ISSUE OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND RACISM AMONG STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

Education universally is a fundamental right for every individual, both individuals with ability and with disabilities, irrespective of age or gender. This fundamental right allows students with disabilities to enroll in higher education alongside other students to earn a degree. Students with disabilities according to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 1973 are considered as '...any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment. Since higher education institutions settings are programmed for abled body students, so there is a need for the government to establish a law that includes and provides proper accommodation for students with disabilities. Thus, the creation of Section 504 1973 of the Rehabilitation Act being the first federal civil rights for persons with disabilities taking effect in 1977. This Act prohibits postsecondary education from discriminating against otherwise qualified individuals with a disability by any program or activity receiving Federal funding or other assistance. It requires postsecondary institutions to provide appropriate academic adjustments to assist these students. In the book, the student development theory by Patton et al., 'Shaver (2010) documented that between 1990 and 2005 the percentage of secondary school graduates with disabilities who went on to postsecondary education increased from 26% to 46%’. Students’ disabilities, which may be visible or hidden, are protected under this Acts. Despite the accommodation and services established by colleges or institutions, some students with disabilities hesitate to disclose their disability or self-advocating for themselves; thus, many students with disabilities may remain unknown because they are concerned about stigma, rejection, or discrimination. The National Center for Education Statistics Data accounts for 19 percent of students who reported having a disability, where 19 percent were male, and 20 percent were female from 2005-2016. Conversely, the effect of this Acts has not changed much in the type of accommodation colleges provide for students with disabilities, looking at discrimination they still face. According to the chronicle of higher education article 'more than 25 colleges including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, MIT, Northwestern, Penn State, Ohio State University, and the University of California at Berkeley, have been sued or have had a complaint brought against them for not providing access or alternative formats for disabled students or closed captioning for deaf students'.

Discrimination is a general challenge these group of students faces; however, amidst this is the intersecting identity all students are confronted with, understanding themselves and developing into a successful student and personality. The college is an institution where students learn, improve on their skills, and where they are supported to develop holistically. And so, students' development comes along with their identities and other complex issues. Thus, this socially constructed intersecting identity does not exempt students with disabilities as they must grapple with disability identity. Hence, the concept of disability identity and identity development would be adopted in understanding how students with disabilities view themselves and how they
develop their identity. Also, the concept of intersectionality socially constructed identities (racism) student experience viewed through the lens of critical race theory.

**Disability Identities**

Disability identity, according to the student's development theory textbook involves individuals and their environment, and the interaction between the two (Patton et al. pg. 296). Students with disabilities identity development are pivotal, and for higher education professional to facilitate their development, it is crucial to understand the historical construction of these students’ populations. Patton et al. book (pg. 294) of student development theory explains the approaches to understanding college students with disabilities. The approaches by Evans, brown, and Wike highlight the historical construction of disability through the moral model to a medical model, functional limitation approach which emphasis rehabilitation, a social model, a minority group model, and to the ableist or social justice approach. In higher education, disabilities have been conceptualized historically 'through a medical model that situates it as “deviance from the norm, as pathological condition and as deficit” (Linton, 1998, p. 144)'. This disability identity as to do with the individuals and their environment and the interaction between the two. Students with disabilities interactions with their environment come with invisibility, marginalization, exclusion, and biases.

For a better understanding of how these categories of students see themselves personally and how they relate based on how the world perceives them, Johnstone 2004, in his literature, created six categories of disability identity. The first category in Johnstone literature was externally ascribed, disempowering identities. This portrays identity imposed on an individual with a disability through stigmatization, limiting their opportunity to self-discovery of identity. The second category is overcompensating identities. This identity, in this stage, justify students who had disclosed their disability and fell compelled to perform more than their ability to prove they are not impaired or deemphasized. The third identity category is the identities that shift the focus away from disability. Here is an identity that emphasizes social bonds rather than rehabilitation. The fourth identities category is empowering identities. This identity reclaims the body and legitimizes the experience of being a person with a disability. The fifth category is complex identities, and this locates identity within multiple identity domains, including class, gender, race, and sexual orientation. The sixth category is the common identities, which account for the commonality feelings and shared experience. This common identity among students may be shared across types of disability, and it may be accentuated within communities of students with the same or similar impairments. Although these categories of identities created by Johnstone does not explain the growth stages of students with disabilities; however, it helps in understanding how student see themselves in light of how their environment perceive them. The environment or social perception of students with disabilities impacts students' disclosure of disability, as stated at the beginning, due to stigmatization and oppression they may face. The four sense-making discourse or 'repertoires' by Davidson and Henderson (2010) explains rationale or how students elect to express their identities, particularly if those identities are not immediately visible. The first repertoire was keeping safe, which explains why some student refuses to disclose their disability. The second repertoire was qualified deception, focusing on the complex nature of nondisclosure at a different level to different people. The third repertoire was like/as resistance where they liken their failure of disclosure to that of LGBTQ coming out and that of the deaf individuals. The fourth was an educational approach where individuals build community as part of disclosure. The Johnstone and David and Henderson approaches are both the ecological overview of disability identity in students.
Suffice to say the perspective the campus climate holds on students with disabilities determines their disclosure and also impacts their disability identities. Although the ecological overview serves as a basis for understanding the disability identity, it also lay a background for better support of these group of students. However, there is a need to understand the stage models of disability identity that reveals the progression of individuals with disabilities. The three-stage models by Gibson 2006 guide student services in higher education in better facilitation. The first stage model is Passive awareness, which is said to occur within the first part of life and may continue to adulthood. Here is where an individual's medical needs are met, with no role model, and is taught to deny social aspects of disability and avoid associating with other disabled individuals. The second stage model is realization, which is from adolescence to adulthood. Here the individual may experience hate and anger and also concerned about how others see them by realizing their disability. The last and third stage model is acceptance, which has parallel stages among the minority identity models. This stage highlights individual adulthood, where they positively understand their disabilities and learn to interact with everyone and by also engaging with people with disabilities and be part of disability advocacy and activism. This stage model elicits the development and growth of disability identity, and it helps understand how students learn and grow into accepting themselves as persons with disability positively, and how they may engage in motivating others in their group and become an advocate. Consequently, this stage models explain the identities of these groups of students and expose the student affairs professional to understand and help guide the fluidity that may happen during their development. It will guide professionals in working along with these students and foster their holistic development through college.

