

2013

Social class and learning disabilities: Intersectional effects on college students in New York City

Ashleigh B. Thompson
City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/oa_pubs

 Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ashleigh Thompson, (2013), Social class and learning disabilities: Intersectional effects on college students in New York City, in (ed.) Disability and Intersecting Statuses (Research in Social Science and Disability, Volume 7) Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.267 - 292

This Book Chapter or Section is brought to you for free and open access by the CUNY Central Office at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications and Research by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.

SOCIAL CLASS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES: INTERSECTIONAL EFFECTS ON COLLEGE STUDENTS IN NEW YORK CITY

Ashleigh Thompson

ABSTRACT

Purpose – Previous quantitative research documents that college students with disabilities do not attain higher education at rates equal to their nondisabled peers. This qualitative study posits that socioeconomic status (SES) is a determinant of this discrepancy, and explores how SES and disability shape the college experience of New York City (NYC) students with learning disabilities (LDs), specifically.

Methodology – Research findings from semi-structured interviews with students with LDs (n = 10) at a low-SES and a high-SES colleges are presented against the backdrop of administrative data from NYC baccalaureate-granting colleges (n = 44), disability staff surveys (n = 21), and disability staff interviews (n = 9). Examined through the lens of political economy, qualitative data demonstrate the ways

Disability and Intersecting Statuses

Research in Social Science and Disability, Volume 7, 267–292

Copyright © 2013 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved

ISSN: 1479-3547/doi:10.1108/S1479-3547(2013)0000007012

colleges create environments that enable or hinder student success through difference in policy implementation.

Findings – Student themes like stress, identity, and entitlement are discussed against the theoretical and empirical exploration of the intersectionality of SES and disability. Socioeconomic differences are linked to variation in students' college choice, accessing evaluations, requesting accommodations, and receiving supplementary supports.

Keywords: Learning disabilities; socioeconomic status; higher education; urban education

INTRODUCTION

In a nation where less than a third of the adult population boasts a bachelor's degree (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a), disparities in educational attainment on the basis of race, class, and disability are often reinforced in U.S. higher education. As university budgets tighten and institutional competition grows fiercer, colleges increasingly vie for high-achieving students who are likely to finish (Brainard & Fuller, 2010). Low income levels, disability status, work, and family responsibilities increase time-to-degree: younger and wealthier students are more likely to be counted as successes in the flawed but common metrics used to track graduation rates nationally (Cook & Pullaro, 2010). Examining the political economy highlights the distribution of material resources which affect every facet of service provision and use; this key theoretical lens elucidates how and why certain students with disabilities persist in college environments differentiated by socioeconomic status (SES) of student body.

Within the framework of an empirical qualitative study, this chapter explores the effects of the intersectionality of disability and SES on college practices for students with learning disabilities (LD) in New York City (NYC). Previous quantitative work in this area revealed a difficult cycle: high school students with disabilities were more likely to experience poverty, and this poverty was correlated with them being less likely to enter college (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). A statistical analysis of a national dataset (NELS of 1988) corroborated these findings: family income had a significant impact on full-time college students' status (Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). The original interview research presented here features

student voice to describe the texture of how these dynamics affect the college experience of students with LDs.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy, 9% of undergraduates self-report as having a disability (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) cites the national figure of college students with disabilities at 11% (2006). National data show that college students with disabilities are qualitatively different from their nondisabled peers. Students with disabilities are older, with an average age of 30, though almost 25% are older than 40. Compare this with the average age of 26 for typical students, of whom only 12% are 40 or older. Interestingly, students with disabilities are also more likely to live off-campus, attend school part-time, and have children (NCES, 2008b).

But despite a growth in numbers in the decades since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), college students with disabilities do not attain postsecondary education at rates equal to their nondisabled peers. According to NCES, 33% of students with disabilities earn a bachelor's degree from public four-year colleges in the same time 48% of students with no documented disability earn a degree (2000). At private four-year colleges, this difference in bachelor's degree completion is 57% for students with disabilities compared to 67% for students without a disability.

These figures on persistence lend relevance to two widely documented economic trends: people with college degrees earn more than individuals without a degree, and people with disabilities are generally more low-income than people without disabilities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the May 2012 unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 12.9%, compared with 7.7% for people with no disability. For these reasons, the ability of people with disabilities to earn a college degree becomes doubly relevant.

The economic impact of access to and persistence in postsecondary education, or lack thereof, is measurable and widely cited. Census Bureau data (2010b) show that women of all races with a bachelor's degree earned a median income of \$40,393 working full-time, compared to \$21,427 for women with a high school diploma (see also Attewell & Lavin, 2007). The Brookings Institution (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008) underscores the

economic impact of higher education in their report “Getting Ahead or Losing Ground: Economic Mobility in America.” The report’s authors cite higher education as a positive factor for economic mobility across generations. Across income quintiles, 74% of children with college degrees earned incomes higher than their parents (p. 94). Only 16% of adult children with a college degree remained in the bottom quintile: “education contributed to a boost in economic status for children from poor families” (p. 95).

The question of who belongs in college is debated and often rhetorical, but its political–economic effects are anything but symbolic. Shavit, Arum, and Gamoran argue that, “Higher education is the gatekeeper of managerial and professional positions in the labor market” (2007). They further contend that the growth of the higher education sector does not necessarily result in more equitable opportunity. This gatekeeping has real world consequences for students with disabilities, especially low-SES students. Schofer and Meyer highlight “the absence of particular groups from higher education” as a social problem (2005, p. 903). While political economy theory (Anyon, 2005) typically provides a vehicle for macro-level critique, it finds its place in this smaller study embedded within the examination of SES and disability status as well as U.S. higher education.

THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND DISABILITY IN COLLEGE

Disability is usually examined in its own silo, as if the divide exists between typical college students and college students with disabilities. As depicted previously with enrollment data, the true divide may actually lie between high- and low-income college students with disabilities. High-SES groups are able to access education without disability presenting a substantial barrier, and this access is often facilitated by parents. Apple (2006) describes:

Middle-class parents have become quite skilled, in general, in exploiting market mechanisms in education and in bringing their social, economic, and cultural capital to bear on them. Middle-class parents are more likely to have the knowledge, skills, and contacts to decode and manipulate what are increasingly complex and deregulated systems of choice and recruitment. (p. 61)

Ferri and Connor (2006) echo this point: “It is clear that dominant-group parents expect schools to mirror, rather than disrupt, the social stratification in the larger community” (p. 11).

