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WE ARE NOT DIFFERENT; WE JUST SIT: A CASE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN WHEELCHAIRS

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In the present qualitative case study, we used the participatory action research method of photovoice in order to explore the lived experiences of college students in wheelchairs at a mid-sized, Midwestern university campus. Five undergraduate students with mobility impairments participated in the present study. Participants were asked to photographically record their daily life on campus by taking pictures which they felt represented their experience. We then asked participants to reflect on these experiences with us through individual interviews. Results revealed that participants spent much time and effort dealing with the intersection of accessibility and independence on campus. The photos and narratives suggested an important connectivity between academics and social relationships. Further, these participants shared deep social connections with friends as well as mentors, were highly concerned about their academic pursuits, and felt a particular desire to share their individuality as a student and person.

College attendance for students with disabilities increased from 6% of undergraduate students in 1999 to 11% of undergraduate students just over a decade later (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), these disabilities may include learning disabilities, or impairments in vision, hearing, speech, orthopedics, or a combination of these. Of students with disabilities, 15% reported impairments which were orthopedic, or related to

mobility (Newman et al., 2011). The rise in postsecondary enrollment for students with disabilities has prompted a growing body of research regarding the experiences of these students on college campuses.

Students with physical disabilities, as compared to students with other disabilities, have a more complex and unique set of factors to consider during the college selection process. When choosing a college, while academic major is still important for students with mobility impairments, the two deciding factors in college choice are accessibility and disability services, with accessibility often cited as the primary consideration (Wessel, Jones, Blanch, & Markle, 2015). Once on campus, students with physical disabilities continue to experience physical barriers in accessibility, even on the most accommodating of campuses (Agarwal, Moya, Yasui, & Seymour, 2015; Wessel et al., 2015) and

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reported more transitional issues to college life (Burwell, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2015). Students with physical disabilities report fewer social interactions and less investment in peer relationships while in college (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012). Papasotiriou and Windle (2012) found that students with physical disabilities are particularly resilient and, as compared to students without physical disabilities, tend to measure their self-concept in terms of academic success rather than success with social relationships.

Interviews with college students with physical disabilities often reveal that they have adapted well socially, are happy to be near peers with similar disabilities, and, as they transition to college, often develop a new feeling of independence (Wessel et al., 2015). Students with disabilities also report being excited and enthusiastic about future careers despite previous frustrations (Kim & Williams, 2012). While research suggests that college students with physical disabilities have certain unique barriers and triumphs, a relatively limited body of research explores the more specific daily experiences of this population. Continued research on the lived experiences of college students with physical disabilities is important in order to provide insight into their day-to-day encounters. While research on lived experiences of college students with disabilities is necessary, there are important considerations for conducting this work. For example, persons with disabilities are often leery of non-disabled researchers because of the lack of personal knowledge of disability and a possibility of unrepresentative findings (Kitchin, 2000). Kitchin (2000) also noted that the disabled respondents in his study called for a model of inclusive research that moved the disabled voice from only that of subject to that of collaborator in the research process. Similarly, Burwell, Wessel, and Mulvihill (2015) called for research methods that built trust between the researcher and disabled students, since the students were likely to share very personal information.

In the current study, we chose photovoice as a methodology in order to enable the students in wheelchairs to take the lead in interpreting their own lived experiences on campus. Photovoice is a participatory action research method that combines photography, discussion, and advocacy. The methodology is used in order to

give power to participants who may otherwise not have adequate power, status, or recognition. It puts the interview subjects on a more even field with the researchers, thus allowing them to have a more meaningful experience (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice has been used extensively with marginalized groups in order to identify issues and advocate for change with key stakeholders (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Previous research has used the photovoice technique in higher education in order to study a variety of topics such as a service-learning capstone project (Hall & Bowen, 2015), food experiences of international students (Amos & Lordly, 2014), a campus smoking policy (Seitz et al., 2012), information literacy of freshmen (Julien, Given, & Opryshko, 2013), and student teacher preparation (Langdon, Walker, Colquitt, & Pritchard, 2014). One photovoice project was conducted with college students with physical disabilities in order to bring light to the existing accessibility barriers on campus (Agarwal, Moya, Yasui, & Seymour, 2015). The project resulted in benefits for both the participants and the campus, empowering the student participants to speak up about their experiences and initiating immediate changes to several campus spaces (Agarwal et al., 2015).

