

DEVELOPING SELF-ADVOCACY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENT EMPLOYEES
WITH DISABILITIES: AN EXPLORATORY MULTICASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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College students with disabilities are attending higher education in growing numbers, yet there is a disparity in employment outcomes for college graduates with disabilities compared to their nondisabled peers. Opportunities for engagement, including part-time student employment, may mitigate risks of attrition for college students, including those with disabilities. Self-advocacy is identified in the literature as a skillset that strengthens both academic and employment outcomes among people with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore, through collective case study design coupled with narrative inquiry, how students with disabilities, who experienced at least one year of part-time employment on campus, define, apply, and promote self-advocacy. Sources of data included participant responses to reflective journal prompts and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis relied heavily upon a narrative inquiry approach within cases, extending themes within and across cases to a larger reflection on the guiding theoretical framework.

KEY WORDS: Disability, Postsecondary Education, Employment, Self-Advocacy, Independent Living, Case Study

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PREFACE

“Our experience as strangers, we discover, moves along a continuum. At one end there is no knowledge or recognition; at the other, there is greatest familiarity,”

(Shabatay, 1991, p. 143).

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Students with disabilities represent a growing population within higher education. Currently, it is estimated that students with disabilities comprise 11% of the national postsecondary population (Raue & Lewis, 2011). Despite the advent of civil rights legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, adults with disabilities experience disproportionately low full-time employment rates compared to their nondisabled peers (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014). In 2014, the unemployment rate of adults with disabilities between the ages of 25 and 64 who had earned a bachelor's degree was 8.3%. Conversely, in the same year, the unemployment rate of adults without disabilities between the ages of 20 and 64 who had earned a bachelor's degree was 3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). These employment statistics represent a leak in the pipeline from higher education to employment; gainful employment for graduates with disabilities remains at a disadvantage compared to graduates without disabilities. College graduates with disabilities continue to experience barriers to employment, including insufficient preparation during college years for the processes of disclosure and work place accommodation (Kim & Williams, 2012). Although it is well-established through national statistics that baccalaureate degree completion increases employment outcomes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), a limited number of studies exist that examine early transition experiences of adults with disabilities between postsecondary education and the workforce (Madaus, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

Higher education institutions provide students with a rich array of opportunities for engagement. These opportunities afford students fertile ground to develop a sense of belonging. Early feelings of attachment and belonging to an institution might decrease the risk of attrition (O’Keefe, 2013). One area of engagement is student employment. Part-time, on-campus employment during the postsecondary experience has been positively associated with degree completion (Astin, 1997). Experiential opportunities in the form of internships and service learning are particularly impactful for students with disabilities, because these opportunities help students gain relevant job skills, and provide practice in developing disclosure (the act of sharing disability status with an employer) and self-advocacy capabilities (Johnson, 2000).

Self-advocacy is an umbrella term for several fundamental components of holistic independence (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005), and is identified as a cornerstone of successful transition experiences for students with disabilities (McCall, 2015). Conceptually, self-advocacy exists both as a construct for individual growth in developing voice and decision-making authority, as well as collective method for organizing political action (Buchanan & Walmsley, 2006). Given the aforementioned employment gap experienced by college graduates with disabilities coupled with reported benefits of providing students with disabilities experiential career preparation opportunities throughout both secondary and postsecondary education environments (Hennessey, Roessler, Cook, Unger, & Rumrill, 2005; Sears, Strauser, & Wong, 2011), student employment opportunities for students with disabilities warrant detailed exploration. The impetus behind this study was my desire to contribute

additional data, in the form of richly descriptive case studies, to the extant literature on career-readiness and self-advocacy development among college students and recent college graduates with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore, through collective case study design coupled with narrative inquiry, how students with disabilities, who experienced at least one year of part-time employment on campus, define, apply, and promote self-advocacy.

Educational Significance

As an academic discipline, education is replete with studies devoted to intervention with, and on behalf of, students with disabilities (Brock & Carter, 2016). Considerable effort has been devoted to the assessment of children with disabilities in K-12 settings, primarily through rehabilitation and special education perspectives (Scruggs, Mastropieri, Berkeley, & Graetz, 2010). Given the increased representation of students with disabilities at the postsecondary level, research on the experiences of adult learners with disabilities is emerging in the literature.

In this study, I build upon these existing inquiries for two principal reasons. First, the positive relationship between college degree completion and post-graduation employment is clearly founded. As national employment statistics among college graduates are examined, it is critical to consider marginalized populations who experience employment at a reduced rate compared to their peers. College students with disabilities are one of these subpopulations. As discussed earlier, the disaggregation of employment outcomes among adults with baccalaureate degrees demonstrates a concerning achievement gap between people with disabilities and those without.

Findings from this dissertation study will provide educational and scholarly significance by shedding further light on this troubling trend.

The second reason for the scholarly significance of this study is its potential to implore both readers and researchers to diverge from the story presented by quantitative trends and statistics to consider other narratives. Stories of success, resilience, learning, and development are often untold by the numbers alone. The decision to pursue a qualitative design exploring the development of self-advocacy and independence among people with disabilities, who engaged deeply in campus employment experiences, offers the chance to share insights on which approaches and opportunities foster positive outcomes for individual students with disabilities. Stories of success, resilience, learning, and development are often untold by the numbers alone. The data presented through this case study research may contribute to the growing canon of “disability narratives,”—histories and reflections which, according to Ginsburg and Rapp (2013), “are foundational to the integration of disability into everyday life in the United States,” (p. 188).

Therefore, the educational significance of this research is comprised of attention to a systemic social inequality, while appreciating that the richness of counter-narratives may provide scholarly and practical responses to a complex phenomenon. These responses and reflections may avail issues for future inquiry and research. Additionally, the discovery of self-advocacy development as a result of student employment experiences may shed light on programmatic initiatives to improve post-employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

Research Question

In contrast to the specificity of quantitative research questions, this qualitative approach begins with a broader framework of inquiry. Qualitative research, through exploration, surfaces and refines questions and problems throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013). This study was guided by the following research question:

How do bachelor's degree-seeking college student employees with disabilities experience the development of self-advocacy?

Profile of the Researcher

I bring a personal familiarity with disability support services and disability culture to this study. In 2009, I began a seven-year career as a disability service provider on a university campus. Through those experiences, I was able to engage with hundreds of college students with documented disabilities, and gained a deep appreciation for the rich diversity within the population of students I served. The desire to pursue this research is, in part, informed by my belief that higher education provides students with disabilities the opportunity to develop skills and confidence, both academically and personally, through curricular and extracurricular activities.

I do not identify as a person with a disability, and I recognize that this identity experience informs and shapes my perspectives. While I continue to pursue scholarship and other activities to promote broader access to higher education for people with disabilities, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the benefits and power I gain through my ability privilege. My intention, through this study, was to create space in the literature for the voices and lived experiences of participants involved in the research. As both the instrument for data collection and the author of this study, I proceeded through

my work with great attention toward the acknowledgement of my own assumptions and biases, the construction of trustworthiness with participants, vigilant member-checking of the data, and the conservation of an intact chain of evidence.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

In this dissertation study, I explored the development of self-advocacy among college students with disabilities who experienced employment opportunities on their college campuses. In order to contextualize the phenomenon of this experience, a theoretical framework was developed. This framework was predicated upon three theoretical assumptions. The first assumption was that the oppression experienced by people with disabilities is a socially constructed phenomenon. The second assumption was that disability is a social identity, which may be developed over time. The third assumption was that self-advocacy is conceptually complex and involves growth and maturity within several domains identified by extant literature. In this section, the three theoretical assumptions of the framework are explored, concluding with a comprehensive model purposed to integrate the concepts.

Models of Disability

The notion that disability is a socially constructed phenomenon may seem, initially, incongruent with dominant depictions of disability itself as a physically or mentally impeding state. Identifying models of disability, therefore, begins the process of questioning fundamental assumptions about the definition of disability in society. Disability studies literature is replete with discourse on models of understanding disability (Griffo, 2013; Linton, 1998) however, a framework composed by Jones (1996) presented an elegant synthesis of the models as a three-step evolution.

Jones (1996) categorized the progression of models of disability using three terms: functional limitations framework, minority group paradigm, and social construction framework. The functional limitations framework encompasses a medical lens, in which disability is viewed as an impairment which must be cured or otherwise managed. In this sense, disability is a condition which has impacted the individual, and therefore precludes them from full participation in daily living activities. The minority group paradigm progresses toward a legal lens, and relates primarily to the shared experience among people with disabilities of fighting for civil rights. In this model, disability is still largely categorized as an individual impairment, although one which society has the obligation to accommodate through a wide range of civil rights legislation and practices. Finally, the social construction framework recognizes that disability is a phenomenon experienced by both those who identify as having a disability and those who do not. This framework is grounded in the idea that disability is experienced differently by individuals navigating structures and systems of power through the relationships and environments they encounter in their lives.

This final model is a departure from the other two, in that it recognizes the role of power and privilege in the social construction of disability. Social construction framework could be interpreted as a critical theory, in that it examines the very assumptions and underpinnings of normalcy as a product of structural and systemic exclusions of disability from the societal realm. The norms of what it means to be able-bodied, capable, and well are understood to be the result not of some biological truth, but rather, what Martinez-Alemán (2015) described as meanings which “become accepted,

reproduced, and standardized, thereby replicating structures of domination and suppression,” (p. 8).

Identity Development

An evolving conceptualization which moves disability from a fixed medical condition which impacts an individual, toward a model of social construction, provides the opportunity to appreciate disability as a social identity which may be developed over time. Social identity development is a process in which an individual learns and accepts how they wish to identify, while eventually comprehending the complex relationships between their identity/identities and those of others (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Specifically addressing disability as a social identity, Gibson (2006) outlined a model of Disability Identity Development. The model includes three fluid stages. The first stage is Passive Awareness, in which an individual lacks positive role models of disability. Passive Awareness is characterized by co-dependency with family members and silence regarding disability status. The second stage is Realization, in which the individual begins to recognize disability as part of their life. Realization often involves grief, hatred, and other affective dissonance. The third and final stage is Acceptance, in which the individual begins to form positive associations about their disability identity. Indicators of acceptance include involvement in activism and self-advocacy, formation of relationships with other people with disabilities, and efforts to participate broadly in social and professional realms.

Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is touted as a cornerstone of positive disability identity growth (Gibson, 2006). It is also the umbrella term for a skillset which this dissertation seeks to

explore through in-depth interviews with participants. It is, therefore, highly prudent to operationalize the concept of self-advocacy through the use of theory. Through a systematic review of the literature describing self-advocacy, including a meta-analysis of indicators and attributes identified by researchers, Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) led to a conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities. The framework is comprised of four components: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. The first two components, knowledge of self and knowledge of rights, are intrapersonal in nature. The latter two components, communication and leadership, fall into interpersonal domains. Different components of the self-advocacy framework may advance throughout a person's lifetime, however, knowledge of self and knowledge of rights must be developed before communication and leadership skills progress (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005).

Comprehensive Theoretical Framework

I used the three theoretical assumptions to guide this dissertation integrating them to create a robust, interconnected model. This model was largely based on the framework proposed by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005), with further consideration given to aspects of identity development as well as broader systems of power and privilege. Specifically, knowledge of self, a domain identified as one of four in the framework of self-advocacy (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005), is further delineated to encompass the Disability Identity Development model proposed by Gibson (2006). The domain addressing knowledge of rights is integrated with the minority group paradigm described by Jones (1996). Finally, the interpersonal domains of communication and leadership viewed through a social construction lens (Jones, 1996),

in which the dynamics of privilege and oppression actively contribute to a dominant ableist perspective (Linton, 1998), which must be combated through the use of counter-narrative and critical inquiry. Nontraditional indicators of leadership development were also considered in framing leadership attainment among an academically underrepresented student population (Sedlacek, 2004). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the comprehensive model that will guide the theoretical perspective of this dissertation.

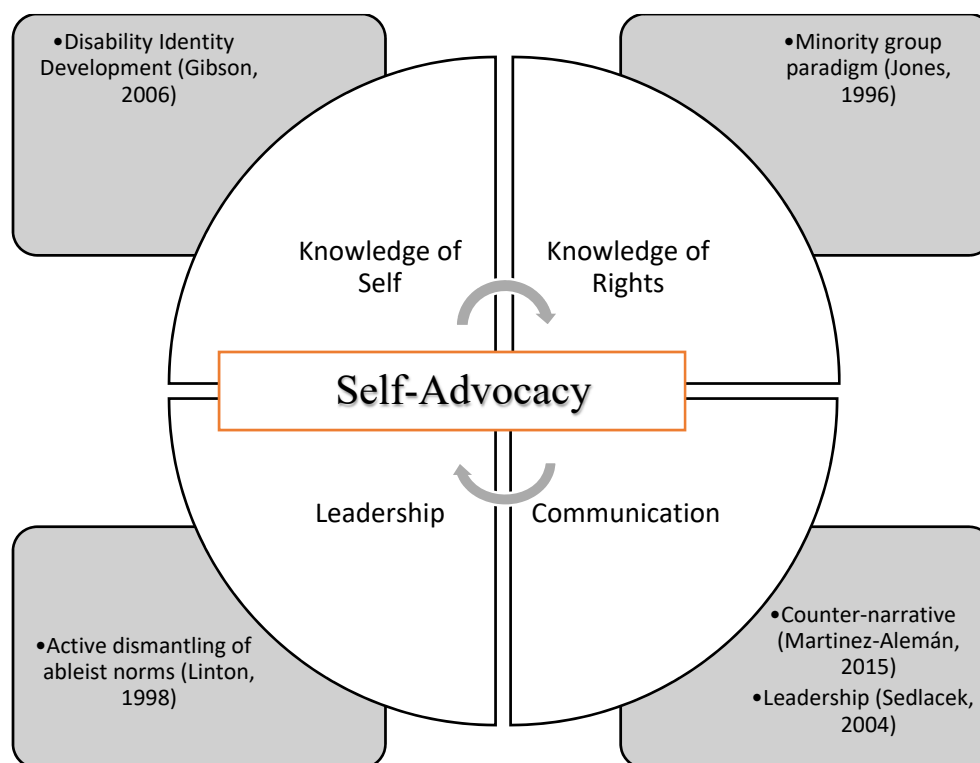


Figure 1. Comprehensive theoretical model of self-advocacy.

Research Design

In this study, I explored how participants define, apply, and promote self-advocacy, particularly within the context of lived experiences with part-time student employment. Given that I sought to explore better the depth of individual experiences in

order to understand a particular problem, qualitative research was selected as the most appropriate paradigm of inquiry. Creswell (2013) wrote that qualitative inquiry “represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration without apology or comparisons to quantitative research,” (p. 6).

Methodologically, case study design is most successful when the researcher selects identifiable cases that represent bounded systems. Cases are commonly people or programs, but most importantly encompass a “specific, complex, functioning thing,” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). In this study, I pursued a design in which individual people were considered cases. The decision to pursue a collective approach—that is, the analysis of more than one case in the study—was not driven by the desire to generalize a universal experience of the development of self-advocacy in students with disabilities who participate in on-campus employment. Rather, the collective approach was informed by an understanding that there is rich diversity of how disability is individually experienced (Mertens, 2003), and that collective design may provide space for different perspectives and voices in a manner that a single case study approach would not. Yin (2014) wrote that while inquiry may focus on a single or a collective case study design, the method in which a case is explored and evaluated remains focused on the integrity of each case as its own unique system (p. 59).

The collective case study design in this study was interpretive in approach. Interpretive design is appropriate when a theoretical framework is initially selected to guide the inquiry, and data from the case study will be used to challenge or support the assumptions identified by the framework (Merriam, 1998). In this study, for example, a theoretical framework related to the development of self-advocacy among people with

disabilities structurally guided the questions used for data collection. Following a multiple-case study procedure outlined by Yin (2014) and Stake (2006), this study began with the development of a theoretical framework, then proceeded to the conducting of case studies. However, rather than continuing with a classic reductionist approach to the identification of cross-case assertions, an analysis grounded in principles of narrative inquiry was ultimately selected to approach the data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Stake, 2000). A discussion of the analysis used in this study is addressed in greater detail in Chapter III.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced a dissertation study purposed to explore, through exploratory multicase study design, how college student employees with disabilities experience the development of self-advocacy. I outlined a comprehensive theoretical framework created to guide the inquiry and analysis of data was outlined and discussed. A preliminary overview of the research design was conducted. In the following chapter, a review of the literature is presented.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The previous chapter provided an introduction to the purpose, scope, and educational significance of this dissertation research. Background and context on the issue of employment outcomes of college graduates with disabilities was provided to illustrate the disparity between graduates with disabilities and those without. The guiding research question for this study was presented, along with my positionality as the researcher. A comprehensive theoretical framework on self-advocacy development among adults with disabilities was illustrated. Finally, a qualitative multicase study research design was introduced as a methodological framework to explore the research question posed by this dissertation study. The following chapter reviews selected arenas of extant literature for the purpose of contextualizing this dissertation study within related and supportive pieces of theory and research.

This study was predicated on the assumption that disability encompasses a rich and unique experience for both individuals with disabilities, and the environment through which they interact. Beyond acknowledging this assumption, it is critical to highlight a perspective which undergirds the method of a collective case study. That is, a desire to better understand and give voice to the experiences of individuals in a particular bounded system (Stake, 2000). Furthermore, extending upon the identification of “giving voice,” individual narratives played an integral role in exploring the central question guiding the study. Given these two influences, the chapter that follows is multifaceted. While the summary, comparison, and critique of supporting scholarship is presented, particular care

was taken to highlight qualitative perspectives, invite critical theory, and demonstrate the relevance of both the topic and design of this dissertation to previous research efforts.

Four areas of literature and research provided the background and context that is salient to the subject of this dissertation study: (a) theoretical perspectives on models of disability, (b) the academic experiences of students with disabilities, (c) definitions and conceptual illustrations of self-advocacy, and (d) employment outcomes among college graduates with disabilities. Klein (1996) reflected on the interdisciplinary framework as a three-part process: challenging the subject matter as the property of a specific discipline, filling in gaps in knowledge from other communities, and “constituting new knowledge space,” (pp. 36-37). This review and summary of the literature may be best-described as interdisciplinary. While research in educational leadership certainly informed many of the topics supporting this study, several other disciplines including psychology, rehabilitation counseling, sociology, and disability studies provided valuable perspectives.

Models of Disability

Disability theorists often use models as a method of understanding historical and social perceptions of disability. While the semantics may differ, models typically encompass a range of social paradigms related to how disability is understood, experienced, and labeled by both people with disabilities and those without. Smart (2009) discussed a four-model framework, which included the biomedical model, the environmental model, the functional model, and the sociopolitical model. DePoy and Gilson (2004) termed models as “explanations” and divided them into two categories: medical-diagnostic and constructed. Drawing from and modernizing an article written by

Hanks and Hanks (1948) in the mid-Twentieth Century, theorist Linton (1998) identified social categories for those with physical disabilities, which included: pariah, economic and social liability, tolerant utilization, limited participation, laissez-faire, and participation and accommodation. Griffo (2014) further refined the models of disability to encompass the following orientations: worth-based, charity, productivist, medical, compensation, and social. These scholars offer but a few examples of how models or classification schemes are used in disability studies to make meaning of the interactions between disability and social order.

Although the terminology, amount of detail, and cultural bias may be considered somewhat dynamic, model-based approaches tend to have three themes in common. First, the concept of a medical model is prominent in the theoretical literature, given an extensive social history of understanding disability as condition, impairment, or disease. Second, the question of how society's members with disability participate in labor, production, or the workforce and the extent to which that is valued is prevalent among various disability model frameworks. Finally, most model frameworks address what could be broadly categorized as a social model; an intentional shift toward investigating and recognizing the manner in which the environment and society create and uphold disability through abelist norms (Oliver, 1981). The following section discusses these three components—medical, labor/production, and social—in greater detail.

Medical Model

The medical model views disability as a pathological condition, warranting treatment or intervention from a community of medical experts. It is, at its core, a model concerned with deficits and abnormalities. Linton (1998) posited that “the medicalization

of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and, significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy,” (p. 11).

Indeed, the desire to correct, obfuscate, or mitigate physical and mental disabilities through the medical establishment on an individual level, without broader consideration of the ways social structures impose limitation, is at the crux of the medical model.

Disability theorists and historians have astutely observed that the life-long medical management of disability is a relatively modern phenomenon (Hahn, 2005; Linton, 1998). However, because of structural power imbalances between disability communities and the medical establishment, life-long medical management of disability may not meet the holistic needs of an individual aiming for full participation in daily life. The medical model, placing the locus of disability entirely within the individual, perpetuates a dialectic of “normal” and “abnormal,” (Shyman, 2016). Representing disability as an experience of personal deficit assists society in maintaining several degrees of distance between those identified with disabilities, and those without. The reasons for this are complex, but the dualism between normal and abnormal, sick and healthy, certainly contributes to the staying power of the medical model. “A negative and aversive reaction to the presence of disability is, in part, fear for the precariousness of one’s own being and the vulnerabilities of our ephemeral flesh,” wrote Hughes (2012, p. 69).

Labor/Production Model

Barriers to gainful and sustained employment faced by people with disabilities are a global reality, with lower employment rates experienced by both men and women with disabilities worldwide (World Health Organization, 2011). The impact of this, beyond

one of personal economic consequences, affects broader social systems of power and privilege. Roulstone (2012) observed:

It is axiomatic that in a world where work is valorized as an important social contribution, as a defense (however limited) against poverty, and as a source of self-validation, the lack of paid work or wider economic activity is a significant social disadvantage (p. 211).

Historical perspectives on the intersection between disability and labor provide insight on many of the existing concerns related to access and opportunity in today's workforce. Expanding on the category of Tolerant Utilization first described by Hanks and Hanks (1948), Linton (1998) made the claim that, in a labor model, "disabled people's actions therefore are at the will and the bidding of the nondisabled majority," (p. 51). In this framework, the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce is not only prescribed to certain functions, those particular jobs and responsibilities may be assigned with little regard for health and safety. Hahn (1997) explored this phenomenon in terms of Marx's concept of an industrial reserve army—a mass comprised of groups at high risk of economic precarity, including those with disabilities—who are used, in a most disposable manner, by the capitalist system to replenish labor forces when needs arise (pp. 172-173). While Roulstone (2012) partially refuted the general applicability of Marx's theory in the present era, a recognizable dearth of opportunities for people with disabilities in the labor market was presented in great detail.

Griffo (2014) discussed the productivist model, with its origins in the Industrial Revolution, as a way of explaining employment exclusion among people with disabilities still experienced in the present. During the Industrial Revolution, people with disabilities

were seen as incapable of fulfilling productive work roles, therefore justifying a relegation of people with disabilities to the margins of society. This societal orientation toward people with disabilities eventually evolved to a welfare/protective model, generally assuming that people with disabilities possessed a lack of independence and capacity for full-time, gainful employment (Griffo, 2014). Hughes (2012) reflected on the result of a welfare model, observing that “disabled people are cast as ‘unfortunates’, existing (and in most cases subsisting) in the dark throes of great suffering. Such persons are in need of and deserve sympathy and charity...” (p. 70).

It is unsurprising, after a review of the relationship between people with disabilities and the sociopolitical evolution of the industrial workforce, that barriers to employment remain deeply entrenched. Griffo (2014) remarked, “When those with disabilities manage to live a full life, it is not surprising that they take on the role of extraordinary and almost heroic individuals,” (p. 150). As points of entry to the professional world remain narrow for individuals with disabilities, it is understandable that both implicit and explicit messages received during secondary and postsecondary education about career readiness are particularly salient.

