ACCOMMODATION ACCESS BY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

Abstract: An increasing number of students with disabilities (SWD) are attending college. Yet, many SWD, including students with specific learning disabilities (SLD), do not access accommodations needed for their academic success (Travis, 2014). To identify barriers and supports that affect access to accommodations, the researcher used a qualitative methodology with a descriptive, phenomenological approach to explore experiences of accessing accommodations for a convenience sample of students who self-identified with SLD and were attending Southern California community colleges. Data collected from semistructured interviews were analyzed through the lenses of self-advocacy theory and self-determination theory. The researcher found and identified three practical themes: (a) assigned advocates, (b) meeting with instructors, and (c) positive school experiences that assist students with SLD on postsecondary campuses access their accommodations. The themes support recommendations to those working with postsecondary students with SLD. Those recommendations include (a) assigning advocates, (b) facilitating meetings with instructors, (c) ensuring all students have positive educational experiences, (d) training and educating all those who encounter SWD on postsecondary campuses, and (e) alleviating stigma and negative perceptions associated with disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of students with disabilities (SWD) in higher education has increased over the past decades (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016; Williams-Hall 2018), mostly due to legislative mandates, such as the American With Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA; Agarwal Calvo & Kumar, 2014). The NCES (2016) estimated 12% of the U.S. community college student population identified as individuals with disabilites, and U.S. community colleges enroll half of all SWD, more than 1.3 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

Despite increases in enrollment, graduation rates of SWD are significantly lower than rates of their peers (Herbert, Welsh, Hong, Kurz, Byun, Soo-yong & Atkinson, 2014). Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver & Wei (2009) found 29% of SWD graduated or completed their postsecondary studies, while 89% of students without disabilities completed their studies. Newman Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver & Wei (2011) found the rate of completion for SWD attending 4-year colleges and universities was 34%, compared to 52% of students without disabilities.

In a study of 59 Illinois postsecondary institutions, Williams-Hall (2018) found adequate resources were not available for SWD, and many SWD did not use the office of disability services (ODS), which offers access to accommodations and supports transitions to college. Williams-Hall identified barriers to accommodations, including embarrassment and lack of self-advocacy skills, knowledge of postsecondary institutions, understanding of disabilities, transition planning from high school, self-advocacy skills, study habits, organizational skills, time-management skills, and social skills. These barriers impede accommodations, retention, completion, and success in higher education environments.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD, 2014) found approximately 17% of students with SLD received accommodations and support in college, compared to 94% of students with SLD who received assistance in high school. Even though the ADA and Section 504 have granted SWD the legal right to equal access to postsecondary education, many SLD do not access postsecondary services (Agarwal et al., 2014). Students with disabilities shift from structured and guided educational processes in high school to self-directed paths in college (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015). Shifting the responsibility from the school to the student requires SWD to use self-advocacy skills, and many SWD do not know how to engage in self-advocacy skills, such as disclosure, requesting accommodations, or seeking special services. Students with disabilities experience barriers when trying to access accommodations, including not being understood by instructors, instructors' lack of knowledge, and students not knowing how to request services (Travis, 2014). When SWD are assisted in accessing accommodations that support SWD academic progress, they are successful in completing their academic goals (Travis, 2014). Problems SWD face in accessing accommodations in postsecondary education settings create issues of social injustice for individuals with disabilities. Johnson and Parry (2015) suggested social justice as inquiry as an approach to a problem when change may come from many directions. The researcher of the current study used social justice inquiry, highlighting experiences of individuals with disabilities in the college population. The researcher used a social justice lens to explore the phenomenon of SWD accessing their accommodations on postsecondary campuses and used a phenomenological lens based on recommendations in studies by O'Shea and Meyer (2016) and Newman, Madaus & Javitz (2016).

BACKGROUND AND FOUNDATION

Specific learning disabilities are a group of disorders that manifest in difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or performing mathematics. Sometimes referred to as *invisible disabilities,* SLDs have no visible indications (NCLD, 2014) and consist of auditory, visual, sensory, and motor processing disorders. They can be challenging to identify and sometimes go unnoticed (NCLD, 2014). Specific learning disabilities can involve phonological processing, may relate to attention, and can affect areas of learning. Specific learning disabilities do not include low cognitive disabilities but can affect cognitive abilities in association,

conceptualization, and expression. Specific learning disabilities are one of category of disabilities. Along with all disabilities, SLD are protected educationally under legislation.

Section 504 is civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination toward SWD (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The IDEA provides free, appropriate, public education to all eligible SWD and ensures special education and related services to SWD. The IDEA was later incorporated into the ADA and applied to any U.S. citizen with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Section 504 has been applied to the student population to provide equal access in general education settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Section 504 has broad qualifications and allows for eligibility under *504 plan*s, which provide specific accommodations in classrooms. Legislative acts, such as Section 504 and the ADA, protect SWD during postsecondary enrollment and have provided initiatives and procedures for institutions to support SWD success in higher education (Hadley, 2007).