The goals of the current study were to (a) extend the use of photovoice to students in wheelchairs in order to explore their lived experiences and (b) explore the effectiveness in using photovoice as an inclusive research method with disabled participants and non-disabled researchers. The current study is centered in visual sociology, using visual data as a means of inquiry (Harper, 2002). Radley (2010) contends that photographs are "concrete statements of a social condition" (p.269), and not just a summary of stories. The photographs are used in order to make meaning for the subjects, and their voices come through as the viewer is willing to acknowledge that the subjects' experiences are possible. As photographs are viewed, the subjects allow the viewer a "glimpse" (Goffman, 1976) of their real lives. Wang and Burris (1997) found that voice comes through when marginalized populations are allowed to communicate their ideas through their stories with specific photographs.

Method

The current study sought to understand the lived experience of college students in wheelchairs at Midwestern University (a pseudonym), as well as their own perceptions of the college environment. Photovoice, a method which allows participants to express their points of view and represent their communities by photographs, was chosen in order to allow for collaboration between us as non-disabled researchers and the disabled participants. The participants were asked to photographically record their lived experience on campus and then reflect on these experiences with us. Harper (2002) contends that placing photos in the process of research leads to deeper understandings of experiences and meanings between the researcher and participant. This use of photo elicitation led to "deep and interesting talk" (p.23) that could only be placed in viewing a photograph (Harper, 2002). Photovoice put the control of taking photos and describing important aspects and experiences within their lives into the hands of the participants.

Midwestern University

The site where the present study was conducted was Midwestern University, a small, public four-year institution in the Midwestern United States. Midwestern University is unique in ways that likely make it a particularly attractive institution to students in wheelchairs. The main campus of Midwestern University consists primarily of interconnected buildings including all classrooms, the student center, library, and athletic facilities. In other words, students do not have to go outside in order to travel from building to building. This connectivity is particularly important since, in the Midwestern United States, cold weather, snow, and ice are common. In addition to the physical interconnectivity of the Midwestern University campus, the university also has a long-standing history of commitment to accessibility on campus in other ways. This priority is most notable through the university sponsored wheelchair basketball program, which travels regularly throughout the Midwest, recruits students from across the country, and boasts an Olympic gold medalist as well as several other students who have played wheelchair basketball professionally in Europe after college.

Participants

There are no official enrollment figures on the number of students with mobility disabilities at Midwestern University, but an informal estimation by the campus disability services office reported about 40. The participants were recruited through a purposive sampling technique, beginning first with the disability services office and the wheelchair basketball coach. Email invitations were sent to a suggested list of 20 students. We followed up by holding personal visits with students whom we had direct connections with through classes or advising. Eight undergraduates were recruited and given cameras, but because of the time-intensive nature of the project, three dropped out. Five students, two females and three males, in wheelchairs or scooters completed participation in the present study. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24.

Photovoice Procedures

The photovoice procedures, in part, included three meetings with each participant, each approximately 60-90 minutes long. Each meeting had a different focus. During the initial meeting with all the student participants, we shared information about the photovoice project, emphasizing the time commitment expectations and obtained informed consent. Following the guidelines of gathering data on the lived experience (Munhall, 1994), we offered the students a fairly non-directive description of what to photograph. The students were given the instructions to photographically answer the question: "If we were to hang out with you for a day on campus, what would we see, where would we go, and what would we do?" Next, we discussed safety and ethical concerns of a photography project, including photographing other people (Allen, 2012). The students were instructed to avoid photographing any dangerous, illegal, or criminal activities. They were asked to receive verbal consent before taking a photo of another person. Each student was provided a disposable camera for this project and was asked to return it within two weeks. Disposable cameras were chosen for the project as the students could not easily edit the photos before submission like would be possible with a digital photo and because of privacy and safety

issues that may arise with photos taken from a student's personal phone camera.