Social Model

The social model is a broad label for a set of perspectives that challenge the medical model’s biological assumptions of normalcy, health, and ability by examining artificial and socially constructed barriers to participation in numerous facets of daily life (Tregaskis, 2002). Oliver (1990) illustrated the concept of individual and social models, the former portraying disability as a tragic individual fate, and the latter positioning responsibility for limitations on the constructed norms of society. Contrasting the

medical preoccupation with treating, mitigating, or curing disability, the social model introduced a new paradigm of viewing externalized and socially-based systems of oppression (DePoy & Gibson, 2004). The 1976 statement of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, an organization that originated United Kingdom, is typically viewed as the formal introduction of the social model. The statement outlined, among other things, the outcomes of segregated residential environments, schools, and other institutions:

The cruelty, petty humiliation, and physical and mental deprivation suffered in residential institutions, where isolation and segregation have been carried to extremes, lays bare the essentially oppressive relations of this society with its physically impaired members. As in most similar places, such as special schools, there are some staff and volunteers doing their best to help the residents. But their efforts are systematically overwhelmed by the basic function of segregated institutions, which is to look after batches of disabled people – and in the process convince them that they cannot realistically expect to participate fully in society and earn a good living, (p. 3).

The independent living movement, catalyzed in part by the work of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, contributed toward the progression of disability rights. Callus (2013) pinpointed that one of the most politically significant components of this shift was the “result of disabled people’s growing realization that the problems they were encountering were not caused principally by their impairments but by socially constructed barriers,” (p. 29).

The examination of disability as a social construct segued into the disciplinary field of disability studies. Moving around the fixed definitional underpinnings of the medical model, the social model and accompanying disability studies discourse illuminated a much more fluid dialectic between the oppressors and the oppressed. Linton (1998) summarized disability studies as a paradigm that:

adds a critical dimension to thinking about issues such as autonomy, competence, wholeness, independence/dependence, health, physical appearance, aesthetics, community, and notions of progress and perfection—issues that pervade every aspect of the civic and pedagogic culture (p. 118).

The growth of disability studies in tandem with student disability advocacy on college campuses is not a coincidental occurrence. Stout and Schwartz (2014) observed that, “students often are influenced by DS [disability studies] concepts and, because of their position within academia, can access and act upon these ideas more readily than many others can,” (para. 4). Disability studies may provide students with a framework for activism and advocacy within several arenas, including higher education.

The Academic Experience of Students with Disabilities

Many touchstones of the disability rights movement in the United States are located within the origin story of organized student political activities at the University of California Berkley in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. In the chapter *From Charity to Independent Living*, Shapiro (1994) detailed the history of Ed Roberts, a man who became physically disabled after surviving Polio and would go on to join with a handful of other students with physical disabilities to form the Rolling Quads. Because of their activism and advocacy, the Physically Disabled Students Program launched at the

university in 1970. Like the disability rights movement in the United Kingdom, the transfer of power from institutionalized contexts to independent living was a critical component to the Rolling Quads' mission. The gradual transformation from long-term living in hospital settings to independent residential settings was a catalyst in the quest to attend higher education. Furthermore, the outcomes achieved by student activism at Berkley signaled an historically significant shift toward self-advocacy. In an assessment of the student-run Physically Disabled Students Program, Shapiro (1994) wrote:

The student program was radical. The medical model of disability measured independence by how far one could bend his legs after an accident. But Roberts defined independence as the control a disabled person had over his life.

Independence was measured not by the tasks one could perform without assistance but by the quality of one's life with help, (p. 51).

Students with physical disabilities that would have, in merely a decade prior, amounted to a life in a hospital bed were attending higher education for the first time. The focus on autonomy, choice, and advocacy provided by people with physical disabilities, and not by others on their behalf, informed the direction of the movement through the lens of the social model.

The challenges faced by college students with disabilities in the 1970's have been addressed, to some extent, by legislation, programmatic changes, cultural shifts, and other phenomena. Legislation evolved, over the course of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century from efforts aimed purely at resource allocation to the financially neediest toward more comprehensive civil rights laws (DePoy & Gilson, 2004). However, the present-day experience of students with disabilities in higher education sheds light on

remaining barriers to participation, episodes of discrimination, and low expectations for success.

In a qualitative analysis of 16 students with a variety of disabilities, many physical, using data collected via reflective journaling exercises, Hong (2015) found that participants experienced several barriers in their postsecondary education. For example, participants in the study expressed concerns about how they were perceived by faculty, informed by the students' experiences with low faculty expectations and other discriminatory attitudes. Low expectations influenced advising experiences, as well, with some participants sharing examples of interactions where they were not cared for, did not feel that their intelligence was being accurately assessed, or when they received erroneous advising. Participants in the study disclosed the additional burden of stress often experienced while attending school with a disability. For some, the process of seeking accommodation was a barrier. Hong (2015) explained, "on numerous occasions, students' preference for expediency and self-sufficiency also overshadowed their need to ask for help," (p. 218).

Living in a society that terms ability as normal and disability as abnormal is a hindrance to positive disability identity development. Linton (1998) wrote at length about the phenomena of overcoming disability. Overcoming a disability, argued Linton, is a flawed understanding. Rather, individuals with disabilities may receive accolades for overcoming the social stigma of disability. "The idea that someone can *overcome* a disability," wrote Linton, "is a wish fulfillment from the outside," (p. 18). In her seminal *TED Talk*, Stella Young (2014) approached social pressure to overcome disability by sharing the following:

I really think that this lie that we've been sold about disability is the great injustice. It makes life hard for us. And that quote, 'The only disability in life is a bad attitude,' the reason that that's bullshit is because it's just not true, because of the social model of disability. No amount of smiling at a flight of stairs have ever made it turn into a ramp. Never.

Students with physical disabilities in higher education must build an academic and professional identity in an environment that may lack visible role models in positions of authority. Linton (1998) observed that students with disabilities experience further isolation in the primary and secondary education environment by pressure to mainstream and appear as nondisabled as possible. These expectations for passing as nondisabled may lead to long term consequences for identity development.

An exploration of the professional identity development among students with physical disabilities in a teacher education program was the focus of a narrative approach employed by Dvir (2015). The narratives of all three student teachers participating in the study followed a common arc: the recognition of pain associated with experiences of discrimination and exclusion due to their physical disability, a "significant turning point" described as a gradual recognition of their strengths and disabled identity, and, finally, the construction of a professional identity integrating academic knowledge with lived experience. The narratives presented in the Dvir (2015) study demonstrated the personal significance for participants in working toward an academic and professional credential while engaging in disability identity development. The significant turning point and construction of a professional identity situated in lived experiences represented a

progression from the pressure to overcome disability/pass as nondisabled and toward a more holistic and integrated sense of self.

Disability encompasses a wide breadth of experiences, from physical to mental health disabilities. Mental illness is a growing phenomenon on college campuses, with onset of most diagnoses emerging prior to the age of 24 (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2009). Salzer (2012) posited that students with mental health disabilities were at higher risk of attrition, especially given the challenges a combination of symptoms and medication side-effects could pose. Subsequently, a quantitative study surveying the experiences of students with mental health disabilities and their nondisabled peers demonstrated a disparity between the two groups. Students with mental health disabilities made less use of faculty, staff, and student resources. However, students with mental health disabilities who demonstrated engagement, for example by participating in student leadership activities, were more likely to persist to graduation (Salzer, 2012).

A survey of college students with mental health disabilities conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) echoed the importance of student engagement (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). Former students with mental health disabilities who dropped out of college were asked about what strategies or resources may have prevented their attrition. Respondents identified academic accommodations, early access to mental health services and practitioners, peer support networks, financial assistance, disability management support, and community support from friends and family as resources that may have contributed toward their persistence and eventual degree completion.

Disclosure of disability status was another barrier identified by respondents in the NAMI survey. The stigma of mental illness was among chief concerns identified by respondents as a barrier to disclosure in a college environment. Perceived consequences of disclosure and the underuse of specific health resources were also identified as barriers to engagement and retention in a study of first year college students with chronic illness. Students with chronic and mental health disabilities may encounter additional difficulties in the transition to college, for example, moving from a pediatric healthcare model toward independently advocating for adult healthcare resources (Herts, Wallis, & Maslow, 2014).

Learning disabilities, which impact cognitive processes related to reading, math, and written expression comprise a large category within the disability spectrum. Learning disabilities provide an intriguing launching point for exploration, as learning disability diagnoses are prevalent among Americans at an estimated 12% of the population (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Additionally, learning disabilities are not typically visible; students with learning disabilities may navigate various levels of disclosure throughout their college careers, encountering decision points of sharing their diagnoses with others, including peers, staff, and faculty.

Academic development is also multifaceted. While standardized cognitive assessments comprised a hallmark of academic capability historically, non-cognitive outcomes were left largely unconsidered. Sedlacek (2004) discussed the disparity between issues and concerns facing an increasingly diverse college student population and traditional instruments used to measure aptitude and achievement among those students; the results of these biases and a lag in responsive interventions disadvantaged

educational access for underrepresented student populations within higher education. Non-cognitive variables, therefore, provide another and an important means through which to examine student development, achievement, and success.

Most of the research studies on the self-efficacy and self-concept of adult learners with learning disabilities focused on a comparative model, in which participants with learning disabilities were compared to nondisabled peers. Overall, the majority of the studies concluded that there was little significant difference in the global self-efficacy and self-concept when comparing self-reports of participants with disabilities to their nondisabled peers. However, within the academic domain, some studies did find a significant deficit in the self-efficacy and self-concept scores among participants with disabilities.

The marked difference in academic self-efficacy and self-concept among students with learning disabilities is well-established in the literature. To assess whether college students with learning disabilities reported a different self-concept than their nondisabled peers, Cosden and McNamara (1997) compared scores on the *Self-Perception Profile for College Students* and *People in My Life* instruments between two samples of college students. The researchers found that the sample of students with learning disabilities averaged lower scores on measures of self-concept, specifically in regard to academic abilities. However, students with learning disabilities reported higher levels of social connectedness and support than their nondisabled peers. Although there was a significant difference in academic self-concept between students with learning disabilities and nondisabled students, both groups reported similar scores in relation to global self-esteem.

Examining a relationship between the longitudinal impact of learning disability diagnoses and interventions on socio-emotional growth, Lewandowski and Arcangelo (1994) compared responses on the *Social Adjustment Scale-Self Report* and the *Tennessee Self-Concept Scale* between 100 participants who had received services for learning disabilities in public schooling and 100 participant peers who had not been diagnosed with learning disabilities. Participants graduated from high school up to a decade prior to the dissemination of the survey materials. Using multiple regressions, the researchers found that participants with learning disabilities did not report significant differences in social adjustment or self-concept when compared to their nondisabled peers.

Exploring the phenomenon of the development of self-concept among adults with learning disabilities, Pestana (2014) employed a qualitative approach to individually interview eight adult participants with learning disabilities about their self-concept. The data from the interviews were analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach, with a focus on drawing out themes related to self-concept. While the perceptions of their own self-concept reported by participants were overwhelmingly positive, some negative themes emerged. Participants expressed perceptions of social anxiety, abnormal self, and slow processing speed, among other attributes. Two participants who were identified as both learning disabled and physically disabled reported negative perceptions of their physical self

In a study of undergraduate students in Israel, Hen and Goroshit (2012) measured the difference between college students with learning disabilities and nondisabled college students across three domains: academic procrastination, emotional intelligence, and academic self-efficacy. Using structural equation modeling, the researchers compared

the effect relationship between variables using structure equation modeling. The mean scores of the separate assessments were compared using a multivariate analysis of variance. While there were not significant differences in grade point average between participants with learning disabilities and nondisabled participants, participants with learning disabilities presented with lower emotional intelligence scores, lower academic self-efficacy scores, and higher procrastination tendencies. Furthermore, the effect of emotional intelligence on procrastination and grade point average was more significant among participants with learning disabilities.

Bear, Minke, and Manning (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of 61 comparative studies of students with and without learning disabilities. The researchers found that there was little to no difference in the global self-worth between students with learning disabilities compared to their nondisabled peers. Students with learning disabilities perceived their academic self-concept as lower than their nondisabled peers. At the conclusion of their meta-analysis, the researchers questioned the value of future comparative studies measuring the self-efficacy and self-concept scores of students with and without learning disabilities. However, through a review of the literature, it became clear that a marked difference in self-efficacy and self-concept within the academic domain among students with learning disabilities remained a consistent finding, including in the analyses and results.

The development of academic identity may be especially challenging for students who do not readily assimilate to socially popular ideas or constructs of how college students learn and behave. To explore autism culture in the academy, Prince-Hughes (2002) presented an anthology of narratives written by college students on the autism

spectrum. Narratives often described the friction between students who presented with highly functioning cognitive skills and their difficult navigating the implicit social expectations among neurologically typical students. Writing about high-functioning students, Price-Hughes remarked:

It is these relatively “invisible” autistic people who, by dint of their intellectual prowess, are most likely to find their way into the university system and then to be misunderstood as students who are detriments to the academy’s goals: producing uniform students who learn well within a particular instruction range, freeing professors to engage in research which in turn brings the academy revenue and prestige, (pp. xix-xx).

It is unsurprising that difficulty achieving feelings of belonging would prove challenging to the educational experience of students with disabilities. Analyzing the results of in-depth interviews with several college students with disabilities, Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, and Newman (2015) suggested that participants were academically persistent because of “mastery of the student role,” (679). This mastery, involving a process of assimilation to the college culture, helped students recognize their own legitimacy as learners, and therefore develop academic identity.

Self-Advocacy

The concept of self-advocacy is intimately connected to the development of the independent living and disability rights movements. Literature on self-advocacy suggests that it is a key component of successful outcomes for students with disabilities (Test, Fowler, Brewer, & Wood, 2005). Callus (2013) succinctly portrayed self-advocacy as a practice which “seeks to counter adverse experiences of disempowerment and denial of

rights,” (p. 6). Self-advocacy has been termed a “nonacademic prerequisite skill” for college success (Foley, 2006), in that it encompasses disability disclosure as well as the pursuit of appropriate accommodations. Because the academic supports available to students with disabilities at the secondary level are so varied, the needs of college students with disabilities are often diverse and individualized. However, even students who are provided with comprehensive accommodation and support at the secondary level may face substantial challenges in the transition to higher education. Foley (2006) observed that, “at the college level, the combination of less academic support and the need to exert greater independence often results in frustration and failure for students who had previously experienced success in school.”

A review of research on self-advocacy and students with disabilities identified both gaps in the literature, as well as opportunities for future study. Endeavoring to present the lived experiences of transition from high school to college among academically successful students with disabilities, McCall (2015) conducted a phenomenological study focused on four research participants. The four participants were interviewed over the course of 15 months utilizing a longitudinal interview approach. The participants, all of whom identified with different disability categories, narrated their transition experiences from high school to college. After coding and distilling the narrative data into themes, McCall (2015) identified themes related to formal transition supports, informal transition supports, and college disability experiences. Among the formal transition supports, student-focused transition planning and family involvement were lacking for nearly all participants as they moved from secondary to post-secondary education environments. Conversely, informal transition

supports, including opportunities for self-advocacy and the presence of support and expectations for family members were prominently experienced by all participants. Participants experienced challenges in the college-level accommodation process, including challenges with instructors and college disability support personnel throughout. Future research on the development of self-determination and self-advocacy among adult learners with disabilities was recommended. The McCall (2015) study echoed the issues framed by Foley (2006). While the formal transition supports for students with disabilities at the college level were often lacking, the personal significance of informal (in McCall's terms) or nonacademic (in Foley's terms) opportunities for students to develop and practice self-advocacy remains as an integral component of students' persistence in higher education.

One of the factors which must be considered in a review of self-advocacy literature is the flexible nomenclature constructed by a broad array of disciplines addressing components of the disability experience. For example, "self-determination" is sometimes used as an umbrella term to signify many of the behaviors associated with self-advocacy. In the prelude to their conceptual framework for self-advocacy, Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) acknowledged that self-advocacy has been an education-related goal, a civil rights initiative, as well a skill closely associated with self-determination.

An article by Field, Sarver, and Shaw (2003) summarized institutional characteristics, both environmental and personality-based, that support the development of self-determination among students with learning disabilities in postsecondary settings. Environmental factors included institutional infrastructure, information access, social

support systems, class size, and the orientation of faculty toward students. Personality factors included autonomy, problem solving, and persistence. Field and Hoffman (1996) attributed five characteristics to environments which support the development of self-determination: self-determined role models, instruction of skills related to self-determination, opportunities for students to make decisions, a communication culture which values self-determination, and the presence of student support systems. These articles both highlight, once again, the value of providing students with disabilities a space to make self-guided decisions, access peer support, and participate in communication.

Self-advocacy was also viewed as an essential pillar of the retention and success among college students with disabilities in the research conducted by Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman (2015). Through in-depth interviews, the importance of self-advocacy skills in the development of academic mastery among participants was noted throughout the data analysis. The literature on self-advocacy among college students with disabilities is replete with recommendations that college and university personnel should be more intentional about teaching self-advocacy as a skill to new students to facilitate a more successful transition to higher education (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Janiga & Costenbader, 2002; Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman, 2015).

The development of self-advocacy skills is not only relevant the success of students with disabilities in higher education. Self-advocacy is also a critical component of career-readiness and successful employment outcomes. Roberts, Ju, and Zhang (2016) systematically reviewed empirical research studies on self-advocacy development among students published from 2004-2012. The studies included in the analysis ranged in

methodological design, representing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. Most of the studies included in the review addressed interventions in educational settings and made use of pre-developed instruments or curricula as the tool for assessing self-advocacy. Among the four studies included in the analysis that identified employment or post-secondary benchmarks as dependent variables, a positive relationship between the development and articulation of self-advocacy and success in the workplace was demonstrated.

Employment Outcomes

Student Employment

Developmental growth resulting from student employment experience remains a marginalized area of educational research. Large-scale longitudinal studies examine student employment as an area of engagement (Astin, 1993) and institutional involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Padgett and Grady (2009) explained:

A significant proportion of the literature examining the effects of student employment focuses primarily on academic achievement, retention, and financial implications during and after college as outcome measures. While these measures do provide insightful and practical evidence toward explaining the effects employment has on students during college, few studies have extended the effect of college employment toward specific student development and growth, (p. 31).

Luzzo and Ward (1995) posited that social learning theory, specifically self-efficacy and locus of control, were strong factors contributing to the career development of college students. The researchers executed a study on the relationship between self-efficacy, locus of control, and “career aspiration-current occupation congruence among

students” (student employment opportunities aligned with long-term career goals). The results of the study demonstrated that a more internalized locus of control was a statistically significant predictor of students seeking part-time employment congruent with eventual career goals. However, the practical difficulty of students obtaining student employment congruent with their career aspirations was noted as a critical consideration. The role of student educators, including advising staff and career counselors, was identified as a possible opportunity to strengthen the visibility of career aspiration congruent student employment opportunities. Rather than conceptualizing all student employment opportunities as equally capable of providing engagement, the type of student employment experience matters when examining effects on both student development and long-term career aspiration.

Research on the relationships between student employment and development are not broadly represented in the literature. Butler (2007) argued that several of the existing studies, by using a “finite resources” framework—reductionist logic arguing depletion of energy across competing commitments—may overlook nuanced aspects of student employment and how it is experienced. Contrasting the finite resources framework, Butler offered the concept of “resource expansion through multiple role occupancy,” (p. 501). Rather than concluding that student employment may lead to a depletion of fixed amounts of energy or capacity over time, this study explored how multiple roles and commitments may provide symbiotic enrichment, developmental benefits, and improvement to academic outcomes. Results of the study demonstrated that student employment experiences that were congruent with career aspirations facilitated growth in the academic realm among participants, leading to a stronger connections between school

and applications in the work environment. However, students facing high job demands, including heavy hours, were more likely to experience work school conflict. The implications of this study are particularly salient to the educational significance of this dissertation study. Butler (2007) highlighted a gap in the literature—that the interplay between work and school roles, particularly within the context of student development, is currently underexplored. Furthermore, the recommendation was made that future research should identify and situate growth and experiences that emerge because of school-work interrole effects in a variety of contexts.

Employment and Disability

It may be commonly assumed that job searching after completion of a bachelor's degree is a touchstone for most college graduates. While all recent college graduates may face stressors associated with a first professional job search, graduates with disabilities often weigh the ramifications of employment and unemployment in a more deeply nuanced manner. In a job-hunting manual written for people with disabilities, Bolles and Brown (2001) delineated the possible economic disincentives related to employment. These disincentives included the loss of specific medical insurance from state and federal programs, the unavailability of sufficient medical coverage from a private employer, difficulty securing adequate time for medical appointments, lack of accessible transportation, and physical barriers in the workplace itself.

Indeed, job applicants with disabilities must confront these potential obstacles while also navigating external and internal systems of oppression. In a phenomenological study of graduating or recently graduated college students with physical disabilities, Kim and Williams (2011) found that participants were, at times,

unclear about how to request and receive accommodations in the work place. Among those who had experienced an employment accommodation process, some participants expressed dissatisfaction. The researchers also concluded that many participants experienced a gap in knowledge of disability accommodation rights in the transition between postsecondary and employment environments.

Intrapersonal Development

An individual's sense of their disability is greatly influenced by the meaning that society gives to it (Smart, 2009). Young adults with disabilities may receive the message early on that expectations for their career attainment are low, consequently informing an internally oppressive construct of career-readiness (Roulstone, 2012). Students with disabilities may face unique challenges in the development of career-readiness. In a pilot study of the affect and career readiness of students with disabilities at a large university, Sears, Strausser, and Wong (2011) noted a significant deficit in external conflict scores among participants with disabilities. The external conflict scale, a marker of career-readiness, indicated an individual's capacity for reconciling the needs and expectations of others with their own. This study also explored a relationship between career-readiness and positive affect. Participants with lower levels of career-readiness were more likely to present with a negative self-concept in relation to employment goals.

Education Network

Interactions between students with disabilities and their educational institutions may influence the development of career goals and outcomes. While in college, students with disabilities explore possible careers less than their nondisabled peers (Hennessey, et al., 2005). Using a participatory action research design, Hennessey et al. (2005) explored

the career concerns of students with disabilities from seven institutions around the nation. The findings of this study illuminated institutional attributes which could help or hinder students with disabilities fully explore career goals. The availability of mentorship programs between industry and the institution targeted directly toward students with disabilities, for example, was identified by participants as an extremely critical asset for the development of career-readiness. However, participants identified nebulous and risky aspects of career development, including disclosure of disability status in the work environment. Without support and assistance from campus career centers and disability service offices on these specific issues, the concerns could persist unacknowledged by the institution.

Societal Obstacles

Discrimination in the workplace was identified as a possible area of concern among students with disabilities (Hennessey, et al., 2005). The fear of prejudice is not unfounded. Unfortunately, the fact that people with disabilities are at risk for unequal treatment in the employment process is well-documented. In a study of community college students with disabilities, Martz (2003) found that participants with invisible disabilities were 16 times more likely to gain employment than those with visible disabilities (p. 158). Although employees with invisible disabilities face many serious challenges in the work environment, many may pass for nondisabled through the employment process. Visible disability, however, may be stereotyped by employers to such a degree that the applicant's skills are ignored (Martz, 2003).

