IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
USING ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
The Requirements for
The Degree

Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership

by

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Identities and Experiences of California Community College Students Who Use Accessibility Support Services* by Theresa Michal Kazumi Oda-Burns, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

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2020

As disabled student enrollment in postsecondary education has increased, the literature has grown regarding challenges and barriers to truly accessible education. This study deepens our understanding of students' experiences using accessibility support services in community college. Through exploratory case study design, phenomenological interviews were used to answer the following questions: How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify in terms of disability-related language? What are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access? Findings include widely varied linguistic self-identities regarding disability, including language affirming, language selecting, and language informing responses. Students also report previous negative experiences, the power of interactions with instructional faculty, acceptance of accountability for accessibility, and support from social networks to overcome hesitation. Recommendations include reflection on labeling practices and a move toward universally designing college education. The lived experiences of students in California Community Colleges must inform our institutional practices to achieve true accessibility.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

Chair, Dissertation Committee

Date

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With gratitude to...

My parents: For letting me put in loads of laundry on my way to class on the weekends, serving up a hot meal at the end of a long school day, and letting me be quiet. For loving me through my highs and lows and always, always believing in me.

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My therapist: For listening.

My dog: For being silly, joyful, and cuddly through it all.

My village is strong and mighty.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Margaret Oda, and my mother, Marjorie Oda-Burns. Both having earned doctoral degrees themselves, my grandma and mom paved the way for me to pursue my dreams. They not only taught me, they showed me how to be courageous, strong, and resilient while acting with compassion, grace, and love. I will ask myself what they would do in the inevitable moments of uncertainty that arise over the course of a career and a lifetime. Carrying with me the love and wisdom of these two phenomenal women, I am never alone.

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A Note on Language

Language has the power to alter how we think, perceive, and understand. In the literature and over time, the language regarding disability has been variable. In Assembly Bill 77 for instance, one of the central laws passed to institutionalize disability rights in postsecondary institutions, the term “handicapped” was used throughout, as it was the most commonly accepted language at the time of its writing. The term handicapped apparently came from a horse-racing term used to describe ways of limiting certain superior horses (i.e. by putting ankle weights on a faster horse), with intent to indicate that impairment is not inherent to an individual, but rather placed upon a person by outside factors imposed from outside (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke, 2017). This actually sounds relatively progressive from a 2020 retrospective. But over time the term became conflated with panhandling and of utmost importance, was not chosen by the group of people it was used to describe. So, the term was later rejected through the disability rights movement, and “disabled” became the preferred term embraced by those leading the movement.

Language is everchanging as it is used and as people reflect on its power and meaning. When I pick up this dissertation to re-read at age 75, I may be appalled by the language I chose to use, as it will likely have changed multiple times between now and then. Because published writing is crystalized and somewhat frozen in time, I will

explain my current (2020) rationale for using “disabled students” throughout this work, with the humility to realize that it may not sit comfortably with all readers, both in this moment and years from now. Language has enormous power and it transforms who we know ourselves to be, so the language chosen for this dissertation challenges some norms, with the goal of contributing to an ongoing linguistic conversation.

The most commonly accepted terminology in recent years has been student-first language, e.g. “student with a disability.” The intent here is to emphasize that the person is, above all, a person. By making this language choice, disability is a secondary qualifier, rather than the first word associated with the person, as it appears when using “disabled student.” I wrote the proposal and first drafts of this dissertation using “student with a disability” and frequently still use it in public presentations when there is insufficient time to explain linguistic choice, because student-first language is how we have collectively honored students’ humanity across disciplines for many years now. Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke (2017), authors of a book that informs much of this dissertation, chose to use both “disabled student” and “student with a disability” throughout their book to recognize the varied perspectives that exist in this linguistic space. I made a choice to commit to “disabled students,” after several years of reflection. Authentic and transformative leadership means pushing the conversation

forward, both within the walls of the institution, and beyond in the broader political sphere for the purpose of social justice, which is in ongoing practice (Shields, 2010).

Though student-first language, “student with a disability,” empowers students by first recognizing humanity, it includes a prepositional phrase “with a disability” to follow. This, to me, emphasizes the that impairment or disability is something inherent to an individual, rather than a combination of bodymind characteristics and environmental factors, with a substantial twist of power dynamics in which systems have been intentionally built to include some bodyminds and exclude others. It is similar saying, “a student with a backpack,” which indicates that the backpack belongs to that student, and that student alone. The backpack theirs, it is therefore their responsibility, and society has very little do with it.

The medical model ideation of disability that says bodyminds too divergent from the imaginary ideal of an “average” person are a result of a medical problem or defect that should be cured or ameliorated, and a movement away from this model is necessary at this time. Especially in a heavily capitalistic society in which we tend to value ourselves and each other based on the amount we can produce or contribute, I push back on any language formation that indicates that some individual bodyminds are deficient. Society and environment have been set up to privilege some bodyminds

and oppress others, and the language used here must reflect that power dynamic instead of diminishing it.

“Disabled students” will be the most commonly used language in this document. Many feel that “disabled student” has a stigma associated with it, as the common understanding of disability in the United States focuses on individual inabilities, resulting in this terminology sounding like “unable student” or “incapable student,” again indicating that an individual student has a problem. “Disabled student” is identity-based language and reflects the social and cultural models of disability, but when heard or read within the deficit model of disability is understood as disrespectful and reflects an understanding of “disability” as an impairment that resides within the individual person’s bodymind. “Bodymind” is another term that will be used throughout this work to recognize that mental and physical processes are inherently interdependent and one (Price, 2015).

There is another reading of “disabled student” however, commonly accepted in other parts of the world, which acknowledges that some students “*have been* disabled” by spaces, systems, and structures that are designed inaccessibly (Titchkosky, 2011). In this way, “disabled students” may or may not identify as having an impairment, but because of their bodymind have been disenfranchised by society, therefore changing the onus of the accessibility deficit to society, rather than upon the

individual. This is latter reading of “disabled student” is intentionally the lens through which I write, as it calls attention to the role of society and institutions in disability.

There are individual group preferences to consider as well, which also change over time. For example, many Deaf students identify as Deaf-first, as it is a linguistic and cultural group, often more so than a disability category. Today, many autistic students prefer autism-first language because it is a source of identity ownership, not something to be feared or overshadowed. The range of linguistic preferences is broad and malleable, constantly shaped by the individuals’ experiences and interactions with society and the environment.

I have chosen to use “disabled students,” (1) to honor the voices of students who do identify as disabled first, and (2) to represent my belief that many students *have been disabled* by our institutions in various ways. I honor other linguistic perspectives, and aim never to label another person in a way that does not feel accurate to that person. As case-in-point, not all of the students interviewed in this study identified as disabled, so “disabled student” as it will be used here is intended to primarily acknowledge an institutional power dynamic, not label any individual person who chooses to use accessibility support services. As language continues to change, and this dissertation stays frozen in time, I hope the language used here is at the very least an accurate time capsule of one perspective at the time of its writing.

Chapter One: Purpose of the Study

Introduction

Disabled students in the United States are attending institutions of higher education in larger numbers than ever before, with the majority attending community colleges for some or all of their postsecondary education (Mamishvili & Koch, 2012). In the 2018-2019 academic year, 121,505 unduplicated (unique) California Community College (CCC) students accessed support services through their college's Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) office, which is approximately 5% of the total CCC population that year, at 2,349,965 unduplicated students (CCCCO Datamart, 2019). This leaves many students unaccounted for, however, who may benefit from accessibility support, as 71.6% of students identified by their secondary school as having a disability either did not identify as having a disability or did identify as having a disability but chose not to disclose at their postsecondary institution (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). Colleges and universities are required to provide equitable access to education for disabled students, in accordance with state and federal non-discrimination laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This call for non-discrimination is only the beginning, however, of providing truly accessible educational spaces.

Statement of the Problem

The policies and procedures used by California Community Colleges are based in the medical model of disability, which focuses solely on deficits of individual bodyminds. Recent standards regarding accessibility of technological material (Community College League of California Administrative Procedure 3725 Information and Communication Technology and Instructional Material Accessibility Standard) have greatly enhanced awareness of web and digital accessibility responsibilities of colleges (California Community Colleges Accessibility Center, 2019). Such policies have the potential to shift a large portion of college culture toward anticipatory access rather than reactionary access for disabled students. However, students are still granted access to many parts of their education through individually requested accommodations. Disabled students who attend CCCs are required to identify themselves and constantly self-advocate to their institution and instructors to receive disability-related support.

Whereas the number of disabled students who choose to attend postsecondary education has increased and systems of disability-related support have been institutionalized, equitable access to education without the need for forced disclosure of disability has yet to be fully realized. Community colleges are a key component of

providing equity-minded education to many historically oppressed students, including disabled students.

The Role of Community Colleges

Community colleges are responsible for the postsecondary education of many disabled students. Forty-four percent of disabled students who exit high school and attend postsecondary school attend a 2-year or community college, as opposed to 20.6% of the general population. This makes community colleges the postsecondary institutions most attended by disabled students (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010). The responsibility to not only accept but adequately support and empower disabled students, a historically disenfranchised college-going group, therefore rests largely on two-year and community colleges.

Community colleges are distinct from most other postsecondary institutions in that they are “open access” institutions of higher education. The Vision for Success is a document released by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office to set goals and plan for the educational and occupational success of Californians. “Open access,” as the term is used in the Vision for Success, is founded upon “a remarkable idea: that higher education should be available to everyone” (CCCCO, 2017). CCCs are required to admit any California resident with a high school diploma or equivalent, and may admit non-residents with a high school diploma or equivalent or any resident or

non-resident over the age of eighteen without a high school diploma or equivalent who the board deems capable of benefitting from the educational programs available (California Community Colleges, 2020). Students who have not yet graduated from high school may also take courses at CCCs with authorization from both the college and secondary school. Whereas the majority of four-year colleges and universities have a competitive application process, including a comprehensive review of high school or transfer grade point average, personal statement, standardized test measures, interview, etc., community colleges do not assess students for admission.

By virtue of the very fact that students in community colleges have not been screened or cherry-picked for qualities that many colleges evaluate to grant admission (often qualities that college representatives have decided indicate ability to benefit from and complete college coursework,) students in community colleges represent an intentionally broad range of abilities, disabilities, identities, racial groups, ages, academic backgrounds, etc. The term “access” in community colleges’ admission policies cannot be fulfilled without planning for the breadth of students who will enroll. Once students are admitted by community colleges, the most attended postsecondary institution type by disabled students, the colleges assume full responsibility to provide equitable access to its educational materials, spaces, cultures and experiences for all of the students this open access policy invites.

Increase in Postsecondary Enrollment

The number of disabled students attending higher education institutions in the United States has been growing rapidly over the last 20 years. Between 1990 and 2005 enrollment of disabled high school graduates into postsecondary institutions increased from 26% to 46% (Newman et al., 2010). In the most recent study of high school graduates with documented disabilities, 55% enrolled in some type of postsecondary institution within eight years of completing high school (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey & Shaver, 2011). For years, many disabled students were discouraged from attending college. Edward Roberts is one of many students who moved the needle of access through a lawsuit against the University of California, Berkeley in 1962 regarding physically inaccessible spaces (Evans et al., 2017). The Architectural Barriers Act followed in 1968, which enforced physical accessibility of buildings built with federal money. With this acknowledgement that spaces must be physically accessible to disabled students, colleges and universities very gradually became understood as places that students with various and diverse bodyminds could attend.

Increased enrollment is a positive step toward educational and vocational equity for disabled students in terms of access to higher education, as a college education increases opportunities for higher wage earnings, attainment of financial independence, and opportunity for personal exploration. With mere acceptance, and

inadequate or inequitable supports for disabled students pursuing higher education, however, colleges have idly opened the doors, but not reflect through policy and procedure genuine, systemic belief that disabled students belong in college. Dolmage (2017) recognizes that colleges and universities were founded upon principles of elitism, and that race and disability in particular pose threats to this historically very polite form of exclusion and oppression. Community colleges have challenged this elitism by their very existence and open admissions requirements; However, some of the elitist practices have bled through from the earliest postsecondary institutional structures.

Postsecondary Education Accessibility is an Equity Issue

What is at stake if disabled students do not feel supported to attend or complete college? Increasingly, jobs in the United States require a college education, with 20% needing at least some college in 1959, 56% needing at least some college in 2000 (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver & Wei, 2011), and an anticipated 65% of jobs opening around 2020 due to baby boomer retirement requiring some college (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). According to the United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2016) individuals with a bachelor's degree earn an average of just under double that of individuals whose highest educational level is a high school diploma.

A college education is also worth more than the dollar amount one can earn after completion. Having been reared in a capitalist society, I am trained to recognize measurable “success” in terms of a person’s ability to earn money, function independently, and participate in the workforce. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) writes from the perspective of Disability Justice activists, “We don’t believe that human worth is dependent on what and how much a person can produce. We understand capitalism to be a system that promotes private wealth accumulation for some at the expense of others” (p. 27). The study of disability through a Disability Justice lens calls for a critique of capitalism’s reduction of human beings, and of education, to potential earnings and dollar signs. A more expansive exploration of Disability Justice follows later in this chapter. Students who complete college do earn a degree that expands employment and income opportunities, but that diminishes the richness of the college experience just as capitalism diminishes the richness of the human experience.

Beyond the additional earnings, prestige, and status that come with a college education in our present society, the opportunity to explore the self and come together with peers and instructors who can engage in critical inquiry through community is arguably an even more valuable aspect of postsecondary education. Higher education provides adult learners with an opportunity for uninhibited and voluntary exploration of the self and the world in which we live. The idea that the

college experience and opportunity for advancement both economically and personally should be kept from a group of students based on income, disability, race, religion, sexuality, gender, or any other identifier is an inherent and persistent social injustice.

Disabled Students' College Goal Completion

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NTLS-2), which tracked disabled students eight years after high school, shows that disabled students at 4-year colleges or universities complete their postsecondary degrees and/or goals at rates lower than the general student population (41 percent vs. 52 percent); yet, disabled students actually complete at a rate above their non-disabled peers at 2-year colleges (41 percent vs. 22 percent) (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver & Wei, 2011). Though it is a hopeful sign that disabled students at 2-year colleges complete their goals at a higher rate than their non-disabled peers, the completion rate for disabled students remains consistent at a modest 41 percent across postsecondary institutions. One could argue that the more troubling figure is that the completion rate falls so low for the general population in 2-year and community colleges, indicating room for improvement for all students, more than it indicates exquisite services for disabled students.

Most of the literature regarding higher education and disability focus on four-year colleges, which may not address issues unique to community colleges. A review of the literature on disability-related supports in colleges and universities, with very few studies conducted at CCCs, has surfaced two critical problems: (1) Many students choose not to use disability support services for a variety of environmental and personal reasons, including stigma, and (2) there are institutional, social, and attitudinal barriers in place for those who do choose to use disability support services.

Hesitation to Disclose

Nationwide, disabled students are not receiving disability support services from their institutions (Newman, Wagner, Cameto & Knokey, 2009). One of the critical features of the access model adopted by most of our postsecondary institutions is that students must disclose disability to register with and receive accommodations and supports from the office tasked with disability support. Forcing this medical disclosure and depending heavily on student self-advocacy and help-seeking behaviors has proven to be one of the major barriers to accessible education.

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2), as referenced in the introduction, 28.4% of disabled students entering college from high school disclosed disability at their postsecondary institution, while the remaining 71.6% either did not identify as having a disability or identified as having a disability but chose not

to disclose (Newman et al., 2009). Students, especially those with invisible disabilities, are choosing not to identify with and use disability support services in college.

Conservatively, it is estimated that between 9 and 17% of the community college population are identified as having some type of visible or invisible disability (Getzel, 2008). In fact, in the 2015-2016 school year, 19% of the undergraduate postsecondary student population identified as disabled via intake survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This survey is confidential and inconsequential to students, in that it does not sign them up for any type of individual services, as opposed to the disclosure processes in most colleges. In contrast, 5.4% of students in California Community Colleges requested and received disability support services at their colleges in the 2017-2018 academic year (CCCCO Datamart, 2018). This discrepancy indicates that there are many students attending two-year and community colleges, many of whom have received support services in past, who are unidentified and unsupported by the institution regarding disability and access.

To bring that discrepancy home to California, in the 2017-2018 academic year, the CCCs served 2,339,043 unduplicated students total and 5.40% of these students registered with and used at least one service from Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) (the statewide name for disability support services, regardless of individual school's choice of department name), for a total of 118,913 students served

(CCCCO Datamart, 2019). If I use a conservative 12% as the approximation of disabled students on any given campus who might benefit from support services, there was potential to serve 280,685 ($2,339,043 \times .12$) total students, and the CCCs effectively did not serve 161,772 students who may have benefitted from disability-specific support.

One way to interpret the modest number of self-identified disabled students in the CCCs is to assume that the education, spaces, and material are already so accessible that support is not necessary; However, none of the studies in the literature have found this to be the case from student report. Data from qualitative studies to be discussed in the literature review reveal that it is more likely due to stigma and other environmental, structural, and attitudinal barriers placed by the institution. As community college leaders are on a constant mission to increase overall completion, transfer, and success rates, it is important to keep in mind a considerable group of students who have rejected our institutional labeling system when it comes to disability, or chosen for other reasons not to use disability support services, but need and deserve an accessible, disability-conscious education.

Institutional Barriers

Disability has become the Whack-a-Mole of higher education. When disability pops up, we slap it with a quick accommodation, and we just hope it doesn't pop up again. (Dolmage, 2017)

The process through which disabled students at California Community Colleges (CCCs) request and receive provisions for an accessible education, has the potential to create an additional challenge for an already marginalized student population. Current supports for disabled students depend heavily upon auxiliary aids or accommodations, which are reasonable adaptations of the educational material. Some examples of accommodations and auxiliary aids are (a) American Sign Language interpreters, (b) extended testing time, (c) reduced-distraction environment for testing, (d) magnifiers, (e) audio/digital text, (f) Braille, (g) speech-to-text software, (h) text-to-speech software, and (i) notetaking assistance.

The process for students to receive these accommodations from the college at no additional charge to the student, can be disjointed, and requires a considerable amount of self-advocacy. These help-seeking and self-advocacy behaviors expected of students include persistent disclosure of disability, numerous requests for services, and additional responsibilities to manage the logistics of accommodations. Self-advocacy is a term with roots in the disability rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s to empower and liberate persons with intellectual disabilities (Ward, 2009). Self-advocacy, as it will be referred to throughout this dissertation, is the practice of representing one's self, and making one's individual needs known. Retrofitting via accommodations, however, can preserve exclusion by allowing institutions to proceed

with inequitable and inaccessible practices (Dolmage, 2017). Accommodations therefore are one of the mechanisms through which institutions can avoid taking steps to become proactively accessible for all students.

Though self-advocacy was originally a concept designed to recognize the expertise of disabled people in the area of their own needs, the institutional insistence on incessant self-advocacy can create an inherently inequitable structure for disabled students to navigate. Disabled students can experience barriers to their success, to which their non-disabled peers are not subjected, through the very process designed by the institution to support their individual needs. Students must identify themselves as “disabled” multiple times to multiple parties each semester to receive support, which at a crucial time of identity development is an institutionally enforced structure that has the potential to maintain inequity. While self-advocacy is an essential skill to navigate college and has been used as a tool of empowerment for disabled students, among other marginalized groups, this study problematizes institutionalized labeling and excessive self-advocacy. At what point is it inequitable to require some students to self-advocate repeatedly, while others need not self-advocate as much to have their educational needs met?

Educational leaders have the choice to adopt inclusive or exclusionary practices in their schools. CCCs have adopted a practice that places deficit upon individual

students (“what is wrong with you?”) instead of upon themselves (“what is wrong with the institution?”) Educational leaders, with an understanding that our institutions of higher education were created with white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender male students in mind, must deconstruct and reconstruct the ways in which our increasingly diverse students are anticipated, welcomed, and served. As the Vice President of Administrative Services at the college where this research was conducted has said, “It is time we create student-ready colleges, rather than focusing on college-ready students.”

Research Questions

Enforced institutional labeling and excessive self-advocacy may be barriers to educational success for disabled students in California Community Colleges (CCCs). This qualitative research study aims to better understand the identities and experiences of disabled students from a Disability Justice perspective, with the goal of informing California Community College policies and procedures, by asking two research questions:

1. How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify in terms of disability-related language?

2. What are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access?

It is of note that when I began this study, identity was not a major component of the inquiry. Through the phenomenological and iterative design of my research, however, students showed me that identity language was a key component of their self-expression and experience. Therefore, as I use the term “identity” throughout this work, I am referring to the language with which participants self-identify, regarding disability. Acknowledging that terminology and language are only small facets of comprehensive human identities, the word is used here to explore linguistic expressions of students to describe themselves.

A Phenomenological Case Study

This research is a phenomenological case study through interviews with disabled students served by the Accessibility Center (AC) at one California Community College (CCC). It builds on Hoggatt’s (2017) critical discourse analysis which found that the policies, structures, and practices of CCCs regarding disabled students generally restricted opportunities of disabled students (Hoggatt, 2017). The interviews conducted for the current study focus on disabled students’ experiences using the AC at one college within this procedural framework outlined by the California Community

College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), and aims to elicit students' ideas for improvements to state-wide accessibility practices.

Student voice is the most appropriate vehicle for exploring the experiences of disabled students. From a Disability Justice perspective, it is essential to centralize the experiences of disabled students in educational research. From a Disability Rights retrospective, "Nothing about us without us," a disability rights mantra and the title of a book written by Charlton (2000) about the oppression of disabled people, remains relevant almost fifty years after the heart of the Disability Rights movement. Disabled students are the experts in their own needs, preferences, and experiences. Both the history of Disability Rights and the current-day, grassroots, activist-driven principles of Disability Justice inform this work. To honor lived experience and intentionally defer expertise, students' stories, identities, and opinions were pursued to uncover how disability support services are experienced, and how services might be improved for students, in their end-user position in CCCs.

Norma, one of my doctoral colleagues, studies the experiences of university students who are undocumented, and much of the literature celebrates students' "resiliency" as a group. She asks, "But why do they have to be so resilient?" Similarly, for disabled students, I ask, "But why do they have to continuously self-advocate?" Resiliency and self-advocacy are positive traits in and of themselves, but we challenge

the celebration of these terms, as they indicate institutional practices that require some students to persistently push through barriers set up by our postsecondary institutions.

