College is for Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School

Allison Simpson
allison.k.simpson@gmail.com

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COLLEGE IS FOR EVERYONE: EXAMINATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING TO POSTSECONDARY SCHOOL

By

Allison Simpson

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Allison Simpson

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Jennifer Guthrie, Ph.D.  
*Examination Committee Chair*

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.  
*Graduate College Interim Dean*

Emma Frances Bloomfield, Ph.D.  
*Examination Committee Member*

Lisa Menegatos, Ph.D.  
*Examination Committee Member*

Joshua Baker, Ph.D.  
*Graduate College Faculty Representative*
Abstract

Through a qualitative research study using Baxter’s (2011) contrapuntal analysis and Ellingson’s (2008) crystallization, this project illuminates the support needed for students with intellectual developmental disability (IDD) transitioning into postsecondary education. Through comparing interviews with parents of students in a postsecondary education (PSE) program, four PSE program websites, and shared experiences from an online webinar found on “Thinkcollege.net,” dialectical tensions in messages are highlighted. By analyzing what is stated (and not stated), perceptions of students with IDD attending college are understood. The aim of this research study is to use the identified perceptions to help provide better support for PSE programs and students.

Keywords: contrapuntal analysis, intellectual disabilities, postsecondary education, family support.
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Chapter One:  
Introduction and Rationale

I dream…

To, to one day, for one day to finally get a job.

- Kobe, PSE participant

I dream big! I dream of freedom, of personal freedom, and freedom in general of people. I dream of being able to, be able to really do exactly what you want to do every day and not feel like you HAVE to do something…. I dream of, you know, having really good health for all of us, for my family. And you know, like for instance, with my son just being able to see him really succeed in life and be happy, you know, that's both of my sons, really just being happy with whatever it is that they're going to do in life. You know.

- Elizabeth, PSE participant’s parent

I dream of, my dream for [son’s name] to live independently at some point in his future.

- Loralynn, PSE participant’s parent

Like dream big, I dream in color. I think I dream toward the future…. Let's see a dream about having grandchildren, some day.

- Margery, PSE participant’s parent
Everyone has different dreams that they would like to see come true. But for a while, individuals with intellectual developmental disability (IDD) and their family were restricted on the reality of what dreams could come true in their lifetime. The personal participant dreams listed above started to become more possible to achieve through the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA; 2008)—the first legislation that offered federal guidance to providing higher education opportunities to students with intellectual disability. While none of the dreams listed above were about attending college, each of the dreams were regarding individuals with IDD who are part of college campuses now. HEOA began shifting the wide-spread expectation that students with disabilities would not attend college. First termed as dual enrollment programs (Hart, Zimbrich, & Parker, 2005), school systems began to use funds allocated from the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and other local district funds to pay for high school students in special education programs to take classes at universities in both the high school and college level (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). The dual enrollment programs were the beginning for postsecondary education (PSE) programs. And here, the dreams of those students who are able to attend PSE education because of those pieces of legislation are what begin this research study.

Rationale

For any adolescent, the transition out of high school can be a challenge. Deciding whether to go to college or into the workforce is not a decision unique to individuals without an intellectual developmental disability (IDD). However, students with an IDD are faced with unique challenges in their postsecondary transition (Hetherington et al., 2010). In accordance to the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA; section 300.43), transition plans are required for all students 16 years or older, with individualized education plans (IEPs;
Hetherington et al., 2010). A common limitation to the transition plans, as with other social services, is the sparse active involvement of the individual and parents in the process (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009; Hetherington et al., 2010; Kohler, 1999). Instead, the teachers and/or social service providers develop a ‘plan’ without much consultation with the individuals or caregivers about various options. The transition period for young adults/adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the United States is particularly important because services that were once entitled to these students are now based on eligibility when they age out or exit the school system at 22 years old (Neece, Kraemer, & Blacher, 2009). Along with services no longer being entitled to individuals, there has been a lack of evidence-based interventions and services for individuals aged 16 to 21 years old (Wehman, Smith, & Schall, 2009; Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010). Thus, it is crucial that researchers study communication surrounding the transition opportunities for these individuals.

As exemplified in these federal policies, families and individuals with IDD need to have an active role in the student’s planning. Not only because it is mandated by law (e.g. IDEA), but families and individuals should be involved because it has been linked to more successful transition planning (Hetherington et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2010; Zager & Alpern, 2010). Previously, vocational training or day programs were some of the only transition options; however, through more recent policies postsecondary education is now an option. Having inclusive universities “ensur[es] that college is a viable choice for everyone [which] is important, as this indicates that we believe in all students’ potential for success in this arena and that we [society] are not excluding or prejudging any one group” (Hart et al., 2010, p. 134).

There has not always been the opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities to have postsecondary education options. Many Americans believe that the transition into and
eventual completion of postsecondary school, such as college, will then turn into high paying jobs, thus leading them to a higher quality of life (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010). Along with students without disabilities, there are great benefits of receiving a college education for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Hart et al., 2010). For all students, benefits include: “growth in academic and personal skill building, employment, self-advocacy, and self-confidence” (Hart et al., 2010, p. 134). Most students with or without disability decide to attend college for the commonly held idea that a college education will lead to higher paying jobs. Having postsecondary education opportunities is a way that individuals with IDD can achieve a higher quality of life (Hart et al., 2010).

The common argument against allowing students with IDD an opportunity for postsecondary education is that professors will have to ‘water down’ the material taught (Hart et al., 2010; Grigal & Hart, 2009). This is not the case (Hart et al., 2010; Grigal & Hart, 2009). Instead, the students who are seeking postsecondary education are looking for the general curriculum taught. However, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with intellectual disabilities do have the opportunity to seek accommodations that are available to all students with a disability (Hart et al., 2010). Such services are offered through a university’s Disability Resource Center or related office and through peer support groups.

Particularly for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), communication and social skills can be difficult (Zager & Alpern, 2010). Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that individuals can range in severity/functioning. Similar to their peers, individuals with ASD and other intellectual developmental disability can experience difficulties in: time management, keeping up with the rigor of course work at the postsecondary education level,
decision making skills, and effective communication in social and professional settings (Zager & Alpern, 2010). One key aspect of individuals with intellectual developmental disability integrating into the campus is learning social communication skills (Zager & Alpern, 2010). Because of the vast potential benefits for students with IDD attending postsecondary schools, more research is needed regarding the communication that surrounds the transition process from high school to college for these students. Illuminating the helpful and unhelpful messages surrounding their transition can potentially benefit both theory and practice.

Overall, this project highlights the interplay of competing discourses—including similarities and differences—(Baxter, 2011) surrounding the transition into college for individuals with IDD. By examining the messages sent from post-secondary education sources and how those messages are received by families and individuals with IDD, this project aims to provide theoretical implications regarding (un)supportive messages and practical implications regarding how to best provide support for those with intellectual disabilities as they transition into college.
Chapter Two:

Literature Review

In the following review of literature, I provide a foundational understanding of intellectual developmental disability and relevant policies and education models. Next, I describe the stigma associated with intellectual developmental disability, as well as the measures of quality of life. Furthermore, the importance of parental support of individuals with IDD will be discussed. Through this foundational understanding, the objective and method of this study will be highlighted.

Conceptualizing Intellectual Disability

The term intellectual disability is a relatively new term accepted widely. In the field of disability research, the term intellectual disability is replacing the now outdated term mental retardation (Schalock, et al., 2007). The shift in terminology is rooted in the changes to the construct but not as much in the definition of the word (Schalock et al., 2007). A description of a phenomenon is known as the construct and the name of the phenomenon is the term (Schalock et al., 2007). Broadly the construct of disability is “focused on the expression of limitations in individual functioning within associated context and represents a substantial disadvantage to the individual” (Schalock et al., 2007, p. 117). The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) define intellectual disability as “characterized by significant limitations in both ‘intellectual functioning’ and in ‘adaptive behavior,’ which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18” (AAIDD, 2017). Fitting within the construct of disability, intellectual disability’s construct shifted to focus on the individualized supports that strengthen the individual’s functioning in their environment (Schalock et al., 2007).
After there was a shift in the societal view of intellectual disabilities, policy and program developments occurred (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010). Through the de-institutionalization of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the 1970s, and the move away from the term mental retardation in the 2000s, it seems that society was beginning to change. The construct of intellectual disability replacing mental retardation created a new paradigm which “illustrat[es] the ‘fit’ of individual capacities within the structure and expectation of the individual’s personal and social environment,” thus empowering individuals with disabilities (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010, p. 131). This paradigm shift created new models of support, providing person-centered services. The advantage of person-centered services is that the service provided is tailored to fit the individual’s desires and goals based on their unique needs.

With the new paradigm came more societal change through federal policies and legal decisions: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, 1997, and 2004 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and 2008 (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010). IDEA focuses on education planning, preparation, and transition for students with disabilities. Within these acts, it ensures that students with intellectual disability have access to general education classrooms and individualized curriculum/performance goals. IDEA also ensures that the teachers, parents, and the student with disability are all involved during the education planning process (i.e., Individualized Education Plans and transition plans; Stodden & Mruzek, 2010). Under ADA 1990, civil rights for individuals with disabilities were protected by “providing the tools for people with disabilities to self-advocate in various public settings, including postsecondary education” (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010, p. 132). The amendment in 2008 focuses on ensuring reasonable accommodations, allowing for equitable education and work opportunities (Stodden & Mruzek, 2010).
Post-secondary Education

The aforementioned policies paved the way for post-secondary education programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Post-secondary education (PSE) programs are defined as “a 2-year or 4-year institution of higher education or a vocational/adult education institution” (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012, p. 225). There are three main PSE models, such as: mixed/hybrid model, substantially separate model, and inclusive individual support model (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). The aim of each of these models is to best provide an “authentic, inclusive college education experience” (Grigal et al., 2012, p. 230). However, each of these models outlined above create the inclusive college education experience differently. In the mixed/hybrid model, students are involved in ‘life skills’ classes or ‘transition classes’ that consist of other students with disabilities and taking additional classes with the greater population of university students for credit or audit (Hart et al., 2006). Similarly to the mixed/hybrid model, the substantially separate model offers ‘life skills’ or ‘transition classes’ to students, and students have the opportunity to participate in “generic social activities on campus and may be offered employment experience, often through a rotation of pre-established employment slots on- or off-campus” (Hart et al., 2006, p.1). The most integrative model is the inclusive individual support model, which focuses primarily on the individual student’s goals and creates a model of support for the individual (Grigal et al., 2012). In this model, students may receive additional services such as an “educational coach, tutor, technology, natural supports in college courses, certificate programs, and/or degree programs for audit or credit” (Hart et al., 2006, p.1). The integrative model is the most common type of PSE programs today.

Students involved in PSE programs learn more than just academics. Part of PSE programs is to provide students with opportunities to build their own social network, learn
job/employment skills, and gain more independence (Griffin, McMillan, & Hodapp, 2010). Like most parents, parents of students with an intellectual developmental disability (IDD) believe that PSE programs/attending college is a beneficial experience during the transitional period for young adults (Griffin et al., 2010). However, research has shown that these parents believe that educators did not actively encourage PSE as an option for their child (Griffin et al., 2010). PSE programs provide students with IDD another option to receive additional skills for job placement and competitive pay like their peers (Hart et al., 2010). Through PSE, students are able to receive additional education which will help them advance in jobs in the future.