Students with disabilities are less likely to attend public four-year colleges and more likely to be enrolled in public two-year institutions or “other” institutions, which include for-profit vocational institutions. They are as likely as their nondisabled peers to enroll in private four-year colleges: 14% of students with disabilities and 15% of students without disabilities attend private four-year schools nationally (NCES, 2000).

Given that low-income students are less likely to attend private, not-for-profit colleges generally (Kahlenberg, 2008), these national data suggest an interesting effect of SES on disability. For those with greater financial resources, students with disabilities are on par with students without disabilities in terms of enrollment at four-year private colleges. For those with fewer financial resources (in the public colleges), students with disabilities are more likely than students without disabilities to be enrolled in the two-year institutions than four-year institutions. SES seems to facilitate equal access to private higher education for those students with disabilities who have resources. For those who don’t, disability seems to present an even greater barrier in getting into a four-year school. This effect has significant repercussions: community college students are far less likely to graduate with a degree than their peers at four-year institutions (NCES, 2008a).

In light of the data illustrating that resourced students with disabilities have equitable access to private colleges, this study explored whether more robust disability services are offered on these high-SES campuses. Certainly students with disabilities persist at lower rates in every college category. But the difference in degree-attainment between disabled and nondisabled students in private four-year colleges is only 10%, compared to a difference of 15% at public four-year colleges. Taking all the data into account, one can infer that elite students with disabilities do better academically overall. Michael Apple describes this stratification as “school-mediated forms of class privilege” (2006, p. 68).

So while these dynamics are acknowledged, the effects of the intersectionality of disability and SES often go uninterrogated. Early writing in Disability Studies by Irving Zola (1982) asserts that the American social perception is to regard being disabled as both a “personal and social failure.” Tom Shakespeare uses this lens to describe disability as “an interaction between impaired bodies and excluding environments” (2005, p. 147). These ideas challenge university policies and support services, and provide an important empirical lens: how does socioeconomic class fundamentally change the way an environment does or doesn’t exclude a student with a disability?

Research designed to explore the intersectionality of disability and SES is well placed in NYC. According to the U.S. Census (2000),¹ more than a fifth of NYC residents live below the poverty level (21%), and 1.8 million have a disability (24.5%). In a borough like the Bronx, these numbers for poverty and disability jump to 30.7% and 28.4%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The New York City Coalition Against Hunger cites that 1.4 million residents live in households that can't afford enough food (2010). The borough of Manhattan boasts the highest wealth disparity in the country (Blodget, 2006).

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

At the postsecondary level, LDs are the most commonly reported disability category for college students, and represent about 3.5% of all first-time, full-time college students (Hock, 2005, p. 233). Interestingly in the case of LD, its link to socioeconomics is often written about differently from other disability categories in terms of SES. As Connor notes, "I noticed that the label signified different outcomes for different people (2006, p. 154). While college students with disabilities on a whole are more likely to represent the lowest income quartile, dependent college students with LDs specifically are more than twice as likely to represent the highest quartile (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Federal disability and income data analyzed by these authors at the Institute for Higher Education Policy present other features of note: dependent students with the diagnosis of Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are three times more likely to be from the highest income quartile than the lowest, while independent students with mental illness are almost twice as likely to be from the lowest income quartile than the highest. These data reveal that income and behavior labels are related when there is a societal stigma involved: for a category like visual impairments, the distribution across income quartiles is nearly equal.

Described as "affirmative action for spoiled rich white kids" by one author (Katz, 2010), LDs made front-page news when the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story about disability accommodations becoming a way for "privileged families to gain advantage on a high-stakes exam" (Weiss, 2000). The article includes analyses of College Board data which depict that while only about 2% of test-takers nationally receive accommodations, the percentage jumps "fivefold for students at New England prep schools,"

while not even 1 out of 1,439 students across 10 inner-city schools in Los Angeles received extra time or other accommodations on the SAT (*ibid.*). The author continues:

Students who get such accommodations on the SAT are twice as likely to come from families that earn more than \$100,000. They are much more likely to be male. Compared to regular test-takers, they are also far more likely to have parents with either a bachelor's or graduate degree. And they are considerably more likely than other test-takers to be white and attend either private schools or public ones in wealthy suburbs.

Disability Services staff from a high-SES college in NYC describes parental expectation at his institution and the sense of quid pro quo that can derive from paying high tuition:

The parents may kind of have this sort of, "I'm paying X. I should be getting Y for my son or daughter, and I sort of don't care what the ADA says," or whatever it is ... Sometimes it does happen, and there are students that will definitely play that card, and say, "Well, I'm going to this school, and I'm paying all this money, and I should be getting blah, blah, blah, and you need to advocate for me, and you need to do this." (J. Kenny,² personal communication, April 12, 2010)

This rhetoric about appropriation of the LD label by socioeconomic elites has a long scientific and political history which some writers trace to the landmark 1954 desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. While scientists and educators had been working with psychometrics since the 1920s, Sam Kirk, the father of learning disabilities, and others offered definitions and approaches to LDs in the early 1960s (Danforth, 2009). A radical structuralist critique paints the picture of a public education system with limited power and resources, thus the special education system was used as a vehicle for reproducing cultural inequality (Ferri & Connor, 2006; Sleeter, 1995). Sleeter posits that the label of "learning disabled" came about during the time after *Brown* to separate the white children with disabilities from the other racial groups with disabilities, and to differentiate the disabilities of the white children as being comparatively less severe (p. 160). To support her argument, she cites the 1973 change when the IQ cutoff score for mental retardation was lowered from 85 to 70 (Hourcade, 2002), thus increasing the number of students considered to have a typical IQ and poised for the LD label.