A Working Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) generously acknowledge for social science researchers that a conceptual framework is never really “done.” It is a continuous practice of a researcher’s reflection upon why the topic of research is important, why the methods chosen for studying the topic are appropriate and rigorous, and how personal positionality and theoretical orientation impact the research. All three of these components are moving targets in the iterative process of social science research, so what follows is a snapshot of my conceptual framework during the writing of this dissertation.

Importance of Study and Appropriateness of Chosen Method

Although the majority of disabled students attend community colleges for some or all of their postsecondary education, there is little research on the experiences of disabled students in community colleges. The majority of research in this field focuses on the experiences of disabled students attending four-year universities, the transition from high school to college, and the experiences of students with a particular impairment (e.g. learning disability, autism, etc.) in the community

colleges (Evans et al., 2017). To address this gap in the literature, this study is designed to explore the lived experiences of disabled students attending community college who have at some point used DSPS to receive academic accommodations and disability support.

This study explores the experiences of students at an “access” terminology college regarding the processes of disability-related self-advocacy, academic accommodations, and disability support services. By “access terminology,” I mean that this college has chosen to use “Accessibility Center” (AC), rather than “Disabled Students Programs and Services” (DSPS) as the office is known at the state level. This intentional language choice was voted upon by students and institutionally adopted campus-wide. This local language shift indicates that student voice is superior to institutional norms and history at the college where the study takes place.

Regardless of department name, however, students are still expected to register with the disability support office, which in most cases requires medical documentation from a licensed medical professional, based on medical-model norms. They must then approach instructors with accommodations forms each semester, schedule multiple testing and alternate media appointments, and continuously make their needs known to receive accommodations. Their experiences with repeated self-advocacy are, through informal, anecdotal report and many empirical studies often

challenging and exhausting (Baker, Boland & Nowik, 2012; Denhart, 2008; and Hong, 2015). It is the intent of this study to formally voice the lived experiences of students who use the Accessibility Center in a California Community College, in search of a more equitable systemic approach to accessibility.

It is important for me to note that the intent of this research is *not* to make disability invisible by integrating it fully into our anticipatory practices. Disability is an essential part of the broad range of human experience, one that it would be an injustice to erase. There is a recognized, potential danger to discourses of “access” and “universal design” (the concept of making spaces, products, and learning accessible to the broadest range of people possible, without special adaptations or accommodations), as it stops putting “disability” in the mouths and minds of communities. Invisibility and lack of recognition can be as oppressive as outright discrimination.

By prioritizing real feedback from disabled students through phenomenological inquiry, it is the intent of this research not to devalue or erase disability, but to bring tangible, lived experiences to the foreground to guide institutional practices. Students who have navigated the current systems in place are the experts, and in a listening practitioner’s role, I am in search of answers to make their experiences in the community college more comfortable, equitable, and inclusionary.

Relationality

Because I have never identified or been identified as a disabled student in a California Community College, my relationality to this work is especially relevant as I explore a conceptual framework. Disability as an identifier is one that is heterogeneous and can change over the course of one's lifetime. Disability is also fairly arbitrary, and defined differently from various perspectives. For example, the medical model upholds that there is a medically verified "problem" that resides in an individual, whereas in the social model, society has consciously created environments which privilege certain bodyminds and oppress others. There are many other models of disability between and beyond these two. Where is the invisible line of "disabled" vs. "non-disabled"? Some would be very committed to a clear answer. For instance, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) law has its own declared line firmly grounded in the medical model, and others would draw that line elsewhere.

From the perspective of questioning the invisible line of bodymind "normalcy," I explore my positionality regarding disability. I am an exceptionally slow reader, I need to be shown how to complete a task multiple times before I can do it independently, and I invert numbers when I read them aloud. Because I always found a way to pass my courses and I have a (half) Asian stereotypical tendency to comply with authority, I was never tested for a learning disability. I am near-sighted and wear corrective lenses.

I attempted suicide in college when I thought I was letting everyone down, and once I was released from the psych ward, no one ever brought it up again. I have had migraine headaches between one and five times a month since I was a teenager. I have undiagnosed social anxiety and rarely fit in socially. I have torn both anterior cruciate ligaments (ACLs), and all four menisci in my knees, but four surgeries later, I can walk and run, through a moderate and fluctuating amount of pain. So, if impairment is part of the disability puzzle, these are bodymind characteristics and experiences of mine that may indicate a degrees of divergence from the imaginary norm.

One of the things I love about working in and around issues of disability and accessibility is that I can fully explore all those experiences listed above, with intention and without secrecy. Society encourages us to hide what makes us fully human in many cases, and rewards those who outwardly project the “norm” rather than the complexity. But highs and lows of mental health, difficulty with learning and expression, headaches, reconstructed knees, eyesight, etc. all make me, me. Some people will still believe that these things diminish credibility and excellence. In a field where the breadth of humanity is not only shared but celebrated, however, I get to embrace this fullness of experience and feel a part of a community that gets it.

From the perspective of disability not as an inherent, individual quality, but rather a social construction created in the spaces between environment and embodiment, I have not been disabled. And I have further not been disabled by society in a way that has interfered with my education. But if a student walked in to my office and described many of the conditions listed above, I would from my position as an Accessibility Center counselor approve her for academic accommodations after a discussion about how any of the impairments impact her in an academic setting (and a request for medical documentation, to the extent possible, per CCCC Title 5 guidelines).

It never occurred to me to seek support services for disability in college, which is when most of the impairments listed above were exacerbated. I crutched across the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) campus, an expansive and hilly terrain, for months after surgery without the slightest thought about free accessible transport services. I find the invisible line between “disabled” and “non-disabled” murky, as I reflect on my own disability identity. There are times I have felt disabled in certain situations, by my anxiety more than anything, but I have never identified or been identified as disabled. This may very well be an expression of the non-disclosure and hesitation to disclose explored throughout this study. I recognize my privilege to choose my identity, however, while others are identified by medical professionals,

others, and/or themselves as disabled, and are often disabled by the inability of the environment around them to create accessible spaces, without the option to choose.

Theoretical Perspective

Although a traditionally phenomenological approach might exclude a theoretical perspective so as not to taint the outcome of the inquiry, I have included theory in this study. As a researcher in a doctoral program, I was immersed in the perspectives and various works of scholars and activists who also study disability and accessibility. So as not to pretend that these ideas and perspectives are not bubbling up in my present work, authenticity is more important than strict adherence to classic phenomenology. Included in my conceptual framework is this exploration of theory as it relates to the identities and experiences of disabled students using the accommodations model of access in a California Community College.

Disability Justice has been chosen as the philosophic perspective, rather than a formally recognized academic theory, through which to approach this research. After brief explorations of Critical Disability Theory, Disability Studies, and DisCrit to guide my research, the more activist-driven, somewhat messy and unapologetically authentic core of Disability Justice won my heart. Originating in Oakland, Disability Justice is a term envisioned by disabled queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and people of color (QTBIPOC) writers and activists who have been “living disability out loud,”

together, for years (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2019). This philosophic perspective is intentionally non-academic in nature, and although I have determined it is the most appropriate lens through which to approach my research, I do not want to contribute to the academic appropriation of Disability Justice, about which the QTBIPOC visionaries are wary. I will therefore represent the philosophic perspective as accurately as I can and recognize its preferred independence from the academic arena. I aim not to appropriate, but to present the perspective that I believe has the most promise to lead to accessible spaces for ourselves and our students.

Disability Justice goes beyond previous models of disability through either a medical model or social model lens. Loewen and Pollard (2010) compare the definition of “disability” from the medical model, “The condition of being unable to perform a task due to an impairment which is an individual burden, personal tragedy or individual problem” to the social model’s definition of disability, “The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by design of environments which exclude disabled persons from participation in mainstream social activities” (p. 10). Disability Justice at once rejects both of these models and recognizes elements of both. While recognizing that environments have been intentionally designed to privilege ableist norms and that a large portion of disability is socially constructed, Disability Justice scholars recognize that bodies, embodiment, and impairment can mean hard, real, inescapable

experiences (Mingus, 2013). In this way, disability is neither as simple as, “there’s something wrong with you,” nor “there’s something wrong with society.” It is a complex framework in which embodiment, social constructs, power, privilege, intersectionality, and experience are all recognized and given voice.

Before launching into the tenants of Disability Justice, where I ended up, homage is due to the scholars and visionaries of the other theoretical frameworks I worked through, which also shaped my thought processes and paved the way for access and disability studies over time. Though I did not ultimately end up approaching my work from a Disability Studies in Education (DSE), Critical Disability Theory (CDT), or DisCrit lens, I recognize the merit and progressive movement stemming from each theoretical body of work. Rather than rejecting these other theoretical frameworks, I acknowledge them for the monumental part they played in moving the social justice needle, and helping me to better understand disability scholarship and thought.

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is where I started my theoretical journey, as it seemed to be the foundation for a majority of educational research studies in the field of education. DSE aims to: (1) contextualize disability within political and social spheres; (2) privilege the interests, agendas, and voices of people labeled with disability/disabled people; (3) promote social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for

people labeled with disability/disabled people; and (4) assume competence and reject deficit models of disability (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). I fully embrace all tenets of this framework, but found myself wanting more explicit and foregrounded attention to intersectionality of identities, such as disability and race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, etc. DSE has been challenged for being a racially white-dominated theoretical perspective. While it can be argued that the first tenet's mention of "political and social spheres" covers various identities which also impact disability and education, it does reflect a more abstract acknowledgement of intersectional identities than other theoretical frameworks.

Critical Disability Theory (CDT) has four core components. (1) Disability is a slippery, fluid, and heterogeneous, allowing disability to change over time and to be shaped by other aspects of social identity. (2) Local knowledge is a central method for understanding lived experiences of disabled people. (3) Emancipation and spotlight issues of human rights and social justice that are important to disabled people are voiced (i.e. not just employment, education, and housing, but also issues like culture, sex, etc.). (4) Impairment and environment create a relational discourse between embodiment and disability and frustration is honored (Shildrick, 2009; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). One of the components I appreciated most about this framework

is the attention paid to local environments and needs. Ultimately, however the critical aspects of intersectionality were not as bold as I envisioned for my own work.

I understand DisCrit as a blending together of Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory. There are seven central tenets of DisCrit. DisCrit (1) acknowledges that racism and ableism circulate interdependently to uphold “normalcy”; (2) values multidimensional identities; (3) emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability; (4) privileges voices of marginalized populations; (5) considers legal and historical aspects of disability and race; (6) recognizes whiteness and ability as property; and (7) requires activism. This got closer to my need to recognize, head-on, that disability is multifaceted and contextualized by environments and societies. Components of DSE, CDT and DisCrit have informed my perspectives regarding disabled students and postsecondary education and accommodation. Disability Justice took these ideas one step further in a way that does not discount the other theoretical frameworks, but builds upon them.

There are ten principles of Disability Justice, which start with the importance of intersectionality: (1) Intersectionality—The recognition that each person has multiple identities and that each one can be a site of privilege or oppression; (2) Leadership of those most impacted—A dedication to leadership by those who know historical systems of oppression; (3) Anti-Capitalist politic—Rejection of the belief that human

worth is dependent upon what or how much a person can produce; (4) Cross-movement solidarity—Acknowledgement of and participation in united social justice movements; (5) Wholeness—Recognition that disabled people are whole, as they are; (6) Sustainability—An intentional pacing with embodiment as a guide; (7) Cross-disability solidarity—A commitment to honor the insights and participation of all disability community members; (8) Interdependence—A pre-colonial value of working together to meet societal needs; (9) Collective Access—Assurance that we can be unafraid and unapologetic of vulnerabilities, knowing that strengths are respected; and (10) Collective Liberation—The underlying question being: How do we move together to leave no bodymind behind? (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2019).

Disability justice felt like “home” for my research when I read it, mainly because it emphasizes intersectionality, lived experiences, anti-capitalism, impact of colonialism, wholeness, and activism, which came off as more brave and inclusive than the other more formal theories I considered. It is a “multi-issue politic,” meaning that the theory and movement are not only about disability. Disability Justice recognizes the whole person as well as groups of people who have been oppressed, including various race, gender, citizenship, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, age, and socioeconomic identities. For a study grounded in student voice and lived experience

amidst a bureaucratic educational institution (CCCs) Disability Justice calls in and recognizes the diverse students served by CCCs, and calls out many structures which have historically, intentionally and systematically oppressed groups of people.

More radical than the rest, Disability Justice challenged me to take a comprehensive look at our entrenched, institutional systems and dream about what could be for our students. Living Disability Justice means liberation and painful struggle at the same time. I reflect on CCC structures and wonder if true Disability Justice has a place in them, or if we need to start from scratch. These were the awesome brain struggles I got to deeply indulge through this work, through this lens. Disability Justice allowed me to wonder: What if we were valued not by how much or how well could individually produce, but rather by how well we collectively care for each other? Disability Justice calls out capitalism and the myth of independence for which we all supposedly strive, and uplifts the reality and human beauty of interdependence. It is a larger and braver mind-shift than the other theories that informed my thinking, and our CCC students deserve this bold wonderment to inform their institutions.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into what would make the experience of disabled students more naturally accessible, and to learn from the experiences of students to inform state-wide disability and access policies and

procedures. If disabled students came to college and felt that the institution was designed with and for them, that would be an expression of authentic access. If disabled students could access educational communications and materials with “substantially equivalent ease of use” as their non-disabled peers, as directed by California Community College Chancellor Eloy Oakley in his 2018 Information and Communication Technology and Instructional Material Accessibility Standard (CCCCO, 2018), we would be one step closer to Disability Justice.

As a student services practitioner, I know it will be an ongoing practice, not the work of one doctoral dissertation. What this dissertation can do is illuminate the experiences of students who use the current disability support services in place, to get a better understanding of how accessibility might be achieved from a Disability Justice approach, rather than from an individual, deficit-based approach designed predominantly to avoid legal repercussions. A phenomenological understanding of students’ identities and experiences at one community college is only a starting point for working toward institutional practices that not only simply serve, but respect and value disabled students. Understanding students’ identities and experiences at one college might help inform accessibility policies in California Community Colleges, as well as four-year universities and other postsecondary institutions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The academic accommodations process for students with disabilities steps outside of the realm of typical interpersonal discourse as the process requires disclosing what would normally be personal and privileged information to an essential stranger, a faculty member... Each participant responded that she/he would not share her/his disabled status but for the accommodations process requiring disclosure. (Barnar-Brak, Lectenberger, & Lan, 2010, p. 413)

Introduction

This chapter uses literature and current data to explore what is already known in the field of disability, higher education, and students' experiences to date. First, there is a review of the completion and retention rates of disabled students in postsecondary education institutions, to contextualize the purpose of this study. Second, there is an exploration of the laws and policies that guide postsecondary institutions' provision of access for disabled students. Then, there is an exploration and review of the current California Community Colleges procedures regarding access for disabled students. Finally, there is the traditional literature review, identifying and describing the literature already done in the field, organized into three main themes and leading to a gap in the literature.

Postsecondary Completion and Retention

Disabled students who attend community colleges appear to be completing their educational goals at rates above or consistent with their peers who have not been disabled. As established in Chapter 1, in a nation-wide longitudinal study of

students exiting high school (NTLS-2), disabled students at 4-year colleges or universities completed their postsecondary degrees and/or goals at rates lower than the general student population (41 percent vs. 52 percent), whereas disabled students who completed at a rate above their non-disabled peers at 2-year colleges (41 percent vs. 22 percent) (Newman, et al., 2011). Community colleges and 4-year colleges, however, appear through this study to graduate about the same percentage of students who were identified in high school as having a disability (41%) which leaves just under 60% of these students accessing higher education but not completing their goal.

Completion and retention rates at California Community Colleges are tracked on a semester-to-semester basis. Although total degree/certificate completions are enumerated, there is not a degree/certificate completion rate to compare to the NTLS-2 data. Senate Bill 1224 (SB-1224) will require a longitudinal data collection system for public educational institutions from kindergarten through to the workforce, which will include California Community Colleges. Until this longitudinal dataset is more fully formed, what we can see on the CCCC Datamart is completion and retention data per semester.

Retention is defined in this short-term measurement as students who received any letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F), P (pass), NP (no pass), I (incomplete), or FW (failed

withdrawal); roughly translated as a student who stayed in school through the whole semester, regardless of the final grade. Success is defined as any student who passed the course with an A, B, or C grade, or received an incomplete grade, which means anyone who passed the course or has work pending to complete the course. In the Spring 2019 semester, there was a retention rate of 87.04% for the general student population, and 87.18% for students enrolled in DSPS. In this same semester, 72.89% of the general student population achieved success in their courses, and 72.21% of students enrolled in DSPS achieved success in their courses. The data was very similar in the Fall 2019 semester. As far as the public data will allow us to explore, students registered with DSPS have both retention and success rates consistent with the general student population. It is important to remember with this data that not all students who would qualify for DSPS have chosen to register, so the DSPS data does not reflect all disabled students at the college.

With completion and retention data showing that disabled students fare just about as well as the general student population, one might argue that there is no problem. What remains unsettling is the very low percentage of students who choose to disclose and use disability support services in higher education, and the relatively low overall graduation rates among our postsecondary institutions. Pine College, the pseudonym for the college where this study takes place, serves a relatively high

percentage of students through the Accessibility Center (AC). The voices of students who may not have registered with AC (or DSPS) in other college contexts, therefore may be represented, giving insight into experiences that can inform CCC policies and practices regarding equity and inclusion.

Non-Discrimination Disability Laws and Regulations

The following section explores the legal and procedural regulations which guide California Community College leaders in their provision of access to education for disabled students. The accommodations model of access for disabled students is the result of years of disability rights activism and subsequent non-discrimination laws and policies. Many of these laws and policies fall short of justice for disabled students, but a grasp of how we have arrived at the accommodations approach to access over time gives context to the discussion.

Americans with Disabilities Act, Title II.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal nondiscrimination law, originally implemented in 1990, and amended in 2008 (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008) to broaden the definition of persons with disabilities. The ADA definition of a “person with a disability” is an individual who “has, is regarded as having, or has a history of a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,” including but not limited to education (ADA, 1990). Title

II of the ADA prohibits any public entity (including public institutions of higher education) from discriminating against people with disabilities with the language: “No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity” (ADA, 1990). This is the most frequently cited legal regulation in the United States regarding disability, though there were several preceding laws which started the movement toward equitable access for people with disabilities.

Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is an earlier nation-wide nondiscrimination law, prohibiting organizations or agencies that receive federal funding from “excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services” (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). Under the Rehabilitation Act, individuals with disabilities are defined as “persons with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities” (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). People who have a history of, or who are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, are also covered. Major life activities include caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks, and learning

(Rehabilitation Act, 1973). This law also includes language regarding “reasonable accommodation” indicating that the organization, employer, or agency is required to take reasonable steps to accommodate for disability, given that the it does not substantiate undue hardship for the organization, employer, or agency, and that the individual can perform the essential functions of the job, course, or activity in question (Rehabilitation Act, 1973).

In 1998, by which time information technology was becoming a major tool used by most organizations, Congress made an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 with Section 508. Under this section of the law, organizations, employers, and agencies receiving federal funding must provide information to people with disabilities and the public comparable to the information access given to others. More recently, the U.S. Access Board developed Information and Communication Technology (ICT) guidelines to govern accessibility requirements covered by Section 508 (U.S General Service Administration, 2019). The new telecommunications guidelines were incorporated into Section 255 of the Communications Act, which went into effect in January of 2018. This law come along side other standards for web and telecommunications, such as the European Commission standards and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0 and 2.1). In more plain English, these laws enforce that any communications be made accessible to

disabled people, among others. For example, photocopied PDFs for course readings must be converted into a format that can be read by a screen-reader so that it is accessible to a person who is blind, as well as others for whom written text is inaccessible.

Assembly Bill 77.

Assembly Bill 77 of 1976 was the formal beginning of what is now known as Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) in California Community Colleges. Frank D. Lanterman, an assemblyman and author, wrote many other California assembly bills, now laws, that protect the rights and promote independence of disabled people. DSPS is a mandated department at all 115 CCCs to provide support services and instructional programs for disabled students. DSPS departments are responsible for ensuring that students attending CCCs have access to education in compliance with both federal- and state-level non-discrimination laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

AB 77 was largely written in response to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Community colleges realized that without formally creating one central department on campus to provide supports for disabled students, many services were being duplicated and resources were haphazardly being drawn from various budgets around

campus. This made quantifying, verifying and accounting for services provided an almost impossible task (AB 77 Statute, 1976). It was proposed as an urgent act to amend, add, and repeal several sections of the California Education Code which did not at the time promote organized disability support services at CCCs. Over 40 years later, this assembly bill remains the legal reason why DSPS exists on all CCC campuses.

Education Code, Section 84850.

California Education Code Title 3, Division 7, Part 50, Chapter 5, Article 6, Section 84850 (Education Code, 1979) mandates that the Board of Governors of California Community Colleges adopt rules for the administration and funding for programs and support services for disabled students. Under this legislation, “disabled students” are defined as “persons with exceptional needs who have applied or enrolled at a community college who, because of a verified disability, cannot fully benefit from classes, activities, and services regularly provided by the college without specific additional specialized services or educational programs” (Education Code, 1979). Education Code Section 84850 mainly enforces that California Community Colleges designate funds and policies explicitly for disabled students’ full participation in the education offered at each institution.

Title 5, California Code of Regulations, Sections 56000-56076.

In response to Education Code, Section 84850, Sections 56000-56076 were included in Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations. The California Code of Regulations documents policies for community colleges to follow to ensure compliance with the law, in this instance Education Code, Section 84850. A “student with a disability” is defined in Title 5 as “a person enrolled at a community college who has a verified disability which limits one or more major life activities, resulting in an educational limitation” (California Code of Regulations, 1988). DSPS departments follow Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations to run their programs and services in compliance with the law. This particular code was last updated in 2015 to include the most current state and federal language regarding disability, and the California Community College Chancellor’s Office provided implementation guidelines for all DSPS departments to review and follow as they provide the services mandated by law.