Despite the goal of many PSE programs to provide the most authentic, inclusive college education experience, there are a large number of programs that have a separate process for their students to receive academic advising or register for classes than the main population of students on campus (Grigal et al., 2012). Furthermore, unlike their peers, some students in PSE programs may also not be eligible for federal financial aid. Many students with IDD do not graduate high school with a standard high school diploma; instead, they graduate with an adjusted diploma, which in some cases would make them ineligible for federal financial aid. There are also only certain PSE programs that are recognized with the federal government and are eligible to offer financial aid regardless of standard diploma or not. Having an adjusted diploma can create an additional difficulty for accessing PSE for economically challenged students (Hart et al., 2006). For a program to be recognized with the federal government and receive aid, they must apply to be a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) or a Transition Post-Secondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID). The TPSID categorization of programs allows the program to receive grants to the higher education institution and enables the university to create more inclusive programs.
Beyond having financial constraints, there are multiple other reasons why PSE is not viewed as an option by some. According to Griffin, McMillan, and Hodapp (2010), “parents of students with intellectual disabilities are among the most pessimistic about transition outcomes, including PSE participation” (p. 340). In particular, most of the parents in the referenced study did not view PSE as an option for their child because of lack of communication and understanding (Griffin et al., 2010). Other reasons consisted of long wait lists to get into the program, being given conflicting advice from schools and teachers, and confusing materials promoting the program that were difficult to understand (Griffin et al., 2010). Understanding these additional constraints helps programs address these issues.

**Poor Communication**

Poor communication is a common barrier in PSE programs (Griffin et al., 2010). There are multiple facets where poor communication is occurring, between program and parents, programs and schools, and schools and parents (Griffin et al., 2010). The quality of PSE and the amount of options are limited because of poor communication that is occurring. According to Griffin et al. (2010), about 74% of parents they interviewed reported that their child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) did not include plans for their student after high school, or they were not aware of plans being in place. One of the top reasons they reported for the lack of plans was, “lack of general information or guidance, and other staff did not help me understand” (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 342). However, IDEA (2004) requires such plans to be in place, stating: “transition planning requires Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to include appropriate measurable post-school goals based on age-appropriate, independent living skills to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post-school adult life” (Grigal et al., 2011, p.4). The lack of
planning or the poor communication is resulting in students with IDD having a difficult time transitioning out of high school.

Parental expectations and student involvement should be included in IEPs and is mandated by law through IDEA throughout the entire process of updating the student’s IEP and transition plan (Hetherington et al., 2010). Their involvement includes more than just a presence: “being present for an IEP meeting does not necessarily suggest engagement with the transition planning process” (Hetherington et al., 2010). It is also important that the student learns self-determination skills so they are able to demonstrate agency in the decisions being made about their future (Hetherington et al., 2010). As stated in IDEA (2004), “transition planning requires Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to include appropriate, measurable, post school goals based on age-appropriate transition assessment related to education and training, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post school adult life” (as cited in Grigal et al., 2011, p. 4).

Surprisingly, “of all students with disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities have the poorest post-school outcomes” (Hart et al., 2006, p. 2). For students with IDD, approximately 62% to 70% are expected to pursue education after high school (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). This low expectation for students to pursue education after high school can be attributed to poor communication about college being an option. But there is also a possibility that it is more cyclical—poor communication results in individuals having low expectations, and low expectations results in poor communication.

**Stigma of Intellectual Developmental Disability**

Formal and informal support are needed for families that have a child with IDD because there is still stigma associated with these individuals. The word *stigma* dates back to the Greeks
who used stigma to “refer to bodily signed designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (Goffman, 1963). When stigma is used today, it does not necessitate the visual representation of difference but focuses more on the idea of difference (Goffman, 1963). In many ways, stigma refers to the attribute that makes an individual disliked or unpleasing. Stigma can also refer to holding low expectations of a group of individuals based off their label, such as disability. The visibility of a disability may have a role in the stigmatization of the individual because of the relations of attribute and stereotype. However, this is not always the case. The idea of visibility of difference is further developed through Goffman’s “double perspective” which asks, “does the stigmatized individual assume his difference is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them?” (Goffman, 1963, p.4). There is more to stigma than just supporting a social norm: It is focusing on the realization of the act in doing so.

According to Grochowski (2014), families have the power to eliminate all forms of stigmatization. By educating the family to recognize and avoid behaviors that are negative, this will help manage stigma. The negative social attitudes and stereotypes are not the only outcomes of an individual experiencing stigmatization. An individual can engage in “self-discrimination, concealment, withdrawal, and other forms of stigma management” (Burris, 2008; as cited in Grochowski, 2014, p.116) because of the societal stigmas (Grochowski, 2014). Link and Phelan (2001) expand Goffman’s concept of stigma by adding five specific aspects of stigmatization:

a.) Labeling the medical difference as less important as other more acceptable conditions, such as cancer or diabetes; b.) linking those affiliated with the undesirable illness to negative stereotypes; c.) separating ‘them’ from ‘us’; d.) perpetuating a loss
of status for those with this trait (illness) through discrimination (employment, health insurance coverage, etc.); e.) societal elements (social, economic, and political) that allow this stigma and prejudice to exist and continue (Grochowski, 2014, p. 116).

By understanding how stigmas are created, and further how they can be broken down, individuals with IDD can potentially have higher expectations placed on them with the help of their families. The turn for research to focus on the quality of life for individuals with IDD, stems from a more positive outlook society has on these individuals. The study of communication is imperative for these families within the social support setting, both formal and informal, because of the impact it can have on the quality of life for the individual with IDD.

**Quality of Life**

In modern research the approach to understanding individuals with intellectual disabilities is different than in the past. Much of current research focuses on the ‘quality of life’ of the individual and family (Canary, 2008). Quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities is constructed through their integration in communities, having their own social network, participating in recreational activities, and having fundamental needs met such as food, shelter, and human interaction (Blacher, Neece, & Paczkowski, 2005). For many years, the language used in research had a negative outlook on individuals with disabilities. This includes using phrasing in questions in surveys, such as *unfortunate consequences* of a diagnosis (Ferguson, 2001). In today’s research, by looking at quality of life for individuals, the family unit is highlighted as a large factor. The family unit for many individuals are the lifelong caregivers who are a constant, despite any changes in social services throughout their lives (Hole, Stainton, & Wilson, 2013).

**Parent Involvement with Formal and Informal Support**
Parent involvement and input into services for individuals with IDD is essential. When collaborative relationships are formed with parents and professionals, there is a higher parental satisfaction of care, which leads to empowering parents to be advocated for their children and better-quality relationships within the family (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). When parents are strong advocated for their children with IDD, this leads to the individual being socialized and learning more self-determination skills. These skills will help the individual make decisions for themselves in the future.

In a past study examining parents’ responses to services that their child with Autism receives, it was found that a key concern for them is experiencing difficulty with social agencies (Kohler, 1999). These findings could possibly be generalized beyond those parents with a child with Autism to more broadly any family that has a child with an IDD. A concern that is often expressed by parents is the service delivery system. For example, multiple families reported not receiving an accurate diagnosis until after visiting three or four psychiatrists (Kohler, 1999). Children who have Autism have many different services that they require, and some families are working with on-average six different services and have close to 37 hours of weekly therapy that their child receives (Kohler, 1999).

Parents may also have difficulties if agencies and parents do not have a good relationship of accurately expressing services that are needed. Parents tend to have frustrations in “keeping everyone informed and ensuring that providers collaborate in planning, implementing and evaluating services” (Kohler, 1999, p. 157). Parents begin to be concerned about a child’s development around 18 months of age, but the average age of diagnosis for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is around three and a half to six years (Renty & Roeyers, 2005). Overall, Renty and Roeyers (2005) found that the shortcomings of services for individuals with ASD boil down
to: age of diagnosis, quality of life information, clarity of final diagnosis, and collaboration/coordination of services. The primary role for professional support/formal social support is providing information for parents such as learning about and developing tools for problem-solving in relation to their child with disabilities (Renty & Roeyers, 2005).

Whereas formal support is services that the family seeks out or are provided, informal support is the social network they have in place. Informal support may act as “a buffer against demands of caring for a child with a disability, resulting in better family adaptation” (Renty & Roeyers, 2005, p. 371). Informal support such as family (spouses and grandparents), friends, and religious or community groups often times lead to higher satisfaction with formal support (Renty & Roeyers, 2005). In relation to formal support and informal support, when the practitioner first shares the news of the diagnosis with the family, the parents interpret the meaning through their social network (Whiting, 2014). Through the diagnosis process, parents who do not have a strong social network may be at risk for their own mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Blacher et al., 2005). It has been found that when family units participate in community activities such as recreation or church, it is a way for them to relieve this risk, and they have higher reports of quality of life for all individuals (Blacher et al., 2005).

Despite progressive gender roles, the primary caregiving role of a child with ASD continues to be the mother (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). Many mothers take time away from their careers to stay at home to care for their child, which can in-turn negatively impact the mother (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). Mothers of children with ASD, as compared to mothers with a child with Down Syndrome, at times have less personal growth and put pressure on their child more because of the amount of services that are needed (Pisula, 2007). However, when mothers use optimism, it has the best mediating effect for their psychological well-being (Gabovitch &
Curtin, 2009). It is hypothesized that this leads back to contradicting the past belief of the ‘refrigerator mother’ (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). In the 1940s, the beginning diagnoses of Autism was under theories of Bruno Bettelheim which stated that it was caused by “refrigerator mothers” — cold and detached mothers (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). This theory has long since been proven invalid (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). In heterosexual two-parent families, the father’s role falls back on outdated gender roles as well. The father’s role tends to be to work outside of the home as the main financial support (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009). Fathers tend to cope relative to their spouse, so spousal support is important to consider. Some fathers may suppress their feelings and express later through anger, which can often lead to marital problems (Gabovitch & Curtin, 2009).

**Research Question**

This research study will explore how inherent messages of social stigmas in society and self-determination messages are reflected in the conversations with parents of individuals in PSE programs. This study hopes to understand more about the sense making process to attend PSE by examining the crystallization of data from: interview data from an individual in a PSE program and parents of individuals in a PSE program, thematic analysis of PSE programs’ online presence, and analysis of a public account of parental support in a PSE program (via a webinar). This research seeks to answer the following two research questions:

RQ: How do families talk about their experiences as individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) transition into postsecondary education?

In sum, I would like to not only analyze how PSE programs promote their services online but also how individuals with IDD make the decision to attend PSE with parental support. I hope to
be able to understand more in depth the types of messages the PSE programs provide and some possible implications of these messages.
Chapter Three:

Methods

The current study uses contrapuntal analysis to better understand messages that are sent by post-secondary education programs and how those messages are received by parents of individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) and those with IDD. Baxter (2011) describes contrapuntal analysis in her voicing of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT). The following section provides background regarding RDT and the theoretical assumptions underlying contrapuntal analysis. Next, I describe data collection and analyses.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Methodology: Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) is not a post-positivist theory that aims at predicting the world, but it is rather a theory that is descriptive and sensitizing (Baxter, 2011). RDT, grounded in the studies of Mikhail Bakhtin, is based on the idea that relating is an intricate process through meaning making (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). The goal of RDT “is to function as a heuristic device to render the communicative social world intelligible” (Baxter, 2011, p. 7). Furthermore, RDT is a “heuristic tool that obligates scholars to advance an interpretation rather than the interpretation of how meaning is made in utterances” (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 290). How relationships and individual identity is formed through language is best understood through RDT (Baxter, 2011). The way that concepts create meaning is through a complex web of other concepts and meaning (Baxter, 2011). At the core of RDT’s theoretical principle is that “meaning in the moment is not simply the result of isolated, unitary discourses but instead is the result of the interplay of competing discourses” (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). Competing discourses are identified when the meanings of the discourses negate one another’s dichotomy.
Through the interplay of the competing discourses, relationships achieve meaning (Baxter, 2011). The focus however is not on the individual voice or who spoke particular utterances but “on the discourses themselves and how they interanimate in talk” (Baxter, 2011, p. 5). RDT’s framework directs us to different points of view by directing our attention to the various aspects of the phenomena and finding meaning in the “between—” (Baxter, 2011, p. 12), which is where the interplay of competing discourses is located.