At the postsecondary level, many responsibilities in providing accommodations for students and complying with mandates of disability legislation are carried out through the ODS. These offices handle specialized services, though structures and processes vary by institution. Processes often require SWD to seek the ODS, self-identify as having a disability through the documentation of a 504 plan, request services from the ODS, and accept services offered (Hadley, 2007).

Requesting services for accommodations at the college level often requires self-advocacy skills and knowledge of available accommodations and how to obtain them (Hengen, 2018). When students want to disclose their disability and ask for services, they are required to provide prior documentation, such as a doctor's report, a 504 plan, or a prior IEP. All needed accommodations are stated there which minimizes the need to negotiate for such services. Although, self-advocacy is necessary for individuals to effectively communicate, negotiate, and assert their interests, desires, needs, and rights (Hengen, 2018). Students need to understand their abilities, their legal rights, how to locate assistance, and what to do if their rights are violated (Hengen, 2018). Many students with SLD lack the self-advocacy skills needed to access

accommodations for their disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

Students are supported in pursuing accommodations when they have self-advocacy skills (Daly-Cano et al., 2015), self-knowledge (Herbert et al., 2014; Kraglund-Gauthier, Young & Kell, 2014), positive past education experiences (Hengen, 2018; Ramsdell, 2014), transition planning (Hamblet, 2014), knowledgeable instructors (Leyser, Yona, Vogel & Wyland, 1998), and self-determination skills (Herbert et al., 2014; O'Shea & Meyer 2016).

Upon entering college, SWD must self-advocate to receive accommodations for their disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) uncovered the need for SWD to demonstrate strong self-advocacy skills, willingness to disclose their disabilities, and positive attitudes. To successfully navigate the process, SWD must use self-advocacy skills, including knowledge of self (limitations, strengths, weaknesses, and rights), their disabilities, and how those disabilities might impact their lives on campus (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Students with SLD must understand their disabilities, explain them, and know how they affect their learning (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

The way SWD construct meaning of their disabilities and how motivated students are to access accommodations depends on the cognitive and emotional ways students make sense of their disabilities and their past high school experiences (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Students with positive experiences with accommodations in high school are more motivated to disclose their disabilities and seek support services in college (Hamblet, 2014; O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). They understand their disabilities, can navigate services for their disabilities, and understand their disabilities are one part of their comprehensive identities.

Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, & Newman (2015) demonstrated a correlation between SWD social relationships and motivations to use accommodations; they found experiences of SWD were distinctive from other marginalized social groups. A sense of belonging helped advance students' self-advocacy, allowed for positive experiences, and supported social relationships. Positive experiences can assist SWD in forming friendships, finding strategies for self-advocacy, mastering the student role, and fostering a sense of belonging. Emphasizing and

celebrating student strengths and engaging in intentional advising through efforts to support students in mastering the student role can build a sense of belonging (Vaccaro et al., 2015). Positive relationships combine experiences of comfort with being part of the school culture, which help SWD gain confidence in their abilities to experience college life.

Social supports are essential to SWD academic success and can include family (Lux, 2016), faculty and staff (Krug, 2015), peers, and ongoing connections with past special educators (Lux, 2016). When peers include SWD and faculty and staff take time to get to know SWD and their abilities, SWD feel included in the educational processes, leading to accommodation accessibility (Krug, 2015). Faculty and staff who take time to understand SWD needs interact with students positively and accommodate them readily (Krug, 2015). Reciprocally, the more students self-disclose, the more self-efficacy instructors have in making accommodations, as instructors then have more information about SWD and their needs (Wright & Meyer, 2017).

Postsecondary staff need training in working effectively with SWD (McCallister, Wilson & Baker, 2014). Staff training on disability laws and staff responsibilities can improve staff willingness to provide essential services to students (West, Novak & Mueller, 2016). Instructors who learn about special education laws and mandates are more likely to value their roles in supporting SWD and assisting them in the use of ODS (Herbert et al., 2014; West et al., 2016). When faculty have sufficient knowledge, they make comprehensive, informed efforts to implement appropriate accommodations and remove barriers to academic success (Sniatecki, Perry & Snell, 2015).

