exist in students' experience of the postsecondary environment. These studies raise a question of whether students with non-apparent disabilities in particular may be less likely to come forward and reveal their disability when they are already facing lower expectation based on their race or ethnicity. Additionally, both studies also highlight important findings about the practice of resistance regarding cultural narratives that communicate low expectations, stereotypes, or delegitimize the realities of participants' identity.

Overall, the picture of students' development with regard to their disability and identity is complex, as is the process of disclosure and seeking accommodations in the academic environment. The literature on disclosure and accommodations-seeking behavior indicates that a variety of factors may contribute to disclosure and seeking out accommodations. These factors include students' awareness of their disability and its impacts, their understandings of their legal responsibilities to disclose, their self-determination and advocacy skills, and the extent to which students believe that the benefits of disclosing their disability and getting accommodations outweigh the risks. The literature also indicates that two major factors could contribute to the decision not to

disclose. One factor is fear of stigma and low expectations of faculty and peers. A second factor relates to identity, including not identifying with a disability, not wanting to be different from peers, and wanting to do things on their own without the additional assistance of accommodations. The picture of disability identity might be particularly complex for students who are underrepresented in other ways, such as by race, in that they are often facing multiple forms of negative cultural narratives and oppression.

While the literature indicates that many students do self-advocate, resist negative cultural messages, and practice self-determination skills that enhance their ability to be successful, further exploration of the role that postsecondary institutions play in supporting students with disabilities is needed. Providing academic accommodations may not be enough if such a large percentage of students do not disclose their disability and if the process of disclosure and implementing accommodations remains complex. Many scholars and practitioners have been exploring curricular and pedagogical interventions that enhance classroom access and inclusion for students with disabilities, including those with other underrepresented identities. The following section will explore theoretical underpinnings and research related to Universal Design, particularly in postsecondary classrooms.

Universal Design in Instruction and Learning

Universal Design (UD) in instruction, teaching, and learning has been acknowledged as a potential intervention to reduce the need for students with disabilities to identify themselves to their institution, seek out services individually, and rely solely on secondary support systems in the postsecondary environment (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998). UD was originally conceptualized by Ronald Mace (Center for

Universal Design, 2008) and was influenced by the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and Americans with Disabilities Act (Pliner & Johnson, 2004). UD focused primarily on designing physical environments to be accessible to all people, regardless of a disability (Rao, Ok, & Bryant, 2014).

UD eventually gave rise to concepts of Universal Instructional Design (Pliner & Johnson, 2004), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Universal Design for Instruction (UDI; Rao et al., 2014). While each model has its own set of principles, all three focus on improving flexibility in curriculum, instruction, pedagogy and educational resources to enhance cognitive access for diverse learners, including students with disabilities (Rao et al., 2014). Part of the purpose of these design models is to reduce the need for individual accommodations, the extent to which students must rely on external supports to succeed in the classroom, the need to segregate students from their peers, and the extent to which students must disclose their disability (Higbee & Goff, 2008; Pliner & Johnson, 2004). The intent of UD is not to group all students into one category of universal learners, but to instead be flexible and responsive to the needs of diverse learners (Higbee & Goff, 2008).

Universal Design techniques in instruction and learning have been explored and implemented to respond to the growing number of students with disabilities, including non-apparent disabilities, in higher education, as well as the growing number of students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, international students and non-traditional aged students (Zeff, 2007). Universal Instructional Design (UID), Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature, and have also been described

separately with overlapping principles and practices (Rao et al., 2004). The following section will provide background on the existing models of UD, including the ways in which they differ from one another and the ways in which they are similar and build on one another.

UDL was developed by the Center for Applied Technology (CAST) and is rooted in findings from cognitive neuroscience (Rose, Harbour, Johnston, Daley, & Abarbanell, 2006). CAST was originally interested in the way that UD was being applied to architecture and saw application to the k-12 learning environment (Zeff, 2007). While their work in developing UDL initially focused on k-12 teaching and learning, their focus gradually began to expand to postsecondary education (Zeff, 2007). UDL identifies three primary brain networks involved in learning (recognition, strategic, and affective) to provide three principles for designing learning (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2014; Rao, Ok, Bryant, 2014). UDL is differentiated from the general concept of UD because it focuses on the process of teaching and learning, not on access to information or physical structures (Rose et al., 2006).

UDL centers on three primary teaching and learning principles that include multiple means of action and expression, representation, and engagement in the learning process (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). The principle of multiple means of representation focuses on presenting and representing information for learners (Meyer et al., 2014). Multiple means of representation may include the way that course content is presented, the way that course material is organized, and the way that content connects to other aspects of students' learning (Rose et al., 2006). For example, instructors may implement multiple means of representation by varying how content is delivered,

including through lecture, small group discussions, and individual or group assignments (Zeff, 2007). Guidelines for the principle of multiple means of representation include providing "options for comprehension"; "options for language, mathematical expression, and symbols"; and "options for perception" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 54).

A core aspect of the principle of multiple means of action and expression is allowing students to respond to content and express what they know in various ways (Meyer et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2006). This principle is intended to support students who may need to express their learning in different ways due to a disability or other factor related to their identity or learning style. Multiple means of expression may include providing multiple ways for students to demonstrate their learning or access in-class supports, like tutoring (Rose et al., 2006). Guidelines for the principle of multiple means of action and expression include providing "options for executive functions, expression and communication, and options for physical action" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 55). Multiple means of engagement acknowledges that not all students engage in learning in the same way, develop similar internal motivation, or are engaged by the same reward structure (Rose et al., 2006). For example, an instructor may implement multiple means of expression by offering different kinds of assignments and activities, including presentations, blogging or social media exercises, or writing papers (Zeff, 2007). Guidelines for the principle of multiple means of engagement include providing "options for self-regulation," "options for sustaining effort and persistence," and "options for recruiting interest" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 52).

While UDL had previously been more widely used in k-12 education, UDI and UID have predominantly focused on postsecondary learning environments. UDI and

UID have individual sets of principles that address aspects of curriculum and instruction, as well as interactions with faculty and student accommodation needs (Rao, Ok, Bryant, 2014). Expanding on the seven principles of UD, which had originally been geared toward architecture and the physical environment, Scott, McGuire, and Shaw (2003) established the following nine principles that became known as Universal Design in Instruction:

1. Equitable use (accessible instruction and materials for all students),

2. Flexibility in use (varied methods of instruction that meet various abilities and styles),

3. Simple and intuitive (straightforward and clear instruction),

4. Perceptible information (information is clearly communicated to students and available in multiple formats),

5. Tolerance for error (instruction fits wide variety of skills and learning paces),

6. Low physical effort (physical effort unrelated to essential course requirements is minimal),

7. Size and space for approach and use (considerations of size, space, manipulation, approach, etc. are made),

8. Community of learners (interactions between students and faculty are encouraged),

9. Instructional climate (a welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students).

The research on UD as a method for improving outcomes for students with disabilities in postsecondary education has largely focused on instructors' perceptions of

implementing UD and students' perceptions of changes in teaching strategies after

training on implementation of UD (Schelly, Davies, & Spooner, 2011; Spooner, Baker,

Harris, Ahlgrim-Delzell & Browder, 2007). Very few UD studies include students with

disabilities in identifying what teaching and learning practices are valuable to their

learning. A small number of studies seek to highlight efficacy of UD principles through

feedback from students with and without disabilities.

In an initiative to further understand the validity of UDI, McGuire and Scott

(2006) explored the perceptions of effective teaching and instructional strategies by

conducting four focus groups with students with learning disabilities at three

Northeastern colleges. Participants were from a community college in New York, a

community college and Massachusetts, and a research university in Connecticut. Each

institution was participating in the University of Connecticut's Universal Design for

Instruction project. The campuses disability service offices identified participants and a

total of 23 students participated in the study. Fifteen participants provided demographic

information; nine identified as men and four identified as women. Participants ranged in

ages from 19 to 42. Racial and ethnic background was not specified. The four focus

groups were conducted at the students' home institution. Each session was audio

recorded, transcribed, and was analyzed for specific themes.

In response to being asked about instructional strategies that supported their

learning, participants identified practices that were categorized into the following themes:

clear expectations, advanced organizers and supports, information in multiple formats, a

welcoming classroom climate, connecting teaching with real life experiences, frequent

and formative feedback, supporting individual learning needs within the group, and

effective assessment strategies (McGuire & Scott, 2006). Themes regarding instructor attributes that positively impacted learning also surfaced. These qualities included being approachable and available, being focused on the subject, making personal connections, and holding challenging standards for learning (McGuire & Scott, 2006). McGuire and Scott asserted that the research findings from this study align closely with the nine principles of UDI and that the themes are pervasive across the four focus groups. Although the authors noted that participants articulated challenges and barriers regarding their experiences with instruction, related themes were not reported in the findings.

Black, Weinberg, and Brodwin (2015) explored students' perspectives of instructional methods and the extent to which these methods fit with UDL and UDI principles at an urban university in California. Black et al. utilized a phenomenological approach and conducted interviews with a total of 15 students, 12 students with disabilities and 3 students without disabilities. Participants had a range of disabilities including mental health, learning disabilities, mobility disabilities, and ADHD. Eleven participants were undergraduates and two were graduate students. Five participants were male-identified; other gender and racial demographics were not included. The interview questions focused on learning tools and accommodations, learning preferences, and UDI/UDL principles. All participants were asked interview questions that reflected each of the UDI and UDL principles. Participants were asked to rate the usefulness of a specific practice that aligned with and UDI/UDL principle using a Likert scale of not important, somewhat important, and very important. The researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and compared initial themes to those that surfaced in their literature review.

With regard to accommodation issues, themes emerged related to concerns about inappropriate accommodations, stigma, discomfort disclosing and discussing accommodations, and instructor knowledge about disabilities (Black, Weinberg, & Brodwin, 2015). Regarding learning preferences, findings varied but all participants said that they benefitted from instruction that addressed a variety of learning preferences. From the UDI/UDL questions, the researchers found that participants gave the highest rating overall to having slides and notes in advance of class. Participants also discussed the importance of having materials in accessible format, particularly those with visual disabilities, in order to be able to access materials with screen readers. Having a variety of interactive activities, within the Community of Learners principle, was generally highly rated. Black et al. indicated that this practice increased students' motivation and learning. Similarly, setting high expectations for all students, within the Instructional Climate principle, was rated highly and was also surmised to promote learning and motivation (Black, Weinberg, & Brodwin, 2015).

Conceptually similar to UDI, UID was a term that was originally coined by Silver, Bourke, and Streyhorn (1998). Silver et al. conducted focus groups with faculty from the University of Massachusetts to better understand how faculty actually view and implement concepts of UID in the classroom and explore the potential barriers of its use. The researchers recruited participants through the Office of Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS) Faculty and Friends Network, which is comprised of faculty who have been recognized by students with disabilities as providing extraordinary accommodations (Silver et al., 1998, p. 48). A total of 13 faculty members participated

in this study. Demographic characteristics of faculty participants were not

included. LDSS staff conducted three 1.5-hour focus groups with two research assistants.

Perceptions of useful strategies and attitudes for implementing UID expressed by

participants included high expectations and standards for students, desire for all students

to succeed, desire to be responsive to diverse learning needs, feeling that diverse teaching

methods are beneficial to all students, feeling that gifted teachers provide multiple

options in instruction and assessment, finding creative ways to teach, and expecting that

students will take some responsibility for their own learning (Silver et al., 1998, p.

49). Strategies that faculty identified for enhancing UID and success of students with

disabilities included team-based and cooperative learning; peer-editing; contextual,

constructive, and criterion-based learning; prompting and cueing; distributing materials

prior to class; putting materials on reserve for student access outside of class; providing

extended time on projects and tests; consistency between teaching and testing; computer

assisted learning; and online instruction and assessment (Silver et al., 1998, p. 49).

Barriers to implementing UID included difficulty in changing teaching strategies due to

pressure to conform to the status quo of the university, encountering faculty attitudes of

elitism and gate keeping, the time-consuming nature of implementing UID, and lack of

awareness about needs of diverse learners and alternative pedagogical methods.

Expanding on the work of Silver et al. (2008) and the work of Chickering and

Gamson (1987), researchers involved in a partnership called Curriculum Transformation

and Disability (CTAD) at the University of Minnesota proposed eight principles of UID

(Higbee & Goff, 2008). These principles include:

1. Creating a welcoming classroom;

2. Determining essential course components;

3. Communicating clear expectations;

4. Providing constructive feedback;

5. Exploring the use of natural supports in learning (such as technology) to support all learners;

6. Designing teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and background knowledge;

7. Creating multiple ways for students to demonstrate knowledge;

8. Promoting interactions between students and faculty (Fox, Hatfield, & Collins, 2003; Higbee & Goff, 2008, p. 2).

The researchers note that UID broadens the thinking around effective instruction by taking into consideration the ways in which student identity shapes their learning experiences and by ensuring that no student is marginalized or excluded in the learning environment (Higbee & Goff, 2008).

Universal Design, Disability, and Diversity

Accessibility, disability, and diversity have been key themes on UD principles and practices. While few scholarly studies that focus of UD and the intersections of disability and diversity, Pliner and Johnson (2004) explored the concept of UID (a version later known as UDI) in theoretical and historical contexts, as well as UID's connections to multicultural and social justice education. Pliner and Johnson cited the Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 as landmark legislation that helped make higher education accessible to historically

underrepresented populations. Despite these changes, Pliner and Johnson noted that institutional culture and practices did not follow suit.

Pliner and Johnson (2004) synthesized concepts of UID with those of multicultural and social justice education noting that the three concepts come from different historical contexts and theoretical backgrounds but speak to the need for faculty to address and examine issues of difference, inequity and exclusion of historically underrepresented learners in higher education. The concepts advocate creating more accessible classrooms and learning environments by addressing issues related to instruction, pedagogy, and curriculum. Pliner and Johnson called for the involvement and collaboration of instructors, staff, and students in designing courses, pedagogy, and other aspects of the learning environment.

Focusing on the social justice frame of UD, Knoll (2009) utilized a feminist analysis to explore issues of intersectionality, power, and privilege. While universally designed environments have the potential to provide large-scale access for diverse groups of people, Knoll asserted that the experiences of people with disabilities are not universal and that individual needs must be taken into account. For example, the work of Wendell (1997) was cited to discuss "double-oppression," in which marginalization based on a second aspect of identity, such as gender or race, occurs in addition to a disability (Knoll, 2009, p. 124). Knoll integrated concepts from disability studies and feminist disability scholarship as well as physical-object privileges (how spaces and items are physically created and made accessible) and social-privilege (how society grants access to resources or capital to people without disabilities) to discuss postsecondary classroom implications

for enhancing access for people with disabilities while accounting for other

underrepresented identities (Knoll, 2009, p. 124).

Knoll (2009) noted the importance of utilizing Universal Design as well as

accommodations to maximize access for all students. Knoll suggested that instructors

can let students know that they will work with them to address accessibility needs

without the involvement of disability services or additional documentation if

needed. This practice may reduce the barrier of needing to pay for testing if

documentation has not been acquired; however, this practice could have legal

implications if the same modification were not provided to all students. Knoll discussed

the practice of interdependency, which raises students' awareness of physical-object and

social privileges by asking them to take mutual responsibility for creating an accessible

learning environment. Examples of interdependency included involving students in

writing notes that are visible to the class as the instructor speaks, reading out loud, and

determining adjustments to make the classroom space more accessible. Knoll's analysis

is important to the literature on UD models because it illuminates the complexity of

serving students with multiple underrepresented identities and integrates perspectives

from feminist theory, as well as disability and queer studies, which are often missing

from the dialog on UD.

While part of the purpose of UD in teaching and learning is to be responsive to

the needs of diverse students, some scholars have questioned whether the principles of

UD on their own are enough to ensure that this goal is in fact a genuine outcome.

Hackman (2008) has suggested that the integration of Social Justice Education (SJE) and

Critical Multicultural Education (CME) frameworks has the potential to enhance UD

practices, particularly in serving students from historically marginalized groups, whether they have a disability or not. Hackman contends:

> Unless educators have an awareness of students' social identities and the connection of power and privilege to those identities, as well as cultural competency in relating to those identities, there is a strong likelihood that even in a classroom where UID is deeply integrated, students from non-dominant groups will be alienated (p. 26).

Hackman (2008) has suggested that UID could be enhanced with greater attention to the dynamics of power and privilege in the context of classroom accessibility and that emphasizing the history of exclusion of students with disabilities in education could make a firmer argument for the importance of UID. Hackman also noted the importance of going beyond physical access and accommodations when implementing UDI to a focus on reducing systemic barriers related to ableism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. Hackman has asserted that while the disability rights movement focused on self-advocacy, UID lacks a focus on activism and social responsibility that are more present in SJE. Scholars such as Liasidou (2014) have posited that UD should become more embedded in a social justice framework in both pedagogy and curricula. Additionally, Liasidou has also suggested a needed focus on collaboration and broadening networks to facilitate a more international approach to implementing UD.

Scholars have explored models of instructional and curricular design that integrate principles both of UD and multicultural instruction. For example, Higbee, Goff, and Schultz (2012) have proposed a model called Integrated Multicultural Instructional Design (IMID), conceptualized from a variety of theoretical and pedagogical perspectives

including Freire (1970/2000) and Banks (1993, 1996). Higbee et al. represent IMID as a pyramid, which has a base of community members, including faculty, staff, and students, who are committed to multiculturalism and diversity. The four sides of the pyramid are inclusive of all members of the campus community and represent the following components:

1. How we learn and how we teach,

2. What we learn and what we teach,

3. How we access academic services and support and how we support learners,

4. How we demonstrate learning and how we assess learning (Higbee et al., 2012, p. 293).

Higbee et al. noted that a drawback of UID is the false assumption that the word "universal" implies a "one size fits all" solution (p. 293). The authors assert that the model highlights the benefit and value of diverse learners and difference in the postsecondary environment and brings attention to the role of culture in teaching and learning, which is sometimes missing for UD models. Higbee et al.'s model also ties in the role of the instructor into every aspect of the IMID pyramid, an element that is sometimes absent from aspects of UD models.

As a whole, scholarship on UD teaching and learning models shows promising practices that may reduce the need for some students to disclose a disability and enhance access and inclusion for students with underrepresented identities. Still, the research is very limited in providing in-depth information about appropriate implementation and evidence of effective outcomes. Roberts, Park, Brown, and Cook (2011) argued that research on UID in particular has yielded limited evidence that these instructional

practices actually improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Roberts et al. pointed to a lack of studies utilizing mixed methods and experimental design to validate the effectiveness of UID. Additionally, Rao et al. (2014) argued that another limitation of the literature on UD models is the lack of consistency in addressing what practices can be considered universally designed and what principles actually result in effective practice. Rao et al. also asserted that the literature on UD models includes limited detail about the actual implementation and operationalization of the principles, making it difficult to replicate or evaluate effectiveness. Additionally, Rao et al. have called for researchers to include more detailed demographic information about study participants, including disability type, race, gender, and English language learner status, and also to disaggregate data to better assess what interventions are effective for which learners. Furthermore, they urged that the voices of students with disabilities be further integrated into the scholarship on UD.

Overall, gaps exist in understanding the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments. Scholarly research demonstrates that students' understandings of their disabilities and responsibilities to seek out accommodations, self-determination skills, and ability to effectively integrate into the campus environment impact their ability to transition and persist in postsecondary education. At the same time, the literature also indicates that stigma, misunderstanding and judgment by peers and instructors, and the experience of negative cultural narratives can pose additional barriers to the success of students with disabilities. While scholarship has focused on understanding the nature of disclosure, methods for supporting students through accommodations, and classroom techniques that widen access and inclusion for

students regardless of identity, further research integrating the voices of students with disabilities is needed to understand how students with disabilities experience the classroom environment outside of the accommodations process.

Grounding Assumptions of This Study

Based on existing literature and scholarship on the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, there are several grounding assumptions that I have established for this study. These grounding assumptions include: 1). Postsecondary institutions must play a primary role in creating equitable outcomes for students with disabilities; 2). Universal Design is a promising framework for reducing inequities for students with disabilities in the classroom environment; 3). A social justice perspective is integral to understanding disability identity and classroom experiences; 4). Disability is one of many identities that may affect students' experiences in postsecondary classroom environments. The following points are intended to provide context and grounding for the approach used in this research study.

Postsecondary institutions must play a primary role in creating equitable outcomes for students with disabilities: The foundation of this study has been situated in an equity frame, as conceptualized in Bensimon's (2005) frames for organizational learning. Although Bensimon's work was originally developed to address inequitable educational outcomes for underrepresented students based on race and ethnicity, I believe that this framework is translatable to research focusing on students with disabilities. Bensimon conceptualized three cognitive frames for how individuals make sense of a phenomenon or a situation, such as disparate outcomes for racially and ethnically

underrepresented students. These frames include the diversity frame, deficit frame, and equity frame.

The diversity frame focuses on celebrating diversity, highlighting diverse student demographics, and accentuating the positive learning outcomes of a diverse student body without attention to the ways in which individuals and the institution create disparate outcomes for these students (Bensimon, 2005). The deficit frame focuses on student attributes that may make certain populations less likely to succeed (Bensimon, 2005). The perception of student attributes may be based on stereotypes and assumptions that negative outcomes are self-perpetuated, for example, due to lack of motivation, or that obstacles are too great for students to overcome (Bensimon, 2005). The equity frame examines patterns of inequity and acknowledges the historical context and consequences of discrimination and segregation (Bensimon, 2005). Bensimon asserts that an equity orientation focuses on "institutional practices and the production of unequal educational outcomes for minority group students" (p. 103).

The history and context of access and discrimination are not the same for students with disabilities as they are underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students, though some students with disabilities are also racially and ethnically underrepresented. Still, Bensimon's equity frame is fitting as a foundation of this study. While this study centers on the voices and experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary classrooms, a primary intent of this research is to use these participant narratives to understand how postsecondary institutions can change the classroom environment to reduce inequities for students with disabilities. The intent of this study was not to look for ways for students to improve their own success, or simply to raise awareness about disability as an aspect of

diversity. The grounding assumption in using the equity frame is that postsecondary

institutions must be primarily accountable and responsible for reducing inequities for

students with disabilities.

Universal Design is a promising framework for reducing inequities for

students with disabilities in the classroom environment: As stated earlier, practices

related to UD (UDL, UDI, and UID), show promise in enhancing classroom access for

students with disabilities whether or not they choose to disclose and seek formalized

support. I believe that UD is an important component of institutional responsibility for

ensuring equity, but more information is needed to understand the prevalence and impact

of these approaches in classroom settings. With the assumption that UD may in fact

improve equitable outcomes for students with disabilities, it has been integrated into this

study to explore how participants' stories of classroom experiences and practices that

benefit or create barriers to their learning potentially fit within existing frameworks of

Universal Design. The integration of UD into the study design and data analysis

procedures is further outlined in Chapter III.

A social justice perspective is integral to understanding disability identity

and classroom experiences: This study has been grounded in the social justice

perspective of disability, which acknowledges both the systemic oppression experienced

by people with disabilities as well as their empowerment and involvement in the process

of pursuing equitable access (Evans & Herriott, 2009). The social justice perspective

also acknowledges the complete identity of people with disabilities, including the

intersections of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and focuses on systemic

changes within the educational environment, including in the classroom (Evans &

Herriott, 2009). The social justice approach was selected to ground this research because it provides a more nuanced and intersectional lens on disability and a fitting frame for understanding how systemic inequities and barriers can be reduced in classroom environments. The social justice perspective also shaped the grounding assumption for how disability is viewed in the context of this study as one of many identities.

Disability is one of many identities that may affect students' experiences in postsecondary classroom environments: Although there is an array of disciplinary and scholarly perspectives on if and how disability manifests as a construct of identity, this study has positioned disability as an aspect of social identity. Not all students with disabilities, especially those who choose not to disclose, may identify closely with their disability or see it as an aspect of their identity. But positioning disability as a social identity in this study was intended to provide participants an opportunity to think about and discuss if and how disability is salient to them. This positioning is also more consistent with a social justice framing on disability. Since there is currently a wide array of perspectives on disability as an identity, including whether or not there is any group affiliation or shared experience of having a disability, positioning disability as an identity is also intended to provide an avenue to explore these ideas further through participants' perspectives and narratives. As Shakespeare (1996) has noted:

> Disability identity is about stories, having the space to tell them, and an audience which will listen. It is also about recognizing differences, and isolating the significant attributes and experiences which constitute disability. Some we might choose to change, others to recuperate or celebrate (p. 111).

Disability has also been positioned as one of many aspects of identity that is shaped by contextual factors and is mutually influencing of other identities with which it intersects. Thus, I used the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI; see Figure 1; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) as a framework for conceptualizing identity in this study. The MMDI was used to explore how students understand their disability in relationship to their other identities, including whether or not they viewed their disability as an identity at all. The MMDI was also used to investigate how contextual factors of the environments and others' perceptions shaped students' understanding and experiences of their identities throughout the semester. The MMDI shaped the approach to the development of data collection methods in this study and was also used to explain to participants how identity was being viewed and conceptualized in the context of this study.

Conclusion

Legislative mandates and provisions for academic accommodations have been vital to enhancing access to higher education for students with disabilities. While accommodations may greatly assist students in the postsecondary environment, students must first disclose their disability and actively seek out accommodations. Literature in this review indicates that many students choose not to disclose their disability or ask for accommodations until they are struggling, if at all. Navigating the shift into higher education remains complex due to the changes in students' responsibility to disclose their disability and seek services. Students face the reality of needing to disclose personal medical information about themselves, stigma related to their disability, fear of negative attitudes and low expectations from faculty, sometimes in conjunction with other cultural

narratives about their identity. Scholarship reframing access to students with disabilities through UD has suggested that changes to teaching, learning, and instruction may reduce students' need to disclose and have additional accommodations to be successful. Additionally, advocates of UD argue that the techniques widen access for students of diverse identities, including those who also have a disability.

While there are many environments students with disabilities navigate during their postsecondary journey, the classroom environment is integral to their overall academic success. Postsecondary institutions must create classroom environments in which students with disabilities can thrive in order to truly improve equity and academic outcomes for this population. In order to do so though, practitioners and scholars must have a better understanding of how students with disabilities experience the classroom environment, the factors that affect their learning and success, and how their disabilities and identities shape their experiences. It is in turn critically important for scholarship to include and value the voices of students and honor their experiences in building theory and practice for better serving this population. For these reasons, I focused my study on examining the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments and how students' disabilities and identities shape these experiences, from the perspective of students themselves. The following chapter provides an overview of the four primary research questions, methodological approach, and design of this study.

Chapter III

Methodology

Students with disabilities are not required and may not choose to utilize academic accommodations in their postsecondary courses. Though scholarship has focused on the process of disclosure and utilizing accommodations, less is known about students' experiences regarding other aspects of postsecondary classroom environments. Promising frameworks focused on teaching and learning have emerged as mechanisms to improve outcomes for students whether or not they disclose a disability, but gaps exist in understanding how these frameworks are actually experienced by students. This study explored the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments, including the ways in which they were affected by their disability and other identities, and their perceptions of the factors and practices that impact their success. The following research questions guided this study:

- How, if at all, are students' disabilities and other social identities salient to them in postsecondary classroom environments?

- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe support their learning?

- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe create barriers to their learning?

- To what extent do classroom practices and factors that support student learning align with or diverge from principles of Universal Design?

Methodological Approach

To explore the four core research questions of this study, I used a narrative

methodological approach grounded in a transformational paradigm. Put simply,

"narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who

lived them" (Chase, 2011, p. 421). The stories of students with disabilities are vital to

understanding their experiences in postsecondary classroom environments; thus a

narrative inquiry was a fitting approach for this study. I also believe that a narrative

approach was an effective method to shed light on students' perceptions of the teaching

and learning practices that benefit them as well as those that create barriers to their

learning. In addition, narrative inquiry has the capacity to reveal individuals'

understandings of their own identities (Creswell, 2013). Exploring the intersection of

disability and identity was a vital aspect of this investigation in creating a nuanced and

more complete picture of how students experienced classroom environments.

I also approached this study through a transformative paradigm. Mertens,

Sullivan, and Stace (2011) have noted that a transformative paradigm focuses on the rich

diversity and strength of the disability community and seeks to further social justice as

well as cultural respect. Ontologically, the transformative paradigm suggests that reality

is defined and shaped by environmental, political, and cultural factors (Mertens, 2007).

Though varied perspectives of reality exist, some perspectives of reality are privileged

over others (Mertens et al., 2011). Thus a critical aspect of the transformative paradigm

involves examining dynamics of power and inequity, exploring whose realities have been

privileged, and uncovering whose perspectives on reality will further social justice

(Mertens et al., 2011). Cultural competency and capacity building are a necessity for a

researcher utilizing a transformative paradigm (Mertens et al., 2011). Though

quantitative methods may be used, qualitative inquiry becomes an important technique

for creating dialog between the researcher and participants (Mertens et al., 2011).

A transformative paradigm was critical to employ in this study because I was

intending to foreground and privilege the stories of a community of students with

disabilities. While research has sought to benefit students with disabilities by informing

practitioners about working with this population, students themselves still remain on a

differentiated plane of power from instructors and other professionals in the sphere of

higher education. Historically, students with disabilities have faced discrimination and

segregation in the context of education. This history has undoubtedly shaped policies and

practices related to serving students with disabilities in higher education. The intent of

centering student voices in this research was to shed light on their experiences and also to

actively include them in the process of considering what practice in higher education

would further equity and social justice for themselves as well as others.

Methods

Site Selection

This study was conducted at a large Midwestern research university that serves

over 30,000 undergraduate and over 16,000 graduate students. Part of the intent of

selecting a large public research university was to better understand the classroom

experiences of students with disabilities in an institution where teaching is not the

primary mission or central criterion for faculty tenure. Understanding what kind of

factors and practices support student learning at this kind of institution was especially

intriguing to me because one might argue that these practices would be harder to

implement in a context where teaching is not the primary focus. The relatively large size of this institution also made it possible to provide a greater level of anonymity for participants than might be possible at a smaller school. Additionally, the size of the undergraduate population as well as the array of disciplinary subjects and majors available to students helped ensure some additional diversity in the sample with regard to participants' majors and their background characteristics. During the year that this study was conducted, the disability office served over 2,000 students with disabilities. Over three quarters of these students were undergraduates. The highest percentage of disabilities represented by the students served was mental health-related disabilities, followed by ADHD. Undergraduates at this institution were also predominantly White, making up almost 70% of the undergraduate population. Students of color and international students made up just under 20% and 10% of the undergraduate population respectively.

Participant Selection

Participants of this study were 13 undergraduate students who were enrolled in at least six credits during the spring semester of 2016. The demographic information of the participants is outlined in Table 1 at the start of Chapter IV. Participant recruitment occurred in several ways. Primary recruitment occurred through email invitations (see Appendix A) sent by the campus disability services office to students who were registered with their office. Sampling through the campus disability office was purposeful. Staff who had regular contact with students were asked to send the email invitation directly to students who they thought would be a good fit for this study. In selecting students to receive the recruitment message, staff were asked to consider

students who were in at least their sophomore year of college, who would be likely to commit to a semester-long study, and who would bring diversity to the sample, including with regard to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability type. The reason that I chose to recruit most heavily though the disability services office was because it was one of the only means to ensure that the recruitment message was reaching a large population of students with disabilities. Additionally, due to the nature of the subject matter and length of the study, I thought that more targeted recruitment of participants would help ensure a greater likelihood of participants remaining invested and committed to providing a rich and nuanced account of their experiences through the semester.

In an attempt to also recruit students who had not registered with the disability office or sought accommodations, I employed a few other recruitment strategies. Email invitations were sent from two other diversity offices on campus, one from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) office and another from a college-based diversity office. Recruitment flyers were also put up in various places in the university multicultural center (see Appendix B). One instructor who taught classes on disability, gender, and sexuality studies also sent the email to students in her department. Additionally, the recruitment message was sent to two different student organizations on campus whose focus was on disability and mental health in underserved communities. Again, these recruitment strategies were intended to reach students who may have a disability but did not have formal accommodations. Additionally, as noted in the literature review, studies on the experiences of college students with disabilities have not necessarily been widely representative of historically-underrepresented student

populations and often have not broken out demographic information when reporting the findings. The reason I selected to send my recruitment messages through diversity-focused offices was to try to enhance the relative diversity of my sample, especially with regard to race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Students who were interested in participating were asked to respond directly to my personal email address. I then sent them a participant information questionnaire to complete and return to me by email (see Appendix C). All information collected on the participant information questionnaire, including disability, was based on self-report. I did not want to make the process of applying to participate in the study overly burdensome, nor did I want to ask participants to share confidential medical documentation with me. Therefore, relying on self-report was the most appropriate approach in the recruitment process. Participants were selected if they met the primary criteria for the study, which included being at least a sophomore in academic standing, enrolled in at least 6 credits during the spring 2016 semester, and previously diagnosed with a disability. I had originally targeted a sample of 15 participants. In total, 15 students expressed interest in the study. All 15 students were invited to participate and 13 ultimately chose to enroll.