Through intertwined propositions, RDT moves beyond just identifying competing discourses to the meaning that is created from their interlacing (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). RDT’s first proposition is that “every utterance is embedded in a larger utterance chain,” stating that each part of a dialogue is not isolated (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 281). Rather, the utterances are a response to something previous or something that is forthcoming (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Within an utterance chain there are classifications of links: proximal already-spoken, proximal not-yet-spoken, distal already-spoken, and distal not-yet-spoken (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). The proximal classification of links is based on relational history (proximal already-spoken) and expectation of a future relationship (proximal not-yet-spoken) between partners (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Distal links are utterances shared through cultural discourses (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). For example, the way that individuals may anticipate responses from relational partners, they may also have expectations of “how theirs and others’ relational experiences align with or are different from that which is considered normal or is idealized in a given culture” (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 282). The distal already-spoken and distal not-yet-spoken can relate to the stigma that is underlying apparent in culture.

The second proposition, “meaning is constructed through struggle among different, often opposing, discourses of varying force” is the central proposition of RDT (Baxter & Norwood,
This proposition states that through the ambivalence of discourses the meaning-making process can be characterized (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). The way that meanings are constructed is through the exchange of centripetal-centrifugal struggle, best understood as the interaction of the discourses, not through the impact or intersubjectivity of the discourse (Baxter, 2011). The centripetal force is the dominant discourse that holds the most power in the meaning-making process, whereas the centrifugal force is the symbolic discourse that is often more marginalized (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Together, through the struggle of these forces, current meaning is ingrained and new meanings can grow (Baxter & Norwood, 2015).

The third proposition, “the interplay of discourses results in various arrangements of meaning that are never finalized, but always in flux,” illuminates that communication and relationships are in a constant state of change (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 283). RDT views the communication in a relationship on a continuum of exchange ranging from monologic to dialogic (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). The two overarching processes of the continuum are diachronic interplay and synchronic interplay, when two discourses are present (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Diachronic interplay means an interplay that has occurred over time where one discourse is privileged in one instance, and a clashing discourse is privileged in another context (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Synchronic interplay is the “co-occurrence of multiple discourses at a given time point” (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 283). Within synchronic interplay there are multiple dimensions—antagonistic and non-antagonistic (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). In non-antagonistic forms, competing discourses can be found within the multiple discourses identified within individual’s speech (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). In a direct form, an individual can be seeking balance or entertaining conflicting perspectives at once (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Whereas in an indirect form, the conflicting discourses are more ambiguous and “can function to
neutralize the struggle between competing discourses, to keep centrifugal discourses at the margins, or to temper the power of centripetal meanings” (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 284).

Overall, RDT views communication as being comprised of both the individual and the relationship integral to the meaning through communication (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Through utterance chains, meaning emerges and is negotiated and renegotiated over time. While RDT’s goal is not to predict or solve communicative problems, RDT helps us to appreciate that the social world is a rarely cut-and-dried communicative site of stable and consistent meanings; it ought to be reassuring to appreciate that relating is messy, tension-filled business rather than a sign that something is inherently wrong with the relationship (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 288). Inherent in relationships, the push and pull is successfully explained in RDT (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Through contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011), we can navigate the complexities of RDT to understand “the centripetal-centrifugal struggle of discourses and the meanings that emerge from it” (Baxter & Norwood, 2015, p. 289). In other words, through contrapuntal analysis, I am able to uncover the distal discourses such as broader cultural narratives and how this contributes to our understanding in our relationships. Through contrapuntal analysis, I am also able to uncover tensions present in our own discourses which contributes further to our relational and identity understanding. The process of contrapuntal analysis will be further described in the methods section.

**Contrapuntal Analysis and Crystallization**

In this current study, contrapuntal analysis is used to further understand the discourses family members experience regarding their child with intellectual disability transitioning to college. Contrapuntal analysis relies on interpretive methods such as thematic analysis, to find patterns/themes from the data (Baxter, 2011). There are two distinctions in themes— manifest
and latent. Manifest themes in the data are what is being said and most apparent (Baxter, 2011). Latent themes, however are found more in-between-the-lines (Baxter, 2011). Latent themes are found through identifying lexical markers in discourse. Together these themes are analyzed to find any competing discourses that may be present in messages (Baxter, 2011). The competing discourses found in the messages act as a tool for the researcher to further understand the process of meaning making for individuals. Furthermore, what is stated (and not stated) by individuals provides an understanding of the meaning making process of how marginalized discourses are created (Baxter, 2011).

In addition to contrapuntal analysis, the notion of crystallization will be used to further enhance the understanding of students with intellectual developmental disability (IDD) continuing to post-secondary education. The notion of crystallization is used when, “researchers are encouraged to engage in multiple types of data collection, at multiple points in time, with multiple co-researchers, in order to construct a multi-facted, more complicated, and therefore more credible picture of the context” (Ellingson, 2008; as cited in Tracy, 2013). While crystallization can be used to establish greater credibility in qualitative research, in this study, it will also be used to provide other voices and perspectives to fully describe the PSE context.

The influence of society and culture, “lurk in every utterance voiced by relational parties” (Baxter, 2011, p.9). Thus, the societal stigmas and ideas of individuals with IDD can be embedded within messages received. Societal stigmas can be identified through what individuals say but also what they do not say, relating to the latent themes outlined above. Since the influence of society and culture lurk in every utterance and tend to be latent themes, lexical markers are an indicator to when researcher can identify exactly where these utterances are taking place within discourses. Furthermore, the aim of this study is to illuminate the influence
of messages provided by PSE programs through their support and website persona and how these messages are understood by the research participants. The influence of these messages is understood through identifying the centripetal discourse (i.e., dominant discourse that holds the most power in the meaning-making process) and centrifugal discourse (i.e., symbolic discourse that is often more marginalized) (Baxter & Norwood, 2015).

Data Collection

As previously stated, the method of crystallization is gathering multiple forms of data to create a larger picture of the phenomena being studied. Data was collected through three different means. First, data was collected through Thinkcollege.net, a website that is dedicated to providing information regarding PSE programs to students with IDD. It was through this website I chose four PSE programs from across the United States and completed a contrapuntal analysis on the messages found on their website. These four programs were chosen based off of different region and type of services that the PSE program provides in order to assess a range of these programs. As with the ever-changing nature of the internet, I took screen shots of each page on the website so I have a file to reference. Just like any other college instution or university program, the way that these programs market themselves through their online presence is important because it could be the first message that students/ parents may receive about such programs. When analyzing the website, I was focused on the ways in which the programs talked about their services and the students whom they served. I decided not to analyze the overall marketetability or visual attractiveness of the websites because I wanted to keep my overall analysis focused on the discourses being presented.

The second set of data was collected through a Thinkcollege.net webinar that is open to the public and saved on the website as part of an online module providing further information
about PSE programs to families. This webinar shared four different stories from mothers of children with IDD and the journey their children took to attend PSE programs—and for some, what they are doing after. While listening to the webinar and following along on the provided transcript, I also took notes as if I were present listening to a presentation panel, similarly to a researcher taking field notes. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011) field notes should ask the “the questions of who, what, where, when, and how… to unpack the particulars of what is happening in a social scene and will ideally and ultimately allow for understandings of why” (as cited in Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 125). The way that the mothers of these four students talked about their experience, and their child’s experience will highlight other families’ perspective of their child attending college. The schools referenced in the webinar are different schools than the PSE programs on which I completed the website analysis. Together the data further adds to the conversation of PSE for individuals with IDD.

Lastly, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with an individual with IDD and three family members of other individuals with IDD who are part of a PSE transition program at a large, urban, southwest campus. This part of data collection received approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board. These interviews were conducted directly by the researcher. The participants were recruited by the researcher providing the program’s Associate Director a flyer promoting the study to both students and family members and an email script that was forwarded to both sets of potential participants. Interested participants scheduled an interview directly with the researcher through a private SignUp.com link, an online scheduling tool. The link to the SignUp page was included in the email announcement.

**Site information.** This program’s missions and goals align with previous researchs’ ideas about postsecondary education: creation of an inclusive community and classes, career
education, and self-determination skills (Hetherington et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2010; Zager & Alpern, 2010). Students are admitted into the program through an application process, which is competitive based on the program’s resources. Once admitted into the program, students receive person-centered advising, tailoring their experience. Most students in the program are working towards a 2 year (42 credits) or 4 year (84 credits) certificate instead of a bachelor’s degree. However, if there were a student who aspired for a bachelor’s degree, the student can work with an advisor. Students participating in this program, pay the large, urban, southwest university’s tuition costs and an additional fee for the program that is used to pay the program’s staff and tutors. The experience of being part of the program for participants is explained in the results section.

Interview data. A semi-structured protocol was crafted to allow for the participants’ freedom to tell the story of how their decision to attend postsecondary school was made, the types of social support they receive, and their family’s opinion about their decision (see Appendix A). Prior to interviews starting, I explained the process and structure of how the interview will be conducted and obtained written consent from each participant. The interviews took place in a research lab and were partially transcribed by an autotranscription tool called Trint. Transcripts were verified for accuracy by the researcher. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. There was one 25 minute interview and 1 hour interview that were outliers. The participants were thanked for their participation by snacks being provided during the interview. Participants’ identities will be protected throughout the research process. All audio files and transcriptions are saved under the alias name that the participants chose or agreed to.
Website and webinar data. Together, both the website analysis and the webinar analysis provide a public perception of PSE programs. Though all of the data on the websites and webinar are public data, the names of the programs and individuals referenced in webinare are omitted for research integrity. There is also no affiliation to Thinkcollege.net in this current study. This website is used as a reference and central location to find information about PSE programs and options. Whereas the interviews conducted by the researcher provide four individual and personal accounts of the same PSE program, through the crystallization of using multiple forms of resources found on Thinkcollege.net and one-on-one interviews, I am able to understand more in depth the types of messages PSE programs provide and the possible implications of these messages.

Data Analysis

After all data was collected and interviews were transcribed, the researcher began the first steps of contrapuntal coding as laid out by Baxter (2011). The first step is to become familiar with the data. As a starting point, wordles were used to see broadly what was present in the data. McNaught and Lam (2010) state wordles are “a tool for peliminary analysis, quickly highlighting main differences and possible points of interest, thus providing a direction for detailed analyses in following stages” (p. 631). These graphical representations are more than “the perception that word clouds are pretty and fun toys,” they “can be impactful and useful as research and assessment tools” (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 44). For this reason, I created wordles for each of my data sets to begin to analyze each of the data collections separally. The wordles allowed me to properly orient myself with the information. The wordles are a methodical and quick way I am able to see the “big picture” of my data to be able to narrow in on specifics (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). Each of the separate data analysis will be outlined below.
Website analysis. For the website analysis, I began by copying all of the text from the website pages and creating a word cloud from Wordle.com for each program website. On the word cloud, I removed all of the common English words and then began to try to find any patterns/themes. By using some of Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) concept of grounded theory, I continuously compared the data to create my initial codes, or first-level codes (Tracy, 2013). These first-level codes, “focus on ‘what’ is present in the data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). Prior to conducting, answers of ‘why’ to my overall research question, I first needed to understand ‘what’ was going on at the scene. By using the websites’ actual words from the word clouds to create my first-level codes, this is an example of in vivo coding, using the words of participants (Charmaz, 2014; Tracy, 2013). Once the first-level codes were decided for this data set, I began going through the website screenshots and coding the data. I used different colored highlights to signify different codes. While coding, I also left memos of possible new codes and information that was sticking out to me. The process of creating memos while coding was to help guide myself later when I started to identify dialectical tensions.