The students, within the present study, could take up to 24 pictures on one disposable camera, and we offered students the option of obtaining a second camera if they had more experiences to document. After a collection of the disposable cameras from the students, the photos were developed, and we scheduled a second meeting with each participant. During the second meeting, we met individually with the students in order to view and listen to the story of each of his/her own photos. These individual meetings were audio recorded. As we looked at each photo together, we encouraged discussion by utilizing a well-established technique in photovoice called the SHOWeD Technique (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wang 1999). The prompts of SHOWeD are: (1) What do you SEE here? (2) What is really HAPPENING? (3) How does this relate to OUR lives? (4) WHY does this problem or strength exist? and (5) What can we DO about it? We took notes during the meeting, writing down key phrases, and asked clarifying questions as needed. We attempted to be the curious listeners, as outlined by Munhall (1994). After each individual session, we also journaled about our own reflections of the conversation.

At the close of the session, we asked each student to select four to five photos that were most meaningful to share with the other student participants at the final group meeting to be held following the conclusion of all individual meetings. The purpose of the final group meeting was in order to corroborate, expand, and refute experiences of the student participants (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997). First, we gave each student his or her selected photos from the previous session, and they each wrote captions for their own photos. Second, each student shared the photo with the group, read the caption, and reflected on the meaning of the photo. Others were asked to share, elaborate upon, or challenge an experience. Due to scheduling difficulties, only two of the five students participated in this final meeting. During this final wrap-up discussion, the two students in the group meeting expressed a desire to share this project with the broader campus community, which we ultimately did through a campus forum format.

Data Analysis

The data for the present study included the photographs taken by participants, transcriptions from the individual meetings and group meeting, and our written reflections. Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological approach guided the analysis. An essential principle is to grasp the meaning of the data while not interpreting excessively. The themes of the data were isolated using a selective or highlighting approach in which the passage was read several times in order to identify what the phrases were revealing (van Manen, 1990). As part of the process, notes were made about phrases that described the meaning of the themes along with how the themes might be connected.

Internal Validity

Several techniques were used in order to establish trustworthiness of the analysis, including prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, we were actively engaged as the researchers in all aspects of the project, conducting the reflection meetings, transcribing the audio recordings, journaling our own thoughts and reflections of the meeting, and reviewing the transcriptions and photos in detail. This process provided us with ample knowledge of the data. Through this prolonged engagement, we also developed a rapport with the participants that, from our standpoint, established a sense of trust between us as researchers and the participants (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

Second, we used different methods and sources of data in order to establish triangulation and enhance internal validity. Photovoice procedures include photos, individual interviews, group reflections, and journaling. The photos served as a guide for the whole process, and as a verification of the participants' behaviors, attitudes, and viewpoints of the lived experience (Shenton, 2004). We continually confirmed or disconfirmed the findings through all the data sources.

Next, in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of our interpretations of the data, we corroborated with two participants in a form of member checking for verification of the themes and meanings (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and in order to select photos for the public

Table 1
Participant Demographics

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Distinguishing Characteristic(s)</i>
Blake	Lives in university apartments
Mark	Physical education major; strong connection to wheelchair basketball coach
Chase	Skilled in the repair of wheelchair tires
Morgan	Self-described as religious
Becky	Admissions office ambassador; self-described student advocate for incoming students with physical disabilities

presentation (Kitchin, 2000). This check included both formal and informal methods. After the students selected the photos for the public presentation, we emailed the descriptions of the final themes to the participants for editing, clarification, and verification that the themes discussed were salient to the participants. The participants agreed that the findings represented their lived experiences on campus. This assurance paralleled the collaborative discussion, as described by van Manen (1990), designed in order to seek deeper meaning of the themes and strengthen the text.

Results

Each participant took between 9 to 13 photographs, totaling 54 photos used within the present study. The photographs, along with the narratives and reflective journals, were used in order to generate major themes from the data and a more detailed understanding of the participants' experiences. Four major themes were generated including (1) the intersection of independence and accessibility, (2) social connectivity, (3) a particular academic focus, and (4) a desire for a sense of individuality. While the participants in the current case study shared some common experiences and were similar in their mobility impairments, each was also, of course, a distinct individual with many distinguishing characteristics. These individual qualities became evident during the extensive interviews with the students as they shared their experiences of campus life. The demographic information about each participant, along with distinguishing qualities are presented below.