Participant Consent, Confidentiality, and Protection

I obtained approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the institution in which this study was conducted prior to sending out my recruitment messages. All participants received a participant consent form by email prior to the first interview (see Appendix D). At the beginning of the first interview, I took time to read the consent form out loud to each participant, gave them time to ask questions, and then had them sign the form. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study

and the fact that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were told that there was no direct risk to participating in the study, aside from potentially feeling discomfort in talking about their disability and past classroom experiences. They were also told that there was no direct benefit to participating in the study, but that the information they chose to share may potentially enhance what is known about the experiences of students with disabilities and enhance practice related to teaching and course design.

Interested participants were asked to contact me directly through my personal email so they did not need to make themselves or their interests known to any other person in order to participate in the study. All participants were asked to select a pseudonym to be used in place of their real name. For those who did not express preference for a pseudonym, I assigned them one to ensure their confidentiality. I also removed all identifiable characteristics from the data and findings to the greatest extent possible. All participants were asked to review their personal narratives to check for accuracy and also to let me know if there was any information included that they thought would make them identifiable to others.

Interviews conducted with participants were held in a private space on campus. All information that was collected by email, including the participant information questionnaire and journal entries, was collected through my personal university email account. All audio recordings, transcripts, and research data were kept on my personal computer, which was password protected. All audio and files that contained identifying information were either password protected or encrypted.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews and journaling were the primary data collection method used in this study. Merriam (2011) has asserted, "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe the behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p.88). Since the perspectives of my participants were not directly observable, interviewing was a critical method for gathering information about how they made meaning of their disability and identities and how they were impacted by practices in the classroom environment. I conducted two sets of interviews for this study. Both interviews were guided by a protocol and were piloted with one person prior to conducting the interviews with the participants. The person who piloted the interviews was not a current student but was a person with multiple disabilities who graduated a few years ago with an undergraduate degree. Piloting the protocols allowed me to test out the questions and activities that were incorporated into the interviews so that I could further refine the questions and materials, as well as identify areas in which my own bias may have shaped a question to be leading or confusing to my participants.

The majority of the first interviews were conducted in February 2016, with a few occurring in early March. Interviews were conducted with each of the 13 participants and generally lasted 60-90 minutes. The first set of interviews were semi-structured and were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix E). The primary purpose of the first interview was to get to know the participants as people and to gather information and stories about their previous experiences in college classes, as well as how they thought about their disabilities, and how they conceptualized their identities. All interview questions were sent to participants at least one day in advance of the interview to allow

them to have additional time to process the questions and prepare for the interview. Participants were also given a hard copy of the interview questions to review during the interview. The practices of providing information in advance and in multiple formats are reflective of UD principles and were intended to maximize accessibility for my participants.

The second round of interviews were conducted primarily in mid to late April 2016, with a few occurring in early May at the very end of the semester. Similar to the first set of interviews, the second interviews were semi-structured, 60-90 minutes in length, and were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix F). Participants also received these questions at least one day prior to the interview and were given a hard copy to review during the time of our meeting. The primary purpose of the second interview was to gather information and stories about how the spring 2016 semester went for them, to provide another opportunity for them to reflect on their identities, especially in the context of the classroom environment, and to talk with them about specific Universal Design practices that they believed benefitted their learning. Conducting two interviews with the participants also allowed me to follow-up and probe more deeply in to responses that were gathered from the first interview and gave me greater insight into the extent to which participants' perceptions of their experiences evolved and changed throughout the semester.

A second significant method for gathering data in this study was through collecting journal entries from the participants. The primary purpose of having the participants complete journal entries was to capture their perceptions and experiences of the classroom environment throughout the semester in real-time. Again, because the way

that participants experience their identities and the classroom environment is not easily

observable, I wanted to find another means to capture this information. Another purpose

of having participants complete journal entries was to provide them with an opportunity

to express themselves in a different way. This method of sharing and conveying

information may have been easier for participants who were introverted, needed

additional processing time, or who expressed their thoughts and feelings more easily

through writing. Participants were also told that they could submit journal entries in

different formats, including in text through email, or as an audio or video clip attachment.

Giving participants options for submitting their journals was also a way to incorporate

UD into the design of this study.

Participants were sent journal questions at four different points during the

semester (see Appendix G). Participants received the first journal prompt by email one to

two weeks after the first interview, depending on when they enrolled in the study.

Participants then received the remaining three journal prompts approximately every one

to two weeks from the time that they submitted the first journal entry. Participants were

given about a week to return their answer to each prompt, although additional time was

given to those participants who requested it. The next journal prompt was not sent to the

participants until they had submitted their response to the previous prompt. There was no

required length communicated to participants so participants could determine how long a

journal entry they wanted to submit for each prompt. The second interview was not

conducted until all journal entries were complete and submitted. The purpose of

spreading out the interviews and journal entries with no component overlapping was to

prevent participants from getting overwhelmed by what they were being asked to do for

the study. A second purpose was to ensure that data were being collected over a span of time greater than a month and a half in order to be able to see if and how participants' experiences and perceptions evolved and changed over time.

A third method of gathering data was through the collection of syllabi from the participants' courses. Electronic or hard copies of participants' syllabi were collected near the start of the study. The syllabi served primarily as a reference point for participants' reports of their experiences and were also used to identify probes for the second interview. I reviewed the syllabi to understand the kind of activities in which participants were engaged, how they were being asked to demonstrate knowledge, the ways in which their learning was being evaluated, as well as the messaging that they received from instructors through their syllabi. Again, the syllabi were primarily used to provide me with greater context about their experiences in their spring 2016 courses, and to identify whether or not it would be helpful for me to probe and gather information about more specific aspects of their courses in the second interview.

Of the 13 participants, 11 completed the two interviews, four journal entries, and submission of course syllabi. Two participants chose only to complete the first interview, although they did not choose to withdraw from the study. Compensation was given to participants for completing two different sections of this study. Twenty dollars was given to participants after the first interview and an additional fifty dollars was given to participants after completing the four journal entries and a second interview, for a total of seventy dollars. Each participant signed a receipt of payment after compensation was given. Participants were given compensation to provide incentive to complete all aspects of this study and as a means to honor them for the time they committed to participating in

this study. Compensation for participants was funded through a graduate student grant and my private funds.

Data Analysis Procedures

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also taken during each of the interviews. Reflective journals were transcribed in the instances when they were submitted in an audio format. Data were analyzed through a series of thematic analyses. The purpose of my research was to explore participants' experiences and understanding of their identities in postsecondary classroom contexts. Subsequently, data analysis focused more on the content of participants' stories, including events and experiences, rather than the way in which these stories were told (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Each participant, with the exception of the two who only completed the first interview, had two interview transcripts and four journal entries included in their individual data set. I began the data analysis process by conducting a thematic analysis of each interview and each journal entry to identify themes and assumptions within the six data sources for each participant (Riessman, 2008). The purpose of this approach was to preserve the sequence and detail of each narrative as opposed to breaking down that data into segments (Riessman, 2008). I then pulled out prominent stories and themes from within each participants' interview data and journal entries to construct an individual case, or narrative, for each participant. These participant narratives are outlined in Chapter IV. The participant narratives are intended to illustrate the experiences and stories of each participant in this study so that the data can first be understood within the context of the individual.

In the second stage of data analysis, I conducted a thematic analysis across all data sets of the 13 participants to identify general patterns and variation, as well as assumptions present across the narratives (Riessman, 2008). While I did establish preliminary overarching themes based on the four primary research questions, subthemes emerged as the data were being analyzed. Preliminary themes related to the research questions included Identity, Disability, Support, Barriers, and Universal Design. Subthemes were primarily coded into one of the five overarching themes to keep consistency with the data and the research questions. Individual participant data sets were coded one individual at a time. Narratives were synthesized during the process of coding based on the primary stories that were identified and the primary subthemes that related to the first three research questions. Subthemes related to Universal Design were not included in the individual participant narratives but were instead used in the overall analysis of the data and incorporated into the broader findings of the study. The subthemes for Universal Design were created based on the principles outlined on the supplement material for interview protocol two (see Appendix F).

Positionality and Preconceptions of the Researcher

I believe that reflexivity is critical for ensuring integrity in qualitative research. I know that my identities undoubtedly shaped all aspects of this study. I am a White, cisgender woman with a non-apparent disability that was diagnosed when I myself was a college student. As illustrated in the literature review for this study, the decision to disclose and seek out services can be complex. I chose not to disclose my disability when I was diagnosed and instead focused on how I would fix what I saw as a profound deficit in my own functioning. I ultimately changed academic programs to avoid the

kinds of courses that I was struggling with. It took me several years to build strategies on my own and to begin looking at my disability as an aspect of diversity that shaped my experiences and the way in which I moved through the world.

While I know that my own experiences with a disability may bias me as a researcher, I also believe this particular experience and identity has given me important insight into the subject matter on which this study centers. For example, my experiences have given me some contextual understanding for what the process of diagnosis and disclosure can be like, as well as how different environments like the classroom can shape the experience of having a disability. This context gave me some insight into the kinds of questions to ask and probes to follow up. The context of my own experience also allowed me to be forthcoming and vulnerable with the participants about my own identity as a person with a disability, which it turn may have created greater openness and comfort for them in sharing their own experiences with me.

Still, I am very aware that my own experiences were not the same as those of my participants. I also have several privileged identities that impact my perception of and experiences in higher education, particularly as they relate to race, class, and education level. I am White, cisgender, middle class, a doctoral candidate, and an employee at the institution at which this study was conducted. While I sought to ensure that my study is representative of students with a diverse array of identities, I know that my Whiteness and my positionality as a university worker with advanced degrees likely affected the extent to which students were willing to enroll in the study, and the extent to which they were willing to share personal information and experiences with me. I also know that my identities have shaped the lens through which I view and interpret the world. Thus, I

know that my identities may in some ways bias my understanding of students'

experiences and stories.

Additionally, I am also an employee in the disability office at the university in

which this study was conducted and previously worked in diversity and inclusion

programs within another collegiate office. My work experiences gave me valuable

insight into the context of the institution and allowed me to utilize networks to identify

participants who would be a good fit for this study. Additionally, my work in diversity

and inclusion programs provided me a valuable grounding in social justice frameworks as

well as tools to utilize cultural competency in my research. At the same time, my role

and work at the university may have also influenced the extent to which students felt

comfortable enrolling in the study and openly sharing their experiences.

As methods to engage in reflexivity, I utilized reflection, journaling, and

purposeful capacity building during the length of this study. The purpose of reflection

was two-fold. The first purpose was to provide an avenue for me to articulate and

bracket my own perceptions and biases to help reduce the risk of them infiltrating my

research subconsciously. Some of the reflection that I engaged in was informal and some

was done in writing. I kept a research journal throughout the study in which I reflected

on interviews with the students, wrote out my thoughts and assumptions as I transcribed

the interviews, and made notes for myself as I conducted the data analysis. I also

engaged in purposeful capacity building during the length of this study. The capacity

building on which I embarked primarily occurred through going to workshops, events,

and conversations that were hosted across campus related to diversity, inclusion, and

social justice topics. Purposeful capacity building also involved engaging in ongoing

conversations with my colleagues with disabilities and other underrepresented identities.

Engaging in reflection, writing, and purposeful capacity building helped me to ensure that

I was thinking about my own biases, privilege, and experiences, as well as how they

might influence my interactions with participants, my interpretation and understanding of

their stories, and the way in which I reported the findings.

Trustworthiness

Strategies to ensure validity and trustworthiness of my findings occurred in a few

different ways. First, triangulation was utilized by collecting multiple forms of data

(Merriam, 2011). Interview data were gathered from each participant at two different

points of the semester, once near the beginning and once near the end. The two

interviews occurred approximately 8-12 weeks apart. Additionally, journal entries were

collected at four different times throughout the semester. The purpose of the extended

timeline and repetition of data collection was done to help ensure the trustworthiness of

the data. A third source of data was collected through obtaining the syllabi of the

participants' classes. Again, the primary purpose of collecting the syllabi was to provide

further context for the participants' experiences and as reference points for developing

further probes and questions throughout the research study. While triangulation could

also have occurred through participant observations, this form of data was not integrated

into the study due to concerns over logistics and participant confidentiality.

Member checks were also used to ensure trustworthiness in this study.

Participants were sent a copy of their individual narrative and the transcripts from both

sets of interviews. They were asked to let me know if they believed that any of the

information captured was inaccurate or was not reflective of their experiences. They

were also asked to let me know if they believed there was important information missing from their narrative or transcripts. The purpose of member checking was to ensure that I did not misinterpret the meaning of what the participants said or wrote (Merriam, 2011), and that I was portraying an accurate depiction of their perceptions of their experiences in postsecondary classroom environments. I also used member checks as a means to help ensure that my own cultural frame and biases were not filtering their experiences. Lastly, this research study went through a peer review process by the members of my committee, who each bring their own identities, interpretation, and expertise to the content of this study. Peer review was an important mechanism for ensuring integrity in the research design of this study, as well as the analysis and reporting of the data and findings.

Research Design Limitations

One significant limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size, which has limited the extent to which findings can be interpreted as more broadly generalizable. The intent of this research was not to generate generalizable findings, but was instead to reveal findings that may be transferrable given the context and detail provided in the research design. The participants chosen for this study were not randomly sampled and were not necessarily representative of the larger population of students with disabilities in the institution, nor did they represent students of all identities. Still, as Merriam (2011) has asserted, "what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered" (p. 225). To ensure the possibility of transferability, I have attempted to provide a "thick description" of the context, participants, and findings, including quotes and excerpts from students' reflective

journaling so that the reader has a distinct picture of various aspects of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A second significant limitation of this study is that much of the recruitment for this study was purposeful and targeted. While an argument could be made that such targeted recruiting diminishes the trustworthiness of the findings, I have used this approach to help ensure that I had a sample that was relatively diverse, with participants who would commit to the entire length of the study. Still, targeted participant recruitment may have resulted in a sample with skewed perspectives on the impact of their identity and with regard to reporting barriers and supports to their learning. In order to ensure integrity in recruitment and sampling, I did not conduct any purposeful recruiting myself and relied on other staff to reach out to students who they thought would have an interest in participating in this study. Additionally, all participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study and the fact that they could choose to withdraw at any time. Participants were also notified that their choice to enroll or not enroll would not have an effect on their relationship with any of the offices on campus that sent out the recruitment message, especially the disability services office.

While my intent in purposeful sampling was to recruit a diverse sample of participants, the sample is still relatively limited in the extent to which it reflects broad diversity. For example, there is still a relatively low number of students of color and male-identified students who participated in this study. Additionally, the sample does not include international students or students with certain kinds of disabilities, such as students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, blind, or have mobility disabilities. Mental health and ADHD are the most prominently represented disabilities in this particular

study, which ultimately does affect the extent to which findings are representative of students with disabilities more broadly. Still, the high representation of mental health and ADHD does reflect the broader makeup of students with disabilities who are registered with the campus disability office at this particular institution.

Another limitation is that this study relied on students' self-report of identity and disability. While the verification of disability and identity may be limited, the focus of this study is about the perception of students' identities in the classroom environment. Still, there was no way to ensure that participants truly had been diagnosed with a disability unless it was verified through documentation. Again, I believe that asking for documentation would have been too significant of a barrier to participants, that it could have exacerbated the feeling of having private information probed and invaded, and would have been too large of a risk to participant confidentiality.

Additionally, although I had hoped to recruit some participants who had not disclosed their disability or sought accommodations, the majority of the participants in this sample were registered with the campus disability office. The high representation of registered students is likely due to the purposeful recruiting through the campus disability office. It may also indicate that students who have not disclosed a disability may in fact not associate disability as an identity and may not be interested in talking to a researcher about their experiences. Although I can only speculate on why so few students who were not registered with the disability office responded to recruitment messages, I do want to highlight this issue with the sample to again note that the findings will not be generalizable to all students with disabilities.

Another limitation of this study is that I also relied on students' self-report of classroom practices that impact their success or create barriers for their learning. Some participants in this study may be very early in their own development of identity and self-awareness. Additionally, some participants may also not have an accurate perception about what actually limits or enhances their learning. Still, the purpose of this study was to capture their voices and their perspectives. With these potential limitations in mind, I constructed different probes and follow-up questions based on what I had learned from their previous interview and journal entries to look for consistency in their reports as well as to identify areas of nuance in their experiences. I then used this information to try to construct a more accurate picture of who these participants were in their individual narratives and their perceptions of the academic environment.

A final limitation of this study was the extent to which the research approach held true to the principles of a transformative paradigm and social justice approach. While a critical component of the transformative paradigm involves a team approach between the researchers and participants, this study did not engage participants in all aspects of the research. Participants were not involved in forming the research questions or in any other aspect of the study design. Still, I did seek feedback about my research questions, as well as questions used in the interviews and journal prompts, from people who identify as having a disability or as being part of the disability community. I also involved participants in member checking to ensure that I was accurately capturing and depicting their stories in my data analysis and findings. The second aspect of this research that may fall short of the transformative paradigm and social justice approach is the capacity for this research to create positive change and bring about equity for people with

disabilities. Although an intention of my research is to highlight potential inequities experienced by students with disabilities in postsecondary classrooms, there was not a guarantee that the findings would reveal dynamics of privilege and oppression, or that any action will be taken to address potential inequities. Still, I believe that narrative research was a powerful way to illuminate participants' stories and explore my research questions. As Riessman (2008) has noted, "Stories function to alter the way we view mundane everyday events. Stories can indeed accomplish change" (p. 63).

The following chapter discusses the findings in the context of the individual participant narratives. Participants' full demographic information is outlined near the beginning of this chapter. The participant narratives present the findings as they surfaced across each individual participants' experience. The findings are then looked at more broadly as a whole, across the participant narratives, in Chapter V.

Chapter IV

Findings: Individual Participant Narratives

The findings of this study are presented in two sections, beginning with the individual participant narratives and then transitioning into the overarching themes that emerged across the narratives. In a narrative methodological approach, individuals' narrations of their own experiences are vital to understand their lived experiences. This chapter provides a summary of each individual participant and focuses on their educational journey and broad classroom experiences, how they experience and understand their disability, and how they make sense of and conceptualize their individual identities. The intent of these narratives is to capture information that was important to the individuals themselves within the context of their experiences, before pulling out themes that were specific to the four research questions of this study, which are outlined in Chapter V.

The participants for this study were 13 undergraduate students. Table 1 outlines demographic information that was provided by participants prior to the first interview. Each participant selected or was assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their confidentiality. The participants' major has also been listed as a general category in Table 1 and in their individual narrative to decrease the likelihood that they would be identifiable. Disability, race/ethnicity, and gender identity are all listed exactly as they were reported by the participant to maintain nuance in the understanding of how they person identify themselves. Participants were also asked whether they had any other identities that were relevant to this study when providing initial demographic information. Any identities for that question were included in the *Other relevant identities* column in Table 1. *None listed* indicates that the participant did not list any other identities for that particular question.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Year	Major	Disability	Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation	Gender identity	Other relevant identities
Alex	Senior	Social Sciences	Bipolar with psychotic features, Borderline Personality Disorder, Generalized Anxiety	White	Trans – Nonbinary	Bisexual
Cameron	Senior	Biological Sciences	Bipolar	African American	Male	None listed
Gabrielle	Sophomore	Undeclared	Anxiety and Depression	White	Girl	None listed
Hannah	Sophomore	Information Technology and Biological Sciences	Visual Spatial Processing	Asian (Chinese)	Female	Adopted
Jonathan	Junior	Social Sciences	Back Surgeries/ongoing complications, ADHD	Caucasian	Male	Straight, Citizen of US
Karl	Junior	Humanities	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Hispanic	Male	Heterosexual
Lauren	Junior	Social Sciences	Depression and Anxiety	White	Cisgender woman	Sexuality—queer
Louisa	Senior	Humanities	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	White	Female	Heterosexual

Pseudonym	Year	Major	Disability	Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation	Gender identity	Other relevant identities
Maddox	Junior	Social Sciences	Mental illness	Filipinx	Nonbinary	Queer, First-generation American, Femme
Sophia	Senior	Biological Sciences	ADHD and Reading disorder	White/ European	Female	None listed
Zoe	Junior	Humanities	"Chemo-brain", ADHD, Depression, Anxiety	Caucasian	Female	None listed
Kara	Junior	Social Sciences	Anxiety, Bipolar II, Insomnia	White	Cis-female	Pansexual
Quinn	Senior	Social Sciences	Depression	White	Genderfluid	Bisexual, 1st gen college student, family history of mental health issues

During the interview, each participant was asked about preferred pronouns. These pronouns were used within the individual narratives, overall findings, and discussion sections to honor the identities of the participants. Narratives were created for all participants with the exception of Kara and Quinn. Kara and Quinn did not withdraw from the study, but they chose only to complete the first interview. Therefore, information and experiences gathered for Kara and Quinn were much more limited than for the other participants. I chose to integrate their data into the overall findings and discussion of this study because they maintained enrollment in the study and provided valuable insight into their experiences during their single interview.

Alex

Disability: Bipolar with psychotic features, Borderline Personality Disorder, Generalized Anxiety

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: White

Gender identity: Trans – Nonbinary

Other relevant identities: Bisexual

Pronouns: They/them

Alex was a senior and double majoring in social science disciplines. Alex had originally planned to go into agricultural science but struggled with math and science-based subjects. Alex selected their specific social sciences majors because of the application of the subjects to their own life experiences and communities with which they identify. Alex will be writing their senior thesis on the intersection of disability, gender identity, and socioeconomic status in getting psychiatric and preventative care. Alex would eventually like to go to graduate school because of their interest in doing research.

Alex described themselves as a "really smart kid" in elementary through high school. They did well academically, participated in honors courses, and knew how to navigate the environment and demonstrate concepts in a way that would get them good grades. Alex was diagnosed with anxiety and depression in high school and then with ADHD once they got to college. Alex was put on stimulant medication that exacerbated symptoms of psychosis and was put in the hospital. They were eventually diagnosed with Bipolar and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). The combination of injuries and psychotic symptoms, as well as the difference in how knowledge is demonstrated between high school and college, eventually created challenges for them academically.

Throughout their interviews, Alex revealed that they have chronic pain from previous injuries and have been told by providers that they may also have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a learning disability. Alex has not sought an evaluation for a learning disability due to the time and cost of the assessment. In some ways, Alex's formal disability diagnoses were even unclear to them. They explained:

> I feel like everytime I go to a new doctor, I list off what I understand I have and they look at the paperwork and they go, "that's not what this says." And that's actually an experience that I know a lot of other people who I know and I'm friends with who are mentally ill and use disability services, they talk about like, "I do not have a diagnosis of this but I'm in treatment for it," or something like that . . . because so much of the symptoms have overlapped.

Alex discussed the ways in which their disabilities, and even more so their medications, have insignificantly impacted their engagement in courses, noting:

It's also been hard just because mental health waxes and wanes until you figure

out what you're doing . . . just trying to find medication that works for me over the

last four years has been really difficult because a lot of times the medicines don't

work until you're taking them for a while. And side effects can be unbearable.

And then if something's not working, coming down off of it, there's a lot of times

withdrawal.

Alex has continued to be enrolled in school regularly but has been at part-time

status intermittently for disability-related reasons. In describing how they experience

their disabilities in the classroom, Alex noted that they sometimes have trouble

remembering what they need to do for class and paying attention through the length of

the lecture or lesson. Alex also struggles with attendance and then feels stigma about

coming to class if they are not completely caught up with their work or if they have been

absent from class for a few days. Alex is registered with the disability services office and

generally gives their accommodation letter to their instructors but sometimes does it late

in the semester due to forgetting to request it and then feeling uncomfortable turning the

letter in late. Alex described the struggle they sometimes experience when using their

accommodations:

There's a couple classes where I know if I really apply myself and I work hard I

should be able to do this, which I know is false and I probably should be using my

[accommodations] to get a better grade but it's really hard to unlearn the feeling

that the work I'm doing needs to be genuine I guess. I read this reading for class

once and it was interviews with disabled students and one of them was like "I'd

rather have a C of my own sweat then an A off of accommodations." And I fall

into that trap sometimes.

Alex has had a complex set of experiences in the classroom due to their disability

as well as the way in which their gender and sexuality are perceived by others. Alex

discussed feelings of invisibility in the classroom due to messaging that they have gotten

about their disability:

When we get to a class where the teacher says something like, "none of you

would know about this drug because none of you are psychopharmacologist," it

means "I don't believe anyone who is taking this drug could be in college." And

that's, that's hurtful. That communicates to me that the professor doesn't have

faith in me even if that's not their intention.

Alex has also experienced tokenism in some of their classes, especially in hard-science

classes where instructors will sometimes ask them questions related to gender and

sexuality because of their major. In these circumstances, Alex cannot respond in the way

they want because they have not "outed" themselves to the class. Alex elaborated:

It's stressful when that happens too . . . I want to check out, I don't want to be in

class anymore because suddenly they're singling you out as being different from

everybody else in the class and it gets really overwhelming.

Alex was recently in an unsafe living situation that had made being in school

challenging, on top of trying to work intermittently and manage disability and health

episodes. Alex received help from a teaching assistant (TA) in one of their courses in

finding housing and connecting to services related to relationship violence. They are now

in a safer living situation but continued to have experiences through the semester that

impacted their coursework because they were confronted by or reminded of past trauma. Alex reflected during the second interview on a journal entry that they had submitted about a struggle in one of their courses:

It's really frustrating because there are situations in class where a trigger warning would have saved me like weeks of upset. At the same time, I have been dealing so intensely and intimately with my trauma that being confronted with this person, that it's frustrating because it's this constant state of being alert for him and it really has taken a toll on my classes and I don't feel like there's anything good in place to explain that to teachers.

With regard to their identities, Alex said that non-binary transgender, activist, gay, mentally disabled, and empathetic tend to be core identities. Secondary identities included Whiteness, atheist, and polyamorous. Alex included female, fat, and service oriented in identities that others might perceive to be salient to them. Alex expanded on why they put mentally ill and disabled in their core by saying:

I feel like the way I see the world and the way that I conceptualize things and the understanding I have of how the world is structured through my struggles engaging with it, really affects everything about me from how I approach work to how even I approach the construction of my gender and how I'm going to relate to partners, relate to friends, relate to employers, it's something that I am almost constantly having to think about and having to navigate the world.

Alex also noted that they feel their non-binary gender identity, being gay, and transgender all intersect together and influence their everyday relationships with others and how they see themselves. Alex explained that sometimes the environment and who

they are talking to will influence how they perform their identities, noting, "I have aspects of my identity that I don't even touch in class because I'm like, you know it's like A: going to confuse people or, B: not be not be technically useful or relevant." Outside of class, as a commuter student, Alex noted:

> Being kind of visibly gender-nonconforming and fat and perceived as female at the same time draws me a lot of negative attention, I get harassed a lot on transit in ways that I know other people do not.

Alex also discussed the ways in which their identity influences how they perform their gender. They explained that they cannot always perform gender in the way that they would like due to money and not being able to work, a result of their disability. Due to having better access to healthcare, Alex will now be able to utilize hormone therapy to begin the process of transitioning. During the semester of this study, Alex noted that they had an array of peer support, as well as instructors who were accommodating and shared resources with them. Alex also had a leadership role in a student group. This group has provided Alex with a lot of support outside of their classes. Alex noted:

> That has been a place where I've been able to use aspects of my identity as a way to build a lot of really concrete skills and feel like I'm doing something important and, that's not so much about classes, but it really is. I would consider it equally as much of a part of my University experience.

Alex continued:

> Had I not had the support and the feelings of success associated with being in that student group, I don't know if I would still be here. It really pushed me to keep succeeding in school so that I can keep participating with the group.

Alex had thought a lot about how their identities intersected and affected their postsecondary experiences. At times though, Alex noted that discussing their identities was hard for them. Alex often described situations in which they were aware of how others perceived their identities, including being fat and female, even though that is not how they themselves identified. Alex also discussed positive traits that they identified with and that others perceived of them, including being empathetic and service-oriented. Alex discussed the way they utilize empathy to understand the struggle of others, as well as to relate to classmates who might have questions about their gender and sexual identities. They also discussed their desire to be helpful in supporting other students in their classes and through the student organizations in which they themselves found personal support.

Cameron

Disability: Bipolar

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: African American

Gender identity: Male

Other Relevant Identities: None listed

Pronouns: He/him

Cameron was a senior majoring in a biological science discipline. Cameron originally started college at a culinary arts school in Chicago with the goal of becoming a top chef. During this time, Cameron was diagnosed with a mental illness and ended up having to leave school. He eventually moved closer to family and began attending the community college that his mom attended before starting her career. Cameron began to get involved with community gardening projects, started taking science and math classes,

and became involved in a program that supports students of color who are interested in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines. After finishing his two-year degree, he decided to transfer to current four-year university to complete a bachelor's degree.

Cameron talked about his disability in general terms, explaining "the best way to describe it is my mood shifts." He continued, "I have a condition that just causes me to be really sad sometimes and lethargic probably too. Then other times I'm really energized." Cameron described how his disability, race, and shy nature affect his classroom experiences:

I think depression is linked to self-esteem and for a long part of my life I was, and I still am, pretty shy, and I think that's linked with depression and not feeling like I can do or say anything that I feel comfortable saying. And I think in a classroom environment where most of the students are White and the teacher is White, it can be hard and challenging at times to express my opinions.

Cameron noted that he experiences changes in his mood regardless of his medication, although periods of depression are more common for him than periods of mania. Cameron does not typically share information about his disability with his peers. He explained:

I'm getting a little more comfortable doing it but most peers, at least here at the university, I don't feel very connected to on a personal level . . . I'm not going to share my personal life with people I don't feel very connected to.

Aside from personal connection, stigma is the other reason that Cameron does not share information about his disability. Cameron noted, "I don't want to feel less than other people."

During the semester of this study, Cameron was a couple months away from graduating and was looking for a full-time job. He also won a prestigious scholarship from his department. Cameron struggled with feelings of unworthiness and self-doubt after receiving the scholarship. He reflected:

> It's hard for me to be proud of myself I guess and—but also this semester I've been thinking a lot about just how I got here and how it seems like, on purpose, some miracle that I got here, that I did well.

He continued:

> I think it's hard to break out of a poverty mindset when most of my family lives in poverty. There's no good examples in my family of men who are, I guess doing something productive, I mean besides one of my brothers. But even still there's not examples of men who have been educated, and there's definitely some privilege to being educated. So internally I know that I'm worthy because I do the work and I get good results but I guess it's hard for me to feel it externally. Not even with my family, not even just that, but many other places because there's not a lot of good examples of people like me, particularly in [my field].

Cameron said that being a part of a multicultural organization for students in his field has helped with some of these feelings. Cameron traveled with this organization to a national conference during the semester of this study. He said that traveling to this conference

and meeting other students has been helpful, "Just to reinforce I guess, it's a false assumption I have that there's not other people like me in this field."

Cameron originally transferred to his current university from one of the most diverse two-year colleges in the state. He described his transfer to a predominantly White institution (PWI) as a "big shock." He noted:

> While being a student here I have enjoyed the opportunities for student to student interactions and I think that could be tied to my own growth as I've been a student here and kind of gotten out of my shy tendencies.

Cameron tied the experience of being at a PWI to the important role that classroom climate and content play in his experiences:

> At a predomiantly White institution like this, I would say if different perspectives can't be brought to the classroom just because there are students who can't afford to come here or are locked out for other reasons, then at least those perspectives could be woven into the classroom discussions.

He continued:

> Those perspectives include a diversity of people . . . incorporating their perspectives in the classroom could be helpful. Particularly minority farmers. I haven't seen a class where they've brought in a Hmong farmer . . . which are pretty prevelant here.

Cameron described resilience as one of his strengths and as a core piece of his identity. He explained, "it's how I live my life I suppose, it's how I've gotten through a lot of trauma or a lot of traumatic things, or I guess low self-esteem." Cameron also noted that a second core identity, faith, connects to his ability to be resilient. As a part of

his faith and spirituality, he practices religion, meditation, and affirmations. These practices in turn help him be resilient. Generational status was also salient to Cameron because he is the second generation in his family to go to college, but he is the first of his siblings to attend and the first in his family to go to a four-year university.