Once I finished highlighting the different coded data on the website screenshots, I compiled all the data found from the screenshots of the four PSE programs into an excel worksheet. By analyzing the PSE websites, I was able to see the messages that each program promotes to the greater public and if there are any large differences or similarities based on geographical region. After I entered all of the first-level coded data into the excel worksheet, I organized the sheet to see the significance of each code. During this time, I also cleaned the data of all identifying information. Throughout this process, I continued to see if any codes could be combined or needed to be expanded.
**Webinar analysis.** Similar to the website pages, I created an excel worksheet with the data from the webinar. Through analyzing the webinar, I was able to see possible effects of the program marketing through accounts of students’ experiences. While listening to the webinar, I took notes of statements that stood out to me with a timestamp. After listening and taking notes from the webinar a first time, I went back and compared my notes to the transcription provided by Thinkcollege.net. When I came across a notable phrase, I created a code using the in vivo coding to maintain the dialogue. As I was reading through the transcription and my notes, when there was a new theme that emerged, I created a new code. I continued this process until I reached the end of the transcription. I entered the initial codes and phrases into the new excel worksheet. After entering the first-level codes, I sorted the document by the code to see the significance of each. Next, I created a word cloud with the phrases from each code. My aim for doing this was to identify any further emergent themes that could be found in a sub-section. After creating a word cloud for each of the first-level codes of the webinar, I compared all the word clouds and created a list of all of the top words used among all of the different codes. From here, I did the similar process of creating codes. I grouped these words by new codes and found other emergent themes/patterns. Through this process I reached saturation for this data set.

**Interview analysis.** Following a similar process, after I finished transcribing the interviews, I created word clouds for each participant. I took the participant’s words from the transcription and uploaded it into Wordle.com, which generated a word cloud of the most common words they used in the interview. After repeating this process with each of the interview transcriptions, initial coding categories were created. The most common words were similar across all participants. The common words were: know, really, think, like, just, going, school, kind, thing, program, actually, get, something, work, and go. To create initial codes, similar
words were collapsed into a category. The initial codes were: know, similar (like), different (just), action (go). The beginning coding categories were recorded by different colored highlights on the interview transcript and entered into an excel spreadsheet. Once entered into the excel spreadsheet, other columns were created for the alias name and corresponding code.

**Crystallization of data.** The data was then analyzed again to find any supplemental codes or messages and recorded in another tab on the spreadsheet. By continuously comparing data, this is an example of Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory practice, through constant comparison and developing theory advancements during the data collection and analysis stages (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss constructed grounded theory to guide qualitative analysis by extending beyond descriptive studies and into explanatory theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, “they urged novice grounded theorists to develop fresh theories and thus advocated delaying the literature review to avoid seeing the world through the lens of extant ideas” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). Thus, the literature review for this project was revised and tailored to include relevant literature to the findings.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that through a finished grounded theory project, the process of the study promotes new theoretical terms, explains the theoretical classifications, and illuminates the setting in which this occurs (Charmaz, 2014). The process of grounded theory research begins with the overarching research questions and extends into the recruitment and sampling of participants and data collection. Within the initial coding process, I developed theoretical categories and was constantly refocusing and tailoring categories to fit the data. This initial sensitizing stage of the analysis was where I became aware of the emergent themes. By continuing with Baxter’s (2011) steps to conduct a contrapuntal analysis, the emergent themes
(i.e., discourses) were recorded in the excel spreadsheet and reviewed again to locate any competing discourses. According to Baxter (2011),

Discourses—Systems of meaning—can be sociocultural or interpersonal in nature. Sociocultural discourses—those emphasized in the distal already-spoken and distal not-yet-spoken—are invoked whenever relationship parties talk, individually or jointly; parties talk culture whenever they open their mouths. Interpersonal discourses are those systems of meaning that are crafted jointly between relationship parties and reflect their unique history together (p. 157).

As I was analyzing the data, the various types of discourses were a leading guideline for preliminary emergent themes. Once a coding saturation point was reached, I then identified where competing discourse may be taking place. Baxter (2011) outlines that, “competing discourse should compete from the participant’s point of view (as cited in Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Through the process of crystallization, the public messages of PSE programs and the individual experiences of PSE programs were compared.

There are three discourse markers as mentioned by Baxter (2011) for determining when discourses are in contrapuntal relation: negating, countering, and entertaining. When there is an alternative discourse acknowledged just for the purpose of the speaker to reject or disclaim the message, this is negating (Halliwell, 2016). Countering is apparent when there is a discourse that is presented when another type of discourse would typically be expected in its place. There are “lexical choices such as *even though, however, still* and *surprisingly*” (Halliwell, 2016, p. 91) that reveal when countering is taking place. Furthermore, entertaining explains when a speaker may be indicating that the given discourse is just one possibility among other discourse positons (Halliwell, 2016). Words or phrases that may highlight when a speaker is entertaining are: “*may,*
might, it is possible that, and it seems” (Baxter, 2011; as cited in Halliwell, 2016, p. 91). What is not being said or what is being said between-the-lines can better highlight what the speaker’s message means than the actual words being uttered. In this paper, I propose that the between-the-lines messages can be identified with lexical markers such as the phrase of “you know.” Messages that include the lexical marker of “you know” may still include other markers that demonstrate a competing discourse as explained above.

Furthermore, the lexical marker of “you know” is significant because it is a lexical marker that has not been used before and extends the method of contrapuntal analysis. By adding another lexical marker that other researchers can use, they are able to identify other instances when discourses are negating, countering, or entertaining. In this paper, it is so important to see the significance of the lexical marker of “you know” because it is signifying competing discourses of individuals who are typically marginalized and the distal discourses that further reinforce their marginalization and highlight stigma that is present. The distal discourse of stigma may not be found unless looking for lexical markers and conducting a contrapuntal analysis. Without the lexical markers such as “you know,” much of the discourse would go unanalyzed and could not contribute to breaking down stigmas present. The use of lexical markers is an indicator of competing discourse and highlights the centripetal discourse (i.e. more dominant discourse) and the centrifugal discourse (i.e. often marginalized discourse). More of the centripetal and centrifugal discourses in this study will be discussed in the results section.
Chapter Four:

Results

For the purpose of this project, all of the lexical markers outlined above will be used in guiding the results. As stated previously, latent themes are found more in-between-the-lines (Baxter, 2011). By using the lexical markers as outlined above, the latent themes can be identified. It is through the lexical marker, “you know” that most of the latent themes will be analyzed. A more detailed outline of this lexical marker, as well as other markers, will be explained below. After collapsing emerging codes into themes, similarities and differences in discourses across the data set emerged. Therefore, themes—illuminated through lexical markers—are arranged below following Baxter’s (2011) distinction of similarity and difference. Then, higher level coding also revealed three larger dialectical discourses surrounding success, high/low expectations for individuals with IDD, and the interplay of communication regarding more and less positive experiences before and after the transition into postsecondary education. Using these lexical markers and latent themes, the research question will be answered:

RQ: How do families talk about their experiences as individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) transition into postsecondary education?

Similar Themes

PSE participant and parent experiences from interviews. Each of the interview participants shared similar themes in their responses. As I stated in the data analysis section, I created word clouds of what they said during the interviews. The words that they said most often are the largest words in the images. Surprisingly, all of the interview participants shared the same most used words. This is significant not because of the frequency that participants said these words but because these images allow me to quickly visualize shared themes among the
participants. McNaught and Lam (2010) state, “the visualization allows researchers to grasp common themes in the text, and sometimes even find out the main differences between sets of responses” (p. 641). Furthermore, word clouds, or wordles “could be an initial step in honing in on the important concepts identified by the group. This step could save a great deal of time in coding qualitative data, since the researcher would already have an idea of which terms or ideas are most common and would therefore warrant closer investigation” (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 42). Here, I used wordles as my initial coding step to become familiar with my data in a fast and methodical way. Below are word clouds and following are the further analysis and implications of the similar theme pattern.

*Figure 1: Kobe- PSE Program Participant*
It is apparent that across all of the interviews the most commonly used word was *know*. Followed by *like, just, really, think,* and *school*. These words on their own all illuminate a unique perspective to the nature of these interviews. Based on these words, I expanded my codes to be *you know, similar experiences, and differences* (see Baxter, 2011). Despite having only a few interviews, these word clouds demonstrate saturation within the data collection for this set because every single one of the participants started using the same wording to describe their unique experiences.

“*You know.*” Out of the average 45 minutes of talking with each participant, *you know,* kept coming up over and over. Comparing the parents’ experiences and the participant’s experience, there is similar language being used. I found that there were six different themes explaining why someone may use this phrase: a) to assume the researcher was knowledgeable, b) as a fill-in word, c) to designate an example, d) to insinuate connection between the researcher and interviewee, e) looking for reassurance, and f) thinking out loud.
Designating an example. Out of these six different themes, the most common was to designate an example. While participants were sharing a story, they would use you know to communicate they were giving an example. One of the participants, Loralynn said, “[Tearing up] They just really great kids. And I do know that they’re there and they say, you know, we do as a family like we do fundraisers and that kind of thing.” Here Loralynn was sharing how her and her family are there for one another and began getting emotional. Instead of finishing her thought of what her children say, she provides an example of what they do instead.

Another participant, Margery, shared, “We go to spring training in March as a family. We do that every year in Arizona. And, you know, just coordinating all that, that we’re going to fly, and all that. That should be fun.” Like Loralynn, Margery was sharing an example of how her family connects but also how she coordinates all the travel accommodations. Here, Margery continues her statement about how her and her family are close by signaling that despite her having to make all the plans, she knows that it is fun for her family. Another example of Margery using you know as an example indictor is:

I think I would encourage parents to go find out, go to an information thing, ask more questions, you know, questions that they’ve answered before, they’re ready to go ahead and answer. But I would encourage all parents to consider that.

Here Margery was suggesting that other parents of children with IDD should attend more information sessions about PSE and not be afraid to ask questions: for example, questions that most PSE programs have already been asked and know the answers to.