Perception of disability as a weakness, constructed through social dynamics of power and privilege, cannot be ignored as a significant barrier to employment access for

people with disabilities. Bates and Davis (2004) explained the importance of public perception of disability within the context of social capital and social inclusion:

The way in which people with learning disabilities are perceived by others can be even more important to their capacity to contribute to the development of social capital and their own social inclusion than their disability. For example, if members of the public label people with learning disabilities as fraudulent, attention seeking, disinterested in civic affairs or unable to make a positive contribution to the community, this will limit the potential for reciprocal relationships with non-disabled community members, (p. 199).

Ostensibly, one of the major spaces reciprocal relationships of the nature described by Bates and Davis (2004) would be places of employment. While access to enter the employment realm remains a chief concern among people with disabilities, the complexities of how acceptance and integration does or does not happen in the work environment after entry is also a critical dimension of retention (Skellern & Astbury, 2012).

Implications for Higher Education Leadership

The literature on career-readiness among college students with disabilities demonstrates a need for higher education leadership to better address the needs of students with disabilities beyond academic accommodation. Career interest development programs targeting students with disabilities, either led through or in partnership with campus disability officers and career centers could provide students with a broad array of resources. Although specialized programs may serve a smaller student population, these programs may not necessitate additional funding. Federal programs, such as the Office

of Disability Employment Policy, offer resources to educators and employers regarding internship and career development programs. University of Washington hosts the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Program. This program provides resources to students, families, campuses, and employers to promote greater employment opportunities for college graduates with disabilities (University of Washington, 2015).

Given the amount of time and capital invested in higher education, colleges and universities can no longer afford to ignore the transition from higher education to the workforce. A great disparity in employment rates between graduates with disabilities and their nondisabled peers sheds additional light on this need among a growing and diverse population of college students. Individual professionals can make a difference by acknowledging the additional information and experiences that students may need to formulate strong career pathways. This intentionality and practice of inclusion may also be scaled-up to the institutional level, in which students with disabilities are recognized in strategic conversations on school-to-work transitions and employment accountability for the institution's graduates.

Summary

This chapter presented an interdisciplinary literature review for the purpose of situating the current study within extant scholarship. Models of disability, including medical, labor, and social models, were reviewed. The academic experiences of students with disabilities in higher education were contextualized through a broad review of student activist history as well as more recent studies on the persistence and resilience of college students with identifying with a variety of disabilities. Self-advocacy was framed

and discussed as a skillset identified, through research, scholarship, and students' own narratives, as a significant support in the development of both academic mastery and career-readiness. Finally, employment outcomes, and employment-related concerns among college students and graduates with disabilities were presented. The next chapter will provide an overview of the methodological approach for this study.

CHAPTER III

Method

The previous chapter reviewed literature and select theories for the purpose of providing background and context of this dissertation study. Four areas were explored through this review: models of disability, academic experiences of students with disabilities, self-advocacy, and employment outcomes among college graduates with disabilities. The following chapter details the methodological approach that comprised the strategy of inquiry, guided by the central research question, of this dissertation study. An illustration of how and why an exploratory multicase study design was used to explore how bachelor's degree-seeking college students who participate in employment opportunities during their college years, experience the development of self-advocacy.

Case study research aims, in part, to understand how a phenomenon manifests within a bounded system. Stake (2006) emphasized that in multicase research, each case presents meaningful information as a unique experience, while also contributing toward a repertoire or landscape of a collection of cases. Together, this collection of cases relates to a central phenomenon, a concept that Stake termed a "quintain." In the context of this dissertation study, the development, application, and promotion of self-advocacy within a student employment context comprised the quintain, or as Stake explained, "the arena or holding company or umbrella for the cases we will study," (p. 6).

Regional Midsized University

Regional Midsized University (RMU) is a public, regional university in the Western United States (a pseudonym for the data collection site will be used to protect the identity of the participants). The university maintains a primary focus on

undergraduate education, providing limited graduate offerings for a small percentage of the student body. The population at RMU is around 15,000 students; around 60% of these students identify as female, and 40% identify as male. Nearly a quarter of the student population is comprised of students of color. The age demographic at RMU is overwhelmingly traditional; most students fall within the 18-24 age bracket. Most students are in-state residents. While the institution does not require first year students to live on campus in residence halls, apartments, and dormitories, nearly 90% opt to do so.

The number of students who self-identify as having a disability and formally register with the disability services office hovers right above 1300. This amounts to nearly 9% of the total student body at RMU. The demographic proportion of students with disabilities at RMU is slightly below nationally reported demographics of 11% (Raue & Lewis, 2011).

Students at RMU may register with the disability services office at any time during their college career. Information on the availability of disability services is routinely made available to all RMU students through the university website, orientation materials and events, as well as verbiage on how to access accommodations that is required in all course syllabi. Registering with the disability services office entails providing the department with qualifying documentation of a disability, as well as scheduling and completing an intake appointment. During the intake appointment, a disability service provider works with the student to determine eligibility for specific accommodations. Accommodation eligibility at RMU is based on a combination of factors: the academic barriers currently encountered by the student, a student's history of receiving accommodations, if relevant, and functional limitations as presented by medical

documentation. Students who are eligible for accommodation are included in the institution's active population of students with disabilities. Students remain registered with the disability services office, even if they do not pursue accommodations for which they are eligible. RMU utilizes an accommodation delivery model in which students select, on a term-basis, any accommodations for which they are eligible for their individual classes. Students are able to opt out of using accommodations at any time, but remain registered with the disability services department.

RMU offers on-campus student employment opportunities throughout the year. These positions are funded either through a work study award, as a component of a financial aid package for students under a certain income level, or through departmental means. Work study positions are limited to students who receive eligibility to accept those positions as a component of their financial aid award. Departmentally-funded positions are open to any student eligible for employment. RMU stipulates that students must be attending school at least halftime and are in good academic standing in order to work for the university. The student employment positions offered by RMU are capped at 19 hours a week. Nearly every department at RMU is eligible avail work study positions; job opportunities run the gamut from office support roles to food service team members.

Participant Selection

Selection of participants for this study was designed with two guiding considerations. First, it was determined that participants must be able to inform, through interview and journal responses, the quintain which the cases collectively explore. This meant that study participants were to be college students or recent graduates with

disabilities, who possessed an adequate level of experience with part-time employment in a campus environment. Second, the selection of participants was, in part, facilitated with the assistance of a gatekeeper. A gatekeeper is an individual who maintains relationships with key informants or participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 94).

The sampling technique employed by this study was criterion and network based. Criterion sampling suggests that all cases in the study will meet predetermined conditions of eligibility (Creswell, 2013). Network-based sampling is a subtype of purposive sampling, in which participants and gatekeepers may assist the researcher in recruiting additional participants through relationships and referral (Merriam, 1998). Unlike probabilistic sampling, which is common in quantitative research that aims to generalize findings from a sample to a larger population, purposeful sampling, using strategies such as criterion and network-based, provides researchers with the ability to identify information-rich cases for in-depth exploration and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Stake (1995) noted that the first consideration in selecting cases should be “to maximize what we can learn,” (p. 4). Although the aim of case study is not to generalize, comprehensively, for a population, there are ways in which findings from case study research may generalize on a smaller scale, or modify broadly assumed generalizations through contrast or contradiction (Stake, 1995).

Methodologically, there is no recommended fixed number of cases for a multicase study (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). Obviously, in a multicase design, there is more than one case, but the determination of total cases relies upon a careful balance between research questions, research design, and opportunities for data collection. Stake (2006) cautioned that, while cases generally number between four and ten, there may be sound justification

for selecting cases below or above that range. Yin (2014) discussed the concept of “replication logic” in a multicase design. Replication logic posits that each case is, on its own, a complete study. Multiple cases seek to provide literal or theoretical replication, in some ways analogous to repeating an experiment multiple times (p. 57). Because this study proposes that self-advocacy, as a theoretical framework, is dynamic and developmental in nature, an array of experiences that may inform different components of the framework was sought.

Participant Selection Criteria

The researcher worked with the gatekeeper, a director of disability support services at a mid-sized public university (“RMU”) in the Pacific Northwestern region of the United States, to purposively identify potential participants. The gatekeeper sent a recruitment email approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at both institutions (Sam Houston State University and RMU) to students registered with the disability support services office at RMU. The recruitment information included criteria for participation. Participants who met the criteria and were interested in participating in the study were invited to contact the researcher. I corresponded with interested students, responding to any of their questions, providing a factsheet about the study, and determining whether or not prospective participants met criteria for participation. I determined eligibility by confirming that the interested participants met the qualifications for inclusion. The gatekeeper assisted by acting as a bridge between myself and interested students. Given my former employment experience as a campus disability service provider, several students recognized me from my previous role. However, the gatekeeper was instrumental in assuring prospective participants of the legitimacy of the

dissertation study, and my demonstrated commitment to confidentiality (both through approved IRB applications as well as my professional reputation). Participants who met the following criteria were eligible for inclusion in the study:

- 1) The participant identified as a person with a disability (with the disability services office at RMU)
- 2) The participant was currently enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program
- 3) The participant engaged in a part-time student employment opportunity on or through their college campus for a minimum of six months

Data Collection

Prior to the collection of data, IRB approval was secured from both the researcher's sponsoring academic institution, as well as the institution where the case study research was conducted. An email invitation to participate in the research project was sent by the gatekeeper, the director of disability services at the site of data collection, to 1311 students, all registered with the disability service office. In the email, prospective participants received a fact sheet about the study, including its purpose and expected contributions to the field. Participants received information about informed consent, including a clear option to withdraw from the study at any time. The gatekeeper provided interested parties with my direct contact information. In total, nine respondents expressed interest and willingness to participate in the study. Four respondents immediately withdrew after I clarified eligibility criteria. Five respondents signed informed consent documents, but only four proceeded to complete the data collection process.

Data collection did not proceed until informed consent forms were completed and returned to me. Finally, because qualitative case study research involves, undoubtedly, the disclosure of personal information, participants were invited to meet with me on an informal basis, as needed, to develop rapport and responses to any questions or concerns that arose. Ultimately, the four participants completed the phases of data collection without requesting additional meetings with me.

Four Principles of Data Collection

Yin (2014) outlined four principles of data collection: Use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, maintenance of a chain of evidence, and practice of caution with electronic data and information (pp. 118-130). These four principles guided the collection of data for this study. An expanded overview of how each principle was applied to this study follows.

Multiple sources of evidence. The aim of case study research to better understand (or acknowledge the limits of understanding) the functional parts and integrated nature of a bounded system. A fundamental principle of case study research, therefore, is the “study of the particular,” (Stake, 2000). For the purpose of this dissertation, the bounded systems were college students with disabilities with at least 6 months of employment experience in a university setting. Merriam (1998) outlined three general types of data sources in case study research: interviews, observations, and documents, noting that since other types qualitative studies in education typically draw from one-two sources, case study designs frequently utilize all three (p. 134). Yin (2014) further expanded these sources of evidence into six distinct categories: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical

artifacts. For the purposes of this study, three sources of evidence contributed to the collection of data. The first source was comprised of reflective journal entries in response to prompts I provided to the participants. The four prompts were open-ended and conveyed through a secure Qualtrics link. The topics of the prompts were loosely informed by the theoretical framework for self-advocacy (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005). Each prompt corresponded to one of the components of self-advocacy identified in the theory literature (knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, leadership, and communication). A full script of the four prompts is delineated in Appendix A.

Prompts were released one week apart, unless participants expressed desire to respond at a faster pace. The second source of data was interviews, more specifically, semi-structured individual interviews with participants. These interviews were conducted after the reflective journal phase of data collection was complete. The final source was documentation. Each participant was asked to provide their most current resume. This documentation source provided a text-based artifact demonstrating how participants articulated their professional strengths and skills. Additionally, instructional manuals and training materials from participants' job sites were collected as evidence of the employment context within which they performed job duties.

Case study database. Yin (2014) discussed the foibles of combining the evidence of a case study with the researcher's report. This practice promotes a "comingling" of narrative evidence with the researcher's interpretations, and may obfuscate or confuse the data analysis and results (p. 123). An electronic database that is separate from the case study report was created. This database was comprised of journal

prompt responses, transcribed interview responses, researcher memos from the interviews, and documentation sources submitted by the participants.

Chain of evidence. A direct connection between conclusions proposed in the case study report to evidence in the case study database should be apparent to outsiders reviewing the study. Furthermore, evidence collected for the case study database should be justified through the data collection protocols, which, in turn, should be informed by the research questions and the theoretical framework (Yin, 2014). Because the goal of multicase research is not to make sweeping generalizations, the protocols followed in each case should be clearly followed as to maintain integrity of the design and results (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, because I used a theme-based narrative approach for analysis, the integrity of the narrative and sequence was critical to the integrity of the data (Kohler Riessman, 2008). In this sense, the preservation of what was “told,” both in written and oral format, became a significant component of the basis of evidence for my interpretations and analysis.

Protection of electronic data. The case study database was stored in an encrypted and password-protected file which was locked in my home office when not being accessed for the purposes of reporting. Digital audio recordings of interviews were deleted immediately following successful transcription and member-checking for accuracy.

Instrumentation: Role of the Researcher

The design of this study situated the researcher as the instrument. Stake (1995) wrote, “the intent of qualitative researchers to promote a *subjective* research paradigm is a given. Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needed to be eliminated but as an essential

element of understanding,” [italics in original] (p. 45). Denzin (2001) explained, “the researcher is historically and locally situated within the very process of being studied,” (p. 3). Through semi-structured individual interviews, the researcher acts as the instrument for data collection, as well as a contributor and shaper of data generated through conversation and engagement (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). The protocol for interviews becomes, therefore, critically important to the strength of a qualitative design. Yin (2014) observed that a case study researcher must execute *both* the recording of data, as well as the interpretation of data (p. 76). In a case study design, therefore, the focus of the researcher on the guiding theoretical framework and research questions is crucial. Furthermore, research ethics, which include the protection of human subjects, robust triangulation and member-checking strategies, as well as the provision of clear evidence as the basis of inference, play a central role in the validity of qualitative case study design (Yin, 2014).

The notion of qualitative researchers as “noninterventionists”—particularly in the context of field observations—was a consideration throughout the design, collection, and analysis of data, (Stake, 1995, p. 44). However, I would be remiss not to acknowledge my own “historical location” within the context of conducting this research. In this sense, I often reflected on a passage from Chase (2011):

Some researchers treat *their* stories about life experience (including research itself as a life experience) as a significant and necessary focus of narrative inquiry.

Sometimes their aim is to create a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those she or he studies by subjecting the researched *and* the researcher to an analytic lens. And sometimes researchers’ aim is to explore a

topic or research question more fully by including the researcher's experience of it [*italics in original*] (p. 423).

It became clearer as I pursued this study that my work could not be adequately categorized as research outside of my lived experience. My role as a researcher and my past as a disability services professional intersected with the experiences of participants; at times peripherally, and at times more intimately. For example, participants were asked to recount early accommodation experiences at the college level. I acknowledge that I occupied a historical location for some of the participants, either in a capacity as *their* disability counselor at the time, or as a professional who identified with the apparatus providing access (or perhaps barriers) to an accommodation process. I had a prior professional relationship with one participant (Chris) prior to my departure from disability services. Another participant (Michael) made contact with the disability services department during my tenure, though did not interact with me specifically. The other two participants (Rachel and Greg) were not students at RMU while I worked in disability services. As an ongoing professional member of the campus community where I conducted the study, despite my departure from disability services, I had a thread of belonging and place in common with at least one of the participants. Ultimately, the worlds described through our interactions were realms in which we both had some ownership; some part to play. Through this evolution, I approached a tension in my "place as a researcher," well described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000):

The surprise [discovery of tension in oneself] comes in finding that she is uncomfortable with where this narrative process leads her, and she discovers a boundary within herself—a boundary created by her own narrative history with

respect to formalistic thinking on matters of culture and her purpose in undertaking a narrative inquiry, (p. 45).

As I continued with data collection and analysis, my goal in my role as a researcher was identify and come to appreciate the tensions and boundaries within myself. By doing this, I was able to engage in a reflexive process that truly shifted my growth as both a researcher and a practitioner in the field of higher education.

Reflective Journal Protocol

Following a method used in earlier research on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education (Hong, 2015), participants in this study were asked to complete four weeks of journaling prior to the semi-structured interviews. These reflective journal prompts are detailed in Appendix A. Reflective journaling provided several benefits to the integrity of this case study design. Participants were afforded an opportunity to explore and articulate their experiences without feeling pressured by the presence of an interviewer, the time constraints of a conversational exchange, and without perceivable judgement from an interviewer (Borg, 2001; Cooper, 1991). Belenky, et al. (1986) addressed the power of story-telling as a way of finding voice among institutionally marginalized and oppressed populations. The action of journaling may provide participants with the opportunity to revisit experiences and reflect upon them (Holly, 1989). The warming up period structured by this four-week period of reflective journal prompts was purposed to prepare participants for the interview. Finally, following the principles of Universal Design for Learning, an instructional strategy identified as a best practice for the inclusion of students with disabilities, the journal prompts facilitated multiple means of action and expression among study participants by

availing the opportunity to respond to questions in a written format and without time constraints (Gordon, Meyer, & Rose, 2016).

Beyond support in the literature introduce the sharing of lived experiences with a form of journaling, I found that multiple methods of collecting “stories” ultimately enriched the focus of the research design to study both the particulars and the complexities of each case. Describing a “rhizomatic” approach to narrative methods, Loots, Coppens, and Sermijn (2013) portrayed the multidimensionality of experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making. Asking similar questions in different ways, or across different points in time, therefore, provided me with insight on the robust nature of narrative, often providing opportunities to expand conceptions of self-advocacy and identity development.

Interview Protocol

Seidman (1991) identified a three-phase protocol for phenomenological interview. This study used an adapted version of that protocol as an overarching guide for semi-structured interviews with participants (See Appendix B). The interviews ran for an approximate duration of 45 minutes. The first third of the interview was a focused life history, in which the participant recounted their personal history leading up to the present, within the context of intrapersonal identity development. The second third of the interview was an intake of the details of the experience, in which the participant was asked to reflect upon their student employment experiences within the context of interpersonal dimensions of self-advocacy development. The final third of the interview was entirely reflective, in which the participant was prompted to make meaning of their experiences in the context of student employment, and how those could or have already

translated to the embodiment of self-advocacy in the workforce, particularly within the dimensions of leadership and communication.

Document Analysis

Bowen (2009) described five specific uses of documents in qualitative research: to provide context, to generate additional questions, to provide deeper levels of data, to observe and track development, and to corroborate findings. Primarily, document artifacts were analyzed for the purposes of building greater context for participants' lived experiences, and to corroborate findings. Training and instructional manuals from participants' job sites allowed me as the researcher to situate interview and observation data within a specific employment context. Although I initially aimed to collect participants' resumes at the end of data collection, many of the participants did not have existing resumes in their possession. Therefore, I made the decision to forego this data source.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, cases were selected to shed light on the extent to which student employment experiences provide space or opportunity for the development of self-advocacy among undergraduate college students with disabilities. Early on in the development of the research prospectus, a theoretical framework developed by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005) provided guidance on conceptual understanding of "self-advocacy" as well as for the provenance and structure of data collection. However, I developed a caution toward engaging in an overly-reductive process in the analysis of the data. Given the deep learning encountered through the review of the literature about the relationship of disability and society, both historically and presently, I

made the decision to center analysis on participants' experiences in as holistic a manner as possible, while still maintaining a connection to the supporting theoretical framework. For these reasons, while preserving a multicase study design, I opted to draw from the narrative tradition in the approach to analysis. Specifically, thematic narrative analysis was used as a foundational lens through which data were interpreted.

Thematic Narrative Analysis

Thematic narrative analysis was chosen as a methodological approach which facilitated a bridge between narrative and case study designs. Four tenants of thematic narrative analysis were identified by Riessman (2008). First, a theory or theoretical framework may guide the researcher while space is also given to identify new concepts and insights outside of those frameworks. In this study, a guiding theoretical framework was used to inform question provenance in data collection, as well as to make partial meaning of those data throughout analysis. Second, in thematic narrative analysis, the researcher maintains focus on intact segments or sequences of narrative data, rather than breaking up text in a more traditional thematic coding exercise, as one may more commonly observe in methods such as grounded theory. Thus, results were presented with large arcs of the narrative telling intact, further broken down by Seidman's protocol (1991) to contextualize chronological sequence. Third, Riessman (2008) described the importance of attention to "time and place"—meaning that the historical and locational specificity of a narrative telling is privileged over any attempts to generalize one story to a larger population. This attention to "time and place" was fundamentally honored by analyzing each case and corresponding narrative data first individually, without looking to other cases to inform primary thematic analysis. Related to the third tenant of thematic

narrative analysis, the final aspect that differentiates this method from others is a commitment to the case. The primary goal of analysis is to center understanding and meaning on what is told through the narrative. Unlike grounded theory, the final outcome is not generation of a novel theory to explain phenomena across cases.

However, in the context of this study, themes from the data were discussed in a cohesive manner after individual analysis, within the broader context of the guiding theoretical framework.

Holistic Form Analysis

The data collected from each case was summarized in a chronological format aligning with the three phases of the interview protocol: Focused life history, details of the experience, reflection on the meaning (Seidman, 1991). This approach to summarization was selected as a complement to how both the journal entry prompts and interview questions, the two main sources of data collection, were structured. The resulting case data were episodic in nature, featuring three components of narrative per individual. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) identified two underlying spectra in approaching narrative analysis: holistic versus categorical, and content versus form. While I intentionally structured data collection to delve into particular episodes of development: early educational experiences and the transition to college, details of the student employment experience itself, and reflections on how the combination of academic and work experiences informed future goals and aspirations, these particular episodes of experience comprised the understanding of a larger narrative. In this sense, I privileged subplots and overarching stories over smaller measures of content. Additionally, the way I engaged my participants in data collection, both asynchronously

through reflective journal prompts, and spontaneously through face-to-face interviews, focused on how their stories progressed along a narrative arc, informed by the interview protocol. Subsequent analysis focused on the telling of “how” stories unfolded, rather than structural components (linguistic, for example) of the telling itself. A holistic form approach to narrative inquiry aligned well with thematic narrative analysis, as both provided methodological support for the identification of broader themes and lengthier, more substantial excerpts of narrative evidence to support those themes.

Trustworthiness

As originally identified by Guba and Lincoln (1986), four dimensions of trustworthiness were identified within the context of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, I invited participants to review interview transcripts and journal prompt responses. Through this “member checking” exercise, participants were able to clarify details, redact information, or add further thoughts (particularly after reflecting on the interview experience). To ensure transferability, I provided robust descriptions of the historical and locational context of the participants’ narratives. Dependability was supported by clear protocols for storing and analyzing the data corpus. Confirmability was strengthened through the preservation of the chains of evidence—that is, themes were evidenced by the narrative, privileging holistic segments and sequences of the telling. Finally, reflexive memo writing and peer debriefing were utilized throughout the data collection and analysis processes, with safeguards in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. These practices provided me with critical opportunities to process and reflect throughout the research experience.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodological approach of this research proposal. Participants were selected using criterion and network-based sampling techniques. Data was collected through response to reflective journaling prompts, followed by participation in semi-structured interviews. Documents, including the organizational websites for participants' employers and publicly available training materials were reviewed to provide more detailed context for specific workplace structures. The data corpus was stored in a secured case-study database. A thematic narrative approach, guided by the four tenants summarized by Riessman (2008), was selected to analyze each distinct case and its respective data. Themes from the narratives were then collectively addressed within the context of the guiding theoretical framework. Practices to ensure trustworthiness throughout the research process were addressed. The next chapter presents and discusses the results of this dissertation study.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The previous chapter outlined the methodological approach used to guide inquiry in this dissertation study. A description of case study research was provided, followed by details of the data collection site and the participant selection criteria and process. Data collection methods were detailed, followed by the procedure and explanation for data analysis. The following chapter presents the results of the data collection and analysis.