Philosophical shifts, such as universal design for learning (UDL), can provide foundations for instructors and staff to support SWD contextual and functional needs. Instructional strategies can be paired with supporting components, such as the importance of considering students' needs when providing instruction and accommodations (Seok, Soonhwa, DaCosta, Boaventura, Hodges, & Russ, 2018). Institutions that provide equal access to the letter of the law offer services that may limit accommodations because of a focus on students' disabilities and classroom accommodations (Seok et al., 2018). Institutions

that embrace the spirit of the law and provide access to all invest in accommodation processes that consider the entirety of student life, including individual functional needs, cost benefits, and UDL concepts that give all individuals opportunities to learn (Seok et al., 2018).

Transitional planning is an additional way faculty and staff can support SWD. As a result of transition planning, SWD, parents, counselors, and teachers become aware of postsecondary options for SWD (Leyser et al., 1998). Transition planning education is available at the postsecondary level and is necessary for educational success, and plans specific to postsecondary environments assist a broad range of student needs (Newman et al., 2016). Transition planning with specific postsecondary accommodations increase the likelihood of receipt of disability-specific supports in postsecondary schools (Newman et al., 2016).

Students with disabilities are more apt to disclose their disabilities if they had transition planning in high school because they had practice discussing their limitations in the transition planning meetings (Newman et al., 2016). Assistance in providing successful transitional planning starts in secondary education (Newman et al., 2016). The IDEA requires all SWD, ages 16 and over, to have individualized education plans (IEPs) that include appropriate and measurable postsecondary transitional goals and describe the transition services required to assist the student in reaching these goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Students involved in planning their transitions develop self-advocacy skills, learn to value the accommodation process, and report faculty use inclusive teaching practices (Ramsdell, 2014). When SWD discuss disability diagnoses in transition planning meeting, they feel less stigma (Ramsdell, 2014).

Two critical elements of the transition planning process are (a) the relationship between self-disclosure and receiving accommodation and (b) specific student characteristics related to past school experiences and access to accommodations (Newman et al., 2016). When SWD become strong in their self-determination skills, they are able to meet their needs of (a) *competence*: knowing their limitations, (b) *relatedness*: how the accommodations they use relate to their situations, and (c) *autonomy*: each student's individual disability and how their

disability affects them as an individual (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Competence, relatedness, and autonomy determine the likelihood of students disclosing their disabilities and actively accessing their accommodations (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Students' insights into their competence, relatedness, and autonomy assist in decisions to disclose disabilities and use support services related to accessing accommodations (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016).

Barriers to accessing accommodations include the need for SWD to self-disclose their abilities to the institution (Daly-Cano et al., 2015), SWD lack of self-advocacy skills (Hengen, 2018), SWD lack of knowledge about their disabilities (Hamblet, 2014; Herbet et al., 2014), and SWD lack of knowledge about the accommodation process (Hamblet, 2014).

Students with disabilities encounter negativity and faculty and staff lack of awareness of policies, procedures, and available supports for SWD (Sniatecki et al., 2015; Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Students must navigate negative and uninformed perceptions of the use of accommodations by instructors and peers (Sniatecki et al., 2015; Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Ill-informed instructors can cause SWD to feel they are unimportant or "not normal," hindering SWD accommodation access (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Students with disabilities often feel they are treated differently once instructors learn they have disabilities. SWD may hide their disabilities. Othertimes, SWD feel humiliated in front of instructors and peers when they are treated differently (Hong, 2015). It can take courage to present accommodation letters to instructors, and SWD may sense cynicism and distrust from instructors (Hong, 2015). The willingness and flexibility of university faculty to comply with and provide accommodations for SWD are critical to SWD academic success (Wright & Meyer, 2017).

On college campuses, the ODS is the hub of services for SWD. Participants may not fully access the ODS, despite the value of support, because SWD are not fully informed. In a study of student experiences using services offered by the ODS, Abreu, Hillier, Frye & Goldstein (2016) explored participants' reported numbers of visits to the ODS, reasons for visits, how ODS had been helpful, and recommendations for improvement. Abreu et al. found the ODS and the support is not fully utilized by SWD on postsecondary campuses.

Williams-Hall (2018) alluded to the importance of SWD interactions with the ODS and accommodation acquisition, highlighting the assistance the ODS provides SWD toward academic achievement. Students with disabilities may need to be urged to go to the ODS (Kendall, 2016). If SWD do not know where to go or have someone to encourage them to seek out services, SWD may forgo accommodation processes. Students with disabilities who have active support systems to motivate or assist them through the process are more likely to use the ODS (Williams-Hall, 2018). Unless students are aware of the ODS and how to access it, they are not able to access the services made available to them (Herbert et al., 2014).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this descriptive, transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore SWD experiences of accessing community college accommodations. The researcher focused on students with SLD, due to recommendations by Newman et al. (2016) to study individuals with specific disabilities receiving accommodations in postsecondary settings, and the California Community College environment, as O'Shea and Meyer (2016) recommended research with a small student-to-instructor ratio. Descriptions of the phenomenon of accessing accommodations provided insights to assist SLD in their academic success.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for the study was: *What experiences do college students who self-identify with SLD have in accessing accommodations on campus?* The subquestions were:

1. What experiences do students who self-identify as having SLD in college have using self-advocacy skills to access accommodations on campus?