Cameron also included race and ethnicity as identities that were close to his core, but noted, "I'd rather not identify with race and ethnicity but it's kind of a part of the society I live in." In discussing why he sometimes did not want to associate with his race, Cameron noted:

> [I think it] makes people think because I am Black I have some sort of special advantage. And then sometimes they use people of color in institutions like ours as examples that there is diversity, and I think that's wrong.

His race is salient in his classes, as is his introverted nature. He explained, "my identity of being Black and introverted and smart, I think that singles me out a lot. And yeah I don't like that feeling of being singled out." He noted that he often feels singled out because there is not a lot of people like him in his classes.

Cameron does not consider disability to be an identity that is close to his core because he does not talk about it much. He also noted:

> I think by my resiliency, my relgion, and health, my disability hasn't caused me to have too many problems carrying on my life, whereas I know for other people it's been a constant theme in their life because they get hospitalized alot.

In a journal entry that Cameron completed during the semester that focused on his art class, Cameron shifted his disability and gender to the area of core identities. About his disabilities specifically, Cameron wrote that drawing can create a range of emotions

during class depending on what he is drawing. These feelings relate to perfectionist tendencies, desire to control things, and eroticism. Cameron wrote that sometimes not knowing how to handle those emotions can elicit depression and binge eating. On the other hand, Cameron wrote:

> Because this art class is on Saturdays, I use it to destress from other classes I take throughout the week, which are science based and seem to create a lot of stress and anxiety in my life. I do get anxiety about not having enough time to do my art assignments, but after I make time to do an assignment and start working on it all those negative thoughts dissipate. Art class helps my disability and eating disorder.

Regarding the extent to which his identities affect his learning, Cameron said "It doesn't. I just love to learn so, yeah if anything my identities reinforce that love I have for learning."

In general, Cameron did not talk a lot about his disability. Hesitancy in talking about his disability was reflected in his decision not to share much information with his peers and instructors, aside from his accommodation letter. Resilience was a core theme throughout his narrative, as were the personal strategies and supports that he utilized to reduce barriers related to his disability. These strategies included involvement in student organizations and campus activities, meditation and mindfulness, and seeking support from his family. Race also significantly impacted Cameron's experiences in school. His narrative echoes a call for the institution to be more reflective of the experiences of diverse populations, both in the general campus environment and in the context of the classroom.

Gabrielle

Disabilities: Anxiety and Depression

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: White

Gender Identity: Girl

Other identities relevant to this study: None listed

Pronouns: She/her

Gabrielle was a sophomore and had not yet declared a major, although she planned to pursue a humanities degree. Gabrielle enjoys reading and writing and had some teachers during high school that she really liked, which were factors that are driving her toward one specific humanities major. She anticipated that she would go to grad school eventually or may also consider law school. Gabrielle was originally from a state on the east coast and chose her current school because out of state tuition was comparable and she wanted to be in a city environment.

Gabrielle had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety prior to attending college. She had more recently been diagnosed with PTSD due to a trauma that she experienced over the summer prior to when this study was conducted. She is sometimes reminded of her trauma when discussing certain academic content and has almost started crying in class on several occasions. Gabrielle's disabilities often affect her motivation to sit down and do her school work. Once she can get herself motivated, she finds that she is able to become engaged with her coursework but the process of getting there can be particularly challenging for her. Gabrielle's disabilities also affect the extent to which she can focus during class, which sometimes prevents her from attending altogether. She explained the ripple effect that missing class has on her:

It makes me feel worse if I don't go or if I go late because I feel like my disability is consuming me, it's affecting me. I feel more down on myself because I'm not doing my work and then that makes me have a bad self-image [and] self-esteem . . . . It also makes you feel kind of hopeless [because] only I can really get myself to class.

Gabrielle has had accommodations through the campus disability office to take a reduced course load and to receive flexibility on some assignment deadlines. She has not always shared her letter with her instructors because she feels uncomfortable and noted that it gives her a lot of anxiety when she thinks about how others might perceive her. She is also unsure of what her instructors' experiences with mental health have been and then worries that they might think that she is seeking a special advantage. Although Gabrielle has not always shared her letter, she noted:

I feel like when I'm giving the letter or explaining it, it almost makes it less likely that I'd use it because it's there as a backup so it kind of it makes me less stressed and sometimes when I'm less stressed I can do my work.

Gabrielle also described the effect that certain actions of the instructors can have on her willingness to share her letter:

When they go over the syllabus and get to mental health, they're all like "please tell me if you have a disability, it's helpful, I've had some great students with disabilities" . . . saying that makes me feel way less awkward and way less like I'm burdening them with my disability. That's almost how it feels sometimes, like I'm burdening you with my disability.

Gabrielle is generally relatively open with her peers and has told her roommates and close friends about her disabilities. She noted that she does not disclose to her classmates because she does not want them to think she is cheating or that she does not really need it.

Gabrielle identified her mental illness as an identity close to her core because mental illness runs in her family and because she has been seeing a therapist since she was young. Due to her familial and personal experiences with mental illness, Gabrielle is particularly sensitive to pejorative terms like "crazy," which she said she often hears students in her classes use to describe other people. Terms like "crazy" often shut Gabrielle down and make her less likely to engage with those who use that language. Gabrielle listed disability as a secondary identity because she does not want it to affect her as much as it sometimes does. Anxiety is the specific aspect of her mental illness and disability that she identified as salient because it is more noticeable and affects her peer relationships more so than depression. She explained:

> I feel like being depressed and stuff, I tend to, I don't know if I would say hide it but I don't think it's as easily noticeable. Whereas my anxiety is something that really permeates through my speech, whether it's asking questions a million times . . . . But I also don't miss class, I have a really good GPA, and so it doesn't really feel like it's completely conspicuous.

Gabrielle also identifies with being female, especially in the context of her family in which she has two older brothers who are more politically conservative. Gender is sometimes salient for Gabrielle in class as well. Gabrielle gave an example of an English class that she had been taking in which a student had made comments about a female

writer that transpired into a deeper discussion on perceptions about what writers can say

or write about as a result of their gender. Gender also more deeply intersected with

Gabrielle's disability identity inside and outside of the classroom. Gabrielle explained,

"Anxiety and being female you know, feeling like sometimes when you're walking like

you're always on stage or people are watching you, that kind of adds to my anxiety."

Gabrielle indicated that these experiences related to gender have not necessarily

prevented her from speaking or participating in class, but they have reinforced being

female as a relevant identity and one that affects her everyday experiences in and outside

of class.

Although Gabrielle grew up in the Jewish faith, she identifies more with not being

Christian than she does with being Jewish. Gabrielle discussed some frustrating

interactions that she has had with her peers who do not understand her identity as a non-

Christian. She noted:

> Sometimes people here cannot fathom that I don't celebrate Christmas. They just
>
> don't understand that not everyone celebrates it or they think that maybe it's a
>
> national holiday. As if I'm Jewish but I also just celebrate it for fun.

Gabrielle also identifies with being from an east coast state, where it is more

common to be Jewish than in the Midwest where she is attending school. Gabrielle said

that she is perceived as "more ethnic" than she would be in her home state and is often

asked if she is biracial. As a result, she said she is not always sure of how her race and

ethnicity are perceived by others. She noted that having diversity and diverse

perspectives represented in the classroom sometimes helps her feel more comfortable just

being in the environment.

Gabrielle listed sexual orientation as a secondary identity, noting:

I guess it doesn't seem so relative all the time . . . sometimes people ask me about

my sexual orientation and I'm dealing with who I find attractive, but it also seems

like I don't have to think about it, no one cares.

Socioeconomic status was a secondary identity for Gabrielle, although she was

aware of how it affected her in her college pursuits. She discussed the ways in which her

socioeconomic status offered her some privileges to be more relaxed about school and

take a reduced course load, major in a humanities discipline, and not see college as just a

means to get a good job. Gabrielle has a "criminalized parent," which she wrote in as an

identity close to her core. She noted that her experience of having a criminalized parent

intersected with her socioeconomic status because it is something that is rare in her

suburban hometown and in her socioeconomic class. Her trauma and her experience of

having a criminalized parent also intersected with her socioeconomic status, in that her

family could get a lawyer and Gabrielle is able to work regularly with a therapist because

she has health insurance.

During the semester of this study, Gabrielle journaled about the changing saliency

of her disability and the intersection with her gender identity, writing:

I have figured out that despite sometimes denying the altitude of my disability, it

is more of a core identity which I deal with everyday [*sic*]. The location changed

most likely due to the trauma I experienced this summer which sinks deeper and

deeper each day. Flashbacks or sudden emotional bursts in class have never

caused me to leave but have made me tear up or become completely disillusioned

and disassociated with what I am doing. I still would put being a woman as a core

identity just as I did on the first model since it has become so interwoven with my disability. Feeling ashamed to talk or self-conscious or objectified may not be the sole cause of my disability but it sure amplifies it.

Throughout Gabrielle's participation in this study it became apparent that her trauma and having a criminalized parent had deeply shaped her academic experiences. Despite the negative toll of these factors, which at times compounded the impact of her disabilities, Gabrielle also expressed an intense desire to be engaged in her courses. While her disability at times affected her attendance, Gabrielle often spoke of times in which she would prepare for class discussions, purposefully speak up and participate, and would try to engage with others in her courses. This desire for engagement also seemed to enhance Gabrielle's motivation to participate in and do well in her classes. She sometimes expressed worry about how classmates and professors would perceive her disability. This concern often kept her from sharing disability-related information but did not necessarily keep her from wanting to do well and desiring to be present in the classroom, even if it was not always possible for her.

Hannah

Disability: Visual Spatial Processing

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: Asian (Chinese)

Gender identity: Female

Other identities relevant to this study: Adopted

Pronouns: She/her

Hannah was a sophomore majoring in information technology and biological sciences. She became interested in both disciplines in high school, at which time she

participated in a national business organization and won a scholarship for writing an essay on a topic related to information technology. Hannah is from the central United States and chose to study at this specific university because of the reputation of the academic program that she was interested in at the time. She came from a small high school that she described as "more diverse than any class here," referring to her courses at the university.

Hannah was diagnosed with a visual-spatial processing learning disability during the summer after her first year of college. Hannah did not know a lot about the disability but said "it was kind of a timing and processing thing . . . it is kind of also just a confidence issue and then anxiety about the way that I'm tested rather than the actual learning disability I supposedly have." In describing how the disability affects her, Hannah said "processing sometimes takes me longer but then once I have time, like maybe other people understand faster but then sometimes I understand better than them later on, but it just took me a longer time to get there."

Hannah has struggled significantly on exams, particularly on those that are multiple choice because she can think of a number of possible answers and has trouble narrowing down to one. She regularly goes to office hours to work with her instructors when she begins to struggle with course material. Although her instructors often tell her that she seems to be grasping the content, her test scores do not reflect her mastery of the material. Hannah said that she thinks the disconnect in what she knows and the scores that she gets on her exams seems to be related to how she is being tested on the material. She explained:

I feel like I'm not really tested on my strengths . . . [or] taught in my learning

style, so it's just harder for me, I have to do a lot more work to understand.

Whereas if it was just taught to me and explained in my learning style and [I was]

tested in that way I think it would be fine, or lot better.

Before being diagnosed with a learning disability, Hannah took a calculus class

during the spring semester of her first year in college and "basically failed" the class.

That summer, Hannah took an algebra class to brush up on her math skills and started

working with a tutor. The tutor was familiar with her specific disability and helped her

better understand her learning style. Hannah described her learning style in this way:

My verbal skills help me a lot in my learning style so that's why academic classes

that are based on exams and stuff are really challenging for me because I do better

if I can explain it rather than writing it down. And talking about stuff helps me

process it versus when I'm just sitting and have it all in my head, then sometimes I

can't figure out how to put it on paper . . . I have doubts about it.

Hannah enrolled in calculus again this past fall and got a B in the course. Hannah

credits this accomplishment to working hard over the summer, utilizing her tutor as well

as the TA and professor for the course, knowing more about her learning style, and

having accommodations in place. Hannah has an accommodation for extra time on her

exams to process through the information and manage her testing anxiety. She always

shares her accommodation letter but does not disclose her specific disability. She has

told her close friends but generally does not tell her peers. She indicated that telling

people she as a learning disability may lead them to believe that she is "stupid." She

explained:

The thing is, I know that I'm not stupid but a lot of times I just feel like I am, especially in classes. I think college is hard but I just feel stupid all the time and I think that affects my learning, so I don't tell people about, "oh I have a learning disability," or "I have accommodations."

Hannah comes from an area of the country and a high school that is more diverse than her current university. She said of her classroom experiences:

It's difficult to be a person that's different from the majority of the crowd because, I like being different, but then in some situations I still feel like I can't contribute because people are going to think lesser [of me] . . . I have experienced that— we're having a discussion, I say something and people think what I contribute is less because they don't understand that there's other types of thinking . . . because they've never been exposed to it. And that's not their fault necessarily but I think it just makes it harder sometimes.

Hannah is a Chinese American adoptee and said that these aspects of her identity have had even more of an impact on her college experience than she anticipated. She shared, "I've had professors asking me if English is my first language when I don't understand something, even when I'm talking to them like I'm talking to you right now, they still ask me, 'is English your first language?'" She said that sometimes other students also think that she is an international student. Hannah reflected:

I've heard stories from other Chinese adoptees about their schools and how people see them and the way that they learn and stereotypes but I didn't think I'd be in a place where I'd experienced that, and then I did . . . It's just been a thing that I have to process daily.

She continued:

> It just makes me feel like I'm just put somewhere out of place, like I'm just
> displaced in the community. There's a lot of White people then there's a lot of
> like international Chinese and Asian students and then I'm just displaced . . . .
> People don't understand because they've never met adopted people . . . . So I don't
> know exactly how much it affects my learning but I'm pretty sure it affects me.

Hannah identified gender identity as being close to her core because she believes that China's one child policy has a lot to do with why she is here and what she has been able to do in school. Race and ethnicity had always been close to Hannah's core but she said she did not notice it as much until she moved away to college and began living in a less diverse community. Hannah also noted that being adopted and being a part of a multiracial family are a part of her core identities. Hannah has an adopted sibling and cousin but the rest of her family is White. She said that people are often surprised to learn that her family is White, just as they are surprised to learn that she is not an international student and that her primary language is English. Hannah also included intellect and character values close to her core. She noted that she included intellect because she feels it has been doubted a number of times during college. Hannah included disability as a secondary identity. She explained:

> I think having a disability is more just like recognizing that I do learn differently
> or think differently but I don't think it needs to define who I am and it's not
> something I want to be labeled with really. I don't think that's important whether
> or not somebody has a disability in terms of who they are. I don't think it really
> means anything. It's a factor but it's not that important.

Hannah said that no one in her classes knows about her disability so it does not feel

particularly relevant to her in a classroom environment.

During the time of this study, Hannah ended up having to drop one of her classes

mid-semester because she was not able to get the help she needed from the instructor.

She journaled about her experience attending office hours for this course:

> The instructor eventually became impatient with me when I asked for help, which
>
> took a huge toll on my self-confidence and ability to do well and stay motivated.
>
> I got to the point where the instructor was even putting me down about the way
>
> that I learn and was telling me how poorly I was doing in the course
>
> comparatively.

She continued, "If I were to change something about the course, I would want a more

patient and understanding instructor who is able to provide multiple ways of explaining a

concept." Although her experiences with this class were not good, Hannah said the

experience ended up coming out alright because she was able to devote more time to her

other classes and maintain her mental health.

During the last year and a half, Hannah had experienced several transitions that

changed the way she saw herself and how she believed others perceived her. She had

transitioned into an environment that was less diverse, into a place where people's

perceptions of her were different from what she had experienced in the community in

which she grew up, and into a place where her learning style was not necessarily

supported in the same way as in high school. Her narrative reflects the ways in which

racial dynamics have shaped how she believes others see her and her experience in the

classroom environment. Despite the significant transitions, changes, and barriers related

to others' perceptions of her, Hannah expressed confidence and significant determination to be successful.

Jonathan

Disability: Back Surgeries/ongoing complications, ADHD

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: Caucasian

Gender identity: Male

Other identities: Straight, citizen of US

Pronouns: He/him

Jonathan was a junior majoring in a biological sciences discipline. He started out in school as a pre-medical major but chose to change his major as a result of one of his disabilities. Jonathan was in a car accident a few years ago and subsequently underwent several back surgeries. Once he was able to start school again, he realized that pre-med would be a difficult major given the back pain he was still experiencing and the opioid medications that he needed to take to manage his pain. Jonathan decided that he would switch majors to study medicinal plants and alternatives to opioid medications. Jonathan was a transfer student and first earned his associates degree from a two-year college before attending his current university. It was after he transferred that his back issues became worse. He spent time taking classes from home and then came back to school the semester before this study began.

Jonathan was also diagnosed with ADHD a few months prior to the start of this study. The semester that the study occurred was especially hard for Jonathan as he is working to navigate his health insurance, as well as the side effects of his medication. He

described the way that his ADHD was affecting him in one particular course this
semester:

> The instructor goes through the things pretty quickly and also each lecture is just
> packed with so much information that it's hard for me to take [it] in . . . with
> ADHD, my ears kind of shut off at some points . . . I kind of zone out and I think
> about other things.

In describing his disability further, Jonathan explained:

> I'd say just the inability to focus. I have to record the lectures, go back over them.
> Reading is not my strong point so I have to read a paragraph and I won't even
> know what I've read, so it takes me twice as long to go over the lecture, go over
> the reading . . . when I can't focus my brain just kind of switches on to other
> things that I'm worrying about, or feeling like I'm not a good enough student.
>
> Jonathan had been struggling to find support resources after his ADHD diagnosis.

He described an incident in which he tried to ask his instructor for ideas:

> I was literally just diagnosed with ADHD, had no idea what to do with this
> information, so I decided to go up and ask him, "hey do you have any tips?" And
> that just made me feel like I did something wrong or [that it], wasn't the right
> thing to do, or maybe I was coming off as I was complaining or something, or
> trying to make an excuse.
>
> Jonathan explained that he thinks his ADHD causes him to come off differently to

other people than he intends, especially because his ADHD makes him more impulsive.
He gave an example of getting to class late and going to sit right in front of the class
instead of in the back, which upset his professor. He said he realized it after the fact and

apologized. Jonathan noted that he often overthinks things and struggles to focus and process information when it is delivered quickly. He explained, "people need to realize that there's more to ADHD then just attention, you know they think it's just attention but there's also you know, over-analyzing, over-thinking, zoning out, compulsiveness, that there's just so many different symptoms of it."

Jonathan has accommodations and always shares his letter but he has only actually disclosed his disability to two professors. He said he was not afraid to disclose his disability but noted that he is not always sure if full disclosure is appropriate or not. Jonathan gave an example of when he came back to school from being away due to his back issues and ended up disclosing a lot of information to a professor. He then worried that his disclosure may have been inappropriate. He elaborated on his concern:

> In a sense you don't really want to disclose your information when you're trying to
>
> make a good impression and friendships with these professors, so you know if
>
> you want grad school recommendations or to work with them. I mean in my
>
> opinion they might not want to work with you if they find this thing out.

About the impact of these interactions on him this semester, Jonathan said:

> I'm trying to make good relationships, but also the thought of maybe wanting to
>
> go to grad school, there's just a lot of pressure that you have to put on yourself
>
> and once I kind of figured out that I may have been blowing these things, that's
>
> kind of when things started spiraling.

Jonathan was working to get his ADHD managed during the time of this study. The first two medications that Jonathan was put on had a negative effect on him overall and he did not end up starting his assignments until about two months into his class.

Jonathan ended up taking an incomplete in his most challenging course but was finishing it up over the coming week when this study concluded.

At the start of this study, Jonathan identified his disabilities as being the most salient to him. Regarding his disability, Jonathan noted:

> I guess I've just been dealing with it for so long that it's just become something that's part of me now, something I've had to adapt to. It's changed my life so lately dealing with both of them is just how I think about myself right now I guess.

Jonathan selected race, ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, national origin as secondary identities. Some of the identities that Jonathan included being close to his core were being a musician, his family, his health and taking care of himself, and getting his education completed. Jonathan noted that intelligence was also a primary identity. He said he viewed himself as intelligent but struggled to answer questions at times because he was afraid he would be wrong and sound less intelligent.

Later in the study in one of his journal entries, Jonathan wrote that he identified as being a scientist, which he said helped him build confidence in himself and his goal of going to graduate school. Jonathan also moved ethnicity to a core identity, noting that his grandmother lived in Latvia but was then forced to move to Germany during World War II. He wrote that he takes pride in being Latvian and wrote that it affects how he views others as well as the opportunities he has for education. Jonathan's perception of his disability also changed slightly during the course of the study. In a journal entry, he wrote:

Disability would be a secondary quality. As I adjust to the academic environment, I've realized that my disability affects me, but not to the degree that I perceive. When I had difficulties with concepts I would blame it on my disability instead of considering that these concepts are difficult for everyone. Nobody knows that I have a disability unless I tell them. Reminding myself of what I had to endure with my back problems and surgeries helps motivate me during tough and stressful times.

Although Jonathan did not identify strongly with his disabilities, his narrative reflects several ways in which it has more recently shaped his academic experiences and his path to graduate school. Like several of the other participants, Jonathan's disability diagnosis was relatively new and he was still in the process of understanding how it affected his own experiences and others' views of him. Jonathan's narrative also reflected several instances in which he experienced barriers and environments that were not necessarily set up to support his learning. Still, he noted several times that he believed he was capable of being successful in his classes, even when the environment posed barriers to him. Jonathan also expressed a strong desire for peer-to-peer interaction, hands-on learning, and opportunities that would prepare him for graduate school and professional work.

Karl

Disability: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: Hispanic

Gender identity: Male

Other relevant identities to this study: Heterosexual

Pronouns: He/him

Karl was a junior double majoring in social science and humanities disciplines. He spent his first two years of college at a private school in Chicago before transferring to his current university. Karl said he had always thought of himself as "an awful student" before going to college. He was kicked out of two high schools and struggled to take his ADHD medication because it made him "feel like a zombie." By the time he moved to his third high school, Karl had started doing slam poetry and writing. During his senior year, he began to read more and had two supportive teachers. Karl explained that these experiences eventually prompted him to consider becoming a teacher himself and motivated him to try to do better in school.

Although he said he was "expecting to fail" in college, Karl made the Dean's List in his first quarter. He eventually wanted to be in a more challenging educational environment and transferred to his current institution in his home state. Upon coming back from Chicago, Karl took some time off to work on political campaigns and had been actively enrolled as an undergraduate for two and a half years at the time of this study. Karl described himself as "terrible at math," which had ultimately kept him from being an education major, but he said he had found that his strong writing skills, interest in reading, and curiosity were a good fit for his current majors.

Regarding how he viewed his disability, Karl explained:

I don't like to use it as like a crutch or anything, the only reason I disclose that

with teachers or anything is because the testing center is awesome and it allows

me to take tests in the environment that will allow me to excel. So, I try to

associate as little as possible with it, but at the same time, I do believe that ADHD

is seen a lot of times by a lot of people as like kind of a curse, and I would argue

that it's more of a blessing . . . . I think it makes me more of a creative person. I

think it allows you to see issues from a lot of different angles just because it's

how your mind works, or at least mine does.

Karl was diagnosed with ADHD in 4th grade and also takes medication for

Bipolar, although did not have a formal diagnosis of Bipolar at the time of this study. He

described his disabilities as largely affecting his decision-making skills and ability to

think things through. He noted that this was especially true when he was a young person

and unmedicated. Karl described the way that his disabilities have affected him in the

classroom environment:

I need to be isolated, I need extra time because things just take me longer to do. I

write slowly, I don't know if that's related or not, but I'm also just so disorganized

mentally, that it's an issue. I'm also just disorganized when it comes to making

sure I have all my papers, it's a total hindrance. It's not like I'm not trying, like

I'm really trying.

He went on to mention as an example that he had lost six water bottles just within the

current school year.

Karl has used accommodations in college but not previously in elementary or high school due to the stigma of being labeled a "disability kid." It was not until college when he went to change medications that he was referred to seek services from the campus disability office and began using accommodations. He noted:

It just doesn't matter past a certain point. I would rather do well and be happy to an extent as opposed to not do it because I'm worried about the stigma and about doing poorly. Its a balance.

Still, Karl does not disclose his ADHD to his professors or his classmates because he feels that ADHD is so stigmatized:

I never tell them. I'd rather have them think I'm just like something else. I'd rather them think of something worse, I prefer that, because ADHD is such a— god people just think you're lazy as shit. Yeah, I'd way rather not ever tell anyone.

He continued to note, "I don't know, my roommate feels the same way that's actually why he doesn't even use the disability center."

Despite the stigma that Karl feels about having ADHD, he identified disability as an identity close to his core due to the ongoing struggle that it causes him in his life. Some of the other identities that he selected as being salient included socioeconomic status, as his dad helps him pay for school, and generational status, related to being a fourth generation American and seeing economic growth in his family over time. Race and ethnicity were complex identities for Karl to discuss. He explained:

People are confused by what race I am a lot of the time, so I don't know. If I was in a protest I don't know if I would be maceed or if I would be able to walk away, like I don't know. The cop wouldn't know. So that's the area I'm in for that.

Karl's grandfather is a first-generation American, originally from the Basque region of Spain. His father feels a lot of pride in being Spanish, and so does Karl, despite not being closely tied to the language and customs. Karl noted that his Spanish heritage is an important part of his family history, especially because his grandfather experienced a lot of pressure to assimilate after moving to the United States. Karl explained that his grandfather basically stopped identifying as Spanish and speaking the language after entering into the U.S. military. These days Karl said that his family has started celebrating holidays like Nochebuena again.

Karl felt very proud to be Hispanic when he was young, but said that as an adult his ethnicity is often questioned. He said in conversations that involve race and ethnicity people often perceive him as being White but when it comes to an achievement, like earning a scholarship, people will sometimes refer to him as Hispanic and question why he got it. Karl said this sentiment is often expressed by other White students. He explained this dichotomy, "if it's inconvenient for people then I can't idenify as Hispanic, but if it's convenient for people—or   if it seems like it benefits me, it pisses people off." He also indicated that his perceived race and socioeconomic status play off of one another. Karl said that he thinks when he dresses down, people probably think he is Hispanic and when he wears nicer clothing, people think he's White with a tan. Karl views his ethnicity is a part of his family history. Curiosity and being social were two

characteristics that Karl identified as identities that were close to his core. Less salient

identities were religion, national origin, gender identity, and race.

Overall, Karl saw his disability as being a primary identity that affected his

learning in the classroom. In his last journal entry for this study, Karl wrote about his

experiences in one of his political science courses:

I am always aware of the ADHD and bipolar disorder though, if not in the

immediate, then in the back of my head nagging me before I silence their voices

with prescription medication. I came out of a two-month depression around a

week ago and had to change my meds to bring me up from feeling abysmal to the,

not great but consistent, below average. I don't know when the next wave of

mania will come, and I certainly won't recognize it until it's too late and I find

myself in some sort of legal trouble, or otherwise.

Karl indicated that disability tends to be more of a personal identity rather than

something broader that he associates with. He had not sought out disability-related

groups or resources beyond accommodations at the disability services office. He

explained,

I think that's why that's like a core identity but it's not necessarily something that I

would seek out because they'll be like, "he's broken or needy, or a complainer," .

. . . Because that is the stigma that's associated with [ADHD and Bipolar].

Karl also noted that he feels that curiosity is connected to his ADHD and is one of

his most core values, "I like learning about people and hearing their stories and that's a

huge part of me, is like, I want to just take it all in and just try and digest it as much as

possible." Karl's curiosity, as well as his self-described "social" nature was evident

throughout his participation in the study. He conveyed an interest in how others saw him and in how he himself was experiencing his identities in general and in the classroom environment. Karl's narrative has exposed some level of dichotomy and ambiguity in his experiences. For example, Karl's race and ethnicity seemed to be ambiguous to others, and in turn, appeared also to be ambiguous and contextual to Karl. With regard to his disabilities, Karl was able to identify strengths that resulted from his disabilities, but also expressed significant feelings of stigma. Although he was very open in his narrative, he was transparent about the fact that he was not necessarily open with many peers or instructors about his disability.

Lauren

Disability: Depression and Anxiety

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: White

Gender identity: Cisgender Woman

Other identities: Sexuality - queer

Pronouns: She/her

Lauren was a junior double majoring in social science disciplines. Lauren became interested in one of her majors through a course that she took in high school and selected other major because the coursework challenged her to think in new ways and provided a level of critical thinking that she deemed necessary for her overall career goals. Lauren struggled with mental health and homesickness during her first year of college and initially considered transferring back to a school in her home state. She eventually found a support network of friends and ultimately decided to stay at her current university.

At the time of this study, Lauren had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety. She did not reveal whether her diagnosis occurred prior to coming to college or in her first year on campus, during which she struggled significantly with mental health. Lauren was open about the way that her anxiety and depression affect her generally, as well as in the academic environment. She said about depression:

I would describe it [as] not really having full control over my emotions and [as] an overarching a lack of control . . . the biggest implications in my life is not knowing when I'm going to be feeling really depressed, and by depressed I mean sad, thoughts of hurting myself, thoughts of killing myself, really low motivation, just feeling kind of hopeless and helpless.

Lauren described her anxiety as being triggered most often by academics and interpersonal conflicts. When Lauren's anxiety is triggered she said she sometimes experiences panic attacks, during which she cannot control her breathing or keep herself from crying and shutting down. Lauren discussed some examples of how the classroom environment affects her disabilities:

When the classroom is high stressed [and] when professors are saying, "the stakes are really high, it's going to be really hard for you to achieve," because I have perfectionist tendencies, not being able to achieve makes me very anxious and makes me feel like I've already failed, which also makes me feel depressed as well.

Conversely, Lauren explained:

When the classroom climate isn't so structured and when people are able to be more open and vulnerable in that space so that we can learn and bounce ideas off

of each other—that's when I don't become anxious about school, and that's when

my anxiety becomes a lot more manageable. My depression doesn't necessarily

have to do with course rigor, although when my anxiety is bad my depression

tends to be worse. So I can be in a really great class and still be feeling depressed.

But generally when classroom climates are more open to acknowledge that

students are coming from different places and make it clear that they are willing

to accommodate, that makes my stress level go down and I actually perform better

in classes.

Lauren generally does not disclose her disability to her instructors unless she has

an episode that impacts her ability to complete an assignment on time. Lauren said she

never discloses her disabilities at the beginning of the semester unless she is asked about

it informally. She gave an example of a time when an instructor gave out a questionnaire

on the first day of class that asked students individually if they have a self-identified

disability. Lauren did feel comfortable disclosing on this questionnaire. In general,

Lauren said she discloses on a case-by-case basis, explaining:

If something's happening where I need to tell them more in order for them to

understand why I can't get this in on time, then I'll tell them but it's always kind of

a toss-up because professors aren't always very understanding of mental health

disabilities.

When Lauren said that when she has asked for extensions for mental health

reasons, her instructors often asked for doctors' notes and referred her to disability

services or student mental health services. She said they have also sometimes refused her

request for extensions. Lauren was not registered with the disability office on campus at

the time of this study, primarily because she did not identify as someone who has a

disability. She explained:

> I've never really thought about myself as [a person with a disability] and only
>
> started considering the fact that I had a disability in the past year, so I never
>
> sought out disability services when I first started here because I had depression
>
> but that didn't seem like a disability to me . . . . Not identifying as disabled for
>
> most of my life definitely influenced my decision not to go to disability services
>
> and even now I feel like I have the mechanisms to handle my disability and still
>
> succeed in school . . . I feel that I can for the most part do that with my own
>
> resources that I have.

Lauren said she generally does not disclose her disability to classmates but will if it

comes up in small group discussions or if she is talking with her friends. She said that

she uses disclosure and being open with people she trusts as a strategy to help her

navigate and deal with her depression.

Lauren identified her gender as a core identity because it is something she has

thought a lot about during the course of her life. She noted:

> It has a lot to do with how I am read in the world and how I appear in the world to
>
> other people . . . And it also has a lot to do with how I choose to present
>
> physically, like how I choose to dress has a lot to do with how I feel about my
>
> gender. So I guess like my identity is shaped a lot by how I see others perceive
>
> me and how I want that perception to be.