This chapter presents the results of four individual case studies, analyzed through the narrative thematic analysis described in the previous chapter. Cases are first summarized in alignment with the chosen interview protocol (Seidman, 1991): Focused life history, details of the experience, and reflection on the meaning. Following this summary, themes from the case are presented and discussed. Lastly, a comprehensive theoretical framework on the development of self-advocacy among adults with disabilities is revisited in a discussion of collective impressions across the four cases.

Case One: Chris

“Just basically getting at my goals, I think, prevented me from feeling like my disability was a hindrance because I didn't see it as the defining character trait of who I am. It's just more of an additional factor that affects the way I function.”

Focused Life History

Chris is a 22-year-old male student at RMU. He is concluding his degree in speech pathology and Spanish, and has been admitted to a graduate program in speech pathology. Prior to beginning his graduate studies, however, Chris will fulfill a Fulbright grant to teach English abroad for a full academic year. In addition to his studies in

speech pathology and Spanish, Chris has remained a member of RMU's selective honors program during his tenure as an undergraduate student. Academics remain a high priority for Chris, and his goals to continue his studies through graduate school as well as eventually teach in a higher education environment are representative of the way he values education.

Chris always felt that he was destined to attend college and receive an education. Both of Chris's parents identified college attendance as a priority for their children. He received strong support from his family members from a young age:

I had always planned on going to college growing up and it was something that I started to get excited about as young as second/third grade. My parents neither of them got a bachelor's degree. They both went to community college, but they were really strong advocates for my sister and I in our education and I was involved in some youth scholar programs through the Regional Research University that made a really big impact on me being exposed to a college setting and seeing how cool college students were made a really big impression on me.

When Chris was injured shortly before high school, his assumptions about eventual college attendance were quickly challenged:

Going into high school, I knew that it was something that I wanted to pursue, and there wasn't really any question about it, but then I suffered a mild, traumatic brain injury in my freshman year of high school. Actually, right before my freshman year of high school. That kind of threw a wrench in everything and everything became sort of uncertain because my academic ability to achieve academically was impacted by that injury and just a lot of other areas.

Throughout high school, recovery from the traumatic brain injury made academics much more challenging, as Chris figured out how to best learn and navigate school through the impacts of his disability. His journey through these years also impacted him on an emotional level, eventually informing a broader sense of identity:

I struggled to come to terms with many aspects of the consequences of my brain injury, and it wasn't until the end of high school that I really identified myself as someone with a learning disability. In a lot of ways, this was freeing because it formally recognized that my learning deficits weren't due to being a weak person or bad student, but because of a real disability.

As Chris progressed through high school, the goal of attending college once again became a strong possibility. Working with his healthcare providers and seeking disability-based accommodations in the classroom equipped Chris to complete his high school education and apply to two colleges during his senior year. Chris was accepted to both colleges, and was confronted with the decision of which one to attend. One college was a commuter school; Chris could live at home, where he received daily support from his family. The other college, RMU, would require Chris to move away. Chris explained his decision to attend RMU:

Initially, I thought that I would go to the one that was closer to home, but I ended up after looking at an honors program that was available at the college that I ended up going to that was a big factor. Another factor is we decided to take a chance and I went away from home for school, and I've had a really great experience ever since so I have no regrets... I think I was really ready for a change of scenery and a different environment. I wasn't really someone who loved

high school. I had good friends in high school and I had activities that replaced the ones that weren't able to do after my injury. I was an athlete growing up and was planning on playing football and basketball in high school, but I switched to playing tennis, and I started playing guitar, and then formed a band with some of my friends, but I was really excited to leave high school because I just didn't really identify with that group of people very much, and I didn't feel very connected to the school that I associated a lot of bad memories with.

I think what I was most excited for was just a new beginning and I was really excited to take classes that were taught by talented and intelligent people to learn from my peers as well as my professors, and just get involved with all the different opportunities that were available at the college that I ended up going to. Those were the things that I was really excited about.

Chris opted to pursue academic accommodations immediately in his transition to RMU. Overall, Chris described the process of setting up and requesting accommodations at RMU as both straightforward and helpful to his studies. Chris had prior experiences with accommodations in high school, and knew that they would be an integral component of his academic success. The ability to interface with faculty directly about his disability needs and accommodations was conveyed by Chris as a benefit, although there was a learning curve in the new type of disclosure:

I think really the first quarter at RMU was I had already gotten used to having conversations with teachers about my disability in high school, but because everything was so new, and I felt like I needed to kind of prove myself as a student and, also, I just felt intimidated by professors it was a different experience

disclosing that information to professors because I was doing it on my own, and because I didn't know the professors like I had known teachers in high school.

However, despite navigating a new environment and teachers, Chris felt that he had more autonomy than he did pursuing accommodations in high school. In particular, Chris identified his participation in RMU's small honors program as a critical component of his transition to college. Chris identified his membership in this program as a support to his transition:

My first quarter at my college was a pretty difficult transition period, but I think getting to know other students, and getting to know professors in the Honors Program encouraged me to pursue the goals that I'd had all along because I think it made me see how positive an experience I could have regardless of whatever special circumstances I had as a student, and definitely was inspired and motivated by one of my professors who was a former director of the Honors Program at my school in particular and he really just showed that he had faith in me as a student even though he didn't even know me very well, but I still keep in contact with him.

Chris went on to describe why this faculty in the honors program was particularly impactful:

[Accommodations] didn't become a large topic of conversation except for with my honors professor at the time, who was also the director because I had more of an open dialog with him since he was a mentor to me through the Honors Program as well. I would talk to him about what my experience was like with my

disability and how I could still accomplish the same things that I wanted to, just in a different way.

...I think he had worked with students with learning disabilities before, as had both the other professors that I had that quarter, but I think he really treated me as an individual and so it was less about my disability and more about just what was the best plan for me, and how to make my academic experience both as fulfilling as I wanted it to be but, also, reducing some of the extra challenges that I had because of my learning disability. I don't think he's an expert on learning disabilities, but I think because he's a very ... He is, but in that time he was also just being a very kind and compassionate person. It was less of a focus on the disability and more just on, "What can I do to help you?" I appreciated that.

Details of the Experience

Finances were not the primary motivating factor in Chris's decision to pursue student employment. He discussed how his parents intentionally provided as much financial support as they were able to in order to alleviate any pressure for Chris to work while attending school. Nevertheless, Chris was intrigued by the idea of applying for a student job while pursuing his education; he saw it as an opportunity to expand his experiences in college. Chris described the role his parents and peers played as he considered applying for a resident advisor position during his first year of college:

That whole process was a big part of the second half of my freshman year at school. I learned about it I think right before the winter break, and then talked to my parents about it, and I was eventually thinking, "Well, I don't really see myself

as that kind of a person," but they thought it could be a good opportunity to look into, and the more we talked it, the more interested I became...

My RA my freshman year was a positive influence on that. She was a good role model and might not necessarily have been the most driven in the traditional RA capacity, but she was a great student and a great person to talk to, and so she took a more realistic approach to it, and was a good example for the two other people and myself on our floor who actually got the position, so I was just drawn to it because I thought it would be great interpersonal skill-building opportunity and I knew that it would help me manage my time better because I do better with more structure and with less free time on my hands, so that was what initially turned me to the position.

Chris considered the unique needs of his disability when he applied for and pursued the resident advisor position. For example, he spoke to the benefits of maintaining a highly structured week as a strategy for time management. In this sense, a student employment obligation, in addition to his academic workload, would provide additional schedule commitments throughout the week. However, in addition to this practical reasoning, Chris also expressed a desire to challenge himself on an experiential level through college employment. This desire, Chris maintained, was core to his ambition—both before and after his brain injury:

I think before and after my brain injury I've always been a pretty ambitious personality, and I set high goals for myself, and try to take active steps towards achieving those goals, so coming to college I really wanted to get the most out of the experience as possible, and for me that meant exploring a lot of different

organizations, and groups on campus, and just looking at what is available at this school that hasn't been available to me in the past, and won't be available to me after I leave, just so that I can have the greatest diversity of experiences while I'm in college and meet, and interact with a lot of people who I might have different shared interests, depending on what sort of environment I spend time with them through.

The challenge of student employment also appealed to Chris. He described his calculus of balancing challenges with “higher rewards.” Chris saw both the risk of attending school away from his childhood home and pursuing the resident advisor position as the types of challenges that would ultimately yield learning experiences, independence, and growth.

When asked to describe a typical day as a resident advisor, Chris found it impossible to summarize the daily responsibilities with any predictability. The position itself was dynamic and cyclical in nature, with many factors influencing the demands of any given day on Chris's workload. Chris explained the variability of resident advisor work:

I think one of the biggest aspects of being an RA is that there's a lot of variability in the position, and expectations vary widely, depending on your location on campus, and who your supervisor is, and what your residents are like. In a lot of ways, you have some choices to make about what kind of an experience do you want to have in the position and what kind of experience do you want your residents to have. You get to choose how you want to spend your time, and you don't clock in your hours, which is problematic in some respects, but we won't

talk about that because that's a whole 'nother issue related to just the administrative sort of approach in that department, but basically your principle responsibilities as an RA are working with students on a one-on-one level having themed conversations throughout the year.

Chris went on to describe the inconsistency between daily workloads as a resident advisor:

A typical day could be anything from no RA responsibilities and one day of just going to class and, basically, being available for any needs that might come up or it could be as much as going to class and having all those responsibilities, but you also have an event in the evening, and you have two or four one-on-one conversations with residents, and then you might be on call the same night, too, so then you go on rounds at 9:00 and 11:00, so very busy days and some days where there's no job responsibility.

Some expectations for the resident advisors proved difficult to Chris. Resident advisors were tasked with facilitating one-on-one conversations with their residents, typically revolving around academic success. The housing department set a minimum completion rate for these conversations at 80% for the resident advisors. Chris explained how this quota, along with other time commitments, created some sources of contention through the employment experience:

I think the most difficult aspects of that position is that there are specific expectations set by your supervisor, and you have to meet those on a quarterly basis, but you're in charge of how you complete those tasks, and the biggest one would be all RAs, traditionally have been expected to have an 80% completion

rate for their one-on-one conversations with their residents, and depending on how many residents you have that can be difficult to accomplish when you have maybe a five-week window to have those conversations, and you have 58 residents like I had both years as an RA. That's the biggest pressure you feel, but there's a lot of time commitments that can be a drag to plan around being on call.

Chris further explained some of the stress associated with rotating through being on-call alongside with the other responsibilities of the position:

You have one night a week where you're on call and then you have two or three weekends per quarter that you're on call, and so that's a big commitment that you can't really work around, and then events and stuff like that. I think the time commitment, and the deadlines were the hardest thing for me to manage, but dealing with people can be difficult and when personalities don't work together very well, then that can be a challenge.

Chris returned as a resident advisor for a second year, but endured a less pleasant experience. He described feeling a lack of appreciation from his residents and supervisor, which made it difficult to persist in a position that required much of his time and energy. Eyeing his fourth and final year in college as a time when he would be applying for both graduate programs and a Fulbright grant, Chris decided to take a student position in the RMU Registrar's Office. Chris explained some of the benefits of the new position:

I got to choose my own hours, and I still do, which is that I recognize will probably the only time or might be the only time in my life that I'll be able to do that, so I'm trying to enjoy that as much as I can. I work with great people who are

passionate about what they do, and really dedicated to student support. That's when I find experience getting to work in sort of a more professional environment. Basically, I set my schedule for the quarter and then I would show up, most of the time on schedule, but if I had something going on, then I would cancel for work that day, and that was a big deal, but I would just be reporting to my supervisors on a direct basis, and they would assign me projects, and then I would just complete them, and they would let me know if there was deadline, but most of the time it would just be complete stuff as I can because they're in a support role.

Chris found that the new position as an assistant for scheduling and curriculum in the registrar's office gave him an opportunity to capitalize on a different strength: his attention to detail. He identified his ability to persist through projects that required several hours of attention to minutiae:

I think what are some of my strongest traits in my current position are my attention to detail and my perfectionist traits, a little bit, which can be kind of a hindrance when I'm working on stuff for school, but when I'm doing data entry or other kind of more detail-oriented tasks, helps me make sure they don't make mistakes, and I think I'm good at concentrating on one task until it's completed, and there's lots of projects that I'll work on for multiple weeks at a time in the registrar's office, so I'm not someone who gets bored easily, I guess.

Flexibility to set his own hours during the academic year was mentioned repeatedly as a highlight of the job when Chris described his tenure in the Registrar's Office as a student employee. Longer projects allowed him to concentrate on one objective at a time.

Reflection on the Meaning

Chris articulated his definition of leadership, one that was richly informed by his experience as a resident advisor. He identified exemplar leaders as those who engaged in mutual respect with those whom they are leading. Chris was able to evidence the effectiveness of this leadership philosophy through his own experiences as a resident advisor:

I didn't consider myself a leader going into the RA role, like in the traditional sense, I guess. I had always sort of embraced the you-lead-by-example philosophy, but I've found out that there can be a lot different types of leaders, and I was well respected by my residents because I gave them the respect and the validation that they were looking for and I was proud of the relationships that I was able to establish with those people, so I guess my definition of leadership would be someone who is trusted to make important decisions for a larger group.... That person must take into account the needs of the whole group and not just their own.

In addition to reflection on lessons learned as a student employee and student leader, Chris was able to articulate a connection between his concept of leadership and his lived experience as a person with a disability. Disability provided Chris with the opportunity to understand that goals may be achieved through a diversity of approaches. Chris also identified his development of persistence through some of the disability-related challenges he has faced in recent years. Overall, Chris expressed a notion that his experience with disability shaped him uniquely, separate and in addition to the other factors in his life:

I think I wouldn't be the same person that I am today if I hadn't had to deal with a learning disability. I am much more able to be empathetic towards others who are experiencing difficulties. It doesn't even have to be related to academics, but I think I am more patient and determined because I've had to work through some of my own difficulties, so I think that really helps give me just the faith that things will be accomplished one way or another, and the flexibility to change plans if need be, so I think those are all important traits in leadership roles. I think I am a much more confident person, and I trust my own abilities to achieve goals because I've had to work through some adversity. I am willing to put myself out there for things that I'm passionate about, and that makes me a better leader.

Chris felt that his student employment experiences availed an opportunity to practice professional competencies ahead of entering the workforce fulltime. One example he described was learning how to reframe work assignments to make them personally meaningful, when it may seem initially satisfying to dismiss something due to initially low interest:

I think I know that there's always opportunities to take ownership of work, and make it your own even if it's just the way you approach it from a mental standpoint, which is important for me because one of my flaws is that I have a hard time doing my best work if I'm not invested in what I'm doing or engaged in it. I think just learning how there's often more depth to something than just what you might originally think. That's been helpful.

Chris also described how practicing communication skills with existing professionals helped him to develop his own sense of professionalism. Because of this, the learning

curve in regard to communication and etiquette, upon entering a professional environment fulltime, would be somewhat lessened:

I think just learning how to interact with peers in the professional setting and supervisors, and that would be a really uncomfortable adjustment if I had never had a job going into a very professional setting as a speech pathologist, so I think that's something that I'll always value about my student employment opportunities is that they're a really safe and kind of sheltered way of gaining those skills without having real life consequences.

The lower-risk consequences of making mistakes in a student employment setting were also meaningful. Chris described the financial benefits of student employment as secondary to the educational benefits:

There's a lot more leniency and understanding with the student employees because it's also an opportunity to learn while you're working and not just make money...

Chris credited student employment as an integral part of his overall engagement with his college education. Balancing the dual roles of student and employee provided Chris with a greater sense of investment in the institution. This increased sense of engagement and investment informed Chris's level of advocacy and activism while in college:

I think it's had a huge impact on my experience at RMU, the employment opportunities that I've gotten involved with. I think I would feel a lot less connected to my school and I think I would feel less fulfilled in my time in

college, but I think that feeling of kind of ownership of the college that I attend and, also, being the place where I work makes me take things seriously, and feel like even though I'm a student here and I'm a student employee, that doesn't mean that I can't have my voice heard and that I can't be an active participant in sort of the constant dialog that's going on campus.

Chris went on to explain that he also felt he gained different skills specifically through his student employment opportunities. This co-curricular education enhanced what he gained through his academic studies. He identified both experiences as complimentary toward his overall development:

I think I gained a lot of tangible skills, but a lot of intangible skills through my employment positions, and so I think I'll always bring those with me because this has been a really informative period in my life, and looking back on who I was when I entered college and who I am now, graduating it's a big difference, and so I think I have a lot of that to attribute to my jobs that I've been at college, and not just the classes that I've taken...

Later, Chris added:

I think if I hadn't taken any work positions at college, then I wouldn't have experienced at least half of all the personal growth that I have, so it's been a big part of my experience here.

Theme One: Risk and Reward

Throughout his journal entries and interviews, Chris emphasized his ability to identify goals that were personally valuable to him, even if they included risk. He

repeatedly framed this pursuit as a necessary tension between risks and rewards. Chris made meaning of his decisions, such as college choice, enrollment in the university honors program, the pursuit of a demanding resident advisor position, by reflecting on fear or difficulty of the unknown as a motivator for ultimately achieving a greater level of skill and learning more about himself. He seemed to derive satisfaction from the idea of taking chances with new challenges.

Chris identified himself as a highly ambitious person both before and after experiencing his brain injury. However, the intentional pursuit of challenging experiences, situations, and environments, particularly within the educational and co-curricular process, were also attractive to Chris because they helped him to increase his self-efficacy. These academic and co-curricular experiences provided Chris with the evidence that he could rise to challenges and learn new skills in order to successfully navigate and solve a variety of problems. This evidence became a tangible scaffolding upon which Chris could visualize his ability to realize his career goals of both graduate schooling as well as eventual practice as a clinical speech pathologist.

Theme Two: Mentors and Mentorship

Mentors played an important role in creating a sense of purpose and efficacy for Chris, both in the academic realm, as well as throughout his student employment experiences. An early experience with the director of the honors program at the university, who took an interest in Chris and was extremely responsive to his disability needs, was integral to his successful transition to a rigorous academic program. Chris's residence advisor during his first year at RMU inspired him to consider applying for the position when he otherwise may have looked elsewhere. Chris expressed deep

appreciation for a few particularly memorable individuals at RMU who believed in his abilities from early on.

Chris also derived satisfaction from serving as a mentor to other students later on during his college years. He took pride in offering informal mentorship and support to newer students in the university's honors program. Chris reported in his journal entries that he found it meaningful to support other students with disabilities living in the hall. Because of his experiences, he felt he was able to offer insights on how to successfully navigate RMU as a student with a disability.

Chris met with his disability services advisor every other week for throughout most of his tenure at RMU. These conversations were helpful to Chris because they provided him with an opportunity to continuously reflect on his own development within the context of academic and co-curricular challenges. He identified the mentorship he received from his disability services advisor as another critical component of his ongoing success and persistence. In a journal response, Chris relayed an episode where his disability services advisor was able to support him in providing the housing administration with specific feedback on how to make the resident advisor position more accessible to students with disabilities. He felt that the outcome of this meeting would eventually help other students like him to participate in the residence advisor program at much higher levels.

Theme Three: Membership

Across his narrative, Chris identified his role as a member of distinct groups and organizations. For example, he spoke repeatedly to his identity as a student at RMU, and the ways in which he felt more connected to RMU as a central place during his

undergraduate years. When describing the formation of his academic identity through participation in the honors and speech pathology programs, Chris often conveyed a sense of membership to those areas of study as communities. As a resident advisor, Chris identified with both membership to the residential community he helped oversee, as well as to the larger RMU resident advisor body, across campus. Fulfilling a professional role and being part of the staff in the Registrar's Office provided Chris with a strengthened sense of self-efficacy, particularly as he imagined his effectiveness in future career and academic opportunities. Maintaining collegial relationships in these arenas of membership appeared to be a motivator for Chris.

Theme Four: Employment as Co-Curricular

The primary motivator Chris disclosed for seeking student employment was to enrich his college experience by learning new skills. Although he did not initially see himself as a resident advisor, he was attracted to the idea of taking the risk, and received validating support from his parents. Chris was able to articulate how student employment, along with the benefits and challenges of his two positions, helped him to gain self-awareness about his own strengths and abilities. He recognized that the responsibilities afforded to him as a leader, for example in the resident advisor position, provided him with a unique opportunity to engage with his peers. Chris framed student employment as a co-curricular endeavor: he could identify the skills he developed through his work experience that were distinct from his academic growth. He described his employment experiences as providing the pathway to "take ownership" of his education, supporting his fully realized role as a member of the RMU campus community.

Case Two: Rachel

“Because my mind is moving so quickly, I tend to move quickly with it...”

Focused Life History

Rachel is a 32-year-old student who recently transferred to RMU from a community college system in an adjacent county. She is the mother of four children and the spouse of a Navy veteran who is retired on disability. Rachel is about midway through completing her bachelor’s degree. She plans to pursue graduate studies in mental health counseling after completing a four-year Sociology degree. Career options and employment security remain the primary goals for Rachel in her education. An abrupt end to her partner’s military career catalyzed Rachel’s return to education—first to her local community college, and now as a transfer student at RMU.

Rachel lives together with her four children, her husband, and her in-laws. They reside in a small city that is collocated with a large Navy base. Attending college was not an immediate goal for Rachel, but life circumstances changed her mind. Rachel explained her decision to attend college:

I hadn't planned on starting college until after my kids were grown and out of the house, but with my husband's disability, we kind of had to speed things up because he wouldn't be able to support us anymore and I needed to be able to support all of us. The best way to do that is college and then getting a job from there. Yeah, our plans kind of got sped up on that. Yeah.

Even though college held the promise of better career options, Rachel faced uncertainty about the transition to school. She had poor early experiences with public schooling, and was the first in her family to enroll in higher education:

I was so anxious and worried about having to start fresh. Public school was not a good experience for me. There was that hurdle to overcome, and then just trying to do something new and completely different that nobody had done before in our family. It was really scary, and so there wasn't really anything I was excited about, but it was something that I had to do to get to the career I wanted. It was just another hoop to jump through.

Rachel described two support systems as fundamental to her early success as a community college student. First, she pursued disability accommodations. Early on in her college experience, at an orientation event, Rachel learned about the services that were available to students with disabilities:

Getting accommodations helped a lot. Within the first few weeks of starting I realized I was going to need help. Having that setup in place was a huge stepping stone for me... I attended an orientation before the classes actually started, and there was a representative from we call it TRiO, but it's the disability services, and it mentioned it. I wasn't sure that I would qualify, but within the first week or two, I knew with the timed tests and just everything else that I was different and needed some assistance. I knew where to go because of that orientation, and had a meeting with her and got it set up pretty quickly. I mean, it was in the first week or two that we had them all in place. That was really useful.

Although using accommodations was ultimately very helpful to Rachel, accessing those accommodations meant disclosing her disability for the first time to anyone on campus. In a journal entry, Rachel described her first experience disclosing her disability to a support professional at LCC:

The first time I disclosed my disabilities was to the disabilities coordinator during my evaluation. I was very anxious- I could hear my heartbeat pounding in my ears, was sweating, and felt like I couldn't catch my breath. The coordinator and I shook hands and exchanged pleasantries. I handed her my psychological evaluation and explained I didn't have the doctor's diagnosis of ADHD on me, but I could get it if needed. She looked over the psych evaluation and told me I did qualify for services and the ADHD diagnosis wasn't needed because the accommodations for that were the same as what I'd be receiving anyway. She outlined which services I could receive, how to request them each quarter, and then gave me a handout for reference. She asked if I had any questions (I didn't) and gave me her contact information if I thought of anything or had future questions. I thanked her and left. I didn't have to do much talking, which I appreciated, and everything was set up very quickly.