The Intersection of Independence and Accessibility

All participants conveyed, in some way, the interconnections between accessibility and independence, sharing their perceptions of both positive and negative experiences. The photographs that focused on more positive aspects included images of accessible chair machines in the weight room, accessible computer desks in labs and the student center, and modifications made to cars for use of hand brakes. The images of areas on campus that were perceived more negatively included a high water fountain, a wall soap dispenser in a bathroom that was unreachable from a wheelchair, and elevators that did not accommodate more than one or two wheelchairs at a time. Most students spoke about maneuvering around campus and the challenge of the elevators. A few elevators on campus did not accommodate the size of some wheelchairs, and in all elevators, the maximum number of wheelchairs at any one time was two. The students became very strategic when moving around campus and knew the limitations of each elevator. Chase, for example, developed various strategies, depending on if he was using his basketball chair with the butterfly wheels or his everyday chair with the straight wheels. When discussing the challenge of entering certain elevators, Chase said:

The elevators are too small. When you are with your friends and there are three of you and only two can fit, one has to stay behind. Things like that. When we go in with our basketball chairs, we have to pop off a wheel to get into some of them. Even some doors are too narrow. Like I have to

Figure 1

*Things take longer**"You have to take off your wheels and cushion, it's like a formula you have to have down."*

hop sideways through doors because they are too narrow.

While the elevators were only mentioned in a negative light, the wheelchair ramps on campus were described both positively and negatively. Overall, the indoor ramps were seen as a positive aspect of moving from place to place, since the ramps were situated alongside the stairs. Conversely, the outdoor ramps to enter buildings were only discussed by the students when they remembered a negative experience. Chase, for example, described the ramps as either being "a pretty good workout that involved conditioning", or "pretty snowy and slick in the winter."

An important part of accessibility and independence for the students was the issue of time and the need to constantly plan ahead. The students shared that activities in daily life take longer, such as going out of the way in order to use the elevator to get upstairs, using the bathroom, or just making it to campus. Chase went on to describe the process of getting gas for his car in order to come to campus. It was apparent that he had to plan ahead and that it took some practice in order to be efficient. He stated: "When you want to go from like the gas station to where you want to go it's pretty tough. You have to take off your wheels and cushion, it's like a formula you have to have down." Below is Chase's photo that reminds him of the hassle with cars:

Blake and Becky spoke about the issue of time for them as it related to the scheduling of

classes. The 10 minutes between classes did not always allow enough time in order to use the bathroom and arrive to the next class on time, so the students often had to choose one over the other. This choice limited their attendance in classes; they were self-conscious about coming late into class, so would often skip that class for the day. Course schedule planning was important, but back-to-back classes could often not be avoided because of the limited sections offered. As part of the timing issue, the students spoke about the need to continually educate their instructors on the complexities of moving around campus. For example, every semester they had to disclose to their instructors that they might be late to class if the elevator was in use, if they had to use the bathroom, or if they had mechanical issues with their wheelchairs. This communication was a continual process that involved advocating and sometimes sharing personal information. Similarly, the students also had to educate friends and dating partners. When Blake started dating an able-bodied person, he had to explain to his new girlfriend the reasons why he did certain things, helping her understand how he moved around campus. Blake described this by explaining: "When I started dating, she had no idea why I do half the things I do. It's because I'm in a wheelchair, that's how I do them, have to do them."

Independence was important to the students, but they also indicated the need for assistance in either moving around or becoming

more self-sufficient. They received assistance from friends, caregiving assistants, and coaches. The assistance was either in the form of direct help or in the form of teaching the participants how to be more independent. This view was demonstrated by Chase who spoke about how important his basketball coach was in teaching him to repair his wheelchair. Since his arrival to college, he learned how to fix his wheels and change flat tires. This need was almost a daily occurrence during the wheelchair basketball season. Chase described by indicating: "We're supposed to go and try first and if we can't do it then he'll come assist." Mark, another a wheelchair basketball player, also spoke about the need to develop skills that would allow him to be self-sufficient by indicating: "In the future, you're not going to have anybody or somebody there to do it for you. You have to rely on yourself." Other participants spoke about the direct help received from people in their day-to-day lives. Blake lived with a disabled roommate whose personal care attendant (PCA) sometimes put things out of reach in the kitchen, such as on top of the refrigerator or on the second shelf in the kitchen cupboard. He had to ask an able-bodied friend to help him retrieve these items in his apartment. That did not bother Blake, though, because he enjoyed living in a campus apartment and felt as though the PCA did not focus on his disability.