This is the language relied upon by the California Community Colleges (CCCs) in their documents and policies regarding services for disabled students. It is grounded in the medical model of disability, wherein a disability is inherent to an individual, in contrast to more progressive models which recognize that society and environment play major roles in “disabling” certain individuals. Not all persons who would qualify as meeting this definition self-identify as having a disability which, as with any identifier,

is essential to honor. Evans, Broido, Brown & Wilke (2017) reiterate that when it comes to the definition of disability, especially in regard to the provision of equitable student services, “The letter of the law provides a foundation, a baseline of legal protections for individuals with disabilities; the intent of social justice provides a ceiling” (p.120). These documents and guidelines have historically been regarded as the colleges’ “ceiling” for provision of services, and have resulted in a system that places disability upon the individual student, requiring the individual to self-disclose, self-advocate, and request accommodations to fully participate.

CCCs follow many federal- and state-wide laws and education code policies and procedures to determine how disabled students will have equitable access to educational spaces, coursework, and materials, in compliance with the law. This dissertation research aims to explore the experiences of students in one California community college, given the legally-informed discourse of disability at the state California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), as well as students’ input and ideas about practices which might be made to processes associated with truly accessible education.

A Review of the California Community College Policies Regarding Disability

Before jumping into the three main strands of research, this literature review is prefaced by a critical discourse analysis of California Community Colleges’ policies

regarding disability. At the outset of my study, I intended to do a critical discourse analysis of the major written documents driving educational policy in the CCCs around disability, accommodations, and self-advocacy. Upon a more thorough review of the literature, it seems that Hoggatt (2017) has done this critical discourse analysis on the current policies in place in CCCs. This is one of the very few articles written about California community college and disability thus far.

By looking primarily at Title 5 of California Education Code, Hoggatt's (2017) critical discourse analysis revealed four findings. First, CCC policies are written from a deficit-lens, as evidenced by the weighted student count funding formula which enforces labeling of students into categories to be funded at various rates. Second, there was a theme of individualization and segregation of disabled students, which requires special and separate funding and services, in contrast to other programs such as tutoring, Student Success Supports and Programs (SSSP), and other student success initiatives designed for all students.

Third, the analysis indicated that CCC policies were a constraining force upon disabled students, as they placed power outside of the individual to determine if and when supports would be granted. Finally, Hoggatt (2017) found a discrepancy in the messaging of the CCC policies, as they are explicitly medical model and deficit-based, and yet claim to grant access and inclusion. Through a critical lens, it is clear that the

power lies within the institution, and the policies in place attribute individual dysfunction to individuals, while enforcing policies that label, burden, and isolate students. Because of the systems in place, students must self-identify, self-disclose, and self-advocate tirelessly for access to education. This will be a central piece of literature to this dissertation research, as it informs the power dynamics and systems within which CCC students are expected to navigate.

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature was conducted primarily using San Francisco State University's EBSCOhost online library, supplemented by several books recommended by faculty members. The databases used included: Education Full Text, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education Administration Abstracts, and PsychInfo. Initial search terms included "disab*" AND "community college" OR "two-year college" OR "junior college." As it became apparent that community college-specific research is limited, I broadened the search by using "postsecondary" OR "higher education" OR "college." I searched also using terms closely related to my area of interest including, "accommodations," "stigma," "ableism" and later, "self-advocacy," "experience," and "identity."

A recent and comprehensive book by Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke (2017) served as a guide for recent research in the field, and lead me to several additional

empirical studies and authors I had not found through my own library research. I paid special attention to studies that used a similar, qualitative, phenomenological narrative approach to the one I planned to use, but found it relevant to read studies of various methodological approaches for a full picture of the studies conducted in the field of student experiences using disability services in higher education. There are also two comprehensive reviews of the literature published in major research journals which informed this literature review, the first a review of the literature of disability in higher education from 1990-2010 (Peña, 2014) and the second a review of the growing body of literature between 2011 and 2018 (Kimball & Thoma, 2019). The experiences of disabled students in higher education have been increasingly explored as this student population has grown over the last 20 years.

This literature review will be organized into three “buckets” of recent empirical literature. The three main strands in the current literature appear to focus on: The transition to college, instructional faculty interactions, and identity formation. Much of the literature to-date explores the transition from compulsory high school special education services to voluntary college disability support services, with an emphasis on increased preparedness and self-advocacy training programs before transition, with fewer studies exploring transition from military or adulthood to college. When we ask students to self-advocate, it is also essential to consider the attitudes of the recipients,

the instructional faculty, most often on the other end of the self-advocacy efforts.

Identity formation of disabled students is the third area explored in the review of the literature, as college is often a pivotal time in identity (re)formation processes.

Transition to College and Outreach

A major barrier identified in the literature about disability support services in higher education is the underutilization of services due to an abrupt change in disability rights laws between high school and college, without sufficient education for students about the major differences. Students in K-12 public education are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensuring free and appropriate public education, including special education, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requiring public educational institutions to provide equitable access to education. In college, adult students are protected primarily by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. The key difference that affects college students is that whereas in K-12 education, the school is responsible for identifying students as disabled and providing corresponding educational accommodations or alterations, in college the onus is on the students to self-identify and request disability support services. This shift is unbeknownst to many students as they transition to

postsecondary education, and can therefore become a major barrier to accessing disability support services.

Disabled students are responsible for disclosing disability and seeking out appropriate support services in college. This transition, among the other significant adjustments between K-12 education and college, can be confusing and fragmented. In an analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, which tracked students' choices and academics eight years after exiting high school, Newman and Madaus (2015) found that students who received transition (to college) planning that specifically addressed accommodations suggested for college were more likely to seek and use support services at community colleges than students who did not receive this transition support. Students who are educated and prepared for the difference in service provision in postsecondary schools are more equipped to identify resources and self-advocate than students who have not made a disability-specific transition plan. Although it is a violation of IDEA for disabled students to leave secondary school without transition planning, including an understanding of students' rights, personal strengths and areas of need, and future goals, most disabled high school students do not receive comprehensive transition planning (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro & Newman, 2015).

Confusion about disability resources in college is reported by students and disability support personnel in small- and large-scale studies. In a series of three case

studies with disabled African American college students attending 4-year universities, both the need for increased information for students transitioning from high school to college and reduction of deficit-lens (ableist) faculty attitudes were indicated (Banks, 2014). Students reported that they did not know disability support services existed in college because it was not mentioned before leaving high school (Banks, 2014). The change in law and accompanying services are unclear, and without specific education about the topic, students enter college un- or underinformed. In a large, nationwide online survey study of 408 college-level disability support personnel, over 60% responded that they rarely or never coordinated with high schools to ease the transition from high school to college disability services (Wadlington, DeOrnellas, & Scott, 2017). With the majority of colleges confirming that they do not engage in transition planning for disabled students coming from high schools, it is not surprising that students report unfamiliarity with available services and the processes by which to access them.

Because this gap in students' education as they transition from high school to college is known, many researchers focus on enhancing transition programs, emphasizing that students must take charge and self-advocate in college. While preparedness programs address the legal and systemic changes that impact students' education between high school and college, a singular focus on training students to

self-advocate allows colleges to maintain a deficit lens of students' inability to use resources, rather than an introspective look at what colleges might do to make services more readily accessible.

In a study closely related to the intent of this dissertation to uncover student-initiated ways in improve accessibility and disability support services on college campuses, Fleming, Oertle, and Plotner (2017) found via open-ended survey responses that among 132 disabled students attending one of three large, public universities, a lack of information about support available to disabled students was the first of several major themes identified by participants. Students reported how much the disability services office helped once they were registered, and a wish to have been informed about it sooner. It is important to remember that students attending postsecondary education, especially at the community college level, are often not coming directly from high school, so transition planning will not reach all students who may benefit from disability-specific support. The second theme revolved in large part around college personnel behavior, which contributed to the overall college climate. Many of these responses used words such as "ignored," "insignificant," "misjudged," "overlooked" and "no voice" (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017). This second theme leads into the next "bucket" of literature, which centralizes interpersonal interactions

through disclosure and self-advocacy of disabled students in postsecondary institutional settings.

Challenges with Disclosure and Self-Advocacy

Forced intimacy is the cornerstone of ableism. Disabled people are expected to “strip down” ... metaphorically in order to get the basic access we need in order to survive... People are allowed to ask me intrusive questions about my body, make me “prove” my disability or expect me to share with them every aspect of my disability needs. (Mingus, 2017, para. 3)

Students repeatedly report challenges with the self-disclosure and self-advocacy piece of receiving reasonable accommodations, predominantly with interactions with instructional faculty. Because students are required to disclose disability status to their instructors in college to receive accommodations, many students choose not to disclose either to the disability support office or to the instructor, to avoid negative reactions. Yssel, Pak and Beilke (2016) conducted interviews with 12 disabled students at a university in the Midwest, and found that across participants there was a desire to blend in with other students in the eyes of their instructors. This often meant not disclosing the accommodations verification form provided by the disability services office to their course instructors, to avoid lowered expectations, overcompensation, and change of attitude (Yssel, Pak & Beilke, 2016).

Students' anticipation of negative reactions from faculty, deter them from self-identifying as disabled, and this anticipation appears to be grounded in historical experience. In a study of 59 disabled students and recent graduates from four different colleges (including various selectivity levels and both public and private institutional types), students reported incidents of instructors disregarding their documented accommodations and of finding certain environments on campus inaccessible or unwelcoming (Kimball, Moore, Vaccaro, Troiano & Newman, 2016). Once sent with accommodations forms and expected to communicate directly with instructional faculty and other college personnel, students report being met with misunderstanding, discrimination, and/or judgement.

In further research regarding difficulty with disability-related self-advocacy, a qualitative study including surveys and focus groups at 15 different community colleges and technical schools in California, Minnesota and Kansas, students reported that the accommodations process itself often contributed to a feeling of lack of belonging on their college campuses (Kurth & Mellard, 2006). Dehnart (2008) similarly found that 9 of 10 students found eligible for accommodations based on recent learning disability testing were reluctant to use the accommodations due to fear of instructors viewing them as inferior, slacking, or undeserving. According to the research, disclosing disability is an ostracizing process, so students are faced with the

choice of either feeling stigmatized but receiving accommodations, or “fitting in” independently but without disability-related support.

The expression of difficulty faced by disabled students as they self-advocate in their college spaces is far-reaching. In another study including 59 disabled students and six disability resource providers across five two-year colleges in the United States, Garrison-Wade (2012) found that negative attitudes and low expectations of disabled students expressed by faculty and peers contributed to students’ feelings of self-doubt and lack of belonging in college. In a phenomenological study of disabled students attending a four-year postsecondary institution, Black, Weinberg & Brodwin (2014) found that of 12 student participants, 11 cited lack of familiarity of instructional faculty with accommodations procedures, 9 cited frustration with accommodations and school policies, and 7 cited disability-related stigma as themes impacting their educational experiences. In yet another study, students with both visible and invisible disabilities report college experiences including shift in faculty attitude once disability is disclosed, difficulty accessing timely disability support services, exclusion from service and policy planning processes, and a perception by faculty that all disabled students had the same needs (Getzel, 2008).

These student reports are corroborated by studies like Bruder and Mogro-Wilson’s (2010) study of faculty attitudes about the provision of accommodations for

disabled students. Though 83% of faculty expressed admiration for disabled students, 61% also reported feeling pity, awkwardness, and embarrassment when interacting with disabled students (Bruer & Mogro-Wilson, 2010). Constant reminders that students are regarded as “other” within the college, especially by instructional faculty, likely contribute to students’ hesitation to use disability support services.

In a study that took a slightly different approach and focused quantitatively on reports of student satisfaction, a more social aspect of the college student experience, a higher sense of belonging (which is known to be associated with retention) was positively associated with greater student satisfaction (Fleming, Oertle, Plotner, & Hakun, 2017). Self-advocacy and perception of the college climate toward disabled students also had an impact on student satisfaction of the 325 student participants receiving disability support services from one of three large public universities, pointing toward a trend that students feeling a warmer college climate were therefore more comfortable to self-advocate and felt a deeper sense of belonging at their universities. College climate refers to the quality and character of college life, including patterns of students’ experiences in college, as well as college norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). The collection of students’ experiences into their perceptions of college climate toward disabled students likely

impacts their ability to safely engage in self-advocacy and feel a full sense of inclusion and respect on campus.

Discarding the “Disability” Identity

The final theme identified in the literature is the wish to shed the “disability” title when forming college identity. College is seen by many as an opportunity to redefine themselves. With prevalent disability stigma both in schools and in the broader community, once disability support services become voluntary under the law at the college level, many students are eager to disassociate with “disability” as an identifier.

In a qualitative study at a medium-size university, interviews with 16 disabled students were conducted to understand why they had registered with the disability support services office, but were not utilizing the services offered (Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010). A desire to shift identity away from disability was the first of five themes identified across interviewees (Marshak et al., 2010). In a qualitative study at one large university in the Southwestern United States Barnar-Brak, Lectenberger, and Lan (2010) found through interviews with five disabled students that none of them would disclose disability to their instructional faculty, were it not for the need to disclose to receive academic accommodations. In yet another qualitative study at a small state university on the East Coast, 16 disabled students

completed journals over the course of 10 weeks, documenting their experiences regarding disability in college. The most prevalently cited barrier across students was a concern about faculty perceptions. One student wrote, “I weighed getting the accommodation versus the mortification of talking about my disability with a stranger... I just threw the paper away and studied twice as hard” (Hong, 2015). When given the opportunity to choose whether to identify as having a disability or not, students are choosing the latter, often at the expense of their grades, well-being, and success, to avoid a stigmatized identity.

The hesitation to identify outwardly as disabled in academic settings is maintained across diagnostic disability groups. From a series of semi-structured interviews with nine college students in southeastern United States, one study found that autistic students took a “tentative but pragmatic” approach to disability disclosure, choosing only to disclose for the purpose of getting accommodations or waiting until an interaction arose in which disclosure was virtually unavoidable (Cox, Thompson, Anderson, Mintz, Locks, Morgan, Edelstein & Wolz, 2017). Students were all at very different points of identity development, with various comfort levels with the autism diagnosis, but all used some degree of judgement and trepidation when considering disclosure. In a nation-wide study of 13 college students who self-identified as having a physical disability, Abes and Wallace (2018) found that students

felt a polarity on campus, of being both hyper-visible and objectified (through being called “inspirational” and being asked to stand in photos for promotional materials) and invisible, needing to downplay their needs and disabilities to make others comfortable. Though most of the students in this study could not hide physical impairment(s), even they felt the need to minimize their experiences and appear as “normal” as possible on college campuses.

Intersectional identity studies also show calculated and complex disability disclosure choices made by college students. In a study of 31 disabled lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus (LGBTQ+) students at two universities in southern United States, the majority of participants experienced disclosure of disability as “riskier” than disclosure of queer identities, especially in university settings (Miller, Wynn & Webb, 2019). All students in the study had invisible disabilities, so would either (1) choose to disclose for the sake of advocating for or solidarity with others, (2) indirectly disclose in ongoing interactions in which disability became apparent, or (3) pass for privileged identities (heterosexual, cis gender and/or non-disabled). The decision to disclose was entirely situational and guided by students’ feelings of safety, responsibility, and investment in each interaction. A qualitative study of intersectional LGBTQ+ and disability identities of 140 public Midwest college students found that 39% of students identifying as both LGBTQ+ and disabled used the disability services

provided by their postsecondary institutions (Miller, Dika, Nguyen, Woodford, & Renn, 2019). Though this study did not indicate reasons why students did not use disability support services, it again indicates hesitation to disclose disability identity at the institutional level.

It appears that students' wishes to reject the "disability" title is more intentional than mis- or lacking information provided by their high schools about disability support services in college. In a study of 45 disabled students in college professional preparation programs, 28 disclosed that they did not use disability services or accommodations, citing reasons including a wish for independence, an intent to challenge themselves, a move beyond the need for support, and an avoidance of stigma (Squires, Burnell, McCarty & Schnackenberg, 2018). With 62% of students making intentional moves away from accommodations, Squires et al. (2018) called for increased means of true independence for disabled students in their educational programs. In a quantitative study of 163 first-year private university students, 45 students identified as having a physical or mental chronic illness, and only 15% of those students registered with the disability services office on campus, while their experience of loneliness was significantly higher than students who did not report chronic illness. Large portions of postsecondary disabled students across

disability groups, across the country are not registering with the disability services office on campus.

Conscious rejection of disability identity is an expression of student voice that cannot be ignored, indicating the urgent need for a more innovative way of providing accessible education than the self-disclosure, self-advocacy, and accommodations processes currently implemented in most postsecondary institutions. Broken down by disability type, Dong and Lucas (2016) found through a freshman year intake survey and disability support office usage data at one 4-year university that 87.6% of students reporting psychological disability, 67.7% of students reporting cognitive disability, and 90.8% of students reporting physical disability did not request accommodations. They further found that students who used accommodations had significantly lower levels of academic probation and dismissal over the course of four semesters than those who did not use accommodations, across disability types. Also of note from this study is that enrollment with the disability support office in the third semester increased significantly for all four incoming classes tracked through the study, indicating that students tend to attempt college coursework without accommodations, especially in their first semesters of attendance.

The studies on disability disclosure and use of accommodations in college settings reveal three major findings: Transition from high school to college disability

supports is often unclear, disability-related self-advocacy on campus can be difficult, and the disability identifier is often unwanted by college students. Not all students experience these boundaries, and as with any discussion of identity, intersections with other personal identifiers impact a student's choice to use disability support services. It is a challenge for educators to honor students' right to non-disclosure, and also provide supports to maximize chances at success for disabled students in college; However, the message is clear from students that the way that accessibility is being approached in colleges at the moment is not working. The siloed approach to diversity on college campuses, and the fact that disability is addressed through forced disclosure and accommodations enforces disability as something that needs to be responded to rather than celebrated and fully included (Dolmage, 2017). Disability Rights helped us have disability legally responded to, but it is now 2020 and Disability Justice does not settle for "at least." Anticipating all the bodyminds who might enter our community colleges, rather than reacting to them is possible. With an understanding of the factors that serve as barriers to access of disability support services for students, educational leaders must work to remove those barriers in new and innovative ways.

Gap in the Literature

Between the time of Peña's 2014 literature review and Kimball and Thoma's 2019 review of literature in the area of higher education and disability, the body of work has grown enormously, and become more mainstreamed in top academic journals. The majority of studies have taken place in 4-year universities, with very few studies focusing on community colleges in particular. There are also many studies that target a specific groups of students based on disability type (autism, physical, learning disability, etc.). Studies that take a broad look at the whole group pf students who may use disability support or access services at their postsecondary institutions are in the minority. The studies in the recent literature are mostly qualitative, as is fitting with the individual nature of an intersectional disability experience. The current study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of disabled students in community college. In particular, as there is a comprehensive discourse analysis of California Community College policies directing the provision of disability and access support (Hoggatt, 2017) the goal of this research was to investigate students' experiences in a system whose state-level discourse regarding disability has been explored.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study is an exploratory case study, using phenomenological interviews to explore the following questions: How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify in terms of disability-related language? And, what are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access? Understanding the ways disabled students identify linguistically and experience the accommodations process in one California Community College is an important step toward providing more equitable education for disabled students system-wide. With the input of students who use AC at a community college that has adopted “access” terminology for its DSPS office, the goal was to gain a broad perspective on the identities and experiences of students who register with the department. This chapter is an overview of the methods used in this research study. It begins with a description of the research site and participant selection criteria, and concludes with a description of the data collection and analysis processes.

This chapter will address the research design, my professional relationality, a description of the research site, the relevant language used at the research site, participant selection and summary of participants, human protections and ethics

measures, data analysis procedures, exploration of trustworthiness and reliability, and critical qualitative subjectivities.

Study Design

This study was designed as an exploratory case study. Case studies provide an opportunity for in-depth study of one relatively small unit of analysis and examination of data within a specific context. This research tool is commonly used in education and social science fields, as case studies allow for an investigation of current, real-life phenomena that can often not be explained by quantitative methods alone (Zainal, 2007). There are three major case study designs: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. For a close look at the experiences of students, an exploratory design is most appropriate as the goal is to understand more about the experiences, rather than describing experiences as they unfold (descriptive) or explaining why those experiences occur (explanatory) (Zainal, 2007). In this research study, the community college institution will serve as the unit of analysis.

This study is also phenomenological, in that it seeks to “uncover the meaning of *lived experience* within the *everyday lifeworld*” (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008, p. 3). With a goal of gaining a deep understanding of students’ experiences, a phenomenological approach to interviewing was adopted to uncover daily, lived realities. By isolating (or bracketing) one seemingly ordinary human experience and deeply investigating the

consciousness associated with that lived experience, phenomenology allows researchers to see the extraordinary in the ordinary (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008). Phenomenology has also been used to question the biomedical approach that tends to separate the body and mind into two separate entities, and through its deep exploration of experiences embraces embodiment as the intersection of body, mind, and society (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008), which resonates particularly closely with the focus on disability that was explored in the current study.

Professional Relationality

My relationship to this work is a central part of my perspectives and approach to the study. I am a full-time, tenure-track learning disabilities specialist and counselor for disabled students in a CCC. This means I am certified to use standardized cognitive and achievement testing measures, approved by the CCCCCO, to determine eligibility for disability support services based on the Title 5 definition of learning disability. I also work more generally with a broad range of disabled students to establish and implement an academic accommodations plan (AAP), create educational plans, help with petitions and college systems navigation, among other general counseling duties. I have worked in this field in similar positions over the course of seven years at two different CCCs in northern California. Because of my position as a counselor for

disabled students, I am in many ways complicit as a cog in the wheel of the institutional practices of labeling and promotion of excessive student self-advocacy.

Description of the Research Site

The study took place at a mid-size (about 9,100 fulltime equivalent students (FTES) in the 2018-2019 academic year) California community college in northern California (CCCCO Datamart, 2019). For purposes of keeping student information confidential and unidentifiable, pseudonyms, or made-up names, are used to identify students, the department, and the college. I will refer to the research site as Pine College. To maintain confidentiality and also maintain the idea of the language used, the pseudonym of the department is Accessibility Center (AC). This college has opted to use “access” language for the title of its Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS) office. In the 2018-2019 academic year, the AC office at Pine College served approximately 1,880 individual (unduplicated) students (CCCCO Datamart, 2019).