Most mainstream special educators who watch their students struggle in classrooms would not subscribe to this critique of the LD label as mere resource allocation. But disability professionals across the board do acknowledge the high cost of evaluations and the economic barrier that

exists for many in accessing one. Costs for a psycho-educational evaluation needed to substantiate disability accommodations for school and high-stakes testing are typically estimated around \$2,000. One staff interviewed at a competitive private NYC college explains how she sees SES play out in the context of testing:

For our students with learning disabilities, when you want to go on to take the MCAT or the LSAT, these really high-stakes testing where the documentation is so – guidelines and standards are so rigorous, and not being able to afford an evaluation or only being able to afford an evaluation at a university testing center where they may or may not meet the guidelines for MCAT or LSAT or GRE. (C. Whitney, personal communication, October 2, 2009)

Before students can be evaluated, someone must recognize the need for such evaluation. A majority of students are diagnosed with LD during K-12 years. Reading and math LDs are often noticed in elementary school, and spatial or organization issues are diagnosed in middle school as classes get more difficult and students have to remember things like locker combinations (S. Olsen, personal communication, October 22, 2009). But socioeconomic factors can contribute to students not being diagnosed until college: cultural stigma, overcrowded K-12 classrooms where a teacher may not notice an issue, insufficient health insurance or lack of medical care, and lack of parental awareness or empowerment (*ibid.*). Language is another confounder of LDs. Paradis (2005) explains that “missed identity” is a false negative which occurs when a child’s poor academic performance is attributed to being an English Language Learner (ELL), while “mistaken identity” is the opposite phenomenon in school: a false positive occurs when a minority child or ELL is diagnosed as having a LD when in fact their learning issue is related to language acquisition. Danforth (2009) shows that Dr. Sam Kirk acknowledged misdiagnoses as an issue decades ago:

School districts have identified many children as learning disabled simply because they did not perform at grade level. Many of these children are slow learners, culturally or linguistically disadvantaged, or have had inappropriate instruction ... If this practice continues, the learning disability programs are in danger of becoming dumping grounds for all educational problems. (p. 184)

Scientists, academics, the media, classroom educators, and other stakeholders run the gamut on if or how they connect SES and LD. For this study, the connection between them was made after the point of diagnosis – all the students interviewed were labeled as having a LD. There’s no question that disability labels, necessary for receiving support services, have

been used as a mechanism to stigmatize and segregate, and conversely, to advantage and privilege. In this way, LD research affects a broad range of students and these multiple contexts demonstrate the complexity of the label. Using the LD label as an equalizer positioned the researcher to perceive differences in college environments and experiences of students, and words and actions of staff. The socioeconomic context of LDs fundamentally framed this study and its research questions.

METHODOLOGY

How do socioeconomic and disability status affect the lived experiences of NYC college students? Are higher SES students with disabilities represented in larger numbers in elite NYC colleges? And are they able to continue this advantage into success through college courses? For wealthier students, does disability act as a resource, and not a barrier? How do colleges deal with these issues, especially considering their own limited resources? And how does university practice resonate with or contradict federal disability law? Situated within a Disability Studies framework which examines variables external to disability, the social, political, and intellectual contingencies that shape meaning and behavior (Linton, 1998), these queries sparked the formulation of research questions.

The study described here examined policies, practices, and perceptions at four-year institutions in NYC and explored how the student body's SES affects the experience of college students with LDs. Research questions were twofold. First, are federal policies with regard to students with LDs implemented differently in institutions of higher education in NYC with different socioeconomic class populations? If so, how? Second, does variance in policy implementation and student body social class impact the college experience of students with LDs? If so, how? To explore these questions, holistically mixed methods were used (Creswell, 2003).

NCES's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) served as the source of administrative data which undergirded this study, and featured federally mandated self-report data from postsecondary institutions around the country. Data from baccalaureate-granting colleges in NYC ($n=44$) were then culled from IPEDS (Data Center and College Navigator) and compiled in Excel. Data gathered included numbers for enrollment during fall 2008, number of students at a given institution who received Pell grants in academic year 2008–2009, and percentage of

undergraduate students self-reporting as students with a disability. Percentage of students receiving Pell at a given campus was also extracted from the College Navigator tool in IPEDS, for both full-time, first-time freshmen and the undergraduate student body as a whole. The 44 schools were ranked in order of this percentage for full-time, first-time freshman from highest (most students receiving aid) to lowest (fewest students receiving aid). These colleges were then labeled according to a normal distribution: 16 schools were labeled as “high-Pell,” 12 as “medium-Pell,” and 16 as “low-Pell.” Descriptive statistics were generated in Excel, and inferential statistics were performed using SPSS.

The Disability Services Officer (or comparable job function) at each of these 44 schools was contacted to participate in a survey. The sample ($n=21$) was comprised of survey data collected in fall 2009 from named respondents. The survey design was cross-sectional and comparative, capturing information at a particular moment in time and making it possible to compare responses by institution (Fink, 2006). Several questions were open-ended.

A subset of survey respondents participated in staff interviews ($n=9$). Using typical case and maximum variation sampling (Glesne, 2006) based on university-type and Pell category to select interviewees, nine staff from around NYC comprised this subsample. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately one hour in length, were audio-recorded, and transcribed. These interviews provided an opportunity to confirm or expound information collected from administrative and survey data. De-identified transcripts were open coded for themes using Atlas.ti.

The data featured in this chapter are derived from the final phase of empirical research: interviews with students with LDs ($n=10$). Students at low-SES, high-Pell Livingston College and high-SES, low-Pell Commonwealth College participated in semi-structured interviews equally: five students were interviewed from each college. Six of these were women and four were men. Interviews lasted approximately one hour in length, were audio-recorded, and transcribed. To facilitate member checking, field-notes were generated for several of the interviews, summaries were offered, and no follow-up comments were received from interviewees. De-identified transcripts were then entered into Atlas.ti 6 software and were tagged inductively using an open coding approach. Some transcripts were coded multiple times as additional open codes emerged.