In addition to accommodations, a shift in family dynamics was also instrumental in supporting Rachel's return to school. As the primary caregiver for four children, three of whom have disabilities, Rachel was worried about the transitions at home:

The biggest concern was how my kids were going to react, with three of the four of them being on the [Autism] spectrum. That's a really big change. With my husband being gone so much in the military, they were used to coming to mom. They knew me, and they didn't really know their dad very much. That transition for them was probably my biggest concern, because I don't want them to feel like they didn't have access to me.

Rachel described how her husband, now at home and retired from the Navy, was able to fulfill domestic and family responsibilities as a way of providing her with support:

My husband really taking on the more traditionally feminine roles, the cooking, the cleaning, the kids, so that I wouldn't have to worry as much about that. During finals week he usually tries to get the kids out of the house completely so I can just really focus. The at-home support was monumental in helping.

Rachel explained that her experience at Local Community College (LCC) was relatively welcoming; the college itself is a satellite campus associated with a larger regional system. The classes and services are all located within one building. It was easier to gain familiarity with routine, even if some classroom experiences, such as public speaking, proved difficult:

When I first started, when I was able to talk to the disability instructor and we got that taken care of, but I didn't really have many in-seat classes that were traditional. Like my math classes were more of a: you come in when you have to take a test, you take your test and then you leave. So, there wasn't any in-seat instruction. I actually was able to avoid people for the most part for at least the first full year. After that it was fairly unavoidable. We started having things like group projects and then class participation where I actually needed to disclose my disability for the sake of the group so they understood where I was coming from, boinging all over the place with different topics or saying, "No, I can't do this, and this is why."

However, upon transferring to RMU, new challenges emerged. For example, Rachel described the struggles of adjusting to a much larger campus:

This campus [RMU] is significantly bigger than the other campus. Whenever I'm going someplace new, I've got maps out and the GPS going, and sort of just trying to navigate and not get lost because I have a hard time asking for directions. I'm getting better, but yeah. Then too, with the bus, having to park at the [Park and Ride] and then I bus in. For the first quarter here, I was on a very this is the stop I got off on, the building I needed was just right there. But now in my second quarter I don't need that building, but I'm still taking that same route because trying to get off at a different stop is so anxiety-provoking for me. I don't want to do it, so I'll just walk the extra five, ten minutes to get wherever I need to. I don't have to my route.

The fear Rachel experienced around commuting and the bus, in particular, were surprising to her. This signified, to her, just how important predicable routine was for her. She described the panic that she sometimes experienced during the commute:

I didn't realize how set in a routine I actually am. Like I knew I was a creature of habit, but I didn't realize to what extent. Like I would actually walk extra far just so that I wouldn't have to get off at a different bus stop. That came as a surprise. I've always known I kind of have a difficulty being on buses. I've never had really good experiences with buses, so taking the shuttle the first few times was difficult. I knew it would be. I've gotten better with it, but there's still that twinge of panic that starts to surface every time I get on, but I was expecting that one and I've been working on that.

Despite the new challenges at RMU, Rachel found it easier to disclose her disability on the new campus. She described some of her concerns disclosing while studying at LCC:

For the most part people were pretty understanding, but it is kind of difficult to try to explain it in terms that they would understand, but that also doesn't make me seem insensitive, just saying, "Hey, I have ADD. Sorry, I'm going so crazy." People kind of like, "Oh, it's okay," but then you're wondering too, "Do they understand really the extent?" There's such a stigma around especially ADHD that it's, "Do they feel like I'm being insensitive? Am I being insensitive to others?" It was kind of a struggle to balance everything.

Conversely, at RMU, Rachel described having more direct conversations about her disability with other students:

It's getting easier too to just volunteer that information. The people on this campus seem much more willing to accept it, so that's fantastic.

Details of the Experience

Rachel works as a student employee in the campus library at LCC. Although she has recently transferred to RMU, her work study award enables her to remain eligible for employment at her alma mater. Rachel described her motivation to seek student employment as twofold: She was both in need of financial assistance during college, and she was also looking for opportunities to return to the workforce after an eight year hiatus:

We needed a little extra income, and that was the best way for me to get my foot in the door. I hadn't worked in eight years, something like that, and so trying to find ... [LCC Satellite Location] doesn't have a lot of employment opportunities to begin with. It's a pretty small community. There aren't a lot available. Being able to get my foot in the door in the academic setting where it's already kind of inclusive is, "Okay, this is probably a good place to start."

When Rachel applied for work study positions, she had two opportunities. She could either work as an aid in the LCC library, or as a receptionist in the main administration office. Rachel's assessment of her strengths and weaknesses informed her decision to take the library aid position. She mentioned both interpersonal communication demands as well as risk-level associated with the job tasks as considerations she weighed in making this decision:

There were two positions opened for work study that I felt I qualified for. One was the library and one was in the administration office as a receptionist. I've been a receptionist before, so I had a little bit more insight as to what that would entail, but I chose the library one because there would be less people. Really I wanted to be less interaction, and I felt that if I made a mistake it would not be as detrimental to the overall system. You know, we accidentally delete somebody's record, or you know. It's a much less important position I guess.

Rachel proceeded to detail a typical shift as a library aid at LCC. After signing in and putting on her badge, Rachel consults two documents—a sheet of specific daily tasks, and a sheet of general tasks—to determine what needs to be completed in any given shift. She monitors patrons to make sure they are in compliance with library rules,

watches for unaccompanied bags, and answers general questions at the front desk. The library itself is confined to one room, so it is easy for Rachel to observe most activity at a glance.

Rachel discussed the strengths she brings to her position as a library aid. She pays close attention to detail and described herself as a person who takes initiative, often problem-solving with efficiency. Rachel explained:

I am very detail-oriented. Like I can walk down a row of books and just be like, "There's something out of place." If there's even the smallest change I'm usually one of the first to realize something's off, something's different. Also too, what needs to be done. I can just walk in and be like, "This needs to be done, this needs to be done," and kind of figure out how best to do it.

Rachel expressed that her disability may contribute to the strengths she demonstrates in her employment position. She detailed how these disability-related strengths emerge in her daily work tasks:

Those OCD tendencies that I have with the details and making sure everything is neat and tidy, yes. I tend to over-clean as well to really get in there, which is beneficial because I'm really paranoid about germs. The students that are making sure they're getting very clean equipment. With my ADHD, because my mind is moving so quickly I tend to move quickly with it, so I'm able to get more done in 30 minutes than my other coworkers are able to do in their even two hours. I don't like sitting still, so I'm constantly looking for new projects. My boss has actually will leave things and say, "Don't shelve those books. Leave those for Rachel because she's going to need something to do." Yes.

While Rachel brings many strengths to her position, she also encounters challenges. Interpersonal communication and conflict comprised a major area of stress for her in the work environment. Because one of her responsibilities involves enforcing library rules, Rachel must, at times, interact as a figure of authority with library patrons. For example, Rachel described the stress of proctoring exams:

Tests are also difficult. We proctor tests and I don't want to screw those up. There is a lot of pressure there. Then too, the policy is whatever you aren't allowed with you, you leave over on the desk. Sometimes we have people fight us on that. That's really difficult for me because I know what's supposed to happen. If you're not complying with that then I'm in a position of conflict, and I don't handle that well. I usually just go and get my boss and she comes and takes care of it, but yeah. Any time that I'm in a position of conflict like that, it's very difficult for me.

At times, the same anxiety that aids Rachel in paying attention to detail and resolving problems quickly can sometimes fuel a cycle of self-doubt. For example, Rachel continues to be very uncomfortable with episodes of “down time” during her shifts:

There are times when there's just nothing to do. I've done everything that needs to be done for this shift, everything that's done for the day, we've done the site reading and the dusting and everything, and it's like, "Well, okay. Now what?" As a student I get to work on homework, but I'm always concerned, "Is there something I'm forgetting? Should I actually be doing this homework? What am I missing?"

Rachel also discussed difficulty receiving constructive feedback. The feeling of being wrong about something is a source of stress at work. Nevertheless, Rachel articulated understanding that there are learning opportunities embedded in that feedback:

I don't want to be corrected. I have a hard time being corrected. It takes a toll on me emotionally and physically. That's why I try very hard not to let those little corrections get me down throughout the whole day and just completely disrupt everything. I mean, I realize they're coming from a place where I need to grow, and I appreciate that, but at the same there is that little bit on my head that's, "You're not good enough," and it's very difficult.

Rachel's relationship with her supervisor is an important aspect of her success on the job. In one example, Rachel's supervisor advocated to keep Rachel in the library, even when another employment opportunity in the IT center opened up. It was apparent to Rachel that her supervisor valued Rachel's contributions as a library aid. Even though Rachel struggles to have direct conversations with her supervisor about the difficulties she experiences while working, Rachel described a supervisor who is often able to intuit methods of appropriate support. Rachel explained:

I personally find it difficult to approach her on those subjects. She's usually pretty intuitive though. She'll be like, "Hey, do you need a break? What's going on?" Then I can, "Okay, well maybe I do." I can take it from there, or if I've got finals coming up and I think I'm going to need more time, "Can we adjust the schedule a little bit even though you've already put it out?" It's hard for me to approach her on those things, but like I said, she's pretty intuitive and so she goes, "Hey, red flag. What's going on."

Reflection on the Meaning

Rachel described her concept of leadership as one that was based on the idea of guidance, or stewardship, rather than control. In this conceptualization, input from others was key to a successful leadership philosophy. Rachel found that her own fears about being wrong helped her to accept the ideas of others:

I think for me leadership is someone who will kind of take charge and guide whatever is going on and whatever needs to be done, not necessarily controlling it, but guiding it, taking in information and opinions from other people and using that to kind of help shape the directions...

I don't feel comfortable saying, "This is my idea and it's the right idea." I don't even feel comfortable saying, "This is my idea," quite frankly. It's, "What if it's wrong, what if it's right?" There's just so much in stating an opinion that it's just anxiety-provoking, quite frankly. I think that because of that I'm more willing to accept other peoples' ideas, and I've seen that that does make a good leader when they're willing to listen to other people. I appreciate it when people listen to my ideas and then don't reject them harshly or immediately discount them or dismiss them. I think that's really shaped who my identity and as well as my definition of leadership.

Rachel described the experiences where she demonstrates leadership. At home, she found herself as an unexpected leader of the family. Historically, Rachel saw her husband as the leader of the household, but she described how that has recently changed:

At home, because so many of the family members are, I hate to say "more disabled than me," but their disabilities manifest in ways that require somebody

else to kind of take charge, my husband's been coming to terms with the idea that I am actually the leader of the house. He's in a position I think now where he's okay with it, but it was certainly difficult for him to kind of take a more step back so that he can heal a little bit. But as that head of the house figure, I'm making sure that everything gets done and the bills are paid, the kids are where they need to be, that they're having their needs met both in school and out of school, that he's having his needs met in and out of the home.

Despite initially describing group projects as a challenge in the academic environment, Rachel drew from these experiences to evidence her demonstration of leadership in the classroom setting:

In school, I think for me it's mostly in areas where it's group projects where we have to work together and you're trying to get things started. Most recently in this last quarter we had to do a group project. It was four girls, and I don't know if it was all of us girls are just we don't want to be seen as the head or we don't want to feel like we're being commandeering or bossy or anything. Women tend to get that stereotype. But I felt there was at a point where I was like, "We need to get moving." I kind of, "Okay, let's do this," and kind of got the ball rolling. Actually at LCC we had a similar experience. There was a boy but he was much younger than I was, and so I think as the oldest person usually in the class I tend to take charge a little bit more and make sure we get projects going or get started with whatever it is we're supposed to be doing.

Rachel views her student employment experience as an opportunity that helped her develop her self-advocacy skills. She described learning to balance her wellbeing and needs with the discomfort of voicing her needs:

Definitely for myself, being able to identify that I need a break or I need extra time, whatever have you, and then feeling comfortable enough to go up and say, "Hey, I need this." Then even when I don't feel comfortable, moving past that and saying, "Okay, I do actually need to address this." I think having such an understanding boss helps, and that's helped me be able to get out of my shell a little bit more and kind of do the uncomfortable things.

The boundaries and expectations of the work environment provide some framework for facilitating these episodes of advocacy. For example, the authority Rachel derives from her position as a library aid sometimes enables her to leave her comfort zone in order to fulfill the obligations of the job. Rachel explained:

There have been times when I'm closing and somebody's not leaving and I need them to leave. Having to push past that discomfort and saying, "We're closing. You need to go or I'll call security." Yeah, definitely just having to break away from what I'm comfortable with because I'm in that position... Definitely having that name badge that says, "This is my job. This is what I'm supposed to be doing." I kind of almost see it as a crutch. Like if I have this symbol of authority, I feel much more comfortable in directing things or making demands. When I don't have it, then I don't feel like I'm as valid I guess and I shouldn't be doing these things or saying these things.

Rachel described her plans to attend graduate school for clinical psychology at the conclusion of her bachelor's degree program, even if she has to take some time off from work to finance this goal. Clinical psychology will inevitably involve interpersonal communication and boundary-setting. Although the field does not align with Rachel's ideal comfort zone, gaining new experiences and finding new challenges was important to her. She described how her student employment role helped her to gauge her long-term career interests:

I really enjoy working in the library. I appreciate the quiet. That's very helpful for me. Then of course the smell of the books is very calming for me. There was a few months there where I'm like, "Maybe I should just do library, get a masters in library services and do that because it's a very good fit for me." But I don't know that that's actually something I could do forever. I don't know that it would be challenging enough long term. But I think too, being in an environment where there's so much information gathering, information distributing, we're kind of a hub for that, and then working with such flexible people, yeah, I think that's strengthened my ideas and my resolve I guess to work where I am.

Rachel reflected on how her work experiences and her experiences as a parent helped her to appreciate the need to continue developing self-advocacy and independence. Rachel realized that in her role as an employee at the library, she could not always be all things to all people. Through her journal responses, Rachel was especially reflective on her oldest daughter's academic experiences and followed up with this topic during the interview. Observing her own daughter struggling in school, Rachel pondered her own educational journey. She explained:

Certainly that the symbol of power, using the backpack or the name badge or whatever as kind of a crutch. I think too, we have a few people that come into the library who require a lot of assistance and guidance using the equipment, or that just want somebody there to kind of help them feel like they're doing okay. We're not always able to accommodate that just because there are times when we have so much going on that we can't just sit there and hold their hands. I think that was really eye-opening for me because especially with my oldest daughter as she's struggling through middle school now, it was, "Am I holding her hand too much? Do I need to be letting her experience some of this on her own?" Then for me too, "What am I doing to hold myself back?" That was kind of an unpleasant realization, but it's something now that I'm aware of I'm trying to balance.

Theme One: Mitigating Fear

Rachel framed her return to school as an unexpected event. Her prior experiences in primary and secondary education systems were difficult, and this created a feeling of anxiety about pursuing a college education. She appeared to view the initial undertaking of higher education as a necessary sacrifice for her family system; the sudden onset of her husband's disability amounted to financial and practical pressures for Rachel to enroll at her local community college.

Throughout her narrative and journal entries, a commitment to family financial security and wellbeing emerged as a personally significant contributing factor toward Rachel's persistence in higher education. Despite this motivator, Rachel described the constant labor of mitigating fear, uncertainty, and anxiety. One way Rachel demonstrated this labor was through the telling of her commuting routine to RMU. The

act of taking the bus and navigating to class was so stressful that Rachel continued to take the bus to the same stop each quarter, even though the location of her classes changed to different buildings. Another example of this theme emerged in the challenges Rachel described regarding downtime during her job shifts at the library. She experienced anxiety about forgetting to complete tasks, often questioning whether she was truly entitled to downtime for studying and other activities.

Rachel named concerns surrounding the process of disclosure. She appeared to welcome the opportunity to tell people about her disability, but worried about whether she was explaining her diagnoses and experiences in a thorough way that was understandable to others. She was cautious about perpetuating any stereotypes or misconceptions about mental health disabilities. Overall, Rachel expressed a desire to be perceived as strong and capable; she expressed that it was challenging to be incorrect, or to ask for help. When individuals, such as her workplace supervisor, could intuit her needs for support and suggest them proactively, it was preferable to Rachel. Nevertheless, Rachel recognized that she would benefit from expressing her needs and developing a greater capacity for receiving constructive feedback.

Theme Two: Role Signifiers

Rachel described the importance of specific props or identifiers to legitimate her role in a setting in which she felt self-conscious. For example, she spoke to the power of wearing her badge while working at the library. The badge identified Rachel as an official employee—from this visible symbol, she could derive confidence to perform duties, particularly when they involved a confrontation or action of enforcement in relation to a library patron. This concept extended to her role as a student. For example,

Rachel described how wearing a backpack increased the perception that she was a student and belonged on campus. Assuming the “student” role in this sense provided her with an increased sense of authenticity. Even though Rachel acknowledged that she was both an employee of the library and a student at RMU regardless of her exterior presentation, the symbols of the badge and the backpack were clearly tools she identified as easing her own sense of belonging and authority both at the LCC library and the RMU campus, respectively.

The theme of role playing also emerged in the way that Rachel described her nuclear family dynamics upon returning to school. While her husband was serving actively in the military, Rachel identified herself as the primary caregiver for her four children. Her labor and contributions to the family were previously limited to the domestic scope; she did not work outside of the home, and spent much of her time supporting her children through their educational challenges. When Rachel’s spouse became disabled and was no longer able to serve in the military, Rachel’s role in the family shifted dramatically, as did her husband’s role. Rachel reflected on the challenges of transitioning to school as a returning adult student in two realms; while she named the barriers she faced intrapersonally as a person with a disability, she could also appreciate the disruption to the norms of her nuclear family system. Rachel effectively traded roles with her husband; he learned to become the primary caregiver in the domestic arena, and Rachel adjusted to her new role of supporting the family through earning an income and returning to school.

Theme Three: Family Disability History

Rachel expressed a unique positionality in her identity as a person with a disability in the sense that disability permeated her family system across three generations. Rachel disclosed that three of her four children were diagnosed with disabilities, and that her family cohabitates with her husband's parents, who are also both disabled. Rachel's husband was recently discharged from the military due to disability-related reasons.

From this standpoint, Rachel appeared to relate her experiences and challenges to those of her family members. She mitigated her fears of returning to school by recognizing the impact of her husband's disability on his life as more catastrophic than the daily impact of disability on her own life. Rachel also reflected on her experiences as a returning student as an opportunity to examine how to better support her children with disabilities through their schooling. Rachel struggled through her primarily and secondary education, and could see some of the same patterns reemerging, in particular, with her oldest daughter. She used the lessons learned from her lived experience as a returning student to think more critically about how to challenge and support her oldest daughter in middle school, by providing her with increased autonomy. Rachel could apply her insights on development and growth as a student with a disability to how she supported and parented her own children with disabilities.

Case Three: Michael

"I started thinking about everybody who's ever been this smart, a great person who's awesome at what they do. None of them are normal. It's all the people who enjoy what they've done who are the normal ones. So I was like, 'Okay. Maybe that's just who

I am. Maybe everybody who is really good at what they do has something a bit off about them. That's where they get their ideas from'..."

Focused Life History

Michael is a 23-year-old student at RMU. He grew up and attended high school across the country, and contemplated enlisting in the military upon graduation. Michael's ambitions changed, however, and he decided to attend RMU. Michael initially disclosed his disability at RMU for the purpose of securing a housing accommodation but did not request additional accommodations thereafter. After a turbulent start to his college academic career, Michael discovered a deep appreciation for the study of economics. Not unlike his academic career, early work experiences as a work-study student in the campus weight room were initially unsatisfactory. After finding an off-campus job at a local marina, Michael could combine his knowledge of boats with an experience to learn hands-on business operations. This off-campus job eventually became an opportunity for Michael to both work and earn money, as well as to earn internship credits through the economics department.

When I asked Michael, what factors influenced his decision to attend college, he was quick to respond that he wanted to "be smart and make money." However, after some probing, he expanded on his reasoning to include a desire for independence and to expand his world view. Michael explained the benefits of attending college:

You get to be your own person. There's no one influencing how you feel besides yourself. So if you want to do something, you can do it. And there's probably other people that do it too. People don't judge you for what you find fun or just your interests at all, really, because there's always someone else who can relate to

you. So they always think it's cool. Independence and knowing that there's a freedom to do whatever you want. You can just make it happen. That's cool.

Michael did not experience an easy transition to college. He moved across the country to a university that was much larger than his high school experience. Many of his concerns about transitioning to college initially revolved around social expectations and adjustments:

I'm from a small town. There were three towns that went to my one high school. My graduating class with three towns combined was, I think, 78 people. You knew everybody from kindergarten. They were the same people. But then when you come here, it's almost like a huge shock, because you don't know anyone. You have no friends. So you just think to yourself, "Oh, how can I make friends and make it so everybody likes me?" And so you assume that you'll just have this role to play and you're supposed to act a certain way and stuff. And so I kind of fell into that.

He struggled academically, and even though he received targeted referrals to support resources, including the disability services office, he mostly ignored them. As he explained to me, Michael was a high-achieving student in high school, where he received academic awards and accolades. He did not feel inclined to follow up on the academic outreach emails he received during his first year at RMU. Michael explained his thought-process behind this resistance:

I got all these emails telling me I should go see [my assigned disability counselor]. And I just ignored it, because I was like, "Oh, I'm too good for that. I'm fine. I'm smart. I got into college."

Michael went on to detail an academic report of his first two years as a student at RMU:

...My freshman year wasn't too hot. Got couple Ds and only Cs and then I got one A in English, but then I realized after that, I didn't need to take English 101, because I was already exempt of whatever that's called. And then sophomore year, didn't do so hot either until the last quarter. And then I started doing really, really well.

Michael explained that this academic turning point occurred after he sought feedback from the faculty teaching his entry-level accounting class. When the faculty brought Michael's attention to his own mistakes on the final exam, Michael realized that his narrative of "I'm fine. I'm smart," was no longer serving him well. Michael explained this within the context of his second year at RMU:

Well, I'm from [Home State]. So I had a girlfriend for five years. Then when I came out here again sophomore year, she dumped me. And so I was really distraught and stuff. And I was probably depressed, didn't talk to anybody about it ever. And so then I got a D in Accounting 240 and went to go see the teacher. And I was like, "Oh, it's got to be a mistake in my final." He was like, "No, you just don't know anything." That hit me and I was like, "Wow. I'm dumb." So then I just started doing better and retook it next quarter and got an A. And then I just started doing really well from there.

Michael appeared to experience a dramatic turnaround in his academic performance, largely self-motivated. Michael did not request academic accommodations for his disability, other than housing accommodations in his first year, throughout his

career at RMU. He rarely disclosed his disability to faculty on campus, only recalling one episode of doing so:

One time. It was this past winter quarter. One of the teachers for my 400 level classes in Econ, I was taking vitamin C supplements to stay healthy in the winter. And I didn't realize until I talked to my doctor about it, that vitamin C is really acidic. So it actually breaks down your medication so it doesn't work. The first half of winter quarter, I was in class, I'm like, "Why do I feel this way?" And I didn't understand. I took my meds. Why do I feel like this? And then I talked to my doctor and realized it. Then went to her and I was like, "Hey, I'm failing your class and I think this is why." She's like, "Oh, okay." Yeah, she was like, "Well this is what you have to do to pass." I was like, "Okay, cool."