2. What experiences do students who self-identify as having SLD in colleges have using self-determination skills to access accommodations on campus?

3. How have past K-12 academic experiences affected how students who self-identify as having

SLD access accommodations in postsecondary education?

4. What do students who self-identify as having SLD recommend colleges do to assist in access of desired accommodations?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In K-12 education settings, students with SLD do not have to initiate the process to access accommodations; the education provider has processes to locate students and assign designated services to them (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). At the postsecondary level, this process is self-initiated. Students with disabilities or their parents/guardians must use self-advocacy skills to receive services for their disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Self-advocacy theory (SAT), developed from Payne's (2005) empowerment theory, is a theory of knowing one's self and one's limitations, strengths, and weaknesses to overcome barriers and achieve one's objectives (Black & Rose, 2002). Self-advocacy skills can help students make decisions to take control of actions in their lives and challenge oppression (Black & Rose, 2002). Self-determination theory (SDT) is a framework for the study of human motivation and personality (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2019). Self-determination theorists have defined intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation and provided understanding of cognitive and social development with a focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine one's sense of volition and initiative, wellbeing, and behaviors (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2019). Self-determination skills support the psychological needs of autonomy, competency, and relatedness, which foster motivation and engagement for activities, enhanced performance and persistence, and increased creativity (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Self-determination theory provides educators working with SWD instructional guidance related to the cognitive and emotional ways students construct meaning of their limitations and how students' high school experiences have influenced their actions and choices on college campuses. When SWD have determined how their accommodations relate to their disabilities and how accommodations can help them succeed, they are motivated to access their accommodations.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative methodology, as the study was an exploration of a social group and a human problem (Creswell, 2014). To orient to a socially relevant, responsible, and sensitive endeavor, a social justice inquiry was used, so results could yield information for positive changes for participants and the social group of the study (Johnson & Parry, 2015). The researcher of this study used semistructured interviews with a descriptive, transcendental phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014), intentionally studying the phenomenon related to the experience to gain a deep understanding of the of students with SLD while accessing their accommodations.

SAMPLE

A convenient, purposeful sample allowed the researcher to find participants who could provide information to allow the researcher to understand the problem. The sample frame consisted of past students with SLD who graduated in the past 5 years from John Muir Charter School (JMCS), where the researcher provides special education services. JMCS is a public charter high school in California for students ages 16 to 26. The most frequently identified group of disabilities at JMCS is SLD, and JMCS graduating IEP and 504 students qualify for 504 plans at postsecondary institutions. Most JMCS graduates attend community college locally, often at Southern California community colleges. Records for recent graduates with special educational needs were made available to the researcher, and the researcher searched for graduates who met the study criteria. The researcher used screening phone call and emails to assess interest in participation and confirm candidates met the criteria. Six participants were chosen to participate in the semistructured interviews (see Table 1). Participants were adults over the age of 18 who graduated between the years of 2013 and 2018.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection followed Vagle's (2014) steps for transcendental, descriptive, phenomenological data collection. Initial interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview protocol. A follow-up interview was conducted with

Participant 1, as he had not been using accommodations, and the researcher wanted to learn about his progress and if he decided to use his accommodations at a later point. Interviews were audio recorded. The researcher used member checking with participants to check transcript accuracy. Interviews were conducted at a location of each participant's choice. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 45 minutes. No compensation was offered. Interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. Upon the conclusion of each interview, a recording of the interview was forwarded to Temi Speech-to-Text Transcriptions. The researcher read transcripts for clarity, making corrections and clarifications where needed.

DATA ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis was the description of the phenomenon—experiences of accessing the accommodations—not the participants themselves. The researcher applied concrete, descriptive analysis with Vagle's (2014) whole-part-whole method: (a) holistically reading entire transcripts, (b) coding individual transcripts and identifying patterns, and (c) reading transcripts again to identify themes. The researcher used a reflexivity journal to bridle biases and preconceptions (Vagle, 2014).

FINDINGS

1. ASSIGNED ADVOCATES

Several participants spoke of how advocates assisted them in obtaining their accommodations. An unassigned counselor assisted Aaron the 504 processes. Lite also discussed an advocate and friend who helped him to navigate the process to receive his accommodations. Lite shared how he was not heard and felt unsuccessful with the 504 processes until his advocate got involved. Alex had a friend who worked on campus who had a 504 plan and directed him where to go to receive services.