There are two campus locations for this college. The larger of the two sites is located in a predominantly White, upper-middle class coastal area, and the other site is located in a predominantly Latino agricultural coastal area. AC has a presence at both college sites. My office at either site, where I work as an AC counselor and learning disabilities specialist, was offered as a confidential interview space. If students had another confidential meeting location or forum, I met in other appropriate

locations, either physical or virtual. One student was interviewed in her home, and the other interviews took place at one of the two offices offered on campus.

Language Choice of the Case Study Institution

As mentioned, this study will take place at a community college institution that has chosen to adopt “access” language in its department title (Accessibility Center). Pine College changed the name of the department to support disabled students from “Disabled Students Programs & Services” to “Accessibility Center” (close pseudonym) in 2014. I was not yet an employee at Pine College at the time, so the history of the name-change has been told to me by faculty members who saw the process take place. It was an informal, highly student-centered process involving butcher paper and felt-tip markers to collectively brainstorm ideas over the course of several weeks. Access terms were by far the more preferred terms by students, and it came down to an eventual student vote for the final departmental name, Accessibility Center.

It is important to get the input of students at a college that has made an intentional shift in discourse. Access language is broadly in compliance with but also divergent from the CCCC’s primary language choice (Disabled Students Programs & Services). The potential effects of this divergence have not been studied, including whether more students are more likely to use services that are framed in access language, or not. With most colleges serving an average of 5.40% of their students

through DSPS, the college where this study takes place serves 10.40% of students. By studying a school that chooses access terminology and serves a larger proportion of its students than many other colleges, the intent was to elicit voices that might be missed at a college serving proportionately fewer students.

The following informal investigation of departmental names used was conducted to get a sense of whether departmental name has any impact on students' use of accessibility support services. As this is not a quantitative study, and departmental name not the focus, no measures of statistical significance were calculated. It is a surface-level peak into students' linguistic preferences regarding disability and accessibility. Table 1 reflects information from the CCCCCO Datamart: The annual unduplicated students served by DSPS, divided by the annual unduplicated student count at each California community college, to determine the percentage of enrolled students who also registered with DSPS at each college, excluding Cal Bright College, which had no student data at the time of this study. Using the pivot table function of Microsoft Excel the average percentage of students served by the disability support office in coded category (A, DD, DY or O) was calculated.

Table 1. Department Names

Primary Language Term	Count of Colleges	% Registered Students
Access (e.g. Accessibility Support Center)	15	7.05%
Disabled (e.g. Disabled Students' Programs & Services)	47	5.30%

Disability (e.g. Disability Resource Center)	41	5.13%
Other (e.g. Special Services)	11	4.64%
Total	114	5.40%

Table 1. The department names chosen by individual colleges and usage rates of departments according to language used in the title.

There are 114 accredited California Community Colleges with student data, all of which have an office dedicated to providing auxiliary aids, accommodations, support services and counseling to disabled students. Each college's disability support office was looked up on the college's official website to find out the name of the department. In most cases, typing "disability" into the website's search field yielded a link to the office providing support services to disabled students. Once each college's department name was documented, the titles were coded, "A" if the name included "access" or "accessibility," "DD" if the name included "disabled," "DY" if the name included "disability" or "disabilities," and "O" if the name included miscellaneous other words like "special," "assistance," or "diversabilities."

According to this 2017-2018 academic year data analysis, 5.40% of the California Community College student population statewide used the disability support office at their college. The range of percentages of students served at each school was between 1.28% and 12.58%. Table 1 shows the number of colleges by name code, and the average percentage of students served by the disability support office according to name code. There was very little difference in service use between whether the

college used “disabled” (DD) or “disability”/“disabilities” (DY) in their titles, with 47 DD colleges averaging 5.30% of students served and 41 DY colleges averaging 5.13% of students served. The 11 schools that were coded “O” because they used terms like “special,” “assistance,” or “diversabilities” served an average of 4.64% of students. With only 15 colleges total that were coded “A” for their use of the term “access” or “accessibility” the highest percentage of students were served, at 7.05%.

This surface-level exploration of terminology is food for thought regarding local language preferences of students who choose to use disability and accessibility support offices. Language is a component of this work, but far more important are the experiences of students who use the services provided by the DSPS office, whatever its name may be. A linguistic shift is arguably a superficial change if the processes and procedures used by the office continue to maintain medical model, individual deficit-based approaches to accessibility. For instance, the students of Pine College voted on “access” terminology, changed the office name years ago now, and yet they are still called upon to self-disclose disability to the office, explain “functional limitations,” provide medical documentation, and self-advocate with their instructors, all of which arguably place undue burden on individuals, rather than demanding structural and attitudinal shifts of our institutions.

Participant Selection

The study used semi-structured phenomenological interviews with Pine College students who have used or currently use AC services. Between 15 and 20 student participants above the age of 18 were anticipated for one individual interview of up to 90 minutes with me. Seventeen students consented to interview. Creswell (2012) recommends between 5 and 25 participants for phenomenological interview, and by aiming for the upper end of this range, the hope was to capture a range of experiences across many different disability types and other demographic identities (gender, race/ethnicity, age, etc.).

Interviewing is one method for eliciting student experiences, and for interviews deep enough to address meaning making, an in-depth, phenomenological interview is most effective (Seidman, 2013). Seidman, in fact, encourages a total of three 90-minute interviews with each participant to arrive at deep meaning-making. Due to time and resource constraints, I chose to have one interview of up to 90-minutes with each participant. This was a choice made to honor the already-busy lives of college student participants, as well as a conscious sacrifice in time with each student to increase total number of participants for the broadest range of inputs possible within a finite time period. Although 90 minutes was the upper limit, the average interview time was closer to 45 minutes. Because of the flexibility that accessibility requires, I

allowed for this variation in response times. Some were far more expansive in their responses and others were more concise, but no less insightful. Although follow-up questions were used to elicit as much information as possible from the students who were more brief in their responses, there seemed no reason to enforce that students answer more questions to fill time up to 90 minutes. Accessibility and appreciation of human variation was the main consideration when making this choice to conduct and honor interviews of various length.

The students interviewed were all students who were either registered in the Fall 2019 term or previously registered within two primary semesters (Fall 2018 or Spring 2019) with the AC office. To participate, students were either currently enrolled at Pine College in a credit-bearing college course of at least one unit, or had a history of being enrolled in a credit-bearing course within the past two primary semesters (Fall or Spring).

A recruitment email was sent out to students from the Planning and Research Office (PRO), advertising the research project to students who fit the participant criteria. Students were given the researcher's direct contact information to express interest in the study. Paper flyers were also posted at both locations. Although emailing students for recruitment required more human protections measures to pass through the Internal Review Board (IRB), and additional effort with the college's PRO

office, it was an essential step for the study. With paper flyers alone, there was the potential for missing visually impaired students, dyslexic students, and students who do not frequent the AC office, among others. This was a step taken again to promote broad access through multiple modalities.

The recruitment email was sent to 1,173 students who were identified by PRO as meeting the participant selection criteria and flyers were posted near the AC office at both college campuses. Constant Contact software used for the high-volume email blast suggested a date and time to send the message for optimal response rate. Of those contacted, 29 responded via email, 13 responded via phone, and 5 walked into the office to express interest in participating in the study, for a total of 47 respondents. Students were extended an invitation to participate in the order in which they expressed interest in participation. A total of 17 students were scheduled for interview, according to availability of the researcher and participant. One student withdrew her participation as she was suspended from the college and needed to tend to her more immediate needs. Over the course of a one-month period, 16 participants were interviewed. The 30 students who were not scheduled for interview were notified that they would be kept on a list to be contacted should the researcher need more interview data after the preliminary interviews.

A non-probability, convenience sample was drawn from students who met the criteria and were available and willing to participate in the study. More students expressed interest than were interviewed. I responded to student in the order their interest communication was received. This non-random sampling method was most realistic, as the time commitment for students was significant amidst other college student responsibilities. Students were also in a position to share very sensitive, personal information through interview, which necessitated voluntary participation. Students were offered a \$20 gift card as an incentive to participate and as a small appreciation for their time and input.

With between 15 and 20 students as the goal, after 16 interviews, I paused to determine an appropriate stopping point. When using phenomenological interviewing as a data collection tool, the point at which to stop collecting data is most commonly determined by the point at which the researcher is hearing similar responses and themes arise from participants, without gaining significant additional insights (Seidman, 2013). Although each student's story was unique and insightful, at the end of 16 interviews, students were repeating similar experiences and themes regarding the research questions. I stopped at 16 in the Fall of 2019 with the flexibility to reach out to the additional list of interested students should there be the need for further information after a more thorough analysis of the data.

As students who had registered with AC, all students had a primary disability documented with the department, which the CCCs categorize under the following areas: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disability, physical disability, psychological disability, acquired brain injury (ABI), autism spectrum, low vision/blind, deaf/Deaf or hard of hearing, or other/speech. As part of the informed consent, students agreed to have their demographic and student information released, including gender, age, disability category, academic standing, ethnicity, grade point average, and other identifiers housed on college-wide databases. Because students do not always identify neatly into the “boxes” provided by the institution, a demographic questionnaire was also provided at the beginning of the interview, so students could self-identify demographic information in their own words.

A summary of students interviewed is included in Table 2. This table describes students as they are identified by the institution. I have included this information as a snapshot of who the participants are through the eyes of the school, though you will discover in the findings section that many do not identify themselves in these terms. The average age of participants was 37 years old. There were 6 participants identified as male, 9 identified as female, and 1 identified as gender-nonbinary. As they are recognized by the institution, 9 participants were white, 1 identified as Latinx, 1 identified as African American, 1 identified as Native American, 1 identified as Asian,

and 3 identified as 2 or more races. According to the primary disability category on file with the AC office there were 4 identified under mental health, 1 under ADHD, 3 under mobility, 3 under autism, 1 under ABI, 2 under learning disability, and 2 under other (which leaves 0 under low vision/blind and 0 under dead/Deaf or hard of hearing).

Although sampling was voluntary, this is a fairly representative sample of the students attending Pine College and enrolled with the AC office.

Table 2. Summary of Participants

	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	DSPS Disability Category
S1	Adam	24	Male	White	Mental Health
S2	Trevor	36	Male	White	Mobility
S3	Tina	29	Female	Asian	ADHD
S4	Valerie	41	Female	White	Mental Health
S5	Kyle	18	Male	Two or more races	Autism
S6	Ellie	75	Nonbinary	White	ABI
S7	Alice	59	Female	White	Mobility
S8	Anika	27	Female	White	Learning Disability
S9	Ben	27	Male	White	Autism
S10	Carla	49	Female	Two or more races	Mental Health
S11	Jolene	25	Female	Black/African American	Other
S12	Kimberly	40	Female	White	Other
S13	Marcos	41	Male	Native American	Mental Health
S14	Corina	22	Female	White	Autism
S15	Sylvia	39	Female	Two or more races	Learning Disability
S16	Santos	42	Male	Latinx	Mobility

Table 2. The participants in the study, who have all been assigned pseudonyms, with information about age, gender, and race, and disability category, as recorded by the institution.

Data Collection

Interviews are traditionally understood as oral, verbal exchanges between an interviewer and interviewee. Because the focus of this research is on a vast range of abilities and disabilities, the term “interview” was used more broadly. Lester and Nusbaum (2018) call for a reclamation of methods that centralizes disability in qualitative methods rather than privileging taken-for-granted methodologies grounded in ableism. Whereas in the traditional interview, the researcher asks a question orally and the interviewee responds orally, in this study, questions and answers were offered in the communication medium most comfortable and accessible to the interviewee. For purposes of keeping interview questions relatively standard across participants, I was prepared to ask the core questions either orally or in written form. Student interviewees, however, were free to respond in oral, written, visual, or other forms of their choice. This allowed space for a non-speaking autistic student, for example, to potentially participate, whereas the conventional interview format likely would have excluded such a participant.

I remained open to students’ preferences for mode of communication, as well as medium of communication. If students were most able to have a video conference, phone interview, in-person written dialogue, online chat, or other form of meeting communication within reason, I was flexible with various meeting styles. This not only

addressed Disability Justice, but also acknowledged the varied resources, time restraints and geographic locations from which our students come. If a student's preference was for an accommodation to fully participate in the study, for instance a sign language interpreter, accommodations were also offered, to be provided at the researcher's expense. Though this data collection method blurs the lines of traditional research interviews, it was the most appropriate for this study which explicitly explored inclusion through multiple modalities and questioned the processes associated with disability accommodation, which are a band-aid in many cases to cover up the wounds inflicted by institutionalized exclusionary practices.

Human Protections and Ethics

A request to do this research was submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at both San Francisco State University and Pine College, to maximize safety and welfare of participants. It was thoroughly reviewed, and extra precautions were taken both because disabled students are viewed as a "vulnerable population" and because there was potential for a power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee based on the researcher's position as counselor in the AC department.

Several precautions were taken to protect participants. AC counselors, including the researcher, could give information about the research if students inquired about the study, but did not verbally or otherwise promote the research in

their sessions with students. Students were reminded in the recruitment messaging and in the informed consent that their interview responses would be kept entirely separate from their AC files and services. The recruitment messaging was sent from PRO, and the contact information used for research was not my work contact, but rather the contact information affiliated with the university where I was pursuing doctoral degree. Students who interviewed in the researcher's office also sat at a table in a different part of the office for the research interviews than they would in a counseling session with the researcher to further differentiate research from AC meetings.

Students were informed about the potential risks of participation. There is always a risk of loss of privacy when participating in research containing sensitive personal information. This risk was limited through the use of pseudonyms in both the stored transcripts and in any published reports of the research. Participants were informed that only I (the researcher) and my advisors had access to the research data, which was to be kept in a locked and/or encrypted location.

Students were also informed about the risk of evoking emotional responses while talking about issues of personal identity, disability, and experiences. Students were provided with information for Student Health Services upon request to explore such sensitive topics further with a licensed professional. Each participant was

reminded that their right as a participant was to answer only the questions they were comfortable answering. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw participation at any time, for any reason. If, after research participants felt uncomfortable receiving counseling services provided by the researcher, they were reminded via informed consent that a request to meet with another counselor would be honored, and that under no circumstances would AC services be withheld.

Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. I also took down notes during interview to track potential points for follow-up and support an accurate review of the transcription. Interview notes, transcripts, and journal reflections (data memos) of my reflections on the interviews were all used during analysis of the data.

Interview data was analyzed using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2014) through an iterative Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). Critical discourse analysis takes a close look at the language and messaging used in communication, with a particular exploration of the power dynamics and ideologies present in the discourse (Fairclough, 2010). Because of the concepts of labeling, identity, power relations, and bureaucracy investigated in this study, I chose to take a critical approach to analyzing students' experiences navigating institutions through the

lens of Disability Justice. Coding is a process of designating interpretive labels to portions of text or other data to identify patterns or themes (Charmaz, 2014). With coding strategies from Charmaz (2014) and Saldaña (2016) I used process coding and in vivo coding strategies. Process coding uses gerund-form language (e.g. *experiencing joy*) to maintain an active voice in the emerging codes. In vivo coding uses excerpts of exact language used by participants (e.g. “I was soooo happy!”) as the codes themselves.

Coding was an iterative (ongoing and informative) process, but in general, each transcript was read and coded once for relevant and informative data. Dedoose was the qualitative research software used to assist with digital coding organization and data management. In the first round, everything I found relevant and informative regarding identity and experiences navigating college using AC, I highlighted using Dedoose software, and designated a code. In a second round of coding, I grouped the excerpts from the first round of coding, using the process coding and in vivo coding method. I then looked across these second-round codes for themes across interviews. Although many themes emerged, those cited most frequently and explored most in-depth were the ones included in the findings.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Many qualitative researchers use the idea of trustworthiness and credibility rather than validity, which is arguably a more quantitative measure of research rigor (Saldaña, 2011). Regardless, the question is, to what extent do the tool(s) employed in this study measure what they are intended to measure? This research sought to understand identity and lived experiences, so the validity of the interviews is dependent upon the questions included in the phenomenological interview process. I had three dissertation committee members (all with terminal degrees in relevant fields) and several critical colleagues review the questions included in the interview protocol to cross-check my intentions and line of thinking. Intentional transparency about procedure, relationality, analysis, and other study components were also critical to establish research trustworthiness and credibility.

Even then, as interviews started, I adapted the questions to find wording that optimized student understanding and comfort in responding, which further supported my dedication to access and adaptability. For example, in several early interviews I asked, “What has been one of your most accessible courses in college and why?” This question received a pause and blank stare in several cases, so as I moved through the interviews, I changed the question to, “What has been your best course in college and why?” Although this second iteration of the question did not name accessibility, I

found that accessibility was in many of the responses as students reflected on their most positive course experiences. By choosing the phenomenological interviewing tool, I was afforded the flexibility to adapt my questions and language as the student and I explored their experiences together.

Critical Qualitative Subjectivities

There were several critical qualitative subjectivities (which some qualitative studies may refer to as “limitations”) to the research design and analysis (Nusbaum, personal communication, May 1, 2020). However, these are the very complexities which enliven qualitative research and give it the richness, texture, and rigor that make it so human and powerful. None the less, these critical qualitative subjectivities will be explored for the sake of thorough transparency.

Research participants were identified through a voluntary, non-random sampling method. The potential impact of self-selected participants is that data may reflect the opinions and values of students who are most open to communicating at-length about their experiences using AC. The self-identified group may also exclude students who have busy schedules, those who have disassociated with AC, and those who had never enrolled with AC but could qualify and benefit from support services. The research, therefore, will include the voices of students who have made a choice to

self-identify to use AC and are willing and able to participate in a relatively time-intensive interview.

Another critical qualitative subjectivity was the word “interview” in outreach materials. Although I had planned for multiple modalities of communication to best suit students’ communication preferences, students came into the space expecting to talk to me aloud, verbally, face-to-face, and directly. This indicated several possible lessons. Because the word “interview” is typically understood as an oral, verbal exchange, and was not further explained on the outreach materials, students who responded likely expected an interview by its most common definition. This may have deterred some students who would have otherwise participated. It may also mean that a one-on-one verbal, oral interview is accessible and preferred by many students. But the learning was that if we are to expand our methodologies to defy ableist norms, the outreach must indicate this shift in a way that indicates this divergence from past practices to potential participants.

Another complexity addressed in the Human Protections and Ethics section, but deserving mention here is my position as counselor within the service office responsible for ensuring access for disabled students. Although every precaution was taken to ensure students that this research was entirely separate from their AC

services at Pine College, a potential limitation is that their responses were influenced by their knowledge of my position within the college.

Finally, disability is, by its very nature, experienced by people in individual and unique ways. So, to engage in rounds of coding to generalize about a group of students is somewhat in contradiction to the exceptionality of each lived experience. By using process and in vivo coding practices, cross-examined by others, I aimed to preserve much of the imperative individuality, though I recognize the challenge in the analysis procedure. I made a concerted effort to include excerpts of direct student voice in the dissertation, so as not to lose the students' original and personalized messages through the coding process.

Conclusion

For this qualitative study of the experiences of CCC disabled students using accommodations and accessibility support within the CCCCCO discourse of self-advocacy, I used a predominantly Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach to data collection and analysis. Charmaz (2014), an established CGT practitioner, explains that this inductive and iterative approach to research intends to seek an explanation for phenomena grounded in the data. Therefore, there were no a priori codes or expectations entering into the research process.

In classical CGT research, I would not have started the literature review before conducting the study, so as not to taint the outcome based on preconceived notions drawn from preexisting research. I have diverged in this way from typical CGT research due in part to the time constraints of a 3-year doctoral program of study, and in part because an understanding of the current literature can help the researcher to identify a gap in the research that needs to be filled. I started the literature review before data collection began, and the review continued throughout the research process to further the iterative nature of the study.

Through interviews with flexible response modalities, I aimed to elicit from students their experiences navigating college, as well as their ideas for reform of institutional accessibility practices. The research questions to be addressed are:

1. How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify in terms of disability-related language?
2. What are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access?

An open-ended, open-minded approach to the research was essential. I wanted to ensure that student experiences drove the outcome of the study, and remained

unfixed in my views about what data might emerge. To elicit and understand student experiences and ideas for change primarily, CGT allowed me to collect, interpret, and analyze data continuously, through the course of the project. From a “nothing about us without us” conceptual framework, I look not primarily to the law, to theory, or to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office, but rather to current community college students to better understand how accessible education might be implemented in California Community Colleges.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This exploratory case study is an examination of the identities and lived experiences of disabled students at one California community college. Many studies have indicated that students, predominantly in four-year universities, have experienced stigma and forced intimacy by way of institutionally enforced disability disclosure (Mingus, 2017; Abes & Wallace, 2018). By exploring the experiences of students at one California community college, this study aimed to contribute to the qualitative literature on the experiences of community college students who use the accessibility support office.

This study used phenomenological interviews to answer the following questions: How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify in terms of disability-related language? What are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access? Sixteen students at one California community college were interviewed individually for up to ninety minutes from a semi-structured, phenomenological approach.

Findings are organized to address each research question. The first section addresses students' identities regarding disability-related language. The responses from students are organized into Language Affirming, Language Selecting, and Language Informing subgroups, based on their responses to questions regarding identity and language. The second section addresses students' lived experiences as they navigate the college using AC services and accommodations. Four major themes emerged: (1) Students often enter community college having had past negative experiences regarding disability and accessibility in educational spaces; (2) Interactions with instructional faculty members (both positive and negative) are powerful and leave a lasting impression; (3) Students often take responsibility for inaccessible experiences; and (4) Students experience hesitation when considering use of AC and it often takes external encouragement to initiate AC services.

To emphasize students' voices, each subtheme is defined and then accompanied by several quotes taken directly from the interviews. Because each student is unique in his, her, or their identity, an excerpt from each student is included in the Identity Language section. To address the themes concerning students' lived experiences, several student interview quotes were chosen and included to demonstrate specific examples of each theme.