For some participants, independence was limited when things were not in good repair or working properly. Two things that were consistently mentioned were elevators and sidewalks. Blake discussed the weekend the elevator in the campus apartments malfunctioned and the freedom that was immediately taken away from him. Blake lived on the second floor and could not make it to his room without the elevator. His roommate, already in the second floor apartment at the time of the malfunction, had a powerchair and remained in his room the whole weekend. Blake watched as other able-bodied students in the building carried his mobility-impaired friend up to her apartment, while her powerchair was stored on the main floor. Though Blake was frustrated, he did not like to focus on the negative situation. He said: "I normally wouldn't have left on the weekend anyway but knowing that even if you want to you couldn't, it affects your freedom. But I really

don't think about it." Blake chose to stay with a friend in another dorm with a working elevator.

Becky spoke about the holes in sidewalks around the community. She liked to explore the community with her friends or by herself when the weather was warm. She described her embarrassment when her wheelchair tipped on the sidewalk and she fell out:

I don't have a seatbelt on my chair. I know I should but I don't. So I usually fall when I'm not with people, which is weird. So when I fall I usually get right back up and keep going. And look around to see if anyone saw me because it's really embarrassing. But if I'm with people, they are there to help me back up. It's still embarrassing but I just have an attitude to get back up and keep going. And if the sidewalks were fixed, I wouldn't have to deal with that. But we don't live in a perfect world, we can't have everything. It could be a lot worse.

Becky was concerned about the community's need to take action but also demonstrated a positive attitude in her approach to the situation. Some participants discussed the weather as a detriment, especially the snow and ice. Blake described himself as an "outdoorsy person", and the winter weather kept him inside too much. Becky spoke about falling out of her chair into the snow and calling public safety on campus to assist her when she was unable to do it herself. Her independence was hampered by the snow and ice. She was grateful for her cell phone so she could call for help. Issues related to both repair and the weather are highly connected to the way in which students required others to help facilitate accessibility. Facilities crews are responsible for both snow or ice removal and for maintaining sidewalks and elevators on campus. So while students cared greatly about being independent, they still required others to ensure accommodations were available.

All 13 of Becky's photos related to accessibility, with the purpose of educating others and exposing the issues on campus. The main reason she chose Midwestern University was the "handicap accessible" features such as the interconnected buildings. Now, she served as an ambassador in the Admissions Office, and her

duties included giving tours to potential students and their parents. She highlighted these features during her tours, especially when she gave tours to students in wheelchairs. Becky felt a sense of responsibility to those students in wheelchairs whom she was recruiting. She described:

Since I'm an ambassador on campus, for how much I represent this school and how much this school broadcasts or advertises as being handicap accessible, that no one really notices unless you're handicapped. Not everything can be perfect, but things can be changed. So I'm not fixing things for myself. I'm fixing things for those coming in.

Becky was advocating not only for herself but also for future students. She was well aware of how she lived and moved on campus and how different that was from able-bodied people. She had a desire to help others see her point of view by bringing awareness to the layout of the physical spaces on campus and the notion that accessibility was not always convenient. Following is a photo she took:

Figure 2

Accessibility

"Here's how you guys live and right next to it is how we live."



Becky's photo of a staircase in the student center was about awareness. She said: "The stairs are kinda cool but I won't be able to use them. Pretty much with my pictures I am saying here's

how you guys live and right next to it is how we live."

Overall, student photos emphasized the importance of self-determination as their expression of independence. Their discussions of the choices and the specific scheduling of their days highlight the ways that their ability to self-determine can be both enhanced and hampered by questions of accessibility. Accessibility allowed for their participation within the campus community and was a key theme within their lives.

Social Connectivity

Social connectivity was another theme emerging from the data. The photographs as well as the interview data illustrated both places and people that were a part of the everyday social experience of these students. The places included the wheelchair basketball room, the weight room, the campus religious center, physical therapy room, and the work-study office. These places were important because they served as a connection to friends and mentors. Morgan, a student who described herself as religious, spoke about the fun she had in bible study with a small group of friends at the campus religious center. The location served as a warm reminder of this connection with others that allowed her to unwind from the stress of classes and homework. Blake spoke about using the lobby of the residence hall as a place to study in order to "see the different people" who lived in the building and socialize with them. He described himself as "very social" and purposely positioned himself in an area that would allow conversations and connections, even brief connections, with other students. Morgan's photograph of the work-study office included the pay schedule posted on the wall. While she needed to work in order to pay for college, the job was important because it connected her with other students. She described how she liked to help students and also recognized that she was gaining interpersonal skills as she learned to handle various issues in the disability services office. She spoke about becoming a "more patient person," a skill that would be beneficial in her future career.