All participants had strong self-advocacy skills, yet Alex, Lite, and Aaron found advocates, including friends, helpful in accommodation processes. Lite was unsuccessful on his own to secure services, and Aaron and Alex felt more comfortable with the assistance of someone helping them through the process of securing

their accommodations. Advocates assisted participants on their community college campuses with finding where and how to receive services, communicating needs to the ODS, and communicating with instructors.

2. MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTORS

Smiley spoke positively about his instructors, but he had not disclosed. Aaron felt his instructors treated him with respect and provided him with services he needed to feel confident and comfortable. Milk had positive and negative experiences. Once she had in-depth communication with her instructors about her disability, she felt their attitudes were more positive in assisting her with accommodations. Lite had one positive experience to share about his instructors, but most of his experiences were negative regarding assistance, accommodations, and attitudes of faculty.

Participants stated when they met with their instructors, participants discussed their needs. During these meetings, participants talked about their strengths, weaknesses, learning needs, instructors' teaching styles, and faculty comfort levels in allowing accommodations in their classrooms. The information gained during these meetings assisted participants in accessing for accommodations.

In interviews, participants discussed self-advocacy and self-determination skills, such as knowing and communicating strengths, weaknesses, and needs, in connection with the need also to meet with instructors before beginning new courses to discuss accommodations. Participants highlighted use of self-determination skills when conducting meetings with instructors to discuss accommodation use and about how communicating more about their needs had or would have helped them be successful.

Three participants discussed how meetings had assisted them and how they thought more meetings and earlier discussions in the accommodation process with instructors would have assisted in their success. Having meetings before classes start can lead to supportive relationships. Conversations with instructors about teaching styles and how to best assist SWD promote accommodation access and help SWD discuss individualized accommodation needs, leading to their academic success.

3. POSITIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

All participants noted prior experiences at JMCS had been positive, assisting them with navigating 504 processes to use accommodations on college campuses or contributing to not needing accommodations. They shared how prior positive experiences had pushed them to further their education and feel confident in communicating their disabilities and needs. Smiley was thought to be mute during his early education years, and JMCS helped him open up. Milk, Lite, and JTB talked about positive school experiences they encountered through the individual care and genuine concern JMCS instructors provided. Participants talked about staff at JMCS pushing them to continue their education and helping them realize their strengths and potential. Responses of past positive educational experiences indicate JMCS students learned useful strategies for accessing their accommodations in postsecondary environments. All participants shared their transitional planning experiences, which assisted them in navigating postsecondary environments. Smiley stated his plans had changed since his high school transitional planning. Aaron, Lite, and Milk talked about how the prior transition plans had assisted in the process of obtaining their accommodations on their postsecondary campus.

DISCUSSION

The way participants constructed meaning of their disabilities and how motivated they were to access accommodations depended on how participants made sense, cognitively and emotionally, of their disabilities. Students with disabilities must use self-advocate skills themselves to receive assistance or services for their disabilities (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Self-advocacy requires knowledge of self, including one's limitations, strengths, weaknesses, and rights. Self-determination theory provides educators working with SWD instructional guidance in satisfying fundamental needs. Interactions SWD have with significant adults, such as parents, teachers, and instructors, contribute to motivating them and how they access accommodations on college campuses (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016).

All six participants mentioned how their communication skills had grown while attending JMCS. Communication between instructors and SWD is central to the delivery of accommodations for student success. Kraglund-Gauthier et al. (2014) stated the lack of communication, confidence, and self-advocacy affects students' attitudes and interactions with educators and other institutional advisors hindered access to accommodations. Communication skills used during meetings between SWD and staff encompass self-advocacy and self-determination skills needed for success on college campuses (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014).

Hamblet (2014) found SWD with positive experiences in high school were often more motivated to disclose their disabilities and seek support services in college and access their accommodations because they experienced firsthand how to relate to their disabilities. O'Shea and Meyer (2016) found students who had positive experiences in their past educational environments were more secure in seeking services in college and were more motivated to seek accommodations. Participants shared favorable experiences with JMCS staff in connecting to accommodations in high school and wondered why it was not as easy on their college campuses.

All participants talked about transition planning, which assists in providing accommodations for SWD, starting in secondary education (Newman et al., 2016; Ramsdell, 2014). Participants made positive comments about their transitional planning, mirroring findings in the literature that transitional planning supports accessing accommodation on postsecondary campuses. When asked about the transition planning during their time with JMCS, all participants recalled transition planning and stated it assisted in their plans.