Identity Language

The first theme that emerged from the study was that students have varied self-identities when it comes to disability status and language. At the outset of the study, two of the questions asked early on in the interview were, “What does disability mean to you in your personal life?” and “What does disability mean to you in your school life?” Students in the first few interviews stared blankly at me and asked me to explain the question further. As we discussed the question, it became clear that this question was grounded in the assumption that students who use the Accessibility Center think about and identify with disability in their daily lives. Through the flexibility of phenomenological interview, once I realized this was an inaccurate assumption, I adjusted the questions to focus more on disability-related identity of each participant. These identities were far from homogenous among participants, which necessitated a preliminary exploration of disability-related identity before an understanding of lived experience.

In this section, there is an interview excerpt from each participant to convey the diversity of linguistic preferences as students reflect on their identities in association with the terms “disabled” and “disability.” Some students identified very certainly with both of these terms (which I refer to as “Language Affirming,”) some firmly rejected “disabled” but accepted “disability” (which I refer to as “Language

Selecting,") and some provided alternative language that they use to self-identify (which I refer to as "Language Informing.") Students' responses are divided among the three identity preference groups, with two Language Affirming, two Language Selecting, and twelve Language Informing students.

Language affirming.

Two students unwaveringly identified with both the term "disability" and "disabled." For Santos, this language in fact helped him to understand himself in a post-adolescent epiphany, when he was diagnosed. His diagnosis was a pivotal "ah-ha" moment in his life, at which point much of his physical pain and academic struggle made sense. He went on to explain that he was unsure if he would qualify, and was hesitant to identify as disabled. He had a belief that physical disabilities were the "real" disabilities.

Yes, to both. When the diagnosis came, it all made sense. I had no idea. I'm estranged, I was raised by the system. It turned out I have a degenerative disease.

I was always worried about, "Would I count?" because before we found out the long array of stuff that I have, I thought being a disabled student meant that you actually had to be in a wheelchair... Or we want to believe like, "No, that's

not me," and I was one of the ones that I believe, "No, that was not me, I didn't need that or I didn't qualify for that.

Marcos, who is served by AC primarily due to mental health, associates with the term "disabled" based on his physical disability. He identifies as disabled because his medical doctor and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) have verified his eligibility for a disabled parking placard. There was no mention of whether or not he would identify in this way were his physical disability not under consideration.

I do have a disabled placard for being injured in my back, so I do consider myself disabled, yes. I do qualify for that because of my disability.

These two students identified as having a disability, and also identified as disabled. There were indicators "disabled" is more associated with physical characteristics in their minds. There was also some repetition of the sense of validation that is associated with "disabled" and "disability" labels, which can help students to understand and explain their experiences.

Language selecting.

Two students rejected the term "disabled" but identified with the term "disability" as they reflected on self-identity. Interestingly, none of them expressed the inverse, embracing "disabled" and rejecting "disability." Carla identifies as having a disability and went on to explain how her mental health can impact her studies. She is

not sure about the term “disabled,” but through her quick response regarding “disability” language, it was clear that she identifies strongly as having a disability.

Yes, I do [identify as having a disability]. I know that my anxiety gets the best of me, which can lead to depression, which can get the best of me. I also have a really hard time focusing and would not be surprised if I have ADHD as well, but I haven’t been tested. “Disabled,” I don’t know, but I definitely think I have a disability as far as that goes.

Like Marcos, the term “disability” helps Sylvia make sense of her experience. She is a student who was tested for learning disability in adulthood through the AC office. When she received her test results and was found eligible for accommodations based on learning disability, she felt her life-long experience of difficulty in school was validated. She added that the word “disabled” in the previous name of the department signaled a deficiency or problem with students who used the service, and like Santos, previously believed that disability services were intended for students with physical disabilities.

I would like to think I do [have a disability] [laughs] because I’m like, “How come I don’t understand?” I don’t know if it’s studying habits or what it is, but I think so... It feels awkward because back then it was called the Disabled Student Services so you’re like, “Oh God, there’s something wrong with me.”

When you see people coming through and they're in a wheelchair, you're like, "Gosh, I feel bad because it's like I don't have that type of disability." I feel like maybe I shouldn't be utilizing the services or taking up somebody else's spot.

As with Marcos and Santos, the two students who selected "disability" as a personal identifier found it helpful to validate their experience. Sylvia referenced "disabled" as more associated with physical disability and deficit as she described with some shock the idea, "Oh God, there's something wrong with me." Similar to the Language Affirming students, these two felt relieved and supported by the word disability as it recognizes their experiences as real.

Language informing.

Twelve students had various opinions about the words "disabled" and "disability" in their responses, but ultimately offered alternative language to describe themselves and their experiences. They described dualities of experience, other preferred language, and non-binary (neither disabled nor non-disabled) identity. Alice is one such student who had a "yes and no" response to the question of disability-related self-identity. The distal part of one of her legs was amputated after a motorcycle accident. She offered preferred words like "limitations" and "adjust."

Yes and No. I would say I have a few limitations I have to adjust for.

Ellie firmly rejects the term “disabled” to describe herself, though she does identify as having a disability. She explained that “disabled” would insinuate that she is less of a person, taking away from her humanity. She is a student who acquired a brain injury as an adult, and often now struggles to find her place in society. Her strong statements demonstrate a wish not to be pushed to the edges of humanity, and rather to be embraced in her fullness of being. She used and emphasized the word “adapt” to explain her process of navigating the world since her injury.

No, I am not a disabled person. Person with a disability, yes; disabled person, no. I am still a person... member of a species. I AM! Nothing more, nothing less. I do have a disability that requires me to *adapt* in living my life, in ways others of my species may not need to do. Saying I am a disabled person, seems to say I am a diminished person, a discounted person, a disconnected person. I don't see myself that way. I am a whole person, no matter the challenges, either physical or brain challenges, necessitating *adapting* to live life fully as me.

Like Ellie, Trevor does not identify as disabled, and points to a similar perspective that the term “disabled” signals a diminished sense of humanity. He also, however, does not identify as having a disability, and would rather self-identify by naming his diagnosis. Trevor had brain surgery due to a neurological condition when

he was in his twenties and spent three years in the hospital. He lost much of his mobility from the neck down. He pointed very clearly to the impact of others' perceptions when it comes to disability-related identity. While he does not, himself, identify as either disabled or as having a disability, he in two separate situations alluded to his flexibility with the language used by other people to understand or describe his experience.

Whether I identify as having a disability or not really depends on the scenario and to whom I am speaking. Usually, the only time that I identify as having a disability is when I feel like another person is not aware that I have certain physical limitations, or perhaps when I feel another person is not being accommodating or respectful enough. For example, when I recently purchased a piece of furniture online that required assembly, I had to keep explaining to the customer service representative on the phone that I have a disability and assembling the furniture myself was not possible.

And no, I rarely identify as disabled. I feel like labeling myself in such a way somehow confirms that I am less of a person, and I certainly do not feel that I am. I do not, however, take offense when other people use the term to describe or identify me. When I do identify as being disabled, it is typically because someone else has labeled me as being disabled and I, for some

reason, momentarily adopt their terminology. Usually, the only time that I feel like I am disabled is when other people, or stairs, make it abundantly clear that I am. If a kid asks, “What happened to you?” or something, I usually answer that I have a neurological condition.

Adam also referred to his diagnosed condition rather than to the terms “disabled” or “disability.” Like some of the Language Affirming and Language Selecting students, Adam associates “disabled” with a more physical limitation. Regardless of the terminology, Adam did report that he sometimes feels “less than” as a result of his mental health.

I never think about being disabled. I have a chronic medical condition so sometimes I feel frustrated or less than, but I don’t feel disabled. If I was missing a foot, that would suck.

Kyle is another student who identifies with diagnoses rather than “disability” or “disabled” terminology. He is a young student who is attending college immediately after high school. He said the following quote very matter-of-factly, as if to draw a clear distinction between his chosen identifiers and the terms in question.

I don’t identify as disabled or as having a disability. I have ADHD and dyslexia.

Tina, a student in the nursing program who is eligible for AC supports and services due to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), does not self-identify

as disabled or as having a disability. She rather focused on the support she needs to be successful.

I'm not really disabled—I just need extra support. I like what AC offers but I wouldn't say I have a disability.

Another student who does not identify with either term, Valerie, acquired a brain injury due to an accident in adolescence and has a mental health diagnosis. She understands disability as something that would be verified by a test. She was perhaps referencing the learning disability testing we do in the AC office, or perhaps a medical test that would be conducted by a doctor. Ultimately, she was unsure if the terms would be appropriate to identify her experience and offered another way of describing her learning.

Disability? Or disabled, hmm. I can't say that I do—I haven't been tested. I don't know if I could be categorized. I just have a different way of learning.

Kimberly, who recently turned 40 and is pursuing a career in psychology, grappled with the different definitions of disability used by various government agencies as she reflected on disability language identity. She later in the interview expressed her relief that disability support services were available to her through AC at Pine College without authorization from the state. As Trevor thought about the people and definitions used around him as he reflected on his self-identity, and Valerie

wondered if she qualified based on an institutional definition of disability that involved validation through a test, Kimberly also considered various other entities' and institutions' definitions of the terms as she reflected on her self-identity.

My doctor indicated that I wouldn't qualify for any sort of disability. I'm just disabled enough to make things more difficult and some things unfeasible, but not disabled enough to really get support from the state. That's a difficult place to be in.

Before being asked about self-identity and disability-related language, Corina started her interview by saying, "I'm ADHD, bipolar, autistic." She names diagnoses to explain how her educational experience has been challenging leading up to college. Her language in this first statement also conveys that her diagnoses are what she *is*, in contrast to language used to describe conditions she *has*. Later in the interview when asked about terminology, she expressed a duality of experience. She does identify as having disabilities, and she also prefers to focus on solutions and strengths. The student draws a contrast between disability and awesomeness.

I found that sometimes if I slap a label on myself, I tend to get stuck in that label, rather than trying to find ways around it. Yes, I do see myself that way, but I try to more focus on how can I get around the disability than what the disability is, if that makes sense... The back of my mind knows, "Yes, you still

have these issues, Corina," but the rest of me is like, "Yes, but look at all the awesome stuff I can do."

Anika hesitantly accepted association with the term "disability." She went on to reject it in favor of language reflecting that one skill is harder for her than for others. She emphasized that there is one area that she finds challenging in her college studies, and like Corina, acknowledged the many other skills and abilities she has.

I guess so. I don't really consider it a disability, I just consider that it's hard for me. I can't process everything she's saying and then remember to write everything that she said down. I don't have that *one* talent.

Jolene also reluctantly identifies as having a disability. She defines disability as something in contrast to "normal" and by way of that definition does identify as having a disability. She used the term "normal" several times throughout the interview, as opposed to her own experiences. Jolene has a chronic medical condition that often interferes with her ability to complete courses and attend in a typical, sequential 16- to 18-week semester. She does not associate herself with the term "disabled."

I would define disability as something that restricts you in some way from doing the things that normal people do, and that's probably the only reason I do [identify as having a disability]. Otherwise, I wouldn't. But no, not as disabled.

When Ben was asked how he identifies in terms of disability-related language he replied, “Autism, I think.” He followed up with an alternative to the term “disabled.” He offered an identity as “different” and asked if that was synonymous with “disabled,” as if the authority to decide was in my hands.

I identify as being different. Is that disabled?

Language Informing students express various identities that are not simply polarized into categories like “disabled,” “non-disabled,” “has a disability,” “does not have a disability.” Students in this group offered other language preferences or explained the experience of occupying the grey space in between the black and white of binary disability terminology. Again in this group, students often reference definitions used by others to reflect on their own identities.

The students in the Language Informing group identified sentiments that “disabled” implies deficit and reduced humanity. There was also a tendency for some to identify with a particular diagnosis, but not with the terms “disability” or “disabled.” There is a thread through all three groups that students’ identities are intertwined with and influenced by definitions of “disability” and “disabled” used by the broader society and institutions which influence their understanding of identity regarding disability language. Taken together, there were two students who identified with “disabled” language, two who identified with “disability” language, and twelve

students who identified in various ways regarding the words “disabled” and “disability,” and ultimately were unsure or offered alternative ways to self-identify.

Students were asked about several personal identifiers at the outset of the interview, in an open-ended response format, as opposed to having to check a predetermined box. Students were asked to state their age, racial identity, and gender identity, in their own terms. This is all information housed on the college’s database, but it was important to hear how students identify themselves when not restricted by categories pre-determined by a college application process. To emphasize the significance of students’ varied disability-related identities, what follows is a short synopsis of how students identified themselves in terms of other demographic groups.

When asked about age, all sixteen students stated a number, with no hesitation or evidence of further thought on the subject. This number corresponded with the number documented by the college in all cases. When asked about gender identity, six students stated “male,” nine students stated “female,” and one student identified as “nonbinary.” With one student rejecting the historical gender binary, there were still only three different responses in total. When asked about race, the responses were more mixed. Though many identified simply with one racial group, several identified as more mixed and multiracial than their college-documented racial categorization, and some rejected race as an identifier. When asked about racial

identity, one student reported a racial mix, similar to several other students, which was summarized by the college as one racial group.

I want to say I'm a coconut. [laughs] I'm white, but I'm mixed of-- I have Latino, I have American Native Indian. I have what else? European. I'm just really a mutt, but I always laugh because I'm very white girl for all my mixes.

Two students defied placement into a category by race. One student responded, "Haplo H. I go by DNA. I don't go with all that other race stuff." Another student stated, "That one is kind of tricky. I've identified as pretty much everything in the past but now that I know it's all pretty much just social constraints, I just identify as human." This study did not explore the fullness and intersectionality of identity comprehensively, but through the short and open-ended demographic information questions at the outset of each interview, students conveyed affirmation of some identifiers used by institutions to describe them, and rejection or questioning of others. In certain areas, such as chronological age, the students who participated in this study seem to identify in a way that corresponds to the college and other institutional organizations. Most students in terms of gender and racial identity identified using the terminology that would be provided by the college, while several others described a more complex or unconventional identity. When compared to age, gender, and racial identity, disability identity was far more diverse. Twelve of sixteen

students offered different terminology, outside of the “disabled” vs. “non-disabled” or “has a disability” vs. “does not have a disability” binaries. Students’ thoughtful and complex answers to disability-identity questions show a broad range of disparate self-identities.

Previous Negative Experiences

A significant theme that arose across the individual interviews was that many students come to Pine College having had previous negative experiences in the area of academic accessibility. Students recalled experiences in kindergarten through twelfth grade, at other colleges, and many years ago at Pine College which have shaped their understandings of society’s perspectives on disability. In Carla’s case, negative messaging from educators about ability in school started at a very early age. Over forty years later, she can still vividly remember this instructor and the words others associated with her academic performance.

That’s why I don’t like reading, because I was put down in second grade for a reading comprehension issue. I had teachers tell me, “What? Are you stupid or something?”

Corina contrasted the way she was treated by high school educators to her experience with AC in college. She felt she was a burden in high school and that those in charge of accommodations tried to get away with the minimum requirements

mandated by law. She recalled the anxiety and terror she felt coming to AC for the first time, based on her experiences in high school where she felt judged.

They're not trying to avoid giving you accommodations here, which is often the feel I got from my high school. They were like, "We do not want to give you more than we are legally obligated to." That made it hard.

I remember being really like, "Oh my gosh, what if they're going to judge me?" Because I'd never been [to AC] before. Unfortunately, the high school and middle school speech and language therapists that were the equivalent were really judgy at the schools I was at. I was utterly terrified you guys were going to judge me. Luckily, you didn't, so that was nice.

Santos described continuous, public debates with teachers at another college regarding testing accommodations. He felt that he was being made to feel publicly ashamed of his educational needs and that his instructors hated the accommodations process. This is a student who overcame many barriers to attending higher education, including illiteracy, a home in which language was rarely spoken, incarceration, and unsupportive social networks. Upon long-last entry to college, he was met with intolerance and resentment due to his need for and right to academic accommodations.

That was a nightmare. I never thought that I would experience having to argue, and argue big, with instructors in front of an entire classroom to please send an exam so I can go and do it. They'd be saying, "Well you're here now, just do it here now." There's nothing to be ashamed of, but it was attempts to try to make me feel ashamed for having disabilities and for receiving more time. They hated it. They would literally call out some of the students saying, "It's not my fault that you needed to go somewhere else" and calling out like what specification do we have and break confidentiality.

Jolene had negative experiences with both instructors and a disability resource counselor at another California community college. Her experience points to a college culture of underinformed educators in the area of disability. These interactions taken together contributed to Jolene's decreased motivation to attend college, and eventual choice to transfer to Pine College where she feels she is treated more fairly. She, like Santos, described her experience as a fight with educators.

At Cooper College most teachers hadn't even heard of accommodations.

Every time I went to that [Disability Resource Center] counselor I felt pretty much discouraged because she would say something else that was—She didn't have insight basically. Seems like she has too many students that she has to deal with so she's not really concerned about your best interest. For her, it's

just a job because she's been doing it so long... It's been a fight to say the least.

After that whole experience, I didn't want to go to college anymore.

Sylvia had a negative experience with a counselor at Pine College when she attended straight out of high school. She was not registered with AC at the time and believes this counselor was in the general counseling department. She described wondering what it was about her that indicated to the counselor that she may not be capable of reaching her goals. She eventually left the college, pursued other goals, and returned twenty years later to pursue that original dream.

I remember I told her that I wanted to major in Psychology. At that time, she looked at me as if I was crazy and was like, "Wow. That's a pretty high goal you want to achieve." She's like, "Are you sure you can do that?" It made me start beginning to second guess myself. That's when I changed my major, which is crazy because like 20 years later, I changed it back. I was like, "You bitch."

[laughs] I was like, "Why did you make me second doubt myself?" I don't think somebody else should be able to advise you on what you want when you're letting them know what you want [laughs], especially a counselor.

Students often come to community college having experienced negative feedback from past educators. Whether or not students were formally diagnosed with a disability in years past, they have often been fed discouraging messaging and learned

that accessibility is a fight. Students have often overcome barriers fabricated by other educators before they arrive in our classrooms and offices at the community college level.

Likely connected with these previous experiences, students go through a great deal of thought to assess whether or not they are safe with each instructor. Corina explained her process of approaching instructors to discuss accommodations.

Sometimes I'm nervous, sometimes whatever. Most of the time, when I'm nervous, it's because I don't know the teacher at all and don't have a good read on them. Not that I read people well anyways, but if I really don't have a good read on them, like I can't tell if they like anyone or not, I can't tell if their a grump or not, then I feel stressed about the conversation and I'm like, "Here's my accommodation sheet," all timid and kind of scared. If I know the teacher, or feel comfortable, or kind of have a read on them, it's easier and I can just walk up and be direct, so it depends.

After carefully assessing their safety with each instructor, students have to decide whether to disclose affiliation with AC to receive accommodations, and they are met with either negative or positive interactions over the course of each semester.

Interactions with Instructional Faculty

Interactions with instructional faculty (teachers) were the most influential factor on students' overall experiences regarding educational accessibility. Though in many instances, students arrive to community college having had previous negative experiences regarding educational accessibility, at Pine College, students described predominantly positive and supportive experiences with their instructional faculty. Interactions with instructional faculty regarding accessibility were discussed in detail by all students, and whether positive or negative, made a lasting impression on students' sense of safety and belonging at the college. The theme of Interactions with Instructional Faculty is divided into Negative Interactions with Instructional Faculty, followed by Positive Interactions with Instructional Faculty.

Negative interactions with instructional faculty.

Negative interactions with instructional faculty reported by students were far less prevalent than positive and supportive interactions, but equally as powerful. These negative interactions generally had to do with being singled out or misunderstood by instructors. In Anika's case, the instructor broke confidentiality and disclosed disability status (with which Anika does not absolutely identify, as discussed in the previous section) to the whole class. By incorrectly following through on her responsibility to find a peer notetaker for the student, this instructor isolated and

“outed” Anika. One thing that the accommodations approach to educational access enforces is “forced intimacy” with instructors, in that students must disclose their eligibility for accommodations with their instructors, thereby giving more information to an essential stranger than one typically would choose to volunteer (Mingus, 2017). In this case, such forced intimacy resulted in a breach of Anika’s private information among her college peers.

She just told the class, Anika needs somebody to take notes for her, and I thought that was rude. She said my name in front of the class and said that I had a disability and needed help. Then if I’d have a question, she talked really slow to me as compared to everyone else. I’ve noticed with another girl in my class who is deaf. She talks really slow for her interpreter, which she doesn’t need to do—Just talk normally. She’s treating me and this other girl differently than everyone else.

In a similarly isolating situation, Sylvia felt singled out by an instructor, and used the word “rude,” as Anika did, to describe the behavior. In this case, the instructor did not disclose the student’s personal information, but did make a public point to check in with the student in what was experienced as a condescending and insulting way.

The teacher during that class would sit there and ask me questions directed at me. I'd be sitting there just kind of trying to concentrate, and focusing because of my vision; Also just looking at the board and making sure I'm understanding everything and she would ask in front of everybody, "Does anyone have any questions?" People wouldn't raise their hands and eventually it got to like, "Do *you* have any questions?" looking straight at me. I'm like ugh—because she's singling me out. She's like annoyed that I'm pregnant and sitting in her class or—At the time I didn't know what it was, I was just like, "Stop being so rude to me."

Kimberly cited an instance of being publicly put-down by an instructor which resulted in her avoidance of classes she needs for her major. This negative interaction did not seem necessarily disability-related, as she indicated that this teacher was "harsh on the student body" as a whole, and her individual experience was one example of his behavior with all students. Again, the theme of being singled out and disparaged in front of peers impacted this student to the extent that she would sacrifice her educational plan to avoid similar interactions in future. Kimberly articulated another insight that she, and likely other students, are often so exhausted from their multiple responsibilities that negative instructor behavior often goes unreported to the college.

There's been some instances where a particular teacher has been so harsh on the student body that people were leaving the classroom in tears. People were complaining that their eating disorders had gotten worse and their nail-biting behaviors had gotten worse. I wanted to reach out to the department but I was struggling so much myself that I didn't really have the spare energy to make a report. I had this teacher disparage my question in front of the class and said it was nonsense. I refused to take any more classes with him, which blocks me out of a certain segment of psychology courses because he teaches those. Clashes with teachers really impact what I can do.