Michael also seemed to present a distinct experience with identifying his academic interest area. When he arrived at RMU, Michael was interested in engineering, but soon changed his mind, looking toward accounting as another possibility. Michael explained:

Well I like Physics. I'm not very good at it. I know a lot of stuff about it, but I never took a lot of classes in it. So I do a lot of learning on my own for that, because I don't have time to take actual classes here. And then, so I was like, "Oh, I want to be an engineer." So when I came here, I originally wanted to do engineering. Then realized I don't want to do it. It's not as fun as I thought. So I was like, "Oh. I'll do business." So I was like, "I'll be an Accounting major." And then I was like, "Nope."

His passion for economics was unplanned; he discovered a connection after repeating an entry-level economics class that is a general prerequisite for the business department:

But during the prereqs to get into the College of Business and Economics is Econ 206 [microeconomics]. And when I first took it, I got a D or a D+ and the second prereq is Econ 207 [macroeconomics], but you have to have a C or better in 206. So I retook it. And I was sitting there one day. The teacher had wrote something on the board and I was like, "Holy shit. I get this." And I'm like, "Math through all the calculus I've ever learned after that point, all the econ and stuff like that, just made sense to me." I don't study for anything. It just made sense now. It was really weird. It was like all of the sudden...

He wrote one formula on the board. And then he was doing all this other stuff. And I just kept staring at it for 15 minutes. And all of a sudden I was like, "Oh, I get it." I don't know. It's been really good from then on out.

Details of the Experience

Michael sought employment during his college years to gain financial stability. He arrived at RMU with experiences working as a student. In high school, Michael worked 30-hours-a-week to make ends meet during a family financial crisis. His initial employment opportunity while at RMU arrived in the form of a work-study award. Michael found the job to be both uninspiring and financially limiting. While looking for summer employment (a time period that is not covered by work-study at RMU), Michael discovered a position at the marina:

Well, I had work-study and the job was boring. You can't really do anything. You don't make any money doing it. I worked in RMU weight room. And then they switched to another location. And it was the same thing, but it was really boring. You don't do anything. It was really non-interactive with everything. You just sit

there and wait to leave. And so the marina was first a summer job, but then I realized, "Oh, I can make more money and gain more experience and have a better resume if I do this real job compared to the work-study." And so I just did that.

Michael was no stranger to working with boats. He explained that he worked in a marina in his hometown to earn money to pay for college. With ample opportunities in RMU's location to work in the maritime industry, Michael found the job at the marina to be a relatively easy opportunity to secure.

During the academic year, Michael works part-time at the marina. However, during the summer, the job often exceeds 50 hours a week. Michael detailed his typical day at work:

Get there at seven in the morning. Turn my office stuff on, check emails, get the whole place ready, turn all the computers on, get my point of sales system going and everything, clean up, make the place presentable. Then usually our employees get there between 7:45 and 7:50. And then I go over what jobs each mechanic or technician is going to be doing that day. Tell them what they need to get done, how many hours they have for each job. And then they go do their thing. And then if it's a busy day, I'll do boat sales and engine sales or just regular counter stuff, help people with parts, stuff like that. If it's a slow day like it's starting to get, I do the marketing. So a lot of just office computer work stuff. There's no real typical day, because it's all different. Trying to think. Yeah, I do that until five or 5:30 or 6:00.

Michael feels his contributions to the marina have helped the company grow tremendously. For example, Michael described and quantified how he has improved sales and revenue for the marina:

I account for over a quarter of the entire revenue of the company over the course of a year. And I'm only there full time three months a year... If I'm service writing, writing up bills for people who are getting work done on their boat. I know how to bill the shit out of them while still making it realistic, so they're fine with their bill too. So I do probably 100 to 150 grand a month in revenue for the company.

In addition to the revenue contributions, Michael also described how he operates to help the marina better drive up and, appropriately respond to, customer demand:

And then every year, I've been doing more every month on my side, because we're just getting better and getting more customers. I've brought our online presence up a lot. I created the website. Did the analytics stuff, so now when anybody goes on Google, they type used boats. We're one of the first to show up. Campus Town Boats, boat sales, engine sales, engine mechanic, anything like that. We're always the first to show up. No one there knows how to do that stuff. Like getting Instagram following, working on stocking for the company to correctly stock the right ... People stock engines, but each one's three grand our cost, so if we're going to stock 20, that's a lot of money. So you've got to know what to buy so you sell them all. I've done that the right way. Kind of just everything.

Even though the job at the marina started as a summer opportunity to earn some money for college, Michael quickly discovered that the marina was also a laboratory for applying the concepts he was learning in his economics coursework to real-life scenarios. He explained that he finds ways to use everything he learns in his classes at work. Michael further described the benefits of a hands-on environment where he applies these concepts:

It's cool, because Economics is really abstract unless you have a word problem that you're given. Or it's a huge project you're doing. So a lot of it's X and Y squared plus this is the demand curve. But I'm working with the individual sales that make up your demand curve that you use to make future decisions. So now I understand the whole process from beginning to end of how everything's done, which they don't teach you in one whole class. It's different parts, but you're expected to know how to tie them all together. [Whereas] this is, you're just doing it.

Through his time and experience at the marina, Michael developed in his role as a manager. Michael described a technique he has refined for helping new employees become invested in their positions at the marina. Michael explained his strategy with a recent hire:

I ask if they actually want to work here. This kid Jim, I just hired him at the beginning of the summer. And he's going to school for engineering. He's a really soft kid. He was adopted. Had a really nice upbringing. He's scrawny. He's not that physically able. He plays a lot of video games, but he's really smart. And he's

really interested in engines and stuff, so he likes engineering. But I knew the environment that he'd be in where we work is fast paced, and rigid and stuff.

So I was like, "Do you actually want to work here?" He was like, "Yeah." And I was like, "You sure?" I make them think that he shouldn't work there, because they have to actually want to do it. And so he kept saying he did. So I was like, "Okay, cool." And that makes them almost expect it's going to be a terrible job. That way they don't have that high of expectations. And then from there on out, it's almost like they have the mindset of, "I know I'm better than this shitty job, so I can at least make this place better, because they've probably never had someone like me." And it has worked. It sounds really weird. But I've thought about it a lot, and I end up doing it with a lot of people. It's worked every time.

Michael feels that his management techniques are helping the marina to retain its employees for longer. The marina itself is growing from a small business to a larger professional shop. Michael's ability to retain employees is a critical benefit to the business in maintaining quality and growth. He explained this observation:

[The marina is] family owned business. And they're trying to move towards the more corporate professional field, which is where I come in. So they've had a lot of turnover, a lot of leniency on rules and stuff like that. So not too much structure. So that's why, when we started moving towards more structure, certain employees weren't matching up with that. But I've found that you can maintain a nice equilibrium between friend and supervisor that you can do so people can still feel free to open up to you while at the same time they look at you as an authority

figure. So I've done that with all the employees there. So that's why they're starting to stick around. So I think they're all going to be there for a while.

Reflection on the Meaning

Michael seemed almost ethically conflicted over his definition of leadership. He felt that leadership involved, at its core, a practice of manipulation, despite opportunities to describe it otherwise. He also realized, through his reflections, that this leadership was a necessary part of successfully managing a business. Michael explained leadership:

Leadership is really manipulative. You have to be a sociopath to be really good at it. You have to know how to make people do what you want them to do to get the end result you want, while at the same time, making them think that they're doing something for themselves and for the greater of something else. So I don't know. That's what it comes down to being. But you can say whatever you want, but that's the actual definition of what you're doing...

I talked to my girlfriend about it a couple weeks ago, because I started realizing what I do. And I was like, "Huh. I feel like a scumbag knowing that I'm getting people to do what I want them to do while they don't even realize they're doing what I want them to do." And it felt almost wrong to me, but she had to convince me, "Oh, no. That's just what your job is. You don't really have a choice. You've got to do that. That's what managers do."

It just felt deceptive, because I won't tell [my employees] what the goal is. It's like economics. So if I say, "Oh, we're going to do this, so we can factor it into this, so it will influence this other thing to happen." They're going to be like, "What?" So

I just keep it simple and say, "Oh, we want to do this. And you're a really good employee. Make it, make a bunch of money doing this."

However, despite his conceptualization of how leadership played out on the job, Michael presented a different approach to leadership in his academic work:

If I don't have to take a partner in something, I won't. If I do have a group, I'll just sit back and look at their ideas, because I actually believe that people have good ideas. And so I'll what they generally want to do, and then base what I say off of what they've already said.

Michael appeared conflicted about the benefits of working during college.

Acknowledging that his experience gave him the opportunity to directly apply what he was learning in his business and economics classes to a real world setting, he also expressed a general discouragement of college students pursuing employment. For example, Michael detailed his own growth as a leader due to his experiences working in college, explaining one of the main benefits of persisting with his job:

Learning how to actually do it. There's some guy who talked about it. He was like, "Oh, you can study how to shoot a basketball all you want, but until you actually shoot it, you're not going to know how to do it." So it's actually applying everything that I've learned and actually going through the motion of doing it where there's actual consequences. There's people that rely on your decisions and whether you're right or wrong affects everybody.

Nevertheless, Michael expressed a cost to working so many hours during his college education. He realized that the financial ambitions that once motivated his interest in

picking up a job off campus with higher responsibilities and higher pay were beginning to wane in the face of losing work-life balance. Michael explained:

Yeah, okay so this summer, I made 17 grand so far. And as a college student with a summer job, that's a lot. But I hate it. I hate my job. I hate working there. I hate working 55 hours a week, never having time to do anything. You have all this money, but you have no time to spend it. You lose all your friends. I'm like, "All right. Well, I'm glad I learned this early on in life." Because as a kid, you're always taught, oh you want to make that money. Want to get that Lamborghini and stuff. And now I'm like, "I don't even care about that. I just want to go biking, have a day to go on a ski trip with my girlfriend. That would be fun."

He felt that while his job provided him the opportunity to apply much of his academic knowledge in real-time, it was also a hindrance to his overall experience as a student:

Well, there's an opportunity cost, because you only have 24 hours in a day, right? So how many hours do you spend studying? How many hours do you spend learning? There's times when I'm in class where I get phone calls and have to deal with stuff. And it's like, "What's the value of what you're giving up in class to take care of something you're going to get paid for?" So obviously, I can say to myself, it's had a negative impact on what I've taken away from school. But it's also given me more experience in how a job actually is.

Throughout his journal entries and his interview, Michael expressed a criticism that disability status would in any way lower expectations of success or achievement. He appeared to take great pride in succeeding academically without using disability

accommodations at the college level. He shared his thoughts about how students with disabilities should ideally approach their education:

One, I don't think people should use any disability as a crutch, any reason that you shouldn't be held to the same standards as anybody else. And two, if you know you have a disability, try not getting extensions on tests, because the first time you do well with that, you're going to be so proud of yourself. If you have any disability, and you're able to accomplish something the same way someone without a disability can, you're going to have, forever, the rest of your life, more confidence than the person who you're kind of competing with... I mean in the real world, at work, I can't go to a customer and be like, "Oh, don't get mad. I have ADD, so it's going to take me an extra day or two." [For example] You can get a wheelchair ramp, but no one cares, frankly. So knowing that you're a strong competitor with everybody else that's out there who's normal is good.

Michael expanded on this reflection, further explaining the efforts he undertook to perform successfully in school:

I've thought about it a lot, because I've reflected on where I've screwed up. Obviously, there's different cases, but as far as ADD or ADHD, if you're willing to put in time outside of school or work with counseling and stuff like that, learning how to cope with just realizing ... Or I have this thing, I have what can I do to make myself better? Because you can take Vyvanse, you can take whatever you want, but it's like handing someone an AR-15 and not knowing how to use guns. You have this tool, but you don't know how to use it. You can learn how to use it so you can be just as normal as anybody else. But you could see somebody.

I started seeing a counselor too, and it was helpful. It was the best thing I could have done.

Michael concluded reflecting on his college and recent employment experiences by exploring what motivated his sense of self-sufficiency. His family circumstances pushed him to become financially independent from a young age. He realized that being presented with the options of either consistently working hard or having nothing pushed him to seek success and survival. Michael explained:

One really helpful thing was ... It's really hard to get other people to feel it, but my house got foreclosed on while I was in high school. I had to work 30 hours a week in high school. And I paid for my own food, own car, own insurance, stuff like that, learn how to save. So then after my second year here, I already started a retirement fund. So having no other option. It doesn't matter if you have anything. I could be in a wheelchair. You still have to survive, kind of thing. But a lot of kids, especially in college, because most people that go to college are going to have some sort of help. So if you have no other option other than to just do what you need to do or else you are literally going to have nothing. Then it makes it easier. It makes it easier to make a choice.

Theme One: Self-sufficiency

Throughout his journal entry responses and the interview, Michael emphasized his belief in the importance of self-sufficiency. He demonstrated an ownership of his success. Michael's early career interest in joining the military signaled an attraction to commitments requiring a high degree of discipline and personal responsibility. Although

Michael named the challenges he faced in his transition to college, he was quick to place responsibility for those difficulties on his own shortcomings.

Working as a means of securing necessary financial support was a way of life that Michael transitioned from his high school experiences to his university career. The economic hardships that Michael's family faced while he was in high school were formative in his own sense of economic security. Michael perceived his work ethic and relationship to employment as distinct from the attitudes of his peers; he understood that he did not have a financial safety net within his family, and that his investment in a college education was a risk he shouldered independently.

Academically, Michael did not seek disability accommodations because of his initial struggles at RMU. Additionally, he did not view external factors, such as the quality of instruction in his courses, the attitudes of his faculty members, or advising received during his first two years of college, as culprits responsible for his poor performance. Although Michael considered a few majors before identifying economics, he appeared to maintain a genuine interest and passion for the discipline. Although he initially struggled with the foundational economics coursework, he described experiencing a revelation in his understanding of the material and mathematics while retaking a prerequisite course that was fundamental in reframing his relationship to academics.

Theme Two: Experiential Learning

Michael readily connected his ongoing work experiences at the marina to his coursework in economics. He expressed a desire to translate his classroom knowledge immediately to the work environment; applying theory to practice appeared to contribute

greatly to Michael's sense of ownership over his education. Michael's employment at the marina coincided with more advanced studies in his academic curriculum. He noted that his experiences in the business provided him with a laboratory to live out concepts he learned in class and show him how they functioned from beginning to end.

Michael struggled with his approach to management and supervision at the marina. While he recognized that he was highly effective in motivating his employees, he felt conflicted about engaging in a perceived practice of manipulation. Michael felt he was deceiving his employees through his leadership style; he was cognizant of his ability to understand the big picture of the overall business operations while sharing limited information with employees for the purpose of motivating them to complete their respective duties. Gaining experience as a manager at the marina appeared to greatly inform and refine Michael's perspective on leadership.

Michael's lived experience as a student working full-time at the marina also gave him insights on his own preferences for work-life balance. Because of the nature and time commitment of his work, he experienced some maturation in his work ethic. Michael appeared, at times, highly passionate about his role in operations at the marina. On the other hand, he also presented conflict over the commitment that this role represented in his overall priorities. Although Michael was receiving academic internship credit in tandem with payment for his work at the marina, the risks associated with his responsibilities at the marina were substantial. His early experience dealing with a company lawsuit demonstrated his position in an environment with few protections. While he felt he was making a positive impact on the business and, was subsequently afforded an opportunity to apply academic concepts directly to his work and management

experiences, he also expressed some regrets about the time and attention his job demanded in the grander scheme of his academic and social commitments.

Theme Three: Challenging Disability

During the first phase of data collection, Michael responded succinctly to the reflective journal prompts. He often challenged the basis of the questions; he appeared to push back on the notion that disability would factor in to any considerations of strengths and weaknesses either in the employment or academic settings. Although Michael alluded to a family history of disability and acknowledged using medications to manage his disability, he emphasized his reluctance to request academic accommodations at any time during his university career.

Related to the theme of self-sufficiency, Michael critiqued the premise of disability justifying any additional supports or considerations from external sources. He felt that, beyond his own experience, other students with disabilities were at a disadvantage by relying too heavily upon academic accommodations. He expressed a belief that individual survival and success was ultimately achieved through independence. Michael held this belief in regard to both visible and invisible disabilities.

Michael's critique of disability as an excuse to underperform was additionally nuanced by his understanding of how individuals with disabilities could take actions to empower themselves. He described using strategies to manage his own disability, including prescription medications and therapy, as tools. He viewed these tools as effective only when an individual sought educational guidance on best practices for their use. It appeared personally meaningful to Michael that he pursued counseling to assist him with understanding and managing his disability. He maintained that this approach to

self-exploration and empowerment would be of general benefit to students with disabilities.

Case Four: Greg

“I listen rather than talk which means I get to know people faster.”

Focused Life History

Greg is a 21-year-old senior at RMU. Greg maintains a fondness for and curiosity about rocks, dating back to some of his earliest childhood memories. He is now in the late stages of completing his geology degree. Greg experienced a stroke at birth that impacted his cognitive functioning, particularly in the arena of expressive speech and language. Although he did not use accommodations during his primary and secondary education, he became reacquainted with his disability identity after pursuing accommodations during his early college career. Greg is one of two student employees who work for RMU’s parking enforcement office.

Greg’s parents encouraged him to attend college early on in his education. He participated in a dual-enrollment program for high school students at his local community college during his last two years of high school. Greg did not use accommodations prior to attending community college, though he acknowledged that he experienced chronic academic difficulty in certain subjects. Greg explained that his initial failure in community college led him to seeking accommodations:

The first thing in community college that really helped me was just completely bombing the first quarter. That's what gave me the push to try to figure out; Where was I going wrong? How could I improve? So and then that pushed me

into getting into the disability service office. And then that got me into doing out all the paperwork and stuff, and finding out all my old medical records.

Greg's mother was instrumental in helping him navigate the accommodation process.

Greg explained:

I was just discussing troubleshooting tactics on where I was going wrong, 'cause I wasn't getting very good test scores on anything, especially my math placement test. I was testing really low. We were trying to figure out what could we do better? It came down to time management, and me not having enough time to logic everything together. So we were looking into ways to fix that and my mom was like, "You know, I probably should have done this before, but I'll compile all your medical records together, and we'll go see disability services and see what is available to us." So that was the thought process behind it.

By the time Greg transferred to RMU, he identified disability accommodations as a critical component of a successful academic transition:

I went [to RMU's disability services office] before I went to either financial aid or any kind of department. That was just what I knew I need to do first. Schedule a meeting with them first thing.

Greg experienced some academic difficulty his first quarter at RMU, but mostly attributed those challenges to limited course availability, due to missing the RMU orientation and registration process over the summer prior to his enrollment. While he was well-experienced in disclosing his disability status as a result of his community college experiences, Greg found it more challenging to connect in this way with his

faculty at RMU. Greg expressed a preference for face-to-face communication with professors about his accommodation needs. At his community college, students with disabilities would hand-carry accommodation letters and paperwork to their faculty. Moving to RMU's larger accommodation infrastructure, one that sends accommodation notifications out through automated emails, made it difficult to foster connections early on. Eventually, Greg found his own way to successfully navigate the RMU accommodation process:

[The community college] was a lot more in depth, a lot more interpersonal there than it was here. Here it's just an email that they send out for you. Which I see as good for some people, but in my case I can tell people, and I feel like it's better for me to tell them face-to-face, then it is through an email that I don't even send. So I usually go in and talk to them first, around the same time as the email.... And they can put a face to the name. And that's exactly what we did in community college too. They'd give me, I'd go to disability services, or the equivalent, to get a letter that I'd go take to the professors instead of an email.

Details of the Experience

Greg was motivated to seek a job on-campus for financial reasons. He was eager to gain independence and become less reliant upon his family's financial support. Greg considered his disability when applying for various student employment positions. Parking enforcement appeared to be a position that would play to his strengths. Greg explained:

The less I had to troubleshoot by talking the better. So I feel like a receptionist wouldn't be a poor position for me, but I'm very much a lone wolf, so parking is

great 'cause I can just work alone. I'm not usually on with any other people, don't have to talk to people that much, but I can answer questions if need be.

Greg described his usual workday as highly independent; he usually works alone. His responsibilities include driving through the lots and giving out citations. Greg summarized a typical shift:

A typical day at work is; I get on, like an hour before everyone else goes home, and gear up, and get the news of the day, and sometimes talk to dispatch to get keys and stuff. Most of the time I just hop in the truck and drive around parking lots for four or so hours, four or five.

Greg was able to articulate several strengths he brings to the position. For example, his attention to procedural detail and general interest in mechanics are both highlights of his work in parking enforcement. Greg described these strengths:

I feel like I'm really good at remembering rules. 'Cause you're constantly having to remember different parts of this whole big handbook that you have to remember of rules, and parking lot regulations, and how to fix the receipt machines and stuff. We also cover vehicle maintenance on a small part. We do the vehicle lock out, we'll break into your car, jump starts, tire flats, and if you run out of gas in the middle of the parking lot we'll help you. I'm very mechanically inclined, so definitely that's not the hardest part of my job.

Despite the natural strengths Greg detailed, he also described the challenges he encountered in his parking enforcement role. He experienced stress around customer confrontation, particularly after his supervisors removed the ability for student employees

to give warnings as an alternative to citations. Greg discussed his biggest source of work-related stress:

Customer interaction. I always tend to side on taking pity on people instead of full-force. So, it's difficult because this last year they vetoed our vote for our ability to give out warnings, so we're not allowed to give out warnings anymore... It means we have to go hard on people. If they're coming out to their vehicle while we're writing the ticket we have to give them a hard one, we can't cut them breaks.

Nevertheless, Greg could identify ways in which his disability and distinct communication style has helped him to mitigate this stress:

I'm not one to mince words because of it. So I'm very straight to the point, and that works when you're trying to be stone-faced and responsible-faced for the police station.

One of the disappointments Greg experienced during his student employment position was when the parking enforcement office changed their policy of allowing less experienced employees to partner and ride alongside with senior employees. Greg discussed several benefits of the team approach, including how a more experienced employee could model communication strategies during difficult customer interactions. Greg explained:

Because the more you look at [the senior employees], and how they treat customers, the more you'll know how to interact with people. I was only allowed to ride with people for the first six months of my job, and then we changed bosses

and they didn't want us riding with each other anymore. So I wasn't able to gain a whole bunch of that knowledge after a short intro period.

Greg struggled to understand why the option to work with a team member was taken away by the parking enforcement administration. Greg recognized that this program was particularly useful to employees still growing into the required skillset:

Especially seeing that we're not supposed to take over for the parking officers, the full-time people, why are we working alone if we're only supplementary? It's really weird, and there's a whole bunch of bureaucracy behind it that is non-sympathetic towards us. But, yeah, I'd bring it back because people's strengths aren't always that rounded.

Reflection on the Meaning

Greg defined leadership as an exchange of mutual respect. He also valued objectivity and level-headedness as an integral part of how he understood leadership. Greg explained:

[Leadership] means being someone worth following. Treating people the way you like ... typical rule; treat others with respect and that's what you're going to get. It's a lot about knowing how to make the tough decisions too. So a good control on chaos, like pros and cons.

Greg reflected on how he exhibits this leadership style in his work environment. While recognizing his position in the organizational hierarchy, he was able to identify methods of demonstrating leadership:

I try to as much as can at work, but I'm lowest on the totem pole. I always try to be someone that's knowledgeable, and worth listening to in the office meetings and stuff. Just try to give my 100%.