Transition planning made specific to the students' postsecondary interests and needs must be part of SWD educational plans as mandated through IEPs in secondary educations. Transition plans increase the likelihood of receipt of disability-specific supports in postsecondary schools. Students with disabilities may be more likely to disclose their disabilities if they had transition planning in high school because they had practice discussing their limitations in transition planning

meetings (Newman et al., 2016). Transition planning done in collaboration with the post-secondary institutions to which the student is likely to attend would even heighten the likelihood of the student's accommodation access and success.

Kendall (2016) discussed the usefulness of active support systems to motivate SWD through the 504 processes and assist them in accommodation access. William-Hall (2018) said providing a contact staff member, appointed through the ODS, can assist SWD in obtaining accommodations. The ODS is the hub of services for SWD and plays a significant part in the access to accommodations and services for SWD. The ODS is designed to assist SWD in accessing their accommodations. Abreu et al. (2016) suggested SWD do not fully access the ODS, despite the amount of help the ODS provides SWD. Reasons SWD do not use services provided by the ODS range from students not being well informed of 504 processes or how to initiate their services through the ODS to improvements needed to the ODS process.

Participants of the current study and findings from the literature review showed mixed reactions to the ODS, describing it as both a support and a barrier to the attainment of accommodations. Alex and Aaron had reported only positive experiences with the ODS, and Aaron had found the ODS useful to his accommodation process. Aaron attributed his continued success to his assigned counselor located at the ODS. Milk reported no negative experiences in her many encounters with the ODS. Lite did not have positive experiences with the ODS, even after he enlisted the assistance of an advocate. Students with disabilities are more likely to use the services of ODS when providers are knowledgeable about SWD needs, as in Lite's situation. Herbert et al. (2014) found there was a connection of training needed, as professional competences of providers affects whether SWD engage with the ODS.

Being a self-advocate and developing self-advocacy skills assists with connecting to the ODS for SWD, as postsecondary SWD must self-report their disability to the ODS. The more students self-disclose, the more self-efficacy instructors have in making accommodations (Wright & Meyer, 2017). Herbert et al. (2014) reported unless students are aware of the ODS

and know how to access it, they are not able to access the services made available to them.

Participants had mixed feelings about staff knowledge and attitudes. The more knowledge and training faculty and staff have in working with SWD and providing them with their accommodations, the more successful staff are in delivering those services (McCallister et al., 2014). Students with disabilities often refrain from disclosing their disabilities due to staff or instructors who do not respond appropriately to their limitations (Wright & Meyer, 2017). When staff are positive about accommodating and provide supportive relationships to SWD, accommodations are made more easily accessible (Timmerman & Mulvihill, 2015). Wright and Meyer (2017) found the willingness and flexibility of university instructors to comply with and provide accommodations for SWD were critical to SWD academic success because students felt more comfortable because of instructors' efforts made for them.

Providing written documentation for instructors would be a useful tool in accommodation access for SWD. If instructors had in hand students' plans during meetings, as students communicated their needs and accommodations, stigma and misconceptions could be alleviated. Ill-informed instructors can cause SWD to feel they are unimportant or not normal, resulting in inadequate or inappropriate support (West et al., 2016). Many SWD struggle with being judged or treated differently by peers and instructors; faculty and peer attitudes then affect SWD, hindering SWD accommodation access (Hong, 2015). Assistance and adaptations could be given still maintaining the same goals and standards and the suggested practice is to provide them discreetly without disclosing them to the rest of the class. Because of the feelings of accommodation not being normal, SWD may struggle with accepting and asking for accommodations to assist with their academic progress (Hong, 2015). Positive staff attitudes result in favorable outcomes for SWD (Krug, 2016). Participants in the current study talked about feelings of stigma attached to their disabilities, trying to appear normal, and how instructors' attitudes affected accommodation access. Participants, such as Lite, Milk, and JTB, discussed experiences of stigma, not wanting to be identified as an individual with disabilities,

and being treated differently. Participants shared feelings of being embarrassed by what others thought about them because others did not understand their disabilities and were unable to assist them correctly with their education.

Participants reported stigma surrounding their disabilities on campus when addressing questions about self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Kendall (2016) discussed the barriers of stigma on campuses of higher education, preventing students from disclosing disabilities to receive services, as students do not want different treatment. Stigma involves interpersonal and intrapersonal feelings of being misunderstood, often manifesting as feeling inadequate as a college student (Kendall, 2016). The fear of stigma can cause students with SLD feelings of being powerless or inadequate, hindering self-advocacy and self-determination skills because of the fear of being treated differently and being unable to navigate postsecondary environments. Three participants reported negative feelings surrounding the use of their 504 plans or from the staff who provided them assistance with their 504 services.