Lauren came out as queer about a year ago. She included sexual orientation as an

identity close to her core because it influences how she identifies herself, who her

partners are, and how others perceive her. She included race near her core because she has more recently been thinking about how it has shaped her experiences and her core self. She explained:

> I grew up like just like assuming Whiteness as a lot of White people do, but being in college and getting involved with social justice work has made my race really salient to me and has made me notice a lot of things about how I move about in the world and the different privileges that go along with my own race.

Lauren included depressed as an identity close to her core and disability as less salient, noting that she identifies more as depressed than she does disabled. She reiterated that she does not necessarily identify with having a disability and does not think others would perceive that as being a part of her identity either. She said of her depression and anxiety:

> It's something I think about almost daily, like am I going to get anxious today, am I going to be sad today? But again, I don't necessarily label it a disability all the time . . . knowing that that depression can come and go and having to think about that all the time is an identity almost because it's something that I have to think about myself and how I'm going to be in the world today.

Although disability was not a salient identity to Lauren in general, she noted that saliency does change when she is in classroom environments:

> I tend to think of myself as actually disabled in the classroom because my performance in that aspect of my life is directly impeded by my depression and anxiety. I guess in a specific context of the classroom I would identify as disabled whereas in just everyday life I don't necessarily.

Other less salient identities noted by Lauren included religion, generational status, ethnicity, and occupation. Lauren said she sees almost all of her identities intersecting in different ways. About her disabilities and gender, Lauren explained:

My gender and my depression and anxiety definitely influence each other because there's all these stereotypes about women and like how emotional they are, so that probably informed why I didn't even identify as like someone with a disability at all, or named myself as disabled, until I realized that it's not just that I'm a woman, I'm emotional, it's that I have depression.

Lauren also noted that her disability intersects with her sexual orientation, noting that being marginalized in the queer community may at times be a "mediator" for mental illness because of how hard it can sometimes be to have a marginalized identity. During the semester of this study, Lauren's sexual orientation became more salient in an LGBTQ topics course, in which she found herself speaking about personal experiences of being a queer person in a queer partnership. Her race became more salient in a Chicanx studies class, which she noted started out "very uncomfortable." She described the change that she felt in the class over the semester in relation to this course and her disability:

We were starting to get more comfortable with each other and so that really helped me to relax in that space and kind of be there and organically figure out what I'm supposed to be doing or what feels right for me . . . just as an individual I feel like I have gotten to that better place mental health-wise to where I feel confident enough to be silent in class, which I'm just kind of realizing right now as I'm saying it how much that kind of internal being okay with myself is reflected in the classroom.

Lauren was one of the few participants in this study who was not registered with the disability office on campus. Lauren's narrative reveals a complex picture of disability identity, for example, in how she saw aspects of her disability as close to her core and yet did not identify as a person with a disability. Her stories of her classroom experiences over the length of this study also depict the way in which she grew in confidence in talking about her queer identity in a classroom context in which her identity was supported, and also grew confident in being silent and listening to the experiences of others. This growth in confidence in turn seemed to be beneficial in easing some of the anxiety that she experienced in the classroom environment.

Louisa

Disability: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: White

Gender Identity: Female

Other Relevant Identities: Heterosexual

Pronouns: She/her

Louisa was a senior majoring in a humanities discipline. She started school at another campus of her current university and then later transferred after deciding to change her major. Louisa began college as a biology major but developed a phobia of blood and "a little bit of anxiety." She also did not like the way that her courses were structured and the rigor of the program. Louisa said she enjoys writing and hopes to work for a magazine or a medical company in a communications department after she graduates.

Louisa has been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). She equated the symptoms of her disability to having "the flu." She explained:

> It's like you're just exausted and it physically pains you to go make lunch or to try to make it to class. And it comes on as fast as a cold or like food poisoning would, I don't always know it's going to happen, sometimes I'll just sit on the couch and I'm like, "oh my gosh I'm exausted and I didn't even notice it." So it's very unpredictable.

Louisa also said that she uses the "spoon theory" (Miserandino, 2003) to describe her disability and the way that it affects her energy level. The spoon theory has been used to describe what it can be like to live with a disability in terms of energy use and depletion. When people feel healthy, they have an unlimited amount of spoons, or energy. People who have a chronic illness or other kind of disability may find themselves with a limited number of spoons, or energy, to expend on certain tasks throughout the day. Louisa explained:

> You start out the day and you have like 10 spoons. And when you get up and get ready, you lose a spoon, when you walk to class you lose a spoon, if you do your homework you lose a spoon. So wherever you are in the day, when you lost your spoons you're done. So it just kind of reinforces how energy levels can be different depending on disability and how it really makes you think through [for example], I didn't get my homework done today, it's not because I didn't want to, it's because I couldn't.

Louisa's disability sometimes affects her attendance and ability to complete assignments on time. She said once she has lost all of her spoons for the day, she is

unable to do anything else because her energy level is so low. Louisa was registered with

the disability office on campus but did not always share her accommodation letter.

During the semester of this study Louisa only gave her letter to one of her instructors.

She explained:

> It's just a lot of work to give out your disability letter because you have to email
>
> them to all your professors and you have to do it in this professional way . . . and
>
> then you have to hunt down the emails of all of your professors when you barely
>
> even know what the class is . . . . I don't tell [my instructor] what the disability is
>
> typically because not everybody believes that it's real. So you be careful about
>
> what you say, but then they're like, "well I kind of want to know more so I can
>
> help you," and I'm like, "I don't want to share any more." And it's just stressful
>
> and it's a lot of work those first couple weeks just getting everything
>
> implemented.

Louisa described her disability and some of the barriers that she encounters in the

context of the classroom, explaining:

> It can radiate into my hands, so like my hands hurt, and so when I'm going to type
>
> it's exhausting or it's painful, or if I'm writing notes, because a lot of my classes
>
> don't want you using computers. [The instructor says] "you can use your
>
> computer because it's in your letter but we want you to sit in the back of the
>
> classroom," and I'm like "I don't want to sit in the back of the classroom, so I'm
>
> going to use my note book." And they ask if that's okay and I say yes because I
>
> don't want to be confrontational with my professor, so I opt for the notebook and
>
> it can be really exhausting hand writing your notes.

Louisa said that on days when she is having a strong flare-up of her disability, she

experiences "brain fog," in which she has a hard time understanding the course material

and keeping track of what's going on.

There were a few classes this semester in which Louisa regretted not sharing her

letter because of some of the barriers that came up. She gave an example of having to

carry heavy camera equipment back and forth from home to school that triggered some of

her symptoms, including brain fog and insomnia. Louisa described why she did not give

her letter this semester:

> [In a previous semester] I gave a letter to a professor and he's like, "well how
>
> should I be sure that you're not going to abuse this?" And I'm like, "well you're
>
> just going to have to trust me," and [for] some professors that's good enough . . . .
>
> I wasn't sure how this professor was going to react and I knew he was really strict
>
> about attendance and I'm like, "I'm just going to make it, it's just going to have to
>
> happen," but if I would have turned in that letter maybe I could have gotten, I
>
> don't know, wheels or something for the equipment.

Louisa has a friend with a chronic disability who she describes as a good support.

He has been encouraging her to join a support group for CFS but she said that she's not

interested. Louisa said that she has read that support groups are not particularly helpful

for students with CFS. She also explained:

> I know I don't have it as bad as a lot of other people—I'm in like the top 30%. On
>
> average 60% of people can't have a job, can't go to school. I know some are
>
> bedridden, some are tube-fed, so I'm not nearly as bad as I could be and I would

almost feel like anything that I said would be considered a complaint versus

somebody else who had it worse than I did so, I'd feel guilty.

Many of the identities that Louisa included in her model were characteristics,

such as being a writer and creative. She also put religion near her core, as well as being

"type A" and noted that they were identities that affected the way that she engaged in life,

including in school. She noted that religion is what influenced her decision to be honest

in her coursework, for example, in talking with professors about why she was late on an

assignment. She explained:

> It's a very strong foundation of why I act the way I act and why I think the way I
>
> think so it, it definitely impacts school in a way that I don't necessarily know that
>
> I can explain. But it just kind of affects everything that I do.

Louisa put socioeconomic status, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, and

national origin on the periphery as secondary identities, noting that she was more or less

like the "control group" in those areas, meaning that she was more similar along those

aspects of identity to her peers. Louisa also talked about the characteristic of empathy

and how that has shaped her understanding and engagement of course content. In one of

her media classes, discussions of race, police brutality, and the Black Lives Matter

movement had come up several times during the semester. Louisa noted that empathy

had helped her understand or see things from another point of view, even though she had

not had similar experiences because of her race.

Louisa also put her disability as a secondary identity. When journaling about the

saliency of her disability in a class session during the semester, Louisa wrote:

Something I hold close, but try to hide is my disability. Yes, it does determine

how and when I can do my work. However, it will interfere with my job

status/grade if I allow it to interfere too much with my work, or if I let my boss

know that it does.

In describing how her disability affects her course experiences, Louisa said:

There are days where I will show up to class and I'm all like "yeah, I want to do

school today," and my brain is just not going to be there. So I, it changes the way

I interact with class that day, it changes how well I do that day, it changes when I

do things . . . . My type A personality kind of clashes with the disability a little bit

because I have to get things done as soon as possible and they have to look their

best and it's something I want to make sure professors to know . . . and [to] see I

worked really hard on it and that I did everything I could to make it look as good

as possible.

Throughout Louisa's participation in this study, she expressed concern both about

how her professors perceived her disability and how they responded to her

accommodations. Louisa's stories reveal that she was often balancing a desire to

advocate for herself and her accommodations with wanting to appease and meet the

expectations of her instructors. Additionally, she was also experiencing issues with her

disability not being well understood by others and as she referenced, energy depletion

both in meeting the expectations that she and others set for her, and with doing what she

needed to do to ensure that she had accommodations in place.

Maddox

Disability: Mental illness

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: Filipinx

Gender identity: Nonbinary (they/them)

Other identities: Queer, first-generation American, femme

Pronouns: They/them

Maddox is a junior double majoring in social science disciplines. They decided to add a second major after taking a class in a department that provided them an opportunity to explore their own identities in the context of their life. They also found that the program brought a more critical lens to the social issues they were studying in their other major. Maddox began taking college credits at a local community college when they were in high school through the Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) Program. Maddox identified as lower middle class and saw PSEO as a vital opportunity to have some of their college paid for so they could finish the rest of their education with the assistance of financial aid.

Maddox has Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). When talking about their disabilities in the university setting, Maddox described their disability as a mental illness, but with a friend, they sometimes explain BPD further. Maddox described how they explain BPD by saying:

> I always show them visually that this is the normal, or the neuro-typical range of what someone feels and I'm way out here . . . [It's] characterized with having unstable relationships and there's a lot of stigma against people with Borderline Personality Disorders just being people that you just don't want to ever mess with,

like "they're dangerous, they're scary, they'll hurt you," . . . no one quite

understands it yet and that there are a lot of mixtures between what Bipolar and

BPD really is.

Maddox had also been diagnosed with anxiety with Obsessive Compulsive

Disorder (OCD) tendencies and has had substance use issues in the past that occasionally

relapse. Maddox said they have typically been able to finish courses despite disability-

related barriers, but had experienced recent incidences where they needed to drop a class

due to racism and transphobia. Maddox had an experience in a course last semester in

which the instructor gave differential treatment to students who had disability letters by

providing some with more flexibility than others. As a result of these issues, Maddox

decided not to share their letter with the professor. Still, this professor singled out

Maddox several times in class and in other venues by commenting on their race and

gender identity. Maddox explained that the professor did not listen to them when they

expressed discomfort with the comments and said that several other students had similar

experiences and eventually dropped the course, while others filed a complaint.

The series of events in this course caused Maddox quite a bit of stress. They

commented that the incident was "taxing on me, like physically, mentally, emotionally, I

was just exhausted all the time." In discussing the broader impact of this incident,

Maddox asserted:

> We just didn't really learn anything that semester. We were all really just stressed
>
> out trying to be alright and get through it. So now it just kind of sucks because I
>
> feel like we're trying to play catch-up at least in terms of the readings that we

should have understood or that we should have mutual in our background now entering the senior semnar.

In a separate course incident in which someone in Maddox's project group was exhibiting racism and transphobia, Maddox said the instructor addressed the issue directly several times in ways that felt very supportive. Maddox explained:

When we brought [the issue] to his attention, he's like, "that will not be tolerated in this space," and had invited me to like, "I really encourage you to come into my office hours and set up a thing so we can talk about this because your safety is really really important to me," and I felt cared for by this professor like directly.

The instructor ended up talking to the student and removed them from Maddox's group for a short time. Eventually the student was allowed back in to the group and Maddox ultimately ended up dropping the course because they would have had to work with that student for the remainder of the semester.

In the context of the classroom, Maddox commented that their mental illness has helped them understand the experiences of their peers and relate to other students more easily. Maddox noted that their cultural background has also influenced the way that they experience classroom environments. Maddox explained:

Filipino culture is very community-oriented and we're in a really Western, individualistic [setting], especially in academia where sometimes it is a competition, where there are curves and you're not there to make friends . . . to me that doesn't make any sense because, a community, you're supposed to help each other out and then everyone benefits . . . to me, culturally, that's just kind of what you do, that's what you should do. You should help out each other and you

should never have to just rely on yourself because it's hard out there, life is kind

of hard.

For Maddox, being one of few students of color in their classes has also impacted

the extent to which classroom spaces feel safe for participation and dissent. Maddox

explained:

> I feel like more than anything else that's the thing that I notice the most is that
>
> sometimes it is really really unsafe to be able to vocalize any discomfort with
>
> White people or other privileged identities, which again, that is all up to the
>
> professor if they're going to help create that safe space.

Maddox said that they have had some instructors who have addressed the issues that race

plays in engaging in the course content and even discussed their own identities in the

context of the issues being raised, but they have also had instructors who do not seem to

care at all.

With regard to Maddox's own identities, they identified race, ethnicity, gender

identity, sexual orientation, being non-western from a family of immigrants, and being a

first-generation American as being close to their core. Maddox identified with their

socioeconomic status and disabilities but said they are not the primary things they

identify with. Instead they identified more with being Filipinx, trans, and queer.

Regarding their disability, Maddox wrote in a journal entry:

> Though I don't actively think about my disability as much as the others, I do
>
> notice and feel the effects of my disabilities and ableism in the classroom
>
> especially as the semester progresses. My mental health is tied to my experiences
>
> at school and as my work load increases, I grow more apathetic about school.

When I'm overwhelmed with school, I feel it in my personal life and it become[s]

very hard to do basic things like eating, cleaning, and maintaining personal

cleanliness. I think it is through internalized ableism that I don't think about my

disability enough, though I would say it is one of the top identities/experiences

that affect my life the most.

Maddox noted that the "invisibility" of their disabilities, including their knee pain,

sometimes has influenced them feeling as though they may not experience as much

ableism as other people with disabilities do.

Maddox's cultural identity as Filipinx also has impacted the messages they

receive about their identity. Maddox discussed the cultural message of needing to have

"tough skin" and not centering or talking about yourself, as well as cultural messages

from elders about the opportunities that they have been given now that they are in the

United States and the struggles of immigration that sometimes minimize smaller

struggles. Maddox discussed the complexity of their disability and Filipinx identity in

navigating different cultural messages and expectations, noting:

When you're told these things by your own culture but then also the dominant

culture in different ways, it's like double weight, and that also you have to

navigate both of those spaces, knowing how to code shift when I'm like with my

Filipino community and my family versus, okay now I'm in this White globalized

capitalist space and this is how I exist here. So I think that being Filipino

definitely has to do with the strains of navigating two places at once.

Maddox explained that they had found support through virtual spaces in ways that

they had not been able to find on campus. They had been a part of Filipinx groups and

queer groups on campus but in online spaces they said they can connect in groups that are "queer centered about Filipino people and like how we navigate the diaspora." About these communities, Maddox said:

> Just having a place, honestly even hearing like, "I have that too," like someone else talks about it and you're like, "oh my gosh, this is just getting a lot easier because I'm not the only one and that this is an OK thing and why can I validate it for someone else and not myself," and then it just gets you thinking critically about your existence in that like, okay these are alright things for me to feel.

Maddox was currently working on a senior thesis that focused on the Filipinx diaspora. Working on a project that so closely focused on their own interests was noted by Maddox as their biggest success of the semester. Maddox explained:

> It's kind of hard to find flexibility in a really structured institution, so I think that that's been the best thing for me is that I got to choose what I wanted to do and consequently, I've been able to put a lot more love and effort into it because it's something that I really enjoy.

They went on to note:

> I felt like this was the first time in my academic career where I've specifically reclaimed the academic institution that is Western academia that has not been inclusive of me and a lot of people . . . I don't think that I've ever had that opportunity before.

Maddox's narrative conveys many instances in which they were navigating multiple cultural spaces and sets of cultural expectations at once, especially with regard to their Filipinx identity and role as a student in the academy. They had thought quite a

bit about the ways in which they would like to see their collegiate institution change to be more supportive and representative of students with marginalized identities. They also expressed frustration about the pace of change and the repeated experiences that they had with racism and transphobia in their courses. Still, Maddox also expressed significant motivation and drive to make their own spaces and opportunities to explore and discuss topics that were relevant to them, despite not feeling more broadly supported in these endeavors at the institution.

Sophia

Disability: ADHD and reading disorder

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: White/ European

Gender identity: Female

Other Relevant Identities: None listed

Pronouns: She/her

Sophia was a senior majoring in a biological sciences discipline. She was working to complete a pre-professional program and was planning on taking a year off to save money while applying to professional programs. Sophia was originally from a large city in the Midwest and chose her current university because she was offered scholarships and an opportunity to teach during her first year. Sophia had not originally planned to go to college right after high school. She had gotten a "working student" job as an Olympic horse trainer but then had a riding accident after graduation. Riding became painful for her, especially at a competitive level. She then chose the second option that she had been weighing for her future, which was to attend college.

Sophia described her undergraduate career as an "emotional journey." She went to a very small high school and was in AP classes and on the honor roll. During her first two years of college, she experienced some family tragedies, had a bad roommate situation, and also dealt with significant depression and anxiety. Sophia had always defined herself as an academic and so she struggled as her grades fell drastically during her first two years. After being encouraged by her dad to get assessed for a disability for several years, Sophia went through testing during her junior year and found out she had ADHD and a reading disorder. Describing what came next, Sophia said:

> I went through, I guess you would call them like the seven stages . . . I was angry,
> I didn't want to tell anyone, I didn't want to get help, and I was on meds and then I
> got off the meds and everything got a lot better. And so I was able to bring my
> GPA from a, I think it was a 2.8 to 3.2 in the last three semesters and then I have
> about 3.9 for the last 60 [credits] which is for me a big achievement.

Sophia reflected on her two differing experiences in high school and college saying that she likely was able to hide her disabilities in high school because they were not apparent in the small, student-focused environment that characterized her school. Sophia has more recently been diagnosed with three disabilities: ADHD, dyslexia, and a generalized reading disorder. She explained that if she discloses her disabilities, she usually just says that she has ADHD, noting, "It's the easiest thing to say and a lot of people can relate to that and can understand it. The problem with that though is that I get a lot of like, 'oh yeah, I'm ADHD too." Sophia indicated that the experience of others saying they also have ADHD can be frustrating because she knows that it is often not true. She also noted that these sentiments seem to indicate that ADHD is something that

everyone experiences sometimes as opposed to it being a disability that affects someone's daily life.

In describing the interactions between her ADHD and learning disabilities, Sophia noted:

> It plays into my testing because if I'm reading the question and I've read it five times and I don't understand it, I just kind of mentally just drift off—or I focus on some other stimulant in the room and I just can't even process the page in front of me.

Sophia said that she sometimes inverts or transposes letters and numbers due to her dyslexia and her learning disorder impacts her understanding of relationships between words.

Sophia was registered with the campus disability office but said she only discloses her disabilities or shares her letter if she feels as though she needs to, such as in very large classes with exams. In Sophia's experience, instructors have sometimes subtly treated her differently after she has shared her letter, for example, being overly concerned about her ability to keep up in the class. She explained:

> I would prefer for my professors at least not to know unless I need them to know. It's just one of those things where I would prefer to be doing this on my own and without any help, again that's the foolish stubbornness. So if I can do it by myself without any outside help I'm going to do that first.

In Sophia's major courses, she said she often has not had to share her letter because the instructors were already doing the things that she needed in order to succeed in the course. For example, these instructors already provided the materials ahead of

time, provided additional resources for learning the materials, and had smaller class sizes in which she can more easily take her exams. With most of the courses, materials were provided in advance of the session, so Sophia was able to convert them and read them ahead of time through her text-to-speech program. She also then did not have to worry about giving the letter or disclosing her disability and said she was instead able to focus on doing what she needs to do to be successful in the course. Sophia reflected on this by saying:

> It's really nice when I have teachers that are aware that there are students [with disabilities] and just are right off the bat like, "okay here's everything, do with it as you will." So I only choose to disclose it if I absolutely need to or if I had a teacher I feel really comfortable with and it just comes up in the discussion.

Sophia noted several instances in which her peers would say things like "oh I'm ADHD sometimes." She also discussed an incident in which she was volunteering at a clinic and overheard a staff member and intern talk about a student who had asked for extra time on an exam. She said they started questioning how this student would be able to succeed in the workforce. Sophia reflected on this experience, noting:

> I really wanted to say like, "that's not how it works, if you're going to talk about this, please understand how it works." I can answer questions and interact in the clinical setting much better than I can on an exam and having an exam be the thing that defines the rest of my life is not really fair because sometimes the exams set me up to fail. But ask me those same questions in an emergency room while I'm having to place a catheter and I can probably answer it . . . that bothers

me when I hear that because it's coming to a from a place of pure ignorance and an unwillingness to understand what the other person is going through

Sophia identified her disability as both a primary and secondary identity. She explained:

It is something that I have learned to closely identify with but it's something that I also have a, a very superficial version that I like put out to the world and so when people look at me they only see that, like oh I have ADHD, just like that flippant attitude towards it that is kind of a mask for myself, but there is a huge part of it that I've learned to identify myself as.

Sophia saw her disabilities as having a significant impact on the way that she learns. She said she has to dedicate most of her time to being in class, working, and studying. She noted that she would typically study for several hours a night, often sacrificing sleep. In the classroom she said she needed to handwrite her notes and keep her phone in her bag to eliminate distraction, and utilize excessive note taking for studying, as well as to maintain concentration in the classroom.

Sophia also said she feels a strong tie to her ethnicity as a first-generation American from an Italian family. Sophia's grandparents brought her father and his siblings to the United States. Sophia noted that generational status was tied to her ethnic identity because of the hierarchical nature of her family, the central role that her grandmother plays in her family, as well as her own strong relationship to her grandmother. Sophia also grew up in a traditional Italian Catholic home and was involved in her church. As a result, she saw Catholicism as being ingrained into her and as a factor that shapes the way in which she sees the world.

Identities like race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and national origin were less salient for Sophia. In the classroom context, she noted that she has worked to understand issues related to race and ethnicity that are different from her own experiences. She said she does not talk about religion because of negative experiences she has had with talking about the topic. Sophia initially identified strongly with her gender, partly because she's received messages through her life that girls do not belong in the sciences. Near to the end of the study, Sophia felt as though this identity had lessened in saliency for her, partly because so many of the people she was around in her schooling and internships were women.

Sophia also identified strongly with her education and saw her goal of getting into professional school as something that had shaped everything that she had been doing on a daily basis. Sophia will be the first woman in her family to get a degree. She said that her grandmother's expectations for her success and experience of coming from nothing were part of the motivation that drove her to pursue her educational goals. She explained:

> Knowing that my grandmother worked her butt off to make sure we had enough, it definitely gives me motivation that is for sure. It gives me maybe that little extra umf of motivation . . . to keep me up at 3:00 a.m. four nights in a row.

Motivation and dedication were themes that surfaced throughout Sophia's narrative. She had very specific goals set for herself and saw many of her identities as motivators for achieving those goals. She was also very aware of how her disabilities might be viewed by others and as a result did not outwardly identify with them as much as she did inwardly. For example, she noted her flippant attitude toward her disability

that served as a mask for herself even though disability was a deeper identity. Also apparent in Sophia's narrative were the significant ways in which her disabilities shaped the way that she approached her studies and her coursework, even though she was often not utilizing her formal accommodations.

Zoe

Disability: "Chemo-brain", ADHD, depression, anxiety

Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation: Caucasian

Gender identity: Female

Other identities relevant to this study: None specified

Pronouns: She/her

Zoe was a junior in a humanities major and a transfer student from an out-of-state university. Zoe had her first bone marrow transplant when she was a senior in high school but said in general that she did well academically, recalling that she never got lower than a B and rarely had to study for school. After transitioning to college, Zoe struggled academically and was put on probation after her first semester. She continued on into her sophomore year and ended up having to withdraw from all of her courses in the spring semester. Not only had Zoe previously had a bone marrow transplant, but she had also had chemo and radiation treatment. At that point, Zoe recalled, "I kind of accepted the fact that, okay, I had chemo and radiation and everything so I was like, 'okay, my brain has totally changed,' so I got a psych eval, the whole six-hour thing."

Zoe's evaluation revealed that she had ADHD. Zoe noted that her "ADHD tendencies," like being loud and disruptive, were likely overlooked in high school because she did well academically. She also learned that her ADHD had likely been

amplified by her chemo and radiation treatments. After her diagnosis, Zoe registered

with the disability office and began to "get everything under control." She was

diagnosed with anxiety and depression and also showed signs of PTSD. At the time of

her interview, Zoe had been back on campus for her second consecutive semester since

her leave. After coming back in the fall and registering with the disability office and

getting supports put into place, Zoe made the Dean's List.

     Zoe's undiagnosed disabilities and lack of disability accommodations caused her

to struggle early on in college. Zoe gave an example of her struggles by discussing a

college chemistry course that she took. Even though she had done well in a high school

chemistry and had helped other students, she failed her college chemistry course twice

because she struggled so much to grasp the material. Her depression also started to kick

in because she could not understand why she struggled so much to keep up with the

course content. She had trouble paying attention in class and would move around a lot

without realizing what she was doing. She said she would sometimes get reprimanded by

her instructors for this behavior.

     Zoe described one of her disabilities, "chemo brain," by saying:

     It's almost like a fog . . . I forget normal words, just an average normal word.

     People are like, "oh I do that all the time," and I'm like, "you probably do but it's

     different" . . . I can be halfway through a sentence and totaly forget what we were

     even talking about. I can be in class and we can have a discussion about an

     assignment and after that class I can totally forget the discussion even happened.

     Zoe struggled to describe her depression but noted that it sometimes physically

hurts and affects her ability to do even simple things like taking a shower, much less go

to class. She described her anxiety as being akin to having her insides in a "paint shaker," especially when she is having a panic attack. With regard to her ADHD, she said:

> It's like I have ping pong balls in my head that are going back and forth . . . those are my thoughts and I'm just trying to grab on to one, that's all I'm trying to do is grab onto one. Or I'm trying to just calm them down and that's what my medication does, it takes those ping pong balls and just kind of holds them steady so I can organize a little bit, otherwise I have no filter in my brain and what's going on.

Zoe said her disabilities in general make her anxious during class. She worries that she will get distracted and that others will know she is not paying attention. She said she becomes concerned that she will miss class because of a depressive episode or that she will have a panic attack in class or will burst into tears and no one will know how to respond. Thinking about all of those things has further affected her ability to stay focused in class. She noted "I get so focused on trying to be normal and trying to seem like I'm normal and just do what everybody else does."

Zoe said that one of her strengths is being open, especially when she is feeling anxious. She said she sometimes will tell other people that she is feeling anxious on a certain day and that is why she may be acting strangely and may get up and leave. She said this helps because then people know what to expect and she noted that it can sometimes open the door for others to discuss their own experiences. Zoe said she was trying to be more open about her disabilities in her classes but said it is much easier in her

smaller classes. She discussed an opportunity that she had in one of her classes to discuss her disabilities through a course assignment:

> I was never going to share [my disabilities] with anybody, I was never going to share that I've had bone marrow transplants, chemo brain, things like the depression stuff . . . . You try to deal with it away from everyone, so then you are the same, you're equal to everybody in the classroom. But in that class we talked so much about everybody's struggles . . . and I think that it helped to me to realize that it's not necessarily like a negative thing, it just changes my perspective a little bit.

Attendance polies have created some barriers for Zoe. She noted that attendance flexibility has been a hard accommodation to negotiate. Zoe explained that she thinks the invisible nature of her disability can make using her accommodations challenging. Zoe tries to be as open as she can, as early as she can, with her professors. She explained:

> I try to be very clear [that] this is just something I struggle with, which, I know it seems so weird but the chemo brain is so real. It's hard because I got it when I was like 17 when my brain was developing so as normal as I can seem, I still have these bouts where I just kind of blank. So I think just being open from the beginning is just really important.

Zoe noted that she thinks her professors do not always know how to respond to the information so she tries not to take it personally if they respond in a way that feels like they are brushing her off. She said that disclosure has made it easier in her classes though, because then if something happens, it does not come out of the blue.

With regard to her identities, Zoe positioned disability close to her core because she has been dealing with her disabilities for 7 years and has been sick for much of that time. She explained that her disabilities have affected her time in college, which is also something that is core to herself. Christian values, being heterosexual with a boyfriend of several years, and being White with strong Norwegian heritage were also core to her identity. Zoe noted that her ADHD sometimes has caused people to view her as obnoxious because she has a hard time filtering what she says. She also used the word "sick" to indicate that this is how she thinks others see her due to her other disabilities. She went on to say:

> That's another reason why I don't want to tell people, or that I'm hesitant to, because then it's almost like in their head they push you into a category. I mean, they don't like try, I just think it's a subconscious thing for some reason. Well it's that stigma, you know? It's just that annoying stigma. It's like, "oh you have anxiety and depression? Oh you must be such a bummer of a person." Or it's like, "you must be super emotional."

Zoe said she has also gotten sick more easily as a result of her disabilities. During the semester in which this study took place, Zoe fell ill during midterms and had to be hospitalized for 4 days. She was also in the process of transitioning providers and medications. She said that most of her professors were good about allowing her to make up her work, which was a relief because her experiences have not always gone so smoothly in the past.

Zoe's narrative highlights her struggle with wanting to be open about her disabilities but also feeling a certain level of stigma about how others would perceive her.

Similar to a few of the other participants, the layering of Zoe's disabilities, as well as the numerous ways in which they affected her sometimes led her to think that others might mischaracterize her actions in the classroom. Zoe indicated that she did see a significant benefit in being open about her disabilities and also wanted to be able to open the door for others to share information about themselves and their struggles with her.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to provide context to the experiences and identities of each of the 11 participants who completed all parts of this study. The purpose of these narratives was to develop a brief snapshot of who these participants were as people, to capture how they understood their disabilities and conceptualized their identities, and to provide space for their individual stories of triumphs and challenges in their undergraduate education so far. Since this study spanned the length of approximately 4 months, these narratives were also intended to capture instances in which participants' thinking and understanding of their experiences changed over time, thus providing a deeper understanding about the extent to which they saw their experiences and identities as relatively fixed or fluid. The next chapter will look at themes that emerged across these individual narratives and will summarize broader findings of this study.

Chapter V

Findings: Overarching Themes

This chapter outlines the overarching themes that surfaced across individual participant interviews. Although participants' experiences, disabilities, and conceptualizations of identities varied widely from one to another, common threads ran across the stories and insights that they shared.

Saliency of Disability and Other Identities in the Classroom

Through the first research question, I sought to understand, how, if at all, students' disabilities and other social identities are salient to them in postsecondary classroom environments. The following themes surfaced in how participants conceptualized their identities and disabilities and how this conceptualization and saliency changed in the classroom environment.

Relevance of Identity

To a large extent, participants described salient identities as being those that were continuously relevant to their everyday lives and across various environments and contexts. Salient or primary identities tended to be those that participants had to think about on a daily basis, those that influenced their course and school work, and those that broadly shaped who participants were as people. Alex explained:

[The] main ones I put down, I have non-binary, transgender, activists, gay, mentally disabled, and I think that all of those things are things that I think about and deal with a lot in my day-to-day life and they're things that I'm constantly like engaging with and I surround myself with people who a lot of times also fit those labels because they are people whose life experiences are similar to mine and it's

like a lot of how, how I see myself, as like things that are really important to me

to the define about myself, that I feel like there's a claim I'm making.

Maddox also shared:

The things that I identify with that feel personal to me are these things that are

struggles. But also these are other things about me that are a part of my identity

and are the way that people perceive me and treat me that I feel are really

necessary for me to always be like, "this is a part of me that I can't remove this

thing from me and that this is going to change the way that I get to navigate this

world."