Intersectionality

The daunting effort of identifying one's identity as a disabled individual is inevitable; however, it is more challenging to deal with the intersecting issue of racism as students of color with disability. Racism is an issue student of color have to deal with in college, and inadvertently racism has always been a persistent problem in American society, thus becoming systemic racism. The campus climate for students of color with disabilities is intimidating and has made these students feel invisible, minoritized, segregated, unequally treated, and discriminated against-this notion reveals how race and disabilities intersect. It’s been recognized among scholars outside of special education ‘that the social construction of dis/ability depends heavily on race and can result in marginalization, particularly for people of color and those from non-dominant communities (Gutiérrez and Stone 1997; McDermott, Goldman, and Varenne 2006; Oakes 1995; Rubin and Noguera 2004)’. And so, intersectionality and racism among students with disabilities elicit oppression and marginalization that play out among students of color with disabilities. The term intersectionality means the complexities of lived experience while discovering relationships “between identity and intersecting systems of inequality” (Abes, 2012, p. 189) (Paton et al.). Intersectionality is used to find combinations of injustices that are felt by members of society. This concept, according to Ladson-Billings,1999; McCoy et al., 2015 assumes that people with color not only experience oppression because of race but also because of other identities such as disability/ability, gender, class, ableism, etc.

Critical Race Theory

Intersectionality emerges from the Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on the centrality of race and racism and challenges white supremacy in the law, education, politics, and other social systems. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white
supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. The critical race theorist, according to Delgado Bernal 2002, advocates the centering of their voices through counter-narratives and counterstorytelling in order to address inequalities experienced by racially minoritized people. “Although CRT is not an abstract set of ideas or rules, its scholarship is marked by a number of specific themes” (Taylor, 1998, p. 122), there are several themes or tenet of CRT which have been maintained over time. Racism, which is permanent and continues to be an ingrained part of American culture, has appeared to be normal and natural. Students of color with disabilities are continually racialized compared to their counterparts. They are faced with stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion, oppression, and isolation due to how they look. Although other predominant white students with disabilities are also confronted with this issue but not as compared to students of color with disabilities. This is as a result of the society's encouragement given to the dominant culture to be self-focused and to see others as threats and feel superior (Godman 2011). Just as it applies to able students, students with disabilities also enjoy this privilege as opposed to students of color. The strategy of critical race theory is to expose racism for what it is (Landon-Billings, 1998), CRT in higher education identified colorblindness, selective admissions, and campus racial climate (Ledesma & Calderon 2015). Although it is not easy for many educators to use CRT, however, it still serves as a guideline and tool to identify these issues and advocate for students, especially ones with a disability. CRT relating to the racism issue student of color with disabilities face in colleges exposes the discrimination perpetrated against them. Although historically, there have been attempts to even the playing field of marginalized students, the effort had faced questionable effectiveness. The failure continues to impact students of color with disabilities, where most of them are found in special education programs and are under-represented in programs of gifted and talented, leading to lack of resources and high drop out and low academic outcomes. This is evident in the statement made by Okhremtchouk (2015), “it is important not to lose sight of the fact that we, as a nation, are losing generations of talent that…students bring into a classroom, which could potently impact us all…we are benefiting no one; in fact, we are stagnating our own collective progress by not ensuring equality of opportunity for these students, so they are well-positioned to demonstrate many merits they bring to our social structure.” (p. 18).

Thus, the intersectionality of socially constructed identities reveals the racism student of color with disabilities experienced within the institution. Employing the approaches to understanding students with disabilities and the stage models of disability identities would aid a better understanding of how well they settle with their identities and their environment, thus enabling the best support for their holistic development. The critical race theory is an excellent tool for facilitating student's development as a higher education professional or student affairs professional. CRT reminds educators to take the time to understand how racism works, recognize it for what it is, identify it within one’s self, and take action to do something about it (Lopez 2003). In conclusion, for a college to maintain its retention and foster students' success and development, student affairs professionals must give attention not only to students but also to students with disabilities. Thus, educators must be involved in social justice activism, ensuring proper support resources are provided for these groups of students, ensure a friendly campus climate, and ensuring a barrier-free education for all. Most importantly, student affairs professionals need to continually educate themselves professionally and always look inward in order to give exception support for students' holistic development.
References


