Amplifying Voices of Postsecondary Outcomes for Physically Disabled Students a Qualitative Research Study

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By
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Abstract

The present qualitative research study analyzed and amplified the voices of physically disabled and/or chronically ill students' perspectives of their postsecondary transition process. Previous transition research dating back to 1983, just a decade after the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, focuses on students with cognitive disabilities, Autism, and Intellectual Disabilities (Will, 1983). From my professional and lived experiences, there appears to be a gap in postsecondary transition services for youth with physical disabilities, which is further substantiated in previous bodies of research (Faggella-Luby et al., 2014; Targetta et al., 2013). This research study is important as it lends voice to youth who have navigated or are currently navigating the postsecondary process. For this research study, participants were recruited through social media platforms via Disability Community groups. Participants were young adults, ages 18 to 27, who had an IEP, lived in the United States, and attended public school. Participants engaged in a one-to-one interview and had the opportunity to participate in an artifact creation in which they represented their feelings towards their postsecondary experiences. Six themes emerged regarding factors that contributed to their postsecondary and transition experiences: (a) Quality of Life, (b) Resilience, (c) Personal Growth, (d) Independence, (e) Community/belonging, (f) Disability Identity, (g) Accessibility.

Keywords: postsecondary, disabled, accessible education, physical disabilities, transition programming
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Lastly, thank you to Jesus for being my rock and strength in all that I do in life as nothing is possible without Him. Jeremiah 29:11, my life verse, reads, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, and Disability Community. Your love, support, and guidance are something I always cherish, and I am even more grateful for it over the past few years of my doctoral journey.

To my mom, Denise Keogh, thank you for your unwavering support and love. Thank you for teaching me to be the fiercely independent woman I am today. From your example and love, I’ve learned how to navigate the many obstacles of life, specifically the obstacles afforded to me because of my physical disability.

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Lastly, thank you to all my friends in our Disability Communities for sharing life with me. I learn so much from our interactions, and I am so grateful to be a part of our communities. Let’s wheel forward!

I say it all the time, and I’ll say it again, I do have the best family, friends, and community that a gal could ask for; thank you for being right by my side through this journey.
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Chapter I: Introduction

In the United States, approximately 22% of people with disabilities (PWD) are employed, which is a stark comparison to the 60.3% of nondisabled people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Notably, there is a gap in services for students with disabilities as they transition between public education and postsecondary life and this gap in services impacts the employability of young persons who are ready to go into the workforce (Wills, 1983; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Morningstar et al., 1999, Cavendish & Connor, 2017).

While the U.S. postsecondary education (PSE) programs for individuals with disabilities have propagated since the passing of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, 2008; Whirley et al., 2020) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) has mandated transition services for students with disabilities, many students graduate high school without the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve their desired educational or vocational goals (Heasley, 2015). Schools are required to specifically plan for students’ post-school outcomes relevant to academics, vocation, and independence, while taking into consideration each student’s needs, strengths, interests, and preferences. Schools should identify and develop goals aimed at facilitating positive post high school outcomes (IDEIA, 2004). To address the disparity between the transition from high school to postsecondary life, more intensive investigations are necessary to determine the relationship between transition programming and the post-high school success of PWD (Parsons et al., 2023). Furthermore, the effective characteristics and qualities of transition programming for special education students should be evaluated. It is essential to understand what postsecondary services entail so that they can be expanded upon to support PWD better as they exit high school and move on to college or enter the workforce.
Overview of Postsecondary Services in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Postsecondary programming and services consist of many components. The communication and collaborative efforts between educators, families, students, vocational rehabilitation offices, and county agencies are crucial in providing adequate support for PWD to ensure they are aware of resources for which they may be eligible (Faggella-Luby et al., 2014; Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). Postsecondary transition planning includes these four main components, as outlined in Table 1: (1) postsecondary education, (2) employment, (3) independent living, and (4) agency involvement. The areas of postsecondary education and training, employment, and independent living include measurable annual goals (MAG), which should identify courses of study, services, and activities. These goals in the Independent Education Program (IEP) are based on student assessment, which identifies the student’s plans in the given area, as well as their strengths and needs (Targetta et al., 2013). The services section of the IEP transition grid outlines the instruction and supports that will be provided to help the student reach the goal. The activities section of the IEP transition grid outlines the skill the student will practice (Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983; Wagner et al., 2012). It is important to have transition goals that align with the students’ area of interest so that a reasonable transition plan with actionable services and activities can be implemented to support the students’ desired outcomes.

Agency involvement is a crucial component of the transition planning process because agencies such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Centers for Independent Living (CIL), Office of Long Term Living (OLTL), Department of Human Services, and developmental and intellectual disabilities councils can connect families and students to resources such as
supported waivers, transportation systems, assistive technology, job coaching, and support workshops that help PWD gain and maintain employment.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Postsecondary Programming and Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postsecondary Education and Training</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Independent Living</th>
<th>Agency Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example Goal</strong></td>
<td>The goal in IEP is based on student assessment, which identifies the student’s plans for independent living. Most students with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses do not have a goal in this area as they are not receiving instruction in this area.</td>
<td>Agency involvement includes information about different community supports, such as OVR, centers for independent living (CIL), and waiver programs to help students gain and maintain employment by providing the needed support (e.g., Personal care assistance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica plans to pursue her bachelor's degree in elementary education.</td>
<td>Jessica plans to obtain employment as an elementary teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica will receive direct instruction in executive functioning.</td>
<td>Jessica will receive direct instruction in prosocial coping skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the support of her special education teacher, Jessica will explore colleges that have her major and the admission requirements.</td>
<td>With the support of her special education teacher, Jessica will intern with an elementary teacher for one day per week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The above figure provides examples of goals, services, and activities that would appear in a student’s IEP.

School personnel involved in the transition process need to be made aware of available services, such as waiver programs to receive personal care assistance with activities of daily living (Cheong & Yahya, 2013; Cavendish & Connor, 2017; Wagner et al., 2012; Morningstar et al., 1999). Plotner et al. (2017) stress the importance of interagency collaboration and its positive
impact on post-high school outcomes for PWD. When school personnel lack knowledge of the available services, students with PWD are negatively impacted because they don’t receive the programming they need to be successful post-high school (Targetta et al., 2013).

**Purpose of Study**

Through one-to-one interviews and artifact creation, this qualitative study explored the perspectives and lived experiences of young adults (18-27 years old) with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses who have experienced the postsecondary transition process. Previous research has focused on the transition experiences of people with Autism, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Cavendish & Connor, 2017; Grigal et al., 2014; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). Additionally, previous research has used mainly quantitative methods, and a few qualitative case studies have focused on the voices of teachers and parents (Cavendish & Connor, 2017). My study will amplify the voices and experiences of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

**Rationale**

The rationale for examining the lived experiences and perspectives of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses is to contribute to the field of research where the voices of physically disabled people are limited. Using interviews, the researcher analyzed the experiences of people with physical disabilities who have navigated postsecondary transition using the disability studies in education (DSE) framework. DSE is a subsection of disability studies that focuses on issues related to disability in schools, centers the voices of PWD, and operates within the social model of disability. DSE also challenges the traditional educational practices of special education and inclusion (Collins et al., 2016). Utilizing this framework will hold the researcher accountable to PWD and ensure their voices are centered. Furthermore, DSE
allows the researcher to explain disability as a normal variation of the human experience. Instead of viewing disability as a deficit, it will focus on the unique strengths of the disabled person (Gilham & Tompkins, 2016; Baglieri et al., 2011). Because limited research surrounding physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses exists in the educational field, this study will contribute to the field of education and transition planning by providing feedback from the primary stakeholders about what programming was useful and what was not so that transition programming practices can be improved.

**Problem Statement**

Pathways from high school to college and/or employment hold value, and PWD deserve to be made aware of the options available to them. This starts with communication and collaboration as a student begins the postsecondary transition process at the age of fourteen (Will, 1983; Targetta et al., 2013). One way of collaborating with students is through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. An IEP is a federal mandate that requires public schools to create an educational program to meet the specific needs of the student with a disability (IDEA § 300.43). The IEP includes goals the student will work on, accommodations that need to be made for the student to achieve success, and post-high school transition planning for students who are a minimum of sixteen years old (Individuals with Disability Education Act, 2004). States have control over the implementation of the federal mandates as long as the state is abiding by the mandate, transition planning age varies by state. For example, Pennsylvania requires that transition planning begin by age 14 (PATTAN, 2023), while New Jersey requires transition planning to begin as appropriate, between the ages of 14 and 16 (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-2.3(k)5). Through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, students and parents need to be made aware of options for after high school so that instruction and support planning
can be tailored to the student’s individual goals (Cheong & Yahya, 2013; Targetta et al., 2013; Cavendish & Connor, 2017). If students and parents continue to be unaware of available options, the students cannot choose the option that helps them achieve their highest desired potential (Donaldson, 2021).

**Disability Labeling**

Our society applies varied labels to categorize disability and try to make sense of disability through the use of models (Michailakis, 2003; Pfeiffer, 2002). Some of the models that strive to help our society understand disability are the medical model, social model, psychological model, and educational model and are specific to certain contexts (Michailakis, 2003; Pfeiffer, 2002). While models may be helpful to understand disability in certain contexts, it is important to note that disability is complex and spans across many areas and contexts in society (Morris et al., 2019). Disability labeling presents challenges disability is a complex experience and might be determined using a set of criteria which not all people with the same disability label meet all the same criteria. Furthermore, there is range of ability and a range of functioning within each label that can vary overtime with factors such as age, disability type, and fatigue (Morris et al., 2019). For example, within the disability label of Autism, there is a range in abilities that impact speaking, learning, cognition, and other adaptive functioning (Ben-Itzchak et al., 2014). Similarly, within the category of physical disabilities and chronically ill, the labels used in this study have a great deal of variance as well.

**Research Questions**

The research questions and sub-questions guiding my study were:

1. What are the career, education, and social experiences of individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses post-high school?
Research Sub-Question 1: What successes have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?

Research Sub-Question 2: What barriers have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?

Research Sub-Question 3: Looking back, what do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses wish they could have learned, or how could they have been better prepared for their career, education, and social life?

2. How do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses illustrate/represent current feelings about their high school transition process, and what are the common themes within their representations?

Research Sub-Question 1: What suggestions do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses have for improving high school transition programs?

These qualitative research questions delve into the lived experiences of young adults with physical disabilities who have experienced the postsecondary transition process. Learning from their experiences will help contribute to the field of special education as educators aim to construct applicable transition plans that increase student involvement in the transition process and connect families with resources.

Rationale for Methods

This qualitative research study analyzed transcribed interviews and participants’ created artifacts through a two-phase coding process. I applied predetermined codes that align with
postsecondary education and training literature in the first phase and inductive coding in the second phase to draw upon specific statements made by the participants.

Previous bodies of research have mainly focused on quantitative research when examining transition services for people with learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and Autism. For example, Faggella-Luby et al. (2014) conducted a historical analysis examining the methodologies used in the literature surrounding postsecondary education. The findings of this study indicated that there were more quantitative research studies and that in fact, most studies were descriptive in nature, providing documentation about programming and conditions. This is significant to note because Faggella-Luby and colleagues suggest more diverse and in-depth research is necessary to understand how postsecondary education can better serve students who have disability needs.

Qualitative research obtains insights into how other people perceive their own experiences and how they derive meaning from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It has been used successfully to capture and convey the lived experiences of people and to gain insight into a specific phenomenon. Current qualitative studies surrounding postsecondary outcomes for PWD primarily focus on people with learning disabilities, Autism, and intellectual disabilities rather than people with physical disabilities. For instance, Durrell’s (2016) research sought to analyze higher education professors’ understanding of learning disabilities and how their understanding of learning disabilities impacted teaching practices and student success. Her findings suggest that while several professors had an understanding of disability, she found that there was room for a deeper understanding as exclusion continued to occur. It is important to recognize there was no mention of physical disabilities in Durrell’s (2016) research. Cheong and Yahya (2013) also researched effective transition planning for students with learning disabilities.
Cheong and Yahya (2013) indicated the important components of transition planning and their findings revealed similar items to what was described under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The essential components Cheong and Yahya (2013) found were (1) a collaborative support system, (2) job coaching, (3) self-advocacy training, (4) transition assessment, (5) career training, and (6) trained personnel work with the PWD. It is important to recognize that Cheong and Yahya (2013) discovered these findings nearly a decade after the 2004 reauthorization of the IDEA. Furthermore, current research suggests these components still need to be expanded upon (Hamdani et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2019; Pangalila et al., 2015). Although many of these federal requirements and transition planning components apply to people with physical disabilities, there was no mention of what transition planning for people with physical disabilities entails or should entail (Cheong & Yahya, 2013; Durrell, 2016; Lindsay et al., 2019).

My research used a qualitative research approach to center and amplify the voices of people with physical disabilities or chronic illness post-transition to recognize their beliefs about what was useful and what was not and to honor their outcomes despite the challenges they have faced. The primary stakeholders report on the effectiveness of transition services for people with physical disabilities. It is important to conduct extensive research about the transition so that practices and programming can be continually improved and students with disabilities can have better postsecondary outcomes. After all, better postsecondary outcomes increase quality of life and feelings of self-worth (Kim et al., 2021; Levasseur et al., 2004; Silverman & Cohen, 2014)

**Significance of Methods**

To address the research questions, this study utilized a qualitative approach that includes interviews and participant-created representations of their feelings surrounding their transition
process. Having young adults participate in interviews allowed me to delve into their transition journey experience to learn about their successes, the barriers they faced, and things they believed they should have learned. Furthermore, when the participants shared their created artifacts, it allowed them to reflect on their experiences and feelings, which can be seen as liberating.

**Positionality**

Many ask why I choose to be an educator and an advocate for those with disabilities. As a female with a physical disability, I have experienced the stigmas, stereotypes, and assumptions that society places on us. In my junior year of high school, when all of my classmates were applying to colleges and anxiously awaiting their acceptances, I was experiencing another source of anxiety stemming from my disability. As a result of my physical disability, I require assistance with everyday tasks such as showering, going to the restroom, and getting dressed. Throughout my life, my mom was my primary care attendant. While she taught me different ways to manage tasks and become as independent as possible, there was still the reality that I could not physically do everything I needed. I was anxious and stressed because I was unsure how these personal care needs would be met in college. My high school IEP team was unsure how this would work either and suggested I attend a local university where my mom could come to the dorm every morning and evening to help me with my personal care tasks. What young adult wants their mother to come to their dorm to help them get dressed? With no other suggestions provided by my high school team, my mother ran into a new neighbor who had a son who happened to use a wheelchair. She learned of Edinboro University, now Penn West, which had personal care attendant services funded by The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).
If my neighbor had not lived in that house and had not met my mom, I would not have known about the opportunities at Edinboro University. Transition planning should be intentional rather than left to chance like mine. Because of my high school transition experiences, I want to change the narrative surrounding disability for my students and future students. I do not want any child to be told that they cannot (play on the playground, participate in gym, go to school, get a job, live independently, be everything they want to be, and more, etc.) because of their disability. Placing limitations on people, putting them in a box, and trying to fit a round peg in a square hole is not what education should be. When placing limitations continues, it causes identity and self-worth conflicts, perpetuates systemic ableism, and negates the individuality we, as education systems, desire to instill in our youth. These outcomes are not what we want for our disabled students; instead, we want to teach them that their disability can be their strength and empower them to choose a career path that matches their interests and skills.

Growing up disabled, my parents never said, “You can’t.” Whether it was playing soccer or participating in an outdoor field trip, they helped me find a way for me to work through it. Sometimes the plan worked out well or needed minor adjustments, while other times, like playing soccer, it didn’t work at all. Regardless, my parents always provided me with the opportunity to try, learn, and adjust as needed. Other times, my parents had to speak on my behalf. A specific memory I recall was when my elementary school didn’t allow me to play on the playground with the rest of my friends, for fear of liability. Because my parents knew I enjoyed the playground as much as any nine-year-old child did, they spoke with the school to ensure I could enjoy recess.

Advocacy and a touch of good trouble run through my veins. I wish all students with disabilities had this kind of parental support.
While pursuing my undergraduate degree in elementary and special education, I had the privilege of attending a college with one of the best disability supports in the nation. Because of these supports, which included personal care assistance, I could live on campus while receiving assistance with my daily living activities. On my dorm floor, I was surrounded by many strong, independent people with physical disabilities. Even though this college had a very well-respected office for students with disabilities, we faced constant obstacles as we were still in the minority. Halfway through my second year of undergraduate studies, I met with my advisor, a special education department chair at my university, to discuss the next semester’s field placement I anxiously awaited. During this meeting, she told me all of the reasons I will never be a teacher because I use a wheelchair. I sat there in my wheelchair, utterly amazed that the department chair for the special education program was telling me this. Because I knew what I wanted and what I was capable of, I politely and firmly dismissed her absurd comments and accusations. Now, I’d be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge that although I politely and assertively dismissed her comments, they did have a long-lasting impact on me; perhaps contributing to what I know now as, internalized ableism.

In the sections above, I provided an overview of the trajectory of postsecondary education, the purpose of my research study, the research questions and accompanying sub questions that guided my study. Additionally, I shared a portion of my positionality as it deeply connects to my research. In the following sections of this chapter, I will acknowledge my potential bias and how I plan to counter it throughout my research, a glossary of important terms, and a brief overview of disability language.
Potential Bias

As the researcher of this study, a special education teacher, and a person with a physical disability, I acknowledge my position and how I need to be careful as I interpret the data that came from this study. Acknowledging my personal and professional connections to this research study is one way I can address any biases that arise. My presence as the researcher may influence the participants’ responses, and reading the participants' body language may help me connect with the participants, making them feel more comfortable as they share.

Important Terms/Glossary

The terms below provide an understanding of words commonly used in this body of research.

1. Accommodations: are adaptations to how a learning task is completed based on the needs of the student with the disability (PaTTAN, 2023).

2. Activities of Daily Living (ADLs): personal tasks like showering, dressing, feeding, etc., that a person would typically do themselves (Nosek et al., 1995)

3. Adaptations: changes in the format or presentation of a task that does not adjust the content or standards (PaTTAN, 2023)

4. Chronic Illness: a disease that lasts for more than three months (PaTTAN, 2023)

5. Community Agency: service providers, such as vocational rehabilitation that offer support for people with disabilities so they can access the community (PaTTAN, 2023).

6. Course of study: a list of courses and educational activities that support the students’ desired postsecondary outcomes (PaTTAN, 2023).

7. FAPE: Free Appropriate Public Education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004)
8. IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the federal law that governs special education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004)

9. Individualized Education Program (IEP): a written plan for the provision of special education services. The plan includes present levels of academic and functional performances, strengths and needs, transition services (as applicable by age), goals, and accommodations (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

10. Centers for Independent Living: are community-based nonprofit organizations run by people with disabilities that offer information and support for PWD in transitioning to independent living (Pennsylvania State Independent Living Centers, 2023).

11. Measurable Annual Goal (MAG): A goal based on an identified academic or functional need that a student is expected to obtain within a year (PaTTAN, 2023).

12. Modifications: adaptations to content that changes what is assessed (PaTTAN, 2023)

13. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR): provides services for people with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2023)

14. Other Health Impairment (OHI): A disability category under IDEA that includes chronic or acute health conditions (PaTTAN, 2023).

15. Personal Care Assistance (PCA): assistance received from another person to assist the disabled person with activities of daily living (Nosek et al., 1995)

16. Physical disability: is an impairment to a person’s body functioning or structure that impacts tasks and activities of daily living (PaTTAN, 2023).

17. Postsecondary transition: the process of moving from high school to post-high school (Kulkarney, 2014)
18. Special Education: The services, supports, and specially designed instruction a student receives who qualifies under one of the disability categories under IDEA (PaTTAN, 2023)

19. Transition services: a group of coordinated learning activities designed to support a student with a disability as they enter adulthood. Transition services include three main areas: (1) employment, (2) education and training, and (3) independent living (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Language

It is important to note that language in this paper varies between person-first and disability-first languages. For example, a person with a disability (PWD) to disability-first language - a disabled person. The reason for the interchanging of the language is to showcase that disability is personal and an important part of someone’s identity (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). The interchanging language also symbolizes that disability is a journey from acceptance to celebration (Durell, 2016). It is also important to note that in a genuine effort to look at disability as a strength, the language in this paper reflects that of disability researchers. Instead of saying handicapped parking, which focuses on the negative connotations and history of the word handicapped, the word accessible or inclusive is used (Zettel & Ballard, 1979).

Summary

Transition planning is not a new mandate for students who receive special education services, but the gaps in programming and postsecondary outcomes still exist (Cavendish & Connor, 2017; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Morningstar et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2012). The research from 1983 to 2017 has yielded the same results (Wills, 1983; Wehmeyer &
Over the past four decades, there has been a need for more accountability, follow-up, and improvement in research. The issues surrounding transition planning have not been resolved or significantly investigated in current research (Lindsay et al.; 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Wills, 1983), and previous bodies of research lack the voices of the person with the disability and don’t highlight people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses (Grigal et al., 2014; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). This study will shed light on the issue of transition planning and programming from the perspective of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

This chapter introduced a general understanding of postsecondary transition services for people with physical disabilities and established why research is needed in this area. It is essential to understand what research has been conducted on this topic and why it needs further study. The following chapter will describe the literature, theories, and policies impacting PWD's postsecondary outcomes.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

This section of my dissertation study focuses on the literature review that expands and supports the understanding of transition planning and the scholarly findings of the impacts of postsecondary life for people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

This chapter begins with a brief history of people with disabilities, which is important to understand as the stigmas still affect people with disabilities (PWD) today. Additionally, current research surrounding postsecondary services is outlined, and this chapter also highlights the literature surrounding disability language, the models for understanding disability, policy that impacts disability, and representation.

Understanding the History of PWD

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) were monumental changes for people with disabilities living in the United States. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prohibited discrimination based on disability and required that the needs of students with disabilities be met to the extent possible as their same-aged nondisabled peers (Section 504, 1973). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act set the stage for the ADA. The ADA was passed in July of 1990, which prohibits discrimination against PWD in numerous areas, including education, communication, employment, public accommodations, and access to state and local government agencies (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Before these federal legislations, PWDs were not awarded these fundamental civil rights.

Disability has existed as long as humans have existed, and the history of disability is lengthy. To begin with, in the eighteenth century, PWD were left to wander the streets begging for food and often put in institutions. Thus began the institutionalization of PWD (Zettel &
Ballard, 1979). Moving into the early twentieth century, PWD were seen as objects of pity and charity and were ridiculed or seen as freaks of nature. Furthermore, around the time of the Immigration Act of 1907, PWD were not allowed to enter the United States for fear that people would view the United States as lazy people (James & Wu, 2006). In the mid-1930s, the United States passed the *Ugly Laws*, which permitted anyone who appeared disfigured in any capacity to show themselves in public; this law lasted until 1974. During World War II, PWD faced Hitler’s wrath if they did not fit what he called the Master Race and were subjected to a painful death (Zettel & Ballard, 1979). Following the Vietnam War, when many soldiers returned from battle injured and disabled, the Section 504 movement began.