For some participants, primary saliency of identity was also affected by familial

heritage, such as their ethnicity, which was salient for a number of participants in this

study, including Cameron, Hannah, Zoe, Sophia, Karl, Jonathan, and Maddox. Similarly,

some participants associated values or characteristics that were important to themselves

or their families as core to their identity. Two of the most common examples associated

with characteristics and values included education and political positionality or

involvement. For other participants, the extent to which they saw an identity as

permanent or changing impacted the extent to which it was salient. For example, Hannah

explained how she thought about the saliency of different aspects of her identity:

[Primary identities] are things that I can't change . . . they are out of my control . .

. the secondary ones are more things that I have in my life but they're just

secondary, like I identify with where I go to school, the people that I'm friends

with, and who I associate with, and what I do for work, things like that are just

secondary things that are part of my life but that don't define me as much like

being adopted. That's always going to be a thing for me, that can't change.

Participants spoke about secondary identities as being those that did not come up

in conversation on a daily basis or did not seem to have an everyday impact on how they

experienced the world around them, even though the identities may at times shape their

views. For example, Louisa explained:

I put the ones on the outside of the ring that, I don't necessarily want to say I don't

care about, but just really don't feel they're important when I'm out in public.

When I'm out in public I'm not like, "oh my family is from here so this is really is

important for everyone to know," so I don't think that really matters.

Alex also described:

With that respect in the second circle, I picked things that are really influential

about me but they're not things that I tend to engage with a lot so like things like

Whiteness, I live in Minnesota, I don't have to engage in with that very often . . .

or being like atheist, I don't talk about that a lot but it affects how I view the world

Several participants, including Louisa, Karl, Maddox, Sophia, Alex, Gabrielle,

Lauren, Kara, and Quinn, discussed the ways in which their identities shifted in saliency

in the classroom, specifically in relation to the course content. In some cases, identities

became less salient because other students in the course had similar identities to

themselves or they believed their identities were respected by others in the classroom

space. For example, Quinn noted that their gender identity and sexual orientation

sometimes felt less significant in gender studies classes. Conversely, some participants

indicated that identities became more salient in courses where their identities were not

represented, or were not as respected. Maddox explained:

> I think when things are brought up that directly challenge [my identities] then that
>
> becomes a lot more personal, and then I'm like, "okay, this is very, this is core to
>
> me, I just may not have otherwise thought so because the people I surround
>
> myself with and the people I interact with—I don't feel like that's a problem."

Other participants felt as though identities were more likely to become salient if a

specific topic or issue was raised, such as topics related to socioeconomic status, race, or

ethnicity. For Hannah, identities stayed relatively static regardless of the context. In one

of her journal entries, Hannah wrote:

> I still believe that the location of the identities on the first model are in the exact
>
> same place as the current model. I kept them the same because the class does not
>
> change who I am. It doesn't change my primary identities nor my secondary
>
> identities. Being in the statistics class does not change that I have a learning
>
> disability. As I said, my primary identities are who I am and they will continually
>
> define me and my experiences throughout the rest of my life. For example, I am
>
> always going to be an adopted Chinese woman. My core values and intellect will
>
> always be a part of me too.

The theme of relevancy was consistent both in how participants viewed their

identities generally and also how they understood their identities in the classroom. For

the most part participants did indicate that the saliency of their identities shifted in some

way in the context of the classroom. The most common reasons that participants

indicated this shifting was due to relevancy of their identity to the course content or the

extent to which their identities were privileged or marginalized in the classroom environment.

Identities of Difference

Closely related to the theme of relevance of identity was a theme of identities of difference. Participants with social identities that could be considered marginalized, such as being underrepresented by race or sexual orientation, or noticeably different from their peers, discussed the way in which this identity was salient to them in the classroom environment with a relatively high frequency. For example, gender identity was often noted as a salient identity, by participants who identified as transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, or female. Gabrielle, Lauren, Alex, Hannah, Zoe, Sophia, Kara, and Quinn all discussed ways in which gender identity was salient to them and their experiences in school. In the classroom context, participants who identified as Transgender, nonbinary, and genderfluid gave examples of being misgendered, having their preferred pronouns ignored, and of times in which course content was only presented from a binary (male/female) frame.

A few of the female-identified participants discussed different levels of participation of students based on their gender and instances in which they felt their behavior or appearance was stereotyped by others based on their gender identity. Zoe described:

> [In this group project] I'm like "we need to get our shit together," you know, "this isn't okay," and in back of my mind I'm like, "okay I'm just the bitch getting everyone together or being over-dramatic about this and that," which I feel like, if it was a guy, people would be more scared instead of annoyed. So I definitely am

aware of that too . . . sometimes I try to not take charge as much just for that reason.

As noted in their personal narratives, Lauren and Gabrielle also discussed the relationship between their disabilities to gender. Both participants noted that they have experienced feelings of being stereotyped or feeling objectified because of their gender identity. These experiences sometimes led them to question the reality of their disability and at times exacerbated symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Sexual orientation was noted as salient by several participants, primarily those whose sexual orientation was underrepresented, including Alex, Maddox, Lauren, Kara, and Quinn. Two participants who identified as straight and heterosexual, Zoe and Karl, also put sexual orientation as primary identities in relationship to choosing their partners. Participants less often cited their sexual orientation as salient in the classroom unless it came up in class discussion and primarily described sexual orientation as an identity affecting who their partners were and who they surrounded themselves with, as well as how others read and perceive them.

Race was also salient for some of the participants, including Cameron, Maddox, Hannah, and Lauren. Cameron, Maddox, and Hannah were racially underrepresented at the university in which this study was conducted. The three of them discussed ways in which race affected how they were perceived by others, including as having a special advantage, as described by Cameron, or being perceived as an international student, as described by Hannah. Maddox described the way in which being light skinned and passing as White can sometimes change their positionality and how they are read by others. This sentiment was also expressed by Karl, who discussed that the way in which

he dressed and his appearance in class often influenced how his race was read by other students. Participants also believed that how their race was viewed by others affected how they experienced the classroom environment. Hannah gave an example of how race and racial makeup of the class has sometime impacted her participation:

> I was in a class that was maybe 40 people or so and it was like mostly White people and very few minorities. And we'd always have discussions about race and stuff and it was just, I don't know how to say it, it was just White people talking about minorities and race when there weren't really that many in the room and so I felt uncomfortable in that situation.

Hannah noted that she was uncomfortable because it seemed as though the class was talking about people like herself who were not actively involved in the conversation, and in some cases who were not even represented in the classroom.

For some of the White participants in this study, race became more salient in the classroom when the topic was focused on race. Some of the students commented that they were sometimes concerned about saying the wrong thing in these classroom conversations or that these conversations enhanced their openness and understanding of where other students were coming from, as well as their ability to recognize aspects of privilege that they were experiencing related to their race. In general, race did not come out as a salient or primary identity outside of these classroom contexts for the White participants in this study, with the exceptions of Zoe and Lauren. Lauren explained:

> Of course my gender is disadvantaged in certain ways too, but things that I never really thought about [for example] being followed around in a store, that experience has never happened to me. And all these other negative experiences

that have never happened to me because of my race both makes it understandable

why it wouldn't be salient and to me when I was a little kid, but being who I am

now, being involved in social justice, has forced me to think about that.

Other identities like socioeconomic status surfaced for Maddox and Quinn.

Maddox gave an example of a class in which people brought food to each session, which

provided relief to them because it meant that they did not have to buy food to eat later.

On the flip side, though, they expressed concern about how they would cover food costs

when it came to their turn to bring food for the class. Other participants tended to talk

about socioeconomic status as a means for being able to access education, health care,

and the treatment that they needed to maintain their health and disability.

Stereotyping, Tokenism, and Bias. Several participants with underrepresented

and marginalized identities, most specifically race, gender identity, and sexual

orientation, discussed at least one instance of stereotyping, tokenism, or bias in the

classroom or in the general campus environment. Instances of stereotyping and tokenism

surfaced in comments made directly to the participants by the instructor or classmates, in

general comments that were overheard or spoken directly in the lecture or discussion, in

the framing of the course content, or in interpersonal interactions. Stereotypes and

instances of tokenism experienced by participants were often based on others' visual

perception of participants' identity, such as their perceived race, national origin, gender,

or sexual orientation. Sometimes the instances of stereotyping and tokenism were based

on identity associations with participants' major, which was the case for a few of the

participants with social sciences majors. Other times these instances were based on

identity-related information that the student shared with the instructor or the students in the class.

Maddox wrote about one such experience in a discussion after watching a video in one of their cultural studies classes:

> The open discussion turned to being actively transphobic, which a few classmates and I tried to actively correct. The professor, who was complicit in this transphobia, defended transphobic comments. Once I disclosed that I was trans, I was now the token trans student with many questions and sentiments directed toward me. I could barely sit through the rest of class.

The feeling of being stereotyped was also a theme related to disability identity that surfaced both in students' experiences disclosing a disability to their instructors or peers, or overhearing disability-related stereotypes or ablest language and comments, such as "I'm so ADD" or "she's a crazy bitch."

Instances of stereotyping affected participants feeling of safety, sense of belonging, and extent to which they participated in the classroom. These instances also affected their perception of the extent to which they were deserving of academic success and the degree to which they perceived that others were judging them as being incompetent, incapable, and even biased in the perspectives they brought to the course content and discussion. Sometimes even the fear of being stereotyped or tokenized resulted in participants not feeling comfortable enough to speak up or participate in class.

Again, Hannah explained how other people's perceptions of her race and national origin, as well as negative comments about international students, have affected her engagement in the classroom:

I think about it a lot . . . I hear people say [negative comments] and then I just

think about if they think that about me when I'm in a class with them and if they

think I am not as good as them.

She continued:

Sometimes I don't want to say anything. I don't really like speaking class anyway,

or being called on, but if I wanted to I feel like sometimes I don't just because I'd

rather avoid saying something that other people are going to not understand

anyway . . . it's frustrating if I do say something and they don't understand, then

I'm not able to clarify it . . . so I just don't say anything.

Alex described that sometimes their willingness to engage or check out of the

class completely can have to do with their own energy level, as well as the ways in which

the question is being asked:

I have a lot of empathy and I understand someone who hasn't encountered this

before who is like, "What? Tell me more, I'm so confused, I'm so curious." I

usually have enough energy that I can deal with those kind of inquiries because

I've gotten good at my stock answers and I've gotten good at responding to them.

Sometimes it gets exhausting and I think that sometimes contributes to me

skipping class because I'm like, "oh God we're talking about elective cosmetic

surgery today in class, I don't want to touch that with a ten-foot pole because

everyone's going to be asking me about trans surgery and I don't want to do that."

So I just skip.

They continued:

A lot of times I just don't even open that can of worms and I go in closeted and if

the teacher maybe doesn't check the majors or doesn't initiate a lot of discussion

and I can just kind of just sit there and listen to other people talk, which is less

engaging and less helpful to me as a student, but sometimes I have to do that.

As a consequence of stereotyping and tokenism, participants also indicated that

these experiences made them feel invisible or voiceless. Alex described:

I've had experiences where I feel like the person who's teaching doesn't think that

there are people like me in the class. They'll say something broadly about like,

"trans people" or "people who take this medicine" or "gay people" . . . they just

say that like there isn't anyone there. I guess it's weirdly alienating because all the

sudden it's like, "dude does everyone else in this class also assume that there's no

one there like that?"

Cameron discussed a course in which he questioned whether he was being graded

differently by the instructor than he was by the TA. Cameron said that he would get

higher grades on his assignments, which were graded by a young minority woman, and

lower grades on his tests, which were graded by his White male teacher. Cameron noted

that it may have been the way that he answered the questions on the exam or the way that

the exams were written that made them more difficult. He said it was hard for him to tell

whether there were other factors related to bias or identity at play in that situation. In

general, he commented that he tries not to think a lot about others' perceptions of him or

whether he has experienced instances of bias, noting:

It's one of those things that could drive someone to be paranoid because I can't

really say. I think it's formed more so in individuals' perceptions not institutions'

perceptions, but it's the collective assumptions of particularly White people. But I don't know because I'm not White.

Identities that were different from their peers, especially those that were underrepresented or marginalized, tended to be more salient to participants in general and also within the classroom environment. Many participants with underrepresented identities also experienced instances of stereotyping, tokenism, and bias, which at times reinforced the salience of an identity and also negatively affected their sense of belonging and engagement in the course.

Saliency of Disability

Since disability was the central identity that was common across all participants and was a central focus of this study, I have broken out findings about disability saliency into a section apart from other aspects of identity. The extent to which disability was a salient identity varied widely across participants in this study. Sometimes the saliency of a disability was associated with the degree to which participants believed that their disability affected them, such as how it shaped their thinking or behavior. For example, Sophia wrote in a journal entry:

> These disabilities, my ADHD and dyslexia, are part of how I define myself. They are as much a part of my primary identification as my gender or name. I think the reason my disabilities are so central to my self-identification is because of [how] clearly they explain the way my brain works. Before I was diagnosed I thought my failures or short comings to be a result of laziness or bad luck. But now that I can fully understand the mis-connections in my brain that make me the way I am,

I can use those so called disabilities to my advantage to become the best version
of myself.

For other participants, such as Gabrielle, more specific aspects of their disabilities
were salient to them because of the extent to which the disability was noticeable to others
and how it affected their lives. Gabrielle identified "anxiety" as core aspect of her
identity during her first interview, but not depression or disability as broad category. She
explained:

More so than depression, anxiety affects my social relationships sometimes.
Especially with terrible paranoia that sometimes I feel like that I unleash on to
friends and that causes us to drift. Or where it's overwhelming to them and that in
turn upsets me a lot so I found that to be more of my core self.

Similarly, Lauren discussed the saliency of her specific disability versus disability
as a broad identity:

I don't necessarily identify as disabled . . . I don't think other people would
perceive me as disabled either. And depression and anxiety . . . impede my day-
to-day existence. [I identified] depressed in primary identities. This is because I
didn't want to put down disability because . . . I feel more depressed than I do
disabled.

For many participants, the extent to which they believed they were impacted by
their disability affected the extent to which it was a salient identity. For other
participants, the perceptions of their classmates about their disability, or whether or not
their peers were aware of their disability, shaped the extent to which it was a salient
identity in the classroom.

Invisibility/Visibility of Disability. As reflected in the previous quote by

Lauren, the invisible nature of disability was at times a related theme to saliency for some

participants. For some participants this invisibility affected the extent to which they

experienced this identity as salient to their internal selves or more broadly as an identity

that they would speak about to others. For some participants, such as Jonathan, Cameron,

and Hannah, the aspect of disability not being an identity that they regularly shared

seemed to be part of what ultimately made disability less salient and close to their core.

Hannah said of her disability:

> I don't think that affects me at all. Nobody knows that about me unless I tell
>
> them, and they don't know who my family is and who my friends are, it's not like
>
> anyone's saying anything about that at all and the class has nothing to do with it.
>
> The less apparent nature of participants' disabilities also at times changed the way

they thought peers perceived them. A few participants discussed how people might make

assumptions or misunderstand their actions because their disability is not apparent.

Jonathan explained:

> Nobody really knows what I've been through and at times this is difficult in class
>
> because I'm still learning how to socialize and communicate, how to think
>
> critically again, be direct, and learn how to live with my disabilities. People see
>
> me as a normal person, and when things go wrong I tend to get weird looks or
>
> ignored.

Zoe shared a related sentiment:

We are given tasks to finish as a class and I find myself getting extremely anxious

while others are comfortably pitching ideas and creating strategies. We also do

many group projects and I am always forgetting due dates and have an extremely difficult time remembering when meetings are and what exactly we are supposed to be doing. This definitely creates the perception that I am lazy, forgetful, or spacey. It is frustrating because I am trying my hardest, but I have a tougher time being completely organized and remembering things.

Openness and Disability Stigma. While some participants noted that they were very open about their disabilities with their friends but were less likely to be open about it with their peers. Most participants said that they did not bring up their disabilities in their classes unless it was directly related to the course content. Similarly, most participants also did not share specific information about their disability with their instructor, if they shared their accommodation letter or disability at all. A number of participants, including Karl, Alex, Zoe, and Cameron, noted the ongoing stigma of having a disability as a part of why they often choose not to tell others about their disabilities.

Stigma about having a disability surfaced in a variety of different ways through the participant narratives. Sometimes stigma was associated with how participants thought others would perceive them or their disability. Karl noted that others might think he is lazy due to his ADHD, or that people may think he is crazy due to his symptoms of Bipolar. Similarly, Hannah discussed concern that others would think she was stupid if she were to disclose her learning disability. Zoe talked further about how other's perceptions affect her in group work, noting, "I feel like they don't want to work with me because they know I have a bad memory or if I do get sick."

Gabrielle, Zoe, Karl, and Alex discussed concern about how others may see them as faking their disability or as getting a special advantage. Alex explained:

When you have someone who's perceiving you in a negative way who thinks that

you are lying or that you are trying to game system . . . that's something that has

definitely been a big struggle for me. The occasional times where someone is

like, "this person is lazy" or "this person is a liar," and trying to find validation

that I'm not those things suddenly becomes like a big deal. That can be really

exhausting on top of everything else and unfortunately a lot of times . . . being

mentally disabled looks like laziness.

Some participants also discussed past or current instances in which they

questioned whether they were being affected by their disability or whether they were not

trying hard enough. Karl noted:

Being able to differentiate . . . between disability and just sucking at something is

really hard. That's something that I really struggle with. And society telling me

that you're just not working very hard. But at the same time, I hate when people

don't work hard so it's very conflicting. And I think it's led to a lot of self-hatred.

In some cases, participants' perceptions of their work ethic or capabilities

changed over time as they learned more about their disabilities, became more familiar

with the course content, or recognized that they were not the only ones struggling. For

example, Jonathan journaled:

When we are asked to solve a problem on our own or with our neighbors I feel

not as intelligent or as able as other students who are able to figure out the

problems right away, but I have come to realize that I am not the only one who is

struggling because it is a lot of information to comprehend in a limited amount of

time.

A few participants, including Zoe and Alex, noted that they were actively working to be open with their peers about their disabilities so that their peers would have a better understanding of what was going on if they missed a group meeting or forgot something. Louisa described her experience of discussing disability with her peers:

> I have learned once you open that dialogue, everyone is very quick to share things and a lot more people have disabilities that they haven't registered . . . or that you are completely unaware of. So even though it's not something that you know about people, there's a lot more people out there that have those things that you don't know about.

Disability and Learning. No matter how participants conceptualized the saliency of their disabilities, all participants discussed ways in which their disabilities affected them in their learning or in the classroom environment. Participants' disabilities affected them in a wide variety of ways, including the extent to which they are able to participate in and attend class, track and remember information from readings and lecture, complete certain kinds of tasks and activities, perform on exams or assignments, and the time they need to devote to learning the material and meeting course requirements outside of class. Although Cameron, Lauren, and Hannah discussed ways in which their disabilities affected their learning, they differed from other participants in the extent to which they believed their disability affected the way that they learn. Hannah indicated that her disability more so affects her learning style and Lauren said that her depression and anxiety can sometimes affect her course performance. As mentioned in his narrative, Cameron said that his identities generally did not affect the way he learns, noting that his love of learning and identities reinforce his learning.

This section focused on participants' collective experiences and conceptualizations of identity, including identity salience, the extent to which participants associated with their disability, and the ways in which participants' identities influenced their classroom experiences. The findings highlighted in this section reveal that salience is often related to how relevant the identity was to participants across various contexts of their life and that salience of certain identities change for some participants when in the classroom environment. Participants with underrepresented or marginalized identities often experienced greater saliency of that particular identity in the classroom environment than those whose identities were well-represented or privileged. Almost all participants with marginalized identities had experienced instances of tokenism, stereotyping, and bias. Although participants varied in the extent to which they believed their identities, especially their disabilities, impacted their learning, finding revealed that all participants were affected by their disabilities in some way when in the classroom environment.

Practices and Factors That Support Learning

Guided by the second research question of this study, I sought to understand what practices and factors students perceived as supporting their learning. To explore this research question, I asked students to tell me about experiences in courses in which they were able to succeed and thrive, provide examples of how their learning has been supported in their classes, and discuss positive experiences in their courses. The following sections presents the prominent themes that surfaced with regard to factors and practices that students believed supported their learning.

Instructor Role

The role of the instructor in promoting success in the classroom was a very

significant theme within this study. Participants identified several ways in which the

instructor supported their learning in addition to how they structured the course more

broadly. The personality of the instructor, including enthusiasm for the subject matter,

the humor integrated into the class session, and dynamic teaching style, influenced

students' learning. Outside of innate characteristics, participants identified several ways

in which instructors demonstrated a commitment and interest in their learning, as well as

a desire to see them succeed.

Showing a Human Side. The extent to which instructors showed a human side

of themselves, such as anecdotes from their personal lives or vulnerability, was a

prominent theme within the instructor role. A number of participants, including Louisa,

Gabrielle, Lauren, Cameron, and Kara, discussed how instructors sharing personal

information and expressing vulnerability improved the climate and community of the

classroom. Cameron shared:

> One of my instructors even told us about his story of being a gay male on the first
>
> day of class, and he told us about how it was difficult for him to come out when
>
> he was 18 to his family.

Cameron continued, "I guess it just made me see my instructors as humans, and people

that live dynamic lives, and they're still able to do good things in spite of their setbacks."

Tara explained that instructors' willingness to share information about

themselves, especially in courses where the students are expected to discuss and share

things about themselves, helps her feel more comfortable when engaging and discussing

things candidly. Similarly, Lauren noted that instructors' vulnerability helps set the tone of a course and stated that it is "key for like growing and learning together in that classroom setting."

Investment in student well-being. Several students discussed the ways in which their instructors demonstrated understanding about their personal circumstances, accommodations, and struggles in and outside of the classroom. Zoe, Alex, and Sophia noted that they were motivated to do well in the class when instructors conveyed understanding for their situations and their need for accommodations or flexibility in meeting course expectations. Sophia described an example of an instructor's understanding in one of her journal entries, explaining:

> I was expecting to have to "go to war" so to speak to get help and understanding. Instead, I experienced nothing but compassion and understanding. See[ing] how devoted that teacher was to helping me succeed, despite my disability, made me want to try harder in the course.

Alex provided an example of a language course in which they had struggled to attend due to mental health episodes. They described an instance in which the instructor told them their language skills were strong and they enjoyed having them in class. Alex commented:

> This really made me feel encouraged to continue making it to her classes, because she acknowledged how well I was doing. I have previously felt very welcomed by professors who make an effort to form a personal connection. I feel like I often prioritize or find myself trying harder to be present and active in professors'

classes when they put that time in to have a conversation with me or thank me for attending. It makes me feel like I have a stake in performing and doing well.

Examples of how instructors demonstrated understanding to participants included direct communication by email or in person, willingness to provide information about the content that was missed or that the student was struggling with, inviting them to have a conversation during office hours, and providing some flexibility if they needed to miss a class session or were delayed on a deadline. Louisa discussed how she sees her role versus the instructor's in initiating communication:

> Obviously if they notice things and think they should step in, that's great, but I don't expect my professors to come up to me and go, "how's your disability going, are you doing okay, do you want me to do anything for you, do you need extra time on this?" I think that's my responsibility. I think their receptiveness to the communication would be the bigger part.

Several participants commented on the important role that their instructors have played in helping them find resources, as well as conveying that they were receptive to communication about students' disability and other course struggles. Karl, Sophia, Alex each discussed situations in which they were directed to resources or referred for supports by their instructors or a teaching assistants for issues that they were struggling with related to mental health, finding housing, and past trauma. Karl spoke many times about the impact that one of his language instructors had on him and others by discussing mental health-related resources in the PowerPoint on the first day of class, as well as by putting the information on their course homepage. Gabrielle and Zoe also recalled times in which their instructors clearly communicated that students should reach out to them if

they found themselves struggling with mental health or other issues. Several participants also noted the impact of the instructor reading and discussing the syllabus statement on disability and/or mental health on their willingness to share their letter, as well as to discuss accommodations or learning needs with their instructor.

Commitment to Student Learning. Investment in student learning was another significant subtheme related to instructors' roles in supporting learning. Participants discussed the ways in which instructors articulated their expectations for students' success, their willingness to provide resources, and encouragement of the students to utilize their office hours. Sophia provided an example of how one of her instructors promoted student success by discussing the mutual roles of instructors and students in ensuring success in the course. Sophia explained:

> Right off the bat, he made it clear that he wants to get to know all of us but he is only going to do his half. We have to come meet him. And there was an expectation set that he's going to provide us with all the tools that we need to succeed, but we have to use the tools. And it was definitely like, "I am here to help you but you have to try," which I think is how an academic setting should be.

Cameron and Lauren provided examples of instructors actively seeking information about students on the first day of class to gain a better understanding of who the students were and what their needs were. Examples of the information gathered by the instructor included whether or not the student had a self-defined disability, preferred pronouns, information about their relationship with the topic in the class, and whether or not they had a family or were working multiple jobs. Cameron commented about a questionnaire that he was asked to fill out on the first day of a class, "it just helped me

feel like this instructor cares about my wellbeing and maybe understanding of, I guess, what I have to do for my life outside of school."

Other participants, such as Louisa and Karl, discussed instances in which the instructor sought out feedback from the class about their understanding of the content, pace of the lecture, and extent to which students felt prepared for upcoming exams. Louisa noted that she had an instructor who actually adjusted the format of an upcoming exam based on the feedback from the class about where they were in learning course content. Lauren described a course in which the instructor sought feedback from the students and subsequently made adjustment to the assignments and timeline to better suit the students' learning needs and pace. Lauren commented:

> I love classes where teachers are very responsive to their students' needs rather than lecturing students about what they should have expected from the class and that, "well, everybody's busy during this time of year, everybody's stressing out, I don't need to change anything about my class to fit my student's needs," which is very ablest [and assumes] that everybody can work in the same way and at the same rate.

Instructors promoting and encouraging use of their office hours surfaced within the theme of investment in well-being and student learning. Using office hours was a significant way that participants built relationships with their instructors, got to know them as people, checked their own understanding of the course contentment, and sought feedback on their performance and work. Karl commented:

I think all professors have office hours but that's the most important thing is going there and just talking to them because if you have a teacher that seems really intimidating it just makes them seem more human if you go talk to them.

Hannah also noted that visiting office hours and talking one on one with her instructors allowed her to get to know her professors and also gave her an opportunity to utilize her primary learning style to verbally process through information in a one-on-one setting.

Fostering Community

Classroom community was a significant theme in the factors and practices that students identified as supporting their learning. In addition to the instructor's role in creating a positive environment, participants discussed the importance of getting to know other students in class as a method to feel more acclimated to the environment and share more during the learning process. Jonathan noted the importance of having the opportunity to meet and work with other students in his classes:

For one, I think it relieves a lot of pressure, when you're around a lot of students, people don't know each other . . . it kind of breaks the ice for all students, you get to establish friendships.

Smaller, more intimate classes were favored by many participants, especially as they discussed courses that fostered community. Being in smaller discussion sections and breaking out into groups were examples of mechanisms used to create a smaller feel in a larger classroom environment. Maddox discussed a course in which they experienced community, intimacy, and vulnerability:

We acknowledge that that you can't remove yourself from the personal things that you're feeling and if you are having a bad day, that it's going to translate into

being in the classroom . . . . We all are expected to be invested in each other's

lives and be really well acquainted . . . we're [not] just a bunch of students

listening to the same professor . . . we're really all teaching together and building

this community. And that's probably the number one thing about what makes it

work well is that we're always heard, and we're always reassured, and we're

always validated, and we're always supporting each other with that in mind.

Some participants also discussed tools like group chats and message boards where

students could engage with each other in another way in or outside of class. Alex

discussed the benefits of a group chat in one of their classes, explaining:

Someone will say, "I'm feeling frustrated" and all of a sudden the other people in

the class see it and they're like, "here's a suggestion," or like "I'm sorry you feel

frustrated," or, "I'm listening to the fact that you're frustrated and I can help you

by doing XYZ," and making sure those support networks are in class and that

class isn't just some totally anonymous nebulous thing.

Alex provided another example of a course in which the instructor has set up a

group forum in the course Moodle site. Alex noted:

The person who's running [the class] right now has a forum on the Moodle for the

class . . . and you can write down your frustrations or your feelings. Or [post], "I

just found this really cool article, I'm excited." And having that sort of outlet

really helps because you don't feel like you have to keep your emotions to your

free time.

Gabrielle spoke to the downside of the group chat, noting that in one of her courses

students used Facebook as a group connecting space and she did not have an account.

Other participants provided examples of informal discussion spaces were also set up on their online course pages and platforms that all students could access.

Several participants also discussed the way in which the instructor fostered community by ensuring that they learned everyone's name, by sitting in the discussion space with the students instead of at the head of the classroom, by offering students opportunities to facilitate sessions, and by being open to students' ideas and comments instead of seeing themselves as the singular teacher. Hannah explained:

> From day one she set it up so everyone is equal in the room and it's about learning together and sharing ideas and exchanging ideas rather than her just telling us facts and we have to just put them on paper to get a good grade . . . I know I can always go to her and say an idea . . . she's open to learning stuff from us, she doesn't act like she knows everything and she's the best just because she's teaching the course . . . it's like everyone everyone's equal . . . it's all about the learning as a community.

Many participants discussed the important role of the instructor setting the tone and fostering space for community, as well as the role that other students played in supporting one another in their learning. Sometimes these actions or mechanisms of support were put in place by the instructor; for example, through providing opportunities for peer interaction and encouraging vulnerability among the students. Other times the students themselves put support mechanisms into place; for example, through the use of group chats.

Creating Opportunities for Peer Learning

Participants widely discussed the role that peer learning has had in their own ability to thrive and engage in their courses. Peer learning activities gave students the opportunity to bounce ideas off of one another to get feedback and constructive criticism before turning in their work to instructors, learn other ways of doing things or thinking about content, and hear different perspectives. Participants gave examples of peer review activities as well as class co-facilitation activities that helped foster peer learning. In co-facilitated activities, a small number of students determine the lesson and activities for the class session and facilitate to the greatest extent possible, with the instructor as a resource and support as needed. Other examples of peer learning included structured peer-led study sessions outside of class that relieved pressure for some because they were not working directly with an instructor or teaching assistant, but were instead able to engage with someone on a similar level.

Sophia described a formal peer learning session that was set up in conjunction with one of her classes and was facilitated by a former student of the course:

We would each go up to the board and explain how we did the problem and so it was a very interactive type of learning. And a lot of times I found there was one person in the group really understood it and then someone else would kind of understands it and there would always be someone in the group who really needed help really bad . . . . Doing a problem [and] talking about why this was the right way really helps everyone so the person that's really struggling gets to hear the people talking about it, the students that are doing okay get to reinforce their knowledge by teaching, and the students that are excelling get to lead the whole

process. So I think it was a really nice tool to use because we're all there, we're

all learning the same thing.

In many ways, the theme of fostering community and creating opportunities for

peer learning were very closely related to one another. Opportunities for peer learning

were important for building relationships with other students and also served as

mechanisms for reinforcing learning. Participants appreciated the opportunities that they

had to teach other students as well as receive feedback from their peers before they were

expected to demonstrate their learning more formally through assignments and exams.

Providing Space for Discussion and Interaction

A theme that was closely tied to fostering community and creating space for peer

learning was having space for discussion. Many participants indicated that discussion

was one of the ways that they learned from their peers and felt like they were part of a

community in the classroom. At the same time, having a positive classroom climate, a

"safe space," and feeling connected to peers was part of what made participants feel as

though they could participate in discussion. Several participants commented on the way

in which discussions made them feel more engaged and invested in the course content

and provided them with an opportunity to make the learning personal, consider

application to their own lives, or consider how the content applied to their discipline

more broadly. Several participants also commented that discussions helped them better

understand the material that they were reading for class, made them feel like the reading

was actually useful, and also encouraged them to complete the readings. Gabrielle noted:

It's nice to contribute and it's nice, when your peers speaking, to be able to have a

counter to them or agree with them as opposed to saying, I have no idea what

you're talking about, so it really does motivate me to do the work when we're discussing.

Alex and Cameron said that engaging in discussion helped them think about the topics being covered in their class more deeply and helps better prepare them for completing projects and papers. Alex explained, "I feel like it gets really rich ideas out there and it's easier to do things like write papers later and allows people to demonstrate an understanding of what's going on." Alex continued:

> People are going to say things [and I'll think] "oh that's kind of like this thing," and I keep notes and I write down like, this connected to this, so I can use that later. And I think it also just helps you figure out . . . if you're not quite understanding something and someone points out like, "oh this concept is happening right here you can see that happening in the show," that's really helpful.