Williams-Hall (2018) found fears of stigma and embarrassment were reasons SWD did not access their accommodations on campuses and were not succeeding academically. Lite shared he felt he was made to feel he was not an individual with a disability enough to receive the accommodations he needed. JTB did not want to use his accommodations, even though he knew they would help him. Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) found perceptions of accommodations not being normal hinders SWD accommodation access and caused SWD to feel singled out. In their study, a large number of students who had negative experiences described being humiliated in front of their professors and classmates when pretending to be normal and not disclosing their need for accommodations.

Heindel (2014) studied college SWD and found instructors needed more training on how to work with SWD. Because instructors lack specific knowledge of the issues that face SWD, instructors may display negative attitudes toward SWD and affect provisions of accommodations (Sniatecki et al., 2015). Williams-Hall (2018) found postsecondary staff required training on working with SWD, so staff could promote the success of SWD while encouraging self-

disclosure and self-advocacy. Instructional training for instructors in disability supports and information surrounding disability support is pivotal for students with SLD. Kraglund-Gauthier et al. (2014) suggested institutions construct policies to promote awareness, advocacy, and learning partnerships among SWD in cooperation with the whole postsecondary community to assist them with their knowledge and gaining services for their disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Participants shared their experiences in hopes of improved guidance in this area of social injustice for SWD. Participants' accounts provided the essence of the researched phenomenon and allowed the researcher to craft recommendations for faculty, staff, and administrators to increase their knowledge and foster positive attitudes. Recommendations for action include advocates to assist students with SLD on community college campuses, facilitating meeting between students with SLD and instructors before classes begin, and positive school experiences before college. Applying these findings in higher education environments could assist community college students with SLD in accessing their accommodations for academic success.

1. ASSIGN ADVOCATES

Participants had strong self-advocacy skills, yet half of the participants stressed the importance of advocates to assisting them in accessing their accommodations. Participants discussed assigned counselors, peers, or mentors. The literature showed promising practices for additional support for SWD through advocates, such as peer tutors (Farley, Gibbons & Cihak, 2014) and virtual mentoring (Gregg, Galyardt, Wolfe, Moon & Todd, 2017). Postsecondary institutions should explore provisions of advocates, and when budgetary concerns do not allow for full-time, professional advocates, peer and virtual advocates may be adequate for increasing accommodation use.

2. FACILITATE MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTORS

All participants discussed meeting with instructors about students' specific needs and accommodations as a positive or potentially positive strategy for accommodation access. During meetings with instructors, participants

used self-determination skills to discuss their needs. Kraglund-Gauthier et al. (2014) suggested institutions conduct meetings with SWD to discuss their needs in cooperation with the whole postsecondary community to assist them with their knowledge and gaining services for their disabilities. Meetings that encompass the postsecondary community, including instructors, can assist students with SLD in overcoming barriers on campuses (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014). Having these meetings before classes start can promote positive relationships and support development of self-advocacy and self-determination skills, which SWD need to be successful later in life. Aspects of self-determination—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are essential to career persistence for SWD (Gregg et al., 2017). The literature provided insight into the importance of communication skills and SWD meetings with instructors; however, participants of the current study highlighted the need for providing specific, on-campus meeting times for students and their instructors to discuss their disabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and accommodation needs.

3. PROVIDE POSITIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

All participants expressed how their experiences at JMCS impacted their community college experiences. Providing all SWD with positive school experiences can alleviate personal and social stigma of disabilities. Positive school experiences are accomplished by providing and reinforcing inclusive and accepting cultures that deliver nonjudgmental messages at all times through all staff. By starting early, attention to and intention with school-wide culture and actions, classroom expectations, the language heard, classroom art, performances, speakers, and instructional delivery can lead to positive experiences for all students.

Hamblet (2014) found SWD with positive experiences in high school were often more motivated to disclose their disabilities and seek support services in college and accessing their accommodations. O'Shea and Meyer (2016) stated students who had positive experiences in their past educational environments were more secure in seeking services in college and more motivated to seek accommodations. Participant responses reinforced findings in the literature

about the importance of secondary school experiences for accommodation access in postsecondary institutions. All participants described their past educational experiences with JMCS as supportive in continuing with a college education and lent the courage, tools, and skills to access their 504 plans and accommodations.

Positive school experiences start in preschool, and transitional planning starts at the secondary school level. Transition planning is a mandated part of IEPs starting at age 14. As described in the literature and by participants, visiting this plan often and making it specific to students' needs is a crucial part of SWD postsecondary journeys. All postsecondary SWD have mandated transitional plans; however, all plans need to be made specific, and students with SLD need to be active participants in these plans.

JMCS students may have more experience with communicating accommodation needs than the broader population, due to the practices of the school. Their comfort in communicating may be informative to other schools that wish to empower students through positive experiences. These experiences may or may not be shared by other participants who had not attended JMCS or other JMCS students on other campuses, although four different JMCS campuses were represented in the participant interviews.