Assumed knowledge. While participants seemed to use the phrase as a way to indicate an example most often in conversation, when participants used you know to assume the researcher was knowledgeable about the topic was one of the most impactful. This was most impactful
because it highlights the centripetal and centrifugal discourses the most clearly. Loralynn used this lexical marker when she was speaking about her son’s class experience in the program:

_How have his classes been? They’ve been good. It’s been hard... to get like... to get past like... the the 100 level classes for him, you know._

She continues by saying:

_And there are things that maybe he’s interested in that that it’s hard to get him into just because the pre-requisites are that kind of thing. So anyway. And teachers don’t necessarily understand that, you know, about why it’s important that he’s in their class [Slows down answering] So...”_

The change in her tone by slowing down and not saying specifically why it is important for her son to be included in other classes leaves me to make the connection of why it is important. By not stating directly about the importance of inclusion and the positive influences of having a student with IDD in the class, it does not communicate confidence about the topic. Here there is a competing discourse about what she is saying—it’s important that her son is in these classes (i.e. centripetal discourse), and what she is not saying—why it is important or what the teachers don’t understand specifically (i.e. centrifugal discourse). Another parent, Elizabeth shared a different experience:

_Well [Son’s name] started really in the [School District] at 3 because I noticed some some delays with his development. And so we went through the [Organization], which is, I don't know if you are familiar with, [Organization], but it's a department at the [School District] that, you know, diagnosis children that may have delays or developmental disorders or any issue that the parent or the doctor may have seen._
Here Elizabeth assumed I had some knowledge but then also explained what the organization does. This contradiction of assuming I had knowledge and still providing me with the information is different than when Loralynn left me making the connections. However, here the centripetal discourse is what the organization does, which is diagnosis children, and the centrifugal discourse is the significance of her son’s diagnosis for his education.

_High vs. low expectations._ While trying to make sense of this lexical marker of trying to say something between the lines, I saw that the participants used _you know_ at a time when they all shared a similar experience. Each of them talked about sharing a similar experience of overcoming a battle of inclusion during their secondary schooling, but once arriving to the PSE program, those experiences were in the past. One PSE participant’s parent, Elizabeth said:

_….then he went to [Local High School] and at [High School], they placed him in a, what is that classroom called, It is for special education students but of lower functioning. And it was terrible that freshman year.. He really didn’t belong there but he did, you know, his three year developmental interview and all the testing he did test in in the like very low intellectual levels. And so they used that to place them in that, you know, placement in high school. So he was, you know, and because he had had so many years of therapy I mean his language is, was great by then and his behaviors have really subsided and he was ready to really be, he didn’t want to, he never wanted to be labeled, or be part of that. So if you ask him, he will tell you that that was probably his worst year, his freshman year in high school, because he was placed in that classroom. Not 100 percent but for like several classes. And the instructor was he, he was just not a good fit. It was just not a good fit. But then we changed. We kept him at [High School] and just changed the placement and he did not pass his his, what they call them, standard proficiency,
proficiency test. So he basically complete, you know, he has a Diploma of completion but not graduated. And and then kind of that last semester in high school we learned about the [PSE Program], because prior to that we really weren’t sure where he was going to go. It was really difficult because the choices were like bad to worse, in my opinion. There was like [Job placement program], where they train you for work, but the opportunities were janitorial, just things that. I mean, I just, I can’t remember how many opportunities there were but there weren’t very many and none of them sounded like anything that made sense for the type of kid he was. And so it was really a blessing to finally hear about an opportunity like this. And then he was going to go to [Community College] but they don’t really have a lot of support. And so even though this is an expensive program we thought it was the best one, you know, for [PSE participant]. So here we are.

Here, Elizabeth shares how most people interacting with her son at the high school did not share her same high expectations for her son. This is a dominant discourse that Elizabeth has to battle with, but she knows that her son can succeed. Therefore, she continues to do what she thinks is best for her son. The lexical marker of “you know” highlights multiple times above when these competing discourses are taking place. Elizabeth further states about coming to the PSE program:

*Today's the future. I love that. That was one of the first things that [PSE Program Worker] said when we had our first interview. He said I don't want to hear about what happened in high school, [PSE Participant]. Don't worry about what happened in high school cause he was all, you know, wanted to say what didn't work. We don't want to*
hear that. This is a whole new world. This is a whole new opportunity. And so I kind of preach that to my kids, you know, don’t live in the past the past, is the past.

This is an important statement from Elizabeth because it shows a contrast between the two experiences that Elizabeth shared. In this second statement, the main discourse is positive, and the lexical marker signifies where the negative discourse would be. However, here she does not share everything again and instead says it between the lines by saying “you know.”

Another research participant, Kobe shares his experiences in high school:

It's just, it's just, wasn't mine it just wasn't favorite to me. But I, I didn't really know any better back then. But I went to [Elementary school] and then I was at [Middle school] and ended up at the end of the last [High School] . . . . They treated me good. I mean sometimes they would... Well only if I gave them a hard time. And you know, [indescribable] some teachers just not in the mood. You know I get why they were rude at times. But you know what? That’s just life.

Like Elizabeth, Kobe here shares an example in which he did not enjoy his high school experience because others were rude to him at times. The difficulties he experienced is the dominant discourse, and he tries to understand others’ actions through the centrifugal discourse that he was giving them a hard time or that he didn’t know any better back them. Kobe further explains his experience now in the PSE program:

Well it's [PSE Program University], just an amazing school, you know. That I love all. I made some new friends here. You know, I know, you don't mind if I say this, the entire basketball team, too.
Unlike in the first experience he shared, here Kobe primarily talks about the positive experience that he is having while in the PSE program. He does not mention any negativity while speaking of the program.

*In between-the-lines.* In each of these recounts, both the student and the parent seem to share experiences of having difficulties prior to the PSE program. They both have different experiences, but throughout, both of them used the phrase *you know* to communicate between-the-lines. When this lexical marker was communicated in some instances, the speaker would like me to fill-in or insinuate what they were talking about—thus speaking enthymematically. An example of this above is:

*So he was, you know, and because he had had so many years of therapy I mean his language is, was great by then and his behaviors have really subsided and he was ready to really be, he didn’t want to, he never wanted to be labeled, or be part of that.*

Here Elizabeth left me to fill-in that she did not want to directly label her son’s diagnosis and that she did not see her son as just his testing results. From this statement, the centripetal discourse of being labeled/treated solely on his diagnosis was in contrast with the centrifugal discourse that Elizabeth had higher expectations for her son. These discourses would not be identified without the lexical marker of “*you know.*”

*Creating connection.* At other times, the phrase *you know* was used to create a connection between the speaker and myself. For example, Kobe said, “*Well it’s just an amazing school, you know.*” In this statement, he is making the assumption that I share the same feelings toward the university. In another example, Elizabeth said, “*And so even though this is an expensive program we thought it was the best one, you know, for [PSE participant].*” Here she was communicating that I would agree that this is the best fit for her son. As a researcher, it is
interesting to have participants assume a personal connection with you. When conducting semi-structured interviews, there is flexibility in the question order and the questions that are asked. In these instances, I used Oakley’s (1981) friendship model of interviewing (as cited in Tracy, 2013) and treated the participants more as respected friends than as ‘research participants.’

**Similar experiences.** The word *like* is often used in conversation as a spacer word when thinking of what to say, a personal preference, but also can signify similarity. However, between these it may be easy to decipher what the speaker is meaning based on how the word is used. Here, I believe that looking at the common words found in the word clouds above, *like* in this instance, also hints to a larger theme of similarity that students in PSE programs share with other students. As stated in my data analysis, the wordles were used to highlight a bigger picture of what was said in my data sets. In the interviews, *like* was one of the emergent themes. Whereas the following examples do not use the word *like*, they do however communicate a message of similarity between students in the PSE program and the larger university. For example, Margery said, “Yesterday she ate in the food court, but a lot of the time, she brings her lunch because we try to keep her healthy but she does. We do want her to have those experiences and make sure she has enough money.” In this quote, I feel that Margery makes the assumption that all students at the university eat in the food court by saying “*those experiences.*” However, it also seems that her daughter may not decide when to eat in the food court as often as other students may because she says, “*...we try to keep her healthy...*” Another parent, Loralynn, shares how her student has similar experiences as other students at the university by saying, “*and so he goes, he’s always, we’ve always taken them to the basketball game so he goes to all the basketball games and sits in the student section and that kind of thing.*” Loralynn, beyond saying her son goes to all of the
basketball games, is saying that the culture of the university is for students to go to all of the games and sit in the designated section.

‘Just’ different difficulties. In the word clouds, just and really were some of the other most common words used. As stated above, these words hint at a larger theme of discourses of difference among the PSE student and other students or how PSE is different than their experiences in high school. This hints at difficulties that students in the PSE program have faced. While the wordles were used to identify the overarching theme of difference/difficulty, the words just and really are a lexical marker to the theme. Overall, through messages combining multiple lexical markers, I was able to unfold the discourses (Baxter, 2011) where messages of difference/difficulties occurred. For example, Loralynn shared:

That’s been a little difficult. And I think, you know, he was involved in some clubs his first couple years and the clubs have gone off campus now so... and because it’s kind of a commuter school. I think it’s more difficult than say maybe if it were a school where the kids came and hung out and they don’t really seem to do that here. . . . But, you know, it’s been, I’ll just say, it’s been difficult making friends. So that’s something that could definitely be improved upon. And I know I don’t know how that have happened. . . . That would probably be the thing that’s been the hardest. It the thing that, you know, you know, that a lot of the interns are really great with them and are, you know, friendships have formed that way but not to the point where they call him and say let’s go hang out, or let’s do this, or that, out of school.

Loralynn was sharing how her son has been having difficulties making friends while in the program. By saying you know and really, she was highlighting the differences that her son has compared to other students at the commuter university. Another parent, Elizabeth said:
So we signed up for [Foreign Language Course], thinking what a great opportunity for him to be successful, but that professor wasn’t really into, into that whole concept of having to modify things a little bit, being a little more relaxed about, you know, not that we want him to, you know, even if he’s failing, he’s got to fail. But just giving a little bit more. You know, a little give, give a little inch, you know, give a little extra time, be be open too. And I think he didn’t really connec—[Son’s name] didn’t really connect with him well so, he learned some. But, you know, I think he could have done a lot better with a better professor to be honest with you, so that I noticed, that it’s different than for instance in high school because everybody in high school, all the teachers know. And so maybe it’s to the detriment because some of them like I said are gonna. Let it slide and ace it when they shouldn’t. So. But I just wish that professors were a little bit more, a little easier to work with.

Here, Elizabeth is comparing PSE and high school education. She describes that there are professors at the university who do not necessarily know how to make accommodations for students in the program; alternatively, high school teachers are all aware of the student’s needs and have the IEP, individualized education plan, to follow.

**Differing Themes**

**PSE websites and parent experiences in webinar.** Comparative to the experiences expressed in the interviews I conducted, there were some differing themes apparent in the website analysis and webinar. Between both the websites and the parent experiences expressed in the webinar, there were differing themes. Just as word clouds can demonstrate similarity in data sets, word clouds can also quickly highlight differences between data sets (McNaught & Lam,
2010). Below are the word clouds that demonstrate differing themes, and following are the implications of the apparent patterns:

*Figure 5: Post-Secondary Education Program Website Themes*
Among these two word clouds, there are differing themes. The main words used on the PSE websites are focused on classes and work. However, in the webinar, the family members used more words about dreams, community, and friends to describe their child’s experience in a PSE program. Here, I began to find the first competing discourse. The PSE program websites that I analyzed tended to focus primarily on what type of opportunities that students are offered through classes and job experience. One PSE program stated, “The primary goal of [PSE Program] is to increase the employability of our students.” Another program continued this same sentiment by stating:

The mission of [PSE Program] is to ensure that students with intellectual disability (ID) have the opportunity to experience an inclusive postsecondary education through academic, career development and student life activities at [University].
However, there were some programs that did seem to have more focus on community and social network building while also focusing on the education and job skills. This aligns more with the type of program that the mothers in the webinar are hopeful for. This program stated:

The purpose of [PSE Program] is to provide an inclusive, accessible, and productive career education program for college aged students with Intellectual Disabilities in the [City] that promotes self-determination, community engagement and partnerships, job readiness and transitions to adulthood through person-centered planning, inclusive teaching, evidence-based research, and positive behavior supports.