The main findings presented in this chapter resulted from this qualitative inquiry conducted through staff and student interviews. Qualitative methodologies were informed by a range of theoretical approaches, including an

interpretivist emphasis on the importance of privileging the voice of individuals with disabilities (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995), and the aim of phenomenology was to capture the lived experiences of these students (Van Manen, 1990). Connor affirms this notion, stating, “I feel that the actual students are still largely absent as *people* – living, thinking, knowing being” (2006, p. 154). Their collective stories lend insight into how the intersectionality of disability and SES affect their time in college.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Interviews with students were conducted on campus at low-SES Livingston College and high-SES Commonwealth College which admit the same percentage of applicants, according to data reported in IPEDS. They have the same Carnegie Classification. Neither school is open admissions; presumably, the students who attend there are qualified to be there. The vast majority of students from both schools move ahead from first year to second year, though retention rates are about 10% higher at Commonwealth than Livingston.

The five students interviewed at Livingston College represented a wide variety of experiences, but shared several traits: earnestness, determination, and struggle. The source of struggle varied from student to student, but aligned in terms of making significant sacrifices to attend college. Financial hardship was an issue mentioned in each interview; every student received grant-based aid, and Jenny relied exclusively on public assistance. Family obligations in the case of Melissa, work demands for Marissa and Melissa, and long commutes for Reid and Christopher (though all students commuted) represented external barriers to be overcome by these students. Except for Christopher, the students had about a C average. The two students who didn't come to Livingston straight from high school (Melissa and Jenny) were both tested and diagnosed with a LD more than half way through their college experience at Livingston. All mentioned a specific moment at Livingston of feeling stressed, ashamed, or embarrassed in conjunction with their disability.

At the same time, each of them had come to Livingston as their first choice school, loved being at Livingston, and felt supported there. Marissa spoke about her first impressions of the Disability Services Office (DSO) and recalled, “I felt I was very welcome, and it was a warm welcome. I felt I belonged there.” They expressed a sense of gratitude toward Livingston.

Jenny offered, “I was blessed to go here,” and Reid volunteers in the Disability Services Office because he likes “doing community service and helping people.” Christopher shared this sense of personal responsibility: “But it’s nice if during someone’s free time they could – they could help out – something to give back.” Each came to Livingston because of the academic programs they offered: none mentioned disability services as a reason for choosing Livingston. These students talked in specific terms about jobs and their future with a sense of hope and willpower.

The five students interviewed at Commonwealth were all traditional students in their early 20s who came straight to college from high school. They all lived on campus; none mentioned having to work except in the context of internship experiences. All of them had applied to private colleges. Each diagnosed with a LD before coming to college, disability services played a substantial role in their decisions to enroll at Commonwealth. They expressed comfort with their disability to varying degrees, and those who struggled with this did so for fear of being judged academically by faculty and peers even though each of them had above a 3.0 average GPA. Mark and Brendan mentioned having access to high-level administrators for guidance. Stress was described in terms of academic pressure. Though they used different adjectives to describe their meaning, each of them agreed they felt like a “typical” Commonwealth student. They talked about jobs after college in terms of preference and vagueness; none expressed urgency.

Across the range of college experience described by students several important themes emerged through the process of inductive coding. Three themes featured here provide a sample of findings and empirical support for questions of intersectionality between LD and SES.

Stress as Internal Versus External

College students perceive life as stressful. Whether they’re roommate troubles, making friends, juggling work and school, negotiating being away from home, tough coursework, paying tuition bills, or staying academically eligible, concurrent worries compete. [Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, and Miller \(2009\)](#) maintain that these stressors for college students result in difficulties with cognition (like concentration), illness, anxiety, and impaired academic performance. Certainly dealing with a disability represents another possible source of stress for students. Holding disability constant, one interesting difference between the students’ experience of low-SES

Livingston College and high-SES Commonwealth College is the placement of those stressors as external or internal and the effect this has on their college experience.

Students interviewed from low-SES Livingston College more wholly discussed barriers to their success as external. Reid expressed worries about the New York State budget and whether tuition funding for students with disabilities, upon which he relies, would be continue to be appropriated. He described track fires on the subway's G-train that make him late to class. Jenny was frustrated at faculty and staff who didn't notice that she was struggling because of an undiagnosed LD. Marissa and Christopher talked passionately about faculty who affected their self-esteem and undermined their academic success. Christopher complained about courses not being available at convenient times, and the expensive textbooks assigned by the professors who wrote them. Melissa described the challenge presented by her husband and five children:

No, when I do homework, my biggest fight now is I can't get any peace and quiet in the home. And I keep saying I'm gonna stay in school until I get my assignments done. But because I feel bad, being that he's always with the children, I end up staying home and I leave everything to the last minute, and then you see me stressing out, and I feel like I want to pull out my hair because I know I have to have this work done for school. (M. Rodriguez, personal communication, October 9, 2009)

At the same time they conveyed general feelings of insecurity about the forces which affect their academic lives, all had already overcome struggles to come this far. So while the frustrations and stressors were expressed as external, students at Livingston conveyed determination to finish college and amazing resourcefulness. Their actions demonstrated internal locus of control: they would fight for successful outcomes. Marissa expresses:

I think that the difference is that even though it hasn't been easy for myself because I've been to that point that I just wanted to say, 'I wanna give up. This is not for me. I can't do it.' I just know that at the end of the day or in the future that I need a degree in order to move on. (M. Diaz, personal communication, April 13, 2010)

Interview rhetoric of the students at high-SES Commonwealth College also conveyed a high internal locus of control. They all described developing compensatory strategies and study techniques as their personal keys to getting through college. Mark uses a pen with green ink; Megan moved her desk into her bedroom so she can shut the door for absolute quiet. Alison describes her approach to school work and places the onus for success on herself:

I feel so confident ... I just have come up with many strategies and just am a better student now as a result of knowing all this ... Yeah, with studying I guess I know that

because my memory is a little wishy washy sometimes it's better for me to go over my notes; like re-write them all which I had never done before ... And just like taking extra time to go over things has really helped me. I used to speed through things. And starting earlier; just blocking out my time more. And actually just – I feel like I was so discouraged when I wasn't doing as well as I thought I should so that I just didn't really do the reading or do what I should have done. So I do the reading and I go prepared to class and I participate more. That's pretty much it. (A. Hofmann, personal communication, April 14, 2010)

Commonwealth students made little mention of external barriers impeding success. In fact, only two students used the word “stress” in their interview at all. Many of the external stressors the Livingston students experienced were nonexistent for the Commonwealth students, and basic material differences account for this. None of the Commonwealth students had to commute long distances; for example, all lived in dorms or nearby campus apartments. None of the Commonwealth students were parents. While some were involved with internships and campus activities, none had significant full-time or part-time jobs. None relied heavily on external tuition funding.