Many participants appreciated having frequent opportunities to comment on and discuss information being covered in class. Gabrielle said of one of her English classes:

> You don't feel awkward speaking, whereas in some big lectures it kind of feels like you're on stage, or at least I feel that way, or doesn't feel like, "oh it's the biggest deal that you spoke," you're just adding to other people speaking.

Participants varied slightly on their preferred format for discussion and the kinds of benefits that can come from the various ways that instructors format discussion. Maddox described:

> Being able to break out into small groups at some point [is] always really good because if you're asked to participate in class, not everyone wants to participate in

front of everyone, but in a smaller group probably you're more likely to share how you're feeling.

Lauren said of one of her classes:

I really like larger group conversations just because it's a little bit more anonymous and you don't have to feel like you have to be talking all of the time. I'm the kind of person who likes to listen to what other people have to say and then raise my hand after I've thought a lot about what I'm going to say . . . . But she also switched that up with doing smaller group conversations, with doing another style that works really well for me which was writing out of responses to some prompt and then talking about it to give us some more time to kind of think out our responses, and she'd also have free writes, talking with partners, self-reflections . . . it was all discussion-based which was really great.

Several participants gave examples of the ways in which their instructors would promote interaction, engagement, or discussion, even in courses that were more lecture based. Examples provided by participants included the instructor bringing up a question that came up after class the week before or asking for any new questions that came up between the last class and the current session. Zoe gave the following example:

One of my professors in my journalism classes last semester would just put a picture up of somebody up who invented something and he would say "does anybody know who this is?" And even if no one knew who it was, he was like, "okay well someone just guess." And then even if they were totally wrong he was like trying to interact.

Gabrielle said of one of her instructors, "He'll stop sometimes in lecture and be like 'I feel like it's feeling rather dull here, does anyone want to make comments?'" She said that students did end up speaking throughout the semester and noted:

> There's this guy who doesn't even major in English and I guess he just he feels so inclined speak that he now has started speaking and that's pretty cool, even though what he says I don't usually agree with, but good for him. I just think it's cool that we feel closer . . . you notice when people don't go just because when you're there, a lot of them speak.

Several participants provided examples of the ways in which the instructor would create opportunities for students to engage and discuss, even in larger lecture courses. Participants indicated that these opportunities can help them feel more engaged in the class and encourage them to share their thoughts and interact when they feel comfortable. For other students, like Lauren, having different kinds of opportunities to participate, like writing her thoughts before speaking, provides the same benefit but a more comfortable way the engage.

Validating Identity and Bringing in Diverse Perspectives

For students who were underrepresented based on other aspects of their identity in addition to their disability, instructors' willingness to validate their experience was also highlighted as a practice that supported participants' learning. Lauren provided one such example when describing a course that she was taking during the semester in which this study occurred:

> She was validating us in what we were saying and validating us in front of the whole class . . . that was really helpful to make me think that was a safe space to

share my experiences. And I think that she also understood that queer voices in

that space are important to have so I think just her teaching methods made it very

clear that she valued students and what they had to say.

Maddox shared a similar sentiment about the power that validation of individuals'

identities and experiences can have, noting:

> To set the stage on the first day by explaining . . . these are the things that are not
>
> going to be tolerated in class and that there will be consequences and that we're
>
> prioritizing the voices of people that are coming from the identities that we're
>
> studying in this class and just in general listening to what marginalized identities
>
> have to say.

Several participants, including Louisa, Zoe, Maddox, Alex, Gabrielle, and Kara

discussed their opportunities to explore and discuss their disability or other identities in

their courses. Louisa discussed a paper that she wrote on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and

Zoe discussed an opportunity to discuss how her disabilities have shaped her leadership

style. Participants commented that these kinds of assignments gave them an opportunity

to look at their disabilities in a different way. For Louisa, looking at CFS from a research

standpoint allowed her to focus on understanding the disability as opposed to getting

stuck on how it would affect her specifically. For Zoe, exploring the effect of her

disabilities on her leadership style allowed her to see how her disabilities affect her

perspective instead of seeing them from a negative vantage point.

Alex and Maddox were both able to shape the topics of their senior thesis project

to integrate aspects of their own identity and commented on the personal significance that

they felt in being able to use their stories and narratives. Alex commented:

I'm writing from experience and I'm doing research that I didn't see . . . I didn't see my experience reflected in any of the critical writing on the topic. And positioning my own self in regards to that has been really really validating.

Other participants discussed the important role that hearing diverse perspectives from their peers or through videos, articles, or guest speakers. Hearing diverse perspectives not only broadened participants' understanding and perspective of the course content, but also provided the opportunity for many participants to see themselves reflected in the course content. Cameron discussed the importance of bringing in perspectives of communities of color into the content of his courses that focused on his field, especially because there were few students of color or perspectives of communities of color represented in the discipline. Lauren commented on how helpful it can be for instructors to bring in guest speakers who can speak and provide perspectives from identities or experiences that are otherwise not reflected by others in the class.

Application of Course Content

Being able to apply the course content to the real world and their future work was another theme that surfaced in factors and practices that supported participants' learning. The act of linking what was being learned to real-world examples and application helped participants understand how they might use the knowledge in a real-world context or how it might be useful to them at some point in the field. Hannah explained that real-world examples help her link the course content to everyday life and better understand how she could use the information. Hannah noted that these connections can sometimes be difficult to determine without the instructor making it clear in the course. Hands-on activities and opportunities to learn practical skills, such as labs, were also discussed by

several participants as being integral to their learning. Jonathan noted that lab courses that taught practical skills helped him think about how he would actually apply his learning to a future job. In describing what he found beneficial about this type of learning, Jonathan explained:

> You would be able to learn what you're actually going to do on the job . . . for instance, maybe instead of learning about, let's say plant anatomy or something, you would actually get hands-on with it . . . take a plant apart and learn the different pieces and mechanisms . . . more hands-on work, I feel like is one of the best ways to learn.

Several participants discussed the value of hands on learning and direct application of the course content to what they would be doing in their future career. Application of course content also helped participants put the content into a real life context and make sense of what they were learning as well as how they would use it in the future.

Providing Multiple Options

Providing multiple options was a significant theme that came up across participant interviews and included providing different options for engaging with materials and earning points, as well as having the material taught in different ways, and being flexible about making changes to aspects of the course. With regard to delivery of the course content, Louisa described the benefit of a health class in which the instructor used video lectures, news reports, and podcasts as different ways for students to learn the content and consider application to the healthcare field. Louisa commented that having these different avenues made it a lot easier for her to absorb the material.

Similarly, Sophia described science and chemistry courses in which her instructors posted supplemental readings, PowerPoints from other instructors, videos, and then had the students engage in different kinds of activities during labs. Even though much of the content was straight biological memorization, Sophia commented that these different ways of engaging with and learning the content provided different ways of explaining the material and addressed students' various learning styles and needs. In the context of math-based courses, Alex commented:

> A lot of times I'll get stuck on this one thing and then the numbers won't go in the right order and I'll be like stressed out . . . I think it's a lot about the teachers being willing to work with you and the teachers being able to show concepts in different ways.

With regard to having multiple options to earn points, Cameron described a course in which students were also able to earn points for electronically submitting answers to questions and turning in problem sets, as opposed to just getting graded on quizzes and tests. He commented:

> I think with my disability, whenever I know I'm going to be graded on something, my anxiety tends to sky rocket, and it helps to know that I won't be graded on something and I can get points just for showing up and trying my best to do the work.

Lauren discussed what she described as a rigorous course in which the instructor provided multiple ways for students to engage with each other and complete assignments, including through online discussion and assignment submission. Lauren commented that this format helped reduce her anxiety and almost felt like an accommodation, even

though it was just the way the class was structured. Kara shared a similar sentiment

about having online assignments in her class:

> We did a lot of online reflections, which I found helpful because we were able to
>
> step outside of the classroom and share opinions without the pressure [of] that
>
> immediate need to come up with an answer or something intelligent to say.
>
> Quinn discussed the role that demonstrating knowledge in a different way played

in their ability to be successful and thrive in a cultural studies course:

> I distinctly remember being really excited because not only was their papers but
>
> there were also artistic assignments, there was an option for people who weren't
>
> necessarily artistic or creative, they could do a paper still but I was able to make
>
> like a little picture book for one of my assignments and some did a canvas
>
> painting . . . and people got really creative with it and they really seemed to like it
>
> and I definitely did for sure.

Quinn noted that writing assignments tend to be the most difficult for them, which has

been a challenge because of how much writing is typically required for their courses. In

commenting about the relationship between the cultural studies course, their disability,

and ability to thrive, Quinn commented:

> I guess just the creative projects were really easy for me so I was able to be more
>
> successful with everything because I was able to balance having to write a ton of
>
> things while also being able to do do things expressively and creatively.
>
> Maddox discussed two class examples in which they were able to demonstrate

learning in different ways. In one example, they were able to write reflections that could

relate to a recent event, a film, or a personal experience, as long as it related to the course

topic. In the second example, they had the opportunity to do a creative interpretation of an autobiography that they had to read. They noted that the instructor gave a wide list of examples of what students could do to demonstrate their knowledge for this reflective assignment. Maddox noted that one of the risks they have seen in the two classes in which multiple options were given is that some students need more structure and information to understand what is expected of them and how they could demonstrate their learning. Maddox noted that in one class the instructor posted examples from previous students to give better guidance on what options students had with regard to format, as well as more concrete information about what was expected of them.

Making Information and Materials Available in Advance

Having resources available ahead of time, such as course lecture slides and readings, was discussed as a helpful practice that directly reduced disability-related barriers. Sophia noted that many of her instructors would make readings and course notes ahead of time, which meant that she did not have to request them early or ask for a formal accommodation because she could convert them to an alternative format on her own. If she found that paying attention was challenging for her, she could also go back and access the course notes or presentation for that day.

Louisa also discussed how valuable having the course materials available on the course site or online platform was so that she could access them after class if she needed to. She commented that this was especially helpful if she needed to be absent for disability-related reasons and needed to catch up on the course material. Sophia also noted that materials posted online were helpful in case she lost focus during lecture so that she could go back and look at the materials later. Zoe commented that she makes

use of lecture slides that are posted prior to class while she is actually in class so that she can follow along and stay focused, which she noted was particularly helpful for her in large lecture classes. Sophia gave an example of how one of her instructors also made recordings available:

> My Bio Chem course, that was another one where there was, a lot of it was drawing structures so it was kind of hard to print out a PowerPoint so he would record his lectures and make them available to us to review so that even if we had to go back over the information . . . we have that resource available to us.

About his recorded lectures, she added:

> It was just audio . . . which was part of his way of making sure we came to lecture. But it was really nice for me because I could go over my notes and listen to it . . . it was a really nice review tool for me to use. That was the course I succeeded in before I knew about my disabilities.

> Jonathan noted how helpful it is to him when the structure of the course is laid out with all of the details of the assignments and available lessons for the year from the very start of the semester. He explained:

> I know what's going to happen, I know what and when it needs to get done at a certain time. It's kind of difficult when you get assignments thrown at you without knowing because you have so much other things to do.

Alex shared a similar sentiment about having a course structure and information in place ahead of time, "when I can plot out how much time I'm going to need to actually do the work that's always when I've been the most successful."

Participants articulated a wide array of factors and practices that support their learning. The role of the instructor, including their ability to be vulnerable with students, their investment in student well-being, and commitment to student learning surfaced as a significant theme within this research question. The instructor role also interrelated with a few of the other themes highlighted in question two, including fostering community and providing space for discussion and Interaction. The findings indicate that the tone the instructor sets in the course can have an impact on the community that is created within the classroom, which in turn has an impact on the students' comfort and willingness to engage in discussion and interact with their peers.

Fostering community and space for discussion and interaction also stood on their own as themes in question two related to the kinds of practices that keep students engaged and invested in the course content. Additional themes in question two included providing students with different options for how they could demonstrate their learning, engage in the course content, and access information and materials in advance of the class session or from the beginning of the semester. Instructors' ability and willingness to validate students' experiences, bring in diverse perspectives and provide them with opportunities to apply their learning to the real world, as well as opportunities to explore their own identities were also prominent themes for practices that participants believed supported their learning and enhanced their likelihood to thrive in their courses.

Practices and Factors That Create Barriers to Learning

Through the third central research question of this study, I sought to understand what practices and factors students with disabilities perceive create barriers to their learning. During the span of the two interviews and four journal entries, participants

were asked to describe experiences in which they were not able to thrive and succeed in a course, struggles that they had with regard to learning or in the classroom environment, and times in which they perceived that barriers interfered with their ability to learn. The following section presents the prominent themes that surfaced within research question three.

Instructor Attitude and Messaging

In the same way that participants believed instructors could positively influence their learning, almost all participants discussed instances in which the instructor was a primary barrier in their ability to thrive and succeed in a course. Subthemes within instructor attitude and messaging relate primarily to messaging that students received from their instructors about their capacity to succeed in the course, as well as having limited communication and interaction with the instructor.

Expectations of Failure. Expectations of failure were sometimes communicated to students from the first day of class. For example, Louisa and Lauren discussed instances in which the instructor started out the first few sessions of class indicating that a lot of students would not pass the class. Lauren discussed the impact that this messaging had on her during that first day:

It was just such a stressful environment because she was explaining everything that we had to do to pass the course and making it seem like it's almost impossible to like do, which is just terrifying to me. I'm a perfectionist that's part of my anxiety . . . there was no openness there was no effort to connect to the students or offer advice for how to do well.

Expectation of failure was also conveyed to participants when seeking assistance from professors in more clearly understanding the course content. Louisa provided an example of a time when she was struggling on tests in one of her health sciences and sought help from her professor. She said at one point that professor told her that she just needed to accept that she was probably going to fail the course. Participants expressed frustration that they did not have the tools to succeed when there were expectations of failure. Expectations of failure also made them question their own ability to thrive and ultimately do well in the class.

Lack of Guidance and Communication. Closely tied to expectations of failure was another subtheme of lack of guidance and communication. Sophia, Maddox, and Hannah discussed instances in which they received little to no guidance from instructors when they were struggling or needed assistance with a class activity or in understanding course content. Maddox described an activity in which the students had an opportunity to co-facilitate a class session. Maddox journaled about barriers that came up during facilitation without the guidance of the instructor:

> Since most of us have had rather limited experience with it in practice, sometimes we need someone to help us stay on track. I feel that the professor has taken too much of a step back in the classroom when his guidance would have been appreciated. This past week was my turn to co-facilitate with my good friend, but so many moments of silence when discussion hit a lull. I felt very anxious and embarrassed when the questions and activities that I thought were good weren't being received, and as a faculty professor I would have appreciated him to step up a bit.

Hannah's and Sophia's experiences related to instances in which they sought out additional help from the instructor and received messages that there was not additional assistance that could be given and that they just needed to put more work into learning the material. Hannah explained the frustration that she felt in her particular situation:

> He has said to me, "I don't know how to help you, you just need to work harder and practice," but then he doesn't tell me what to practice. He doesn't understand that it's not the working hard or the effort because I'm the type of student, I'll put as much effort into it as needed, but if I don't know how to apply what I've learned or I don't know what I'm practicing then I can't do it. I don't think anyone can if they don't know what they're doing.

Hannah eventually had to drop this course. She described the impact of the interactions with her professor:

> I just got a lot of anxiety. I was constantly worrying about it . . . I started to feel bad about myself every time I talked to the guy . . . it really makes a difference if you're thinking negatively and you always feel down about yourself in school it's hard to do well in other places too.

In a journal entry about a time when barriers got in the way of her learning or ability to thrive, Louisa wrote about an experience in which the instructor became frustrated by questions and shut down communication as opposed to providing guidance:

> [The professor] would get so frustrated, prompted by us not understanding a problem . . . that he would tell us we don't have time to ask any more questions. So we would continue on with our lesson no more capable of doing the problems we knew we would be asked to solve in our homework.

Participants also discussed instances in which the instructor put limitations on the way that students could communicate with them. Alex conveyed the impact of not having multiple ways to communicate with their instructor, explaining:

I will miss class and be anxious about the missed class. And they say, "don't email me unless it's of utmost importance," and I don't have a way to communicate with them. I've had a couple professors who say, "don't email me, come to my office hours," and that's really hard because if I can't make it to your class, I can't make it to your office hours. And that seems like this cycle of embarrassment and shame, also [leads to] being really behind.

Jonathan discussed the messaging that he has gotten from instructors about not wanting to hear his concerns or challenges, especially when they have to do with his disability. He said the challenges of communicating with his instructors in some situations have led him to work with an academic advisor instead of directly with the instructor. Lack of guidance and communication left many participants unsure of where to go to get additional help with their coursework and at times made them hesitant to interact further with their instructors, even when they needed support.

Lecture Without Discussion or Engagement

Just as participants articulated the important role that discussion and interactivity had on their learning, they also discussed the ways in which pure lecture created barriers to their learning. Karl saw lecture-style courses as a particular barrier related to his disability, noting "unfortunately lectures are awful if you have ADHD. I do not think that there is any kind of Ritalin remedy that a doctor can prescribe me, capable of making

a lecture work in my favor." Karl journaled about the added struggle of lecture when his instructors do not use visual aids to engage other aspects of his learning:

> My professor doesn't use powerpoint [*sic*] either which is a huge disadvantage because they help keep me from becoming distracted. I like when there's a nice side-by-side, text on the left, picture on the right, that kind of thing. It's nice to match an image with something you're learning so that when you review said powerpoint [*sic*] in the future, you'll be able to be like, "David Wilmot, what a handsome guy . . . Wait isn't there something called the Wilmot Proviso?" and then you can go back to your notes and find the information that you're looking for. Without a powerpoint [*sic*] to look at, I have to focus on the teacher, and I can't do that for an hour and a fifteen minutes straight, so I inevitably end up missing something.

Similar to Karl, Zoe also noted that she experiences barriers to maintaining consistent attention in courses that are completely lecture based. She commented in a journal entry:

> The lecturing is hard for me to pay attention to with my ADD as well as remembering everything with my "chemo-brain." I know this classroom experience is probably a bigger issue for me considering my disabilities than it is for "normal" students, but I think changing the environment to be more interactive would benefit every student regardless of disabilities.

Participants' comments on the barriers of lecture were intertwined with the barriers of not having discussion or peer to peer interactions. For example, Gabrielle noted:

It's so hard to me to go to [big lectures] because . . . you don't feel the same value. In my class that I really like, people know when I'm not there because I contribute, everyone contributes. But in [a big lecture] I guess I feel really just among the crowd.

Zoe and Cameron also discussed some of the barriers that come up for them when there is not discussion related to the readings. Zoe said that she sometimes has trouble making connections between the course content and the readings when there is no discussion. Cameron talked about a class in which the reading seemed to be used only for the purpose of taking a quiz because they do not discuss them in class. Cameron commented:

The structure feels more like almost, what's the point? Besides trying to get a good grade. Whereas the other courses, [discussing the readings] helps you learn and interpret things in your own words instead of somebody else's.

Participants indicated that lecture-based classes not only challenge their attention, but also engagement in the course content because they are not given opportunities to hear the perspectives of others or put the information into their own words. They also sometimes have fewer opportunities to make their own connections about how the readings related to the course content or how they might apply their learning in the real world or their discipline more broadly.

Classroom Dynamics

The theme of classroom dynamics surfaced in relationship to lecture without discussion or engagement and was also closely related to the theme of fostering community in research question two. With regard to classroom dynamics, participants in

this study often expressed hesitancy to participate, ask questions, or engage in the class when they felt as though the class did not represent diverse perspectives, when there was not sense of community, and when they perceived that other students did not want to be there. Hannah was one of the few participants that did not find small group discussions particularly helpful to her learning. Hannah discussed why small classes and discussions can be a challenge for her during her first interview, particularly because of the lack of diversity and different perspectives that are present in smaller classes. Hannah explained:

> The sample is just not big enough to truly get a well-rounded group of people to learn together in a classroom . . . . I don't necessarily like to be known in the classroom by the other students and stuff. I don't care if they don't know me, I care more that the instructor does, which I think can still be done in a bigger class.

Other students' perceptions and lack of diverse perspectives was a prominent theme of the classroom dynamics that created barriers for Hannah in particular. She expanded on her discomfort with the dynamic of small classes during her second interview:

> I say I don't like those small discussions but then I say, "well, I learn verbally" . . . I see how they are contradicting but . . . maybe part of it is just that I don't have friends in that class. I haven't really connected with anyone in the class, I don't really want to speak to them about the material. Versus if there were people that I really wanted to speak to about the material then it would be great.

Lauren also said she sometimes benefits from larger group discussion as opposed to just small group discussions. She journaled about the barriers that can come up from

her with regard to participation when there is no dynamic of community and the instructor uses methods like "cold calling" to engage participants:

> It felt a bit like we were being pressured into sharing these personal reflections with each other. This was especially anxiety inducing because in the class we hadn't achieved a great deal of class cohesiveness, or the sense that we all felt comfortable sharing personal things with each other. In other courses, whenever I had been cold called, especially when instructors hadn't prepared the class by saying that they were going to cold call on people beforehand, I felt very uncomfortable being called on, and it definitely impeded my ability to pay attention to the rest of the lesson.

For other participants, the dynamic of other students not caring about the content or not wanting to be in the class also affected their own participation and engagement in the content. Karl wrote about one particular class with this dynamic in a journal entry on a classroom experience that created barriers to his learning:

> Twenty percent of our final grade comes from "participation" but has absolutely nothing to do with participation, and everything to do with writing your name on a piece of paper. Basically, the TA passes out these half sheets with questions . . . In theory, this is a great idea. This is exactly the kind of thing I want to talk about! However, out of the small groups I've worked in, I've only met about three people who wanted to have a good discussion. I get the feeling that the majority of people in that class are there because they have to be.

> Gabrielle discussed a similar dynamic in one of her classes:

[When I would speak], it felt like I was in highschool and I was being made fun of

for it. I was being judged for it, and I was like, "grow up. Just because you don't

like this class doesn't mean I can't be enthused about it." I would try to make it

exciting any time I could. I would just do extra research about the things and then

share it, then it felt like other people weren't putting in that type of thought . . . I

understand it because I've been in classes where this isn't my favorite class but it

was just disappointing, it made me not want to be there.

Zoe indicated that sometimes messaging from the instructor made her wonder

whether or not it was worthwhile for her to be in class. She explained:

I've had lecture where professors are like, "you know what, if you don't want to

come, I don't care, it's your problem," basically, and it like puts it in your head

like, "oh well, they don't care if I don't go so I'm not going to."

Participants indicated that the classroom dynamics were shaped both by the

instructor and the students themselves. Participants discussed how lack of connection

and community with other students can in turn affect their participation. Additionally,

other students' level of engagement and interest in the class, as well as attitudes about

participation, were also highlighted as factors that created poor classroom dynamics in

which participants felt less engaged. Participants also discussed some instances in which

the instructor themselves seemed not to care whether or not students engaged in

discussion or whether they even came to class in the first place. This in turn created a

dynamic in which participants became less motivated to attend class.

Identity- and Disability-Related Barriers

Although experiences with tokenism, stereotyping, and bias were presented as findings in research question one about how students experience their identities in the classroom, this particular theme also very much fits within research question three. Participants who experienced instances of tokenism, stereotyping, and bias sometimes perceived the classroom climate as being unsafe, felt as though their identities and perspectives were not valued, and conveyed a reduced sense of belonging. Experiences of tokenism, stereotypes, and bias reduced participants' engagement and investment in a course. Subsequently, these findings also interrelated with the findings highlighted in the themes of classroom dynamics and lecture without discussion or engagement in relation to classroom barriers. Again, since findings related to tokenism, stereotyping, and bias have been presented under research question one, they will not be repeated in this section; however, it is important to note that these experiences created barriers to learning for participants, especially those with underrepresented and marginalized identities. These barriers related to feeling safe and supported in the classroom, believing that they were capable of achieving based on their own merit, and desire to engage further in the course.

Participants in this study also experienced a wide range of barriers in the classroom related to their disabilities. These barriers related to struggles with attendance and meeting deadlines due to flare-ups of their disability, maintaining focus and attention due their disability or changes in medication, keeping anxiety at bay in the classroom environment, as well as a wide range of other issues that came up within and outside of class. Many of these barriers were discussed within individual participant narratives and

within preceding themes related to research questions two and three. Two barriers that surfaced in a number of different ways across participant narratives but have not necessarily been addressed in the themes so far are Trauma-Related Triggers and Issues with Accommodations.

Trauma-Related Triggers. During the one semester length of this study, three participants, Gabrielle, Alex, and Zoe were in the process of getting a diagnosis of PTSD. Although all three participants were still unsure of what this diagnosis would mean for them in the long-term, each experienced barriers within their courses related to being triggered. Gabrielle noted that she would at times almost start to cry during classes in which she would need to discuss or read content related to her trauma. Zoe found herself sometimes having to leave her class and then struggling with how to explain herself to her professors. She commented in her second interview:

> I associated that with veterans . . . even my instructors are like, "what do you mean you have PTSD from your stuff? So you freak out?" It's hard to even explain . . . . They think I'm making this all up I think just because the awareness level of some of these things are just so low and just because I'm such a weird case. It's a lot to throw at somebody.

For Alex, triggering content sometimes provoked anxiety, feelings of danger, and panic. Alex conveyed that they knew that such content was being used for an educational purpose and that they were not looking for a way out of having to do assignment or reading, but that the barrier exists when they do not have time to prepare themselves for the content. Alex explained:

I think professors don't realize the amount it helps to just have some idea of what's

coming in the texts they assign. I also think that they assume that everyone in

their class is going to have the same viewpoint as them—that they will benefit

from being shocked, they won't be shocked at all, or if they have personal trauma

that is related to the text, they will have the ability to deal with that in-class, or

postpone their reaction until after. I know this is unintentional, but when

professors I respect do this kind of thing it makes me feel like I'm a bad student—

that I should be able to get over it.

Alex noted that they have already had to personally deal with the graphic content that is

being presented to them, so having it put in front of them for a class requirement without

warning can elicit symptoms of sickness and panic.

Issues With Accommodations. Almost all participants, 11 of the 13 in this

study, were registered with the disability services office on campus and had formal

accommodations established for their classes at some point in their undergraduate career.

As illustrated in the individual participant narratives, students who were registered and

had accommodations did not always choose to share their letter. Sometimes they chose

not to share because they thought they would not need accommodations in a particular

course, they were unsure of how their instructor would respond to their accommodations,

or they forgot to request a letter early in the semester. Students who did choose to share

their letter still discussed barriers related to actually using their accommodations or

having them properly implemented. For example, Louisa discussed experiences in which

she ended up not using accommodations for additional absences, even though she was

being significantly affected by her disability because the course content was too difficult to miss or catch up on later with the instructor.

Zoe indicated that she struggled with asking for accommodations, particularly when they are related to assignment deadlines or absences. Zoe explained that often instructors will ask to see her accommodation letter again, which she said is easy to resend but said she feels like she needs to provide her instructors with extra documentation in order to use the accommodation. Similar to Zoe's concern about feeling as though she needed to provide additional documentation, Maddox noted that many of their instructors want a more detailed explanation of why they are missing class, which makes Maddox uncomfortable because sometimes these absences related to suicidal episodes and their BPD.

Zoe journaled about the fact that she sometimes was not using her testing accommodations on her quizzes, even though she is eligible to use them on all of her tests:

> I want to ensure that I do not miss any notes so I attend class and end up taking the quiz in class, without accommodations, instead of at the [disability center]. I understand that I have the option to leave lecture as soon as the quizzes are distributed but I feel as though I am disrupting and I also feel slightly embarrassed having to do so.

Hannah also journaled about a struggle that she had initially with getting her testing accommodations implemented for in-class quizzes:

> Through ChimeIn we can log on during class and submit a response to a question about the class. Sometimes this is like a pop quiz and there is a time limit which I

really don't like. Sometimes I am unable to process the question and write a

response in the time given and then I lose points because I can't reply fast enough.

I have accommodations to avoid this issue and the one time I brought it up with

one of the teaching assistants she snapped back at me. Though, the professor was

a lot more understanding and still willing to give me a chance to submit my

answer.

Kara discussed struggles that she has had in larger lecture-based classes in which

she is unsure of whether instructors remember that she has an accommodation to not be

called on unless she raisers her hand. She described this struggle in one particular class:

The lecture was very large and he would just kind of point to people and call on

them and one of my accommodations is that they can't just call on me in class

unless I'm raising my hand, however, in a large class like that professors don't

even know or remember and I'm sure they have a lot of accommodations to think

about so I struggled with that for sure because I was always kind of on edge not

knowing if he would remember or not . . . . [Also] not knowing the professor or

the students, I found it difficult to go to either one of those resources for help . . .

so I ended up just getting down on myself and falling behind and then feeling like

and not wanting to go to class.

Kara noted that this particular professor was also not open to honoring her

accommodation to have extended deadlines, which added to her hesitancy to approach

him about struggles she was having with the course content.

The themes that emerged in the findings related to participants' barriers to

learning in many ways relate to those that surfaced in within research question two.

Participants indicated that messaging conveyed by instructors about their potential

failure, their inability to learn the material, their need to work harder, and general lack of

communication and guidance created barriers beyond those they experienced related to

course content. Such messaging, as highlighted in this question as well as within

individual narratives, caused hesitancy for participants in reaching out to their professors,

created doubt in their ability to be successful, and sometimes resulted in them giving up

on the class altogether. The findings in question three also reveal that the classroom

dynamics, as well as lack of discussion and engagement in the class can reduce students'

participation and investment in the content, their ability to maintain focus, and motivation

to be present in class. Experiences of tokenism, stereotypes, and bias, as discussed in

question one adversely affect students' sense of belonging, feelings of safety, and

engagement in the classroom. Findings in question three, taken together with question

one, also reveal that students experience an array of disability-related barriers in the

classroom that are sometimes magnified by not having accommodations, not sharing their

letter, and not having their accommodations honored.

Alignment of Universal Design Principles

The fourth research question of this study sought to investigate the extent to

which participants' perceptions of supports and barriers to their learning aligned with

principles of Universal Design. This fourth research question was both a formal question

of this study, as well as an overarching framework that informs the discussion and

interpretation of all of the findings. The themes regarding Universal Design focus on two

specific elements in the design that participants highlighted in this research study. The

first set of themes are the Universal Design practices that participants identified as having

the most significant impact on their learning. The second set of themes relate to gaps that participants identified in the list of Universal Design principles that they believe would make a difference in student learning.

Universal Design Practices That Impact Learning

At the end of the second interview, each participant was asked to review a list of Universal Design principles that I compiled and grouped from the UDL, UID, and UDI frameworks that that were discussed in Chapter II. Participants were encouraged to select three to five practices that they believed were most beneficial to their learning. All participants received this list in advance so that they had time to think about which items they would select. Table Two shows how Universal Design principles were categorized and the number of participants who selected each item. The following themes then reflect the practices that were most commonly selected by the eleven participants who completed the second interview.

Table 2

Universal Design Principles Selected by Participants as Benefiting Their Learning

Principle	Selected by participants
The instructor uses varied methods of teaching and ways of delivering course content.	7
The instructor uses straightforward and clear teaching methods.	1
The instructor uses teaching strategies that fit a wide variety of skills and learning paces.	4
The instructor outlines clear requirements for the course.	7
The instructor integrates natural supports, such as technology, in teaching and learning.	2
The instructor uses teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and background knowledge.	5
Students are provided with multiple ways to engage in the course content.	3
Students have multiple options for demonstrating what they have learned.	6
Teaching and instructional methods are accessible for all students.	4
The course information clearly communicated and is available in multiple formats.	2
The instructor communicates clear expectations for the course.	1
The instructor provides constructive feedback, for example, on assignments.	3
Physical effort unrelated to essential course requirements is minimal.	0
Enough space and size (of materials, objects in the space) is given, for use by all students, regardless of body size, posture, manipulation, etc.	2
Instructor creates a community of learners in which interactions between students and the instructor is encouraged.	5
A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students.	8

Welcoming, Inclusive Climate and High Expectations. The most common principle selected by participants when asked to select items that have an impact on their learning was *A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students*. Eight of the eleven participants selected this principle from the list. Participants who selected this principle discussed the importance of feeling like the classroom was a safe environment for them to learn and discuss the course content. Sophia noted the climate can sometimes change within a classroom depending on the students and instructors, so having a welcoming environment is also critical. She explained:

> If it's not an environment where people feel comfortable to have discussions or that discussions are welcome in, that's not going to happen and that doesn't really facilitate learning . . . . If you have a class of 300 students, it's hard to break down into discussions, [then] you have to have a class where you feel like you're allowed to ask questions and allowed to discuss those questions . . . . [I was in a class] of almost 200 students and yet I still felt like I could ask questions in the middle of class. And [the professor] would just have a seat on the front desk and discuss that with us. It's one of the best classes I ever had and I learned so much.