**Impact of Stigma on Employment**

The above brief history provides an overview of what PWD faced and what was expected of them. The burden of history and the generational trauma of PWD carries over to varying stigmas today and impacts the lived experiences of PWD today (Silvan-Ferrero et al., 2020; Nosek et al., 1995). One way stigmatization impacts PWD is in the ability to gain and maintain employment. For instance, it is estimated that six hundred and fifty million people in the world live with some type of disability. However, only four hundred and seventy million of the disabled population have employment (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

Furthermore, Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) argue that because of the historical treatment of PWD, stigmas and stereotypes continue today and influence expectations as education in the area of inclusion needs to be elevated. An example of the stereotypes of PWD experience is not only seen in the work of Kulkarni and Gopakumar, where they find that employers are more hesitant to hire someone for fear of costly accommodations or increased absenteeism but is also seen in the higher education setting. Higbee et al., (2010) and Los Santos
et al., (2019) found that although students with disabilities are attending higher education at an increasing rate, they continue to be segregated and marginalized when it comes to all aspects of higher education, including residence life, orientation, and in the classroom. Although Malveaux argues that education is the key to a better quality of life (2013), this does not seem true for PWD considering the barriers they continue to face. In summary, historical treatment and perceptions of PWD have systemically impacted how PWD are currently viewed; furthermore, because of this, PWD face barriers in educational, employment, and social settings, which negatively impacts postsecondary outcomes.

**Understanding IEPs**

IEPs are individualized education plans for students identified with an educational disability under IDEA. An IEP outlines the instruction and services the student with the disability should receive as a provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). IEPs represent students with varying disabilities, such as learning disabilities, Autism, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Speech and Language disabilities, and Other Health Impairments (often including students with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses) (IDEIA, 2004). An IEP aims to ensure that appropriate and attainable goals and accommodations are set for students to access their education (Wagner et al., 2012; Wills, 1983).

The key components of an IEP are (1) present levels of academic and functional performance, (2) transition services, (3) goals and objectives, (4) special education and related services, (5) a statement of the least restrictive environment (LRE) and educational placement (PaTTAN, 2023). The present levels section of the IEP includes data on how the student performs in the general educational setting, progress on IEP goals, and teacher input. The transition services section of the IEP includes input from the parents or guardians on what they
hope for their child regarding post-high school life. Transition services also include student input and career assessments related to the student’s strengths and needs. Furthermore, the transition section includes a transition grid outlining the measurable annual goal in postsecondary education/training, employment, and independent living. Each measurable annual goal has courses of study services and activities specifically designed to help students achieve their goals. Transition planning must begin within the IEP year when a student turns fourteen (Baer et al., 2007; PaTTAN, 2023; Targetta et al., 2013). Targetta et al. describe the transition planning process as something that should be results-driven to focus on a smooth transition for students to move from high school to college or employment (2013). Further, Targetta et al. state that transition planning should consist of ongoing assessment, which is based on the needs of the student as well as the strengths and interests of the student (2013).

Goals and objectives address the skill deficit outlined by the evaluation report and continual progress monitoring. This section of the IEP drives the instruction and accommodations (PaTTAN, 2023). The special education and related services section of the IEP outlines what accommodations are to be provided, who is responsible for the accommodations, and when and how the accommodations will occur. Related services include supports such as speech and language services, and more specifically for students with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses, physical therapy, and occupational therapy (PaTTAN, 2023; Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). The statement of LRE and educational placement includes where the student will receive the instruction for their identified goal areas and how often the student is included with nondisabled students (PaTTAN, 2023).

Many PWD have IEPs that are supposed to help them fill the skill gap in their area of need and level the playing field so they can access the general education curriculum to the
greatest extent possible with their nondisabled peers. IEPs are also designed to prepare them for life after high school. This process is referred to as transition planning, a set of federally mandated activities (Baer et al., 2007; Johnson & Rusch, 1993). Although transition planning is required under federal law, postsecondary outcomes for PWD have remained poor (Hong et al., 2007; Targetta et al., 2013; Avellone et al., 2021; Winsor, 2021). Poor postsecondary outcomes are in research dating back to 2007 (Hong et al., 2007) to more recent transition research in 2021 (Avellone et al., 2021; Windsor, 2021). Furthermore, research shows that when instruction in transition planning is implemented with fidelity, postsecondary outcomes improve (Hong et al., 2007; Mello et al., 2021). While transition planning is important for all students with disabilities, it is especially important for people with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses so that they can be connected with agencies that will provide support for care attendant services (Lindsay et al., 2019).

**Transition History**

Transition planning and programming is a federal mandate for all students who receive special education services (IDEIA 2004, § 300.43). It requires that students who are turning 16 years old participate in a set of coordinated services and activities that will equip them for postsecondary life in the areas of postsecondary education and training, employment, and independent living (Morningstar et al., 1999; Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012; Williams, et al., 2024). In addition to programming a coordinated set of services and activities, students, parents, and guardians must provide input on postsecondary goals. Furthermore, transition planning must include assessment data that identifies the student's skills and how they relate to their ability to obtain their transition goals. Another mandate is that students must be
formally invited to attend their IEP meeting so that they can provide input (Targetta et al., 2013; Williams, et al., 2024).

**History of Transition**

Transition planning has developed over the past five decades, but issues with postsecondary outcomes still exist. In the 1970s, career education was introduced by the United States Commissioner of Education because educators were concerned about the increased rate of drop-outs (Morningstar et al., 1999). Career education was designed to permeate the curriculum so students would understand the relevance between curriculum and career. Initially, career education did not include students with disabilities, but towards the mid 1970’s and with increased federal funding, students with disabilities were included (Morningstar et al., 1999). However, in the early 1980s, the career education initiative faded, and a new initiative focused on students with disabilities emerged (Morningstar et al., 1999). Shortly after the federal mandate of providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with all disabilities was introduced, The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services developed The Bridge Model of transition (Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983). This model focused on vocational education and other school-based programming that would lay the foundation for future postsecondary success. The foundations of The Bridge Model were creating personal relationships and networking connections with employers so that PWD could transition from school to work with support that would enable them to secure employment or further education (Will, 1983). In 1985, The Bridge Model was further developed to integrate successful community living for students with disabilities, which urged schools to expand the transition to include teaching social and interpersonal skills (Morningstar et al., 1999). Because no specific federal mandates outlined how transition services would be dispersed, transition
programming varied by state. In 1990, The Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act was reauthorized to what is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Morningstar et al., 1999). This was significant because IDEA addressed how funding should be utilized, that students who are sixteen years old should participate in transition planning, and mandated that transition supports go beyond the school to include agency involvement.

**Policy: PWD Ability to Access Work**

Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) is a state health insurance program for individuals working despite disabilities and chronic health problems. It provides its recipients with comprehensive health insurance coverage at a low cost, which is 5% of their earned income as a monthly premium. The coverage that MAWD provides is support for life-sustaining medical equipment, medications that are of high cost, and care attendant services, which are not all covered under primary insurance through an employer, even if you have the best coverage (Pennsylvania Health Law Project, 2022).

Although Medical Assistance is a federal mandate, the state controls how it disseminates its funds. In PA, the Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) program allows disabled workers to receive Medicaid. However, it came with previously (before PA Act 69) rigid income and asset limits that often-prevented individuals from saving and getting married. In PA, before Act 69, the income limit was 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and the asset limit was $10,000 for an individual or household of any size. With the provision of PA ACT 69 (MAWD WJS), this new category (workers with job success) would allow workers to earn up to 600% (or roughly $76,000/ yearly) of the federal poverty level and keep MAWD. Anything earned over the previous 250% cap would move workers into the new WJS category rather than strip them of their coverage as long as they had been on MAWD for a year. In this new category
of workers with job success (WJS), workers will pay 7.5% of their income to the MAWD program as their healthcare premium.

People with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses need to be aware of MAWD WJS so that they can continue to work and accept promotions that they qualify for without the fear of losing personal care services. When IEP team members know policies impacting PWD ability to access employment, they can implement better transition planning that fosters interagency collaboration (Lindsay et al., 2016).

**Gaps in Literature**

The current literature available is insufficient in identifying and addressing appropriate and extensive student-centered transition planning for students with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses (Grigal et al., 2014; Hedrick et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2012). This is partially due to previous research focusing on learning disabilities, Autism, and intellectual disabilities (Grigal et al., 2014; Martin & William-Diehm, 2013; Mull & Sitlington, 2003; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995). Additionally, research about people with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses resides in occupational therapy journals, rehabilitation journals, and public health-related journals (Kim et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2012; Silvan-Ferrero et al., 2019).

**Transition Research**

In a case study, Cheong and Yahya (2013) utilize a sample population of five coordinators of non-governmental organizations, five people with disabilities who are employed, three employers, four parents of children with disabilities, and two special education teachers. This study found that collaborative support systems are vital to the successful transition of people with disabilities and that there is no cohesive transition period for PWD as they enter postsecondary life. (Cheong, Yahya, 2013). Another common theme from this study is the need
for direct instruction in teaching self-advocacy skills. Cheong and Yahya conclude that effectively communicating wants and needs and understanding their rights as PWD is essential for adult life (2013).

Among other findings, it is evident that trained transitional personnel are needed, which means people providing transition support (Cavendish & Connor, 2017; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). Schools, specifically public schools, should be aware of community agencies that can support people with disabilities.

**Postsecondary Supports**

Numerous colleges and universities implement the principles of universal design to create an educational experience that meets the needs of all students, and for some postsecondary institutions, this includes an attendant care program (Burgstahler, 2015; Tiedemann, 2012). Currently postsecondary institutions that provide an attendant care program are University of California, Berkeley University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Wright State University. Previous institutions that offered an attendant care program were Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, now called Pennsylvania Western University at Edinboro, and University of Houston (Tiedemann, 2012).

To provide a concrete example of support offered through a university’s care attendant program, we look at the former Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Although the Bridge Program has been maintained, it does not offer the on-campus care attendant program it previously did. Students could receive assistance with all activities of daily living, such as showering and dressing (Gilmer, 2021). Students who were Pennsylvania residents received subsidized care through Pennsylvania’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) (Tiedemann,
The program was discontinued the day before spring semester graduation in 2018 (Gilmer, 2021).

**Common Themes of PWD Lived Experiences**

In order to find scholarly research about the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities, it was important to look at research outside of the educational context, which primarily focused on other disabilities (Grigal et al., 2014; Mull & Sitlington, 2003). Quality of life with a physical disability and/or chronic illness, social relationships, experiences with employment, and inclusion in the educational setting are themes from research outside the educational context. These are themes from research within occupational therapy, rehabilitation, and medical journals, perhaps furthering the belief of the medical model that disability is something to be fixed rather than viewing disability from the social model or the disability in education model (Guevara, 2021).

**Quality of Life**

The medical model of understanding disability looks at what is wrong with the individual, and many may think that having a disability leads to a lower quality of life (Guevara, 2021). However, research surrounding people with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses does not confirm that belief. Instead, Battalio et al. conducted a cross-sectional quantitative study that found that resilience in people with physical disabilities contributes to better social outcomes and a better quality of life (2017). Kim et al. recognized that little research exists about people with physical disabilities. Through their survey, Kim et al. also found that people with physical disabilities experience happiness and an overall normal quality of life (2021). A research study consisting of twenty-five physically disabled students who attended eighth to twelfth grade in ‘normal’ schools in India found that quality of life was rated as average (Abraham, 2013). There
is, however, some research that exists and explains how the negative perceptions and stigmas others have about disability lead to internalized ableism, which can lead to a lower quality of life for people with physical disabilities (Nosek et al., 1995; Silvan-Ferrero et al., 2000).

A common theme found in literature was the need to address the mental health of people with physical disabilities as they experience aging with a physical disability. Aging on its own without a disability provides unique challenges, but aging with a progressive disability adds a new layer (Gadaleta et al., 2023; Wan et al., 2019). For instance, nineteen adults ages twenty-five to forty-eight with Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) were surveyed, and it was found that participants rated their quality of life lower because their disability is progressive. They lose function as they age (Gadaleta et al., 2023). Similar findings exist for the twenty-five people with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) who were interviewed, indicating that they experience increased levels of stress and anxiety as they age and lose function (Wan et al., 2019).

Another theme contributing to the quality of life for people with physical disabilities is pain management. Andrews and Wahls found that adults with physical disabilities spend a considerable amount of time managing pain, which can impact how they feel about their lives at that moment (2018).

In summary, the belief held by those who operate within the medical model that the quality of life for people with physical disabilities is lower than for nondisabled people cannot be firmly established.

Employment and Independence

According to Miller et al., less than forty percent of disabled people work (2012). This statistic is concerning because, as part of the IEP transition planning process, students with disabilities have a measurable annual goal of obtaining employment (Targetta et al., 2013;
Wagner et al., 2012). A common theme found among the research focusing on people with physical disabilities is their ability to gain and maintain employment (Andrews & Wahls, 2018; Hamdani et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2019; Pangalila et al., 2015). For example, Pangalila et al. conducted a cross-sectional study of eighty males with DMD in the Netherlands. They found that even though obtaining employment is difficult to navigate with the stereotypes of PWD and the management of pain, the mental health of the participants remained average (2015). In a similar population of young men ages seventeen to twenty-seven with DMD, Hamdani et al. found that feelings of stress and anxiety arise surrounding typical milestones such as achieving employment (2015). Hamdani et al. further researched what constitutes a successful transition and how current transition practices often reflect a dominant able-bodied culture (2015).

Moreover, this research indicated that the participants desire to be as independent as possible. However, assumptions that are embedded in transition goals surrounding independent living and employment reflect general assumptions and social values of PWD (Hamdani et al., 2015). Additionally, because of the level of difficulty in obtaining work for PWD, it was noted that rehabilitation professionals should acknowledge both the positive feelings of accomplishment and the negative feelings about the future of living with a disability (Humdani et al., 2015). Andrews and Wahls also found that people with physical disabilities experience difficulty finding employment and found that a lack of transportation creates a barrier for PWD who are unable to drive to and from work (2018). Moreover, it was evident that despite employment and transportation obstacles, PWD desire to be as independent as possible (Andrews & Wahls, 2018; Humdani et al., 2015).

Current bodies of research lack the in-depth perspectives of people with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses who live independently in a typical community setting rather
than a supported living facility. Kingsnorth et al. conducted survey research of people with physical disabilities who live in a residential facility, which indicated that participants expressed seventy-one percent satisfaction with their living arrangements (2014). To elaborate on concerns and barriers surrounding independent living, receiving personal care assistance (PCA) appears difficult as many PWD receive PCA services from family members (Miller et al., 2012).

Providing transition-aged youth with IEPS and the support and resources available to support employment and independent living could help PWD achieve the desired higher level of independence (Mello et al., 2021).

To understand physically disabled and or chronically ill young adults and their experiences of their high school transition, the next section of this chapter includes a description of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework consists of (a) disability studies and (b) disability studies in education.

**Resilience**

Resilience is a concept that an individual can possess that allows them to recover, or bounce back, from situations. Resilience is developed over time.

**Socio Political and Accessibility**

Disability access issues are often a result of societal perceptions and systemic barriers. These barriers cause negative beliefs about disability which can lead to challenges when PWD try to obtain meaningful postsecondary outcomes.

**Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical frameworks initially influenced the foundation of this qualitative research study, which aims to elevate the voices of people with physical disabilities who have experienced the post-high school transition process. The theoretical frameworks include
disability studies and disability studies in education. Although both frameworks allow and create space for people of marginalized populations, specifically people with disabilities (PWD), to understand disability as a social construct rather than a medical diagnosis (Schalk, 2017) I ultimately prioritized the disabilities studies in education theory as my primary theoretical framework. I did this because it was most relevant to transition programming; it was more established in the educational context.

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is a subsection of disability studies that focuses on issues related to disability in schools, centers the voices of the PWD, and operates within the social model of disability. DSE also challenges the traditional educational practices of special education and inclusion (Collins et al., 2016). DSE is relevant to my research because it critiques ableist practices and traditions heavily rooted within our educational system (Slee et al., 2021).

**Disability Studies**

Disability studies scholars view disability as a social phenomenon in which disability is a normal variation of the human experience. Furthermore, the disability studies framework challenges the harmful rhetoric that disability is something that needs to be fixed, the medical model, and believes that society is the disabling factor, the social model (Pfeiffer, 2001).

**Medical Model of Disability.** The medical model of disability, as the name suggests, is rooted in the medical field. When disability is viewed through the medical model, PWD are seen as abnormal, something that needs to be fixed, and PWD will have a lower quality of life (Connor et al., 2008).

**Social Model of Disability.** The social model states that the lack of accessibility within society causes disability, which is a normal part of the human experience. The social model
places an emphasis on society to fix the issues of access rather than the PWD (Connor et al., 2008).

**Disability Studies Theory**

Disability studies emerged in the late twentieth century following the successes of the disability civil rights movement (Pfeiffer, 2002). Disability studies aim to view disability as part of the human experience resulting from environmental and social factors and positions disability in a positive light (Sandoval Gomez & McKee, 2020). Additionally, disability studies focus on disability as an identity and reject the medical model of disability (Connor et al., 2008).

Although disability studies initially focused on the social model, it has since expanded its focus to include culture, policy, history, and activism (Connor et al., 2008).

One of the components of disability studies that is crucial to the theoretical framework that informs my research is the value of the voices of PWD. This is important because historically, PWD have been marginalized and subjected to the voices of those who operate within the medical model of disability (Collins et al., 2016).

**Disability Studies in Education Theory**

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is a subcategory of disability studies that extends and is more specific because it focuses on issues and problems of disability within the educational context (Collins et al., 2016). DSE also emerged as a critique of special education, which primarily sees disability within the medical model (Gilham & Tompkins, 2016). Gilham and Tompkins (2016) explain that the presence and educational practices of inclusion mean that there are classes that are excluded or segregated. DSE actively works to deconstruct current inclusive practices by reconstructing inclusion where disability is understood from the social model with strengths of individual people rather than the deficit or medical model (Baglieri et
al., 2011). Furthermore, DSE aims to elevate the lived experiences of PWD as they relate to their educational experience. Because my research focuses on the postsecondary transition experiences of people with physical disabilities, this is the primary lens I’ll use to analyze my results. According to Baglieri et al. (2011), key components and questions of DSE include (1) what the nature of disability is and (2) what appropriate teaching practices are for students with disabilities. I will consider these key elements in my research when analyzing my participants' stories.

Sometimes, disability is physical, and in my research study, I will focus on youth with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses that impact mobility and function. I will consider the nature of physical disability and view disability through a more progressive lens, such as the social model. Additionally, my research is aimed at centering the voices and experiences of people with physical disabilities. Previous bodies of research focus on the perspectives of teachers, staff, and families working with PWD rather than the experiences of the person experiencing disability. Utilizing the DSE framework as the lens through which I will analyze and interpret my research will allow me to elevate the lived experiences of physically disabled and chronically ill adults as they share their feelings about their high school transition process. Additionally, learning from the experiences of people with physical disabilities will help shed light on practices and approaches that are beneficial for people with these disabilities since not all practices work for all types of disabilities.

**Summary**

Special education mandates regarding transition planning and programming are not a new issue but remain an issue that has not been adequately resolved or rigorously researched because postsecondary outcomes for PWD remain poor (Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012;
Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Will, 1983). The purpose of this dissertation study is to add to the existing educational research literature and specifically address the gaps in transition planning from the perspective of people with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses, as well as the feelings surrounding their post-high school transition. The next section of this dissertation, methodology, focuses on the research design and the data collection methods used to evaluate and analyze this topic.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework

Note: Theoretical Framework. Susan Baglieri et al. Disabilities Studies Theory (2011) places an emphasis on disability as a normal part of the human experience and rejects the medical model. From Disabilities Studies emerged Disabilities Studies in Education. Collins et al. (2016) Disabilities Studies in Education focuses on disability within the educational setting. DSE is vital in centering the voices of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

Chapter III: Methodology

This qualitative research study examined the post-high school transition journeys, experiences, and feelings of physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults, ages eighteen to twenty-seven, who live in the United States. In this chapter, I outline the research
design and methods used in this qualitative research study of physically disabled young adults who have experienced the transition process. In addition, I will include information about participant selection, instruments, procedures, a review of my positionality, and validity in qualitative designs.

My research aims to obtain information surrounding postsecondary high school transition so that the voices of lived experiences. Perspectives of people with physical disabilities can be amplified, and suggestions for improving transition planning for post-high school can be made. To date, there is little research assembled that expresses the weaknesses of transition planning as it pertains to individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses (Lindsay et al., 2018). Most of the research in this area focuses on individuals with cognitive impairments (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Cavendish & Connor, 2017; Grigal et al., 2014; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

**Research Design**

Qualitative researchers may utilize a combination of data collection methods to ensure the fidelity of the research is maintained (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Marshall et al., 2022). This research study used qualitative methods, including one-to-one virtual interviews and an artifact creation posted on an online forum, Padlet. Interviews and artifact creation are tools of qualitative research in which participants reflect on their lived experiences (Rowsell, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Inspiration for the Study**

Although photovoice was not a method used for this research study, it inspired the methods used. Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology that actively engages participants from a specific community to analyze their lived experiences and create change.
(Graziano, 2004; Hussey, 2006). In this case, I did not use the same process associated with photovoice, but I was inspired by the photovoice method. I asked physically disabled and/or chronically ill participants to create a visual unique to their transition experiences. Due to the potential varying abilities of my participants, I wanted to use a medium that allowed for flexibility and adaptation to fit their disability access needs. Having the participants in my study create an artifact and post it or a picture of it to a shared platform helped expand the content of my research because the artifact provided additional detail and enhanced the data collected from the interviews.

The semi-structured Zoom interview questions served as the primary data point, and the artifacts supplemented and expanded upon the participants' interview responses. Rowsell (2011) shares that artifacts add value to research because they provide insight into experiences that a researcher may not be able to obtain through other methods, such as observations or interviews (p. 332). Furthermore, Rowsell (2011; 2022) states that artifacts help the researcher and the participants reflect on and create meaning in their lived experiences which provides additional context for the information provided within the interviews.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guided my study were developed with knowledge of previous research, the Disability Community I am a part of, and the need for increased transition outcomes for youth and young adults with physical disabilities. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the career, education, and social experiences of individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses post-high school?
Research Sub-Question 1: What successes have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?

Research Sub-Question 2: What barriers have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?

Research Sub-Question 3: Looking back, what do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses wish they could have learned, or how could they have been better prepared for their career, education, and social life?

2. How do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses illustrate/represent current feelings about their high school transition process, and what are the common themes within their representations?

Research Sub-Question 1: What suggestions do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses have for improving high school transition programs?

Participants

I sought to understand how individuals with physical and/or chronic disabilities navigated the transition from high school to life beyond. I used a self-selected sampling strategy to recruit participants (Creswell, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because of my position in the Disability Community, I recruited my participants from the following Facebook groups of which I am a part: Living with MD (Muscular Dystrophy), Women Living with MD, SMA (Spinal Muscular Atrophy) Support System, and Living with Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy. Since I have a physical disability and chronic illness, I have had conversations with members of the physically disabled and chronically ill communities about issues that are important to us. When selecting
the participants for my research study, I knew that the interest and need for this research would be well received. Before posting the recruitment flyer, permissions were obtained from all four community groups of young adults with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses ages 18 to 27.

Participants were recruited from Living with M.D., Women Living with Muscular Dystrophy, SMA Support System, and Living with Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy. A research flyer was posted on each group site to provide information about the study. These groups work to connect individuals with specific disability categories, such as Muscular Dystrophy or Spinal Muscular Atrophy, to provide support, resources, and friendship among the physically disabled/chronically ill communities. Within these groups, members can seek and offer support, provide various resources, and share common and relatable experiences. For example, as disabled individuals, we share life hacks that show how we adapt to living and working as independently as possible. As a member of each of these groups, I have found that finding similarities and commonalities with other individuals who share my disability is most beneficial in obtaining the support I need to navigate my independence.