Promoting positive school experiences should be the goal of all educational leaders and contributors, not just postsecondary leaders or those working with students with SLD. How postsecondary staff at all departments and levels—the ODS staff members, instructors, presidents, and paraprofessionals—treat SWD matters. How students with SLD are treated can cause or alleviate feelings associated with stigma and normalcy. Comments made to students with SLD when enrolling can impact the initiating of services, as participants described. Promoting positive school experiences can be sparked through awareness initiatives and training educators on how to accommodate SWD.

JMCS provides in-services for all full-time staff; one such workshop is Building Positive School Culture, which provides tools to ensure SWD have positive school experience and encourage them to be more proactive in accessing accommodations. A positive school culture starts with caring leaders making intentional decisions to build a strong sense of community. The target

audience for this workshop is all staff who want to build a positive culture and sense of belonging in schools. The workshop includes benefits of intentional culture-building activities, best practices from JMCS veteran teachers, and discussion of how to apply the strategies in individual positions.

Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson (2013) described how to build positive educational experiences and created a framework for initiating positive education on campuses. They explained positive education involves combining principles of positive psychology with best practices in teaching and educational paradigms to promote optimal development and flourishment in school settings (see Figure 1). Norrish et al. targeted six wellbeing domains: (a) positive emotions, (b) positive engagement, (c) positive accomplishment, (d) positive purpose, (e) positive relationships, and (f) positive health, underpinned by a focus on character strengths (see Figure 1). The three concepts that Norrish et al. used to drive their positive education framework were (a) live it: staff should live positive education and act as authentic role models for students; (b) teach it: positive education that helps students understand key ideas and concepts, engage meaningfully in exploration and reflection, and apply the skills and mindsets to flourish; and (c) embed it: the school-wide embedding of a culture for well-being. This framework guide educators with techniques in enhancing positive education cultures.

Another way to encourage positive experiences for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary students is UDL. Educators who provide UDL provide inclusive learning environments for diverse populations and benefits for everyone in the classroom. In providing instructors ideas for new instructional delivery to diverse populations, UDL has opened the door to new accommodation delivery for educational institutions. Philosophical shifts, such as in UDL, provide educators with ideas for adequate and appropriate accommodations for students with SLD contextual and functional needs. Looking into new instructional design ideas may be a key to assisting with accommodation delivery.

CONCLUSION

Despite increases in college enrollment, graduation rates for SWD are lower than those of students without disabilities (Agarwal et al., 2014). Accommodations assist SWD in their academic success, but SWD experience barriers to their accommodations (Travis, 2014). Researchers have stressed the importance of past positive educational experiences (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016) and specific transitional planning (Newman et al., 2016) in the successful navigation of postsecondary campuses for SWD. As the literature and all participants addressed, SWD need to develop self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Students with disabilities need to be strong self-advocates to request services and accommodations needed to assist them with their postsecondary academic success (Kraglund-Gauthier et al., 2014); however, there was minimal discussion in literature on the use of advocates to assist SWD, a strategy some participants stated was the key to their accommodation access. Previous researchers have considered advocates as appropriate for disabilities other than SLD (Lux, 2016; William-Hall, 2018). For SWD to discuss their needs, they need to know their strengths, weaknesses, and how they learn best. Students with disabilities need to know their disabilities, how they affect learning, and how their instructors can assist them best.

Specific instruction that supports development, knowledge, skills, and beliefs is needed to lead to self-determination for SWD (O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Faculty and staff lack knowledge of issues SWD face, causing instructors to display negative attitudes that students with SLD accessing accommodations (Sniatecki et al., 2015). Students with disabilities often refrain from disclosing their disabilities due to staff or instructors who do not respond appropriately to their limitations (Wright & Meyer, 2017). Providing staff with specific knowledge will support effective work with students with SLD, alleviate stigma, and assist with ideas of normalcy.

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ANNEX

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Smiley	Milk	Aaron	Lite	Alex	JTB
Self-Identified Sex	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	19	23	21	25	19	20
Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic	White	Black	White	White	Black

Table 2. Categories Crafted from Participant Interviews

	Smiley	Milk	Aaron	Lite	Alex	JTB
Sought 504 Services	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No/Yes
Used 504 Services	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not yet	No/Yes
Reported College Success	Yes	Yes/No	Yes	Yes/No	Had not started	No/No
Named Disability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Described disability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-Advocacy Skills	Yes	Yes	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes	No
Self Determination Skills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Past Experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Past Transition Plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Themes Crafted from Interview Categories

Participants	Themes		
	Assigned Advocates	Meetings with Instructors	Positive School Experiences
Smiley			x
Milk		x	x
Aaron	x	x	x
Lite	x	x	x
Alex	x		x
JTB		x	x