Furthermore, another program was similar to the program above. This program focused efforts on more than employability but helping the participants in the program become members of a community. This program stated its expectations of being community members more explicitly:

[PSE program] provides post-secondary education and training to young adults with developmental disabilities in the realms of residential, employment, and community skills with the goals of enabling its graduate to live and work as full community members with maximum independence and productivity.

The statements found on the PSE websites above demonstrate that each program has different goals, but each has the mission of enhancing the student’s life through either career development/job readiness or gaining self-determination/independence skills. While all of these programs also have an education component, a mother shares her experience of high school staff not providing educational options: “In the [high school] IEP meeting [the school administration] were trying to steer us to a program that met on college campus but did not take any academic classes.” Similar sentiments were expressed by another mother:
If your school district isn't supporting your child's dream, then get informed some other way. Tell your district what options you have found so they can use this with other students down the road.

While these two mothers express that academics were not seen by the high school administration as an option for their children, the mothers believed that higher education was an option.

**Overall Theme of Expectations for Students**

As previously stated, lexical markers illuminated similar and different themes across the data. Then, higher level coding further illuminated overarching categories. A seemingly prominent message found across all data sets are expectations held about students with IDD. For some parents, they were told specifically that their child could not do something because of their disability. One mother, Elizabeth shared a story from her child’s childhood:

> When he was in kindergarten, actually. And just to give you an example, he was in a classroom with a teacher that had a master's in education early childhood education, I believe. And the principal of the school was very open, and in fact, he started a magnet school later for any, was very open and I had heard really good things about him so that's why we went there and we got a zone variant to go there. And so he recommended that we place them in with this teacher because she had a lot of experience. I mean she was just an educated teacher but she had such an attitude. And so they were learning the ABCs and they had, she had a banner at the top of the classroom with all the ABCs and she would, you know, repeat the ABCs and he was just not getting it at all, for months and months. And so I was taking him in the morning to school for special ed kids, way out on [Street Name] and then driving them back at noon to start kindergarten in [City]. And on one of the drives he was in his car seat and he started singing the ABCs, it's just like
that. And so I was so excited. And so I got him out of the car and he's walking up to his classroom and there was like stairs that he had to climb. And so his teacher met me kind of halfway and I was so excited to tell her and she didn't even let me say anything she says "I want to talk to you because I want to tell you that I cannot have your son in my classroom anymore. I don't have the knowledge, I don't have the patience, I don't have the time," and and so I just burst into tears because I said "I'm so shocked what you're telling me. And also I was going to meet you to tell you what I just experienced driving up." I'll never forget that's that moment because it was just awful. She later apologized in parent night and said that she had only had two classes in special ed and that she felt really overwhelmed but she was just a difficult.

Elizabeth shared about a time when her child faced low expectations from his educators. While she was receiving these messages of low expectations (centripetal discourse), Elizabeth was fighting against them by maintaining high expectations for her child (centrifugal discourse). In the story above, Elizabeth was emotional about realizing her child’s educator did view her child the same way. This was apparent when she recounted “... and so I just burst into tears because I said 'I'm so shocked what you're telling me. And also I was going to meet you to tell you what I just experienced driving up...’” This particular educator highlighted above, demonstrates some of the poor communication that is occurring, as examined in the literature review (see, e.g., Griffin et al., 2010). Elizabeth shared another experience when her child faced low expectations again:

But the teacher only believes that you could only handle grapes and so he would be very condescending and say [PSE Participant] did really good is bunched four five grapes together today. And I'm thinking to myself "you have no idea that you're, you're like
squishing his capabilities because he's capable of so much more." And but he was the
type of guy that would like to manage everything and was so concerned about the other
behaviors that he gave kids, just a certain amount of work so that they wouldn't get
frustrated, and he wouldn't have a lot of behavior. So was this really uncomfortable place
and it was making me sick. Because you really kind of lose control and you have to call a
meeting to make a change. And I haven't, I had an advocate that would go with me. But
she wasn't always available. So it was just complicated. And you don't want to keep your
kid from not going to school, because he wasn't there the whole day, he was there for two
or three of the sessions. But I knew that it was just a bad, a bad situation and I needed to
to make it stop.

For other parents, the centripetal discourse regarding low expectations for their children is more
implicit. In the webinar, one parent said, “We expect great things for [Student] and we do not
accept anybody telling us it cannot be done.” Similarly, another mother shared advice to other
listeners in the webinar saying:

I want you to treat the child just like your other children. If this is your first child, treat
him or her as you would any child. . . Do not accept they cannot do it because they have
Down syndrome.

The statement of “. . .just like your other children. . .” is a clue that the centripetal discourse says
that people treat their children with IDD inherently differently, yet their antagonistic discourse
highlights the centrifugal messages that their children deserve high expectations. Identifying the
centripetal discourse in the message above further highlights that messages of stigma still exist in
our cultural discourse surrounding individuals with IDD. Though the mother from the webinar
was conveying a message to not treat individuals with disabilities differently, she recognizes
subliminally the discourse that people do. During one of the interviews, one of the parents, Margery, shared advice of keeping high expectations:

Oh, well, keep high expectations. Absolutely. You know, don't, don't ever underestimate what they can do, and what they can learn, and keep people around them that are positive that shows, that share that same goal. Otherwise you get caught in a very negative kind of feeling and, you know, try to keep family members filled with high expectations as well. Be thinking about what they can't do, think about what they can do and look for the strength, look what they bring to within them. They bring you brings lots of positive. And and listen to what people say and, you know, a couple of the [PSE Program] people said to me one of the things about her is this, and I like, you know what. That is true. So listen to that information and use it to recognize it, because it also tells you about growth. And then when family members who don't see her for a while say wow, you know, there is growth. So I think it is high expectations are very, very important. People say well you need to be realistic. But realism sometimes can translate into more that what kids can't do. And I think if you stay too realistic sometimes you don't you know look ahead. You don't look, you're looking at kind of like ‘oh this is all we can work with.’ You know, we still want to keep her safe, and so safety is an issue and we always say safety is extremely high up there. But don't underestimate what the kids can do. I work with families all the time who, you know, maybe one of the parents says “well she'll never go to college” and I say “oh no no no no. College is going to be there. College is for literally almost all kids.” So we just need to think about how we're going to do that. So the opportunities are are opening up, doors are opening and we don't want to not walk through those. You know, sure if that's something you don't want to do. Fine. But
often kids with disabilities have been told for so many years that they're not going to college or they don't even know what the college experience is going to look like. So we don't do things because we just fear about unknown. So I would always encourage families to dream and to give them this experience. And so she's having it. She's having a good experience.

Contrary to the parents with whom I spoke or were highlighted in the webinar, as highlighted in the quote above, there are some parents of children with disabilities who have low expectations or limit their children’s future. The low expectations can be caused from society’s messages of stigma surrounding individuals with IDD that then become inherent in their family. The statements above support that “higher expectations for academic and career success [has] been found to relate to better high school completion rates and higher post-secondary school attendance rates” (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007). One of the research participants, Loralynn, kept high expectations for her son and shared his experience in school:

Well it's really interesting the whole inclusion thing for us with [student name] started at a very early age. Our other 3 children went to a local school a little private preschool called [Name of School] preschool. And when it came time for him to go to pre-sch...well He was already doing like early childhood and all that stuff. . . . And so anyway, you know, he was doing all those things. But we, we wanted him to go where the other kids went to school and so we approached the school and said, you know, and they said oh well, you know, we need to be potty trained or whatever. So at 2, I made sure he was at least trained enough that he could go to preschool for three hours and not have an accident. [giggle to herself] So he could go. And so he was the first child with [Disability Diagnosis] at that [Name of School] preschool. And that's where he met a lot of his
friends and a lot of those friends from [Name of School] and went to public school by us.

... And so he was doing the private preschool on the morning and then he would do early childhood in the afternoon when he turned three. So he’s getting a lot of that. But it was always always wanted to. Give him the same educational opportunities that other children have. And I felt like it was really important for him to be involved in the neighborhood and in the things that are going on in our neighborhood. ... So then, you know, so he did the preschool thing and then they they went on to [Elementary school], which is a little public school. And then our oldest daughter got ready to go to a middle school and we wanted to switch her into where it would be like a [Private] education. So we moved her over to [Private school name]. And so from there the other kids all went to middle school there and she went to high school there while they did not have anything set up for kids, you know, with intellectual disability that [Private school name] or any of the private schools that we knew about. And we wanted them where the other. ... And we had him where the other kids were going to school. And so once again we approached the school and we just told them we didn’t know we will help you get this started. We will help you find a teacher. We will, if we need to pay extra to have him have, you know, we will do that we can help find other kids, you know. And so the sixth grade rolls around and they allowed him to go to [Private school name] and so he went there for seven years all through high school. They called it a pilot program when he started and he started with two other students so there was a total of three boys that started and his teacher from [Elementary school], who is actually is my best friend. She moved over and started this program at [Private school name] and now they have so far they’ve graduated. ... six kids have graduated out of that program and they have I think eight kids in the
program now. So it's continued on and we continue to help with fundraising over there for that program and the schools really like embraced it. And they've been given like national awards in the [Private] schools for the program and people have come from as far away as like Hawaii to so that their student could be enrolled in the program. And yeah. So it's really turned into an awesome thing and we're really proud of the fact that [Son’s name] and it kind of initiated that and sparked interest and that the people there would embrace all those kids and love those kids so much and so so, you know, similar patterns, you know, high schools ending, what.. What next? So we know his sister, two sisters went to a [Southwest Private University] and both graduated from [Southwest Private University], and his brother is up at the [Northwest University]. And so he knew that after high school you go to college. That's what, you know, for [Son’s name] that's just kind of what he anticipated. . .

For Loralynn and many other parents of children with IDD, a way to keep high expectations for their child is to hold them to the same or equitable standard as other children, or if they did not have the disability label. Treating individuals the same, regardless of disability diagnosis, follows the advice that all research participants and the mothers from the webinar shared in some capacity. These examples highlight the dialectical tensions present in discourses surrounding expectations for individuals with IDD.

**Overall Theme of Transitioning into PSE**

Answering the research question, discourses surrounding the transition into PSE programs were further illuminated. For many students, disability or not, the thought of what to do after high school can be daunting. While there is the typical funnel to college for most students, students with IDD have not always had this opportunity. Now that more opportunities
are being given to students with IDD, it is important that there are supports and multiple options
given to ensure success. As Margery said above, college is beginning to be for any child.
Through providing equitable services and options as their peers, students with IDD are able to
make the transition to higher education after high school and have hopes of competitive equal
employment. One of the PSE programs’ website provides an example of equitable services by
stating:

To ease this transition for students enrolled in [PSE Program], students have access to
mentors and tutors provided by the project, while also having access to traditional
university services such as the academic success center, writing center, and Disability
Resource Center (DRC) located on campus.

Furthermore, another program describes the transition into college as a commonly difficult
experience for both students with or without disability:

Often times students that attend college as freshmen experience difficulties transitioning
from the demands of secondary school to the independence and self-determination
required in college.