Once I obtained IRB approval, the flyer (Appendix B) was posted in the four Facebook groups. I contacted the administrators of each Facebook group to obtain permission to recruit for my research study. The research flyer explained the study's purpose and expectations and listed the participant inclusion criteria. It included links to the consent form via Qualtrics and a sign-up for the one-to-one virtual interviews. Once the signup was accessed, participants selected a date and time for the one-to-one virtual interviews. Participants accessed the Zoom link via the signup forum.

**Inclusion Criteria**
Participants in this study met the following inclusion criteria for this study:

(a) Were physically disabled and or chronically ill young adults.

(b) Were between the ages of 18 to 27 years old.

(c) Had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in high school.

(d) Attended high school in the United States.

(e) Spoke English as their primary language.

Eight people consented to participate in this study after they received the direct message with the link to the consent form via Qualtrics and the Sign Up Genius link. All eight participants met the required inclusion criteria.

Of the eight participants in this research study, two resided in California, two in the District of Columbia, one from Maryland, one from Iowa, one from New Jersey, and one from Illinois. Figure 2 provides a visual of each participant's location.

**Instrumentation**

One-to-one virtual interviews and an artifact creation were used to solicit information from the participants about their post-high school transition planning services and how the services prepared them for life after high school. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to obtain information through questions where the participants could expand on a topic and share personal stories that answered each question (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Additionally, I sought to learn more about participants’ experiences by creating artifacts that were unique to each participant. The rationale for utilizing artifacts as a data collection method is that my study aimed to amplify voices by making meaning of their lived experiences through reflective practices (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012). Each artifact was created after the interview which
allowed participants to reflect on the information they shared during the interview and further elaborate on their previously provided interview responses. Additionally, because of the varying abilities of each participant, allowing participants to complete the artifact creation within their own timeframe and with their own choice of the medium provided greater flexibility and access for how each participant could better express their feelings of their postsecondary transition journey. It is important to note that because of the unique abilities and complexities of disability, the choice to use artifact creation was important to this study because the participant could manage when they could complete the artifact based on their schedule, energy level, and other disability related needs. The individual interviews were completed before the artifacts so the artifacts could be used to corroborate the interview data. Additionally, Rowsell (2011) shares that the use of artifact data also aids in increasing participant engagement as the participants reflect more upon their previously stated interview responses. The artifacts were analyzed separately after the interviews. The process for analyzing the artifacts was inductive coding analytic memoing (Miles et al., 2014), and the findings were compared to the interview data when I considered the potential for new themes.
Interviews

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom. Each interview participant was asked ten questions and approximately five sub-questions. The interviews took approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Participants were given written directions following the interview to complete the artifact creation. Upon completing the artifact, participants posted it on Padlet, a platform for data submission.

The following questions, sub-questions, were asked to each participant during a one-to-one semi-structured Zoom interview:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, how you identify as a person with a disability, and why you signed up to participate in this study?
2. Think back- As a student with a physical disability or chronic illness, can you tell me about your feelings towards school?
   i) Middle school?
   ii) High school?
3. What did you envision doing after high school? How is it similar or different to what you are doing now?
   i) Consider career
   ii) Consider education
   iii) Consider independent living
4. How do you define success?
   i) What does success look like for you in the following areas
   ii) Social success
   iii) Career success
   iv) Independent living
5. What is your experience with your IEP transition plan?
   i) Do you recall anyone in middle or high school working with you to help you plan for your future? What did that look like?
   ii) What was your transition plan?
   iii) How did your transition programming prepare you?
6. What does a successful college (postsecondary) life look like for you? If there were no barriers.
7. Are there any policy barriers that contribute to or hinder your success? What are they, and how do they impact you?
8. Have you experienced any barriers directly related to your disability when trying to obtain your goals? Can you provide some examples?
9. What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support PWD?
10. Would you be willing to create an artifact that represents how you felt about your transition from high school and post it on an online forum, Padlet, with other people who have been asked these same interview questions? Examples of an artifact include a painting, a song, poem, picture, etc. If so, I have the Padlet link and calendar reminder invite for you in the chat.

Artifact Creation

Rowsell (2011) explains that the purpose of artifacts is to provide a multimodality experience that enhances the narrative. My research study focused on reflection and making meaning so participants could recall their transition journey (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012). The artifacts created for this research study add meaning, provide more information from the interview responses, and serve as a reflective piece for the participants (Pezalla, 2012). For example, participants were asked to provide an artifact in the form of infographics, poetry, or digital art to explain their experiences living, navigating, and learning while having a physical disability or managing chronic illness.

The last question during the interview was to gage if the participants would be willing to and interested in creating an artifact that illustrates and represents their current feelings about their postsecondary transition journey. The six participants who expressed interest in creating an artifact were given directions for completing the artifact verbally during the interview and in writing with a follow up message. The participants who indicated willingness were asked to create a visual that exemplifies their current feelings about their postsecondary transition journey. I provided broad examples of what an artifact could look like, including a poem, drawing, digital graphic. The purpose of keeping the artifact creation guidelines broad was to allow for flexibility in the modality as it is important in energy conservation. While six
participants agreed to engage in the artifact creation, it is important to note that two participants asked additional clarifying questions about when the artifacts were due. I replied with further explanation and asked for the participants to have the artifacts posted as early as possible and before the winter holidays. Due to the time constraint and other responsibilities, these two participants declined after seeking further clarification. One participant, Hunter, declined, stating “I honestly don’t have the time for this [artifact creation] because of things I need to do, but it’s a cool idea.” His response was indicative of the challenges physically disabled and/or chronically ill people face when managing complex disability access needs.

Previous bodies of research focused on other disability categories and/or voices of educators and families (Hamdani et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2019; Pangalila et al., 2015). However, the purpose of my research study is to bridge the gap in literature by exploring, analyzing, and amplifying the voices of physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults who have been historically underrepresented (Hitchings et al., 2005; Baer et al., 2007; Mello et al., 2020).

**Researcher as Instrument**

As a physically disabled and chronically ill researcher and special education teacher, my lived experiences benefit how I view the research (Xu & Storr, 2017). Additionally, utilizing the researcher as a central instrument creates comfort, courage, and empathy for the participants (Pezalla, 2012 & Rowsell, 2011).

**Informed Consent and Protection of Human Subjects**

Privacy and ethical considerations are crucial to any research study, and precautionary privacy protection methods were exercised throughout my research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Carspecken & Saxena, 2022). Because the population of my research study consists of people
with physical disabilities, a uniquely protected minority group, ethical considerations were at the forefront of my research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Beginning with recruitment procedures, permissions were obtained from each of the four community Facebook groups before posting my research flyer. When the research flyer was posted, participants who met the inclusion criteria were asked to send a private direct message or email to me, where they would be given the consent form via Qualtrics and the Sign Up Genius to schedule a Zoom interview. The Sign-Up Genius was anonymous, so other participants could not see who else had signed up to participate in this research study. Once participants scheduled a Zoom interview, they were provided a copy of their signed consent form via private messenger. When participants entered the Zoom meeting room for their scheduled one-to-one interview, they were renamed before being admitted. After the participants were welcomed and thanked for participating in the research study, I reviewed the consent form and asked if they had any questions. Additionally, because of the sensitive and emotional nature of this research study, participants were reminded that they could skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering and could stop participation in the research study at any time without fear of judgment.

Privacy

Participants faced minimal privacy risks because their names were changed before entering the Zoom interview. Messages to confirm meeting times were used and deleted after the interviews. During the interviews, if participants named other individuals or specific schools/districts, the information was redacted to protect the participants' confidentiality. Those participating in the artifact creation were provided with a password protected Padlet to post their artifact creation under their pseudonym.
Mild Discomfort

Due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions, there was a minimal risk of discomfort. Participants could skip questions or stop participating at any time during the study without fear of judgment (Cresswell, 2000).

Confidentiality

Participants were asked to refrain from using the names of any persons, schools, or school districts. If they did, the name was redacted from the transcript and any study products. Actual names were not used in any reports or publications.

Procedures

I utilized semi-structure interview questions based on my professional and personal experiences as a disabled teacher (Reich, 2021; Carspecken & Saxena, 2022). As an additional form of data collection, participants were asked to create an artifact that represents their feelings about their high school transition process and post it online to Padlet.

The following section describes the stages of my data collection procedures, including recruitment, one-on-one interviews, and artifact creation.

Figure 3

Study Procedures
Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the following Facebook groups: Living with M.D., Women Living with Muscular Dystrophy, SMA Support System, and Living with Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy. A research flyer was posted on each group site to provide information about the study. Participants were asked to privately message the PI on Facebook Messenger to express an interest in participating. A reply message was sent, and a link to Qualtrics, where the consent form will be posted, was included. The message also included a link to Sign Up Genius, where the participant selected a date and time or indicated they were unavailable on any of the proposed dates. Each participant was asked to provide an email address to confirm an interview date and time. A copy of the consent form was also attached to the reply message.

Data Analysis Procedures

There were two phases of qualitative analysis for the interview data and one phase of analysis for the artifacts. The first phase of coding interviews was predominantly deductive, although I added one unplanned code as I analyzed the contents of the interviews. This phase consisted of identifying relevant themes from the literature and creating codes before reviewing the interview transcripts. I then aligned each participant's statements, phrases, and words with the predetermined codes and the one new code that emerged (Saldana, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). The codes were translated to themes at the end of the first phase.

The second phase of coding interviews was inductive, and, in this phase, I reviewed the transcripts line by line looking for direct quotes from the participants to support the predetermined themes I maintained in phase one (Miles, et al., 2014). Finally, I used inductive coding and a form of analytic memoing (Miles et al., 2014) to analyze the artifacts.
**Interview Analysis Phase 1 Coding**

Deductive coding was used to analyze the interview transcripts for the first round of analysis. Deductive coding allows the researcher to isolate predetermined codes that are present in the relative literature, theoretical framework, research questions, or aims consistent with the research study (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 74). I initially identified 230 codes but as I transcribed the data, I recognized the need to drop many of the codes. These codes were removed because either none of my data aligned with a code or I found the code fit into another code. The codes that I initially maintained were 1) Quality of Life (Farquhar, 1995; Kim et al., 2020; Wan et al., 2019), 2) Personal Growth (cite), 3) Independence (cite), 4) Community (Swinton, 2012), 5) Embracing Disability as Identity (Michailakis, 2003), and 6) Resilience (cite). One new code, Accessibility, not previously identified was added as I analyzed the data during this first round. My process included color-coding the statements, phrases, and words from each of the transcripts and then sorting them by placing them into an Excel spreadsheet under the chosen codes. Ultimately, I determined that these seven codes would become my overarching themes.

**Inductive Coding**

Inductive coding was used for the second phase of coding. I reread each transcript line by line looking for phrases and words that emphasized a participant’s experience, quality of experience, and emotion related to their experience (Miles, et al., 2014). Inductive coding supported the recurring themes that were established within the initial phase of qualitative analysis (Saldana, 2016). I then created four sub-themes within one of the themes of Accessibility and one subtheme within the theme of Independence.
Artifact Analysis

Participants completed the artifact data and posted poetry, photos, infographics, and vectors with personal narratives and captions to express their transition experiences to a Padlet platform I established for this purpose. These artifacts were then reviewed and analyzed to find these underlying themes embedded within the data. This information was added to a newly designated area of the Excel spreadsheet. I loosely used a form of content analysis with analytic memoing to guide me as I interpreted the meaning of each artifact. Content analysis allows the researcher to apply an iterative process of reinterpreting and redefining artifacts until the researcher is satisfied the participant’s intent is achieved (Krippendorff, 2004 as cited in White & Marsh, 2006). I developed a four-step process for analyzing the artifacts and applied the process twice.

**First-Round Analysis.** In the first round of analysis, I 1) wrote a description of the artifact, 2) wrote my thoughts about its intended meaning, 3) looked for a relationship to my second research question, and then considered potential relationships to the themes that resulted from the interviews.

**Second-Round Analysis.** After the first analysis, I reread my description and added to and revised the details slightly for each of them. I then discussed the deidentified artifacts with my intercoder and my advisor to reconsider the intended meaning. I did this as a measure to protect the validity and limit the potential bias I brought to the study. Additionally, I engaged in informal conversations with members of the Disability Community about the themes such as Quality of Life, Independence, and Accessibility. Having these conversations with my community allowed me to think more deeply about the artifacts as I continued to review and enhance my understanding of their meaning. I then reexamined the artifact looking for a
relationship to all the research questions, especially research question 1.3. Finally, I looked for a relationship to the themes resulting from the interviews.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, the level of confidence associated with what the researcher has reported can be established by acknowledging the important factors in the research questions and then explicitly and completely describing the ways in which these facets are reflected in the data gathered (Stahl & King, 2020). Trustworthiness is also established when the researcher takes steps to be sure the participants’ intent is accurate and provides a strong and thorough description of the results. I attempted to assert confidence by member checking each transcript, using reflective techniques such as documenting my ideas and discussing them with my peer researchers, as well as using two means of data collection to enhance the participants’ stories.

I collected two types of data for my research study: interviews and artifacts. The interviews and the artifact creation data points complement the content provided to support and answer the research questions. I developed the interview questions for this research study as the researcher who also has insider knowledge of issues and questions that the physically disabled community faces. Carspecken and Saxena (2022) explain that having love and empathy for others in your community, specifically, the participants engaging in the research increases credibility as they are comfortable and authentic.

**Limitations**

Quantitative research deals with numbers and data sets, and many quantitative researchers express concerns about validity and quality within qualitative research, which deals with words and phrases (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). Concerns surrounding validity and quality in qualitative research include how data is collected and analyzed.
**Threats to Descriptive Validity**

Descriptive validity, a primary aspect of validity in qualitative research, accurately represents the data seen or heard (Maxwell, 1992). To support quality and validity, Orb et al. (2001) suggest recording and transcribing interviews to ensure that the information gained from the participants accurately reflects what they shared (Orb et al., 2001; Maxwell, 1992). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom and reviewed by me at least twice. In addition, I addressed this concern by using member checking, which allowed each participant to review their transcribed interview and provide clarification if necessary. As an added layer of validation, member checking was used. Each participant received a follow-up message from me with a copy of their transcript to review for accuracy. Participants responded with clarifying information as necessary.

**Threats Related to Interview Questions & Process.** I developed the interview questions as the researcher based on research and my lived experiences. Additionally, the interview questions were presented to the individual participants in an order that supported the flow of the individual interview conversation. As the researcher, I acknowledge and account for the variability in the interview structure, which may have impacted how the participants responded.

**Threats to the Artifact Process and Limitations of Using Artifacts.** Although I provided some directives on creating the artifact, I intended to allow the participants to decide for themselves what the process of constructing them would be and what materials they would use. Because there was no rubric to reference for the artifact creation or for analysis, as this allowed for additional subjectivity in my interpretations. The lack of a structured process created some variability and made my analysis of each artifact differ. Only six of the eight participants chose
to create an artifact as two participants declined because they did not have the time or energy to commit to such a task.

My lived and professional experience as a physically disabled special education teacher both assisted and limited my ability to code accurately. While I have the knowledge of the barriers faced, and the professional experience of what is required for postsecondary transition programming, my bias as a disabled person may have led me to interpret a participant’s intent through my own lens.

**Transferability**

My research focused solely on people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses in the US who were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-seven. Although postsecondary research exists for other disability categories, there is limited research on this topic as it pertains to people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. Although a wide range of factors impact how an individual experiences and navigates postsecondary life, this study aimed to amplify voices and inform educational transition practices.

**State laws and regulations.** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal mandate, yet states can decide how to implement and execute mandates. For instance, in Pennsylvania, the state determined that the age at which transition planning must begin is fourteen, yet in another state, the age is sixteen. The varying state requirements, local government regulations, and the states where my participants reside (these mandates) impact their experiences with the IEP processes.

**Review of Positionality**

Reich (2021) argues that the value of qualitative research is “not qualitative simply because it encodes for the ability “to get closer” to the phenomenon being studied, so much as it
is anchored by a methodological obligation to critically examine how and why that closeness matters” (p. 575). This research study is important to me because, as an individual born with a physical disability, I did not experience K-12 education in the same way a nondisabled person experienced it. Furthermore, my transition from high school to post-high school was challenging because my IEP team was unaware of my options and the systemic political barriers I would encounter when I obtained competitive gainful employment (Brooke et al., 2009). Before the middle of high school, and perhaps even in my early twenties, being disabled brought me feelings of shame, anxiety, and frustration. Still, now I embrace my identity as a disabled person with a physical and chronic illness. This research is close to my heart and personal because despite the frustration associated with my post-high school transition process, I have always thought of how to help make this better for the people who come after me, specifically my students.

My position as a special education teacher allows me to relate to my students in a way that a seemingly non-disabled teacher cannot. Because of my privilege and closeness to the transition process, I can question traditional ableist transition processes so that my students can benefit from disability-empowered educational practices (Reich, 2021).

**Summary**

This research study aimed to amplify the voices of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. In contrast, previous bodies of research have focused on other voices and perspectives (Hamdani et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2019; Pangalila et al., 2015). By interviewing people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses and providing them the opportunity to create an artifact that represents their experiences of their transition journey, I
hope that the narrative surrounding physical and chronic disabilities will be shifted to elevate the voices of people who experience these related disabilities.

This chapter describes the methods proposed and utilized for this qualitative research study. In this research study, I strived to explore the experiences, journeys, and feelings of physically disabled young adults who have navigated the post-high school transition process. I utilized qualitative research methodologies, including one-to-one interviews and artifact creation, to capture and illustrate participants’ feelings on the post-high school transition process. I also included information about my participants, recruitment procedures, instrumentation, positionality, credibility, and data collection information. In the following chapter, I present my findings.
Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to amplify the voices and experiences of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses as they transitioned from high school to post-high school life. My research study utilized two main theoretical frameworks as a lens through which the participants’ experiences were analyzed. My theoretical frameworks were Disability Studies and Disability Studies in Education. This chapter contains the results of this qualitative research study conducted to answer the research questions and sub-questions below:

1. What are the career, education, and social experiences of individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses post-high school?
   
   o Research Sub-Question 1: What successes have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?
   
   o Research Sub-Question 2: What barriers have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life?
   
   o Research Sub-Question 3: Looking back, what do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses wish they could have learned, or how could they have been better prepared for their career, education, and social life?

2. How do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses illustrate/represent current feelings about their high school transition process, and what are the common themes within their representations?
Research Sub-Question 1: What suggestions do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses have for improving high school transition programs?

This chapter also includes a discussion about the analysis conducted, which was consistent with qualitative methodology, and the research questions that were investigated. Additionally, this chapter provides a brief introduction to each participant to complement the data summary. Furthermore, this chapter outlines how the eight individual Zoom interviews and artifact creations were transcribed to reveal common themes and codes that align with my research questions. There were two levels of coding for the Zoom interviews and the artifact creations. Following each coding phase, intercoder reliability was utilized to ensure the reliability of the interview and the collected artifact creation data.

The Study Participants

This study consisted of eight individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses who were between 18 and 27 years old. Participants were recruited from across the United States, met the inclusion criteria of having an individual education program (IEP), and spoke English as their primary language. This section introduces the eight participants who shared their experiences of navigating life with a physical disability post-high school. The following sections introduces the eight participants with the information they provided during the one-to-one virtual interviews. It is important to note that the qualities and characteristics of each participant are reflective of the information shared in the interview. Each individual shared what they felt comfortable with in relation to their disability, living situation, and other personally identifying information. Due to the nature of the study and the communities of which each
participant was recruited from, pseudonyms were assigned and identifying information was redacted in order to maintain confidentiality.

**Pricilla**

Pricilla is 23 years old and lives in Washington, D.C. She went to school and grew up in Maryland. Upon graduating from high school, she attended an Ivy League University, majoring in public and international affairs and minoring in journalism and gender and sexuality studies. She graduated from an Ivy League University with the class of 2022. Currently, she works for the Department of Health and Human Services. It is also important to note that Pricilla attended college during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Maria**

Maria is 22 years old, has Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), and currently lives in Washington, D.C. Maria grew up and went to school in New Jersey and attended college in New Jersey. After graduating with her undergraduate degree, Maria moved to D.C. to start her master's in Public Policy. Maria experienced college during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which she shared that “it was like having two high school transitions.”

**Marabella**

Marabella has Spinal Muscular Atrophy type II and was diagnosed at 11 months. She uses a power wheelchair to navigate the world around her. Currently, Marabella lives at home with her parents and two younger siblings and works as a therapist. In the interview, Marabella commented, "Having SMA makes me a better therapist, to be honest. Because I can have, like, a deeper understanding of, like, the difficulties that people have because I have also, you know, my own set of struggles.” Furthermore, Marabella expressed interest in my research study because she has not found that many studies focus on Quality of Life for people with SMA.
**Abby**

Abby is 26 years old and has a rare form of Muscular Dystrophy (MD), which requires her to use a wheelchair and assisted ventilation to support her breathing. Abby lives with her husband, who is her primary care attendant. Recently, she moved to Illinois because of waiver programming services and had trouble obtaining appropriate care attendant services in her previous state of residence. Because of her experiences, Abby does a lot of advocacy work surrounding creating awareness of marriage penalties for disabled people.

**Hunter**

Hunter is 24 years old and has Spinal Muscular Atrophy type II, but his abilities reflect closer to a type III. He is currently a math teacher, and his undergraduate degree is in Psychology. Hunter is also furthering his education by pursuing his master's degree in psychology, where he hopes to become a clinical therapist. Throughout his undergraduate experience, Hunter lives at home, where his parents can serve as his care attendants. Upon hearing about my research study, Hunter expressed that he was “disappointed when I started going to college. Very disappointed.” Hunter hopes to use his experiences and clinical skill set to help people persevere through challenging times.

**Nadine**

Nadine is 22 years old, has Spinal Muscular Atrophy type II, and has a service dog to assist with her activities of daily living. She is about to finish her Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at a University in the Midwest where Nadine commutes to campus each day. Nadine’s sole focus is school; however, she also tutors math. After graduating from the University in May, Nadine hopes to work in her field of study at an engineering company.
Taylor

Taylor is 25 years old, has Spinal Muscular Atrophy type II, and lives in New Jersey with her parents. Taylor has used a power wheelchair since the onset of her disability at 11 months of age. Taylor is an advocate for disabled people who experience mental health concerns. Last year, Taylor was accepted to a university out west, and when she can attend college, she hopes to major in Writing. Her goal is to write about disability and shed light on the triumphs and tribulations we face as members of the SMA community. Additionally, she hopes to share her experiences as a disabled person and encourage others to see the bright side of disability.

Josh

Josh is 23 years old, has Spinal Muscular Atrophy type II, and uses a power wheelchair to navigate the world around him. Josh lives and goes to school in California, where he spearheaded and transformed the college’s Disability Student Union. After graduating high school, Josh went to community college for his first two years, then transferred to a four-year college for the remainder of his undergraduate education. Now Josh lives on campus, where he is getting his master's degree, and does a lot of policy and advocacy work at the collegiate level. Because of Josh’s work in policy and advocacy combined with his lived experiences, he “sees the importance of building a community that starts with students.”

Each individual who participated in my research study has a physical disability and/or chronic illness that contributes to their experience of the world. Because of their disabled privilege, they agreed to share about their post-high school transition journey. This next section of my chapter describes the coding and analysis of the eight individual Zoom interviews.
Phase One Coding

Predetermined codes that align with postsecondary education and training literature were utilized for the initial round of qualitative data analysis (Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Will, 1983). Because deductive coding consists of applying predetermined terms (Saldana, 2016), the following six codes were identified: Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community and Belonging, and Disability and Identity. After I coded the first interview transcript, I added the code Accessibility.