The people in the photographs were friends, a coach, and a work-study supervisor. The deeper meaning shared was that these particular people provided support, encouragement,

and companionship. Morgan spoke about the support of her friends and how she came to view them as part of her family, considering one friend as her "big sister on campus." Three students discussed the special bonds they had forged with adult mentors on campus, including a coach and work-study supervisors. This type of relationship was especially the case for Mark who interacted with his coach on a daily basis throughout the year. The wheelchair basketball coach became a trusted adult in Mark's life, offering advice about life, careers, and finishing college. Mark said: "I guess he's like a father figure, but he's only like four or five years older than me, but he talked to me about different stuff of life because I never had a father figure in my life so I guess he's like that." Similarly, Morgan admired her supervisors in her work-study position and described the support they gave her during difficult times of the semester. She shared: "So many times this semester where I've said I'm giving up and they are always encouraging." Connections to friends, coaches, and other mentors was an important aspect of the students' lives on campus and the students spoke about these relationships as central to their campus experience.

Academically Focused

Being academically focused emerged as a theme as all participants spoke about their commitment and dedication to their academic pursuits. What was interesting was that academic performance was linked with not only the role of being a student, but also with extracurricular activities, work-study, health, social connections, and accessibility. The responsibilities as a student consisted of taking tests, studying, improving grades, and planning for future careers. Students shared different strategies. Some liked to use the computer labs because they could easily complete work for class. Blake studied in the residence hall lobby. Mark spoke about his future career goals as illustrated in one of his photographs. His photo of the physical education building was a connection to his physical education major and the desire to be a "YMCA director" upon graduation. He was actively seeking out a summer internship in order to make himself more marketable.

Extracurricular activities for two participants were directly connected to academic

performance. Mark shared that because of the expectations of playing on the wheelchair basketball team, he was motivated to perform in class, as demonstrated in his picture below:

Figure 3
Connection to Academic Life
"Gotta study to get on the court."



He kept his grades up so that he could be part of the team. Similarly, Morgan spoke about the connection between her work-study position and her sociology major, sharing that she was learning more about people while working and that would help with her future career goals. She wanted to succeed academically and graduate with a degree. Her desire was to work on a college campus in the disability services office. The extracurricular activities of sports and work-study served as motivating forces for these participants in order to perform well in the classroom.

For Morgan, physical health and academic life were entwined. She spoke about the stress she felt when she did not feel well or had not exercised her legs and how these feelings were reflected in her schoolwork. She said: "If I'm taking a test and not in good health or stressed out about my legs or something, then I won't do good and just circle answers regardless if I read the test or not." She planned her schedule to include time for physical therapy on campus.

In general, all participants spoke about the connection of academic life to issues of accessibility. Mark wrote all his papers using the computers on campus and used the "handicap desk" in the computer labs since the desk could be

raised or lowered in order to fit his wheelchair. Becky spoke about the classroom arrangements and her feelings of being singled out as different, which sometimes caused her stress. She shared that the accessible tables for students in wheelchairs were generally located in the front of the classrooms, not allowing for the preference of sitting in the middle or the back. In big lecture halls, the tables were in front of all the other raised seating, causing her some embarrassment. Blake echoed that sentiment and spoke about the inability to enter a classroom without everyone noticing. He said: "I have to sit in the front. Everyone knows you're late whereas if you weren't in a chair, you could come in and sit in the very back and no one would know." It was apparent that Blake and Becky wanted choice in where they sat in the classroom and did not want to be noticed. Feeling stressed in class sometimes affected their performance negatively. Overall, the photos and narratives of the participants described the connection between academic pursuits and other parts of their lives. Extracurricular activities were motivating factors in order to perform well in class, whereas, poor health and the stress of classroom accessibility could have a negative impact on academic performance.

Figure 4

Individual Flair

"I wear hats all the time and listen to country music."