Valerie shared a similar strategy of resilience through avoidance of instructors who prove to be threatening to safety or sense of belonging. She was very matter-of-fact about her approach, and explained that this is her method of self-preservation as well as feedback to the college, in that she hopes that under-enrollment in the sections of such instructors will result in "them weeding themselves out."

If I do have a problem with a teacher, I'll leave that class. I don't suffer fools.

Once a teacher hit a pencil against the desk, so I switched to Spanish. Energy is important to me. Maybe it sounds "woo-woo" but compassion and patience are important.

Corina explained, on the flip side of publicly singling students out, often instructors forget altogether that students have accommodations. In these situations, it is the student's responsibility to remind the instructor of the accommodations. It sounds as if in Corina's case of the notetaker, sometimes when instructors forget, she goes without the accommodation. She described these interactions as "awkward" on top of her pre-existing discomfort and difficulty interpreting social interactions and social cues.

Sometimes it gets a little awkward if they forget that I have separate testing environment and then go, "Where were you for the exam?" Or sometimes teachers are like, "You're not taking notes in class," and I'm like, "I'm trying." The teacher will just totally forget that you have that accommodation or not understand. And then sometimes teachers totally forget to ever give me a notetaker.

Ben shared two separate instructor-student interactional experiences of being misunderstood. In the first example below, Ben was expected to read between the lines of a given assignment, and when he did not, he was told by the instructor that the responsibility of understanding the instructions fell on the student's interpretation, rather than on the instructor's clarity. In the second example, with another instructor, when Ben's ideas and understanding of a particular project (in which he was deeply

interested and invested) were in divergence from the instructor's expectations, he was sent to the disciplinary dean's office. These experiences are isolating in a different way than those above, but similarly challenging for Ben and others to manage as they seek belonging and validation at the college, with learning and communication styles that are often not in direct alignment with the "norm" expected by some instructional faculty members.

He comes at me about, "You're supposed to have an off switch." He had never mentioned that and then he says, "I shouldn't have to tell you that it has to have an off switch." I was just thinking when the battery runs out, it's off. Nothing in the assignment was about the off switch at all and then his response was, "I shouldn't have to tell you about that."

The thing I turned in was a marketing plan for a heavy-metal-themed winery, and she didn't really get what I was trying to go for. I think she thought I was completely deranged, and that led to a meeting with [the disciplinary dean]. My version of a business plan has the executive summary and a lot of good details trying to get my idea across. Then she says, "Turn it in in my format," which doesn't include things like a summary or any ways to get my ideas really on there. She just has a really hard time getting the weird stuff I've been

coming out with. Her response to that is to schedule something with [the dean] or whatever because she doesn't get it.

One of my favorite musicians is Sam Smith. I think he described autism really well and he has a lyric about, "There's a way that people say to do everything, but what good does it bring if you don't have love?" I feel like [instructors], for some reason they think there's one way to do things but they're wrong and they don't know anything about what's really good out there. They keep bringing it up and they act like it's gold for some reason.

Many participants in this research had positive experiences with instructional faculty. However, even at a college within which many students experienced positive interactions regarding accessibility and learners' diversity, there are individuals and interactions experienced by students who use the Accessibility Center that lead to isolation, loss of privacy, and decreased sense of belonging. Even in an environment that has proven in many ways to be tremendously supportive of disability and accessibility issues, there was a profound duality of intense interpersonal experiences expressed by participants.

Positive instructional faculty interactions.

Almost all students, even those who also had a negative interactional experience to share, reported that instructors were overall very supportive of their

educational accessibility needs and communications. The following section starts with only a handful of the many general statements made by students reflecting the positive experiences they have had with their instructional faculty regarding accessibility. I then have several more in-depth interview excerpts from students to convey specific examples of the positive regard and caring expressed by instructional faculty to students as they navigate the college using Accessibility Center services.

Fifteen of sixteen students reported overall very welcoming and supportive interactions with their instructors regarding accommodations and accessibility. Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, predominantly from four-year colleges and universities, emphasized students' hesitation to communicate about accommodations and accessibility due to fear of lowered expectations, discrimination, and judgement. In these previous studies, students who did choose to self-disclose to instructors often confirmed many of these fears and reported that negative experiences with instructors lead to a sense of decrease belonging in the college setting. Because of these reports, students were asked directly how their outreach for accommodations and interactions with instructional faculty regarding accessibility have been received.

All but one student, who reported that he did not communicate with instructors regarding accommodations, reported many welcoming and supportive interactions. "I feel they're vested in seeing you succeed. Whenever I approached

them, they would always try to find ways to help me succeed.” “The teachers are really nice about [accommodations] and grateful. They want to see their students succeed.” “Every single one of my instructors has been very welcoming.” “They just wanted to do everything they could. My psych teacher was really nice and friendly and we talked about it.” These are some of the more general statements made by students about the positive regard with which they are met by instructors at Pine College when self-advocating for accessibility-related needs.

Several students volunteered specific examples of how their instructors actively nurtured students regarding accessibility, self-advocacy, and self-care. Carla cited two different examples of instructors intentionally championing her as she sought educational access. One instructor responded to her outreach for accommodations by disclosing his own experience with anxiety and conveying flexibility and empathy through his communications throughout the semester. Another instructor took a proactive approach to reminding students about setting up testing accommodations so that the responsibility of remembering the logistical steps of the test proctoring process was supported, and students felt sure that the test would be ready when they arrived. In both of Carla’s examples, instructors took a “We’ll work on this approach” as opposed to placing responsibility for access and success on the student alone.

Instructor Bale was amazing because I have writer's anxiety and often I would send him an email like, "I'm late on this project" or "My anxiety is getting the best of me," and I had to let him know that from the beginning. He said he completely understands the whole anxiety thing. He related it to when he had it with math and how he worked through that and he just kept at it and he really built my confidence. He said, "Okay. We'll work through this. Just keep in communication with me." He always stayed in touch. He always offered. I even saved his emails because they were so, so supportive and so encouraging.

One thing that Instructor Banks does that none of the other instructors do is she sends out a note that she has brought our tests over to the Accessibility Center so that we know that we have it, or she even sends out a reminder, "Hey, don't forget to get your accommodations set up."

Anika also described a couple of occasions with instructors that stood out to her as particularly positive. In her first example, the instructor was not only understanding, but supplemented that support with strategies for preparation and anxiety reduction. In the second instance, two of her Early Childhood Education (ECE) instructors took an active concern in her well-being and helped her to find appropriate support. These experiences, like Carla's, showed the student that she was not alone as she sought equitable, accessible approaches to education and learning.

He's super understanding of my test-taking non-abilities. He'll talk to me about it before the test and tell me what it's about. He'll give me a study guide and he'll tell me about different ways to calm anxiety.

Both of them were just really supportive of me when I was going through a really hard time in my life and they advised me to go get counseling, and even helped me to get a counselor.

Kimberly also had instances of instructors encouraging and supporting her after she has communicated with them about accommodations. In the first example, an instructor had the awareness to automatically include Kimberly in information-sharing during a test, when she could have been left out while in the proctoring center, away from the whole group. In the second experiential report, she expressed the impact instructors' positive and genuine feedback has on her self-esteem and feeling of belonging in college, which helps her to overcome disability-related self-doubt. These instructor interactions are in contrast to the many students who reported lowered expectations and negative attitudes conveyed by instructors in other colleges and universities, as cited in the Chapter 2 review of the literature. Kimberly confirmed that several instructors have enthusiastically endorsed her educational goals and accessibility needs.

The last test I took, there was an error on the test and the teacher came down to my room to let me know there had been an error, so she went out of her way to reach out to me through my accommodations.

A handful of teachers tell me that my work is really special, which is great for my self-esteem because the disability does get to me. It's like, "Oh, how functional can I really be?"

Just as Valerie stated that compassion and patience are important teacher traits to her, Jolene shared an experience in which an instructor showed these qualities, thereby supporting her experience with a chronic medical condition. She gave an example of an instructor showing authentic positive regard for her as a whole person, rather than just as a student. The instructor showed care for her well-being first, and attention to her completion of required coursework second. This student, who came to Pine College healing from difficult accessibility-related experiences at another community college, was met with a humanistic approach to teaching and learning, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.

I got sick while I was out of town towards the end with vertigo for like two weeks. It was not going away. I couldn't see anything really; I couldn't walk straight. Basically it was as if I was drunk every day. When I got back, I let her know what was going on and she asked, "How are you doing?" She said, "Good

to see you. I'm glad you're back." Stuff like that. We didn't even talk about school stuff. That was next, but she was actually concerned about how I was doing.

As students reflected on their interactions with instructional faculty, they reported that many interactions were positive, with some instructors making a special effort to support accessibility and whole-student well-being. In the more specific examples shared during the interviews, students cited illustrations of instructors showing vulnerability through self-disclosure, empathy through flexibility, encouragement through praise, and humanity through an ethic of caring. Experiences such as these have not been reported widely by students in other studies, many of which were conducted at four-year universities, investigating the experiences of disabled students navigating the postsecondary environment with academic accommodations. The polarity of students' positive and negative experiences regarding interactions with instructional faculty concerning accessibility and disability stood out across interviews.

Students Taking Responsibility

Another overarching theme among participants was their willingness take on a great deal of responsibility themselves and minimize institutional errors or inaccessibility. Students would often sing the praises of the Accessibility Center,

express gratitude for all the services provided and the accessibility of the college, and later in the same statement express some profound difficulty with access to their basic educational needs. Instead of getting angry or pointing the arrow out to the institution to hold it responsible for educational access, they assumed responsibility for working harder, finding solutions, and completing procedural steps.

Trevor, a student who uses testing accommodations of extra time, reduced distraction test environment, and occasionally a scribe (someone who writes down the orally expressed answers of a student), brought up challenges of just about every kind when testing in the AC Proctoring Center. He also uses a motorized power chair and explained that physical access is not always dependable on campus. He started the report of his experience, however, by saying how smooth everything has been in terms of access and accommodations.

Everyone's on the ball—Not a hiccup. Taking exams is a little nerve-racking. I've felt like the center wasn't ready for me.

I need a scribe for some exams and a few times the scribes weren't knowledgeable in math, so I had to teach them while doing the test. Another time a scribe had his cell phone out the whole time and was huffing and puffing and the only thing I needed him for was the graphing, so just did those parts first and asked him to leave.

Sometimes they place me in the large room, and once I was in there with someone making phone calls the whole time. And for my test the day after, I guess I wasn't moving a lot while I was taking the test, so the sensor lights were going off and I kept having to wave my arms and move back and forth in my chair to make them turn back on.

Making sure the elevators work is really big for me too. Sometimes when a final or exam is over after 7 pm, the elevators are already shut off, and I have to call for someone to come turn it on. I always have to have an escape plan.

Kimberly also started by saying that there had been virtually no problems while using her accommodations. She went on to explain that she, too, had experienced difficulty using the Proctoring Center, and described overhearing uncertainties being discussed among the staff before her test began. Her description of the logistical shuffle to find the space and equipment needed for her accommodations sounds anxiety-provoking and she expressed feeling "like a guinea pig." Her final sentiment, however, was that it all gets done in the end, essentially excusing the underprepared or under-resourced AC Proctoring Center.

It's mostly problem free. There's a little bit of a struggle with test taking sometimes with them finding a room that doesn't occupy space that other students need. It is evidently a struggle sometimes because I watched them

struggling with the resources and “Where’s the laptop?” and “Will the laptop work?” and which room is appropriate for me. I feel a bit like a guinea pig sometimes. It’s all gotten done in the end and I can do my work, which is what is really important.

Santos also had a difficulty with a test-taking accommodation. He described the miscommunication, and three times in the same explanation repeated, “It’s all on me.” He thought he had taken the steps to secure his accommodations, and though it is not clear where the communication break-down happened, he made sure to take full responsibility for his accessibility need not being met. Santos’ classmates did not have the additional step to set up testing accommodations, and simply arrived to class to take the exam. Santos, however, had an extra procedural step to ensure his testing accommodation, and when this did not go smoothly, he was surprised, disappointed, and even apologetic.

At one point, there was an exam that I was going to take to begin with. It was on me to give my accommodations to the instructor and set up an arrangement date and time. I believed I had done it. Even now thinking back on it, I think I did. But when I went to the Proctoring Center, it turns out there was nothing there. That was really disappointing because I had slaved my butt off studying when I was there and my class was taking the exam so I couldn’t go and bug.

What I ended up having to do was apologize to the proctor and then to my instructor because literally at the end of the day, it's all on me. It's all on me.

In yet another example, Carla told of a high-stakes nursing exam that was inaccurately timed. She did not score well enough to pass the exam, and instead of being upset at the AC Proctoring Center or the nursing instructors who determined the time on the computerized exam, she dismissed the disappointing result because she had a bit of extra time and there was another opportunity to pass.

I don't think the time was right on our exam because I should have had time and a half and it was an hour. I should have an hour and a half, but when we got into the exam it was an hour and 15 minutes, not an hour and a half. I was taking it sick, so the fact that I came within 10 points of what they wanted me to—I'm very happy with that because had I had that extra 15 minutes, I know I would have done better, but it is what it is at this point. I get another, a second try, so I'm okay with it. I am at the point where I was like okay, so I got shorted 15 minutes. Life sometimes gets a little funky.

Marcos had a challenging experience to share, not with test proctoring, but in communication with an instructor as he tried to get his educational needs met. He was having difficulty understanding course expectations and directions, so he took the initiative to ask the instructor for clarification. When he did not understand the

response, he interpreted that as his inability to understand the responses, and inferred that the solution must be to work harder. Again, in the face of an inaccessible experience, a student assumed full responsibility for the barriers to success and questioned himself rather than the accessibility of the instructor, assignment, or institution.

I did go to office hours. I did ask for help. I don't know why, but I always ask questions. "I don't understand this." "How do I do this?" I didn't seem to get my answers mostly to the questions I was asking. I did get help, but I didn't get my questions answered. Not that they weren't answering them, but maybe I wasn't understanding them properly. They just kept referring to the instructions like, "You got to follow the instructions. Follow the instructions." And I'm like, "Yes, but that's why I'm here trying to get help from you." I just figured I have to work harder.

For many students, when difficulties with accessibility arose, they assumed responsibility and excused the institutional factors that may have contributed to the inaccessibility. Words that came up in over half of the interviews were "grateful," "gratitude," "appreciation," or "thankful" when referring to the AC and college-wide accessibility. Even in the face of hardship, the frustration (another commonly

expressed word and sentiment across interviews) was directed inward by students at themselves, rather than outward at institutional shortcomings.

Hesitation and External Support

A final repeating theme in response to the research question regarding lived experiences navigating college using the accommodations model of access is students' hesitation to use or sign up with AC until other people encourage them to use AC resources for increased access. Students reported initial hesitation to register with AC, and eventual registration with the encouragement of someone who supports them. The chosen excerpts below illuminate students' initial reluctance to use AC, which in most cases include a reference to the social support system that lead to their eventual connection with AC.

Kyle came to Pine College directly from high school, where he had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and received compulsory disability-related support services. He described difficulty with the registration process due to social anxiety, and encouragement from his brother to get registered with AC. Kyle described a feeling of relief, alluded to by several other study participants, once he did eventually get connected with AC.

A couple of months ago I was trying to do classes without [AC] and I was struggling. My brother told me about it so I gave them my IEP. It was like a

huge weight off my shoulders—I have bad social anxiety so it was hard to come by myself. It’s just for that extra bit of support, but I wanted to try without at first.

Like Kyle, Valerie also described hesitation to reach out to AC for support initially. In Valerie’s case, multiple classmates referenced AC as the support they needed to find success in college coursework. She explained an identity conflict, as she understood AC as a service for “other people” and needed time to process her belonging.

In 2015 I came back to Pine College. When I came back I said like, “No.” But I kept hearing that story: “That’s how I did it,” from other students. It was different with science classes, but I was still like, “I don’t need help.” I *finally* decided I go, and I mentioned TBI [traumatic brain injury] and was in, super easy. It had been here the whole time, it’s just you know, “That’s for other people.”

Santos, too, talked about his unwillingness to seek or accept support of any kind, until a point of academic failure. It took persistent and consistent messaging from many different college personnel as well as failure to bring Santos to the point of registration with AC. He cited shame, embarrassment, stubbornness, and social anxiety as some reasons he was so resistant to AC and other institutional support.

I would keep to myself like try to act like I'm okay but I was in so, so much pain. I still either felt either ashamed or embarrassed and then that subsided and then now I try to get it in as fast as possible. I was not willing to give up, but I was not willing to get help. I mean tutoring or any of that, until I realized I'm failing really badly and people are bringing it to my attention like, "Hey, you might have other disabilities because the errors you're making are the same ones repeatedly." Me, I was anti-social. I would act like, "No, I'm cool, I'm all right." And no, I wasn't and they knew it. Luckily they cracked through my shell. They got through to me and that changed everything for me.

Corina was hesitant to connect with AC because of preexisting fears of judgement and lack of information regarding available supports offered by AC. She had an educational therapist who both encouraged her to sign up and attended initial meetings to ensure that the transition went smoothly. Corina was afraid of being judged by AC counselors based on previous negative experiences with educational support staff in the secondary school system.

My educational therapist was like, "Hey, you know..." she got me in touch with [AC]. She actually went with me a few times when I was first getting started out here. Yes, she told me about AC and got me in touch. She actually prodded me until I contacted you, because I did not want to. It was just the fear of being

judged and just the, "What are they going to do for me? What's the point?"

Because at the time, I didn't know anything about proctoring centers or any of that. I went, "What are they going to do, tell me that I have something wrong with me like everyone else has?"

Sylvia explained an ongoing hesitation each semester. She is registered with AC, but explained that she tries not to use accommodations at the beginning of each new semester to see if she can do it without. She referenced the anticipation of an awkward conversation with the instructor regarding accommodations as part of her hesitation, though she reports that the conversation is always met with positive regard.

The first test of the semester, I always try to take it in class and then I realize, "Some classes I can pull that off with and most I can't." I feel like it's always awkward going to have that interaction with the teacher but then they are always so nice. They're like, "Okay, great."

There is a pattern of resistance to approaching or using AC services across many participants. This sentiment is consistent with the low percentage of high school students with IEPs who choose to register with accessibility support services once they enter postsecondary school, as discussed by the NTLs-2 and other studies included in the review of literature. Students want to try their college coursework alone, often

despite failure and struggle. It appears that it often takes the encouragement of one or more social contacts for students to take the initial step to register with AC, and even after that initial step, there may be some hesitation to readily use support services for which students are eligible.

Summary of Findings

Students identify in various ways when it comes to disability. Before the study regarding lived experiences of students who use AC services could begin, it became necessary to gain a better understanding of students' identities regarding disability. Students identified very individually, and in most cases did not identify with the term "disabled." Students were somewhat more likely to identify with the term "disability," but many students identified with neither and preferred to explain their identities in entirely different language. These extremely diverse identities have been grouped into Language Affirming, Language Selecting, and Language Informing responses. Students who use AC services cannot be assumed to identify in institutionally designated terms regarding disability.

Four overarching themes regarding lived experiences of students who use AC services as they navigate the college emerged. (1) Students often arrive to Pine College having had negative experiences regarding disability and accessibility in other educational spaces. (2) Both positive and negative interactions with instructional

faculty are powerful and leave a lasting impression on students. (3) Students often hold themselves, rather than the institution, accountable for accessibility. And (4) many students hesitate to register with AC for a variety of reasons, and only register after receiving encouragement from others in their social network.

The data suggest that students who use AC services and accommodations identify in myriad ways, not generalizable by a single word or experience. The experiential data indicate that external forces and interpersonal interactions are of utmost importance to students as they both enter and subsequently navigate postsecondary education. Students are very generous as they grant the institution leniency regarding accessibility, and assume much of the responsibility themselves for instances of difficulty with access. Though many experiences reported by students regarding disability and accessibility were positive at Pine College, there is still a reluctance to use AC services. This may point to a broader societal value placed upon independence and/or to a societal disability stigma that permeates the walls of community colleges. Students' experiences navigating Pine College using AC services and accommodations echoed several themes that can inform departmental, college-wide, and state-wide practices to create the most accessible spaces for all our varied and valuable learners.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

Introduction

While institutions of higher education have seen a dramatic increase in the number of disabled students since the passage of several disability rights and non-discrimination laws, starting in the 1970s, there remains a “separate but equal” approach to the provision of accessible education for many students who have been disabled. Most colleges and universities use the accommodations model of accessible education. This means that students who fall outside of the “normative” students for whom curriculum, programs, spaces, and services were designed, accommodations, reasonable adaptations or auxiliary aids, will be provided upon the request of the student. This process forces disclosure of disability and affiliation with a disabled identity. Both existing literature and this study have found that many students are hesitant to engage in this process, pointing to an institutional practice that was intended to promote equity, but in fact may maintain elements of discrimination.

This phenomenological study was conducted to better understand the identities and experiences of students who use the services and accommodations provided by the Accessibility Center (AC) at one California community college. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) How do students who use Accessibility Center (AC) services and accommodations at one California community college identify

in terms of disability-related language? (2) What are the lived experiences of students who use AC services at one California community college as they navigate the college using the accommodations model of access? The experiences of students who use the institutional systems currently in place are of utmost importance when designing and evaluating the programs intended to support students who have been disabled. These experiences have the potential to shape disability and accessibility programs and services offered in California Community Colleges.

Phenomenological interviews with students attending one California community College and using AC programs and services were the primary vehicle for data collection. Using an interview protocol based on the research questions and review of the literature, but also flexible enough to explore students' experiences through phenomenological inquiry, each interview took its own shape, and lasted up to ninety minutes in length. Students were asked about their identity as it relates to disability, and their experiences navigating Pine College while using AC programs and services. This research design allowed for the breadth of identities and experiences of students to emerge, as students walked me through recollections of real interactions and feelings associated with their higher education and accessibility.