Throughout the interview, Greg repeatedly referenced how his disability impacted spontaneous speech and face-to-face communication. Although this sometimes presented challenges, Greg was able to identify how his communication abilities contributed to his presence as a leader and a valuable employee. Greg explained:

I'm a lot more delicate with my words, and less harsh. I'm less quick to speak, more pondering, which has been helpful in the minuscule leadership roles that I've been in, because I'm more into planning, so definitely take a lot of time for that... Like, I get what people want, and plan stuff out, write things down. Way more inclined to write things down.

Greg felt that his position in parking enforcement encouraged both his personal development, as well as his career goals after college. One of the highlights of his personal growth, was a better developed sense of humor. Working for parking enforcement provided Greg with a comical sense of self-deprecation. Greg explained:

[The job] helped me grow, it definitely opened up my sense of humor. My coworkers are incredibly funny. It's hardened me a little bit. It's opened me up to a little bit of the real world, 'cause I have to ... I often make the joke that I'm one the most hated people on campus, 'cause it's in all honesty probably true.

Greg appreciated that his position also helped him to develop and identify other personal strengths:

I learned talents. I learned that I was a good multi-tasker, because you have to drive and work a computer at the same time. You're doing three things at once and should have four arms. I learned that I'm calm under pressure, like super calm under pressure. And I was good working with some odd people, 'cause I like my coworkers, but to a lot of people they're not easy to work with.

After graduation, Greg aspires to work for the Department of Fish and Wildlife. He sees working for the department as an opportunity to combine both his interest and expertise in the natural sciences with law and policy enforcement. Greg credited his experience in parking enforcement with his interest in pursuit of a police position at some point in his career.

Theme One: Recognizing Disability

Although Greg's disability originated from birth, he did not come to recognize his disability until he entered his college years. Discovering that accommodations could help Greg to overcome academic barriers that had comprised a chronic struggle during his K-12 education was powerful to him. He viewed disability support services as a tool that could help him fully understand the impact of his disability, and also how to best support his educational needs through college. Greg came to identify disability support services as his primary academic resource during his college years, noting that when he was transferring to RMU, he met with his disability support provider even before receiving academic advising.

Greg identified face-to-face communication as an essential aspect of feeling fully recognized and understood in the context of the disability accommodation process. One of the benefits of Greg's early experiences with disability-based accommodations, during

his years at community college, was that he could connect in-person with his college instructors. Conversely, at RMU, Greg found the largely online-based accommodation process less conducive to this type of interaction. He mitigated this by continuing to meet face-to-face with faculty at RMU regarding his disability and accommodations, even though it was not required.

Greg appeared to place a great amount of importance on his own methods and actions of disability disclosure. He named one of the challenges of his disability: its invisibility. Through his journal entries, Greg described his disability could be overlooked or misunderstood because it was cognitive, rather than physical. Stress could impact his symptoms, making it seem like he was impacted in certain situations more than others. It was critical to Greg that his peers and faculty saw the legitimacy of his disability, especially in an academic setting.

Theme Two: Oral Communication

Greg noted on several occasions that his disability impacted several cognitive processes, though speech was the most noticeable external indicator. His relationship to speech delay was nuanced. While this delay could cause difficulty, particularly in the academic environment, Greg also identified several personal strengths as a result of his unique cognitive processing.

Both throughout his interview and journal entries, Greg emphasized his ability to listen more than speak. He identified a few distinct benefits of this behavior. First, Greg found that his interpersonal relationships were strengthened by his comfort with listening; his deliberation with words and speech, in turn, made him more thoughtful about his contributions to partnerships or group dynamics. This also contributed to his inclination

toward capturing information through other media, such as writing, and using those materials to meaningfully support decision-making, planning, and organization for projects or other complex tasks. Second, Greg credited his natural tendency to internalize with his discovery for a passion, at a young age, with science, nature, and mechanics. Although Greg encountered academic challenges because of his processing delays during his educational career, he also noted that many of his academic gifts were engendered by his greater attention to observing the outside world and engaging in nonverbal learning.

Greg's relationship to speech and oral communication influenced his choice of student employment role. He described mostly enjoying the solitary nature of parking enforcement work. The major stressor Greg identified within his employment role was the rare occurrence when he would engage, confrontationally, with a member of the public over a parking violation. Given the parking department's decision to eliminate warnings altogether, Greg felt an increased risk of confrontation with the public due to an increase in mandatory citations. Nevertheless, Greg found that his communication style served him well in his work environment. He admitted that his coworkers and superiors could be difficult to work with, but also felt that his natural ability to listen and take in information before speaking facilitated better working relationships, even under stressful situations.

Theme Three: Employment as Co-Curricular

Greg felt that his experiences in parking enforcement afforded him a unique perspective on how he could progress with his career goals after college. Combining his interest in natural sciences with his lived experience in an enforcement role helped him to identify a future career in the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Despite some of the

challenges involved in being positioned in a role involving spontaneous communication, perhaps confrontationally, with the public, Greg found that his student employment experience nurtured an appreciation for policy and procedure. Through his parking enforcement job, Greg learned that he genuinely enjoyed learning the intricacies of rules and regulations, and how to apply those in the context of law enforcement. Reflecting on the ways he learned to communicate, in part as a result of his disability, Greg also felt that his direct and deliberate patterns of speech could serve him well in a law enforcement position.

Greg noted that his experiences as a student employee in the parking enforcement office had both hardened him and engendered a greater sense of humor. On the one hand, parking enforcement could seem ruthlessly bureaucratic; several decisions were made by supervisory leadership through Greg's tenure with which he did not completely agree. He grew accustomed to working in an environment that left him, at times, conflicted about the organization. On the other hand, Greg appeared to take some degree of pride in persisting as an employee for what he deemed one of the most hated departments on campus. This persistence contributed to a deepened self-deprecating sense of humor; Greg was able to find the comedic elements of his work experience, which in turn helped him to stay motivated in his role.

Theoretical Framework for Self-Advocacy: Indicators across Cases

The stated purpose at the outset of this inquiry was to explore how college students with disabilities develop self-advocacy in the context of student employment experiences. Evidenced by extant literature, it is apparent that self-advocacy is conceptually complex, encompassing many dimensions ranging from individual identity

development to group pursuits of political organization and representation. Exploring the narratives of four individuals through reflective journal entries and interviews further corroborated the notion that self-advocacy, while perhaps enhanced and developed through a supportive employment opportunity, may encompass a long-term range of experiences beginning with early identity formation and extending toward goals and ambitions beyond the college years.

In an effort to better understand the manifestation of self-advocacy across cases, the comprehensive theoretical framework for self-advocacy described in Chapter 1 was used as a basis for examining relationships between case themes and indicators of self-advocacy within the literature. A conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities developed by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005) supported the foundational design of the model. This conceptual framework offered four components of self-advocacy: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. This framework was further expanded by incorporating additional concepts from identity development, disability studies, and critical assessment literature to each of the four components of the design offered by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005).

While the intent of this research study was not to rigidly compare themes across cases in an effort to surface absolute assertions, in part to avoid an overly reductive approach to an individually experienced phenomenon of development, I felt it was worthwhile to explore how these cases reflected the theoretical and conceptual components of self-advocacy articulated through extant literature. In my approach to doing so, I exercised caution in assuming direct relationships between indicators of self-

advocacy within the literature and the prominent themes of each of the four cases. Rather, I privileged demonstrating how case-based themes may support the four conceptual components and accompanying example indicators illustrated by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005), as well as with the expanded indicators surfaced through broader review of the literature. This demonstration is reflected as a matrix format in Appendix C. The remainder of this chapter expands upon conceptual components of self-advocacy, and how they were supported through case-based themes and evidence.

Knowledge of Self

The first intrapersonal component of self-advocacy, identified by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, (2005), is the development of knowledge of self. Indicators of this component include, but are not limited to, knowledge of personal interests, strengths, needs, learning styles, accommodation needs, and specific disability attributes. In sum, knowledge of self relates heavily to identity development, on an individual level, as a person with a disability. Gibson's disability identity model (2006) provides a complimentary approach to understanding this developmental progression. In this model, identity development is imagined as a progression through three stages: passive awareness, realization, and, finally, acceptance.

Many of the case-based themes reflected elements of "self" as a developmental component of self-advocacy. Individual journeys of self were integral to all four narratives, although the extent to which these accounts were specifically focused on disability varied between participants. Both academic and employment environments afforded participants the opportunity to reflect upon and frame components of self.

For example, Chris identified his strengths through a consistent pursuit of high-risk/high-reward situations. Through gaining comfort with his accommodation needs and the way his disability impacted his daily life, Chris developed a sense of self that was highly attracted to challenges, both in the curricular and co-curricular realms. On the other hand, he was sensitive to his needs and how to balance those with his personal interests. He realized that his resident advisor position was not sustainable beyond two years of service, given the other commitments in his life and the goals he associated with them. Lived experience in the resident advisor role ultimately provided Chris with a deeper understanding of what would be sustainable for him in the long term.

Similarly, Michael reached new conclusions about how he imagined a future work-life balance after working intensively, sometimes beyond a full-time schedule, as a manager at the marina while attending school. The challenges associated with his role at the marina, and the experiences mitigating those on a daily basis, helped Michael to frame his personal interests and strengths. While the stress of the responsibility he shouldered at the marina initially supported his desires to maintain financial self-sufficiency, he gradually became aware that there was, in his words, an “opportunity cost” associated with his work and school arrangements.

Rachel was notably relational in her concept of self. Her identity as a partner and a parent was often foregrounded in her journey toward developing greater knowledge of her personal interests, strengths, and needs. Her conceptualization of her own disability attributes and identity was frequently informed by a broader perspective on how disability was experienced by other members of her immediate family. Rachel’s interests and academic goals were framed by a desire to use her schooling as preparation and

credentialing for greater employability and income potential in the hopes of eventually supporting her family with greater financial certainty. Remaining focused on that goal from the beginning of her college career motivated Rachel to articulate her accommodation needs and further explore how to best support her learning style and disability attributes through the available resources.

Greg related his concept of self strongly to his disability attributes. His accommodation needs were a primary consideration in his identification and prioritization of key resources within the college environment. He felt increasingly empowered as a student when given the opportunity to articulate his disability-related needs to faculty in a face-to-face setting, preferring this personal connection to a more automated or anonymous process. Alongside his consideration of disability within his formulation of self, Greg was also cognizant of his personal interests and strengths while imagining his future career goals. He was able to identify how both his academic studies and his student employment experiences connected to his strengths in particular ways, and also provided him with insight on how both might be combined in serving the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The process of developing a disability identity was also present across the four cases. Each participant experienced an invisible disability: one that was not readily apparent to external communities without some type of disclosure. The discovery or revelation of disability occurred at different times and with different significance for each participant. Chris, for example, experienced a sudden onset of disability due to injury in his high school years. Greg's disability originated from complications during his birth, but he did not rediscover this medical history until early in his college career. Rachel and

Michael appeared less attached to the discovery of disability occurring at a single moment in time; rather, they both conceptualized lifelong management of their respective disabilities in differing ways. Nevertheless, disability identity was integral to the development of “self” in all four cases. Situating these narratives within the three-phase model proposed by Gibson (2006), all four participants appeared to be progressing from “realization” toward “acceptance.”

Knowledge of Rights

The second intrapersonal component of self-advocacy identified by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005), is the development of knowledge of rights. This category is a broad umbrella, inclusive of educational, human, and community dimensions, among others. The focus of my data collection was fundamentally grounded within an educational context: curricular and co-curricular experiences through academics and student employment opportunities at a four-year university. Therefore, these case studies do not provide evidence for some of the indicators identified in the “Knowledge of Rights” category, although that does not necessarily signify that the participants have not experienced development outside of the arenas encompassed by this particular narrative inquiry.

Understanding available resources and procedures for addressing violations of rights is also a notable component of this domain of self-advocacy. In the paradigms of disability identified by Jones (1996), the Minority Group Paradigm aligns well with increased awareness of rights and resources. Though Jones (1996) approaches the paradigm with a greater emphasis on legal rights, the Minority Group Paradigm is, on a more general level, representative of a broader system of resources and procedures

available to the disability community for the purpose of ensuring protection from disability and access to supports and accommodations.

All of the participants identified and made use of a process at some point in their college education to secure some type of disability-based accommodation. Participants articulated an awareness of disability support services on their campus, but each had a different relationship to those resources and processes. In some cases, educational rights secured through the disability support office were seen as essential to participants' success in college. Conversely, one participant viewed the academic accommodation process as unnecessary and, perhaps, even disadvantageous to individuals with disabilities in the long-term.

Rachel and Greg both expressed an early orientation to disability support services as integral to their academic success, first at community college, and then at RMU. By locating these resources at the community college level, both of these participants arrived at RMU equipped with knowledge about procedures for securing educational rights. Rachel and Greg both described earlier educational experiences in the K-12 system, prior to receiving disability-based accommodations, as challenging and difficult. They found that the resources available to them through campus disability support services shaped an experience that ultimately reduced some of the barriers they previously experienced in their educational journeys. Through this progression, both participants gained an increased knowledge of their educational rights, as students with disabilities.

Chris also arrived at RMU prepared to navigate an accommodation process. He accessed accommodations during high school, after he experienced his traumatic brain injury. Nevertheless, Chris became more knowledgeable about his educational rights as

he utilized accommodations at RMU. He found the process to be more responsive, as well as flexible, and he developed a proactive approach to engaging his faculty members about his disability needs. Chris also described an episode when he advocated for his disability rights within an employment setting. As a resident advisor, Chris pursued an opportunity to provide feedback to senior administrators within the housing department about how the resident advisor training process and position requirements could become more accessible to students with disabilities. This episode demonstrated a situation where Chris transferred his knowledge of disability-based educational rights to the employment context; he used his knowledge of resources, processes, and legal standards to request structural changes within the resident advisor position.

Michael challenged the concept of a minority group paradigm. His disagreement stemmed from his ideas about what would be realistic to expect in the world outside of an educational institution. Although he noted utilizing disability-based accommodations for a housing assignment during his first year at RMU, he described an ongoing resistance to academic accommodations, despite receiving several referrals. Michael articulated the importance of resources for students with disabilities, but suggested that these resources, or tools, should be accessed outside of a legal mandate framework. He expressed an opinion that reliance upon accommodations could set students up with unrealistic expectations for the support they would receive outside of the college environment. Although Michael maintained this opinion in regard to disability rights, he also demonstrated development in his overall procedural knowledge as a result of his employment experience at the marina. An early experience during his tenure at the

marina with a lawsuit, for example, provided him greater insight on consumer and business rights, and how violations could be redressed through legal action.

Communication

Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005) identified communication as the third conceptual component of self-advocacy; sample indicators included assertiveness, negotiation, listening, and compromise. While the development of both knowledge of self and knowledge of rights may involve interpersonal dimensions, communication is the first component that is explicitly interpersonal in nature, requiring individuals to actively engage with others as a means toward demonstration. Simi Linton (1998) contextualized communication through the process of “reassigning meaning” in disability discourse; challenging the dominant society’s assumptions cast upon disability through new language would serve as “metacommunications about the social, political, intellectual, and ideological transformations that have taken place over the past two decades,” (p. 14). Each participant addressed communication within their journal entries and interviews. In some contexts, communication was discussed more broadly as a component of their overall interpersonal development in college. In other contexts, communication was described more specifically in relationship to disclosure or framing of disability experience.

Greg consistently viewed his communication skills through the lens of his disability. The manner in which his disability impacted his speech was noted several times throughout his narrative. Although Greg acknowledged that disability-based accommodations were fundamental to his academic success in college, he was also able to articulate how other dimensions of communication, such as listening and

comprehension, were perhaps distinctly strong in comparison to his nondisabled peers. Despite Greg's focus on his nonverbal communication strengths, it was also apparent that he experienced growth in his oral communication abilities, especially within the employment context. Greg developed assertiveness through his experience working for campus parking enforcement. Even though the prospect of engaging in conflict or confrontation with the public made Greg anxious, he was able to handle those situations as they arose, and continued to persist in his employment role.

Like Greg, Rachel found that her role as a student employee gave her the authority to practice the assertiveness she recognized was otherwise outside of her comfort zone. Rachel described how her ability to identify as an authority figure in the library, by wearing her employee badge and practicing other rituals, helped her to mitigate some of the anxieties she felt about confrontation with patrons. The structure and protocols of the library position provided somewhat of a script for Rachel for these encounters—from enforcing the library rules to proctoring test takers.

Rachel detailed a significant developmental journal in her interpersonal communication skills through her college and student employment experiences. Beginning with her initial experiences at her community college's satellite campus, Rachel encountered very few opportunities to engage in real-time communication: most of her first year's courses were conducted asynchronously through the computer lab. As she advanced in her college requirements, however, Rachel was expected to attend face-to-face courses, introducing her to situations that demanded both growth in communication strategies, as well as the identification of reasonable disability-based accommodations to address academic barriers while enabling her to meet course

requirements. By the time Rachel began her studies at RMU, she was engaging interpersonally at a more proactive level. One indicator of this growth was Rachel's recognition that her maturity, prior academic experience, and organizational strengths made her well suited to take the lead on group projects at RMU.

Employment expectations also prompted Chris to explore communication skills robustly, particularly throughout his two years as a resident advisor. Frequent expectations of triaging the unexpected while on-call provided Chris the opportunity to practice listening, negotiation, and assertiveness. He also relied upon these skills while completing one of the central requirements of the job: academic intervention meetings with residents. Although Chris did not experience discomfort with the idea of confrontation or conflict with peers, he recognized that his experience interacting with a wide variety of students and supervisory staff increased his confidence in his abilities to work with diverse populations in his future career endeavors. Chris often challenged ableist assumptions about traumatic brain injury through his focus on achieving substantial academic goals. Envisioning his employment experiences as a co-curricular component of his education; Chris credited both work and academics as critical to his overall growth in communication and problem-solving skills while attending RMU. Chris enjoyed sharing about his successes and challenges with others, and sought out opportunities to mentor and befriend other students with disabilities, demonstrating his development in both understanding his own disability identity, and using it as a topic of conversation to engage his peers supportively.

Michael identified high expectations for strong interpersonal communication skills at the marina where he worked as a manager. He frequently practiced negotiation

with his customer base, through his desire to set and achieve competitive sales goals each month. Detailing his employment experience, Michael described an active role in planning and executing a business communication strategy for the marina, introducing the company to social media and other tools to help reach a broader audience.

Michael was invested in challenging what he perceived as general stereotypes about disability. He maintained that those stereotypes, if internalized by people with disabilities, could amount to greater barriers in the long term. He described his own disability as, perhaps, misunderstood by the dominant culture. Rather than viewing his disability as a hindrance or obstacle, Michael reframed it as a distinct way of seeing the world, solving problems, and processing information. Through his journal entries, in particular, Michael shared that social pressure to “overcome” disability frustrated him greatly. He was also critical of disability awareness movements that perpetuated a binary between able-bodied and disabled. Michael wrote:

It's not awareness of a disability that matters, it's awareness of relativity... We try so hard to promote certain things and single out one disability or disease...why not just promote the main idea that we are all extremely different and our own reality is never parallel and the same with another person's reality? Even if a person has no diagnosed mental disability, there is still no one else out there who can truly have the same reality as them.

When given the opportunity to share these thoughts with others, Michael found personal significance in doing so. He maintained a desire to use his own experiences and perspective as an example for other peers with disabilities.

Leadership

The fourth and final component of the conceptual framework for self-advocacy development identified by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005) is leadership. Indicators of leadership include a deep knowledge of resources, evidence of organizational or political participation, and advocacy on behalf of others. Effective management of group dynamics and a nuanced perspective of group rights in totality are also indicators. In examining the concept of leadership for the comprehensive theoretical framework developed for this dissertation, I also felt it important to highlight the critique that commonly accepted benchmarks for leadership or ways of leading may be derived from educational discourse and subsequent reproduction that privileges some populations over others. Martinez-Alemán (2015) discussed this phenomenon in detail through a critical discourse analysis of higher education policy. Sedlacek (2004) also addressed the relevance of leadership experience in assessing noncognitive strengths, particularly among nontraditional students. Considering nontraditional leadership experiences, argued Sedlacek, could better inform a holistic representation of a student's level of attainment in this domain. For the purpose of this study, I sought to ask participants for their personal definitions of leadership, and how they operationalized those definitions through their own experiences, in addition to considering the benchmarks identified by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005). Participants shared diverse perspectives on leadership through their narratives; some were more specifically focused on their academic endeavors, while others drew from less traditional examples in work and family life.

Rachel defined leadership in a manner that preserved space for the consideration of multiple ideas, as she herself appreciated the opportunity to work through problems with acceptance for some mistakes. It appeared that Rachel's concept of leadership was derived from her own experiences returning to school as a nontraditional student. Rachel described her evolving role as a leader in her family system. Before she returned to school, Rachel was the primary caregiver of her four children. After her husband was discharged from the military, Rachel's responsibilities changed. She went back to school and, as a part-time work-study student, became the primary financial support for her immediate family. Rachel's return to school, employment, and introduction to the disability accommodation process at two campuses certainly prompted her development, both intrapersonally, and as a communicator. She was also able to reflect on her experiences in relationship to navigating disability accommodations at the K-12 level, on behalf of her older daughter. Rachel's assessment of her own strengths and weaknesses as a returning student informed her knowledge of resources, and how to capitalize upon those resources, especially in regard to her daughter's educational needs. Subsequently, she engaged in advocacy on behalf of immediate family members, demonstrating her growth as a leader.

Greg defined leadership in terms of mutual respect, and also the ability to keep calm under stressful circumstances. Greg demonstrated this concept of leadership through his professional conduct at his parking enforcement job, as well as balancing high-demand academic commitments with work and other responsibilities. Greg also addressed that his interpersonal communication strengths provided him with a leadership advantage in group settings. Through his strengths in listening, Greg described

navigating and managing group dynamics effectively in a variety of settings, from living with a group of outspoken collegiate debaters to working under disgruntled parking staff members. He also recognized his abilities to contribute and participate in larger organizational endeavors, such as large-scale events in the residence halls.

Michael struggled ethically with his understanding of leadership; he defined leadership as the art of manipulating others to contribute to larger organizational goals, while sometimes omitting information from them. As with other participants, Michael's definition of leadership was informed by his experiences. In Michael's case, his employment experience managing a marina was particularly relevant to his concept of leading others. Michael used his academic knowledge and resources to inform his strategies for improving sales, but felt that sharing the complete basis for his decisions might be too abstract for his employees. He described a practice of intentionally isolating pieces of information to motivate the employees to complete certain tasks. However, he named a lingering dishonesty in this practice, even though he observed how he was able to effectively manage a team using this approach. Michael separated his roles as a leader between school and work quite distinctly; in the academic setting, Michael preferred to contribute to group projects by listening to and considering the ideas of others, before proposing his own. Politically, Michael shared detailed opinions and critiques of the disability rights movement; however, the extent to which he engaged in direct action over those opinions was less clear.