Code One: Quality of Life

Although the term Quality of Life is often highlighted in healthcare research, focusing on end-of-life and disease progression (Farquhar, 1995), this category emphasizes disabled individuals’ overall feelings about social life, physical health, attitudes toward work, and sense of self-worth. Forty-two items in this theme related to the individual's experiences with their post-high school career, employment, and independent living readiness.

Code Two: Resilience

Resilience occurs when an individual is faced with challenges and can recover and bounce back from circumstances. The Resilience category highlighted participants' experiences and how navigating challenges made them emotionally stronger in middle and high school as they transitioned to post-high school life and after. This category particularly sheds light on the individuals' attitudes and thought processes as they navigated medical issues and systemic barriers while learning to advocate for themselves within the K-12 setting and beyond. Twenty-nine of these items were relevant to this code.
**Code Three: Personal Growth**

This category of personal growth provided insight into each participant's journey as they accepted the reality of what it looks like to live independently while living with a disability and learned to embrace and celebrate disabled life. Within this category, participants shared their goals and how those goals have adjusted over time to fit their current realities while remaining true to their missions. Eleven of these items helped to articulate participants’ pride in their ability to advocate for themselves within the special education process.

**Code Four: Independence**

This category of independence highlighted a range of things that constitute the individual participants' ability to more freely navigate the small and large decisions leading to greater autonomy. The key topics discussed within the category include the necessity of a personal care assistant, support systems, state and federal policies that inhibit their ability to be as independent as they desire, life hacks that have been self-developed to increase independence, and their ability to obtain higher education and/or employment. Forty-five of these items were identified under the code *Independence*.

**Code Five: Community and Belonging**

According to Swinton (2012), disability is often defined as a form of difference historically associated with a negative part of the human experience (2012). This category of community and belonging highlighted the importance of finding people who “just get it” and the shared experiences that create a sense of belonging within the Disability Community. Additionally, within this category, participants identified feelings associated with belonging within friend groups, the middle school and high school years, and post-high school life, as well
as the stigmatization and alienation they experienced within the educational setting. Twenty-five items were categorized under the code *Community and Belonging*.

**Code Six: Disability and Identity**

The category of disability and identity included 22 items about the language each participant uses surrounding disability, how their disability is an asset in their career, and how their disability has propelled them towards their goals. Additionally, this category emphasizes how disability permeates every aspect of their lives.

**Code Seven: Accessibility**

The category of accessibility refers not only to physical accessibility but also to access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, reasonable accommodations, relationships, and knowledge of the varying interagency supports. Furthermore, Accessibility addresses the systemic barriers, both social and political barriers, that impact a disabled person’s ability to achieve their desired outcomes. Forty-two items were categorized under the code Accessibility. Six themes from the codes were developed, and then identified supporting statements from the interviews were used to exemplify the themes.

Figure 4 represents a relationship between the emerging themes. I saw the contributions quality of life, sense of community and belonging, independence, and accessibility made to the participants’ overall personal growth and identity.
The visual emerged in my mind as my intercoder, Payton, and I discussed my coding process and examples. I could not help but visualize how the themes were connected, related to, and built upon each other. As she and I discussed our rationale for coding, I envisioned a staircase where specific codes lead to different codes. I created a very basic image showing how the themes are connected.

Accessibility is a fundamental human right for every person (Ashford, 2007; Mitee, 2017). Accessibility in this research includes access to education, resources, relationships, and
knowledge of resources while navigating sociopolitical barriers (cite). For example, Maria, age 22, described her experiences navigating resources and systems post-high school. When asked about barriers she has faced that are directly related to her disability, she said:

Like, all these things that I’m probably entitled to from the government, I just don’t know about them, and I don’t, like, that’s the other thing, I’m pretty smart, like, I have a degree, and I can read things and understand them. And I don’t understand half this [Medicaid waiver programming] stuff.

To further exemplify the sociopolitical barriers faced by disabled and chronically ill people, Abby, age 26, shared that “moving out was her biggest barrier because of [her] need for care” and stated, “I definitely didn’t know what a Medicaid waiver was.”

Independence is the second step of the visual. This code consists of topics and sub-themes surrounding the need for personal care assistants required to maintain the desired level of independence, the self-made support systems among the Disability Community, and the varying life hacks that are exchanged that provide space for problem-solving mundane life tasks. Additionally, Independence addresses the state and federal policies that impact the individual’s level of independence. Furthermore, participants expressed their appreciation and love for education as it provided a pathway towards their independence. Pricilla, age 23, explains that success looks like living independently. Furthermore, when asked about what success looks like for her, Pricilla said:

I wasn’t exactly sure how to figure out if I could [live independently], and I worked hard throughout high school with physical and occupational therapy to learn all of the independent living skills I needed to live away from my parents and on my own. And I made it.
The codes of Community & Belonging and Quality of Life follow Independence.

Community & Belonging in my research study highlights the importance of people who “just get disability.” Based upon the expertise of each individual interviewed, sharing the disabled lived experiences among the Disability Community provides us a sense of unity. Additionally, participants in my research study expressed the importance of nondisabled allies and how these experiences influenced their middle school, high school, and post-high school years.

Subcategories of stigmatization and alienation occurred daily within the social and educational settings. When asked about social success, Maria shared the comfort she finds within her friend group: “Friends who do things for me as we got to a point where they could take my jacket off. Additionally, when Taylor was asked about success, she shared:

   It’s just, like, being able to celebrate all the big wins with my community, and just, like, I don’t know, be involved, in, like, activism, and advocacy, and stuff like that. That’s what makes me happy and makes me feel like I’m successful.

On the contrary, Pricilla explained that she didn’t have a lot of disabled role models, and that’s why she thinks this research is so important. She did explain however, that she connected with a few people she met at a summer camp when they allowed her to visit them and see what it was really like going away to college as a wheelchair user.

**Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder reliability is utilized in qualitative research to confirm the reliability and credibility of the data collected. This process involves two or more researchers reviewing a designated percentage of the data, coding separately, and discussing results to agree (Bellotto, 2018).
**Intercoder Credentials**

The intercoder, Payton, has over a decade of lived and professional experiences as a level II Pennsylvania public school educator. Additionally, Payton has a master's degree plus 60 credits. When analyzing and discussing data, Payton was able to lend a different, perhaps less biased perspective as a nondisabled person.

**First Round Intercoder Reliability.** In this qualitative research study, I, as the primary investigator (PI), met with another researcher, Payton, virtually via Zoom to intercode my data. For the first coding phase, I had 230 items (words and phrases) that I extracted from the eight Zoom interviews and six artifact creations. Using a spreadsheet, Payton coded 15 percent of the 230 items for a total of 35 items. She then categorized the items into seven categories. Before our intercoder discussion, Payton and I independently agreed upon 22 out of the 35 codes for an initial intercoder rate of 62.8 percent. We disagreed on 13 out of the 35 codes. We met the following day via Zoom to discuss our understanding of the codes, provide insight, and consider our biases: Payton’s nondisabled privilege and my disabled biases. We recorded this discussion using features on Zoom so that I could review notes. Following our intercoder discussion, we agreed on 33 out of 35 coded items for a 94% accuracy rating.

Ultimately, at the end of the first phase of coding, seven codes emerged. They were Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community and Belonging, Disability and Identity, and Accessibility. Next, I will discuss the second phase, the of coding.

**Results of the Phase Two Coding**

In the second cycle of coding, I looked for direct quotes from the participants to support the previously identified themes that emerged in phase one of coding (Saldena, 2016). The outcome of the second phase of coding did not yield any additional themes. Therefore, the
themes remained Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community & Belonging, Disability Identity, and Accessibility. However, sub-themes emerged for many of these second-round codes, to include accessible policies, accessibility and safety, access to education and careers, options for postsecondary life, and political barriers.

**Phase Two Subthemes**

Five subthemes emerged as a result of the second round of phase two coding analysis procedures. Three of these subthemes fell under the accessibility theme.

**Accessible Policies.** This subtheme consists of written and understood policies that have a direct impact on how PWD navigate and live their lives.

**Accessibility and Safety.** This subtheme consists of participants’ comments in relation to emergency and safety procedures within the K-12 and higher education settings.

**Access to Education and Careers.** This subtheme consists of participants’ comments that exemplify the increased need to access educational supports and resources. Additionally, this subtheme accounts for an increased need to access community supports which assists PWD in obtaining the substantial gainful employment that they desire.

**Options for Postsecondary Life.** This subtheme consists of participants’ comments that highlight the need for increased postsecondary education and training options specifically for people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

**Political Barriers.** This subtheme consists of participants’ comments that do not align with Disability Studies and Disability Studies in Education theorists (Pfeiffer, 2001).
**Second Round Intercoding Reliability**

Payton and I once again met to check for consistencies in coding. I isolated 15% of the data (29 items) for Payton to review. Initially we found 79% agreement, once we discussed our differences, we arrived at 100% intercoder agreement.

**Results Addressing the Research Questions**

The following section of this chapter reviews my data in relation to each research question and sub-question while aligning the data with the specific themes found through the coding phase of data analysis.

**RQ1 Career, Education, and Social Experiences**

In Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), employment, post-high school education and training, and independent living are required goal areas for any student of transition age. State and federal statutes mandate these goal areas to ensure that students with IEPs are adequately prepared to enter post-high school life (Targetta et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995; Will, 1983). My first research question sought to understand the career, education, and social experiences of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses as they navigated life after high school.

My first research question is: What are the career, education, and social experiences of individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses post-high school? To address this research question further, there are three sub-questions: (1) What successes have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life? (2) What barriers have individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses experienced in their career, education, and social life? (3) Looking back, what do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses wish they could have learned, or how could
they have been better prepared for their career, education, and social life? The following sections contain the data that addresses my first research question and the three sub-questions.

**Successes Experienced in Career, Education, and Social Life**

My first sub-question sought to understand the post-high school successful career, education, and social experiences of people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses as they navigated life after high school. Through the coding process, I ultimately identified four central themes emerging from the codes: Quality of Life, Independence, Personal Growth, and Community and Belonging. In the following sections, I analyze the responses to the individual interviews and share my analysis of each theme with examples for support.

**Successes Leading to Quality of Life.** Quality of life is illustrated through participants’ discussion around their success and how policies did or did not contribute to their successful postsecondary goals. For example, during the interview, Priscilla described her education as successfully preparing her for higher education:

I went to a public school, but it was very, very rigorous, and it [going to college] was kind of the most popular track for people to go down. So, there was never really a question in my mind about whether I would go to college. But what I didn’t totally expect, maybe when I was thirteen or fourteen, was that I would leave the city for college and be able to live entirely on my own at college. And now, in my post-high school life, I knew that’s what I wanted to do.

She had options due to the post-high school education she pursued, and she initially wanted to be an English teacher because she believed so strongly in the power of education. Furthermore, she saw this as a viable career path for her. Before living on campus, Pricilla explained that she did not expect to leave the city and live independently for college as many of
her nondisabled peers would. However, she knew she wanted to live in college in her post-high school life, so she made that her reality. Living on campus during college increased Pricilla’s quality of life. She could enjoy a typical college experience commensurate with her nondisabled peers. When Priscilla was asked about her career success, she stated that doing something she loves and gives her purpose is important because she is mission driven. Working in a field that Pricilla is passionate about provides her with a sense of purpose, provides meaning in everyday mundane tasks, and increases her overall quality of life.

When Maria was asked to define what success looks like for her, she said, “I mean, success is just staying alive, like genuinely – like, my goal in life is to not get sick and to eat three meals a day and to sleep.” She further explained that starting adult life is so hard for her because it is so hard for her to get her basic needs met. Therefore, other goals are not a priority at this time. She clarified that she has other goals but is working on ensuring her basic needs are met. In her interview, Maria said, “I don’t have time or energy to be successful in other ways.”

During her individual interview, Marabella described herself as super social and super involved, and she always had a lot of friends. She also shared that she feels like there is not a lot of emphasis on the quality of life for people with disabilities compared to nondisabled people. When talking about social interactions that improved her life, Marabella says she thinks she feels socially successful and fulfilled. She also said that at work and in her career, she feels valued because she feels like she is doing meaningful work.

When Abby was asked what success looks like for her, she shared that everything in her life is filtered through the lens of her faith. Her faith governed her everyday interactions and guided her when things became challenging. When explicitly asked about Abby’s social success, she shared that she has always struggled with being a people-pleaser, and success for her is not
being a people-pleaser. Changing her responses to others would improve her life. Additionally, Abby shared that policies dramatically impact her and her husband’s quality of life, she explained, “For us, as disabled people, I think policies, they have a huge dramatic impact on our quality of life. Not only my life, but my husband’s life.” This comment shared by Abby highlights the challenges she has faced when trying to find qualified PCAs to fulfill her shifts and help her with her ADLs.

During his individual Zoom interview, when Hunter was asked what success looks like for him in terms of career, education, and social life, his answers closely aligned with the theme of Quality of Life. Hunter described his life as being good when he was able to go out with friends at a moment’s notice and enjoy time with his friends. He further elaborated that being able to do whatever you want to do regardless of the setting is a success. Regarding career success, Hunter stated that since you spend at least eight hours of the day at your job, “you may as well enjoy it.” Hunter disclosed that, at first, it was extremely difficult for him to find a job, and he wondered if his disability partially contributed to his lengthy job search. When Hunter was asked about his educational success, he described that his transition to college was disappointing because he had to live at home rather than stay on campus. Hunter’s inability to live on campus negatively impacted his social life as he was not able to participate in many of the extracurricular activities offered because of his transportation situation.

Nadine was asked what success looked like for her, she shared that she felt successful because she attended a prestigious college, did well in her engineering major, and will graduate in May. Because Nadine’s primary job is at school, she could not speak to what career success currently looks like. However, she shared that career success would be moving somewhere across the country to work for one of the big medical engineering firms.
When Josh was asked what success is regarding career, social life, and education, his responses aligned closely with the theme of Quality of Life. Josh shared that he didn’t have a career plan but knew he wanted to go to college. Josh shared that the lack of a plan was a bit scary when moving away from home. He further explained that not knowing what the accommodations looked like and how to access them for the SAT and ACT scared him because he knew these exams were necessary for college admittance. Because Josh did not know the accommodations, he leaned more toward attending community college right after high school. Additionally, when Josh was asked about success, he said, “I can’t imagine, you know if you told me what I would be doing now when I was back in high school, I wouldn’t have believed you. I just, you know, didn’t know it was possible.”

In summary, each participant provided a narrative describing an attitude, belief, or experiences relating to how their life was shaped. Overall, their comments suggest a general understanding of their quality of life. The following section analyzes each participant’s narrative as it relates to their success leading to independence.

**Successes Leading to Independence.** The theme of independence incorporated comments about successful independent living outcomes and their abilities to make choices and decisions that impacted their lives.

Several of Priscilla’s responses to the interview questions relating to success closely aligned with the theme of Independence. Priscilla stated, “I think perhaps because there are a lot of physical activities I could not do, I really dove into my schoolwork from a very young age, and I would guess, I would assume that that is fairly common for us.” When describing her educational experience, Priscilla said she always knew she wanted to attend college because she cared about education and recognized her academic potential. However, Priscilla explained that
she wasn’t exactly sure if she could live independently at college and, as a result, worked with outside support to ensure that she could live independently at college. Furthermore, Priscilla described her experience of living at college as really rewarding.

Some of Maria’s responses to the interview questions relating to success described her independent lifestyle. Maria shared that she lived with a personal care assistant (PCA) in college. When asked about social success, Maria said she needs to sleep and wear clothes; she further explained that activities of daily living (ADLs) are probably the biggest things that no one talks about, even though they contribute to your ability to be independent. Maria also shared that she is currently trying to figure out Medicare and Social Security, which is challenging. She further explained that she grew up in a household that instilled the mentality of “you don’t need help; you just need to figure it out on your own.” Additionally, Maria explained that there doesn’t seem to be a middle ground [regarding Medicare and Social Security] because you are either completely dependent or don’t need any help.

Marabella’s responses to the interview questions related to success closely aligned with the theme of Independence. When describing her career success, Marabella said being a therapist is “something that I can do physically as well because it’s not a physical job at all.” She further explained that she wants to help people and that “this is something that I can do, like, within my scope of limitations.” As a closing thought about success, Marabella described success as “doing what you want, following your plan, like, if you’re happy, you’re successful, and if you can provide, like, the things you want to provide for yourself, you’re successful.”

Abby’s responses to the interview questions about success closely aligned with the theme of Independence. Abby described social and independent living success as having a choice over how your life is lived. She followed this comment up with an example where she stated, “So, you
know, not having other people tell you, ‘Okay, it’s time to take a bath now.’” Furthermore, Abby talked about the need to have PCAs and the reality that not all of the PCAs are a good fit, but she makes it work for her living situation.

Hunter’s responses to the interview questions about success closely aligned with the theme of Independence. Hunter explained, “I thought I would be much more independent than I am” because he did not have a PCA in college other than his parents. He also shared that having his mom as his PCA was great, “but it’s like, she has her own life, you know, and I didn’t want to, it was, it felt really bad of me having her there all day, every day.” Additionally, in the interview, when Hunter was asked about social experiences in the context of his education, he shared that he never really participated in many extracurricular activities in college since he did not live on campus. Hunter shared that, due to his experience, he became very comfortable being very dependent on his parents.

In her interview, Nadine shared that right now, her job and career are in school, and she feels successful in her education. Nadine shared that she does have to live with her mom because she is not able to live on her own since she is heavily dependent on her mother to assist with her ADLs. “And I think, getting out of bed in the morning, to getting dressed, to food, and then rinse and repeat for bedtime, and anything needed, like, throughout the day.” Nadine described that a specific success is when she can easily complete a nondisabled activity as a disabled person. To elaborate on this kind of success, Nadine stated “It doesn’t have to be necessarily something big, or something people are going to see. It could be something as simple as doing something around the house that is normally really difficult, and hey, I did it today in under five minutes completely by myself.” When asked about independent living success, Nadine shared that she
doesn’t have a successful outcome because she always knows she will need someone to assist her.

In summary, each participant provided a narrative supporting the level of opportunity they have to be independent. Next, I provide an analysis of each participant’s narrative as it relates to their success, which led to their personal growth.

**Successes Leading to Personal Growth.** The theme of Personal Growth developed as participants described their successes in education, career, and social experiences. In some cases, the experiences shared were not stories of triumph but events that ultimately helped them reshape their thinking and develop new understanding. Sometimes personal growth meant accepting limitations and being happy despite them.

Maria’s interview response reflected themes of personal growth as she described her experiences navigating her post-high school transition. For instance, Maria stated that she was not at law school as originally hoped and that she was still happy. To further exemplify the theme of personal growth, Maria shared, “I always have this, like, vision that I’m gonna be living, like, totally independently, and that’s just not realistic. Like, I have accepted that now.” This is a glimpse into Maria’s journey towards accepting her disability.

Hunter’s interview response also reflected themes of personal growth as he described his definition of success. In response to the interview question about career, social, and independent living success, Hunter said:

Yeah, it is different for everyone. And I think the definition of success can change at a moment’s notice. At this moment in time, which is all I can speak to, success is having my needs met, my health needs met, my emotional needs met, my physical needs met,
my financial needs met, and being able to do things I enjoy. That’s really it – just being able to do things that I enjoy. To me, that’s what success is.

Hunter’s perspective on success as it relates to his career, education, and social experiences is an example of personal growth because it was evident throughout his interview that it took him a while to come to terms with what success looks like while living with a physical disability. Furthermore, Hunter emphasized that he can only speak to what success looks like to him on a day-to-day basis, which is a sign of personal growth, as he explained navigating his anxiety relating to his disability and living day by day without pressure to think about the future reduced his anxiety.

Nadine’s interview responses also closely aligned with the theme of personal growth. For example, Nadine shared that she is okay with knowing she will always need help getting dressed and doing other activities of daily living. She also mentioned how her acceptance of the fact that she will need help with ADLs has changed over the course of her life thus far.

In summary, each participant provided a narrative reflecting changes to their thinking that described satisfaction or acceptance that allowed them to move forward. The following section shares participants’ narratives as they describe a sense of community and belonging.

**Successes Leading to Community and Belonging.** Participants’ comments regarding successful education, career, and social experiences centered around a need for a positive sense of community and belonging. Comments related to the theme of Community and Belonging also highlighted the impact of feeling othered.

In terms of educational success for Priscilla, she felt a sense of belonging within the school context because she had many teachers on her side and provided her with support and encouragement, as well as the necessary accommodations for continued success. Priscilla's
support from her teachers made her feel like she belonged and was worthy of success. On the contrary, Pricilla shared that she did not have a lot of disabled role models or guidance, which would have helped her socially as she prepared for life after high school.

Throughout Abby’s interview, she explained how everything in her life is filtered through the lens of her faith, including how she perceives her disability. Because of this lens, Abby has felt a sense of community within her church as she navigates married life with a disability. Abby has experienced political barriers surrounding marriage penalties for people with disabilities, and having the support of her church community has been instrumental in her success as a married, disabled woman.

When Taylor was asked what success looked like for her during her interview, her responses closely aligned with the themes of community and belonging. For example, when asked about social and career success, Taylor stated, “Yeah, I don’t know. I felt like it’s just how it’s really hard to find work because people don’t really understand me or want to be friends with me, you know, it is very strange that way.” At the same time, Taylor highlighted the feeling of belonging within the Disability Community when she said, “Even if we don’t have the same disease, just like, all of us coming together and kind of celebrating each other, or just, like, understanding each other a bit better” makes her feel happy and proud.

Similarly to Pricilla, Josh shared that when he was growing up, he had never seen anyone with a physical disability who was older than he was. He further elaborated on this by stating:

I had never seen anyone with my disability growing up who is older than me, you know, living on my own, going to college, you know, doing all these things. So, it never even occurred to me that that would be my life.
Josh’s statement about not seeing anyone with a physical disability who was older than him indicates a lack of community and belonging and the need for disabled representation. In college, Josh shared that he understands the importance of building a community centering on the voices of the people who experienced the inequity. He further expands on this by stating that his university did not have a budget for the disability rights and advocacy committee, nor was the disabled student union active on campus. Because of his work with the Disability Rights and Advocacy Committee and the Disabled Student Union, he organized a commencement ceremony where 35 students with disabilities could be honored for their upcoming graduation. Josh considers this an educational and career success, as he shared, “It was just a huge success, and I am able to celebrate that, especially for a graduating class that endured the pandemic.” Josh’s work with the Disability Rights and Advocacy Committee and a disabled student union leads me to believe that he found community and belonging by helping other disabled people.

**Barriers Experienced in Career, Education, and Social Life**

My second sub-question sought to understand the high school and post-high school barriers people with physical disabilities or chronic health problems experience that impact their career, education, and social experiences as they navigate life after high school. The same themes aligned as participants relayed their thoughts and emotions about challenges related to their careers, education, and social experiences. The following sections describe the data from the individual interviews and the artifact creations to address Sub-question Two.

**Barriers that Developed Resilience.** Each participant expressed challenges related to their educational, career, or social experiences during and after high school. Often, these challenges made them stronger in some way.
The theme of Resilience was evident in Pricilla’s recollection of her educational journey. When I asked about barriers relating to Pricilla’s career, education, and social life, she spoke about middle and high school being particularly difficult. She contributed to these challenging times as barriers because of the two major surgeries and hospitalizations she experienced. “School was difficult for me health-wise when I had two surgeries and a really major hospitalization for Pneumonia, and so it was the worst health year of my life. All of those incidents were in about a one-year span.” Pricilla further expanded that she felt lucky enough because some instructions in the home and hospital programs allowed her to continue school during these health challenges. Ultimately, she was not held back academically.