Five themes were identified through qualitative data coding: (1) Variance of disability-related identities, (2) Previous negative experiences, (3) Importance of

interactions with instructional faculty, (4) Student acceptance of responsibility, and (5) Hesitation and external encouragement. The first theme, variance of disability-related identities, was characterized by students either affirming, selecting, or informing disability-related language upon reflection on the language used to identify themselves. The second theme, previous negative experiences, was characterized by students feeling stigmatized or shamed by others in educational spaces prior to their current experience at Pine College. The third theme, importance of interactions with instructional faculty, was broken into two sections: Positive interactions, and negative interactions. Although at Pine College the positive interactions with instructional faculty outweighed the negative ones, they were both extremely impactful.

The fourth theme, students' acceptance of responsibility, was characterized by students' frequent and automatic assumption of responsibility for hardships experienced while using AC accommodations programs or services. The fifth theme, hesitation and external encouragement, was characterized by numerous students' reports that it took a close social connection to help them overcome initial reluctance to register with AC. These findings contribute to the existing body of research about the experiences of students who have been disabled in postsecondary institutions across the country. These stories particularly highlight the experiences of students in a

community college, as opposed to four-year colleges and universities, where most of the research in this field has been done.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study both support and shift the existing body of research about the experiences of students who have been disabled in postsecondary education. What follows is a discussion of each theme and its implications. As with any scholarly work in the field of education and social science, these implications are intended to spark thought and reflection, rather than extinguish inquiry by providing “an answer.” It is my hope that while reading what the findings mean from one perspective, readers actively engage in their own exploration of what these students’ voices mean when studied together. Academic research is a dialogue, and without critical and interactive participation, the endeavor is incomplete.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the identities and experiences of disabled students who attend one California community college. Although students were allowed to use a variety of media to express themselves and their experiences (i.e. typical face-to-face oral interview, drawing, typing back-and-forth, video chat, etc.) all students chose to participate in the face-to-face oral, verbal interview. With the exception of several follow-up emails with interviewees to clarify meaning, the findings are entirely spoken expressions. In all cases, the language used

in the previous chapter on findings is the exact language used by interviewed students. The experiences of students who have been disabled are valid, vivid, and valuable, which is why they are the centerpiece of this work and its meaning. Student participants used words like “anxious,” “terrified,” and “misunderstood” in their accounts of experiences with others in college, which are somewhat similar to the words “ignored,” “insignificant,” “misjudged,” “overlooked,” and “no voice” used by students in a study regarding college climate for disabled students (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017). Corina conveys a wish that others might learn to understand her experience.

I feel like if people knew how it felt to be different, to not understand, I hate to say instinctively, but just instinctively, I guess, understand what another person is saying with their body language. Because for me, I have to consciously go, "This expression means this. Combined with this tone, it means this." I am consciously trying to figure out what the heck that person is trying to tell me with their verbal tone and their body language, because that doesn't come naturally to me. I feel like sometimes I offend people completely on accident because I miss a cue. I think they would better understand if they could even feel that for a day. Because when I get tired, I forget to read people, and then things go downhill pretty fast.

In a postsecondary environment that was founded on ableist principals, students who have been disabled are still often misunderstood. With students' voices leading the way, this study is intended to illuminate the experiences of many disabled students, and at the very least this document is a place where students are heard, understood, and invaluable. What follows is an exploration of what we might learn from each of the themes identified in the findings: (1) Identity Language, (2) Previous Negative Experiences, (3) Interactions with Instructional Faculty, (4) Students Taking Responsibility, and (5) Hesitation and External Support.

The Importance of Identity Language

In the original interview protocol, one of the very early questions was, "What does disability mean in your school life?" In the first few interviews, I saw either a blank stare, or a reticent response that disability did not impact their academic lives. After about three interviews I realized that I could not assume that all students who use AC programs and services see disability as part of their experience, part of their identities. So, with the flexibility allowed by the phenomenological grounded theory approach, I changed those initial questions to get a better sense of students' identities regarding disability.

Numerous studies in the existing literature show that students in postsecondary education often make attempts to shed "disability" as an identifier in

college (Marshak et al., 2010; Barnar-Brak et al., 2010; Hong, 2015; Cox et al., 2017; Abes & Wallace, 2018; Miller et al., 2019; Squires et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2011; and Dong & Lucas, 2016). In this study, two of sixteen students identified as disabled. The remaining students either rejected “disabled” but did identify with the term “disability” or used alternate language altogether to describe their experience and identity. Whether or not students identify with the term disability was not as black-and-white. In some situations, whether or not students identified with the term was dependent upon others’ varied definitions, and some students provided alternate terminology and avoided using the term themselves altogether in their responses. While identity language is such an individual expression that it is nearly impossible to generalize, the data from this study showed most participants hesitated to fully adopt “disabled” language in their self-identities.

Pine College has opted to use Accessibility Center (AC) as it’s departmental name, in contrast with the state-wide title Disabled Students Programs & Services (DSPS). According to this study, the majority of students do not identify as disabled, and many also have some reluctance to identify with the term disability. With this information, along with the abundance of other research data regarding college students’ disassociation with disability as an identifier, it is important that we design

our programs and institutions to honor students' preferences. Being labeled by institutions in a way that is uncomfortable or inaccurate is a dehumanizing practice.

Much of the history of disability terminology reminds us that “disability” and “disabled” are the terms chosen through the Disability Rights movement and beyond by the people the term is used to describe. Though this language was adopted from a framework of empowerment, college students seem not to subscribe to this same thought process. Questions for all who study postsecondary disability issues are: Do we need to educate people to accept and rethink disability terminology, or is it time for a linguistic shift driven by the identity language used by the students we currently serve? Does aspirational language risk being language of the elite if it doesn't reach the public conscious? Who has the power to ultimately decide what language is used, and what does that mean? They are honest questions to which I have a leaning toward hearing students as they voice their identity preferences, through the Disability Justice lens of “leadership of the most impacted,” though I also see value in perspectives tending toward maintaining and reinvigorating disability language.

Of utmost importance is that we do not stop the conversation at language. Changing the name of a department does not change its practices nor institutional structures and attitudes. Institutional labeling practices must be called into question, and students must have the final say in how they self-identify, but more critically we

must ask the question: Why are we requiring students to adopt a term at all? All students have needs. All students have bodies. Understanding that our students identify so broadly when it comes to disability, is there room for accessible education for all our students without insistence upon labeling?

The Impact of Previous Negative Experiences

The first theme regarding students' experiences navigating college having registered with AC programs and services is that many had previous negative experiences which inform their behavior. Many students reported starting (or restarting) at Pine College having had one or more negative experiences regarding disability or accessibility in other educational spaces. These experiences ranged from elementary school through to experiences at other colleges or universities. Students report being called names, being humiliated by instructors in front of peers, being treated as a burden, and being discouraged to continue. In all of the experiences cited by students, it was an educator on the other end of these negative interactions. Some of these experiences remained vivid in students' minds over thirty years after the incident occurred, pointing to the significance of these moments in students' lives.

As cited in the review of literature, many studies report students' trepidation to disclose disability for fear of instructors' reactions. These fears are learned by students over time both through a broader societal context and in previous educational

experiences. Students in a university study reported that instructors lowered expectations, overcompensated, and changed their attitudes after students' disclosure of disability for the purposes of receiving accommodations (Yessel et al., 2016). In another study, students with invisible disabilities feared instructors would view them as inferior, slacking, or undeserving (Dehnart, 2008). These are only two of the studies which also explore students' preexisting fears, which are likely grounded in a series of previous negative experiences in students' lives.

Understanding that students come to community college spaces likely having had negative experiences regarding disability or accessibility must inform our practice. Although educators at Pine College may be welcoming overall (as discussed more in depth in the next section), it is important to remember that students often come with emotional scars, unfortunately inflicted by fellow educators. With this information, community college educators must work to rebuild trust even before we think we have lost it, and work together with all educators to raise the standard of both social justice and Disability Justice practices in our schools.

Rebuilding trust with students may look like syllabus accessibility statements with genuinely inviting language, expression of anticipation that not all students will learn alike, or educators' self-disclosure of disability or struggles in school. Raising the standard of social and disability justice practices in our education systems may look

like inter-system (early childhood education, primary, secondary, and postsecondary) faculty trainings, presence of Disability Justice studies in teacher training programs, or cohort training programs for college-wide accessibility and universal design practices. There is also reason to explore institutional hiring practices. Showing students that they belong by hiring faculty, staff, and administrators who mirror the characteristics students see in themselves is trust-building on an institutional level, as the college is not just saying, but *showing* students that it has absolute trust in the ability of disabled people.

The Impact of Interactions with Instructional Faculty

The second experiential theme is that students' interactions with instructional faculty, both positive and negative, are meaning-making and impactful for students. Intricately linked to the first theme of previous negative experiences, current interactions with instructional faculty are also powerful for students. At Pine College, students report that most instructional faculty are open-minded, accommodating, and supportive of accommodations requests and disclosure. The negative experiences were told with great detail and pain, signifying their impact. Again, students' experiences emphasize educators' impact on their sense of belonging and comfort in college settings.

This builds on the literature that students experience anxiety and hesitation before disclosure of disability to instructors. Instructors in turn either confirm or deny that anticipation of negative outcomes. Among others, Garrison-Wade (2012) found that negative attitudes by faculty and peers contributed to students' feelings of self-doubt and belonging in college, and Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2010) found that 61% of faculty felt pity, awkwardness, and embarrassment when interacting with students who have been disabled. Students' interactions with instructors are often anticipated by students with some degree of worry or wonder about how accessibility and disability topics will be received. Most student experiences with instructional faculty at Pine College were positive, in contrast to what students in other studies report anticipating and experiencing at other schools.

In the reports of negative experiences with instructional faculty at Pine College, students report instructors breaking confidentiality in front of peers, singling students out, showing aggression, forgetting about students' accommodations, and making assumptions about students' learning styles. These negative accounts, though less frequent, were told much more vividly than the many accounts of positive interactions with instructional faculty.

By learning how impactful instructional faculty interactions are to students who use AC, community colleges can make intentional efforts to promote a positive college

culture regarding accessibility and regularly educate faculty about their profound impact on the student experience. One measure that might be taken to assist in these efforts is a comprehensive onboarding regarding disability and accessibility for new and incoming faculty, with the understanding that most community college instructors have not been trained as teachers, and are rather experts in their respective fields of study. Regular campus climate surveys and faculty in-service trainings regarding disability issues and accessibility are another tool for educators to keep a pulse on the everchanging college environment. Several students also mentioned that there was no easy opportunity for feedback when they did experience negative interactions, so colleges need a direct and simple-to-use feedback system for students to voice their experiences as close to the moment as possible.

There is also an opportunity to explore other communication methods with instructors that do not require a forced face-to-face conversation, if that is not the student's preference. For many students and instructors, a face-to-face conversation about accommodations is rapport-building and productive. But it appears that in some situations, other avenues of communication would be more comfortable, as students weigh the rewards and consequences of this interaction. Electronic management systems like AIM, SAM, Clockwork, and Starfish have the potential to ease the

requirement of forced-intimacy regarding disability disclosure by allowing students to request that accommodations requests be sent directly to the instructor.

A more truly Disability Justice approach would be to altogether rethink the students' need to take on the responsibility of accessibility. If the resources used to provide accommodations for individual students were used to comprehensively support and train instructors in accessible classroom instruction, environments, and inclusion practices, institutions would be a step closer to equity. As we will discuss in the Universally Designing section below, there will likely still be a need for some individual accommodations, but institutions could assume a far greater responsibility for providing accessible education in anticipation of the diverse bodyminds that enter our classrooms. Instead of labeling students with a specific disability type, reporting those numbers to the state, and receiving money based on the number of students served, the main work of the accessibility center on campus would be to comprehensively support instructors.

Many colleges do have distance learning or information technology (IT) centers to support instructors in providing accessible digital materials as recently mandated by the Community College League of California Administrative Procedure 3725 Information and Communication Technology and Instructional Material Accessibility Standard. This is one step in a very positive direction, as physical accessibility

standards like curb cuts, ramps, and elevators were many years ago. More anticipatory accessibility strategies will be explored when we get to Universally Designing practices, but an overhaul and complete attitudinal change is the challenge for educators who seek to shift the responsibility of accessibility from the student to the institution.

Most studies in the field have found students have predominantly negative experiences with their instructors regarding accommodations, accessibility and disability, which was not always the case with Pine College interviewees. There seems to be a general respect for AC processes and students who use accommodations among Pine College instructional faculty, which is a major step toward readiness for a fully accessible education, designed for the breadth of students' abilities and disabilities from the outset. This is good, but is it good enough for our students? Disability Justice would encourage us to liberate our minds from the siloed approach to diversity and consider the alternatives to having students self-disclose and self-advocate their way to accessible learning.

The Impact of Students Taking Responsibility

This study builds upon previous research in the field through its exploration of students taking responsibility for accessibility. Over half of the students talked about an occasion on which accommodations "went wrong" and in many of those cases, the students immediately vacated the responsibility of the college and AC to meet

accessibility needs appropriately on all occasions. Instead, students either said that access to educational materials was problem-free and went on to explain situations that were in fact very problematic, or they assumed the burden of working harder or being patient with college processes. This may be an expression of internalized oppression, as students learn through our school systems that divergence from the made-up norm is something to be ameliorated.

Several studies have recognized students' underutilization of accessibility resources due to difficulty with the accommodations processes (Black et al., 2014; Getzel, 2008). The testimonies of students in this study add texture to the difficulties experienced, and add another layer of students' assumption of responsibility when things go wrong. Students report experiencing physical inaccessibility on campus, a multitude of challenges regarding test proctoring, and difficulty understanding instructors. In the face of these inaccessible experiences, students place no blame on the institutional structures, in many cases practicing patience and gratitude for what imperfect support is offered instead.

Understanding students' tendencies to express gratitude where criticism may be due is significant as student services professionals strive to improve accessibility for college students. While students may ultimately receive the accommodations they need, and in many instances accommodations go smoothly, students in this study

appear to be granting a fair amount of flexibility to the institution regarding accessibility. This is yet another reason that accessibility must be integrated throughout the campus, rather than put together in a just-in-time patchwork fashion through accommodations. Disability and accessibility support offices should also administer regular student feedback assessments regarding their experiences with AC and college-wide accessibility, which many may already do, to make sure stories like these ones are told; Not just a Likert scale survey, but a genuine, open-ended inquiry regarding accessibility. In a truly equitable education system, students who have been disabled would not be required to bear additional burdens or assume responsibility for gaps in accessibility.

The Impact of Hesitation and External Support

The majority of students reported hesitation to register with AC “at first” and eventual registration with AC after the encouragement of others in their social network. Students reported wanting to try school without additional support, thinking that AC was for “other people,” feeling embarrassed, and questioning the usefulness of AC, among the many reasons they chose not to seek AC services right away. In many cases, students cited another person or persons who supported them in registration with AC. Siblings, educational therapists, classmates, instructors, and AC staff members were among those who encouraged students to get connected with AC. In

students' descriptions of these interactions, it often took persistence and long periods of time for these efforts of encouragement to result in the student actually approaching AC to get set up with accommodations and other services.

This initial hesitation to register with disability and accessibility services in college has been explored in other studies in the field. Squires et al. (2018) found that over 60% of college students did not use disability services or accommodations, citing wish for independence, intent to challenge themselves, a move beyond the need for support, and avoidance as stigma as reasons they held back. Dong and Lucas (2016) found that there was a dramatic increase in third semester enrollment in disability support services in a study tracking incoming freshmen over the course of several years. And in the nation-wide NLTS-2 study of youth up to eight years after leaving high school, around 70% of students who were identified as having a disability in high school did not enroll in disability support services at all. Students in this study and others are reticent to enroll with disability and accessibility support services at their colleges.

This study contributes to the existing body of research in that students who are registered with AC express the network of external support that it took over time to actualize their eventual use of AC programs and services. In most accounts, it took not only one suggestion, but many, over a significant amount of time for students to

overcome this hesitation. In some cases, students had to experience academic failure before considering the suggestions of others. It also indicates that there are likely many students who are still reluctant to connect with AC, and were therefore not included in this study because of the participant selection criteria, but are in our colleges and in need of support. These students are in the “general population” in the college, and likely not receiving supports necessary for access to the educational experience and materials.

This is yet another reason to integrate accessibility into the whole college, rather than leaving the responsibility on individual students to seek out support. In our current set-up regarding accessibility, this information can help anyone in close connection with students who may benefit from AC services as they approach the conversation of AC referral. Students may be reluctant to seek support from AC, and remain reluctant after several suggestions, but students’ interview responses indicate that the insistence of others often helped them to receive the support they needed to find success in college coursework. Ultimately, however, it is another call for a redesign of community college accessibility structures, as students are not inclined to reach out for AC support without persistent persuasion.

Summary of Findings and Implications

The intent of this study at the outset was to explore the lived experiences of students who have been disabled and are both attending a California community college and registered with the Accessibility Center. Through the research process, it became apparent that an exploration of the identities of students who use AC programs and services must precede the exploration of lived experiences. One theme emerged regarding the identities of those who attend Pine College and use AC programs and services: Their disability-related identities and language preferences are enormously varied. Four themes emerged regarding students' lived experiences navigating community college using AC programs and services: (1) Previous negative experiences; (2) the importance of interactions with instructional faculty; (3) students taking responsibility; and (4) hesitation and external support.

When it comes to race, gender, and age, students offer a handful of variations to the customary and historical terms that have been used to describe them. When it comes to disability, however, students offer myriad terms of self-identification, rarely voluntarily choosing the term "disabled." Fairclough (2010), through critical discourse analysis, conducts deep explorations exposing how power and group relations are intrinsically intertwined with the use of language. Institutional language is one of the mechanisms through which some groups maintain power, and others are oppressed.

Students who use and need the Accessibility Center at Pine college expressed many preferred terms to describe their identities as diverse learners, and in most cases, that did not include “disabled” or “disability.” Despite the tireless work disability activists and scholars have done to use, promote, and adopt these terms from a place of empowerment, real college students who need support are not comfortably confined by this language.

The experiences of students who use AC programs and services reveal several patterns. Students often come to college having had previous negative experiences in academic settings. These experiences that shaped students’ self-perceptions and understanding of themselves as learners were typically at the hands of educators. Students then told colorful stories of interactions with instructional faculty at Pine College that continue to impact their sense of belonging and comfort in college. Students reported a duality of positive and negative communications, all of which were significant to their learning experience. There was also a theme of students excusing the institution for inaccessibility and assuming responsibility for inconvenience, burden, or blame. Finally, students described their journeys to AC, usually starting with hesitation, and eventually arriving at AC with the persistent encouragement of others.

These clear and collective voices can help practitioners to create a more equitable learning environment for students who use AC programs and services, and all those who would benefit but are still reticent to reach out for support. Several implications and considerations are discussed in this section, but this is an opportunity for reflection of any reader to explore what next steps seem most appropriate in each local environment. Colleges might consider examining their linguistic practices, not only for accessibility and disability support offices, but across student services and academic departments to ensure that students are not being pigeonholed into terminology that does not serve them. Early childhood education, primary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions might come together to explore best practices to serve and encourage our diverse learners at every level to diminish negative experiences based on disability and accessibility.

Colleges might host new-hire and ongoing Disability Justice and universal design trainings to connect with instructional faculty about their impacts of their behaviors. Accessibility and disability support offices might regularly elicit student feedback and take deliberate actions to improve their experiences and decrease their burden, with the knowledge that students may assume undue responsibility in the face of inaccessibility. And those close to students who may benefit from accessibility or disability support might continue to supportively nudge them with the knowledge that

it often takes consistent, long-term external encouragement for student to overcome the hurdle of initial contact. Of, course at the end of these implications and suggestions, the question emerges: “...Or should we change the way we approach accessibility altogether?” An exploration of alternate methods of approaching accessibility is merited and will follow.

Implications for Social Justice Leadership and Educational Equity

We recognize that ableism is connected, tied up with and mutually dependent on other systems of oppression and that we cannot end ableism without also ending white supremacy, economic exploitation, colonization, and gender oppression. Disability Justice requires that we no longer build single-issue analysis, but instead build framework that can hold the complexities of our lives (Mingus, 2014).

The reality that multiple discriminatory boundaries exist in the broader society and within our schools calls upon educational leaders to exercise transformative leadership to address the institutional inequities face by disabled students.

Transformative educational leaders actively identify unjust practices both within and beyond the walls of their institution and unearth the possibilities of more equitable educational spaces in an ongoing, iterative process (Shields, 2010). While advocating for universal design of teaching and learning to become the expectation instead of the exception, educational leaders must work with the laws and systems in place to provide equitable and accessible education to all students. The role of social justice leaders and educators is to have the “hard” conversations and take a critical approach

to the discourse used to describe our most vulnerable students (Shields & Mohan, 2008). There are cultures of power in each institution, and it is the job of transformative leaders to name those cultures of power, and challenge their validity in an ongoing process (Kivel, 2000). By addressing and actively changing the culture of ableism both within each college and in the larger society, educational leaders can take significant steps toward social justice.

Procknow, Rocco, and Munn (2017) suggest that Authentic Leadership (AL) is the most effective leadership style from the perspective of disabled students. Through self-awareness, balanced processing, self-regulation, and relational transparency, AL practitioners insist upon, among other things, the addition of “disablism” to the existing triad of oppression: racism, classism, and sexism (Procknow, Rocco, & Munn, 2017). According to Fiona Kumari Campbell, “Disablism” is a set of social assumptions and practices which condone differential or unequal treatment of people with actual or perceived impairments, whereas “ableism” is characterized by the fabrication of the perfect body, and therefore an implication that disability is the absence or loss of ableness (Marshall, Kendall, Banks & Gover, 2009, Chapter 3, p. 21). By recognizing personal and institutional biases, authentic leaders recognize the intersectionality of all forms of oppression, and work to constantly address barriers to success both inside and outside the institution. AL in combination with Shields’ (2010) call for

transformative leaders to identify and question inequitable practices at an institutional, community, and even broader societal levels embody the mindset and practices necessary for leaders to address the inequity of support service provision for community college disabled students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study indicate changes to policy and practice may positively impact the educational experiences of students who have been disabled in California community colleges. Inexhaustive suggestions for improving the experience of students, both those who have registered with the disability support on their campus and those who have not but would benefit from more accessible education, are discussed below. Disability Justice calls for radical changes to our current deficit-based approach to disability. I, like many scholars, find myself asking if monumental changes are possible within the existing institutions we have built, or if we need to start from scratch. A fervent believer in the mission of community colleges, to make postsecondary education available to the masses and challenge the historical elitism of higher education, I have tried to imagine Disability Justice within the California community colleges that exist today.