Christopher from low-SES Livingston College described not being able to get the classes he needed and struggles physically with a 14-hour day, while Brendan from high-SES Commonwealth College described, “I do go see the dean at the beginning of the semester and the dean usually insure that I get into the classes.” Per the effects of stress on academic achievement according to Brougham et al. (2009) this difference in external barriers could account for noted differences between the Livingston and Commonwealth students interviewed in factors like time-to-degree and GPA.

Identity and Personal Motivation

This clear difference between how students experience the exacerbation or mitigation of external stressors reemerged when students were asked to describe a typical student at their college. Their comments spoke loudly about demands on their time and the nature of the school. The Commonwealth students spoke positively and invoked student personality traits. Alison described a typical Commonwealth student as “Pretty hard-working, sociable, involved,” and Megan’s response was very similar: “Probably a hard worker but they like to have fun, and most of the people here are caring.” Carrie used the adjectives “nice, outgoing,” and Brendan describes them as “easy going for the most part. Goes to class and has fun

on the weekends.” Their comments are largely insular to the campus experience.

Livingston students, more of whom balance work and family obligations, recognized these realities when describing a typical Livingston student. Marissa acknowledges out-of-school demands and says of the typical student, “There are so much students here that either work full-time and go to school full-time or go to school full-time and work part-time, who have kids or are in service.” Reid acknowledges this vocational orientation and describes the typical Livingston student by saying, “They wanna get a good education to prepare them to get a job after this,” and Christopher reiterates this focus on the future with the descriptors “intelligent, stressful, and trying to get ahead.”

Jenny and Melissa seemed unclear as to their sense of a typical Livingston student, indicating that they felt less social inclusion and more on their own. Jenny states, “I’ve never felt like a typical anybody. I just feel like Jenny. Like I don’t even know what a typical Livingston student is.” Melissa’s remarks mirror this self-reliance as she discounts herself as a typical student:

I don’t know, either. I can’t answer that one because I need to know what’s a typical Livingston student. I mean, I do see a lot of people standing in front of the building smoking and socializing, but I also see a lot of students that go to the labs, go for tutoring, go to their classes, so I don’t know. I probably would say no because, like you said, I just come here, do what I’ve got to do and run home.

Christopher from Livingston also shares that he doesn’t have many friends: “I seen them, but I never really approached them...We’re in college...You just want – it’s a big school – you just want – do that hour and a half and get out.”

Each Livingston student describes going to college for a purpose, more of a means to an end. They are goal-driven and job-driven; higher education represents the path to a better life beyond present circumstances. Melissa describes her experiences as a parent at her children’s school:

And I tell my husband, these people at the school sometimes think that because I live around here that I’m uneducated and I don’t know my rights as a parent or just as a person. And then, when they realize, the way I speak to them and the way I tell them I’m not one of these people that stay home, I work. I know my rights. I go to school. And I explain to them, they treat you differently. (M. Rodriguez, personal communication, October 9, 2009)

For her, the fact that she works is the first characteristic that separates her from the other moms. She wants to get ahead and move away from the drugs and violence in her neighborhood and says, “I mean, personally, like

I tell my husband, I want to save money and do what I have to do to move my children out of that area.”

Jenny is also explicit in mentioning about wanting a better future for herself and explains what finishing college will mean for her financially: “I just go to school because I have to go to school ... I go to school just to have my degrees because I have to have my degrees for me to get a good job and to accomplish to buy my house in five years.” This emphasis on employment might surely derive from the students’ present financial insecurity. In his interview Christopher asserts, “College is my full-time job,” as if the job and not college is the higher good, or that he has to justify the fact that he doesn’t work. Christopher specifically mentioned wanting a job with [health] benefits. These Livingston students are supremely in touch with economic survival. This underlying motivation colors how they view themselves within the college experience.

Entitlement

While worries about stigma from peers or faculty surface at both colleges, student word choice reveals that expectations of support from faculty and staff more clearly bifurcate across lines of school SES. The confidence Commonwealth students express about being successful in college and being helped by faculty and staff is reinforced by their own telling language.

“Accommodation” is a noun used in the ADA legislation to describe a “modification or adjustment” (U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ), 2008). Students at Commonwealth misappropriate this word by using the verb “accommodate,” defined as “to do a kindness or a favor to” or the adjective “accommodating,” which means “easy to deal with” (Dictionary.com, 2010). In this use, the people, not the disability, are accommodated. Carrie describes staff at Commonwealth with, “they *accommodate* me.” Alison says, “he just completely *accommodated* to everything I needed.” With the dean’s assistance, Brendan finds “professors that are supposedly more *accommodating*,” and Mark describes the Disability Services Office with, “They’re very *accommodating* up there.”

Christopher is the only Livingston student to use this verb, but he does so in referencing the ADA language: “They have [to] always *accommodate* me because it’s required by law.” Mark from Commonwealth echoes this legal mandate saying, “No, I give [my accommodations letter] to them, so then I have no problem because if I want the extra time, I had the

documentation in, they have to give it to me in some sense. So I'm not gonna be withheld from it."

This insistence from Mark that accommodations will not be withheld from him is akin to what is characterized by staff as a typical response from a student at a high-SES college. Donna, disability services staff from low-SES Livingston College, relays an anecdote from a colleague about a transfer student:

Somebody mentioned that they got a family who was at – I want to say it was [high-SES college], and they came like expecting all of these bells and whistles that we don't have – you know, she didn't have ... But it was telling because she was like, "We can't" – she didn't necessarily talk about the services but she definitely mentioned that they came with this high level of expectation that they were not able to meet the same level. (D. Johnson, personal communication, September 28, 2009)

She references another high-SES college that Donna knows has the same budget that she has for one-third the number of students with disabilities. She acknowledges that students with disabilities at the high-SES college receive more robust supports and admits, "Obviously, with the same budget we have for a smaller number, you can provide so many more services to your students." Staff are aware of the material differences between college Disability Services Offices across the SES spectrum in NYC.