Chris shared that his perspectives on leadership were shaped greatly by his tenure as a resident advisor. Through that employment experience, Chris observed and collaborated with a variety of leadership styles. He prioritized both mutual respect and

consensus-building in the way he operationalized leadership. Out of the participants in this study, Chris most clearly demonstrated broader political advocacy on behalf of others as a group, particularly in relationship to disability status. The primary example of this activity was demonstrated through Chris's decision to meet with administrators in the housing department with recommendations to change both the resident advisor training process and the position itself to better accommodate students with disabilities. Chris pursued advocacy through mentoring other students. He pursued a broader knowledge of resources in a variety of contexts, both formally (as a resident advisor, for example), and informally (as a senior student in the honors program) in order to connect with other students and provide them with peer support.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of four narrative case studies exploring the development of self-advocacy among college student employees with disabilities. Data were collected through reflective journal entries, semi-structured in-person interviews, and supporting documents and materials. Each narrative was summarized in alignment with a three-phase interview protocol. Thematic narrative analysis was then used to distill individual themes from each case. Following the presentation of the individual cases and accompanying themes, a comprehensive theoretical framework for the development of self-advocacy was reintroduced as the foundation for cross-case analysis. This cross-case analysis explored how each participant expressed indicators or experiences related to the four identified conceptual components of self-advocacy: self, rights, communication, and leadership. The following chapter concludes this study, reflecting on the guiding research question, revisiting of the theoretical framework in

light of the findings, discussing limitations of the study, and proposing recommendations for future research in this area.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Recommendations

The following chapter concludes this research study. First, the guiding research question is reintroduced and discussed. Second, the comprehensive theoretical framework for the development of self-advocacy is revisited in light of the results of this research. Third, limitations of the study are addressed. Finally, future recommendations for both programmatic and research opportunities in this area of study are discussed.

Research Question

The central research question guiding this research study explored how bachelor's degree-seeking student employees with disabilities experienced the development of self-advocacy. Four narrative case studies comprised an examination of this phenomenon in response to the central question. The participants addressed or otherwise demonstrated development of self-advocacy through a variety of lived experiences, including through their roles as employees. The aim of this study was not to prove a causal relationship between student employment and the development of self-advocacy; indicators of self-advocacy development appeared in a variety of locations through the data: academic, co-curricular, employment, and social contexts. The narratives captured through this multicase research suggest that employment contexts may provide college students with disabilities *additional* opportunities to practice many of the elements of self-advocacy described by the literature, including a broader understanding of self and others, identification and utilization of resources, practice with assertiveness and disclosure, as well as experiential application of accommodations and disability management strategies outside of other environments.

Comprehensive Theoretical Framework

A conceptual framework for the development of self-advocacy generated by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005), through a meta-analysis of self-advocacy literature, was selected as the guiding theoretical structure of this study. As addressed in Chapter II, self-advocacy is a broad concept comprised of many skills and attributes. The conceptual framework selected summarized these indicators and categorized them into four domains: self, rights, communication, and leadership. These domains were broad enough to encompass a variety of experiences, and, given that this research design privileged a focus on the particular rather than the general, the initial flexibility of the conceptual framework was attractive. In addition to the four domains presented by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005), I further broadened the framework to account for other dimensions of development within each domain. I felt a comprehensive theoretical framework guiding this study should also draw from disability studies, adult student development theory, and a broader consideration of socially-based paradigms for making meaning of dimensions of power and privilege. Together, the conceptual framework (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005), and added dimensions from related literature (Gibson, 2006; Jones, 1996; Linton, 1998; Martinez-Alemán, 2015; Sedlacek, 2004) provided me with scaffolding to evaluate and explore indicators of self-advocacy development within and across cases.

In some respects, the case study findings did not correspond to each indicator of every domain identified by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005). This was unsurprising, as the scope of this research was quite specifically focused on a defined educational environment (a public university) and experiential context (student

employment). I would caution drawing any conclusions that the case study participants would not be able to articulate evidence for the indicators that were not foregrounded through this particular narrative inquiry. Rather, it is possible that a study focusing more specifically on other types of experiences, such as political engagement, would highlight indicators in a different balance. Despite this variance between individual cases and the indicators delineated in the conceptual framework, it was apparent that each participant's narrative demonstrated development in all four general domains.

It is worth noting that the model developed by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) was informed by studies conducted at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. There may be an opportunity for this framework to be reviewed with a specific focus on research on adult learners with disabilities at the post-secondary level. Because the domains identified in the model remain lifelong developmental opportunities, a set of indicators informed by research on adult learners with disabilities, including a consideration for co-curricular experiences, may have aligned more closely with the data and results surfaced in this study. Nevertheless, I was able to observe some relationships between the themes identified within each case and the domains presented by the broader framework. Overall, the conceptual domains of self-advocacy, along with their implicit flexibility, as well as the additional dimensions of theoretical literature surfaced to flesh out those concepts, provided an appropriate and supportive context for reflecting meaning across cases.

Limitations

As with any research endeavor, this study presented limitations in both design and findings. The focused nature of the design—narrative case study—privileged individual

stories and truths above generalizable conclusions. Though a multicase design expanded upon individual narrative inquiry to paint a slightly more robust collection of experiences from different individuals, it remains, nonetheless, context-dependent and fundamentally derived from distinct lives. Although a limitation in some respects, I believe that my decision to, as Stake (2000) described to “study the particular,” honored the intention of this study to delve into a conceptually complex phenomenon of human development.

I made a decision early on, through specifically pursuing a narrative case study approach, to center this study on the lived experiences of the participants. While this provided rich insight into the participants’ own thoughts and perceptions of self-advocacy development, it excluded voices of other individuals and organizations in the participants’ social and academic ecosystem who may have offered supportive or contrasting evidence. Additionally, this study captures the articulation of self-advocacy within a specific moment of time; I did not, for example, disseminate a self-advocacy inventory to participants prior to collecting narrative evidence as a means of comparison. I acknowledge that I have asked consumers of this research to join me in placing primary value on the words, voices, and stories of students with disabilities who contributed to this study. Therefore, this research process remained comfortable with subjectivity, and this may prove limiting under some circumstances, depending on the situation.

Data collection was limited to a single campus—Regional Midsized University (RMU)—a mid-sized public university in the Pacific Northwest. This institution type and location certainly does not represent a generalizable higher education experience across all institution types or areas of the nation. Nevertheless, some participants reflected prior experiences at community colleges, for example, or from living in

different areas of the country. While the participants were all navigating an academic culture at the same campus, they offered different perspectives, depending on their earlier educational encounters, chosen academic discipline, and experience navigating various disability support resources.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that all four participants who contributed to this study disclosed invisible disabilities, meaning that they did not navigate the world with observable, physical disabilities. In this regard, participants could “pass” as nondisabled, depending on the context, and maintained autonomy over the choice to disclose disability status to others, including campus community members and employers. Although recruitment information for this study was distributed through a gatekeeper to the entire population of students with disabilities registered with the disability support office at RMU, no students with visible physical disabilities responded to the call for participation. It remains possible that the stated criteria for participation eligibility, including six months or more of student employment experience, were a contributing factor to the overall disability representation among the participants. It remains possible that hiring processes, even at the student employment level, remain discriminatory and largely inaccessible for some students with disabilities.

Future Recommendations for Research

As noted earlier in the chapter, theoretical and conceptual frameworks for self-advocacy remain flexible and broad, often drawing from literature spanning all levels of education. A continued effort on developing a schema, framework, or curriculum for the development of self-advocacy within an andragogical context is recommended. This endeavor would have positive applications for adult learners, both with and without

disabilities. As Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) stated, “All students need to be effective advocates for their interests, needs, and rights. All students can benefit from knowing how to advocate for the interests of a group,” (p. 52). Self-advocacy should be considered in research assessing college student development and preparedness, especially within the context of other noncognitive variables.

Student employment as an opportunity for co-curricular development, particularly in the arenas of self-advocacy, leadership, and application of academic knowledge to real world practice, is also deserving of increased attention in the literature. While greater general research in this area is desired, it is also critical for future scholarship to specifically examine the experiences of underrepresented and nontraditional student populations, such as students with disabilities. Variables within student employment experiences that contribute to college student development, retention, or even attrition, may vary across specific student populations.

Strengths-based, student-focused scholarship in the area of disability in higher education remains underserved in the extant educational literature. While interrogating the systemic inequities of higher education in relationship to students with disabilities remains of paramount importance, it is also equally worthwhile to seek examples of persistence, resilience, and best practices. More directly, adults with disabilities are often stewards of vast experiential knowledge that may be under-appreciated in the broader landscape of educational research. Ongoing work in disability studies and critical theory may provide educational researchers with alternate pathways for exploring and making meaning of disability experiences in higher education. Students with disabilities should be invited as co-inquirers in these research endeavors, whenever possible.

Future Recommendations for Practice

Best practices to promote the development of self-advocacy among college students with disabilities, as described in Chapter II, include investment in career-preparation programs. These programs provide students with additional support in accessing employment or internship opportunities, including but not limited to: coaching related to resume and interview preparation, identification of possible internship/employment sites, and assistance navigating disability disclosure and accommodation request at the work site. These support services were not currently available at RMU, at least in any formalized manner. Upon cursory review of peer institutions, these types of preparation programs appeared few and far between, many dependent on grant money for continued funding.

The primary recommendation for higher education administrators and professionals, including both faculty and student services staff, is to invest in building career preparation programs for students with disabilities. Through these programs, students with disabilities would have access to a pipeline for experiential learning opportunities to develop the self-advocacy and other skills identified by the literature as significantly beneficial in improving post-graduation employment outcomes. This study demonstrated that student employment opportunities, even with an accompanying career preparation program, present students with additional opportunities to develop self-advocacy. Through intentional design, these opportunities could be multiplied and made more broadly accessible to a wide range of students with varying disabilities. The findings from this study shed light on the extent to which campus employers provide an initial pipeline for experiential learning opportunities among students, including students

with disabilities. It is recommended that campus employers, including student employment departments or programs that may oversee or provide guidance to these employers, pursue training to deepen their knowledge base on best practices for recruiting and retaining students with disabilities.

Outside of the employment context, broader programmatic endeavors to support the holistic development of students with disabilities, particularly in the domains of communication and leadership, is also a recommendation for practitioners. While most college campuses offer disability support services, as required by law, these services are generally oriented toward accommodation and compliance. Students with disabilities should be afforded opportunities to reflect on their experiences, either through peer affinity groups or leadership opportunities. Campuses should recognize that disability support service officers are not necessarily a guaranteed dragnet for the existing population of students with disabilities in totality; they are contact points for some, but not all, students with disabilities. Reliance upon disability support offices to provide one-stop shopping for the complete needs of students with disabilities is a flawed assumption. Active inclusion of students with disabilities should be a programmatic consideration across campuses in a variety of vectors of engagement, from student government, to academic programs.

Campus professionals across departments should receive training on how to responsively support students with disabilities through a variety of service points and learning experiences. Too frequently, the culture within higher education assumes a medical model orientation toward disability. Indeed, as discussed in the literature review, a medical model limits the construct of disability to an individually experienced problem

or diagnosis. This paradigm may stigmatize students with disabilities, particularly if higher education professionals assume that disability service offices comprise the only area of campus where students with disabilities may receive tailored and well-informed support. In reality, students with disabilities interact with a broad ecology of programs, inclusive of both student services and academic departments. The narratives in this study highlight the rich diversity of experiences students with disabilities encounter and pursue through their college careers. Training across campus on inclusive and best practices is a proactive way for faculty and staff to address students with disabilities in a more intentional and supportive manner. Campus climate assessments on accessibility and inclusion, with particular focus on cocurricular and leadership opportunities, may provide institutions with a baseline report on possible areas for growth and further attention. It is recommended that students with disabilities are included as stakeholders in these assessment endeavors.

Conclusion

This chapter concluded the research study. The central guiding question of this multicase research study was revisited, and the extent to which the findings responded to this question was discussed. A comprehensive theoretical framework for the development of self-advocacy was then evaluated in the context of the findings and themes surfaced through the results. Following this discussion, limitations of the study were identified, to include those present in both the research design and the findings. Finally, recommendations were made for future research and future practice in relation to the development of self-advocacy among college students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Week 1 Journal Prompt: Knowledge of Self

Describe how you came to identify as a person with a disability.

What do you think are your personal strengths?

What are your academic and professional interests?

Do your strengths and interests relate to your disability? Why or why not?

Week 2 Journal Prompt: Knowledge of Rights

Have you requested accommodations or disability related advising at any point during your college education? Why or why not?

If relevant to your experience, please describe the first time during your college education you remember disclosing your disability for the purpose of requesting an accommodation, academic adjustment, or other type of disability-related support.

Week 3 Journal Prompt: Communication

If you were going to disclose or describe your disability, how would you explain it to another person?

What aspects of your disability do you believe are most important to share? Why?

What aspects of your disability do you believe others misunderstand? Why?

Week 4 Journal Prompt: Leadership

Describe a time when you engaged in advocacy for other people with disabilities. Some examples might include:

-A time when you provided mentorship or support to another student or students with disabilities (if you cannot draw from your experience, please describe how you would provide mentorship or support to another student or students with disabilities on your campus).

-An experience joining a club or attending an event for the purpose of raising disability awareness.

-An experience sharing about your disability on a panel or event for the purpose of educating peers and the public.

-A time when you created a piece or scholarship or creative work focused on disability education, disability studies, or general disability awareness.

-A time when you helped professionals revise programs or practices to improve disability inclusion.

APPENDIX B

Section one: *Focused life history* (Seidman, 1991)

- Tell me a little about yourself. *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What factors influenced your decision to attend college? *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What were the things that made you excited to attend college? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What ended up helping you the most when you started your studies here? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What were the things that concerned you the most about transitioning to college? *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What type of obstacles have you encountered as a student here? Were any of these obstacles surprising? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self*; *Knowledge of rights* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- Tell me about an early experience disclosing your disability status on campus. *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self*; *Knowledge of rights*; *Communication* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005) *Experience question* (Spradley, 1979)

Section two: *The details of the experience* (Seidman, 1991)

- What is your current student employment role? *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996)
- Why did you seek student employment during your college career? *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996)
- To what extent did your disability/disabilities influence the positions you applied for? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Knowledge of self* (Test, et al, 2005)
- Take me through a typical day at work. *Grand-tour question* (Spradley, 1979)
- What strengths do you bring to your student employment position? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Example question* (Spradley, 1979)

- What is difficult about your student employment position? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996) *Example question* (Spradley, 1979)
- To what extent do you think your disability/disabilities contribute to your strengths and/or weaknesses in your student employment role?
- If you were going to train a new student employee with a disability/disabilities at your workplace, what advice would you give them on the first day?
Communication; Leadership (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
Native-Language question (Spradley, 1979)

Section three: *Reflection on the meaning* (Seidman, 1991)

- How do you define leadership? *Introducing question* (Kvale, 1996); *Native-Language question* (Spradley, 1979); *Leadership* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- In what ways do you demonstrate leadership on your college campus? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996), *Example question* (Spradley, 1979); *Leadership* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- How does your experience as a student with disability/disabilities inform your ideas of leadership? *Experience question* (Spradley, 1979); *Knowledge of self; Leadership* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- To what extent has working as a student employee helped you to grow as a leader? Could you provide me with some examples? *Follow-up question* (Kvale, 1996); *Example question* (Spradley, 1979); *Leadership* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- In what ways has your experience, both in school and as a student employee, influenced your career goals for yourself after graduation? *Experience question* (Spradley, 1979); *Knowledge of self; Knowledge of others; Communication; Leadership* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)
- What do you know about working in an employment setting with a disability/disabilities that you did not know before college? *Experience question* (Spradley, 1979) *Knowledge of self* (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)

APPENDIX C

Self-Advocacy Matrix: Theoretical Components of Self-Advocacy Related to Indicators from the Literature and Case-Based Themes

Component of Self-Advocacy Framework	Indicators from Literature	Case-Based Themes
Self	Knowledge of personal interests, strengths, needs, learning styles, accommodation needs, disability attributes (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)	Risk and Reward (Chris)
		Membership (Chris)
		Employment as Co-Curricular (Chris)
	Passive awareness, realization, and acceptance (Gibson, 2006)	Mitigating Fear (Rachel)
		Role signifiers (Rachel)
		Family Disability History (Rachel)
		Self-sufficiency (Michael)
Rights	Knowledge of personal, community, human, consumer, and educational rights; knowledge of resources; knowledge of procedures for addressing violations (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)	Recognizing Disability (Greg)
		Employment as Co-Curricular (Greg)
		Mentors and Mentorship (Chris)
		Family Disability History (Rachel)
	Minority group paradigm: Understanding resources within the broader context of legal mandates and laws (Jones, 1996)	Experiential Learning (Michael)
		Recognizing Disability (Greg)

Component of Self-Advocacy Framework	Indicators from Literature	Case-Based Themes
Communication	Assertiveness, negotiation, listening, compromise, use of assistive and adaptive technologies (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)	Mentors and Mentorship (Chris)
		Employment as Co-Curricular (Chris)
	Active dismantling of ableist norms through expression (Linton, 1998)	Role signifiers (Rachel)
		Experiential Learning (Michael)
		Challenging Disability (Michael)
		Oral Communication (Greg)
Leadership	Advocacy on behalf of others, effective management of team dynamics, knowledge of resources, political or organizational participation, broader sense of group's rights (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005)	Mentors and Mentorship (Chris)
		Employment as Co-Curricular (Chris)
		Family Disability History (Rachel)
	Counter-narratives: Challenging dominance through personal truth; conveying this to others (Martinez-Alemán, 2015)	Challenging Disability (Michael)
		Experiential Learning (Michael)
		Oral Communication (Greg)
		Employment as Co-Curricular (Greg)

VITA

Education

Doctor of Education, *Developmental Education Administration*, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX, A.B.D. Anticipated dissertation defense Spring 2018.
 Developing Self-Advocacy Among College Student Employees with Disabilities:
 An Exploratory Multicase Study

Master of Education, *Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education*, Western Washington University (WWU), Bellingham, WA, 2009
 Ten Year Experiment: Washington State Achiever Scholarship Recipients at Western Washington University: An Applied Pilot Assessment Project on High-Achieving, Low-Income Students

Bachelor of Arts, *Political Science, (Spanish minor)*, WWU, Bellingham, WA, 2008

Post-Graduate coursework in Archives and Records Management, History Department, WWU, 2013

Professional Experience

Curriculum and Records Manager,

Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies, WWU, Bellingham, WA 7/16-Present

- Coordinate curriculum procedures on behalf of a semi-autonomous interdisciplinary program
- Instruct students regarding the concentration (self-designed major) development process
- Provide faculty with instruction and training on curriculum development processes
- Interpret and apply university policies and procedures to college curriculum, contracting, and assessment/reporting
- Serve on the college student assessment committee
- Advise students academically
- Co-facilitate the college curriculum committee
- Analyze college and institutional data for the purposes of enrollment management, annual reporting, and identification of key performance indicators
- Oversee the storage, management, and archiving of student academic records spanning more than four decades (Web4U, Banner, NoliJ, Paper Archives)
- Manage and oversee course registration processes

Assistant Director,

WWU disAbility Resources for Students, Bellingham, WA 3/12-6/16

- Oversee daily operations and supervise DRS staff members in alignment with federal, state and institutional compliance mandates in addition to the DRS Mission Statement and strategic goals
- Ensure accommodation/service delivery complies with DRS policy & procedure and federal and state requirements
- Conduct institutional research to evaluate enrollment, retention, and completion outcomes among students with disabilities
- Report departmental data to institutional and state agencies
- Monitor budget and project financial needs
- Advise students by designing highly individualized academic plans
- Oversee a priority registration program
- Annually evaluate staff per personnel policies and procedures outlined by the institution
- Create, manage, and maintain student records database
- Participate in ongoing ADA audit of campus facilities, including prioritization of minor/major capital requests
- Perform descriptive statistical analysis using Banner, BI Query, Excel, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)
- Provide ongoing case management for high-risk students
- Respond to grievances
- Coordinate programs/training for students, staff, faculty and public to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of accommodations/services as determined by current research, national standards and program assessment
- Liaison with university offices and departments to promote disability awareness that includes disability culture, history and social construct
- Collaborate with University Foundation and donors to organize and award annual scholarships for students with disabilities
- Coordinate interdepartmental efficiency to support retention and graduation efforts for students with disabilities

Doctoral Intern,

WWU Office of Institutional Research, Bellingham, WA 1/16-5/16

- Design institutional research projects
- Build and test queries using the institutional data warehouse
- Clean and code data appropriately as specified by the research objective
- Conduct statistical analyses of datasets
- Report findings of research to relevant stakeholders through written and oral means

disAbility Management and Accommodation Counselor, WWU disAbility Resources for Students, Bellingham, WA 9/09-3/12

- Evaluated and process disability documentation

- Performed needs assessments in order to determine appropriate accommodations
- Academically advised population of students with unique needs
- Consulted with potential clients and offer referrals to on and off campus practitioners
- Communicated directly with faculty in order to provide academic accommodations
- Partnered with outside offices in order to strengthen first year experience programs, support student career development, and assist students encountering academic difficulty

Graduate Assistant, WWU disAbility Resources for Students, Bellingham, WA 6/09-9/09

Graduate Assistant, WWU Office of Residence Life, Bellingham, WA 9/08-6/09

Graduate Intern, Skagit Valley College Multicultural Student Services, Mt. Vernon, WA 1/09-6/09

Graduate Intern, WWU Student Outreach Services, Bellingham, WA 5/08-12/08

Community Outreach Experience

Member, City of Bellingham Greenways Advisory Committee, 2017-present

Organizer, Bellingham Mamas Support Network Giving Tree, 2014-present

Founding Board Member, 100+ Women of Whatcom, 2014-2016

Selected Publications

Blick, A. M., Lane, F. C. (2017). Affective vs. non-cognitive assessment: A proposed nomenclature for developmental educators. *Research in Developmental Education*, 27(1).

Selected Presentations and Workshops

“Defining Progress: Evaluating the Relationship Between Enrollment Management and Completion Outcomes,” NASPA National Assessment and Persistence Conference, Portland, OR, June 2016

“Promoting Disability Inclusion in the Workplace”, a class for the Equity and Inclusion Forum, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, ongoing

“Managing Disruptive Students”, a class for faculty and staff, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, ongoing

“Women in Leadership: Reflecting on the Past to Bridge the Gender Gap”, Northwest Association of Student Affairs Professionals, Sunriver, OR, October 2015

“The Impact of Developmental Math on Degree Completion among Academically Underprepared Students at a Four-Year Institution”, a paper presented at the Southeast Association for Educational Research conference, San Antonio, TX, February 2015

“Capture the Flag: Insufficient Progress toward Degree at Western Washington University”, Washington Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA, August 2014

“Universal Design for the Digital Environment: Accessibility & Online Content”, Washington Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Big Bend Community College, Moses Lake, WA, April 2013

“Accessibility Workshop for Online/Blended Courses,” WWU Blended/Online Workshop Series for Faculty, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, February 2013

“Academic Care Team: Building Relationships, Closing Gaps”, Nakama Conference, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, September 2012

“Beyond the Wheelchair Symbol: The Changing Identities of Students with Disabilities”, Nakama Conference, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham, WA, September 2011

“Bridging Development and Compliance: Learning Outcomes for Students with Disabilities”, Nakama Conference, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham, WA, August 2010

“Ten Year Experiment: Washington State Achiever Scholarship Recipients at Western Washington University”, Nakama Conference, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, August 2009

Service Contributions

Program Reviewer, 2016 NASPA Assessment and Persistence Conference

Representative, Professional Staff Organization Executive Committee, WWU

Program Reviewer, Southeast Educational Research Association

Chair, Central Health and Safety Committee, WWU

Co-facilitator, Academic Care Team, WWU

Member, Network Group, WWU

Member, Disability Advisory Committee, WWU

Member, Division Assessment Resource Team, WWU

Commencement Marshal, WWU, 2010-Present

Teaching Learning Academy, WWU, 2009-Present

Memberships and Affiliations

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

National Association for Developmental Education

Northwest Association of Student Affairs Professionals

Society of American Archivists

Southeast Educational Research Association

Washington Association on Postsecondary Education and Disability