The theme of Resilience was evident in Maria’s account of her educational journey. Maria described several potential challenges that she overcame. She shared that she has always liked school because “school is the easy part for me, like I can do the school part.” Maria, like Pricilla, shared that she had several medical issues as she transitioned from middle school to high school that could have potentially derailed her education, but she did not allow them to. Additionally, from another educational perspective, Maria highlighted the barriers and obstacles she experienced with her special education case manager. Because Maria didn’t always agree with her special education case manager, Maria explained that she had to learn how to question this case manager without upsetting her to advocate for her own educational needs. Maria acknowledged many barriers throughout the interview and shared, “Yes, there’s barriers, but if I think about them for too long, I’m not going to move on.” She explained that socially, she experiences barriers related to her disability because of her continued need for Personal Care Assistants (PCA). As a closing remark, Maria stated, “I refuse to live my life paying attention to those barriers.”
Throughout the interview, Abby explained the barriers she faces within her social life. When asked about barriers that hinder her success, she replied with an example of the negative impact of her care attendants in social settings. She stated, “You know, I have these three people lined up who are my caregivers, but in reality, those three people, you know, are not a very good fit.” When Abby mentioned that her caregivers may not be a good fit in reality, she means that some caregivers tend to hover, which hinders her autonomy in a social setting. On the other hand, some caregivers are more open to the suggestions and needs of the Disabled individual. Abby’s comment leads me to believe that although she has developed resilience and grit because of her need for personal care assistance (PCA), for almost all of her activities of daily living (ADLs), she still strives to have an active social life. When asked about policy barriers, Abby described the dramatic impact policies have on her in terms of her social life, specifically her marriage. For example, as Abby stated, “For us as disabled people, I think policies, they have a huge, dramatic impact on our quality of life, not only mine but my husband’s life.” She explained the struggles she faces with waiver services and how her husband is not allowed to be her PCA. Despite the fact that her now husband was not permitted to be her PCA under the state waiver agreement, she decided to marry him anyway. When further elaborating on this complex political barrier, Abby shared that when speaking with multiple county officials about this barrier, she was told, “If you don’t like that policy, you need to live your life differently.” And I thought, well (sarcastic tone), that gives me a lot of freedom.” This comment leads me to believe that Abby has used obstacles to push her advocacy efforts forward as she continues to meet with legislators. Additionally, Abby shared that she felt like there was an educational barrier when she was considering going to college because she was not sure how she would receive help with her
ADLs. Although she did not attend college, she found other ways to further her education by receiving online certifications for media production.

Similarly to the experiences of Maria and Marabella, Hunter viewed education as his only pathway toward success. He described his love for learning: "I mean, I always loved school. Really, I was a good student. I enjoyed learning. I still enjoy learning.” Hunter attended college as a student who commuted daily. He would have liked to live on campus but did not have a PCA. Hunter’s account of the barriers he faced because of his disability within the realm of career and education exemplifies the theme of Resilience when he said in order to achieve his goals, “The only thing is I often need to plan ahead quite a lot.”

Similarly to Maria’s, Marabella’s, and Hunter's experiences, Nadine shared that she loved school because “it didn’t matter that I was disabled. I was just like any other student.” When speaking about her educational experiences, she further explained that it [disability] didn’t matter because she was the smartest person in the room. Because her professors hadn’t dealt with her specific disability, Nadine stated that she often had to educate her professors about her disability. “Educating them about it [my disability], and then seeing how I find all my workarounds with my physical disability, but still being able to operate just like any normal college student.” This statement leads me to believe Nadine’s account of her educational experiences highlights the theme of Resilience as she often had to take on the burden of educating her professors about disability and then turning that experience into a skillset.

In Josh’s interview, he highlights the theme of Resilience as he explained that he found ways to actively and meaningfully participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities despite his physical disability. For example, Josh stated:
I found ways to involve myself in, you know, very nondisabled activities. We’re talking about, you know, high school athletics, which is such a huge thing around the country, and I found ways to involve myself in the football team and became the football manager at my high school.

Because Josh always found an interest in sports but couldn’t physically or competitively participate, he found alternate ways to take part, which broke the perceived barriers other people had placed on him as a disabled person.

In summary, each participant explained how they experienced barriers in their education, career, and social life that led them to develop resilience as they achieved their post-high school outcome. The following section analyzes each participant’s narrative as it relates to barriers within their Disability Identity.

**Barriers in Relation to Disability Identity.** My research on Disability Identity includes the identifying language each participant uses when discussing their disability. Furthermore, my research on Disability Identity includes how participants utilize disability as a strength within their careers and a catalyst for achieving their goals.

Pricilla primarily used disability first language and identifies herself as a disabled person. However, she stated that she does alternate between person-first and disability-first language depending on the context. Pricilla also shared that as she got older, she became increasingly interested in disability and voting. She wrote an undergraduate thesis about disability and voting in the 2020 election. She realized that she wanted to make a systemic difference, so in college, she pursued additional courses that assisted her in pursuing her current employment at the Department of Health and Human Services.
When talking about the barriers related to her identity as a disabled person, Maria shared that she is pretty open about her experiences as a person with a disability because she believes it is a normal part of the human experience. She explained that “figuring out how other people treated their disability” interested her. Furthermore, when Maria was speaking about her lived experiences as a person with a disability, she acknowledged, “I have a little bit of benefit because I have a physical disability.”

The overarching theme of Disability Identity was evident in Marabella’s interview, especially when she shared that “having SMA makes me a better therapist, to be honest. Because I can have, like, a deeper understanding of, like, the difficulties that the people have.” She further elaborated that she desires to help people, and being a therapist is something she can do for a career even though she is disabled.

Nadine spoke about how others perceived that because she was disabled, she wasn’t bright or capable. Nadine further explained that she felt she had to prove herself academically to “get people to look at you kind of like a human and not as someone that’s in a chair with no brain.” Nadine shared that socially, it was challenging in middle and high school because although there were many different social groups, she didn’t see herself in any of them. Nadine disclosed:

I didn’t even fit, like, I didn’t even fit in with the outcasts of the school, if that makes sense, like even though I was in all AP classes and dual credit courses just like anyone else. It was, like, if someone even held the door open for me ‘Oh my god, I get brownie points; I helped the disabled girl.’ That's always kind of how it went.

Nadine further explained that she felt she had to prove herself academically to “get people to look at you kind of like a human and not as someone that’s in a chair with no brain.”
shared these accounts, it became evident that she lacked opportunities to connect with people because of how other people, especially her peers, treated and responded to her disability. She continued to see herself as capable and pushed herself to prove them wrong.

Josh shared that attending college and graduate school helped him develop and embrace disability as an identity. Josh also highlights his involvement in the Disability Rights and Advocacy Committee as a positive experience he would not have had if he had been nondisabled. For instance, he shared that at his University, there wasn’t anything centered around disability other than the academic support systems, which is why he delved into the Disability Rights and Advocacy Committee and Disabled Student Union.

**Barriers Related to Community and Belonging.** Although several participants shared personal events and experiences where they felt there were challenges and limited opportunities to feel present with their peers, Maria and Taylor described situations where they felt like outsiders. Maria transitioned from a middle school where she was one of five hundred students to a high school where she was one of 2,000 students, which was shocking for her. Equally shocking, she explained that she was not the only person with a physical disability in her school. This experience of moving from a smaller school to a larger school impacted Maria’s sense of belonging. Her tone when discussing this change appeared negative. She sarcastically commented that the change was “interesting.” Maria’s account of her experience transitioning from a smaller school to a larger one leads me to believe she felt like she didn’t belong. She further described, “The way I did the transition from middle school to high school was rough.” Taylor described feeling marginalized by her peers, saying it was hard to make friends with people who saw her as different from them. Taylor shared that it was hard to make friends
because “I always felt othered.” Taylor’s negative feelings of feeling othered contributed to poor self esteem and a lack of connection with her nondisabled peers.

**Barriers Related to Quality of Life.** Each participant expressed their perspective on barriers that directly impact their quality of life during high school, but more specifically and substantially post high school. Through each participants’ response, narratives about their lived experience were shared and this often led them to identify what could have been done differently to better enhance their quality of life.

Maria described her goals; she explained how they mostly get put on the back burner because she has to focus on her ADLs. This is evident when Maria shares, “Success is just staying alive, like genuinely, like, my goal in life is to not get sick, to eat three meals a day, and to sleep.” Maria feels that the care related to her disability is so time-consuming that she does not have time to spend on her life goals. She further explained that adult life has been really challenging for her because of the constant struggle to meet her basic needs. When a person like Maria does not have their basic needs met, it is difficult to reach the self-actualization stage of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Haggerty, 1999).

Another theme that was prevalent in Abby’s interview was Quality of Life. Throughout Abby’s interview, her frustration and dissatisfaction were evident as she described how marriage policies and waiver programs negatively impacted her life. Abby described that policies greatly impact her quality of life and the quality of life of her husband as her primary care attendant. She specifically shared that they had to move to a different state in order to receive waiver funding for care assistance, which she needs in order to live life as a disabled woman.

**Barriers and the Impact on Independence.** Each participant conveyed challenges they faced when striving to be as independent as they can. While each participant shared about these
obstacles they face, they frequently discussed the impacts of the barrier and the emotions that coincide with the barrier.

Maria knew she would attend college, but the logistics of how that would work for her physically were impacted by her need for support with her ADLs. When Maria shared about barriers that inhibited her success, she stated, “How I would get to college, where I would live, where I would go, what I would do. That was the stuff that was up in the air.” Maria further elaborated that her need for assistance with her ADLs was the biggest obstacle she faced: “That’s [ADLs] probably the biggest one [barriers]. Like, that’s the one that no one talks about.” As a disabled person, Maria recognizes that her consistent struggle with getting her basic needs met impacts her level of independence in relation to her career and employment goals. “Yes, I would like to get a job, and like, I’m getting a job, and like, all of that is, like, it’s part of it because I need to eat, sleep, et cetera, in order to get a job.”

Reflections on Preparation for Career, Education, and Social Life

My third sub-question sought to understand how individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses viewed and reflected upon their post-high school transition process. Sub-question three was addressed primarily through the individual interviews and one artifact. Two themes, Accessibility and Community and Belonging, emerged to convey participants’ reflective thoughts about what they wished they could have learned or how they could have been better prepared for post high school career, education, and social life.

Reflections Leading to Accessibility. Each participant reflected on their level of preparedness for Career, Education, and Social Life. As each participant shared their lived experiences, the theme of Accessibility was evident as many participants wished resources were better explained to them.
Pricilla doesn’t recall her IEP transition plan. When I asked her what she thought would be crucial to include in a transition plan to best support PWD, she stated, “I think transition plans are important, and it’s obviously super important. The fact that I really don’t remember much probably says something and that it should be more focused on in IEP meetings.” Pricilla continued to explain that it was important to note that she was on a pretty advanced academic track, and she thought that maybe because of her higher level of academic potential, the school didn’t think about her transition as they would have if she was on a different academic level. Pricilla wondered, “keep in mind I was on a pretty advanced track. What about for people who might not be and if they don’t have support systems.” Pricilla concluded her thoughts by sharing that she is grateful for the support systems she had as she transitioned from high school to post-high school life but recognized that not everyone had the same level of support. This belief was evident when Pricilla shared:

> You know, I always had a lot of people who believed in me, and I think that really propelled me to where I am today. And I know that not everyone might have that [support], regardless of disability. I wasn’t in this alone and that made all the difference.

In her recollection of her post-high school transition process, Maria shared that teaching PWD how to self-advocate is crucial. Although Maria didn’t specifically recall her transition plan, she was “sure she had one, but I don’t remember it. I don’t know if it was written down or not.” Like Pricilla, Maria didn’t recall her transition programming, which suggests that additional emphasis is needed to ensure that transition mandates are met with fidelity so that students are better prepared to navigate post high school life. Maria shared a memory from middle school:
As much as I hated it when the middle school people [teachers, special education case manager] would say ‘oh, you’re such an advocate’ or, you know, ‘you’re so strong’ or whatever, I am grateful for them for giving me that because I know now like I wouldn’t be where I am today without it.

This leads me to believe that even though Maria did not enjoy being an advocate or being told how strong she was, she now realizes these experiences were necessary to access her full potential.

Additionally, Maria shared, “I think something they didn’t explain well enough when you’re transitioning is like it’s all on you.” This suggests that although Maria was prepared as a self-advocate, she still was surprised by the extent to which she was responsible for her transition process. In addition to self-efficacy and advocacy skills, access to resources and opportunities is essential to transition programming.

Similarly to Pricilla, Marabella emphasized the importance of mentorship and the benefits that being mentored could have afforded her. Marabella stated, “like how the living part of it [the transition plan] works. Maybe if it’s even like if other people can share with others who have done it, almost like a mentor type of thing.” Also, similarly to the experiences of Maria and Pricilla, Marabella felt that a lot of her transition planning was left up to her and her family. Because of this, she indicated that there should be more attention to transition planning regarding navigating community supports. She suggested that accessing the expertise of the IEP team members would be beneficial in transition programming for people with physical disabilities. On another note, Marabella shared details about a specific barrier she is currently experiencing:

I am trying to figure out what my health insurance looks like. There’s a lot of income restrictions which, without getting all into it, it’s basically certain policies. I’m being put
in a place where it’s choosing how much I can work to stay within the income restrictions without losing insurance, which I obviously feel like that’s very unfair because I’m capable of working full-time.

Marabella wishes she could have been better prepared for the systemic barrier she is now facing. From her artifact, “Things I Learned That Nobody Taught Me” (Figure 7), it is evident that she wasn’t prepared to ask for help from complete strangers but has learned to access support in creative ways that have led to her continued success and independence.

The theme of Accessibility was prevalent as Abby shared what she thought was crucial to include in transition plans to best support PWD. As Abby was sharing about her lack of awareness of Medicaid and other government support programs, she stated:

I think the most crucial part is education on programs available to the person with the disability. Because if they don’t understand how these programs work, they aren’t gonna be able to utilize the program, so that kind of ties back to the barrier question. But that was another barrier I was experiencing. I mean, I’m still learning about these programs every day, but when I reached adulthood, I didn’t even know the difference between them [the programs].

Abby’s vulnerability in sharing her current struggles speaks to her belief that there is a need for increased knowledge of the IEP team members when they are programming for PWD as they transition to post-high school life. Specific knowledge of the supports available to people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses is of importance as it directly impacts their ability to access care attendant services.
The theme of Accessibility was also evident throughout Nadine’s reflection on her level of preparation for post high school life. When Nadine responded to the interview question about her experience with her IEP transition plan, Nadine shared:

My mom is a special education teacher, and so that really helped. You know, she knows that world, and was able to help make that [post high school transition] go super smoothly. So, it was really easy, honestly switching over to college with an IEP.

Nadine’s reflection of her experience is different from the rest of the participants, which leads me to believe that Nadine had more support because of her mother’s profession. Nadine had access to extra support that is not typical of most students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school, which afforded her more opportunities to develop essential skills needed in order to reach her full desired potential. Furthermore, when Nadine was asked if she recalls anybody in the school working with her, she stated, it was really my mom who helped me. I didn’t really go to the counselors at all, or anything like that.” Nadine also shared her thoughts on items that are crucial to include in a transition plan by stating “Making sure they [PWD] have exactly what they need.” Because Nadine’s mom was a special education teacher, I am led to believe that Nadine had what she needed, and she recognizes that not everyone has the same access to resources.

Similarly to Pricilla, Maria, Marabella, Taylor also did not remember her transition plan when she shared,

To be honest, I don’t remember it a lot. It was so long ago though, but I feel like just getting my IEP overall was so difficult. They [the school] just didn’t want to do it, and I’m not really sure why, it was more like ‘oh we have to do this.’
Taylor’s experience with her transition plan is like other participants in my research study and highlights the continued need for improving transition plans. The commonality of these experiences leads me to believe that transition planning needs to not only be more memorable and accessible, but meaningful which requires active participation of the student with the disability. Additionally, and also similarly to, other participants in my research study, Taylor doesn’t recall who helped her with her transition plan and continued to share “mostly just my parents and I figuring out what the next steps were for that moment.” Taylor’s experience is consistent with other individuals in this research study in that the majority of the transition planning fell on the shoulders of families and individuals which leads me to believe that access to resources and planning is not equitable.

**Reflections Leading to a Need for Community and Belonging.** Each participant reflected on their level of preparation for Career, Education, and Social Life. As each participant shared their perspectives, the theme of Community and Belonging was prevalent as many participants shared the benefits of community and the desire for community.

When Maria was asked about what suggestions she could provide for improving the post-high school transition process for people with physical disabilities, she shared “Giving the person with a disability the autonomy to make those decisions and figure out what they want to do, regardless of their disability, and then figure out how that’s gonna be worked in to their plan.” This suggestion speaks to the importance of Community and Belonging because it’s important to center the voices of the disabled person throughout all aspects of the transition process. Another suggestion Maria provided was the importance of having the school recognize all the abilities of the person with a disability. She elaborates on this by stating, “Like, I needed someone to tell me, ‘You’re worth it, you can do this, and if you don’t, no one will.’” In summary, Maria’s
suggestions and reflections, compel me to believe that if her IEP team had been more student focused and if Maria was surrounded by other Disabled people, she would have been empowered to find community.

The theme of Community and Belonging was evident in Hunter’s discussion about his lack of preparedness and social life post-high school. Hunter showed vulnerability as he discussed the mental health issues he experienced early in his college journey and acknowledged that he was not alone in experiencing these mental health issues.

Mental health issues often arise in those years, and I certainly was no exception. At first, I was very, very enthusiastic, very bright-eyed, and just really optimistic about it all academically. I never really struggled until I started having very severe depression in about my second year of college, and the poorer grades followed. I still passed all my classes, but I went from a straight-A student to a B- and C-student because I just – I was just too sad all the time. Academically I was fine, it was the social aspect that I was not prepared for.

Hunter’s experiences with his social preparation compels me to think that oftentimes the IEP transition goal of independent living goes unaddressed for people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

Nadine’s account of her postsecondary transition process displayed the theme of Community and Belonging. Nadine shared that when she toured the university that she ended up attending; she was impressed by the physical accessibility of the campus, but even more so with the preparedness of the university’s office for students with disabilities (OSD). She stated, “So she [OSD employee] was prepared and even asked me if I needed assistance going to the bathroom.” Nadine had a smoother post high school transition than many of the participants in
this research study because of her mom’s position as a special education teacher. Although she had a more positive post high school transition, Nadine’s tone and the time she took to explain the shockingly impressed feeling about the OSD staff, leads me to believe that there is value in knowing that other people who work in the field are prepared to ask questions, rather than the PWD carrying the burden of asking the question.

**RQ2 Artifacts Representing Current Feelings**

My second research question, how do individuals with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses illustrate/represent their current feelings about their high school transition process, and what are the common themes within their representations? My second research question is important because it highlights the impact of transition programming from the perspective of the student with a disability allowing them another forum for communicating their ideas, experiences, and beliefs.

The IEP transition plan is a federal mandate to ensure that students with disabilities are adequately prepared for post high school in the areas of education and training, career employment, and independent living (Will, 1983; Targetta et al., 2013, IDEA, 2004). Transition planning is important because it is not only a federal mandate, but it has a direct impact on the postsecondary goals of the individual with the disability. There are varying pathways a PWD can take after high school and when a PWD is made aware of the options available to them and are adequately prepared, they can reach their desired outcomes in education, career employment, and independent living.

The themes that emerged from the artifact analysis were Resilience, Accessibility, and Community and Belonging. The following section showcases the six artifacts that were created by the participants in my research study. The artifacts were in response to me asking if they
would be willing to create an artifact unique to them, which represents their thoughts and feelings surrounding their post high school transition process.

**Figure 5**

*Ivy*

Pricilla, who attended an Ivy League University, created an artifact representing her feelings toward her post-high school transition experience. Her artifact includes a picture of a multiple-story building covered in ivy and a written narrative in which she explains how ivy, an invasive species, is similar to disabled people. The themes prevalent in Pricilla’s artifact include Resilience, Accessibility, and Community and Belonging. The theme of Resilience is evident in Pricilla’s narrative when she says, “The ivy took over the walls of buildings and formed something beautiful and natural. I hope disabled students can continue to grow and prosper like the ivy.” The theme of Community and Belonging was illustrated in Pricilla’s artifact as she shared that there was a lot of ivy but not many physically disabled students like herself. The
theme of accessibility is highlighted in Pricilla’s artifact when she shares that “Ivy is an invasive species that wasn’t always supposed to exist in the places it lives in, much like disabled people have had to fight for their rights to exist in historically inaccessibility places like colleges and universities.”

Figure 6

_Growth_

Maria created an image with a ladder climbing up to the word growth to illustrate her feelings toward her post-high school transition process. Similarly to Pricilla’s theme, Maria’s artifact portrays the themes of Resilience and Accessibility. The themes of Resilience and

I know that growth is possible, if not guaranteed
I’m smart, capable, deserving
But how do I climb this ladder in my wheelchair?

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Accessibility are evident in Maria’s artifact as she states, “I am smart, capable, deserving, but how do I climb this ladder in my wheelchair?” Through her artifact creation, Maria highlights the capabilities she has developed to compensate for her disabilities. Her artifact also highlights the inaccessibility of society that has prohibited her growth as a human with hopes and goals.
Figure 7

Advocate

Things I Learned That Nobody Taught Me

A sking for help from complete strangers
D oors have many different ways of opening, and some are better than others
V iruses are all around, but you know how to protect yourself
O ther people will take your word for what you need, be confident
C ost-benefit analysis of whether it is ‘worth it’ to have my needs met
A bleism is a buzzword, but it does exist
T ake utensils, cups, anything that works well, it will come in handy later
E veryone has something that they are going through

Marabella created an artifact titled “Things I learned That Nobody Taught me,” an acrostic poem of the word advocate. The themes in Marabella’s artifact are Personal Growth, Independence, Accessibility, Quality of Life, and Resilience. The theme of Personal Growth is highlighted in the last line of her poem, “Everyone has something they are going through.” The overall theme of independence is evident when Marabella describes the cost and benefit analysis of having her needs met. To further exemplify the theme of independence, Marabella has learned
different ways to be independent, such as taking utensils wherever she goes. She further exemplifies the theme of independence through the title of her acrostic poem, and she taught herself to advocate.

Figure 8

*The Unknown*

Abby created an artifact titled “Into the Unknown as a Disabled Young Adult”, which is an image of an eerie path into the woods. The image has overlays of red question marks, a frightened yellow emoji biting its nails, and the word unknown leading into the darkness of the woods. The themes highlighted in Abby’s artifact are Quality of Life, Independence, Accessibility, and Resilience.
Taylor created a narrative piece for her artifact. The themes highlighted throughout her narrative are Personal Growth, Community and Belonging, and Quality of Life. The theme of community is evident throughout her narrative as she describes the true sense of belonging, she feels to the SMA community.
In many aspects of day-to-day life, I find myself relying on non-disabled people when I travel even for short distances. Finding truly accessible ways to travel independently is when I feel the most independence. Ferry rides are one of my greatest forms of comfort and security in this journey.

Josh created an artifact that included a ferry picture and a brief caption. The themes highlighted in Josh’s artifact are Independence and Accessibility. Josh describes his ferry rides as a great form of comfort and security in his journey towards independence.
Participants’ artifact creation provided insight into their emotions surrounding their post high school transition process in relation to where they are now. In the next section, I utilized data collected from the individual interviews to answer research question two, sub-question one.