Students who are in the position to choose perceive this material difference as well. Both Brendan from high-SES Commonwealth College and Jenny from low-SES Livingston College express what is available to them as a matter of fact, and there is an implicit difference in not only what they're getting but what they demand they get. Brendan comments about his college services, "My public high school was known for having good, excellent special services. That was something I wanted to make sure I had the same thing." In contrast Jenny remarks, "So I'm struggling in his class now, but I need it, and there's no tutoring, there's nothing for this class."

The students at Commonwealth describe the robustness of support services available to them outside the bounds of reasonable accommodations. With one quarter of the students and five times the tuition of Livingston, Commonwealth College envelops undergrads in a safety net of administrator concern, writing and tutoring services and open-door faculty offices. Brendan recounts:

I used to use the writing center a lot, sometimes tutoring for Economics or Math. Usually for those things I just go see the professor. [They're always available.] Sometimes if a tutor's not available, the [disability office] director will find someone for me, which is I guess another perk. (B. Symon, personal communication, March 4, 2010)

Alison described how the Disability Services Officer “went like way beyond his duties there and helped us” to intervene in a conflict with her college dorm roommates. She continues, “They’ll basically do whatever you ask them to help you with if it’s like within the area that you need help. But they go over and beyond what they have to do I think to help you.” Carrie expressed, “I still freak out all the time,” and works hard to do well. When she doesn’t get the results she wants she tells herself she’ll just have to try harder next time. But while she conveys an attitude of pulling herself up by her bootstraps, this perspective is scaffolded by support she receives from Commonwealth staff. She describes an anxiety attack she had when she first started college:

My mom called [Commonwealth staff] the next day and explained how I was so overwhelmed and how I didn’t know how to like time manage myself well at all. And she called him and like explained the situation and he called me and was like “Carrie you’re done with midterms. You’re almost — you’re half way there.” He was just so reassuring. He was such a nice man and he really made me feel a lot better. He was really just like so caring. (C. Berrett, personal communication, April 14, 2010)

Amy Girodano, the Disability Services Officer at Commonwealth College, understands this perception of personalized supports from students and parents, and shares:

A student can go for office hours to see their professor and this has small enough classes. And those are all very positive things for every student, but there is that disabled student parent who feels as though they would get lost in the shuffle in a ... larger environment, which they may have. So I would say a small number there is an expectation that you can take care of him or her because that’s what we thought we were going to get.

And I think what they’re getting is an informal form of that because I wouldn’t know the student or an academic advisor wouldn’t know a student well enough to call me and say, “You know what, Amy, Johnny’s not doing too good. What do you know about him? What’s going on?” But truly yes I would say that parents find a small... college a safer environment for a student who has needs. (A. Girodano, personal communication, February 12, 2010)

The students at Commonwealth also described routine supports beyond reasonable accommodations. This contrasted sharply with an exchange with Melissa at low-SES Livingston College, who didn’t want to request any accommodations at all, and was sure that this was the norm in culture and practice: “Yeah, but I’m sure there’s a lot of other people you’re going to hear them say the same thing, they don’t want to feel like they’re a burden to someone.” Melissa is far from entitled; she

barely feels deserving. Her peer Christopher does admit to being entitled in his response to my question of how he knows so much about the disability laws:

I think it's experience dealing with all the special services I had throughout my life. I think I've become a whiz of what I'm entitled to and – but that's basically how I – how I became – not an expert – but as a citizen, you gotta be aware of your rights, and I made sure that I'm aware, what I'm entitled to, and what I need to succeed. (C. Henry, personal communication, April 13, 2010)

His tone is more pugilist than privileged; he's talking about advocacy within the bounds of what is legally provided under the ADA.

The Commonwealth students discuss the level of services they receive as being an important part of their college decision process. Some even met with the DSO at Commonwealth before they were admitted. None of the Livingston students did this. Brendan from Commonwealth shared, "I met the director of the [disability office] prior to coming to Commonwealth College. Actually, that's what made my decision to come here." Before Mark got accepted into college there, he remembers that disability services staff asked him, "What accommodations would you like to see, is there anything that you haven't had and that you want?" The emphasis is on opportunity and preference, not limits.

Interestingly, the Commonwealth students also became assimilated to the amount of support they received. When asked specifically about their accommodations Brendan, Mark, and Megan named discrete supports like extra time on exams, a private testing location, note takers, audio books, or the ability to type essay tests. Throughout the course of the interview, more and more accommodations emerged, perhaps indicating that these students were so accustomed to receiving them that they had become internalized. Privilege is understood as the norm. When asked how he finances his education, Mark replies, "Just through *regular*: parents" (emphasis added).

Bourdieu proves helpful in making sense of the patterns of entitlement discerned through Commonwealth students' expectations of personalized benefits beyond accommodation. For Bourdieu the educational system is a site of symbolic power which "has become the institution most responsible for the transmission of social inequality in modern society" (Swartz, 1997, p. 190). Bourdieu's concept of habitus would explain the disposition of students at a high-SES college to act in ways that reproduce distinctions of class status. He describes the elite French universities' "consecration" of students, where "all activities are designed to nurture a charismatic

quality of entitlement” (p. 205). Interview data excerpted in this section demonstrate how this Bourdieuan “consecration” takes place at high-SES Commonwealth.

As largely first-generation college students, the low-SES Livingston students do not have the cultural capital to embolden them to make special requests. Nor does staff there have the budget to grant an individual request that they couldn’t replicate. Donna, Livingston disability services staff, gives an example:

It’s something that we can accommodate. We can do it. It’s \$25. I mean, right now if we had, now, 50 more students coming to say, “Oh, we need and we need and we” - you know, we would decide, for example, the note-taking ... But it’s becoming such a cost issue and the more students that come with LD the more we have to kinda rethink, “Okay, what do we do?” (D. Johnson, personal communication, September 28, 2009)

Material constraints there mean that provision of services cannot exceed those required by law. As a result, examples given by the Livingston students conveyed an under-request and under-utilization of the accommodations and services for which they qualified.

The students interviewed at Livingston and Commonwealth explored a wealth of ideas and memories about their families, schooling, and LD. An emphasis on personal narrative is important here. Themes like stress, identity, and entitlement pop out of these dialogues. These interviewees are a sample of thousands of students with learning disabilities in NYC for whom concepts like “other” and “normate” shift from one subway stop to the next. This diversity can be liberating, and yet struggles with factors like stress or identity remain.