Participants also discussed the importance of the instructor holding high expectations of them. Alex noted that high expectations without a welcoming climate sometimes will convey to them that they should not use their accommodation letter or they should not come to class if they have not done all the reading or assignments. Alex provided an example of the way in which one of their instructors has communicated high expectations:

[One of my instructors] has done a good job of reaching out to me personally and being like, "I have high expectations for you because your writing is interesting," and that feels like a lot less pressure. I don't even care if he's lying and he doesn't care about my writing at all but it feels good and it feels a lot less pressure than a teacher being like, "I expect you to do all the readings and write all of the things" . . . . I understand communicating what expectations are there, like saying, "you must read the readings before class;" that's better than being like, "if you don't read the readings don't come to class.

Other participants also noted the difference between high expectations motivating them to succeed and creating a good type of stress, as opposed to messaging that the high expectations for the class might be too difficult for the students to meet. Participants indicated that the latter form of expectations conveys that instructors are not invested in students' success.

Varied Methods of Teaching and Delivering Course Content. *The instructor uses varied methods of teaching and ways of delivering course content* was tied for the second most common principle, selected by seven of the eleven participants. Participants discussed the ways in which varied methods of teaching kept them engaged and addressed different learning styles for themselves as well as others in the classroom. Participants also discussed the ways in which using varied methods reduces specific barriers. For example, Maddox noted that when instructors teach and deliver content in ways outside of the lecture and reading textbooks, they benefit due to the barriers that they experience with regard to maintaining attention and also with reading small print. Participants also discussed the ways in which varied methods of teaching and delivering

course content helped them understand and retain the content in different ways. For

example, Zoe mentioned a class in which the instructor will read some of their material

out loud, show a related video clip, and sometimes will have students engage in

discussion. Zoe commented that these different elements help her catch things that she

may have missed the first time it was conveyed to her.

Clear Course Requirements. *The instructor outlines clear requirements for the*

course was tied for the second most common item selected by participants. Participants

discussed the importance of having requirements outlined in the syllabus, clear

instructions for assignments, or rubrics to make sure they understand what they are

supposed to be doing for the course and how to ensure they are meeting the expectations

of what they are being asked to do. Louisa explained:

> I find if I don't have a rubric, I won't necessarily hit the mark that the professor
>
> wanted . . . it's also really stressful trying to figure out, what was I supposed to be
>
> doing? Because I don't know and then you don't want to over contact the
>
> professor going, "I don't know how to do this, I don't know what you want for this
>
> one either."

Zoe commented that she relies heavily on the syllabus to keep track of what they

need to complete and when. As a result, she noted that having up-to-date deadlines and a

breakdown of what she needs to complete is critical for her ability to keep up in the

course. Within this item, some participants also mentioned the importance of having

course requirements readily available and in different formats to ensure accessibility.

Multiple Ways to Demonstrate Learning. *Students have multiple options for*

demonstrating what they have learned was the fourth most commonly selected principle,

with six of eleven participants choosing it. A few participants who selected this item said

that they had not had this opportunity in a class previously but would find it helpful to

their learning. These participants may have had classes in which they had different kinds

of assignments but did not have classes with assignments in which they had a choice of

how to demonstrate their learning. Karl noted an interest in this item but wondered how

an instructor would manage evaluating a single assignment that was submitted in

different formats. Alex and Maddox both had classes in which they had multiple options

for demonstrating learning on a single assignment. Maddox noted that a benefit can be

that students may glean more from doing something in a way that they selected and

makes sense to them. Alex commented that when they have had the opportunity to do

something in a different format, like an art project or story in which they can link it back

to the theory they are learning, it feels as though it is a more organic way of synthesizing

their learning as opposed to just writing a paper.

Sophia thought about this item as having multiple options throughout the length

of a single course to demonstrate her learning. She noted:

> Another one that I would consider pretty important is having multiple options of
>
> demonstrating what they've learned . . . . When I was diagnosed with a disability,
>
> looking back, I was kind of like, "oh that makes sense," because on homework
>
> and mini quizzes and stuff like that I always excelled but then on a big test in big
>
> rooms, that's where I would fail . . . not only does it help people identify that
>
> there's a problem but it also allows us to have different ways of getting grades.

Other participants commented that this item would allow them to utilize their

preferred learning style. Gabrielle commented:

I really like that idea. I think that often intelligence manifests so differently, and I just think that's really inclusive of different ways in which people learn because I think a lot of times people grasp topics but they can't show it because of like the very narrow language they have.

Like Sophia, Hannah connected this principle specifically to the experience of having a disability, explaining:

I think standardization of learning is just bad, and especially if you have a learning disability, you have that for a reason so why would you be tested in the same way as other people? . . . . You're automatically learning differently so you should be able to prove that you learned.

Hannah went on to note that she knows accommodations are intended to mitigate disadvantages based on disability but that the option of demonstrating knowledge in a different way is something she has previously thought would benefit her outside of accommodations. Similar to Karl, Hannah also noted that she was not exactly sure how the grading would work if she was allowed to demonstrate her knowledge in a different way from her peers.

Additional Principles that Support Learning. *Instructor creates a community of learners in which interactions between students and the instructor is encouraged* and *The instructor uses teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and background knowledge* were the fourth most common principles chosen, with five participants selecting each respectively. Comments shared by participants on the principle of *The instructor uses teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and*

background knowledge were reflective of and similar in nature to those shared about *The instructor uses varied methods of teaching and ways of delivering course content.* Participants discussed the benefit of instructors teaching in a way that valued different learning styles as well as validating diverse student experiences and identities. Comments shared on the principle of *Instructor creates a community of learners in which interactions between students and the instructor is encouraged* were similar to those shared about *A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students.* Participants discussed the importance of instructor engagement and connection to the students, as well as creating an atmosphere and climate in which student success is important and valued.

Every item on the list of categorized Universal Design principles was selected by at least one participant as being beneficial to their learning, with the exception of *Physical Effort Unrelated to Essential Course Requirements is Minimal.* The fact that this item was not selected by any participants does not mean that it is not an important principle of Universal Design for students. This particular item may have been less likely to be chosen because of the low number of students with physical disabilities enrolled in the study.

Gaps and New Ideas Regarding Universal Design

Participants were asked about whether or not they noticed gaps or anything missing from the list of Universal Design principles that they thought would be important to add. Not all participants added additional comments or identified gaps in the list. This section identifies some of the suggestions that were given for enhancing or expanding on the list of Universal Design principles.

Expanding Accessibility in Course Format. Closely related to the principle of *Multiple Ways of Delivering Course Content*, Louisa asserted that having the option of engaging in and attending class in multiple ways would be beneficial in her specific situation. Since her disability flares up unexpectedly, she suggested that she would benefit from an option to be able to attend some of her classes or online when she was not actually able to be there in person. She said that she knows that this format is already becoming available to students for some kinds of classes, but hopes the that the practice will expand as a more common option for students. Jonathan noted that he would like to see more hands-on work in classes because that tends to be the best way that he learns. Louisa and Jonathan noted that these ideas may already be captured in the list of principles but they were interested in providing an example of an alternative course format that would work for them.

Providing Additional Support to Students. Expanding on principles related to *Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Climate* and *Community of Learners*, Zoe suggested that instructors should consider setting up thirty-minute timeslots to meet with each student at some point during the semester. Zoe commented that these meetings would help students and instructors get to know each other and perhaps provide a space for students to more comfortably share information. Somewhat similarly, Gabrielle suggested that instructors consider purposefully talking with students about the kind of resources that are available to them for support, including academic resources, such as writing support. Gabrielle said that she has had instructors who wrote these kinds of resources on the board and also posted them to the online course site so that students

were made aware early in the semester and also had a place to refer back to if they forgot the information.

Alex proposed that instructors make sure that they are providing warnings and emotional space to process if they are covering topics that might be hard for students to engage with. Alex described:

The ways that I've experienced it positively would be when we have fourms ahead of time where we can talk about the reading . . . where you feel like you are encouraged to share your emotions with regard to the readings or comment . . . you can just say, "I felt bad about this part because," and "help me understand why this is important" or excedra. I also think that teachers who say, "if you need to leave the room you can," before talking about really difficult things, or who communicate again that everyone's coming from different backgrounds so that if something happens and you're freaking out or crying . . . the teachers respect that and communicates that it's an environment where that can happen and it doesn't mean that person is wrong or bad.

Ideas for providing additional support to students went beyond how the course content was delivered and the options offered to students for demonstrating learning and engaging in course content. The ideas for providing additional support were instead more focused on the emotional wellbeing of students and the interpersonal connections that they were able to make with the instructor.

Centering and Supporting Marginalized Students. Maddox suggested that more of an effort should be made to center content around and prioritize the safety of students with marginalized identities, particularly intersecting marginalized identities.

Maddox noted that this could include race, class, gender, disability, but should also go

beyond these identities to also focus on issues like fatphobia. Maddox commented that

the experiences and safety of people with intersecting marginalized identities is

particularly important "because that's a legitimate safety, that's not just some privileged

person being uncomfortable." Maddox went on to say that it is not helpful to ignore the

issues and assume that people of these identities and these forms of oppression do not

exist because it's "erasing of people's experiences."

Students as Teachers and Learners, and Instructors as Teachers and

Leaners. Related to the principle of *Instructor creates a community of learners in which*

interactions between students and the instructor is encouraged, a few participants noted

that students should be encouraged to have a more active role in the course, whether it is

in teaching and facilitation, or having an active role in discussing the pace, deadlines, and

other aspects of course. Zoe noted:

> Even if things are more strict in the curriculum, just inviting students to decide,
>
> "how do you want to go about this? What's going to work best?" And that always
>
> just makes me feel like, "oh they actually really want this to work."

Similarly, Lauren suggested:

> I think that having regular kind of, I don't want to call it a check-in because that's
>
> an easy word, but just engaging the students and in a meaningful way into how
>
> the classroom is run so that it's not like it's all on the instructor to hit all of these
>
> points but be really transparent with your students and be like, "hey, this is what
>
> we're going to do, can we add anything to this, what is this going to look like for

us?" And just create that dialogue with students. And that it's not like a hierarchy in the classroom so much as it's a collaborative kind of thing.

The issue of hierarchy of the instructor was also noted by Maddox, who suggested a broad change of talking about both students and instructors as "teacher learners." Maddox explained:

I really like that term teacher learner, that everyone can teach that everyone has something to learn and that even if we consider students still being able to be teacher learners, that the teacher itself . . . needs to be also a teacher learner and acknowledge that we are not at one point enlightened . . . we are going to keep learning. And that would be some way of helping subvert power dynamics with student to teacher.

Within this theme, participants discussed ideas for students to become more engaged and involved in both the facilitation and decision making in their courses. Several participants noted throughout the interviews that greater student involvement in various aspects of the course could help to create a more positive relationship between the instructor and students, and could also reduce hierarchy or power dynamics that could stifle engagement and investment in the course.

Instructor Capacity. A few participants identified areas in which instructor development would enhance capacity for being able to implement aspects of Universal Design and competency in creating inclusive spaces. One participant suggested training for instructors on mental health-related resources and how to approach students about mental health issues. Maddox suggested more rigorous diversity training for instructors, possibly with diverse students doing some of the facilitation. Maddox discussed

examples of classes that are required for students to learn about diversity that are still not

taught in an inclusive way. Maddox noted that it is one thing for instructors to teach

theory related to diversity but it is another for them to teach and illustrate the praxis. A

third area of development suggested was about how to create a more interactive

classroom. Zoe suggested:

> If instructors possibly had a conference or workshop . . . to be given ideas and
>
> examples of a more interactive classroom, students with and without disabilities
>
> would absorb more of the material and have an overall more positive experience.
>
> This could, in turn, create higher attendance rates, retention rates, and test scores.

The themes related to Universal Design came from one particular activity at the

end of the second interview in which participants were asked to review a list of Universal

Design principles and discuss which items were most beneficial to their own learning, as

well as where they saw gaps in the list. Four items were selected by more than half of

participants and are in many ways reflective of the themes that surfaced in questions two

and three. As noted at the beginning of this section, the extent to which practices that

support or create barriers to student learning align or do not align with Universal Design

was both a research question and overarching framework in this study. Further

discussion of how the findings of this study fit within the current frameworks or

Universal Design will be further discussed in Chapter VI.

Conclusion

This chapter presented themes that surfaced across participant interviews to

illuminate the ways in which students experience their identities and disabilities in the

classroom environment, their perception of the factors and practices that support and

create barriers to their learning, and their perception of the ways in which Universal

Design practices impact their learning. While the participant narratives highlighted in

Chapter IV were intended to provide a picture of who each of these students were as

individuals, the intent of this chapter was to understand what their stories mean as a

whole when looked at collectively. The following chapter will discuss the overall

findings of this study and present implications for instructors and higher education more

broadly as we seek to better support students with disabilities in the classroom, whether

or not they choose to disclose a disability.

Chapter VI

Discussion and Implications

This study sought to explore how students experience their identities and disabilities in postsecondary classroom environments, as well as the factors related to teaching and learning that support or create barriers to their learning. Prior research and national data have indicated that not all students disclose a disability in college or seek out and utilize academic accommodations. Theories and practices have been developed to support student learning regardless of whether students disclose a disability, but little is known about how students perceive or experience these practices. This study utilized narratives from interviews and journal entries to explore the experiences of 13 undergraduate students to explore the following research questions:

- How, if at all, are students' disabilities and other social identities salient to them in postsecondary classroom environments?

- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe support their learning?

- What classroom practices and factors do students with disabilities believe create barriers to their learning?

- To what extent do classroom practices and factors that support student learning align with or diverge from principles of Universal Design?

Overall, the findings of this study revealed that the identities of students with disabilities are quite dynamic and that disability is not experienced in isolation from other identities. Students' disabilities as well as other identities, especially underrepresented or marginalized social identities, affect their experiences in the classroom environment, and

to a large extent, the way that they learn. The practices and factors that supported and created barriers in the classroom were significantly related to the messaging and tone set by the instructor. The extent to which community was fostered, discussion and interaction occurred, and multiple options were provided for students to demonstrate knowledge, learn the material, and engage in the content also related to whether or not students perceived that their learning was supported. For the most part, the practices and factors that students believed supported their learning fit within existing principles of Universal Design, although there may be room to expend or add to these principles. This chapter discusses the key finding as they relate to each of the four research questions. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the implications, areas for future research, and considerations in interpreting the findings of this study.

Key Findings Related to Saliency of Identity and Disability

Participants in this study associated primary identities as those that they had to think about on a daily basis, those that they saw as inherently shaping who they were as people, and those that they felt were unchanging. To some extent, participants were more likely to include identities close to their core that were different in some way from the majority of others around them, especially in the context of the classroom environment. This was particularly true for participants who had social identities that would be considered historically underrepresented or marginalized. For the most part, participants who did not experience marginalization or oppression related to an identity, such as race or sexual orientation, tended to put these identities further from the core. Saliency of identity tended to change for participants when the topic of the course related to a particular aspect of their identity. For example, race often became more salient,

including for White students, when the topic of the course or class session related to race. These findings suggest that identity is dynamic and that the environment of the classroom can be a factor in the extent to which students experience their identities as salient or not. That being said, one participant in this study believed her identities were static and unchanging regardless of the context of the environment.

The dynamic nature of participants' identities as reflected in the findings of this study speak to the way that Jones and McEwen (2000) have conceptualized identity development as a "fluid and dynamic process" (p. 411). Still, while the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) was used as a model for understanding how participants experienced the saliency of their multiple identities, this research did not explicitly split out social identities and core identities. Participants were encouraged to fill in the model primarily with the locations of their social identities but in many cases participants also filled in characteristics, values, and traits into the model, which would fit more into core identities in the model as conceptualized by Jones and McEwen (2000). This study also did not go in depth to explore the complexity of students' meaning making filters (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), but rather looked generally at how they viewed and understood the saliency of their identities and how these identities did and did not shift in the context of the classroom.

Identities of difference, those that were underrepresented or marginalized, were generally more salient in general and in the classroom for participants in this study. Participants who were underrepresented or marginalized based primarily on race, sexual orientation, and gender identity not only were more likely to experience these identities

as salient, but also discussed the ways in which these identities mattered or impacted their experiences in the classroom. Stereotyping, tokenism, and bias were common experiences of students who were underrepresented or marginalized by race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The impact of these experiences made some participants question their safety in the classroom, reduced their engagement and sense of belonging, and reinforced feelings of invisibility or incompetency.

For some participants, the ways in which their identities intersected, as well as how they thought other people perceived them, also affected how they viewed themselves or performed their identities. Particular examples of this came from Gabrielle and Lauren who discussed how others' perception of their gender identity at times exacerbated their disability or made them question if their emotions were related to stereotyped behavior of women as opposed to an actual disability. Findings in the overarching theme of identities of difference in some ways reflect the scholarship of Knoll (2009), Banks and Hughes (2013) and McDonald, Keys, and Balcazar (2007) in that some participants in this study were experiencing multiple forms of oppression and negative cultural messages based on more than one aspect of their identity. The relationship of multiple marginalized identities and experiences of multiple forms of oppression and negative cultural messaging was not explored in depth in this study but the general findings reflect that these experiences were likely true for several participants. The invisible nature of participants' disability, as well as their hesitancy to share information about their disability with others may have also affected the extent to which they shared experiences of multiple forms of oppression in relation to their disability in this study.

In general, the saliency of disability as identity varied among participants. While several participants included disability as an identity close to their close to their core, others listed their specific disability instead of disability as a broad category, or wrote in disability as a secondary identity. Similar to the finding on general identity saliency, disability was impacted by the extent to which students believed their disabilities affected them in daily life and across different environments, the degree to which it shaped their thinking, behavior, or interactions with others, and whether or not they were open with others about their disability. For some participants, the non-apparent or "invisible" nature of their disability affected the extent to which they viewed their disability as salient. For these participants, the fact that they did not share information about their disabilities with others, and the fact that others could not tell they had a disability decreased the extent to which it was salient to their own identity.

Since the sample in this study was relatively small, it was not feasible to determine whether other factors, such as length on time that participants had been diagnosed with their disability or the kind of disability they had affected the extent to which they viewed their disability as salient. Based on the sample of 13 participants in this study, length of diagnosis and type of disability did not seem to be a factor in determining saliency. In fact, some participants with very similar diagnoses viewed their disabilities and how they were affected in very different ways. For example, Karl and Sophia had both been diagnosed with ADHD. While Karl believed that ADHD was quite stigmatized and did not share his diagnosis with others, Sophia indicated that ADHD was the disability that she was most comfortable discussing with others.

Another complex factor in this particular study that is not as clearly discussed in existing literature on disability identity is that almost all participants in this study had multiple disabilities as opposed to just one. Additionally, at least three participants were in the process of getting a new diagnosis during the semester that this study occurred and at least five participants mentioned the presence of or prior diagnosis of another disability at some point during the study. Even in a small study such as this one, the fact that so many participants had multiple disabilities and were in the process of getting new diagnoses illustrates how complex disability is and the extent to which it is different in its nature from other social identities such as race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Overall the findings reveal that disability is fluid in nature, and can also manifest in different ways in different environments. Many participants in this study indicated that their disability became more salient in the classroom or in specific courses in which they believed their disability was affecting how they learned. Some participants identified with one particular disability or aspect of their disability as opposed to disability as an overarching identity category. The way in which the majority of participants in this study discussed their disability indicated that disability was more often thought of as an individual or private identity as opposed to a group identity with which they associated themselves. While several participants noted that they had friends with disabilities, few participants indicated that they belonged to or would seek out a group that was associated with disability or their specific kind of disability.

One factor that surfaced in the narratives related to disability association or seeking out community was the extent to which participants believed they were affected by their disability. For example, Louisa and Maddox noted that they felt less affected by

their disability than peers or others who had a similar disability. For Louisa, this was one factor that kept her from being interested in a support group for people with CFS. A few participants, including Hannah and Jonathan noted that they would be interested in meeting other students with their disability or joining a peer support group for students with disabilities. The nuance of understanding disability as an individual versus group identity is also not well understood in the current literature on identity and disability but findings in this study indicate that participants viewed disability as more of a personal identity than a group identity.

The findings of this study also reveal that stigma was a factor in how and if participants chose to disclose their specific disability to their peers and instructors. It was less clear whether stigma associated with a disability was a factor for determining the extent to which disability was a salient identity. Several participants expressed feeling of self-doubt about their own abilities and questioned whether they were being affected by their disability or whether they were not trying hard enough. They also worried that others perceived them as lazy or faking a disability to get a special advantage. These sentiments are reflected in the scholarship of McDonald, Keys, and Balcazar (2007), who have suggested that the invisible nature and lack of understanding about some disabilities may be a factor in cultural messages that bring into question the existence of a disability or whether the disability is being used as an excuse.

One significant finding of this study was that regardless of whether participants identified disability as a salient identity, all participants were affected by their disability in the classroom in some way. Participants were affected in a variety of ways, from the way in which they processed information on exams, to the way in which they participated

and were present in class. Almost all participants were registered with the disability services office on campus but not all participants shared their accommodation letter with their instructors. Participants chose not to share their letter for a variety of different reasons. For example, they did not think they would need their accommodations in that particular course or they were concerned their instructor would treat them differently. This particular finding is reflected in the scholarship of Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, and Floersch (2013) and Hong (2015), whose research has also indicated that students with disabilities may at times experience hesitancy and ultimately may choose not to share their accommodations with their instructors, even if they think they may need the accommodations.

Key Findings Related to Factors and Practices That Support Learning

All participants in this study identified the instructor as one of the primary factors that supported their learning. This finding is reflective of research by Wilson, Getzel, and Brown (2000). In their study, participants reported that faculty more than any other group of people on campus had an impact on their ability to be academically successful. The role of the instructor and the notion of "supporting learning" articulated by participants in this study clearly went beyond actions in teaching and learning and expanded into how instructors demonstrated vulnerability, investment in student well-being, and commitment to students' learning. Stories shared about instructors' openness reveal that this particular factor affected the extent to which some participants felt connected to their instructor and peers as a community, as well as their comfort speaking and sharing in front of others.

With regard to investment in wellbeing, participants discussed examples of how their instructor reached out to them after noticing they were struggling and checked-in, shared resources, or encouraged their ongoing engagement in the course. The participants who told these stories frequently commented on how motivating it was for them to hear that their professor cared and was invested in them. In many cases the act of the instructor reaching out made students work harder to meet the demands and expectations of the class. The theme of fostering community surfaced as a separate theme interwoven through the narratives and collective findings, but was in some ways was an outcome of the instructor role in supporting learning. Participants in this study indicated that being a part of a classroom community played a significant role in their ability to thrive and extent to which their learning was supported. Being a part of a community affected students' participation in the course, their engagement in the content, and their comfort sharing their perspectives with their peers.

Engaging in peer learning and classroom discussion were also significant to the findings on practices that supported student learning and were in many ways related to how students felt that community was fostered. Community appeared to be a foundation of effective peer learning and discussion, but the act of engaging in peer learning helped participants take ownership of their learning and deepen their own understanding of course concepts. Participants varied in how they liked to engage in discussion, whether in small or large groups, or writing their thoughts down ahead of time. Regardless, almost all participants mentioned discussion as a method for keeping them engaged, maintaining their attention, and as a valuable way to hear new perspectives and ways of thinking about the content that ultimately helped them with assignments and tasks in

which they had to demonstrate their knowledge. Findings related to the importance of classroom community and the relationship of interactive activities and discussion has also been reflected in scholarship by Black, Weinberg, and Brodwin (2015), who found that classroom community, discussion, and interactive activities enhanced student motivation and learning.

Participants in this study also felt more connected to the classroom community, supported in their learning, and willing to engage in discussion when the instructor validated their experiences and the knowledge they were bringing into the classroom. This was especially true for students with historically underrepresented and marginalized identities. Practices of validation sometimes occurred from the very start of the semester with the instructor discussing support resources for mental health and disability, setting ground rules about how to engage in discussion, explicitly commenting that they would honor voices of difference, or making it clear that discriminatory behavior and comments would not be tolerated in the class. Participants also believed their learning was supported when they had opportunities to explore course content in the context of their own experiences, consider how they might apply their learning to real-world issues and events, or practice using the information and skills as they would in their future career. These opportunities helped to personalize the learning, provide context for the students, and helped them understand why they were learning the information and how they might use it someday.

Although many of the factors and practices that surfaced in themes discussed so far related to some extent to participants' disability, providing multiple options and making information and materials available in advance were two of the themes that many

participants connected very explicitly to their disability. Providing multiple options related to having multiple ways to demonstrate their learning, engage in course content, earn points for the class, and have course content taught to them. For many participants, having multiple options reduced their anxiety, helped them absorb and follow along with content, and allowed them to uses their primary or preferred learning style. Having material and information in advance allowed participants to plan and plot out what they needed to do, at what pace, and in what timeline for the course. They were also able convert materials ahead of time if they needed them in an alternative format.

Several of the findings in this section match practices of support identified by McGuire and Scott (2006). These practices of support included a welcoming classroom climate, connecting teaching with real life experiences, frequent and formative feedback, and supporting individual learning needs within the group. In reporting their findings, McGuire and Scott note that instructor attributes also surfaced as a strong theme in supporting learning among their participants. A few themes of support that emerged in this study that were not necessarily reflected in the work of McGuire and Scott included those related to peer learning, discussion, validating identity and multiple options for demonstrating learning.

Key Findings Related to Practices and Factors That Create Barriers to Learning

Factors and practices that created barriers to students' learning in many ways reflected the opposite of what was shared about supports to learning. Within this research question instructor role was again one of the most prominent themes that surfaced from participant interviews and journal entries. Participants discussed the ways in which messaging from instructors about their anticipated failure, as well as resistance

to providing help and limiting communication about struggles or needed accommodations made them question their ability to be successful in the courses. Sometimes the messaging resulted in reducing participants' confidence in themselves, their willingness to seek help or ask for accommodations, and at times their participation in the class altogether. These findings are not unlike those of Hong (2015), which also reveal that students perceived and experienced attitudinal barriers when sharing their disability or accommodations with some instructors. These experiences in turn led students to think that their instructor did not believe in their ability to succeed and negatively influenced their willingness to disclose in the future.

Similar to what was articulated in question two about discussion and engagement, participants noted significant barriers in classes that were completely lecture-based. Lecture-based classes often affected participants' ability to track and follow along with information, as well as the extent to which they were engaged in the course content. The classroom dynamic also affected the extent to which participants were able to participate in lecture, especially if they felt as though a classroom community had not been fostered. While some of the dynamic was set and created by the students in the course, findings from research question two indicate that the instructor themselves also had a significant impact on shaping the tone and overall dynamic of the course.

Participants discussed various times in which they experienced tokenism, stereotyping, and bias in the classroom environment, as highlighted earlier in this section. Participants also experienced a number of different barriers that were related to their disability. These barriers included maintaining attention to course content and tracking information, anxiety about participation or being in class, fear of being triggered by

course content, and struggling to go to class due to physical or psychological symptoms.

Findings from research question three also reveal that students' accommodations were

not always honored or were met with additional skepticism, as well as requests for

greater detail and information about the situation or issue.

Key Findings Related to Alignment or Divergence From Universal Design Principles

One of the overarching questions in this study was whether or not the practices

that participants believed supported their learning would align with or diverge from

principles related to Universal Design. Overall, the findings from question two did

reflect existing principles and practices of Universal Design. Most particularly, themes

related to classroom community, space for discussion, diverse perspectives, multiple

options, and making information and materials available in advance. Many of these

factors and practices were also reflected in the selections that participants made at the

very end of interview two, in which they were asked to identify principles that most

supported their learning. The top principles that were selected by participants included:

- A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for
  all students.

- The instructor uses varied methods of teaching and ways of delivering course
  content.

- The instructor outlines clear requirements for the course.

- Students have multiple options for demonstrating what they have learned.

- Instructor creates a community of learners in which interactions between students
  and the instructor is encouraged.

- The instructor uses teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and background knowledge.

The principles identified by participants for the most part were reflective of the themes that surfaced in research question two about factors and practices that supported their learning.

Still, there are a few findings from research question two that are less obviously addressed by the principles selected above. One significant finding in question one and two is the role of the instructor and the messages that they send to students about their openness, investment in student learning, expectations for success, and interest in well-being. The role of the instructor messaging does fit within existing principles of Universal Design, arguably in *A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students*. Still, this principle is not actually present in all frameworks of Universal Design. The findings of this study indicate that instructor messaging can set the tone for the course and can affect the extent to which students engage many other aspects of the learning environment. Put simply, if a welcoming and inclusive environment, community, and supportive high expectations are not created by the instructor, it may be more challenging for students to succeed in the course, even if other aspects of Universal Design are in place.

Instructor capacity building and learning was an aspect of instructor role that surfaced in the findings on participants' perceptions of gaps in the principles of Universal Design. Of course, instructors should have the capacity to understand diverse perspectives, how to create an engaging classroom, and disability-related issues in order to effectively implement many of the principles of Universal Design. Still, instructor

capacity building and learning is an important element to consider in scholarship and practice around Universal Design. Research has demonstrated that instructors need and desire capacity building around how to implement Universal Design (Lombardi & Murray, 2013; Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 2006), but capacity building around specific topics such as diversity, oppression and privilege, disability issues, and student engagement may also be vital to improve practice and implementation of each of the principles.

Centering and supporting marginalized students and students as teachers and learners and instructors as teachers and learners were two other gaps that were identified in the list of Universal Design principles. Findings in research questions one, two, and three reflect that students with marginalized identities experience unique barriers in the classroom environment related to tokenism, stereotyping, and bias. Although it could be argued that attention to the experiences and voices of marginalized students is captured in principles related to a welcoming climate, community of learners, or teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, the findings of this study raise important questions about whether or not the experiences of marginalized students should be more explicitly integrated into principles and practices of Universal Design.

Of course, there is often much more detail on practice and implementation attached to the principles of Universal Design than what was included in the list shown to participants in this study. Still, findings related to the impact of tokenism, stereotyping, and bias arguably further the case that other scholars have made that Universal Design frameworks must more explicitly address the needs of marginalized student populations and instructors' capacity to serve them. As scholars such as Hackman (2008) and

Liasidou (2014) have indicated, Universal Design principles would benefit from being more firmly situated in a social justice framework that addresses dynamics of power and privilege. Utilizing principles of Universal Design that explicitly address power and privilege, as well as the needs of marginalized students, could provide a more effective framework for instructors to support these students in the classroom.

A second gap that was highlighted by participants in this study was the role of the student as a learner and teacher, and the role of the instructor as a teacher and learner. Participants discussed the ways in which their learning was supported by opportunities to facilitate class sessions and involvement in decisions made about their courses. These sentiments were also expressed in the theme of commitment to student learning in research question two. Additionally, one participant discussed the important role of the instructor as a learner in the classroom as a method for leveling the power dynamic and conveying the capacity of everyone to be both a teacher and a learner. The idea of positioning both students and instructors as teachers and learners may in some ways be captured in the principle related to instructor creates a community of learners. Still, such a principle could be reframed to reflect the role of both the instructor and the students in creating the community, as well as the instructor and students being teachers and learners.

Implications

Key findings of this study indicate that students' disabilities as well as their other identities have a significant impact on the way that they experience the classroom environment. The findings also highlight the many ways in which the instructor can shape the classroom environment and the ways in which the classroom environment, as

well as teaching and learning practices, can have an overall impact on the extent to which students feel supported in their learning. The following section outlines the implications for shaping future practice and scholarship focused on students with disabilities in higher education.

Recognizing the Role of Identity in the Classroom

The findings of this study reveal that students' identities are multifaceted and dynamic in nature. Students did not in any way see themselves as just a student with a disability; on the contrary, most participants saw themselves as having a variety of identities that influenced the way that they moved in the world, who they were as people, and their positionality in different environments. The way that identity was conceptualized and named by participants was also quite fluid in nature and often times changed by context and environment. These findings indicate that the classroom environment is not a neutral environment where students leave their identity at the door. Students' identities very much affected the way that they experienced the classroom, from the way that they viewed and approached the course content, to the way in which they engaged in participation and interacted with their peers and the instructor. Classroom spaces cannot be perceived as neutral and identity-free spaces.