**Suggestions for Improving High School Transition Programs**

Several themes emerged from the participants’ responses in response to the interview question: What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses? The themes that emerged are Accessibility, Resilience, Community and Belonging, Quality of Life.

**Suggestions Surrounding Accessibility**

When Priscilla was discussing her transition experience, she shared that she didn’t remember a lot of the details about her IEP meetings. She recalled being involved in her meetings, as were her parents. She said, “They [my parents] have always been, you know, supportive of me and my endeavors.” Priscilla further elaborated that she does not specifically recall her IEP transition goals; however, she shared that she was always expected to attend college post-high school. She said, “There weren’t really any specialized people working with me other than the standard guidance counselors and, you know, some teachers that I was really close with.” This quote exemplifies the theme of Accessibility because, in Priscilla’s experience, she did not have access to support people and resources to assist her in planning and implementing her post-high school transition goals. Priscilla further explained,

At that point [in high school], I wasn’t really receiving physical therapy in school. I was outside of school, and my outside-of-school physical therapist worked with me a lot to get me to where I needed to be for independent living. So I’m really grateful for her. I don’t think my school did much on that front.
Another suggestion derived from Pricilla’s response to my interview question: What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support PWD was the need for a mentorship experience. Pricilla stated, “A kind of mentorship aspect is super important, and I know not all schools would really be able to provide that.” Pricilla further shared that talking to someone else who utilized a wheelchair to navigate campus was really beneficial to her because she realized that going away to college could be an option for her. Pricilla stated:

My Ivy League University’s office of disability services connected me with a current student who didn’t even work for the office but utilized a wheelchair. This was so important, and it made me realize this was feasible. I could live on campus on my own, and I think that schools really need to encourage students with disabilities that things are possible even if there isn’t a role model and even if, you know, it is difficult.

When Maria discussed her transition experience, she shared that her interactions with her special education case manager or director were complicated. To elaborate further, Maria shared that the case manager's or director’s thoughts did not always match what she thought was right for her. Maria explained that she had to become a self-advocate in order to access the support she required because of her physical disability. To elaborate further on the theme of accessibility, Maria shared that she had to call the accessibility offices at each college she applied to in order to determine which college would best meet her accessibility needs. In addition to calling the accessibility offices, Maria shared that although she was given information at her IEP meetings about vocational rehabilitation (VR), she had to follow up with VR with very little support from her IEP team. In fact, Maria recalled, “I got there [VR office], and they’re [VR employee] like, ‘Okay, what’s your family’s income?’ and we looked at a chart, and they were like, ‘Yeah, no, we can’t help you.’” This situation exemplifies the theme of Accessibility because Maria was
responsible for accessing community and government support to reach her post-high school transition goals. Maria stressed that when transitioning from high school to college, a lot of it is up to the person with the disability.

When Marabella was discussing her transition experience, she shared that more step-by-step action plans would be helpful to consider when transition planning for people with physical disabilities. “Having, like, more step-by-step, like, ‘This is where and this is how you contact these schools about accessible dorms.’ Like, more like the living part of it, like, maybe ‘This is how to get money for care attendance, or this is a caregiver pool.’” Throughout Marabella’s interview, it was evident that she was the one who was primarily researching resources that would help her live independently at college and beyond college. She elaborated on this by stating,

When I was transitioning out of high school, I would say honestly, it felt like it was mostly my parents and I coming up with my plan, which was always going to college. It was just, what would that look like and how would it be figured out? So, I’d say I don’t know how much my IEP really even played into my transition.

It is important to note that Marabella shared that she never attended or briefly attended her IEP meetings, but she was very aware of her accommodations. Marabella shared that she did not attend her IEP meetings because she was afraid she’d miss lessons in her higher-level courses and trusted that her mom was a great advocate for her.

When Abby was discussing her transition experience, the information she provided was closely aligned with the theme of Accessibility. Abby shared that the most crucial part of transition planning, which should be considered when programming for people with physical disabilities, is understanding the state and federal programs available that support the
individual’s ability to live independently and further their education. She further explained how
the lack of knowledge and access to these programs negatively impacted her post-high school
transition process because she didn’t know what a Medicaid waiver was. Another suggestion
Abby provided was that it would be helpful for IEP teams to consider how these supports would
look, operate, and translate to the real-life application of these supports. She further explained
that having access to people with people with disabilities who have successfully transitioned
would be a huge benefit. She supports this statement by saying, “Who knows our life better than
we do?”

The theme of Accessibility was evident throughout Hunter’s recollection of his post-high
school transition process. He initially shared, “I think it’s important to mention that without the
ability to go to school, people with physical disabilities face even more obstacles and more
barriers.” This statement made by Hunter supports the theme of Accessibility because, without
access to higher education and/or training, people with physical disabilities often cannot obtain
substantial, gainful employment. Hunter’s suggestion for improving transition planning for
people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses is to “provide as many resources as
possible to the families and to the students.”

The theme of Accessibility was evident throughout Nadine’s discussion of her post-high
school transition process. For example, when Nadine talked about why she chose her university,
she stated, “I chose them [the university] because they are just 15 minutes from my house.” This
statement exemplifies the theme of Accessibility because Nadine had to choose a university
close to her house due to her disability. When Nadine was asked about recommendations she
would make for improving the transition process for people with physical disabilities and/or
chronic illnesses, she stated,
I would say having a clear laid out plan like, okay, are you going to stay with your parents or maybe you have a significant other you are planning on moving in with after college or high school? If that’s the plan, do you guys definitely have a good plan for getting into a handicapped living situation, and if you’re doing that, what’s your plan?

What if you guys, like, break up and you’re not friends afterwards or something like that?

Nadine’s suggestion exemplifies the theme of Accessibility because she stresses the importance of having a plan, and thinking through multiple scenarios that support the desired independent living goal of the disabled person. An additional suggestion Nadine provided was that her high school IEP team could be more open-minded. To support this, she stated, “they could be a little less judgmental. Honestly, they could be a little less judgmental, maybe a lot, maybe a lot.”

The theme of Accessibility was evident throughout Taylor’s discussion about her suggestions for improving the transition process for people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. Because Taylor felt like there weren’t many post-high school options made available to her, one of her suggestions is to make sure the high school IEP team thinks creatively about how to support the unique capabilities of the disabled person in their transition goals. She stated, “I feel like just more accommodations, and like for me, I knew I could only take two classes at college because otherwise it would just be a lot for me physically and mentally.” Another suggestion Taylor believed would be beneficial in supporting the transition process was the ability to talk face-to-face to the people providing the accommodation. She stated, “Like talk face to face to the people before they are at college to make sure that they will get what they need.”

The theme of Accessibility was evident throughout Josh’s discussion about his postsecondary journey. Josh recalls in high school that it was helpful for him to have the
accommodation which allowed him to access the resource room as a class to complete work with his PCA. Josh stated, “I’ve always been placed in general classes with usually one class being a resource class. I think that has worked for me and the kind of accommodations that I received in the general classroom.” A suggestion that emerged from this comment was to ensure that IEP teams supported the physical access needs of the disabled students as they participated in the general education classroom setting. Contradictory to other participants in my research study, Josh had a positive experience with the Department of Rehabilitation. He shared, “I would say the Department of Rehabilitation is one of the main reasons I was able to go to college. Not just go to college but go to college without any student debt as well, too. They will cover your tuition and fees and textbooks and everything.” Josh stressed the importance of having the IEP team connect individuals to their state rehabilitation office to empower them as they navigate life after high school.

Furthermore, Josh insisted on the necessity of having an action plan for all tasks related to an individual’s ADLs. Josh shared one of his experiences, which led him to mention this suggestion. “Things as small as an automatic door button not working on a lecture hall that I need to get into or a campus building I need to get into. I think one thing a lot of students don’t know about is that there’s actually a person that you could call under facilities’ management.”

**Resilience Leading to Suggestions**

Resilience was a theme that emerged through Priscilla’s interview. In terms of her post-high school transition goals, she shared that she “wasn’t sure exactly how to figure out if I could live independently, so I worked really hard after school doing physical and occupational therapy to really learn all of the independent living skills that I needed to live away from my parents and on my own. And I made it!” This particular statement
Chapter V: Discussion

This qualitative research study investigated the lived experiences and perspectives of eight individuals as they navigated their post-high school transition process. More distinctly, this study aimed to understand the factors contributing to the participants’ successes and barriers in their transition journey. Furthermore, this study sought to highlight suggestions and recommendations for improving the IEP transition program process from the perspective of physically disabled and/or chronically ill people. In this chapter, I summarize the study, the connection to my theoretical framework, a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and implications for future research and educational practice.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences and perspectives of physically disabled and/or chronically ill youth as they navigated their post-high school transition process. I utilized a qualitative study research design, including individual interviews and artifact creation. I utilized artifact creation, which allowed my participants to expand upon their postsecondary transition journey in a visually creative way. Artifact creation provides a multimodal experience that enhances the narrative, allows for reflection, and assists in making meaning of a lived experience (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012). This study included eight participants who identified as physically disabled and/or chronically ill and had an IEP throughout their K-12 public educational career. This study aimed to answer the research questions about the lived experiences and perspectives of physically disabled and chronically ill youth throughout their post-high school transition journey. The research questions and sub-questions that I examined in this study focused on participants’ successes, barriers, and reflections relating to their career, education, and social experiences. Additionally, the research
questions sought have the participants reflect on their current feelings about their transition journey by engaging in an artifact creation forum.

The first research question and accompanying sub-questions are important because the answers each participant openly shared provide a unique and dynamic lens on disability. Answering these questions produced valuable insight in terms of the success experienced by PWD and the barriers that were navigated by PWD. Additionally, these questions help us understand the implications of current systems and provide insight to consider for future research and educational practices that have the potential to transform the narrative surrounding disability.

The second research question that guided my study is important because the answers provide information about the lasting impact of transition planning. Additionally, this question highlights the commonality of the post-high school transition experiences of physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults. Similarly to my first research question, my second research question emphasizes the implications of the transition experiences and provides suggestions for future educational practice and research.

In summary, there were seven themes related to the successes, barriers, and suggestions for improved IEP transition planning that were prevalent in the data collected: (a) Quality of Life, (b) Resilience, (c) Personal Growth, (d) Independence, (e) Community and Belonging, (f) Disability Identity, and (g) Accessibility. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how these themes connect with the theoretical framework of this study.

**Applications of Findings to Theoretical Framework**

In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical framework which guided my research study. The theoretical frameworks that I chose were carefully and methodologically decided upon so that
the results could connect to the limited previous research (Lindsay et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983).

**Disability Studies in Education**

Disability Studies in Education is an emerging subsection of the Disability Studies framework which focuses on disability specifically within the educational context while centering the voices of the PWD (Slee et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2016). Like the Disability Studies theoretical framework, Disability Studies in Education challenges the negative narrative about disability (Slee et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2016). Disability Studies in Education is relevant to my research because the participants shared their postsecondary transition programming experiences in relation to education. This framework provided me with a lens in which to analyze the data and amplify the voices of PWD as they share suggestions for improving educational practices.

**Disability Studies**

Scholars and researchers who analyze data about disability, from the lens of the Disability Studies theoretical framework, view disability as a normal variation of the human experience (Pfeiffer, 2001). Additionally, the Disability Studies framework challenges the belief that disability is something that needs to be fixed (Pfeiffer, 2001).

I was somewhat surprised to find that the experiences of the participants in my research study were more aligned with beliefs associated with Disability Studies scholars. This was evident specifically in Nadine’s account of her social experiences when she shared, “oh, my god, I get brownie points because I helped the disabled girl.” These social interactions further the negative narrative about disability, and that disability is something to be pitied. It was evident that Nadine struggled socially throughout middle school and high school because of others’
beliefs about disability. This was further substantiated when Nadine shared, “I was glad to finally
graduate. No more awkward, awkward social situations on Mondays through Fridays for most of
the year.” Nadine was not the only participant who shared her negative social experiences
because of the view other people had about disability. Hunter shared that in high school, his
social interactions were somewhat limited because he couldn’t engage in many of the
extracurricular activities that were offered because of his disability. Taylor’s reflections of
“being othered” by her peers were a point of social exclusion for her.

The Disability Studies theoretical framework was found to be important in my research
as it provided me with another lens to view the barriers PWD experience as a societal issue
rather than a disability issue. Throughout the interview and artifact data, it is evident that the
participants in my study are impacted by people who do not view disability from the Disability
Studies framework. Furthermore, the previously determined codes which emerged to themes
from the interview and artifacts, are themes that are within the Disability Studies framework.

**Discussion of Results**

The following section will further examine the results of my research study. In Chapter 4,
I answered both research questions, and the corresponding sub-questions, in relation to themes
that emerged through the coding phases: Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth,
Independence, Community and Belonging, Disability and Identity, and Accessibility. In this
section, I will discuss each of the themes and how they connect with the overall results of my
study. Figure 11 helps guide the discussion of the results obtained through the data collection
process and how it relates to the themes and the literature.
Figure 11

Hierarchy of Themes

Note. This figure is inspired by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Hagerty, 1999).

Accessibility

Accessibility is a fundamental human right. In the context of my research, accessibility refers to physical accessibility, but also access to education, employment, healthcare, reasonable accommodations, relationships, and knowledge of resources. Accessibility is the fundamental theme upon which the other themes expand. It was evident that the participants in my study must focus on accessibility before considering other goals and reaching a higher level of self-actualization (Hagerty, 1999). For example, when Hunter was discussing his frustrating
experiences with Personal Care Attendants (PCA), he shared, “It’s so, it’s so, frustrating that we need to resort to things like that just to live a half normal life.” Abby shared about her challenging experiences when trying to navigate waiver programs that support her in receiving PCA services. Her challenges revolve around finding people who can be hired to help her as a PCA. Another example that illustrates the need for Accessibility before reaching upwards in the pyramid is when Maria shared,

Like, starting this whole adult life thing is so hard for me because I focus on getting my basic needs met. Like, other goals, are just not like, I have other goals, but I don’t work on them, you know what I am saying, like, you're working on other stuff [basic stuff].

**Independence**

The next level of the pyramid is Independence. Once access needs are met, the PWD can begin to reach their desired level of independence. In the context of my research, Independence includes the PWD’s ability to navigate decisions which leads them to a greater level of independence. Independence includes the necessity of having a PCA while navigating support systems with restrictive federal and state policies. Furthermore, Independence includes obtaining a career, substantial gainful employment, while still being able to receive waiver services that provide for the necessity of a PCA. It was clear that the participants in my research study had varying views and experiences with independence. For example, Pricilla is content with her living situation in the city and the career she has working for the Department of Human Services. On the contrary, Taylor experiences more frustration with her current living situation and ability to attend college. Other participants expressed that while they are frustrated with their current challenges, they persist and know they will be able to reach their desired level of independence in the future.
**Personal Growth**

Personal Growth is possible once Accessibility and Independence are addressed. In the context of my research, Personal Growth considers the insight gained from the individual’s disability life journey. This includes accepting the reality of life with a disability and learning to embrace it as a normal part of the human experience (Pfeiffer, 2001). This was a consistent overlaying theme among the participants in my study. This was evident in Hunter’s lived experiences as he explained that he has a solid network of friends but wishes he could be more spontaneous rather than planning his social outings. Hunter shared, “The only thing is, I often need to plan ahead quite a lot.” He further shared that he is happy with his social group. On the other hand, Taylor sarcastically shared that her social interactions were, “So, that was fun. But ya I mean, socially, it was hard, because I always felt othered.” Taylor further elaborated that she wishes that things were different in middle school and high school but has since learned to find a sense of belonging within the Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) community.

**The Importance of Community and Belonging**

Community and Belonging is possible once Accessibility, Independence, and Personal Growth are reached. In the context of my research, Community and Belonging highlight the importance of finding people who just “get it.” This is especially important for the Disability Community as disability is often seen as a negative part of the human experience (Swinton, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2001). This was an overarching theme within my research as many participants, like Abby, Taylor, Josh, either experienced their gratitude for their community or expressed the need for community. Maria, Marabella, and Nadine provided suggestions for improving transition programming that surrounds the need for peer mentorship. In the context of my
research, Community and Belonging includes learning to embrace disability as an identity that can propel PWD’s further as they navigate systematic challenges.

**Disability as an Identity.** In the context of my research, and in alignment with Disability Studies Theorists, the theme of Disability as an identity (Pfeiffer, 2001) includes the language used to speak about disability. It is important to note that disability language is a personal choice for the PWD and varies from individual to individual. Additionally, disability language used in the context of education, government, and other related sectors often uses person first language or other infantilizing language that does not align with the PWD’s stance. Disability as an Identity comes from immersing yourself into a community that you belong to, thus creating a sense of community and belonging. The theme of Disability and Identity was prevalent in Josh’s reflections on his experiences in college with reforming the Disabled Student Union at his higher education institution. Taylor’s reflections also reflected disability as an identity as she shared the joy, she experiences with her SMA community.

**Impact on Quality of Life and Independence**

Within the context of my research, Quality of Life highlights the real-life implications of policies that drive PCA funding. Previous research on Quality of Life exists within the context of medical journals. My research study provides a different, and needed perspective on quality of life as it relates to everyday disability life. This sentiment was shared by Marabella when she explained why she was interested in my research study. Marabella said, “And I feel like there’s not as much emphasis on, like, quality of life.” Quality of Life is the last step in the pyramid which allows PWD to embrace and celebrate life fully while living out their purpose.
Developing Resilience

Resilience is pictured by a line continuing up the pyramid to symbolize that resilience can occur throughout every stage, especially when facing challenging circumstances. Although the participants in my research study did not identify the word resilience, they used similar words like the word persistence or keep going. It was evident that the mindset of resilience was displayed because of the data they shared within the interviews and artifact creations.

In this section, I provided how the data collected from the interviews and artifacts relate to and represent a hierarchy of needs. In the following sections, I discuss the limitations of my research study and how I accounted for each limitation throughout the research process.

Limitations

Similarly to all research studies, my qualitative study had limitations. Some limitations were considered and addressed in Chapter Three which broadly included threats to descriptive validity such as threats to the interview questions and process, threats to the artifact process and limitations of using artifacts. Additionally, Chapter Three addressed threats to external validity including sample size, the impact of state mandates, transferability, and credibility. In addition to the above limitations, this section will focus on the following areas: (a) methodology, (b) analysis limitations, (c) generalizability and contextual analysis, (d) self-selected participation, (e) concerns of quality, and (f) reliability.

Methodology

Qualitative research is an emerging research field that continues to face scrutiny both inside and outside the qualitative realms (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Boddy, 2016). The methodological limitations of my qualitative research study include the sample size, the specific criteria for this study, and the limited previous bodies of research on this specific population.
Sample Size. The sample size for my research study consisted of eight total participants with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses between the ages of 18 and 27 years old. There are differing opinions between quantitative and qualitative researchers of an appropriate qualitative study sample size (Boddy, 2016). Some qualitative researchers believe an adequate sample size is between 12 and 20, while others believe a sample size of 30 is necessary for data saturation (Hennink, 2022; Vasileiou et al., 2018; Boddy, 2016). It is important to note that furthermore, some qualitative researchers find value in qualitative studies consisting of just one participant (Boddy, 2016). The purpose of my research study was to amplify voices of a specific population, physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults where previous research is limited within the educational field. The power of the lived experiences shared throughout the interview and artifact data collection procedures highlight the human emotion behind the stories (Carspecken & Saxena, 2022; Pezalla, 2012; Rowsell, 2011). This research study could be the beginning of amplifying previously marginalized voices; it gained a strong interest following as recruitment flyers were disseminated. Within a period of twelve to twenty-four hours, a number of disabled individuals were expressing their gratitude for this research, signing up for the study, and inquiring the rationale behind the exclusion criteria. I had more volunteers than I could accommodate given the limited timeframe for my study.

Specific Population and Criteria. The population of my research study consisted of five inclusion criteria (a) were physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults, (b) were between the ages of 18 to 27 years old, (c) had an IEP in high school, (d) attended high school in the United States, and (e) spoke English as their primary language. The rationale for the inclusion criteria was to create a narrower focus on the physically disabled and/or chronically ill population where limited research exists, and this inclusion criteria provides a starting point for
this previously marginalized population. Additionally, the required age range for my study allowed for the voices of the disabled person to be amplified with less impact from nondisabled parents and educators. Exclusion criteria was: (a) acquired a physical disability after the age of seven, (b) have a learning disability or cognitive disability, and (c) communicate via sign language or a language other than English. The rationale for the exclusion criteria also allowed me to home in on a population of disabled people who have had a disability for the entirety of their life which is a different experience than people who acquired a disability due to life events. Some physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses also impact cognition and other aspects of the brain. Permitting individuals with comorbid disabilities would have made it difficult to distinguish between the level of supports required for a successful transition. Finally, the need to communicate in English was necessary for the efficiency of this study.

Limited Previous Research. As I previously discussed in detail in Chapter Two, previous research surrounding transition practices and programming largely focuses on other disability categories (Wagner et al., 2012; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983). My research study aimed to highlight a disability category that is historically underrepresented in the educational context. This can be seen as a limitation because the baseline data for the physically disabled population is largely in medical journals (Pfeiffer, 2001; Guevara, 2021), but it can also be seen as an opportunity to infuse disability research into other contexts.

Analysis Limitations

Some additional limitations in the data analysis process that I considered were researcher bias and time constraints. It is also important to note that because I am considered a novice researcher, analysis limitations may have unintentionally occurred. The following sections describe the analysis limitations and how they were addressed throughout my study.
**Researcher Bias.** In Chapter One, I previously discussed my researcher bias as a special education teacher and a PWD. Acknowledging my bias required me to be even more transparent about my procedures, use multiple phases of coding, and engage in discussions with intercoders to counter any unintended bias. On the other hand, being part of the Disability Community allowed me to develop rapport with participants, thus increasing their comfort level during the interview process which allowed them to freely share their lived disabled experiences.

**Time Constraints.** Due to the time constraints of my research study, I was not able to provide opportunities for participants to engage with each other to discuss their artifact creation. An important aspect of artifact creation is to not only help create meaning for the person, but also in a larger context (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012).

**Novice Researcher.** It is important to recognize this is my first research study, so I am considered a novice researcher and there are limitations related to my inexperience. In particular, the process of maintaining conformity while collecting interview data and limiting bias in analysis can be challenging (Kalman, 2019). To address these issues, I took various opportunities to interact with and learn from more experienced researchers and practitioners in order to refine my research skill set.

**Generalizability and Contextual Analysis**

In Chapter Three I briefly discussed the impact of the sample size and further described the impact a sample size of eight participants had on my research study. Generalizability, although not necessary for qualitative research, allows the results of the research study to be reproduced in other settings and situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important to recognize that because of a lack of previous educational research on people with physical
disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, generalizability may be difficult until further research is conducted.

The disabilities represented within my research study are of a similar category, Muscular Dystrophy, and individuals with other types of physical disabilities have different access needs. This is important to recognize because disability is a dynamic and complex experience which is unique to each person.