Desire for a Sense of Individuality

The fourth theme emerging from the data was the desire for a sense of individuality, or the distinctions that made the mobility impaired participants unique and individual, and yet similar to other non-disabled students. Becky summed up this desire in her comment: "We are not different, we just sit." This point was also particularly important to Blake and Morgan, who did not want to be seen as disabled. Many photos and much of the narrative for Blake focused on his personal likes and what was important to him. For example, he enjoyed food, had a favorite chair, liked to sleep, and loved hats. Below is a picture taken by Blake which demonstrated his sense of self:

Blake was proud of his hats, particularly as he connected them to his personality and his family. Blake's father had purchased several hats for him, which he described. Blake went on to indicate:

I wear hats all the time and listen to country music. I have a lot of hats that I don't wear, too. The other day I had to go back to my room. I really didn't need to, but my hat. I forgot my hat, and I would not go to class without it. I tell people that without my hat on I feel naked.

Morgan discussed faith as part of her sense of identifying as a unique individual. She voiced a concern that people were too busy and focused too much on impulsivity. Her faith was an important part of her identity, and provided motivation to her personally. She stated: "Classes are important but that's not all life is about. It helps remind me that even if I have hard classes that God is always there and I will get through it." The deeper meaning for participants was that the physical disability did not make them unique just because they moved around campus in a different way than non-disabled students. They were unique because of their own personal preferences and beliefs, things they talked about with their non-disabled friends. This personhood was at times hard to maintain due to the accessibility requirements. For example, consistently having to disclose needs to professors or the structure of the classrooms meant that the students' impairment was always on display within those settings. Similarly, when accommodations failed disability became the

forefront of their identities within the campus community. Despite these factors, they wanted to be seen as individual persons outside of the mobility impairment.

Discussion

In the current study, we explored the lived experiences of college students with mobility impairments, utilizing both photos and narratives of the students. The findings demonstrate that for each participant, living with a physical disability impacted their experiences, perceptions, and challenges as college students. The four themes that emerged from the data were not independent of one another, and in fact overlapped in many ways. The students shared how the inability to be independent due to accessibility failures led to social connections. Similarly, the concern regarding accessibility on the campus did provide opportunities for mobility and freedom but also forced students to make choices against their academic interests such as when they would elect to not attend classes rather than be late. These intersections between themes, despite the students' desires to be seen as more than their disability, dominate much of the experiences documented within their pictures. These results give an indication that even in a physical environment chosen for accessibility, students are struggling to meet commitments, in part due to social and attitudinal barriers.

As expected of college students, a large portion of the participants' narratives were focused on navigating academic life, such as studying, writing papers, and obtaining good grades. Their academic stories were also intertwined with issues related to classroom accommodations, time constraints, health concerns, and the need to regularly disclose personal information. They shared that non-disabled students and faculty could not really understand the amount of extra time needed for daily tasks and the choices they had to make because of needing more time. They had come to accept the need to disclose personal information every semester to new instructors in order to mitigate the negative consequences of being late to class or not attending class because of time constraints. Consistent with findings from prior research, college students in wheelchairs had to learn to handle the stress of managing their own schedules while enjoying independence,

and constantly disclosing personal information in order to help others understand their actions and behavior (Burwell et al., 2015; Wessel et al., 2015).

While the students were not asked specifically to document issues of accessibility, the narratives and photos revealed that all participants deal with accessibility on a daily basis and approached it with acceptance. They shared strategies in order to navigate the small elevators, non-working elevators, snowy ramps, and heavy doors. Their tenacity and fortitude were consistent with prior research (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012) and were conveyed during our conversations of their experiences and the analysis processes. Reasonable accommodations were made in the classroom, but those accommodations continued to separate students in wheelchairs from other non-disabled students, creating a sense of isolation (Agarwal et al., 2015).

A particularly interesting finding was the connectivity between academics and social relationships. Wheelchair basketball served as a motivation for two participants to maintain good grades, demonstrating a symbiotic relationship. Basketball requires more than skill on the court. Basketball is social, involving social skills and a certain functionality in relationships. The wheelchair basketball student athletes needed good grades in order to be socially involved in basketball, yet previous results showed that academics superseded social relationships (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012). These results show equality between sociality and academics for students in wheelchairs, especially for athletes in wheelchairs.