The processes by which students must self-identify in order to receive disability services in college exacerbate feeling “other.” Even if they reject a medical model of disability philosophically, students must subject themselves to the medicalization of disability by obtaining evaluations describing their cognitive limitations. Additionally, they must advocate for themselves, often uncomfortably, to authority figures (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). It is no wonder, then, that embarrassment or entitlement is a reaction to this process as students negotiate their own power. As Shakespeare (1996) describes, “Social approaches [to disability] view negative self-identity as a result of the experience of oppressive social relations, and focus attention on the possibilities for changing society, empowering disabled people, and promoting a different self-understanding.” The students interviewed here seem to be in various stages of claiming their personal agency and making demands for political and social change.

DISCUSSION

Examination of the political economy provides a compelling context for understanding the socioeconomic and legal boundary lines shaping higher education. The data paint a picture of students with disabilities as being more likely to attend community college than four-year colleges, less likely to stay in college, graduating at lower rates, and ultimately being under or unemployed. These trends are also true for poor students. These factors have been described as mitigated or exacerbated for students with learning disabilities across the spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds.

The distribution of economic resources makes a difference in every facet of service provision and use. For scholars who believe it to be a powerful determinant in social events, this makes sense. As Rothman (2005) states, "I once read somewhere that the United States doesn't have a culture; it has an economy. The values of the market are the dominant values, and they affect everything. Everything" (p. 30). In this study, differences in the distribution of material resources affect where students go to college, how long it takes them to finish, their lived environments, how they advocate for themselves, and the support services available to them. On an institutional level, these differences also affect tuition costs, university budgets, and the resources available to Disability Services Officers.

In a neoliberal economy, economic competition dictates that there are winners and losers. As David Harvey (2005) describes:

If conditions among the lower classes deteriorated, this was because they failed, usually for personal and cultural reasons, to enhance their own human capital (through dedication to education, the acquisition of a Protestant work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility, and the like). Particular problems arose, in short, because of competitive strength or because of personal, cultural and political failings. In a Darwinian neoliberal world, the argument went, only the fittest should and do survive. (p. 157)

Marissa from Livingston College describes her fierce determination to make it:

I think it was the way I was raised with the disability. My mom knew I had a disability, but the disability was not stopping me from doing anything normal like everybody else ... But a lot of people would say, "Oh, she has a learning disability, you could get extra money for her." My mom never wanted that for me. "Oh, why are you buying her a MetroCard? She could get a special MetroCard for it." I think that's the reason why, the way I was raised, that I just don't wanna bother with it even if I'm struggling with money. I just do everything on my own. (M. Diaz, 2010)

Mandated accommodations could ameliorate differences in socioeconomic effects which shape a student's college experience. A note taker is a note taker, and extra time is extra time; the students and staff interviewed in this study all talked about giving and receiving some of the same reasonable accommodations. Low-, medium- and high-Pell schools alike felt they met the *de jure* needs of their learning disabled students.

But *de facto*, the Commonwealth students undeniably received accommodations beyond those typically provided, and described meeting with Deans to choose classes or being assisted far beyond the scope of their disability with issues like bad roommates. Repeatedly, LD students enrolled there expressed feeling a tremendous level of support from the Disability Services Office and made comments like, "He set me up with everything. He cared. You could tell he wasn't going to leave you out to dry" (Brendan); "he just told me what we could do to make things easier" (Megan); and "you know if you ever need any help, if you just ever need someone to talk to I'm here" (Carrie).

Administrative, survey, and interview data provided sufficient evidence to substantiate the answer that yes, federal policies with regard to students with LDs are implemented differently in institutions of higher education in NYC with different socioeconomic class populations. As [Ferri and Connor \(2006\)](#) lament, "Although we may embrace equality and justice as a basic value, we do not expect to see it in practice" (p. 12). In addition to accommodations or "services," extra "supports" are made available to students at schools with wealthier student body populations. From exhaustive student services to access to high-level administrators, auxiliary resources abound at Commonwealth. As a result, this feeling of being supported was pervasive for students there. In nearly every case, when asked what disability services students received, one or two services were mentioned and then later on in the conversation several more surfaced. Students had thoroughly assimilated to the level of support they received and perceived it as typical, not extra.

So what effect did this difference have? The second research question explored if and how variance in policy implementation and student body social class impacted the college experience of students with LDs. The variance did indeed impact the college experience of the students interviewed. The difference resonates loudly when students are specifically asked to describe their college experience. Examples of interview responses depict the contrast in experiencing college as struggle or enjoyment. From Livingston, Christopher described, "There's a lot of high anxiety," and Marissa echoed, "College experience, it's not- it hasn't been easy." At Commonwealth,

Brendan shared, “It’s great. I enjoy it. We have a lot of fun.” His classmate Mark reflected, “The most fun I’ve had in four years from being active, classes, teachers, friends, the atmosphere, the people, it’s great.”

Comparing these responses is telling. The extra supports received by the Commonwealth students – likely a result of the difference in the schools’ socioeconomic environments – create a difference in what’s at stake for these students. Given the robust supports at Commonwealth, one could surmise why GPAs and retention are high. The Livingston students don’t have the same safety net; hard work alone separates them from not persisting in college. The students from Livingston were able to persist in college despite tremendous odds. In a kind of urban Darwinism, they knew how to survive if not thrive and were able to overcome significant obstacles. Livingston students relied on their own actions to make it through school and life, and succeed on their own merit, navigating college similar to the way they navigate life in NYC.

The thread of political economy analysis runs throughout this work, highlighting the intersections of SES and disability both embedded and explicit.

In the end, the students with LD interviewed at both colleges are on the road to earn a baccalaureate degree. While each of their life paths will differ, they hope to reap many of the economic benefits afforded to college graduates.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the ways in which factors like SES and disability affect the academic experience of NYC college students. Data presented show that both affect their internal feelings and external actions, which interact in various ways with attitudes of college staff and the broader campus community. It is within the web of these relationships that students achieve varying degrees of success based on what they and others believe they deserve and can access. The supports they receive make an important difference, and these are surely dependent upon material resources. Socioeconomic disparity is linked to variation in students’ college choice, accessing evaluations, requesting accommodations, and receiving supplementary supports. Both paradigm and policy shifts are necessary to achieve more democratic schools and communities, and these should be predicated on continued, robust theoretical and empirical exploration of the intersectionality of SES and disability.