Self-selected Participation

An additional limitation is that participants self-selected to participate in this study. Participants chose to be involved with this study because they likely have strong feelings about their transition process. These strong feelings may not be representative of the general population and create a potential limitation related to sample selection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Concerns of Quality

In general, concerns surrounding the quality of the research’s rigor and the process’s fidelity in qualitative research include how data is collected and analyzed. To combat quality issues, Orb et al. (2001) suggest increasing the quality of the data collected from research. One of the suggestions includes recording and transcribing interviews to ensure that the information gained from the participants accurately reflects what they shared (Orb et al., 2001). Quantitative researchers express concerns with recording and transcribing data because it impacts the anonymity of the participants (Pratt, 2008). However, qualitative researchers express the need to have a human connection when interviewing participants and suggest ways to keep the information of participants anonymous by asking participants to use a fictitious name when being interviewed (Pratt, 2008). When I conducted my Zoom interviews, participants were given fictitious names.
Reliability

In a qualitative study, reliability and validity concerns exist (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reliability matters because it increases the trustworthiness of the research. Validity is important in qualitative research because ensuring validity means that the tools used to conduct research (for example, interviews) are appropriate for the research being conducted. To address concerns of validity and reliability, specifically within the special education field, Brantlinger et al. (2005) share indicators to ensure that results are reliable and valid. For example, Brantlinger et al. (2005) suggest that results should be coded and sorted systematically, and reflection of the researcher’s personal experience or bias is acknowledged. I coded the Zoom interviews and artifacts for themes by using multiple phases of coding analysis.

In the following sections I discuss suggestions for future research, implications for enhanced educational practices, and a summary of suggestions for improving high school transition programs from the individuals who participated in this study.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are numerous future research studies that have the potential to emerge from this research. Transition planning is a widely researched topic within the educational context; however, the research on the physically disabled population is limited. In Chapter Two, I addressed the literature as it currently exists, but further research is needed in order to obtain a more complete picture centering the disabled voice, specifically the voices of transition people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

A future research study should further examine transition programming and practices by state from the perspective of the person with the disability and/or chronic illness. Because transition mandates vary by state, it’d be helpful to examine transition programming for each
state. This will help provide an overview of effective practices in each state and the funding allocated to transition programming. Along the same lines, it would be beneficial to see which states have more positive postsecondary outcomes based on the funding that is utilized to support transition programming.

Additionally, a future study could also include a narrower context than a state analysis and include regions or counties within the state. In addition to transition mandates varying by state, different counties in a state have different resources allocated to IEP and related services funding. Furthermore, oftentimes, counties have varying county departments, such as The Department of Aging and some counties have combined Independent Living Centers.

A future study could also include participants who graduated high school prior to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). This additional qualifying factor could serve as a reflective piece or baseline that could better assess the trajectory of transition programming through a historical lens.

**Implications for Enhanced Educational Practices**

The results of my research study provided a number of implications for enhanced future educational practices both within the K-12 sector and the higher education context. These implications include suggestions for improved transition programming, navigating complex support systems, addressing independent living, and centering disabled voices.

**Improved Transition Programming.** In Chapter 2, I described the history of transition planning dating back to the 1970s career education initiative that was introduced by the United States Commissioner of Education (Morningstar et al., 1999). I further outlined the history of transition programming through the present-day reauthorization of IDEA. Despite a nearly sixty-year focus on transition planning and programming, we are not doing enough to support PWD,
and specifically people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses who participated in my research study. Utilizing the current federal mandates and the individual guidelines is necessary, until they [the mandates] are changed, but an increased need in access to resources is evident. Specifically, access to knowledge of available resources for special educators who are primarily creating the transition plans. Several participants expressed that they are still unaware of the available resources and certainly did not know of them before graduating high school. Additionally, creating meaningful transition plans that allow the PWD receiving the program to recall, access, and meaningfully engage in their plan. Many participants in this study did not know what a transition plan was or the goals contained in it. access for the individuals who participate in transition planning.

Navigating Complex Support Systems. Although support systems vary by state and even county, it is essential to prepare PWD to navigate the complex networks and systems that later support adults with disabilities. It is possible that the systems can change over time and preparation in terms of the advocacy skill set is something that would improve postsecondary outcomes for PWD. Furthermore, support systems, such as waivers for personal care assistance (PCA), have income restrictions. Many participants in this research study like Maria, Marabella, and Abby expressed their wishes for being better prepared to navigate systems in such a truly independent way. Participants also shared that they were unaware of the financial barriers that impact their need for PCAs. Abby specifically shared that she was unaware of the negative consequences of two combined incomes that marriage afforded her and how that impacts her need for PCA.

Similar to previous research in Chapter Two, preparation first begins with ensuring special educators and districts are aware of how to navigate the complex systems. Once
educators are prepared to navigate the complex networks and systems, they can create opportunities for PWD to meaningfully access. In phase two of the coding process, key phrases such as *access* and *opportunity* arose in interview conversations with participants and their artifact creations which led me to this implication. Additionally, the benefits of peer mentorship arose through the data collected in interviews. Peer mentorship could be a transition programming tool utilized by school districts and county support systems to help facilitate access to resources as well as foster a sense of belonging.

**Addressing Independent Living.** Because of the complex network of county and state support systems, independent living for PWD often looks different than a nondisabled person who does not need to access support systems. Additionally, it’s important to recognize that within the Disability Community, there are differing levels of independent living based on the unique needs and preferences of the PWD. However, independent living is a transition goal area that is often overlooked for people with physical disabilities, but it should be addressed. It is not only important, but highly appropriate to address independent living as a goal area so that physically disabled students can learn how to access county and state support systems.

**Centering Disabled Voices.** The importance of centering student voices in transition planning is not a new approach (Morningstar et al., 1999); however, the need to improve in this area was prevalent in my research. The majority of my participants could not recall their transition plan goals, let alone if they had a transition plan. Furthermore, the participants in the study did not recall their involvement in their high school IEP transition plan and are still figuring out how to navigate the complex systems that they were not prepared to navigate. The lack of involvement in transition planning had a direct impact on the quality of life of the
participants in my study. Focusing on the individualized abilities of each person from a strength-based perspective rather than a deficit perspective will prove helpful in centering disabled voices.

**Suggestions for Improving High School Transition Programs**

Several themes emerged from the participants’ responses directly from the interview question: “What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses?” The suggestions discussed previously, and in detail, in Chapter 4 highlight the themes of Accessibility, Community and Belonging, Disability Identity, and Quality of Life.

A number of participants, specifically Taylor, Pricilla, Marabella, and Josh emphasize the suggestion for peer mentorship among the Disability Community. Providing peer mentorship allows PWD to see that going to college and living independently is a possibility. This was clear in Josh’s account when he shared that he had never seen anyone with his disability when he was growing up who was older than him and he said, “you know, living on my own, going to college, you know, doing all these things. So, it never even occurred to me that that would be my life.” School districts and community support systems such as OVR should consider developing a disability centered peer mentorship forum which can be used to support the transition goal areas in an IEP.

Another suggestion which was heard from every participant in my research study was the need to really center and amplify the voices of the PWD. This was especially evident in Maria’s interview when she shared, “giving the person with the disability, the autonomy to make those decisions and figure out what they want to do, regardless of their disability. Then figure out how that’s gonna be worked in [the plan].” School districts can ensure that disabled voices are centered by promoting active engagement in IEP meetings. Additionally, school districts should
consider creating frameworks and policies that encourage the voices of disabled people to share their desires openly and freely related to their transition plan and overall educational experiences.

An essential suggestion to consider when looking to improve IEP transition programs, is the access to available resources that support PWD later in life. School districts and community support systems can support this effort by ensuring that there is an open line of communication between support systems, families, and districts. This effort can also be supported by first making sure school districts are aware of the complex network of support systems and then educating IEP teams on how these supports can be meaningfully embedded in IEP transition plans.

**Conclusion**

Transition programming is a federal mandate and is an essential part of the IEP as it prepares students with disabilities for their desired postsecondary outcomes (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983). When school districts, community support systems, and PWD are aware of the available resources, they can better prepare transition plans that support the individual needs of the PWD (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983). While support systems may change over time, it is important to be aware of the changes. Additionally, because support systems may change over time, ensuring that the PWD has developed self-advocacy skills will help the PWD continue to navigate the ever-changing support systems so they can live and work to the fullest extent they desire.

This study aimed to examine, analyze, and more importantly, amplify voices of physically disabled and/or chronically ill individuals as they shared about their successes, barriers, reflections, and suggestions on their postsecondary transition journey. The participants
in this study discussed various experiences related to their postsecondary journey. The common themes that emerged from the participants’ interviews and artifact creations were Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community and Belonging, Disability Identity, and Accessibility. These themes align to previous postsecondary research (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983) and are still relevant today. The themes which emerged offer suggestions for continued improvement of IEP transition programming for people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

While my research study solely focused on people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, the implications can impact other disability categories. Future educational practice should consider the suggestions provided by disabled voices and consider how the trajectory of IEP transition programming can be substantially moved forward to better support PWD in their postsecondary outcomes. According to my research, transition programming has a significant impact on how people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses navigate and experience postsecondary life.

shared by Priscilla exemplifies Resilience because although Priscilla was not provided with physical therapy and occupational therapy in school, she knew this was something she had to do to reach her goal of living independently. When Priscilla shared about her process of applying to colleges, she stressed the importance of visiting every school she applied to see if the college would meet her disability needs. This shows how Priscilla needed to be resilient and persistent to reach her post-high school goals.

Resilience was another theme that emerged through Maria’s interview. When Maria discussed her post-high school experience, she shared, “It’s the attitude of ‘you can do this, and you will do this.’” This ‘can-do’ attitude was evident throughout Maria’s account of her post-
high school transition journey. She did note that she forgot how draining it is to figure out everything [activities of daily living] else.

The theme of Resilience was evident throughout Marabella’s discussion of her post-high school journey. She stated that her limitations “did not affect my, like, post-high school trajectory.”

Another theme that was evident throughout Hunter’s interview was Resilience. Hunter shared that because of his physical disability, he knew he had to further his education to reach his post-high school goals. Hunter’s statement supports the theme of Resilience, “I suppose I viewed school as my only pathway towards success, or at least what I defined to be success and a comfortable life.”

Another theme that was evident throughout Nadine’s interview was Resilience. Nadine shared that she enjoyed school because, in the classroom setting, it didn’t matter that she was disabled. After all, “I always kind of was the smartest person in the room.” Nadine shared that she often found herself educating her professors about the functional impact of her disability, and a recommendation she provided was making sure that people with disabilities can accurately describe the accommodations they require as they relate directly to their disability. This is evident when Nadine shared “I was always educating them [professors] about it, and then seeing how I find all my workarounds with my physical disability but still be able to operate just like any normal college student.” Additionally, Nadine shared that it would be helpful for teachers and professors if they were well-versed in the dynamic experience of having a disability.

Suggestions for Community and Belonging

When Maria was asked about what suggestions she could provide for improving the post-high school transition process for people with physical disabilities, she shared “Giving the person
with a disability the autonomy to make those decisions and figure out what they want to do, regardless of their disability, and then figure out how that’s gonna be worked into their plan.” This suggestion speaks to the importance of Community and Belonging, as well as Disability Identity because it’s important to center the voices of the disabled person throughout all aspects of the transition process. Another suggestion Maria provided was the importance of having the school recognize all the abilities of the person with a disability. She elaborates on this by stating, “Like, I needed someone to tell me, ‘You’re worth it, you can do this, and if you don’t, no one will.’”

The theme of Community and Belonging was evident in Hunter’s discussion about his lack of preparedness and social life post-high school. Hunter showed vulnerability as he discussed the mental health issues he experienced early in his college journey and acknowledged that he was not alone in experiencing these mental health issues. Hunter vulnerably shared, Mental health issues often arise in those years, and I certainly was no exception. At first, I was very, very enthusiastic, very bright-eyed, and just really optimistic about it all academically. I never really struggled until I started having very severe depression in about my second year of college, and the poorer grades followed. I still passed all my classes, but I went from a straight-A student to a B- and C-student because I just – I was just too sad all the time. Academically I was fine, it was the social aspect that I was not prepared for.

The theme of Community and Belonging was evident in Nadine’s account of her postsecondary transition process. Nadine shared that when she toured the university, she ended up attending; she was impressed by the physical accessibility of the campus, but even more so with the preparedness of the university’s office for students with disabilities (OSD). She stated,
“So she [OSD employee] was prepared and even asked me if I needed assistance going to the bathroom.”

**Suggestions for Positive Impact on Quality of Life**

Quality of Life was another theme evident throughout Taylor’s discussion of her post-high school transition process. Taylor discussed the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) funding issues, which negatively impacted her ability to begin college. Taylor described that she was initially able to receive funding for a PCA while in college, but then, for an unknown reason, she declined the funding. Taylor further described that the lack of funding significantly impacted her ability to attend college, and at this point, she hasn’t been able to take more than a few college courses. Personal Growth is a sub-theme that emerged through Taylor’s account of these DVR funding issues. Taylor has accepted this reality and is currently content with writing and talking about her experiences as a disabled person. She does, however, state, “I wish it was a lot easier.”

Quality of Life was another theme that was evident throughout Josh’s account of his post-high school transition process. He previously shared that not knowing how to access and apply for accommodations for the SAT and ACT forced him into the path of community college for the first two years before transferring to a four-year college. A sub-theme that emerged because of his community college experience is Resilience. It was because of Josh’s experiences as a transfer student that he became an advocate for all transfer students at his university.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced the participants by giving insight into who they are so their lived experiences could be amplified throughout my research. Additionally, I shared the results of my data analysis of the individual Zoom interviews and the artifacts created by the
participants. The eight participants in my study shared their lived experiences surrounding their postsecondary transition journey, including the successes, barriers, and suggestions for improved transition plan programming. The themes identified align with previous transition research, specifically in disability studies and disability studies in education. The final chapter analyzes the findings further about my theoretical framework. I will also provide an overview of my study, a discussion of the results, suggestions for improving IEP transition practices, and implications for future research.
Chapter V: Discussion

This qualitative research study investigated the lived experiences and perspectives of eight individuals as they navigated their post-high school transition process. More distinctly, this study aimed to understand the factors contributing to the participants’ successes and barriers in their transition journey. Furthermore, this study sought to highlight suggestions and recommendations for improving the IEP transition program process from the perspective of physically disabled and/or chronically ill people. In this chapter, I summarize the study, the connection to my theoretical framework, a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and implications for future research and educational practice.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences and perspectives of physically disabled and/or chronically ill youth as they navigated their post-high school transition process. I utilized a qualitative study research design, including individual interviews and artifact creation. I utilized artifact creation, which allowed my participants to expand upon their postsecondary transition journey in a visually creative way. Artifact creation provides a multimodal experience that enhances the narrative, allows for reflection, and assists in making meaning of a lived experience (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012). This study included eight participants who identified as physically disabled and/or chronically ill and had an IEP throughout their K-12 public educational career. This study aimed to answer the research questions about the lived experiences and perspectives of physically disabled and chronically ill youth throughout their post-high school transition journey. The research questions and sub-questions that I examined in this study focused on participants’ successes, barriers, and reflections relating to their career, education, and social experiences. Additionally, the research
questions sought have the participants reflect on their current feelings about their transition journey by engaging in an artifact creation forum.

The first research question and accompanying sub-questions are important because the answers each participant openly shared provide a unique and dynamic lens on disability. Answering these questions produced valuable insight in terms of the success experienced by PWD and the barriers that were navigated by PWD. Additionally, these questions help us understand the implications of current systems and provide insight to consider for future research and educational practices that have the potential to transform the narrative surrounding disability.

The second research question that guided my study is important because the answers provide information about the lasting impact of transition planning. Additionally, this question highlights the commonality of the post-high school transition experiences of physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults. Similarly to my first research question, my second research question emphasizes the implications of the transition experiences and provides suggestions for future educational practice and research.

In summary, there were seven themes related to the successes, barriers, and suggestions for improved IEP transition planning that were prevalent in the data collected: (a) Quality of Life, (b) Resilience, (c) Personal Growth, (d) Independence, (e) Community and Belonging, (f) Disability Identity, and (g) Accessibility. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how these themes connect with the theoretical framework of this study.

Applications of Findings to Theoretical Framework

In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical framework which guided my research study. The theoretical frameworks that I chose were carefully and methodologically decided upon so that
the results could connect to the limited previous research (Lindsay et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983).

**Disability Studies in Education**

Disability Studies in Education is an emerging subsection of the Disability Studies framework which focuses on disability specifically within the educational context while centering the voices of the PWD (Slee et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2016). Like the Disability Studies theoretical framework, Disability Studies in Education challenges the negative narrative about disability (Slee et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2016). Disability Studies in Education is relevant to my research because the participants shared their postsecondary transition programming experiences in relation to education. This framework provided me with a lens in which to analyze the data and amplify the voices of PWD as they share suggestions for improving educational practices.

**Disability Studies**

Scholars and researchers who analyze data about disability, from the lens of the Disability Studies theoretical framework, view disability as a normal variation of the human experience (Pfeiffer, 2001). Additionally, the Disability Studies framework challenges the belief that disability is something that needs to be fixed (Pfeiffer, 2001).

I was somewhat surprised to find that the experiences of the participants in my research study were more aligned with beliefs associated with Disability Studies scholars. This was evident specifically in Nadine’s account of her social experiences when she shared, “oh, my god, I get brownie points because I helped the disabled girl.” These social interactions further the negative narrative about disability, and that disability is something to be pitied. It was evident that Nadine struggled socially throughout middle school and high school because of others’
beliefs about disability. This was further substantiated when Nadine shared, “I was glad to finally graduate. No more awkward, awkward social situations on Mondays through Fridays for most of the year.” Nadine was not the only participant who shared her negative social experiences because of the view other people had about disability. Hunter shared that in high school, his social interactions were somewhat limited because he couldn’t engage in many of the extracurricular activities that were offered because of his disability. Taylor’s reflections of “being othered” by her peers were a point of social exclusion for her.

The Disability Studies theoretical framework was found to be important in my research as it provided me with another lens to view the barriers PWD experience as a societal issue rather than a disability issue. Throughout the interview and artifact data, it is evident that the participants in my study are impacted by people who do not view disability from the Disability Studies framework. Furthermore, the previously determined codes which emerged to themes from the interview and artifacts, are themes that are within the Disability Studies framework.

Discussion of Results

The following section will further examine the results of my research study. In Chapter 4, I answered both research questions, and the corresponding sub-questions, in relation to themes that emerged through the coding phases: Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community and Belonging, Disability and Identity, and Accessibility. In this section, I will discuss each of the themes and how they connect with the overall results of my study. Figure 11 helps guide the discussion of the results obtained through the data collection process and how it relates to the themes and the literature.
Accessibility

Accessibility is a fundamental human right. In the context of my research, accessibility refers to physical accessibility, but also access to education, employment, healthcare, reasonable accommodations, relationships, and knowledge of resources. Accessibility is the fundamental theme upon which the other themes expand. It was evident that the participants in my study must focus on accessibility before considering other goals and reaching a higher level of self-actualization (Hagerty, 1999). For example, when Hunter was discussing his frustrating
experiences with Personal Care Attendants (PCA), he shared, “It’s so, it’s so, frustrating that we need to resort to things like that just to live a half normal life.” Abby shared about her challenging experiences when trying to navigate waiver programs that support her in receiving PCA services. Her challenges revolve around finding people who can be hired to help her as a PCA. Another example that illustrates the need for Accessibility before reaching upwards in the pyramid is when Maria shared,

Like, starting this whole adult life thing is so hard for me because I focus on getting my basic needs met. Like, other goals, are just not like, I have other goals, but I don’t work on them, you know what I am saying, like, you're working on other stuff [basic stuff].

**Independence**

The next level of the pyramid is Independence. Once access needs are met, the PWD can begin to reach their desired level of independence. In the context of my research, Independence includes the PWD’s ability to navigate decisions which leads them to a greater level of independence. Independence includes the necessity of having a PCA while navigating support systems with restrictive federal and state policies. Furthermore, Independence includes obtaining a career, substantial gainful employment, while still being able to receive waiver services that provide for the necessity of a PCA. It was clear that the participants in my research study had varying views and experiences with independence. For example, Pricilla is content with her living situation in the city and the career she has working for the Department of Human Services. On the contrary, Taylor experiences more frustration with her current living situation and ability to attend college. Other participants expressed that while they are frustrated with their current challenges, they persist and know they will be able to reach their desired level of independence in the future.
Personal Growth

Personal Growth is possible once Accessibility and Independence are addressed. In the context of my research, Personal Growth considers the insight gained from the individual’s disability life journey. This includes accepting the reality of life with a disability and learning to embrace it as a normal part of the human experience (Pfeiffer, 2001). This was a consistent overlaying theme among the participants in my study. This was evident in Hunter’s lived experiences as he explained that he has a solid network of friends but wishes he could be more spontaneous rather than planning his social outings. Hunter shared, “The only thing is, I often need to plan ahead quite a lot.” He further shared that he is happy with his social group. On the other hand, Taylor sarcastically shared that her social interactions were, “So, that was fun. But ya I mean, socially, it was hard, because I always felt othered.” Taylor further elaborated that she wishes that things were different in middle school and high school but has since learned to find a sense of belonging within the Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) community.

The Importance of Community and Belonging

Community and Belonging is possible once Accessibility, Independence, and Personal Growth are reached. In the context of my research, Community and Belonging highlight the importance of finding people who just “get it.” This is especially important for the Disability Community as disability is often seen as a negative part of the human experience (Swinton, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2001). This was an overarching theme within my research as many participants, like Abby, Taylor, Josh, either experienced their gratitude for their community or expressed the need for community. Maria, Marabella, and Nadine provided suggestions for improving transition programming that surrounds the need for peer mentorship. In the context of my
research, Community and Belonging includes learning to embrace disability as an identity that can propel PWD’s further as they navigate systematic challenges.

**Disability as an Identity.** In the context of my research, and in alignment with Disability Studies Theorists, the theme of Disability as an identity (Pfeiffer, 2001) includes the language used to speak about disability. It is important to note that disability language is a personal choice for the PWD and varies from individual to individual. Additionally, disability language used in the context of education, government, and other related sectors often uses person first language or other infantilizing language that does not align with the PWD’s stance. Disability as an Identity comes from immersing yourself into a community that you belong to, thus creating a sense of community and belonging. The theme of Disability and Identity was prevalent in Josh’s reflections on his experiences in college with reforming the Disabled Student Union at his higher education institution. Taylor’s reflections also reflected disability as an identity as she shared the joy, she experiences with her SMA community.

**Impact on Quality of Life and Independence**

Within the context of my research, Quality of Life highlights the real-life implications of policies that drive PCA funding. Previous research on Quality of Life exists within the context of medical journals. My research study provides a different, and needed perspective on quality of life as it relates to everyday disability life. This sentiment was shared by Marabella when she explained why she was interested in my research study. Marabella said, “And I feel like there’s not as much emphasis on, like, quality of life.” Quality of Life is the last step in the pyramid which allows PWD to embrace and celebrate life fully while living out their purpose.
Developing Resilience

Resilience is pictured by a line continuing up the pyramid to symbolize that resilience can occur throughout every stage, especially when facing challenging circumstances. Although the participants in my research study did not identify the word resilience, they used similar words like the word persistence or keep going. It was evident that the mindset of resilience was displayed because of the data they shared within the interviews and artifact creations.

In this section, I provided how the data collected from the interviews and artifacts relate to and represent a hierarchy of needs. In the following sections, I discuss the limitations of my research study and how I accounted for each limitation throughout the research process.

Limitations

Similarly to all research studies, my qualitative study had limitations. Some limitations were considered and addressed in Chapter Three which broadly included threats to descriptive validity such as threats to the interview questions and process, threats to the artifact process and limitations of using artifacts. Additionally, Chapter Three addressed threats to external validity including sample size, the impact of state mandates, transferability, and credibility. In addition to the above limitations, this section will focus on the following areas: (a) methodology, (b) analysis limitations, (c) generalizability and contextual analysis, (d) self-selected participation, (e) concerns of quality, and (f) reliability.