The recognition of difficulties experienced, not just of students with IDD but of all college
freshman, accentuates the distal discourse of college preparedness for incoming students. From
the webinar, a mother described transition as: “Transition was like shoes. There are many pairs
but don’t know what will fit until you try them on.” One of the research participants, echoed the
same theme of transition being like shoes, Elizabeth said, “every kid is different but it's not just
what we're supposed to do. You know, it doesn't work. The shoe doesn't fit on every person. So
just finding the one that fits that person and, you know, treat them with respect and giving them
maturity.” The metaphor of transitioning being like shoes is interesting because it hints that there
are multiple options for individuals with IDD despite some people feeling like there are not many options. For example, Loralynn said, “Oh my goodness. [Son’s name]’s other option [Non-profit organization]. And, you know, that just wasn't going to work for him. So anyway there weren't any other real options. So.” Here it seemed that there were only two options for her son, the PSE program and the non-profit organization, and she did not deem the non-profit organization as a viable option. Being able to further recognize multiple options and opportunities after secondary school is important for students’ with IDD quality of life.

In the examples above, there is the underlying theme that transition is difficult and there needs to be multiple options. Through contrapuntal analysis, these quotes highlight that society has an inherent assumption that transitioning will be difficult for students from high school into college, despite disability diagnosis. This should be more apparent in the messaging PSE programs send to normalize transition periods and help ease the worry of students with IDD. Beyond PSE programs, there needs to be options for students with IDD that they and their family see fit besides going to school.

**Classes during PSE.** Each PSE program is unique with the classes offered to the students and the expectations for academics. One of the websites for a PSE program, under the academics information section, said, “During the two- to three- year program, we provide them with specifically designed [PSE Program] classes, the opportunity to audit undergraduate courses, and an internship on or off campus.” The options of taking specialized classes, auditing university courses, and internships are not unique to just that program. One of the mothers from the webinar said, “[Student] audit classes- [to] take pressure off her, her professors, [and] academic coach.” Here, it is believed that if the classes are not taken for a grade it takes the pressure off of the outcome of the course for everyone involved. One of the parents from the
interviews, Elizabeth, said “He’s in his second year, second semester, second year. So even though he’s having challenges passing the classes and he’s changing them to audit. But he has such determination and I think it’s been really good for him. So I think we’re going to probably end up keeping him here another year.” In contrast to the mother from the webinar, Elizabeth’s son audits the class so he can keep his determination to keep learning.

As mentioned previously, one of the other parents from the interviews described her son’s experience based on the type of classes he is able to take:

> How have his classes been? They’ve been good. It’s been hard.. to get like.. to get past like.. the the 100 level classes for him, you know. And there are things that maybe he’s interested in that that it’s hard to get him into just because the pre-requisites are that kind of thing.

Despite being able to take pre-requisite, 100-level courses, her son has enjoyed some of his classes. She said his favorite course has been on coaching, a course that is fun and may provide future job skills. Similar to Elizabeth, one of the mothers from the webinar said, “My goal for my child is to find ‘fun’ in learning, gain independence, have life experiences, open doors... all in inclusive setting.” To be part of the inclusive college setting seems to be an underlying theme for all students in PSE. As previously mentioned, the lexical marker like illuminated the discourse surrounding messages that students with IDD should have similar experiences in college as others—even if they have different difficulties at times.

Just like most college students and their parents, the pressure/stress about college courses is there for students in PSE programs too. Possibly grander than the programs themselves, but universities need to address the worries of students about the stress of college courses and not continue to perpetuate it.
**Transition out of PSE.** During the interview process, when asked what their children would be doing after they graduate from the PSE program, every participant started their statement with “that’s a good question.” Not having a clear path of what is next needs to be addressed. Kobe, the PSE program student, said that both the program and his family have helped him plan for his future by saying:

“They plan my future by saying what jobs, kind of jobs I want. And you know it's optional too. You can always change it anytime, so that’s a good thing about [PSE Program].”

His family helps, “By start looking up jobs and and making sure I'm on the right track for when they aren't there anymore [sad tone].” For many individuals with IDD, they are outliving their parents, and their siblings are becoming their caregiver or guardian (Smith, Romski, & Sevcik, 2013). For Kobe, he and his family are trying to set him up for a successful life when that day may come. Elizabeth is unsure of what her son’s future is after PSE, she says:

*I'm not sure, and that's why we're not ready to leave [Program] because I don't, it's not clear. It's not clear, he has a job at Subway. A part time job. Hopefully he's applying for another job here on campus. If they don't offer him a job, maybe he can do an internship there. But we don't have a good plan and that's a big, big worry.*

Furthermore, when asked what an ideal job would be for her son, there was still some uncertainty:

*He doesn't really have those dreams. He doesn't have a lot of experience working, so he doesn't know. . . . So he doesn't he's not like a computer kid or a gamer or a sports person, you know. So he doesn't have any real firm thing that he would love to do, now and loves the theater, he was in theater when he was in high school. And so I was telling*
him. "What about a job on campus like at the performing arts center and maybe in the future you could work at a place like the Smith Center." So which I think that he would love, you know, even being an usher, or working in the office and setting up brochures, or, you know, there's so many things going on at the Smith Center. So that is kind of a little dream of mine to be able to work towards that. Is it good to be able to support himself with a job like that? I'm not sure, I kind of doubt it. So we need to financially set him up so that he, you know, either through vocational rehab, or through state support, or something to complement the one he's going to need to survive in the world. That's the biggest concern. Yeah

The financial wellness is a concern and reason why many decide to attend PSE. By having PSE programs, it provides students with IDD an option to receive additional skills for job placement and competitive wages like their peers (Hart et al., 2010). For others, such as Margery, she has been imagining the future for her daughter after PSE like this:

*We're hoping that she could continue to stay working out the preschool maybe increase her hours. I mean that would be ideal. You know, long term I would see if we find the right match a person that she could get an apartment. But again it was with good supports, people checking in, seeing how she's doing. But I do see that. She can get her own breakfast and get her own lunch. But like, I wouldn't want her to do a lot of cooking, you know, or even a lot of microwaving. So I think that those skills still need to be worked on. But I could see that is possible. We just don't know exactly the timing on it or you can get the right person. Someone who kind of compliments her who either where she has some skills and some area they don't have some skills in some area probably someone that she, her habits don't... Like of things that she really likes to do. She likes to go like*
sing in her room. And so, you know, if that really bothers somebody that would be a good match. But we'll see. In another year, we will all know a little more.

Margery would like her daughter to have independence but believes that she will still need support to be successful.

Overall, having a couple paths in mind for transitioning out of the PSE program when starting the program may prove to be fruitful. Just like the IEP in secondary and primary education, having a plan in mind ensures that these students are not paying high tuition rates and meeting their overall goals.
Chapter Five:
Implications/Conclusion

Theoretical Implications

In this study, I extended the traditional sense of crystallization which “follows a constitutive research model, where findings can be considered in light of each other for fuller understanding” (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 183). Ellingson (2009) states that there are two types of crystallization: integrated and dendritic. Integrated crystallization, uses genres to create a single representation of the phenomena being studied (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Whereas, dendritic crystallization “embraces one genre, but the larger research project it developed from will yield research in other genres” (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 184). Overall, crystallization’s main goal is to reject a singular way of knowing (Ellingson, 2009; Manning & Kunkel, 2014). The use of crystallization in this research study was not to solely add credibility to the qualitative study, but also add multivocality and validity to the contrapuntal analysis taking place. As previously stated, Baxter (2011) outlines that, “competing discourse should compete from the participants point of view” (as cited in Manning & Kunkel, 2014). In this study, multiple ways of studying this singular phenomenon has helped create a clearer picture of the competing discourses occurring.

While there are some participants’ points of view of being a student in a PSE program and parents supporting their children in the program, their experiences are representative of one type of PSE program. By bringing in other perspectives of the websites and the webinar, more unique experiences are highlighted. The use of crystallization and contrapuntal analysis can be described as a bricolage of research methods. According to Kincheloe (2001):
Bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive stricture of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process (p. 681).

Thus, in this research study, the method of conducting a contrapuntal analysis and using crystallization to obtain multiple points of views is used to identify the “…the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Having a bricolage approach to research and using all available means brings a new level of rigor to contrapuntal analysis.

Furthermore, through conducting a contrapuntal analysis and using lexical markers to identify competing discourses, I hope to extend the use of lexical markers by arguing that ‘you know’ signifies that there is a message they are expressing between-the-lines. As seen in the previous chapter, there are multiple instances when individuals use the phrase ‘you know’ during conversation that is either upsetting, when they are possibly nervous in the research setting, or when they do not want to fully disclose information. By identifying this new lexical marker, I hope to contribute to the theoretical implications of contrapuntal analysis.

**Practical Implications**

Past research identifying poor communication as one of the greatest implications in services for individuals with IDD inspired this research study. As stated in the literature review, there seems to have historically been a disconnect between families and schools when deciding transition goals for their children. Most research identifying poor communication as a problem is almost ten years old. While this is still relevant research, my aim was to try to identify if and where poor communication was still taking place. As a communication scholar, there has not
been much research conducted in the communication field about practical ways to provide support or services.

In Griffin, McMillan, and Hodapp (2010), parents in this study shared some of the same sentiments as the mothers in the webinar and from my interviews. For some, the child’s high school was not supportive or they did not believe their child could attend college and thus, did not provide information to the parents. There were other mothers who shared that their school was not aware of any programs. Across both the webinar and in my interviews, I found that some of the mothers reached out to professionals themselves to get a program started for their children. For all of the mothers in the webinar and the ones whom I interviewed, despite not easily being provided information for their children, they all wanted to work together to share it with future students. All of them believe in the importance of PSE and would like to help those future students have even better experiences. I believe that these mothers all believe in the motto of “leave it better than when you came.” They all want to see the success of more services for children with IDD and ways to improve their quality of life. This is a strong practical implication because programs can use this information to reach out to parents and/or students directly. It seems that most of the students attending the PSE program from my interviews were doing so because their parents directly reached out to the program to receive more information. As illuminated in the findings, many of the goals of PSE programs are to guide students to more self-determination skills. One way to create this precedence is by promoting to the students directly. Through campus visits, to representatives holding presentations in classrooms, students with IDD will be motivated and knowledgeable about their options—as their peers are—with college.
The importance of the presence that PSE programs establish online is vital for the transition for students with IDD. Through having a strong website and online presence, with clearly stated goals and process for the application into the program, more students with IDD will likely have the opportunity to attend college. Furthermore, more programs need to work on getting community support to be able to offer scholarships or lower the fees that they are charging so that students of all socio-economical classes can participate. It is also important for programs to be rigorous in their program design so it aligns with student’s goals. In the analysis between the PSE websites and the webinar, a disconnect between the program’s offerings and the parent’s goals for their child was found. However, between the mothers I interviewed and the mothers from the webinar, their goals for their children are similar, but the ones I interviewed addressed employability more. Thus, a practical implication would be that PSE programs should address employment opportunities more. One weakness from this research study was that I was able to interview only one student in the PSE program. With more student interviews, I could have received more in-depth information about their overall experience and goals for after the program. Furthermore, future research regarding the perceptions of individuals with IDD would provide a deeper insight into student’s aspirations and definitions of success within the program. Future research should further explore this area.

Another practical implication found in this study was the continued low expectations for students with IDD. The competing discourse present in the transition into the program highlight society’s perceptions of students with IDD. Both sets of mothers from the webinar and my interviews, alongside the PSE websites, all made statements about the difficulties transitioning out of high school. This period of transition for students with IDD needs to be studied more, and more resources need to become available. Part of the grand narrative behind students with IDD
having a difficult time transitioning out of high school may be shared with their peers. Overall, the student preparedness when graduating high school and entering into college is low. We need to be doing more as a society in addressing college/workforce readiness in the final years of high school. Furthermore, language used such as “taking pressure off” leaves the impression that students with IDD are a burden to have in class.