NOTES

1. Numbers for disability are missing in the ACS data which is why data from the 2000 Census is used in this City/Bronx comparison.
2. All college, student, and staff names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

REFERENCES

- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, god and inequality*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Attewell, P., & Lavin, D. (2007). *Passing the torch*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Blodget, H. (2006). Mind the income gap. *New York Magazine*, October 29. Retrieved from <http://nymag.com/guides/money/2006/23488/>
- Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brainard, J., & Fuller, A. (2010). Graduation rates fall at one-third of 4-year colleges. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 5. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Graduation-Rates-Fall-at/125614/>
- Brougham, R. R., Zail, C. M., Mendoza, C. M., & Miller, J. R. (2009). Stress, sex differences, and coping strategies among college students. *Current Psychology*, 28, 85–97.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012, June 1). *Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted*. Retrieved from <http://bls.gov/news.release/empst.it06.htm>. Accessed on June 17, 2012.
- Connor, D. J. (2006). Michael's story: "I get into so much trouble just be walking": Narrative knowing and life at the intersections of learning disability, race, and class. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39, 154–165.
- Cook, B., & Pullaro, N. (2010, September). *College graduation rates: Behind the numbers*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Creswell, J. M. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Danforth, S. (2009). *The incomplete child: An intellectual history of learning disabilities*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Dictionary.com. (2010). *Dictionary.com unabridged*. Retrieved from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/accommodate>. Accessed on November 14, 2010.
- Ferguson, P. M., & Ferguson, D. L. (1995). The interpretivist view of special education and disability: The value of telling stories. In T. M. Skrtic (Ed.), *Disability and democracy: Restructuring (special) education for post-modernity* (pp. 104–121). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. J. (2006). *Reading resistance: Discourses of exclusion in desegregation & inclusion debates*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Fink, A. (2006). *How to conduct surveys: A step by step guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Boston, IL: Longman Press.

- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hock, M. F. (2005). Students with learning disabilities or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. In E. E. Getzel & P. Wehman (Eds.), *Going to college* (pp. 233–252). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.
- Hourcade, J. (2002). *Mental retardation*. Retrieved from http://clsf.info/Articles/mental_retardation_definition.htm. Accessed on January 25, 2011.
- Isaacs, J. B., Sawhill, I. V., & Haskins, R. (2008, February). *Getting ahead or losing ground: Economic mobility in America*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Kahlenberg, R. (2008, May 8). *Still forgotten: Low income students at selective colleges*. Retrieved from http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2008/05/still_forgotten_low_income_stu.html. Accessed on December 3, 2010.
- Katz, J. I. (2010). *Learning disabilities at universities*. Retrieved from <http://wuphys.wustl.edu/~katz/LD.html>. Accessed on November 5, 2010.
- Linton, S. (1998). *Claiming disability: Knowledge and identity*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2000, June). *Disabilities: Enrollment, services and persistence (NCES 1999–187)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2006). *Profile of undergraduates in U.S. postsecondary education institutions: 2003–2004 (NCES 2006-184)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2008a). *Community colleges (NCES 2008-033)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2008b). *Digest of education statistics, 2007 (NCES 2008–2022)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- New York City Coalition Against Hunger. (2010). *Hunger in New York City*. Retrieved from <http://www.nyccah.org/aboutus/hunger-nyc>. Accessed on August 31, 2010.
- Paradis, J. (2005, July). Grammatical morphology in children learning English as a second language: Implications of similarities with language impairment. *Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 172–187.
- Rothman, B. K. (2005). *Weaving a family: Untangling race and adoption*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Schofer, E., & Meyer, J. M. (2005). The Worldwide expansion of higher education in the twentieth century. *American Sociological Review*, 70, 898–920.
- Shakespeare, T. (1996). Disability, identity and difference. In C. Barnes & G. Mercer (Eds.), *Exploring the divide* (pp. 94–113). Leeds: The Disability Press.
- Shakespeare, T. (2005). Review article: Disability studies today and Tomorrow. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 27(1), 138–148.
- Shavit, Y., Arum, R., & Gamoran, A. (2007). *Stratification in higher education: A comparative study*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1995). Radical structuralist perspectives on the creation and use of learning disabilities. In T. M. Skrtic (Ed.), *Disability and democracy: Restructuring (special) education for post-modernity* (pp. 153–165). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture & power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Profile of selected social characteristics: 2000*. Retrieved from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_DP2&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-sse=on. Accessed on January 25, 2011.

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *Bronx County, NY Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFFacts?_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo_id=05000US36005&geoContext=01000US|04000US36|16000US3651000&_street=&_county=bronx&_cityTown=bronx&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&qtr_name=null®=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=. Accessed on January 25, 2011.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010a). *Census bureau reports nearly 6 in 10 advanced degree holders age 25–29 are women*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb10-55.html>. Accessed on January 25, 2011.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010b). *Median earnings in the past 12 months (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars) of workers by sex and women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings by selected characteristics*. Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_S2002&prodType=table. Accessed on June 17, 2012.
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2008). *Americans with disabilities act questions and answers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ada.gov/q%26aeng02.htm>. Accessed on November 14, 2010.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wagner, M. M., & Blackorby, J. (1996). Transition from high school to work or college: How special education students fare. *The Future of Children Special Education For Students With Disabilities*, 6(1), 103–120.
- Weiss, K. R. (2000). New test-taking skill: Working the System. *Los Angeles Times*, January 9.
- Wells, T., Sandefur, G. D., & Hogan, D. P. (2003). What happens after the high school years among young persons with disabilities? *Social Forces*, 82(2), 803–832.
- Wolanin, T. R., & Steele, P. E. (2004, June). *Higher education opportunities for students with disabilities: A primer for policymakers*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy.
- Zola, I. (1982). *Missing pieces: A chronicle of living with a disability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.