Methodology

Qualitative research is an emerging research field that continues to face scrutiny both inside and outside the qualitative realms (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Boddy, 2016). The methodological limitations of my qualitative research study include the sample size, the specific criteria for this study, and the limited previous bodies of research on this specific population.
Sample Size. The sample size for my research study consisted of eight total participants with physical disabilities and or chronic illnesses between the ages of 18 and 27 years old. There are differing opinions between quantitative and qualitative researchers of an appropriate qualitative study sample size (Boddy, 2016). Some qualitative researchers believe an adequate sample size is between 12 and 20, while others believe a sample size of 30 is necessary for data saturation (Hennink, 2022; Vasileiou et al., 2018; Boddy, 2016). It is important to note that furthermore, some qualitative researchers find value in qualitative studies consisting of just one participant (Boddy, 2016). The purpose of my research study was to amplify voices of a specific population, physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults where previous research is limited within the educational field. The power of the lived experiences shared throughout the interview and artifact data collection procedures highlight the human emotion behind the stories (Carspecken & Saxena, 2022; Pezalla, 2012; Rowsell, 2011). This research study could be the beginning of amplifying previously marginalized voices; it gained a strong interest following as recruitment flyers were disseminated. Within a period of twelve to twenty-four hours, a number of disabled individuals were expressing their gratitude for this research, signing up for the study, and inquiring the rationale behind the exclusion criteria. I had more volunteers than I could accommodate given the limited timeframe for my study.

Specific Population and Criteria. The population of my research study consisted of five inclusion criteria (a) were physically disabled and/or chronically ill young adults, (b) were between the ages of 18 to 27 years old, (c) had an IEP in high school, (d) attended high school in the United States, and (e) spoke English as their primary language. The rationale for the inclusion criteria was to create a narrower focus on the physically disabled and/or chronically ill population where limited research exists, and this inclusion criteria provides a starting point for
this previously marginalized population. Additionally, the required age range for my study allowed for the voices of the disabled person to be amplified with less impact from nondisabled parents and educators. Exclusion criteria was: (a) acquired a physical disability after the age of seven, (b) have a learning disability or cognitive disability, and (c) communicate via sign language or a language other than English. The rationale for the exclusion criteria also allowed me to home in on a population of disabled people who have had a disability for the entirety of their life which is a different experience than people who acquired a disability due to life events. Some physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses also impact cognition and other aspects of the brain. Permitting individuals with comorbid disabilities would have made it difficult to distinguish between the level of supports required for a successful transition. Finally, the need to communicate in English was necessary for the efficiency of this study.

**Limited Previous Research.** As I previously discussed in detail in Chapter Two, previous research surrounding transition practices and programming largely focuses on other disability categories (Wagner et al., 2012; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983). My research study aimed to highlight a disability category that is historically underrepresented in the educational context. This can be seen as a limitation because the baseline data for the physically disabled population is largely in medical journals (Pfeiffer, 2001; Guevara, 2021), but it can also be seen as an opportunity to infuse disability research into other contexts.

**Analysis Limitations**

Some additional limitations in the data analysis process that I considered were researcher bias and time constraints. It is also important to note that because I am considered a novice researcher, analysis limitations may have unintentionally occurred. The following sections describe the analysis limitations and how they were addressed throughout my study.
**Researcher Bias.** In Chapter One, I previously discussed my researcher bias as a special education teacher and a PWD. Acknowledging my bias required me to be even more transparent about my procedures, use multiple phases of coding, and engage in discussions with intercoders to counter any unintended bias. On the other hand, being part of the Disability Community allowed me to develop rapport with participants, thus increasing their comfort level during the interview process which allowed them to freely share their lived disabled experiences.

**Time Constraints.** Due to the time constraints of my research study, I was not able to provide opportunities for participants to engage with each other to discuss their artifact creation. An important aspect of artifact creation is to not only help create meaning for the person, but also in a larger context (Rowsell, 2011; Pezalla, 2012).

**Novice Researcher.** It is important to recognize this is my first research study, so I am considered a novice researcher and there are limitations related to my inexperience. In particular, the process of maintaining conformity while collecting interview data and limiting bias in analysis can be challenging (Kalman, 2019). To address these issues, I took various opportunities to interact with and learn from more experienced researchers and practitioners in order to refine my research skill set.

**Generalizability and Contextual Analysis**

In Chapter Three I briefly discussed the impact of the sample size and further described the impact a sample size of eight participants had on my research study. Generalizability, although not necessary for qualitative research, allows the results of the research study to be reproduced in other settings and situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important to recognize that because of a lack of previous educational research on people with physical
disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, generalizability may be difficult until further research is conducted.

The disabilities represented within my research study are of a similar category, Muscular Dystrophy, and individuals with other types of physical disabilities have different access needs. This is important to recognize because disability is a dynamic and complex experience which is unique to each person.

**Self-selected Participation**

An additional limitation is that participants self-selected to participate in this study. Participants chose to be involved with this study because they likely have strong feelings about their transition process. These strong feelings may not be representative of the general population and create a potential limitation related to sample selection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

**Concerns of Quality**

In general, concerns surrounding the quality of the research’s rigor and the process’s fidelity in qualitative research include how data is collected and analyzed. To combat quality issues, Orb et al. (2001) suggest increasing the quality of the data collected from research. One of the suggestions includes recording and transcribing interviews to ensure that the information gained from the participants accurately reflects what they shared (Orb et al., 2001). Quantitative researchers express concerns with recording and transcribing data because it impacts the anonymity of the participants (Pratt, 2008). However, qualitative researchers express the need to have a human connection when interviewing participants and suggest ways to keep the information of participants anonymous by asking participants to use a fictitious name when being interviewed (Pratt, 2008). When I conducted my Zoom interviews, participants were given fictitious names.
**Reliability**

In a qualitative study, reliability and validity concerns exist (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reliability matters because it increases the trustworthiness of the research. Validity is important in qualitative research because ensuring validity means that the tools used to conduct research (for example, interviews) are appropriate for the research being conducted. To address concerns of validity and reliability, specifically within the special education field, Brantlinger et al. (2005) share indicators to ensure that results are reliable and valid. For example, Brantlinger et al. (2005) suggest that results should be coded and sorted systematically, and reflection of the researcher’s personal experience or bias is acknowledged. I coded the Zoom interviews and artifacts for themes by using multiple phases of coding analysis.

In the following sections I discuss suggestions for future research, implications for enhanced educational practices, and a summary of suggestions for improving high school transition programs from the individuals who participated in this study.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

There are numerous future research studies that have the potential to emerge from this research. Transition planning is a widely researched topic within the educational context; however, the research on the physically disabled population is limited. In Chapter Two, I addressed the literature as it currently exists, but further research is needed in order to obtain a more complete picture centering the disabled voice, specifically the voices of transition people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

A future research study should further examine transition programming and practices by state from the perspective of the person with the disability and/or chronic illness. Because transition mandates vary by state, it’d be helpful to examine transition programming for each
state. This will help provide an overview of effective practices in each state and the funding allocated to transition programming. Along the same lines, it would be beneficial to see which states have more positive postsecondary outcomes based on the funding that is utilized to support transition programming.

Additionally, a future study could also include a narrower context than a state analysis and include regions or counties within the state. In addition to transition mandates varying by state, different counties in a state have different resources allocated to IEP and related services funding. Furthermore, oftentimes, counties have varying county departments, such as The Department of Aging and some counties have combined Independent Living Centers.

A future study could also include participants who graduated high school prior to the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). This additional qualifying factor could serve as a reflective piece or baseline that could better assess the trajectory of transition programming through a historical lens.

**Implications for Enhanced Educational Practices**

The results of my research study provided a number of implications for enhanced future educational practices both within the K-12 sector and the higher education context. These implications include suggestions for improved transition programming, navigating complex support systems, addressing independent living, and centering disabled voices.

**Improved Transition Programming.** In Chapter 2, I described the history of transition planning dating back to the 1970s career education initiative that was introduced by the United States Commissioner of Education (Morningstar et al., 1999). I further outlined the history of transition programming through the present-day reauthorization of IDEA. Despite a nearly sixty-year focus on transition planning and programming, we are not doing enough to support PWD,
and specifically people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses who participated in my research study. Utilizing the current federal mandates and the individual guidelines is necessary, until they [the mandates] are changed, but an increased need in access to resources is evident. Specifically, access to knowledge of available resources for special educators who are primarily creating the transition plans. Several participants expressed that they are still unaware of the available resources and certainly did not know of them before graduating high school. Additionally, creating meaningful transition plans that allow the PWD receiving the program to recall, access, and meaningfully engage in their plan. Many participants in this study did not know what a transition plan was or the goals contained in it. access for the individuals who participate in transition planning.

Navigating Complex Support Systems. Although support systems vary by state and even county, it is essential to prepare PWD to navigate the complex networks and systems that later support adults with disabilities. It is possible that the systems can change over time and preparation in terms of the advocacy skill set is something that would improve postsecondary outcomes for PWD. Furthermore, support systems, such as waivers for personal care assistance (PCA), have income restrictions. Many participants in this research study like Maria, Marabella, and Abby expressed their wishes for being better prepared to navigate systems in such a truly independent way. Participants also shared that they were unaware of the financial barriers that impact their need for PCAs. Abby specifically shared that she was unaware of the negative consequences of two combined incomes that marriage afforded her and how that impacts her need for PCA.

Similar to previous research in Chapter Two, preparation first begins with ensuring special educators and districts are aware of how to navigate the complex systems. Once
educators are prepared to navigate the complex networks and systems, they can create opportunities for PWD to meaningfully access. In phase two of the coding process, key phrases such as *access* and *opportunity* arose in interview conversations with participants and their artifact creations which led me to this implication. Additionally, the benefits of peer mentorship arose through the data collected in interviews. Peer mentorship could be a transition programming tool utilized by school districts and county support systems to help facilitate access to resources as well as foster a sense of belonging.

**Addressing Independent Living.** Because of the complex network of county and state support systems, independent living for PWD often looks different than a nondisabled person who does not need to access support systems. Additionally, it’s important to recognize that within the Disability Community, there are differing levels of independent living based on the unique needs and preferences of the PWD. However, independent living is a transition goal area that is often overlooked for people with physical disabilities, but it should be addressed. It is not only important, but highly appropriate to address independent living as a goal area so that physically disabled students can learn how to access county and state support systems.

**Centering Disabled Voices.** The importance of centering student voices in transition planning is not a new approach (Morningstar et al., 1999); however, the need to improve in this area was prevalent in my research. The majority of my participants could not recall their transition plan goals, let alone if they had a transition plan. Furthermore, the participants in the study did not recall their involvement in their high school IEP transition plan and are still figuring out how to navigate the complex systems that they were not prepared to navigate. The lack of involvement in transition planning had a direct impact on the quality of life of the
participants in my study. Focusing on the individualized abilities of each person from a strength-based perspective rather than a deficit perspective will prove helpful in centering disabled voices.

**Suggestions for Improving High School Transition Programs**

Several themes emerged from the participants’ responses directly from the interview question: “What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses?” The suggestions discussed previously, and in detail, in Chapter 4 highlight the themes of Accessibility, Community and Belonging, Disability Identity, and Quality of Life.

A number of participants, specifically Taylor, Pricilla, Marabella, and Josh emphasize the suggestion for peer mentorship among the Disability Community. Providing peer mentorship allows PWD to see that going to college and living independently is a possibility. This was clear in Josh’s account when he shared that he had never seen anyone with his disability when he was growing up who was older than him and he said, “you know, living on my own, going to college, you know, doing all these things. So, it never even occurred to me that that would be my life.” School districts and community support systems such as OVR should consider developing a disability centered peer mentorship forum which can be used to support the transition goal areas in an IEP.

Another suggestion which was heard from every participant in my research study was the need to really center and amplify the voices of the PWD. This was especially evident in Maria’s interview when she shared, “giving the person with the disability, the autonomy to make those decisions and figure out what they want to do, regardless of their disability. Then figure out how that’s gonna be worked in [the plan].” School districts can ensure that disabled voices are centered by promoting active engagement in IEP meetings. Additionally, school districts should
consider creating frameworks and policies that encourage the voices of disabled people to share their desires openly and freely related to their transition plan and overall educational experiences.

An essential suggestion to consider when looking to improve IEP transition programs, is the access to available resources that support PWD later in life. School districts and community support systems can support this effort by ensuring that there is an open line of communication between support systems, families, and districts. This effort can also be supported by first making sure school districts are aware of the complex network of support systems and then educating IEP teams on how these supports can be meaningfully embedded in IEP transition plans.

Conclusion

Transition programming is a federal mandate and is an essential part of the IEP as it prepares students with disabilities for their desired postsecondary outcomes (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Will, 1983). When school districts, community support systems, and PWD are aware of the available resources, they can better prepare transition plans that support the individual needs of the PWD (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983). While support systems may change over time, it is important to be aware of the changes. Additionally, because support systems may change over time, ensuring that the PWD has developed self-advocacy skills will help the PWD continue to navigate the ever-changing support systems so they can live and work to the fullest extent they desire.

This study aimed to examine, analyze, and more importantly, amplify voices of physically disabled and/or chronically ill individuals as they shared about their successes, barriers, reflections, and suggestions on their postsecondary transition journey. The participants
in this study discussed various experiences related to their postsecondary journey. The common themes that emerged from the participants’ interviews and artifact creations were Quality of Life, Resilience, Personal Growth, Independence, Community and Belonging, Disability Identity, and Accessibility. These themes align to previous postsecondary research (Lindsay, et al., 2019; Targetta et al., 2013; Morningstar et al., 1999; Will, 1983) and are still relevant today. The themes which emerged offer suggestions for continued improvement of IEP transition programming for people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

While my research study solely focused on people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, the implications can impact other disability categories. Future educational practice should consider the suggestions provided by disabled voices and consider how the trajectory of IEP transition programming can be substantially moved forward to better support PWD in their postsecondary outcomes. According to my research, transition programming has a significant impact on how people with physical disabilities and/or chronic illnesses navigate and experience postsecondary life.
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Appendix A: Permissions to Recruit

Living with M.D.

May 23

? Time Sensitive Question:
If I were to post a research flyer asking for people in this group to participate in my qualitative research study for my dissertation, who would be the person/persons to provide me with permission to post a recruitment flyer?
Thank you!

3 comments

Like  Comment  Send

3

Top comments

Jess, You are allowed to ask people to participate in your study. Good luck on your dissertation!

Like  Reply

thank you!!
this group to participate in my qualitative research study for my dissertation, who would be the person/persons to provide me with permission to post a recruitment flyer? Thank you!

6 comments

I would contact [redacted] who seems to be the Administrator and she could probably tell you if you can solicit for
Hi [Name], I’m reaching out to see if you’d allow me, a member of Women Living with Muscular Dystrophy, to post a flyer in our group for my doctorate research. I’m looking to recruit participants who would complete an interview and focus group about their experiences of life after high school while having a disability. The research is for my dissertation.

Thank you for considering,
Jessica

Hi Jessica ..yes that's fine. I'm sure there will be ladies on the group that will help you with that
Hi Jess,
Love the idea of this project. I appreciate you asking in advance. Can confirm a couple things. Are you getting paid for the results? Who will be hosting the focus group? And who is getting the results? Are participants getting paid?
Thanks! 😊

*Are you?

There will be no payment/compensation and this is for my dissertation so it will be used in my chapter 4

I am looking to amplify voices of you with physical disabilities as they navigate post secondary life. It’s my hope that the stories are amplified and create
I am looking to amplify voices of you with physical disabilities as they navigate post secondary life. It's my hope that the stories are amplified and create meaningful change in policy.

Love this!! I wish you success with this project! No need for a letter from me, you have my permission to post flyer in group and tag @everyone! 😊😊 Let me know if I can be of help.

Awesome, thank you so much!
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Young Adults with Physical Disabilities Needed for a Research Study!

Amplifying Voices Postsecondary Outcomes for Physically Disabled Students- a Qualitative Study

Are you looking for an opportunity to share your post high school experience?

Inclusion Criteria
- physically disabled and or chronically ill young adults
- between the ages of 18 to 27 years old
- who had an Individualized Education Plan
- were educated in the United States
- speak English as their primary language

Study Details
- zoom interview
- padlet to share artifact
- 90 minute time commitment

Contact Jessica, WCU EDD candidate, directly via Facebook messenger or email to participate in an interview.

e-mail: JK966255@wcupa.edu

This study has been approved by the West Chester University Institutional Review Board, protocol IRB-FY2023-373

Questions or concerns can be directed to:
Jessica Keogh, WCU EDD candidate
jk966255@wcupa.edu
Dr. Staubers, WCU Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education Admin
mstaubers@wcupa.edu
Appendix C: Consent Form

**Project Title:** Amplifying Voices Postsecondary Outcomes for Physically Disabled Students- an Imperative Phenomenological Approach

**Investigator(s):** Jessica Keogh; Merry Staulters

**Project Overview:** Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Jessica Keogh as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how physically disabled or chronically ill youth feel about their postsecondary transition journey.

Your participation will take about 2 hours to give consent to participate in the study, participate in a semi structured Zoom interview, and to create an artifact that represents your feelings towards your postsecondary transition journey. There is a minimal risk that participants may experience mild discomfort or anxiety when reflecting upon their post high school transition journey. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may gain a deeper understanding of how your experiences with postsecondary transition influence your current life experiences and you may identify ways to empower others who experience similar circumstances. The information taken from the study may help school leaders and teachers recognize instructional strategies that may promote positive person-centered transition programming.

The research project is being done by Jessica Keogh as part of their Doctoral Dissertation. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how physically disabled youth feel about their postsecondary transition journey. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Jessica Keogh any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how physically disabled youth feel about their postsecondary transition journey.

2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**

   o give consent to participate in the study.

   o participate in a 60 minute semi structured Zoom interview that will be audio recorded.

   o This study will take 2 hours of your time.
3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?

No

4. Is there any risk to me?

- Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: You may experience mild discomfort or anxiety when reflecting upon their post high school transition journey. If you experience discomfort, you have the right to skip questions or withdraw at any time.
- If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with ORSP at 610-436-3557

5. Is there any benefit to me?

- Benefits to you may include: You may gain a deeper understanding of how your experiences with postsecondary transition influence your current life experiences and you may identify ways to empower others who experience similar circumstances.
- Other benefits may include: The information taken from the study may help school leaders and teachers recognize instructional strategies that may promote positive person-centered transition programming.

6. How will you protect my privacy?

- The semi-structured interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom. A recording of the Zoom interview will be stored on the WCU OneDrive on a password-protected computer.
- The recordings will be destroyed after transcriptions are complete and accurate.
- You will be assigned a fake name to use during the interviews.
- All identifiable data will be changed to protect participants.
- Your records will be private. Only Jessica Keogh, Merry Staulters, and the West Chester IRB will have access to your name and responses.
- Your name will not be used in any reports.
- Records will be stored:
  - Password Protected File/Computer
  - Records will be destroyed Three Years After Study Completion

7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?

No

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?

- For any questions with this study, contact:
  - Primary Investigator: Jessica Keogh at 908-334-3348 or jk966235@wcupa.edu
  - Faculty Sponsor: Merry Staulters at 610-436-2398 or mstaulters@wcupa.edu
- For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.
I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Please check one:

☐ I agree to participate in the study.

☐ I do not agree to participate in the study.

I. _________________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.
Appendix D: Interview Script and Interview Questions

Interview Script:
Jessica will welcome the participant to the zoom interview and thank them for their willingness to spend the next hour with me. Jessica will say “Hi (insert name)! Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this semi structured zoom interview. There are about 7 questions, and I may ask follow up questions as needed. I expect this interview to take about an hour of your time.”

Jessica will pause and ask if the participant has any questions by saying “Do you have any questions so far?”

Jessica will wait for questions and respond as needed.

Jessica will share that she received the signed consent form by saying “I received your signed consent form and was wondering if you have any questions.”

Jessica will wait for questions and respond as needed.

Jessica will remind the participant that their participation is optional, and confidentiality will be maintained by saying “Your participation is optional and should you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can end the zoom interview. You may also choose to skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering. Additionally, as you know, I am audio recording this interview so I can transcribe your answers. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, I have renamed you on Zoom. I will use a pseudonym in my research findings so that no identifying information is shared.”

Jessica will pause and ask if the participant has any questions by saying “Do you have any questions so far?”

Jessica will wait for questions and respond as needed.

Jessica will say “Before we begin with the formal interview, I’d like to review the purpose of my study. The purpose of my research study is to gain a better understanding of how people with physical disabilities viewed their post high school transition.”

Jessica will pause and ask if the participant has any questions by saying “Do you have any questions?”

Jessica will wait for questions and respond as needed.

Jessica will remind the participant that there is no compensation for participating in this research study by saying “We are ready to begin and as a reminder, there is no compensation for participating in this study. Do you consent to participate in this study?”

Once the participant responds, Jessica will say “Thank you. Because I am asking you to share some of your experiences, I think it is important for me to share about mine so that you have a
better understanding of who I am and why this work is important to me. I’m Jessica, and I’m a person with a physical disability called Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). I’m also a special education teacher. I’m interested in this work because I know my post high school transition process was interesting and I’m seeking to understand how other people with similar disabilities to mine have navigated life after high school.”

At the end of the interview, after asking the 7 open ended interview questions, Jessica will thank the participant for participating by saying “Thank you for spending this time with me this evening and sharing your experiences.”

**Interview Questions:**

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, how you identify as a person with a disability, and why you signed up to participate in this study?
- Think back- As a student with a physical disability or chronic illness, can you tell me about your feelings towards school?
  - Middle school?
  - High school?
- What did you envision doing after high school? How is it similar or different to what you are doing now?
  - Consider career
  - Consider education
  - Consider independent living
- How do you define success?
  - What does success look like for you in the following areas
    - Social success
    - Career success
    - Independent living
- What is your experience with your IEP transition plan?
  - Do you recall anyone in middle school or high school working with you to help you plan for your future? What did that look like?
  - What was your transition plan?
  - How did your transition programming prepare you?
- What does a successful college (postsecondary) life look like for you? If there were no barriers.
- Have you experienced any barriers directly related to your disability when trying to obtain your goals? Can you provide some examples?
- What do you think is crucial to include in a transition plan to best support PWD?
- Would you be willing to create an artifact that represents how you felt about your transition from high school to post on an online forum, Padlet, with other people who have been asked these same interview questions? Examples include a painting, a song, poem, picture, etc. If yes, please use this sign up genius to indicate which dates work for you.
Appendix E: Artifact Creation Instructions

Hi [Participant Name],

I hope you had a great day! Thank you again for taking the time to complete the interview! I know I briefly described the Padlet post, but wanted to share it with you here.

I’m asking participants to either create something (a picture, poem, drawing – literally anything) that represents your thoughts and feelings of your transition from high school to post-high school.

Here’s the link for you to post: [Link redacted to protect confidentiality]

The password is: [Password redacted to protect confidentiality]

You can name yourself as Participant # per your interview.

Thank you again for your participation in this!

With gratitude,

Jessica
Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Nov 28, 2023 8:20:42 AM EST

To: Jessica Keogh
Education Policy, Planning Adm, Ed Leadership & Higher Ed Adm

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - IRB-FY2023-373 Amplifying Voices Postsecondary Outcomes for Physically Disabled Students- an Imperative Phenomenological Approach

Dear Jessica Keogh:

Thank you for your submitted application to the West Chester University Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for Amplifying Voices Postsecondary Outcomes for Physically Disabled Students- an Imperative Phenomenological Approach.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Sincerely,
West Chester University Institutional Review Board

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155