All participants expressed the desire for independence, but acknowledged support from others as essential. A key part of independence was equipment that was working properly or in good repair. Several students shared that the feeling of embarrassment was likely if equipment was not working or if mishaps occurred. They attempted to be positive and laughed at themselves. Prior literature on managing emotions for wheelchair users in public supports this finding (Cahill & Eggleston, 1994). This finding also extends to the ideas of resiliency and the use of a positive attitude as a coping mechanism (Papasotiriou & Windle, 2012). Another component of independence was the

ability to fix a malfunctioning wheelchair, as mentioned by the basketball players. The coach was willing to take the time to teach the players this life skill, which was valuable not only on the court, but in real life.

The other two themes, social connectivity and a desire to display a sense of individuality, revealed important insights into the perceptions of these students. All participants shared photos or narratives of special friends and mentors in their lives, discussing features about the quality of the relationship that was important to them. Wessel et al. (2015) reported that having friends was a key component of college integration for undergraduates, both disabled and non-disabled. For Blake, this project served as a way to show himself to be a unique individual outside of his physical disability, with specific likes. Several participants commented that they were similar to other non-disabled students, enjoying all the experiences of college life (Wessel et al., 2015).

In addition, the results shed light on the use of photovoice as a collaborative method of research between disabled participants and a non-disabled researcher. Some of the findings are consistent with the current literature. Collaborating with disabled students as researchers in a photovoice project provided for a model of inclusivity as called for by Kitchin (2000) and a method to develop trust with the participants (Burwell et al., 2015). The participants were involved in all stages of the project, recruiting other students to participate, taking photos, member checking themes, and selecting photos for the public presentation. One participant in particular moved into the role of the researcher easily, as evident when she began to question the non-disabled researchers about what they had learned from this project. In this aspect, the photovoice project was successful in empowering students to take the lead in sharing their stories. After the project ended, three student participants did come back in order to thank us for conducting the project, sharing they had personally learned something about themselves. Photovoice served as a rich way for us as non-disabled researchers to have conversations with students with physical disabilities about their lives on campus.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study did pose some challenges and has several limitations. A major limitation was the small number of participants. Munhall (1994) called for more than six to ten transcribed interviews for a study of lived experiences. Recruiting participants for the current study was a challenge. The coordinator of disability services and the wheelchair basketball coach supplied us with a list of potential students, but the personal contact we made with each student served to be key to involvement. Another challenge was the significant investment of time required from the participants in the present study. Kitchin (2000) notes that many disabled people do not join research projects because of the main concern of time. It became difficult to coordinate schedules with the many demands of the students who were involved in extracurricular activities and work. Only a small number of students participated in the final group meeting (two of the five), which we originally thought was because of scheduling conflicts. Later, we discovered that two students did not participate because of personality conflicts among the students. The collaborative nature of the photovoice procedures with students who may have extensive knowledge of each other is something to consider when beginning a project. There were also issues with the disposable cameras not functioning properly.

One challenge initially considered, when recruiting participants, was the dexterity needed in order to handle a disposable camera, however, all five participants in the present study were able to handle the cameras on their own. If a student with limited dexterity would have volunteered, the personal care attendants (PCAs), who are typically with the students for part of the day, could have taken photos as instructed by the student participant. Students who did not have hand dexterity need in order to handle a camera may have elected not to participate for those very reasons. In attempting to give students in wheelchairs a voice, this constraint may have limited project participation.

Normally, one of the goals of photovoice projects is advocacy and the promotion of change (Wang & Burris, 1997; Agarwal et al., 2015). The public presentation on campus served more as an educational forum, since the purpose of this project was exploring the lived

experience of students in wheelchairs. In retrospect, we would add a dialogue piece to the public presentation, asking the audience in attendance a few questions about how the presentation might have changed their understanding of this group of students, challenges faced, and other issues that might be considered as a university. One student participant suggested an extension of this project to include a student panel, calling it "Wheel a Day in Our Shoes," to promote discussions between disabled and non-disabled students.

Given the efficacy of the photovoice technique, there are many potential directions to go in terms of future research. Expanding the sample size is not only limited to students with mobility impairments; broadening the scope to other disabilities may provide a more complex or nuanced picture of campus life. Asking students to complete this project and go behind just their campus lives and communities might also provide holistic insight into their lives. Similarly, there is value in a comparative version of this project involving students with temporary mobility impairments (e.g., broken limbs) and their perspectives on campus life and accessibility. Finally, given the link between sociality and academics for the wheelchair athletes within the present study, we believe it would be useful in order to explore this quality and to see if this connection extends beyond student athletes in some manner.

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