One possible reason for parents using language such as “taking pressure off” is because persistent attitudinal barriers exist with individuals with IDD attending PSE (Grigal et al., 2012). A frequent argument surrounding students with IDD attending college or PSE is that instructors will have to “water-down” material and expectations (Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2012). However, this is not what students expect. To have successful PSE outcomes, it has to be linked with self-determination skills and be appropriate for academic pursuits (Hetherington et al., 2010). Parents and programs need to be aware of the language choice they use and how that contributes to the grand narrative about inclusion for students with IDD. By not creating further dichotomies of students with IDD and their peers and tokenism of these students by the universities, true inclusion can be achieved.

Having PSE programs and opportunities for students with IDD is vital for these students. Without these programs, many individuals would attend sheltered vocational rehabilitation or day programs. Having PSE options allows for these students to receive additional skills for job placement and pay like their peers (Hart et al., 2010).

**Conclusion**

Overall, PSE programs are doing a great job of battling against society’s low expectations for students with IDD and school districts’ poor communication while making transition plans. However, more can be done. School districts need to be aware and well connected to college
resources for students with IDD. Students should be introduced to the idea of college as much as they are introduced to other jobs and programs. Possible high school tours should be put into place when there are local colleges and universities nearby. Another solution should be that supports should be constantly evaluated based on parents’ and students’ goals. Providing more space for students to practice self-determination skills and create a positive self-image, students with IDD are more likely to have similar high outcomes as their peers. PSE programs also show that “we believe in all students’ potential for success in this arena and that we are not excluding or prejudging any one group” (Hart et al., 2010, p. 134). In support of Hart et al.’s (2010) message, “as students with labels of autism or intellectual disability pursue their educational dreams of attending college, they shatter previously held assumptions about what is possible,” it is important that the programs available provide the best possible means to support every student’s educational dreams.
Appendix A:

IRB Approval Letter

UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB - Exempt Review
Exempt Notice

DATE: November 28, 2017
TO: Jennifer Guthrie
FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

PROTOCOL TITLE: [1148702-2] College is For Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EXEMPT DATE: November 28, 2017
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this protocol. This memorandum is notification that the protocol referenced above has been reviewed as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.101(b) and deemed exempt.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence with our records.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon final determination of exempt status, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the ORI - HS and/or the IRB which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent Forms (Information Sheet) and recruitment materials.

If your project involves paying research participants, it is recommended to contact Carisa Shaffer, ORI Program Coordinator at (702) 895-2794 to ensure compliance with the Policy for Incentives for Human Research Subjects.

Any changes to the application may cause this protocol to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a Modification Form. When the above-referenced protocol has been completed, please submit a Continuing Review/Progress Completion report to notify ORI - HS of its closure.

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your protocol title and IRBNet ID in all correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway . Box 451047 . Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047
(702) 895-2794 . FAX: (702) 895-0935 . IRB@unlv.edu
Appendix B:
Email Script for Students

Hello! I am Allison Cox. I’m a graduate student here at UNLV in the Communication Studies Department. I am currently seeking participants for a research study. The study will focus on how you made the decision to attend college.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you can click the link below to sign up for an interview time. The interview will last about an hour. Attached to this email is the research study flyer with more detailed information.

Link: [http://signup.com/go/PdNLtDF](http://signup.com/go/PdNLtDF)

Here's how it works in 3 easy steps:

1) Click this link to see our SignUp on SignUp.com: [http://signup.com/go/PdNLtDF](http://signup.com/go/PdNLtDF)
2) Review the options listed and choose the spot you like.
3) Sign up! It's Easy - you will NOT need to register an account or keep a password on SignUp.com.

Note: SignUp.com does not share your email address with anyone. If you prefer not to use your email address, please contact me and I can sign you up manually.

If you have any questions, please email me at: [coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu)

Thank you!

*(attach research flyer to forwarded email)*
Appendix C:
Email Script for Family Members

Hello! I am Allison Cox. I’m a graduate student here at UNLV in the Communication Studies Department. I am currently seeking participants for a research study. The study will focus on how your child made the decision to attend college.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you can click the link below to sign up for an interview time. The interview will last about an hour. Attached to this email is the research study flyer with more detailed information.

Link: http://signup.com/go/hoOWKEC

Here's how it works in 3 easy steps:

1) Click this link to see our SignUp on SignUp.com: http://signup.com/go/hoOWKEC
2) Review the options listed and choose the spot you like.
3) Sign up! It's Easy - you will NOT need to register an account or keep a password on SignUp.com.

Note: SignUp.com does not share your email address with anyone. If you prefer not to use your email address, please contact me and I can sign you up manually.

If you have any questions, please email me at: coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu

Thank you!

(attach research flyer to forwarded email)
Appendix D:
Informed Consent Form for Students

EXEMPT RESEARCH STUDY
INFORMATION SHEET
Department of Communication Studies

TITLE OF STUDY: College is For Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School

INVESTIGATOR(S) AND CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Allison Cox at coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu or Jennifer Guthrie at Jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu.

We want to find out how you decided to attend college. We will ask you questions about your decision to join [PSE] program. We will ask you what people said to you that was helpful. We will ask you what people said that was not helpful. We ask because we would like to understand what you think is supportive.

If you say it is okay to be part of this study, you will be asked some questions. Your answers will be audio recorded. Your name will not be included in the results. No one will be able to link your answers to you.

The interview will take about an hour. You will not be paid, but snacks will be provided during the interview. You also can receive free parking while you are being interviewed. The interview will take place in the UNLV Communication Studies research lab in Greenspun College of Urban Affairs (GUA room 4123).

If you have questions or are worried about what we are doing, you can talk to Allison at coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

You do not have to participate if you do not want to. You can stop any time. Please ask questions any time.
**Participant Consent:**
I have read the information and agree to be part of this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this page has been given to me.

Sign Here: _______________________________ Date: ________________

Audio Taping:
I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

Sign Here: _______________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix E:  
Informed Consent for parents

INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Communication Studies

TITLE OF STUDY: College is For Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Jennifer Guthrie (Principal), Allison Cox

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Allison Cox at coxa12@unlv.nevada.edu or Jennifer Guthrie at Jennifer.guthrie@unlv.edu.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of these study is to examine how messages of support influences your child/sibling’s decisions. This study specifically focuses on the influence of supportive messages influence the decision to attend college.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because your child/sibling is part of [PSE Program].

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: (1) complete an interview with the researcher. Questions during the interview will focus on conversations and experiences with family members, school officials, or other professionals who provided support on decision to attend college.

The length of the interview is one hour and will be audio recorded. Your interview will take place in the UNLV Communication Studies research lab in Greenspun College of Urban Affairs (GUA room 4123).

Benefits of Participation
There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You will have the opportunity to consider more how your family and/or friends are supportive of you and your family and how these interactions affect your child/sibling’s decisions. You may also gain insight into how you make decisions based on the different type of support you receive/give.
Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include minimal risks, such as psychological distress and discomfort. To minimize distress and discomfort, you will have the choice of whether or not to answer some questions during the interview process. Similarly, more sensitive topics do not need to be answered if you do not wish to do so.

Because you have control over your responses pertaining to the interview study and follow-up measures, these risks should be similar to those you would normally experience interacting with other individuals and providing support. If you are a student and have questions about your own physical or mental health, contact the Student Wellness Center (Email: caps@unlv.edu; Phone: 702-774-7100). If you are not a student at UNLV and you have questions about your own physical or mental health, you may contact The Practice (702-895-1532) or The Center for Individual, Couple, and Family Counseling (702-895-3106).

Cost/Compensation
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study.

If you are participating in this study, you will be compensated for your time with free parking, as well as snacks provided during your interview.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 5 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be deleted from electronic files and papers will be shredded and confidentially recycled.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_________________________________________  ______________
Signature of Participant                      Date
Participant Name (Please Print)

Audio Taping:

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

_________________________________________  _________________
Signature of Participant                        Date

Participant Name (Please Print)
References


Whiting, M. (2014). What it means to be the parent of a child with a disability or complex health need. *Nuring Children & Young People*.

CURRICULUM VITAE
Allison (Cox) Simpson

Email: Allison.k.simpson@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Master of Arts in Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2018

Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2016
Minor: Human Services

WORK EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant
Spring 2018
Academic Success Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Research new common reader for COLA 100E, First Year Seminar course to use in Fall 2018
- Organize database of course materials for all COLA 100E, First Year Seminar Instructors
- Conduct In-Class Observations of COLA 100E instructors for content comparison

Graduate Assistant
Fall 2016- Fall 2017
Academic Success Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Managed outreach efforts across all departments in the ASC
- Data tracked and collection assistance for Dual Enrollment Students
- Created flyers and outreach material for Dual Enrollment Program

Marketing Assistant
June 2015- August 2016
Opportunity Village
- Compiled and created content for social media and email marketing campaigns
- Data tracked and collection for organization’s marketing efforts and business line revenue
- Took photos and create videos for board meetings and social media

Substitute Teacher
August 2014- June 2015
Clark County School District
- Filled in for teacher in time of absence
- Maintained classroom management and lesson plans
- Worked at various high schools and middle schools in the Las Vegas Valley

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Teacher Assistant

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

- Taught lessons on Effective Oral and Visual Communication; Critical Thinking In and Out of the Classroom; Ethical Theories
- Help grade weekly assignments

**First Year Seminar: COLA 100E Co-Instructor**

*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

- Co-Instructs first year seminar course with fellow graduate student
- Through class lessons and activities help first year students get connected to campus resources and find a major

**PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

**Public Policy Leadership Series- General Government**

*Leadership Foundation of Greater Las Vegas*

- Educated how to develop sound public policy and best practices in public policy development
- Understand functions and structure of government in Nevada and its funding sources and mechanisms
- Completed on October 10, 2017

**CITI Training**

*Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative*

- Conflicts of interest
- Social/Behavioral IRB
- Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course
- Expires on January 19, 2022

**At-Risk for University and College Faculty and Staff**

*Kognito*

- Promote emotional wellness on college and university campuses
- Identify signs and symptoms of students experiencing psychological distress
- Ways to approach and make appropriate referrals to campus resources for screening and Assessment
- Completed on September 13, 2016

**RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Ways to eliminate stigma for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Transition to postsecondary schooling
Non-profit advocacy efforts
Interpersonal Communication Theory

**RESEARCH IN PROGRESS**
College is For Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individual with Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School
Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Guthrie
(IRB Approval: Exempt Status)

PRESENTATIONS

Managing Family Dynamics: Communication Strategies for Families with a Child with Intellectual Disability Breaking Down Societal Stigmas
Poster Presenter
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

College is for Everyone: Examination of Family Support for Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities Transitioning to Postsecondary School
Presenter
UNLV Rebel Grad Slam, Research Rumble

Managing Family Dynamics: Communication Strategies for Families with a Child with Intellectual Disability Breaking Down Societal Stigmas
Poster Presenter
20th Annual Graduate & Professional Student Research Forum

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Facilitator
Southern Nevada Homeless Youth Summit
- Helped facilitate focus group of summit attendees
- Coded responses to assist in presentation of findings

Promise Mentor
Nevada Promise Scholarship Program
- Attend Nevada Promise Scholarship Mentoring Sessions
- Speak with current high school students in the process of applying for the Nevada Promise Scholarship