Outreach.

The students in this study expressed a hesitation to register with the Accessibility Center. They also were asked what could make the college more welcoming to students who use or are considering using AC services. Seven students suggested that increasing awareness of the services offered through AC would be beneficial, by far the most highly cited idea for what could make the college climate more welcoming regarding AC. Sylvia noted that ongoing outreach, if not a more obvious physical location on campus, would help students connect.

I think maybe perhaps like kind of getting it out there more because it's up here; it's in the library; it's in the back part of the library; So, I think it's kind of harder to find. I noticed that some people are like, "What is that?" I'm like, "Mm-hmm." I think maybe just like a little bit more advertising or getting out there so people know about it more even throughout the semester.

Marcos similarly commented on the necessity of advanced information-sharing and physical accessibility of the AC office.

I didn't really know about ASC until I was in a classroom, which was a little late. Maybe how they have little booths when you come up. Maybe something like that or even in the front because they might not be looking for stairs, and maybe in the front of the school or somewhere where it's a little more

accessible. Because the only way I knew about it is when I was in class, once I got actually in a class. Maybe if they have it on-- when they sign up for school as a pamphlet or something.

Corina also gave input about increasing outreach before students experience failure or academic hardship.

Make students more aware that this is a thing, because a lot of the times, people either come in who are totally versed in this, totally know what they need, or they stumble across you guys by accident. They're just like, "I'm lost. I'm already in trouble. It's halfway through the semester, I'm not passing."

They're kind of already up the creek by the time they figure out that they could have help. Maybe outreach, though I don't really have [laughs] suggestions about how to do that.

Tina very simply stated, "An improvement could be reaching out to students so they know they're not alone," while Kyle focused on proactive outreach approach saying, "It makes it easier when teachers reach out to *you*." Educators often express reluctance to refer students to the disability support office on their campuses, but in fact, it appears that the participants in this study appreciate that instructors and others take a proactive approach to informing students about AC as a resource. Several studies in the literature, including Banks (2014) and Fleming (2014), noted

“lack of information” as one of the primary reasons students did not register with the accessibility or disability office at their college. This finding from literature in the field, the finding from this study regarding hesitation to register with AC, and students’ suggestions about improving outreach indicate opportunity for change. Increasing college-wide awareness of AC early and often, through multiple modalities, could improve the experiences of college students who have been disabled.

A streamline and clear referral and communication strategy so students are aware of AC is one level of increasing accessibility. But a level up from a solid referral would be outreach through strategic, accessible, anticipatory, and college-wide design. What I am proposing is an overhaul of our concept of outreach. Could we “outreach” to students to let them know accessibility is paramount to the institution by infusing it into each classroom, policy, and space? Instead of focusing on making students aware that there is an office they can find where they can sign up for accommodations, leaving the action on them, could we outreach all the way by meeting their needs before they need to seek individualized support?

Redesign of the DSPS Funding Formula

The current funding formula for DSPS departments across the state is deeply grounded in medical-model deficit mindset. Students who seek support through the DSPS office are assigned a “disability code” which is reported to the state. Each

disability code is assigned a certain “weight” or value. DSPS offices are then funded in subsequent years based on those counts. The idea behind this, I suppose, is that colleges spend more effort providing services for a deaf student than for a student with ADHD. The model, however, forces practitioners to focus on medical proof, deficits, and self-identification.

Some colleges and universities are instead funded according to the accommodations provided. “X” amount of money for each proctored test, for instance, and “X” amount of money for access to digital text. This model is less intent on branding students with a “disability code” but still insists on accommodations as the method through which accessibility will be granted to those who ask, nicely. Both models practically incentivize disability services offices to “get” more students and provide more accommodations. Practitioners I have met who work in these offices do genuinely care about students who have been disabled, so the better they are at counting and reporting services, the more money comes in for subsequent years. This contributes to the maintenance of inaccessible education with accommodations as the excuse.

I understand that California community colleges are funded in large part by taxpayer dollars, and this means that there is accountability to ensure that money has been spent on the students for whom dollars were earmarked; In this case, disabled

students. This is probably why we started labeling and counting in the first place, which is a noble enough intention. However, I would argue that the time has come to revisit our practice, as it perpetuates a system that reacts to disability, as if it were a surprise, rather than plans for it. It also clearly misses many disabled students who have chosen for a multitude of reasons not to register with AC or DSPS, therefore not using taxpayer dollars to provide support to all disabled students; only those who come forward.

There must be other ways to fund the important work of making education accessible. I will not take away from the imagination of readers by suggesting my funding fantasies. But I realize that as we imagine alternatives, we do need methods for ensuring that the resources are reaching the students we intend to reach, we do need to make sure that the dollar amount does not decrease because disability “counting” is not quantified in the same ways, and we do need to make sure that all stakeholders are involved in key decision-making. I do not have the answer, but I do offer the challenge to the California community college system to be boldly innovative in exploring possibilities for change away from deficit lens funding structures.

Education.

Education for the college community, particularly instructional faculty, is imperative regarding the lived experiences of college students who have been

disabled. By the time students arrive in a college classroom, they have often had previous negative experiences concerning educational accessibility. According to the findings of this study, interactions with instructional faculty, both positive and negative, are the most common and impactful experiences students have in college. To attain or maintain a positive college climate regarding disability and accessibility, frequent educational materials and opportunities must be provided to help college personnel and the student body understand the diverse identities of students who use AC services and the profound impact others have on their experiences postsecondary spaces.

These educational materials could come in the form of videos posted on the AC website, faculty in-service trainings for credit, a new faculty on-boarding session, student speaker panels, disability awareness activities, AC presence at academic department meetings, and others. Most community college instructors are trained experts in their respective fields, as opposed to experts in pedagogy. This means that colleges have the responsibility to give instructors all the information they need to conduct courses and interpersonal communications from a lens of equity and understanding. Because students were so meaningfully impacted by both their past and present educators, it is also important for educators to simply know that their behaviors matter in the lives of students, so they can work with intention.

Move toward universally designing.

Institutions depend on students who have been disabled to advocate for themselves to get their educational needs met, instead of creating educational curriculum and spaces built with a broad range of abilities in mind. Universal Design (UD) is the idea of designing spaces proactively to meet the needs of potential users with a broad range of physical capabilities. The intent is to indicate immediately to any user, “We expected you would come. You are welcome here” (Burgstahler, 2015). This approach has gradually made its way from physical spaces alone into our educational spaces, both physical and pedagogical.

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University defines UD as “the design of products and environments to be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (CUD, 2008, p. 1). Universal Design of Higher Education (UDHE) goes even farther than addressing varied abilities, and expands the goal to making educational environments welcoming and useful to groups of diverse gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, ability, disability, sexuality, veteran status, and learning style (Burgstahler, 2015). Were our California community colleges designed in this way, the need for academic accommodations, self-advocacy, and forced disclosure would decline, placing less burden on individual students.

In the findings section, you may recall Santos saying, “It’s all on me. It’s all on me,” in response to a disappointment at the AC proctoring center. Several other students expressed similar sentiments, including Anika and Sylvia. “I realized that if you don’t speak up, you’re not going to get what you need” and, “Speak up for yourself because no one else will,” they added, respectively. Although students did not directly bemoan the accommodations process or forced disclosure, they did indicate a responsibility, a burden, that many of their peers do not bear. This additional responsibility remains an institutional inequity. In the words of a student who participated in research with Dolmage (2017), “Self-advocacy is easy to preach but is another barrier in practice” (p. 92). With full implementation of UDHE, students would not be “othered” and labeled by the institution, but rather anticipated and included in accessible courses.

Implementation of UDHE is not simple. Many push back with worries that accommodations are simply necessary in some situations. This is correct. For example, it would be unrealistic, for financial and other reasons, to have a sign language interpreter in every classroom, nor would UDHE advocates argue for this. In certain situations, and with the resources available, accommodations are a small part of a UD approach. But wherever possible, making materials and instruction accessible to as many students as possible is the goal. Pine College instructors have been exemplary in

their efforts to make all digital content accessible to the broadest range of people possible, in response to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) guidelines which govern accessibility requirements covered by Section 508 (U.S. General Service Administration, 2019). This means presenting digital content in formats that can be read by a screen reader, have closed captioning or transcripts available for audio, use high-contrast colors for visual text, and insert alternative text to describe images in words, among other best practices. This is an example of the active shift over to a UDHE framework.

There is more to be done, however. Universal design is never finished, which is why I prefer the active term “universally designing.” Students and education are everchanging, and when we are honest, the process of preparing for every single student who might walk through our doors is never complete. In response, universally designing higher education is an iterative process, requiring constant feedback from students and adjustments along the way. A simple example of a pedagogical shift is for instructors to habitually describe in words any graph or visual in a presentation, so a student who does not see the image can follow the presentation fully. Instead of pointing to the graph and saying, “What do you see here?” which might exclude students of various disabilities and capabilities, the instructor describes the image so all have the information visually, auditorily, or both.

Another simple shift might be video taping all lectures, (with appropriate copyright and legal protections agreements signed by students). This could help a student who needs to review material more than once due to learning disability, a student with chronic illness who cannot physically attend each lecture, a student who has to stay home with a sick child, a student for whom English is an additional language, among many others. One more simple strategy among many is to incentivize one or many students to share their notes on a course portal, so all students might have access to legible notes from perspectives other than their own. This practice in particular is grounded in Disability Justice as it enforces the beauty rather than the push against interdependence and learning collectively. CAST UDL Initiative and the DO-IT Center at University of Washington have extensive strategies and materials and trainings for universally designing higher education (Burgstahler, 2015).

As I write this dissertation, we are amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic. Instructors have just scrambled, mid-semester, to shift their courses entirely online. At this time especially, I am cognizant of the fact that asking one more thing of instructors might lead to entirely justified nervous breakdowns. I want to emphasize that shifts toward universally designing community colleges must be supported, funded, and collaborative. Instructors must not be alone in this endeavor. A plan for universally designing community colleges would need to involve conversations with all

stakeholders, including but not limited to students, instructors, AC faculty and staff, IT specialists, and administrators. There is room for exploration, and there are other institutions, like University of Washington and North Carolina State to whom we can look for UDHE practices and support.

Institutional changes are implicated as well to embody Disability Justice. Things like completing a semester in 16-18 weeks and attending all class meetings with very few absences are norms that many take for granted. It is a privilege to be able to string several months together consecutively to complete a semester of coursework. Strict attendance policies must be revisited. “Incomplete” grading options so that the student can complete any remaining coursework after the semester has concluded (without negative federal financial aid consequences) must be normative, within the structure we currently have in place. A step further is to imagine another structure that does not bind students to semester-like timeframes which can privilege non-disabled students, and this is another area for further exploration.

Apparent clashes of Disability Justice principles and California community college structures occupy my mind, and I hope will occupy readers’ minds as well, as we try to design fully accessible spaces in a bureaucratic, though in many ways revolutionary educational system. Intentional shifts toward universally designing

would send that message to students, “You are welcome here,” without requiring unnecessary disclosure, labeling, or self-advocacy.

Recommendations for Further Study

Identity.

This study did not start out as an identity study, but necessitated a brief exploration of identity to give context to students’ experiences using AC programs and services in community college. A far deeper exploration of identity of students who have been disabled and students who use accessibility and disability support services is needed. This study scratched the surface of students’ varied identities regarding ability, disability, accessibility, impairment, and medical conditions. An identity theory specific to disabled college students is underexplored. Vallejo Peña, Stapleton, and Schaffer (2016) called for the formation of a student identity development theory for disabled students, as there is not such theory in current literature.

Intersectionality.

The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of students who have been disabled and who use AC programs and services, as a whole group. To understand the breadth of experience, participants were not selected using any additional criteria, like age, race, sexuality, country of origin, native language, gender, etc. Intersectional studies, including those by Miller et al, (2019) investigating LGBTQ+

identity and disability, and Banks (2014) exploring African American identity and disability are needed to better understand the multidimensional identities of college students. Disability Justice insists that disability does not stand alone and is not a single-issue politic. It is the many simultaneous intersections of our being which make us whole and human.

Instructor experiences.

Student-instructor interpersonal communications were paramount to students' experiences in this study. What follows might be an exploration of instructors' experiences communicating with students who have been disabled and students who use disability and accessibility support services. Bruer and Mogro-Wilson (2010) started investigation in this field, but additional information is needed to better understand the instructors' experiences as they approach accessibility, both through the accommodations model of access, and as they transition to increasingly more universally designing methods of access.

Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate the identities and lived experiences of students who use Accessibility Center programs and services at one California community college. The results add to the growing number of students' voices

represented in studies exploring experiences of students who have been disabled in our postsecondary institutions.

Many physical and social environments are set up as if they never imagined the incredible variety of bodies, minds, senses, emotions, and lives that are 'us.' ...A belief in normative man and normative culture helps to make the marginalization, or even exclusion, of some people seem natural. ...University life makes many of its members, or potential members, into a presence that is not imagined, not welcomed, and yet... we are here. Or, here we are, the unimagined in flesh and blood (Titchkosky, 2011).

Human variation is a universal constant. Postsecondary institutions were built and designed by and for white, heterosexual, cisgender, able, male bodyminds. These institutions have come a long way in terms of diverse student admissions, but maintain many practices which still privilege the attendees who fit the socially constructed idea of the "normative" student. Instead of designing curriculum and spaces in anticipation of diverse bodyminds, retrofitting measures are taken upon individual request to amend both the physical and educational components of college for students who have been disabled.

It is not our students' range of abilities that is unusual, it is the illogical institutional design for the imaginary human norm that is unreasonable. Individual

students bear the burden of requesting accommodations, disclosing personal information, and assuming labels with which they may or may not identify, to compensate for inadequacies in institutional planning for all students. Our California community college students are persistent, perseverant, and resilient, but it is an injustice to rely on their toughness to maintain outdated systemic conventions. May the words and strengths of our students be the motivation we need to guide the continuous process of universally designing community college education.

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Appendix A

San Francisco State Institutional Review Board Approval

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS
HUMAN AND ANIMAL PROTECTIONS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administration 471
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94132

Tel: 415/338-1093
Fax: 415/338-2493
E-mail: protocol@sfsu.edu
Web: <http://research.sfsu.edu/protocol>

Date: September 27, 2019

To: Theresa Oda-Burns

Re: The Discourse of Disability and Self-Advocacy in California Community Colleges

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at San Francisco State University has reviewed and approved the use of human subjects in the above protocol. You may proceed with your research as described in your protocol and as modified in any subsequent correspondence. Please honor your own discipline's professional code of conduct.

Protocol Number: H19-07

Approval Date: September 26, 2019 Non-Exempt Full Committee Review

Original IRB Committee Date: September 18, 2019

Expiration Date: This approval expires on September 25, 2020

If the project will continue, it must be renewed **before** the expiration date. Please allow at least six weeks for processing the renewal application. **Data cannot be used in the research if collected after the expiration date, before the protocol has been renewed.**

Completion: Upon completion of the project, a Study Completion Form must be submitted to the IRB. Renewal and completion forms are found on the web site under Forms and Templates.

Adverse Event Reporting: All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB within ten working days.

Modifications: Prior IRB approval is required before implementing any changes in any of the approved documents. **Data cannot be used in the research if collected before any changes are approved.**

Recordkeeping: You must retain all signed consent forms for at least 3 years after all research activity is completed, including data analysis.

Questions: Please contact ORSP – Human and Animal Protections and the Institutional Review Board at (415) 338-1093, or at protocol@sfsu.edu

Sincerely,
Institutional Review Board

Appendix B
Recruitment Flyer for Student Interviews

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH!

VOICE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (ASC)

The Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experiences using Accessibility Support Center (ASC) services at Cabrillo College. We are particularly interested in your experiences with disability and using accommodations as you navigate the college. Come share your input!

****All participants will receive a
\$20 gift card****

WHO?

Students 18+
years old who
have used
Accessibility
Support Services

WHAT?

Interview of 90
minutes

WHERE?

Cabrillo College
ASC office or
place of your
choice

WHEN?

Fall 2019

CONTACT US TO PARTICIPATE

Theresa Oda-Burns

(831) 479-6563

todaburns@mail.sfsu.edu

Appendix C Consent to Participate

San Francisco State University Informed Consent to Participate in Research *The Discourse of Disability and Self-Advocacy in California Community Colleges*

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this research is to learn about the experiences of students regarding disability and self-advocacy at Cabrillo College. The researcher, Theresa Oda-Burns, is a graduate student at San Francisco State University and counselor in the Accessibility Support Center (ASC) at Cabrillo College, conducting research for a doctoral dissertation in the Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership, part of the Education department. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are over the age of eighteen (18), you are currently enrolled in Cabrillo College as a credit student in a major term, and you have registered with ASC at some point of your academic career at Cabrillo College.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research, the following will occur:

- You will be interviewed for approximately ninety (90) minutes about your experiences with disability and self-advocacy in college.
- You will be offered your preference of how you would like to be interviewed (in-person, via online chat, video conference, with answers given orally, in writing, through drawing, etc.) The modality of interview is flexible, and reasonable accommodations will be offered upon request.
- The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- The interview will take place in the researcher's office or a location of your choosing at a time convenient for you.
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers for up to thirty (30) minutes within one month of the interview.
- At the conclusion of the interview, you will be asked if you would like a copy of the transcript of the interview sent to you via e-mail for review of accuracy.
- Total time commitment will be a maximum of 120 minutes.

C. RISKS

There is a risk of loss of privacy; However, no names or identities will be used on stored files in any published reports of the research. Only the researcher and her advisors will have access to the research data, which will be kept in a locked and/or encrypted location. There is also a risk of evoking emotional responses while talking about issues of personal identity, disability, and possibly difficult experiences. Students will be provided with information for Student Health Services upon request to further explore such sensitive topics with a licensed professional. Student Health Services will provide mental health services if emotional responses arise. Participants may answer only the questions they are comfortable answering. At any time, you are free to withdraw your participation. If, at any time you feel uncomfortable receiving counseling services provided by the researcher, you may request to meet with another counselor and you will not be denied ASC services.

San Francisco State University
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date 09/26/2014
Expiration Date 09/25/2016
Protocol No. H19-07
(415) 338-1093

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The research data will be kept in a secure location and only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the data. All research data will be stored in an encrypted document on a password protected computer. The researcher's personal laptop will be the primary computer used to store data, and the researcher's advisor's computer will be the secondary computer used to store data. Both computers are password-protected, and the audio and transcribed files will be kept in encrypted files.

Audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. Transcripts of the audio recordings will be kept by the researcher in an encrypted file on a password-protected computer for a minimum of three (3) years, in accordance with CSU policy. The data is eligible for use by the researcher indicated on this consent form in future, only for research purposes consistent with the original purpose of research, stated on this consent.

E. DIRECT BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefits to the participant.

Indirect benefits to the participant may include improved Accessibility Support Center services.

F. COSTS

The only cost to participants will be transportation to the research site.

G. COMPENSATION

Compensation for participating in this research will be a \$20 gift card.

H. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is not to participate in the research.

I. QUESTIONS

You have spoken with Theresa Oda-Burns about this study and have had your questions answered. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at todaburns@mail.sfsu.edu or you may contact the researcher's advisor, Professor Betty Yu at bettyyu@sfsu.edu.

Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to the Human and Animal Protections at (415) 338-1093 or protocol@sfsu.edu.

J. CONSENT

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your present or future status at Cabrillo College, San Francisco State University or Accessibility Support Center (ASC).

Signature _____
Research Participant

Date: _____

Signature _____
Researcher

Date: _____

San Francisco State University
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date 09/26/2019

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Protocol No. 119-09

(415) 338-1093

Appendix D
Initial Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about yourself as a learner.
2. What does disability mean to you in your personal life?
3. What does disability mean to you in your school life?
4. What does accessibility mean to you in your personal life?
5. What does accessibility mean to you in your school life?
6. Walk me through your experience coming to the Accessibility Support Center for the first time.
7. What are some of the accommodations or services you use through ASC?
8. Tell me about your experience using accommodations in college.
9. How do you go about notifying your instructors about your accommodations?
10. How has your outreach for accommodations been received by
 - instructional faculty?
 - staff and students at the college?
 - family and friends outside the college?
11. What have been your most positive experiences in college regarding disability?
12. What have been your most challenging experiences in college regarding disability?
13. What are your ideas about how college can be more accessible for students with disabilities?
14. What do your peers, instructors, administrators, counselors, or others need to know to make college more accessible?
15. What was the most accessible class you have had in college? It does not need to be a class in which you used accommodations.
16. What made that class or experience accessible?
17. Is there anything else you want me to know about your college experience and disability that we have not covered?

18. *What are the skills you have that have helped you find success in college?*
19. *What does self-advocacy mean to you?*
20. *Tell me how you self-advocate for your needs regarding disability in college.*
21. *How did you learn to self-advocate for your disability-related needs?*
22. *Walk me through an example of a self-advocacy event you can remember.*

Appendix E
Amended Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experience in education growing up.
2. Tell me about your journey to becoming a college student
3. Do you identify as having a disability?
4. Do you identify as disabled?
5. How does disability/difference/limitation impact your life as a college student?
6. Tell me about your experience coming to the Accessibility Support Center for the first time.
7. What are some of the accommodations or services you use through ASC?
8. Tell me about your experience using those accommodations in college.
9. How do you go about notifying your instructors about your accommodations?
10. How has your outreach for accommodations been received by your teachers?
11. What does your family think about your use of ASC?
12. What is one of the most positive experiences you've had in college?
13. What is one of the most challenging/negative experiences you've had in college?
14. What are your ideas about how college can be more welcoming for students with disabilities or students who use ASC?
15. Complete the sentence: If people at the college only knew _____, they would better understand my experience.
16. What is the best class you've had in college and why?
17. What is the worst class you've had in college and why?
18. What would you tell a classmate who was considering using ASC but didn't wasn't sure about it?
19. What are the skills you have that have helped you the most in college?
20. What does self-advocacy mean to you?
21. Tell me about a time you advocated for yourself in college.
22. Is there anything else you want me to know about your college experience and disability or ASC that we have not covered?