Students at times experienced tokenism, stereotyping, and bias in the classroom, especially if they had a prominent marginalized identity. These experiences can have a deep impact on the extent to which students feel safe in the class, believe that they belong in the environment, and their motivation to continue engaging in the content. It is critical for instructors and practitioners to recognize and value the identities that students bring with them into a classroom environment and also recognize that students' identities will

affect their experience in class. Instructors should consider verbally stating the value that diverse perspectives and experiences bring to enhancing the classroom community and course content, and encourage students to share from the perspective of their own identities. Instructors should also set expectations that students will interact with and respect each other, and that certain kinds of language and actions will not be tolerated.

Instructors should also consider providing opportunities for students to explore their identities in relation to the course content, whether through assignments, discussion, extra credit opportunities, or classroom activities. While this practice may be easier in some disciplines than others, participant narratives from this study indicate that students recognize when their identities and experiences are absent and that this can affect their learning. Instructors should also take steps to integrate diverse perspectives and recognize the identities of the scholars and practitioners being discussed in the course. When diverse perspectives are not present in existing materials, instructors should consider integrating additional materials, including reading, videos, podcasts, or bringing in guest speakers.

Disability cannot be left out of the discussions of identity or in efforts to bring in diverse perspectives into the course content. Too often disability is in fact absent from conversations about diverse perspectives and identities. While not all participants in this study saw their disability as a core identity, many participants did see it as salient and having a significant impact on their life experiences. Instructors should consider discussing disability from the very first day of the class when they discuss their syllabus. The framing of disability is important, even when discussing the syllabus statements. Approaching and discussing disability as an identity, as opposed to as just a deficit for

which students may need accommodations may enhance students' likelihood of being open about their learning needs and approaching the instructor early on in the semester. Student narratives in this study suggest that it is important for instructors to discuss disability on the first day of class when discussing the syllabus and talking about supports for students and accommodations. This act provides an important opportunity to send a message to students with disabilities that they belong in the class and that their perspective and identity also add value to the classroom community.

Reducing Disability-Related Barriers in the Classroom Environment

Nearly half of the students who participated in this study were not diagnosed with a disability until they came to college and several were also in the process of getting a new diagnosis or seeking out an assessment for another disability. Several participants were taking medications that exacerbated a second disability or were in the process of changing medications during the time of this study. These factors in this small population of students are being noted to highlight the complex and changing nature of disability. Instructors and practitioners must recognize that students are diagnosed with disabilities at different times and may be affected in a variety of different ways throughout their time in college. These factors may at times affect the extent to which students identify or associate with their disability, or see it as an aspect of identity. Their association with their disability and understanding of how it affects them may in turn be a factor in the extent to which they utilize formal supports and accommodations, or disclose a disability in the classroom. Again, both instructors and practitioners must recognize that there are a variety of factors that affect how and when students with

disabilities seek out support and accommodations, as well as how and to what extent they identify with their disability at certain times and in particular environments.

Participant narratives in this study reveal that self-doubt, shame, and stigma may also play a role in the extent to which students associate with a disability or utilize their accommodations. Instructors and practitioners must convey openness to students, including openness to hearing about their struggles and their learning needs. As highlighted in this study, the messaging that comes from others, especially from instructors, can have a powerful impact on students' willingness to share information about their disability, their belief in their own ability to succeed, and the extent to which they belong in the classroom.

While many scholars have written about the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination for students with disabilities to be successful, this approach alone will not adequately address the barriers that students experience in the classroom environment. The 13 students in this study very much exhibited traits of self-advocacy and determination. Many of these students sought support from the disability office, utilized office hours, talked with their instructors about their learning needs, and even shared resources with and tried to support other students who were struggling. The two participants in this study who did not have formal accommodations gave examples of times in which they approached their instructors about a disability-related struggle to get informal assistance. Having strong self-advocacy and determination skills is critically important, but these skills alone do not address the differential power dynamic between students and their instructors.

Self-advocacy and determination alone also do not guarantee that an instructor will be understanding, that students' accommodations will be honored, and that they will not still be affected by skepticism, stereotypes, or messaging about low expectations. Participants in this study experienced differential power dynamics, as well as attitudinal barriers in the classroom. We as practitioners and instructors need to recognize our own role in reducing barriers and ensuring equitable outcomes for students with disabilities. This assertion is not to say that students do not have a significant responsibility for their own success, but students only have so much control of the environment that they are in. Students need to be heard, validated, welcomed, empowered, and supported so that they believe that others are invested in their success. From an equity cognitive frame, accountability and responsibility must come from the institution and those in power to more broadly make a difference in the outcomes for historically underrepresented and marginalized students. As such, what we do in our institutions and in our classroom will play a critical role in reducing barriers for students with disabilities.

Implementing Universal Design in Tandem With Accommodations

Accommodations were a vital support and were noted to have made a significant difference for many of the participants in this study. Still, one critical implication of this study is that accommodations on their own are often not enough to fully support students with disabilities. First, as highlighted in this study, not all students view disability as a salient identity or choose to disclose their disability and receive formal accommodation. Second, even when students do choose to disclose a disability, they do not always utilize their accommodations or share their letter with their instructor. This choice is made for a variety of reasons but should not preclude a student from being supported in their

learning. Third, even when students do have formal accommodations, they may still experience barriers that affect their ability to thrive and be successful. As highlighted in this study, students with disabilities are not just simply students with disabilities. They have a variety of other identities that affect how they experience the academic environment. Even when an accommodation addresses one specific set of barriers or learning needs, it may not go far enough in holistically reducing barriers for students.

Implementing Universal Design principles in tandem with accommodations is one significant step that can be taken by instructors to more holistically address barriers in the classroom environment. Many of the practices that participants identified as supporting their learning do indeed fit within existing frameworks of Universal Design. When some of these practices are in place, such as Creating a Welcoming Environment and a Community of Learners, students may be more willing to share their accommodation letter or be open with their instructor about their specific learning needs. Some students may also find that they do not need to use certain accommodations because the way that the course is designed already addresses and supports their learning needs. As cited in the literature on Universal Design, instructors may also come closer to addressing the needs of students who do not disclose a disability or do not currently have a disability diagnosis but are still experiencing academic barriers (Higbee & Goff, 2008; Pliner & Johnson, 2004).

Emphasizing the Role of the Instructor in Universal Design

The important role that instructors play in affecting students' success cannot be understated. The findings of this study make it clear that students do not just see the role of their instructor as someone who delivers knowledge to them and assesses their work.

Instructors play a vital role in setting the tone and the climate for the classroom, in creating a community for the students, in engaging them in the course content, and in providing additional supports to students. In order for Universal Design practices to be effective, the role of the instructor must be further emphasized, not just in how they design the class and implement the principles, but also in how they set the tone, create the climate, and support students in the course, both with the academic content and also through guidance to support resources. Emphasizing the role of the instructor may in fact place more of a burden on a group that already experiences increasing demands for research, teaching, and service. Still the findings of this research are clear that in the context of the classroom, the instructor is one of the major sources of support for students with disabilities. Findings in this study indicated that students may feel more of an investment in a course when they receive messaging related to others' commitment to their well-being and success. It is my hope that messaging to instructors about their critical role in students' success in their course will likewise deepen their own investment to supporting students' learning.

Providing Capacity Building Opportunities for Instructors

Thus far, assertions have been made that instructors should implement Universal Design in tandem with accommodations, recognize that the complexity of student identity and disability, and expand on the way in which they see their role in supporting students. In order to take any of these steps, opportunities must be expanded for instructors to learn about Universal Design as well as issues and experiences that relate to people with disabilities and other marginalized identities. Providing opportunities, as well as incentives for capacity building may be especially challenging in an institution like the

one in which this study was conducted, where again, demands for research, teaching, and service continue to increase. Administrators may need to consider what kinds of requirements, programs, or initiatives that are already in place and in which instructors already engage in capacity building. Capacity building may also look different depending on the department or academic institution. Capacity building could take the form of mentorship by other instructors, research symposia or forums, or through departmental meetings. In an environment where there are competing demands for time, as well as an array of initiatives vying for the attention of instructors, I recognize that a seemingly simple implication is much more complex in practice. Still, opportunities for instructor capacity building are vital for a difference to be made in the classroom environment for students with disabilities.

Making the Invisible Visible

As I engaged with participants to gather data to answer my research questions, it became increasingly clear to me that students were to some extent having experiences of invisibility in the classroom—invisibility not only related to having a disability that no one knew about, but also related to students not being able to see themselves in the course content or in their discipline more broadly. "People Like Me" was integrated into the title of this dissertation because it was a sentiment that I heard conveyed by students throughout their narratives. Students indicated that they sometimes thought the instructor and other students did not think students like them were in the classroom, that they did not see people like them in their course materials and content, and that they did not know if there would be people like them in their field of study.

This sentiment of "people like me" was not limited to disability, but was also noted in relation to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other social identities. The risk of "people like me" is this: without outward acknowledgement, representation, and opportunities to see themselves reflected in the discipline, students can feel that they are invisible, that they do not belong, that they are not deserving of being in the environment that they are in, or worthy of their achievements. Again, instructors and practitioners can make a difference in reducing this sense of invisibility through verbally acknowledging the importance and explicit valuing of diversity in the academic environment, as well as through the purposeful representation of diversity and marginalized communities in all aspects of the academic environment.

From a broader perspective, I see reverberations of the "people like me" sentiment in the lack of scholarship on students with disabilities in the discipline of higher education. For example, in an analysis of four top-tier higher education journals, including *The Journal of Higher Education*, *The Review of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *The Journal of College Student Development*, Peña (2014) found that just 1% of published articles focused on students with disabilities. The lack of scholarship on this population is problematic and perpetuates the invisibility of students with disabilities in higher education. Not only must the exploration of how to improve outcomes and classroom experiences of students with disabilities occur at the institutional level but it also must occur in the national dialog and scholarship of higher education in order for this population to be truly represented.

Areas for Future Research

As previously noted, scholarship in general on the outcomes of students with disabilities in postsecondary education is lacking, especially within the discipline of higher education. What scholars choose to write about and what is published conveys a message about what and who is valued in the context of higher education. When research is limited, or restricted to certain disciplines and publications, it can in turn limit the kind of information that reaches scholars and practitioners more broadly. Students with disabilities are pursing higher education in increasing numbers and many students are being diagnosed with a disability for the first time when they get to college. In general, more scholarship is needed on the outcomes of students with disabilities, as well as the factors and mechanisms that support their learning in higher education. The findings of this particular study highlight several areas in which more research is needed.

This research just barely scratches the surface in exploring how students experience their identity and disability in college. For example, the findings are very limited in the extent to which they reveal information about how students' multiple identities interact and intersect with one another, how they shift in environments outside of the classroom, and the factors that affect the extent to which students view their identities as salient. Additionally, this study did not look at the complexity of students' meaning making filters (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Therefore, this study yields limited information about the actual development and interactions of students' identities, as well as the contextual factors that shape their experiences and understanding of their identities. Further scholarship in this area is critical in providing a more complete picture of student identity development, especially as it relates to college students and their

understanding of and conceptualization of their disability. In general, very little research exists on disability identity development. Disability should be purposefully integrated into future scholarship on identity, including that which focuses on multiple identities and intersectionality.

Furthermore, the findings of this study give some indication that students may view disability as an individual or private identity, as opposed to an identity that is a part of a larger group affiliation. While several participants spoke of having friends with disabilities and an interest in meeting students or joining a support group focused on disability, the general findings did not indicate that participants thought of their disability in affiliation with a broad identity category. This finding is likely due to the complex and unique nature of disability as a fluid identity that can occur and transform at all stages of life. Still, more research is needed to determine if this finding would be reflected in disability identity conceptualization of college students more broadly or if this finding would change based on the specific kind of disability, as it likely would for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. This kind of research would provide practitioners with a more nuanced understanding of disability identity that could better inform the development and implementation of support resources for different kinds of disabilities and communities.

Additionally, while sentiments of stigma, self-doubt, and shame related to a disability were conveyed in this study, several participants also expressed attitudes of pride and associating strengths with their disability. Further research is needed to understand how students develop disability pride within themselves and each other and what factors lead students to view disability as a strength and core factor of identity.

Understanding how students with disabilities come to view themselves as empowered and become involved in the process of pursing equitable access is crucial to truly understanding and approaching disability from a social and disability justice perspective. Although a social justice approach was utilized in this study, the extent to which the findings reflect information on empowerment and involvement in dismantling inequity is limited. Still, this research will be crucial in the future for scholars and practitioners to understand how this kind of identity development is fostered in college students.

Several students in this study discussed resources external to the classroom environment that they utilized for social and other kinds of support, including student groups, online forums, and therapy groups. Since the focus of this study was specific to the classroom environment, these findings were not explored in depth but do highlight an area for future research. A few participants discussed these resources as critical to their ability to remain in college. Further scholarship should explore the kinds of resources students find most beneficial for support, engagement, and empowerment, and the extent to which these resources affect their educational outcomes and collegiate experiences.

As highlighted in the literature review for this study, scholarship focusing on the efficacy and validity of Universal Design frameworks is greatly needed. This study explored students' experiences and perceptions of classroom practices that supported their learning, and in many ways the practices and factors they reported did indeed align with principles of Universal Design. Still, this study does not provide empirical validation of Universal Design practices. Understanding how students experience Universal Design practices is a critical aspect of well-rounded scholarship on the topics, but remains just one facet of needed scholarship. Further scholarship should explore

whether or not these practices do indeed improve the outcomes for students with disabilities and other underrepresented identities. Further research and discussion about potential gaps in Universal Design frameworks would also greatly benefit practice and implementation in the classroom. Findings of this study indicate that there may indeed be potential gaps, but the information on what those gaps are and how they should be improved is very basic and limited in scope.

Additionally, this study did not in any way include the perspectives of instructors. Research exploring implementation and assessment of outcomes is also vital in providing a greater understanding of what Universal Design principles look like in practices, what the barriers are to instructors in implementation, as well as what limitations and opportunities exists for evaluating the effectiveness of the principles. Several participants in this study noted that they thought it would be hard for instructors to implement the Universal Design practices that they thought would support their learning. They raised several important questions about how instructors would evaluate students' learning and how they would implement so many different methods of teaching, engagement, and assessment methods in a single class. We know from previous scholarship and initiatives that have occurred in universities and colleges across the nation that instructors have and do implement these principles. Still, there are currently limited in-depth studies that illustrate how these practices are implemented and evaluated, as well as the extent to which they are effective. This scholarship is vital for the future of the adoption and implementation of Universal Design practices in higher education.

Further Considerations for Interpreting This Research

Although limitations for this study have been outlined in Chapter III, I do want to reiterate a few considerations for interpreting this research. First, the sample size in this study was small and included students who self-selected to participate. Participants were likely to be those who had a specific interest in discussing their identities and had a specific interest in talking about barriers that they were experiencing in the classroom. While I sought to have a diverse sample, I am aware that the perspectives of male-identified students, as well as students of color and Native American students, international students, and other groups were very limited and in some cases absent. Additionally, this sample was almost completely comprised of students with less-apparent disabilities. A few students disclosed that they had chronic pain or other conditions that were more physical in nature, but in general, students with physical, visual, and hearing disabilities were not at all represented in this study. This fact inevitably changes and in some way skews the findings related to identity as well as barriers and supports to student learning. The voices of students with other kinds of disabilities will be vital for future research in providing a more well-rounded perspective on experiences of identity, supports, and barriers in postsecondary classroom environments.

This study also only included participants who were undergraduate students. While graduate and professional students may have some similar experiences as the participants in this study, they likely experience a variety of different issues related to the classroom environment, expectations of academic performance, and identity development than do undergraduate students. The absence of graduate and professional student

narratives in this study also highlights a need for future research to include this population of students with disabilities. Research focused on graduate students is currently quite limited but is also vital for furthering the capacity of postsecondary institutions to equitably serve students with disabilities.

Additionally, the context of the institution, as well as my role and positionality also affect the findings of this study. The context of a large, predominantly White, research university ultimately shapes the teaching and learning environment, as well as the way in which students experience the classroom and academic environment. I myself am a White, cisgender female who works in the disability office of the institution in which this study was conducted. My identities very likely affected students' willingness to enroll in the study and the kinds of information that they were willing to share with me. With all of these factors in mind, this research is not intended to be generalizable. It is instead intended to be transferrable with context considered in how the findings are read, interpreted, and utilized. This study was intended to provide a snapshot into the experiences of a small number of students to provide insight into how they thought about and were affected by their identities in the classroom environment, and what kinds of practices and factors they believed provided support or created barriers to their learning.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities are pursuing postsecondary degrees in increasing numbers. While federal legislation has been vital to ensuring equal access and preventing discrimination for this population, national data indicates that students with disabilities are still experiencing disparate outcomes in higher education. Academic accommodations are an option for students with disabilities to equally access and

participate in academic spaces but not all students seek out and utilize these formal supports. This study diverged from focusing on academic accommodations as the primary support for students with disabilities and instead looked specifically at how students with disabilities experienced the classroom environment more broadly. In particular, this study explored the ways in which students understood and experienced their identities in the context of the postsecondary environment and examined their perceptions of the factors and practices in the classroom that supported and created barriers to their learning.

Findings reveal that the identities of students with disabilities are complex and dynamic, and that an array of factors support and create barriers to learning, outside of the realm of accommodations. Instructors themselves, including the tone that they set, the messaging that they send to students, as well as how they teach their courses and assess learning all have a deep and nuanced effect on students. In order to truly support all students with disabilities, instructors and practitioners must look beyond academic accommodations alone and think critically about the elements of support that they can provide within the classroom environment, regardless of whether a student has disclosed a disability. When classroom environments are purposefully shaped and created to be equitable, inclusive, and validating spaces for all students, higher education can then begin to make real change in the outcomes for students with disabilities.

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Email Message

Greetings, my name is Emily Ehlinger and I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. As a part of my dissertation research, I will be looking at the experiences of students with disabilities in college courses. The purpose of my study is to better understand how students experience their disabilities and identities in college classrooms, as well as to explore their perspectives on practices that benefit or create barriers to their learning.

I am seeking participants for this study who are current University of Minnesota juniors or seniors who have been previously diagnosed with a disability. You are not required to be registered with the Disability Resource Center to participate in this study.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me directly at eehling@umn.edu.

Participants who meet the eligibility requirements and are selected to participate will be asked complete the following: One 60-90 minute interview in early February, a second 60-90 minute interview in mid-April, and four reflective journaling entries during the length of the study (reflections can be submitted electronically in written format, audio recording, or video clip). Participants will also be asked to submit an electronic or hard copy of their syllabi from their spring 2016 courses. Participants who complete both interviews, four reflective journaling entries, and submit their syllabi will be compensated a total of $70.

Participation is confidential and you may withdraw from this study at any time. There is no direct risk to participating in this study. Although there is also no direct benefit, participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own identity and experiences, and will potentially contribute to improving practices related to instruction and design of college classes to better support students with disabilities in the future.

Again, please contact me directly by email at eehling@umn.edu if you have questions or if you are interested in participating in this study.

I hope you will consider participating in this study.

Best Regards,
Emily Ehlinger
Ph.D. Candidate in Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Flyer

Seeking students with disabilities to share their voice in a research study

The purpose of this study is to explore classroom experiences and identities of college students with disabilities. The intent of this research is to better inform policy and practice related to equitably serving students with disabilities.

To participate: you must be currently be an undergrad taking classes on the Twin Cities campus (at least 6 credits), in at least your second year of school, and have previously been diagnosed with a disability (which can include mental health-related disabilities).

Participants will be asked to complete the following:

- Two 60-90 minute interviews
- Four journal entries during the length of the study
- Submit an electronic or hard copy of your current course syllabi

Participants will be compensated a total of $70: $20 after the first interview and $50 after completion of the final interview and journal entries.

Participation is confidential

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Emily Ehlinger at eehling@umn.edu.

Classroom experience study
Contact: Emily Ehlinger
eehling@umn.edu

Classroom experience study
Contact: Emily Ehlinger
eehling@umn.edu

Classroom experience study
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Appendix C

Participant Information Questionnaire

The following questions were sent to interested participants by email:

Required Information:
Name (First and last):
Preferred Name (if different from your first name above):
Year in school:
Are you currently enrolled in courses on the Twin Cities Campus?:
Major:
College:
Disability:

Optional Information:
Age:
Race, ethnicity, and/or tribal affiliation:
Gender identity:
Other identities relevant to this study (e.g. sexual orientation, nationality, generation-status, etc.):
How did you hear about this study?:

Please initial the following:
I certify that all of the information that I provided above is accurate:

Appendix D

Exploring Classroom Experiences of Students with Disabilities

You are invited to participate in a research study of postsecondary classroom experiences of students with disabilities. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a University of Minnesota student who is a junior or senior and has been previously diagnosed with a disability. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Emily Ehlinger, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information

The purpose of my study is to better understand how students experience their disabilities and identities college classrooms, as well as to explore their perspectives on practices that benefit or create barriers to their learning.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
One 60-90 minute interview in early February, a second 60-90 minute interview in mid-April, and four reflective journaling entries during the length of the study (reflections can be submitted electronically in written format, audio recording, or video clip). I would also ask that you submit an electronic or hard copy of the syllabi for your spring 2016 courses.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no direct risks to participating in this study, although you may feel discomfort in talking about your disability and classroom experiences.

While there are no direct benefits to participating in this study, the information that you provide will enhance what is known about students' experiences in college classroom environments and may potentially improve policy, practice, instruction, and design of college classes to better support students with disabilities.

Compensation:

Participants who complete both interviews and all four journal entries will be compensated a total of $70 for their participation in this study. They will receive $20 after completing the first interview and the remaining $50 after completing the four journal entries and final interview. Compensation will be dispersed in cash. Participants

will be asked to sign confirmation of receipt of payment and must complete all parts of this study to receive compensation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality. As the researcher of this study, I will be the only person who has access to the audio recordings, transcripts, journal entries and records of communication. All records will be destroyed after 2 years from the completion date of this study. Confidentiality may be broken if the participant shares information about an imminent danger or intent to harm to self or others.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Emily Ehlinger. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact either Emily Ehlinger at eehling@umn.edu, 612-626-2976, or her advisor, Rebecca Ropers-Huilman at (email), (phone number).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian:_____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview 1 Protocol

1. I'm going to start by asking you to tell me about the major you've chosen to pursue.
   a. What factors influenced your choice of what to study?
2. Tell me about your journey in postsecondary education so far.
   a. Did you start out at the University of Minnesota?

3. I'd like to ask you to think back on previous classes that you've taken during your undergraduate education. Tell me a story of a time in which you felt you were really successful in one of your classes.
   a. What was it about the class that most influenced your success?
   b. To what extent do you feel that your disability or other identities influenced your success in this situation?

4. Tell me a story of a time in which you felt you were not successful in one of your courses?
   a. What was it about that class that created barriers to your success?
   b. To what extent do you feel that your disability or other identities influenced the outcome of this situation?

5. I now want to ask you about your perspective on an ideal classroom climate. For the purposes of this study, classroom climate is defined as "the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn", and is "determined by a constellation of interacting factors that include faculty - student interaction, the tone instructors set, instances of stereotyping or tokenism, the course demographics (for example, relative size of racial and other social groups enrolled in the course), student - student interaction, and the range of perspectives represented in the course content and materials" (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, & Lovett, 2010, p. 170)

   If you were to think about your ideal classroom climate, given this definition, what would it look and feel like to you?
   a. To what extent would the instructor play a role in creating this climate?
   b. To what extent have you had a class in the past with a climate like this?
   c. To what extent do you feel the climate of the classroom has an impact on your learning?

6. I'd like to ask you to tell me a little bit about your disability. How would you describe it to someone who didn't know you?
   a. How would you describe the way your disability impacts you in a classroom setting?

    b. To what extent do you utilize strengths or strategies in the classroom related to your disability?

    c. To what extent do you experience barriers in classroom environments related to your disability?

    d. To what extent have you disclosed your disability this semester? In past semesters?

    e. What factors influenced your decision to disclose your disability?

7. I'm now going to shift to ask you about your identity more broadly. I'm going to show you a figure that represents multiple aspects of identity (see next page). I'd like you to think about how your own identity relates to this figure. (will give verbal description of the model). Where would you put various aspects of your identity, including your disability, in this model?

    a. Now think about the classes that you are currently in. To what extent would your identities shift or stay the same in this figure?

8. Tell me about the kinds of classes you are taking this semester.

    a. Describe your most positive classroom experience in your courses so far this semester.

    b. Describe your most challenging classroom experience in your courses so far this semester.

9. Is there anything else you think you'd like to add to our conversation before we wrap-up?

Supplemental Material

Please fill out the diagram below using the social identity categories listed at the bottom.

Secondary identities

Primary identities

Core Self

How other perceive you
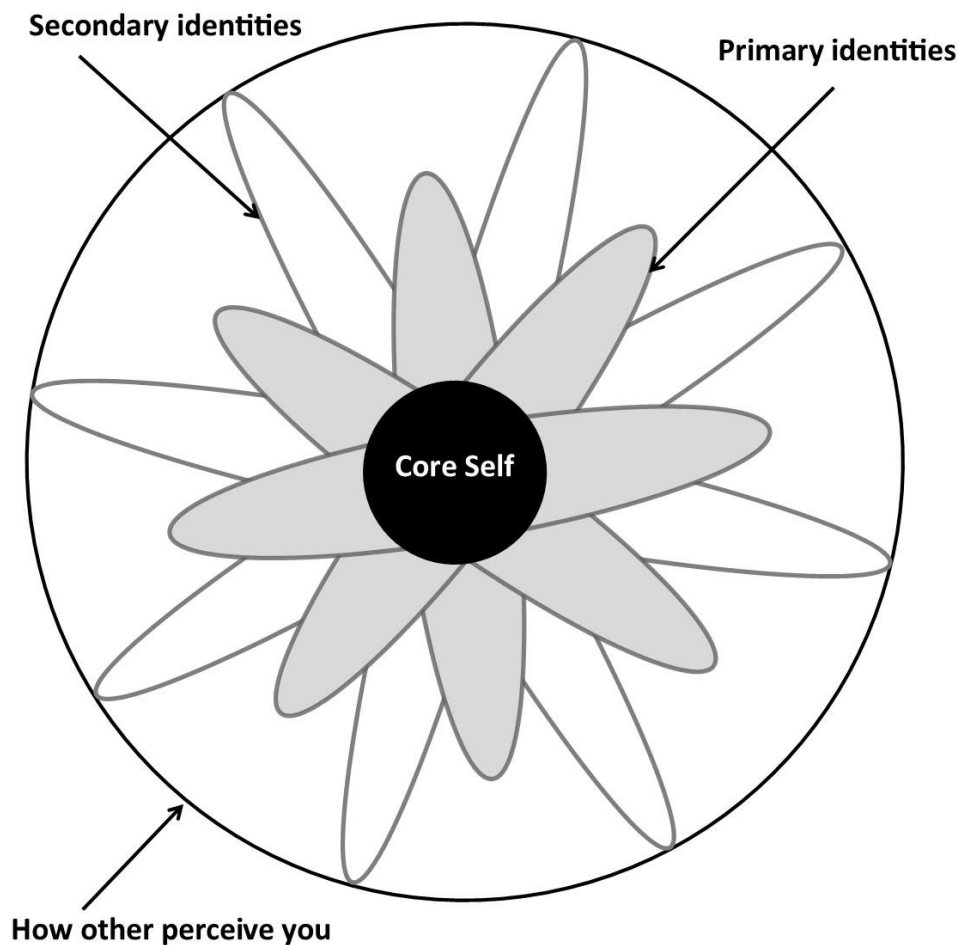
Use the illustration below to identify what identities that you feel are primary and secondary to who you are.

Please consider including the following aspects of identity:

- disability
- race
- ethnicity
- gender identity

- sexual orientation
- national origin
- religion
- socioeconomic status

- generational status
- Other identities not listed here

Fill in the identities that are most salient to you in the grey intersecting circles and the identies that are less salient to you in the white intersecting circles that are further from the core.

Appendix F

Interview 2 Protocol

1. Tell me about an experience in one of your classes that really sticks out in your mind, for whatever reason, as you think back on this semester so far?
    a. What makes this experience so memorable to you?

2. What would you consider to be your biggest success in your courses this semester?

3. What would you consider to be your greatest challenge in your courses this semester?

4. To what extent have your experiences this semester been similar or different to last semester?

5. To what extent, if any, do you feel your identities influenced your experiences in your classes this semester?
    a. To what extent do you feel your identities have an impact on your learning more generally?

6. I'd like to give you some time to look at a list of teaching and learning practices that are intended to enhance classroom accessibility for all students (see next page). Choose 3-5 items from this list that you feel have the most significant impact on your learning.
    a. Tell me about why you have selected these items.
    b. To what extent, if any, is there anything about your identities that make these specific practices particularly helpful?
    c. What, if anything, is missing from this list? What would you add?

7. The purpose of this study is to better understand how students experience their disabilities and identities in postsecondary classroom environments, as well as to explore students' perspectives on practices that benefit or create barriers to their learning. Is there anything else I should know or be thinking about, from your perspective, as I explore these research questions?

Supplemental Material

Classroom Experiences Study: Teaching and Learning List

- The instructor uses varied methods of teaching and ways of delivering course content.

- The instructor uses straightforward and clear teaching methods.

- The instructor uses teaching strategies that fit a wide variety of skills and learning paces.

- The instructor outlines clear requirements for the course.

- The instructor integrates natural supports, such as technology, in teaching and learning.

- The instructor uses teaching methods that consider diverse learning styles, abilities, ways of knowing, previous experience, and background knowledge.

- Students are provided with multiple ways to engage in the course content.

- Students have multiple options for demonstrating what they have learned.

- Teaching and instructional methods are accessible for all students.

- The course information clearly communicated and is available in multiple formats.

- The instructor communicates clear expectations for the course.

- The instructor provides constructive feedback, for example, on assignments.

- Physical effort unrelated to essential course requirements is minimal.

- Enough space and size (of materials, objects in the space) is given, for use by all students, regardless of body size, posture, manipulation, etc.

- Instructor creates a community of learners in which interactions between students and the instructor is encouraged.

- A welcoming and inclusive climate is established as well as high expectations for all students.

Appendix G

Reflective Journaling Questions

Journal Entry One: Choose a class this week to journal about the classroom climate and environment. For the purposes of this study, classroom climate is defined as "the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn", and is "determined by a constellation of interacting factors that include faculty - student interaction, the tone instructors set, instances of stereotyping or tokenism, the course demographics (for example, relative size of racial and other social groups enrolled in the course), student - student interaction, and the range of perspectives represented in the course content and materials" (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, & Lovett, 2010, p. 170).

Based on the definition of classroom climate given above, provide a description of the climate in this particular class. How does the climate feel to you? What factors do you think contribute to the feeling of the climate in your particular class? To what extent do think your disability or other identities impact your perception or experience of the climate and why?

Please do not use the names of any individuals in your journal entry. If you do use names, please give them a pseudonym (name different from their own).

Journal Entry Two: Tell me about a class session you had this week in which you felt as though the instructor supported your learning or academic success (for example, through an activity, lesson, assignment, or other aspect of the course). Please be sure to provide a detailed description, including <u>how</u> the instructor supported your learning.

If you did not have such an experience this week, write about another time this semester in which you felt your academic success was supported by an instructor and answer the same prompts. *Please do not use the names of any individuals in your journal entry. If you do use names, please give them a pseudonym (name different from their own).*

Journal Entry Three: Tell me about a class session you had this week in which you felt as though the instructor may have unintentionally created barriers to your learning or academic success (for example, through an activity, lesson, assignment, or other aspect of the course). Please be sure to provide a detailed description, including <u>how</u> the instructor intentionally or unintentionally created barriers.

If you did not have such an experience this week, write about another time this semester in which you felt barriers were created with regard to your learning or academic success and answer the same prompts. *Please do not use the names of any individuals in your journal entry. If you do use names, please give them a pseudonym (name different from their own).*

Journal Entry Four: Choose a class this week to journal about the attached model (see Appendix E), which we discussed during our first interview. I've also attached the model that you completed during the interview.

How would you arrange your identities, including your disability, on this model when you're in the class that you've selected for this entry? Describe what influenced your arrangement of identities on the model. Consider specifically where you put disability on your first model and this current model. To what extent has the location shifted or stayed the same? What impacted your decision to move or keep it in the same location?

Please do not use the names of any individuals in your journal entry. If you do use names, please give them a pseudonym (name different from their own.