

**Social Support at the Intersection of Minoritized Identities:
An Exploration of the Ego Networks of Latinxs with Dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving
Institution**

by

Emily R. Koren

B.A., Hamilton College, 2003

M.A., University of Denver, 2008

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This dissertation was presented

by

Emily R. Koren

It was defended on

March 14, 2022

and approved by

Dr. Jennifer L. Russell, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

Dr. Leigh Patel, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

Dr. Christine Velez, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Vermont

Dissertation Director: Dr. Gina A. Garcia, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy

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**Social Support at the Intersection of Minoritized Identities:
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Serving Institution

Emily R. Koren, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2022

As a result of constantly grappling with systemic forces of oppression such as racism, ableism, and disablism Latinx students with dis/abilities may experience anxiety, loneliness, and frustration in higher education contexts. Social support has been shown to improve the health, well-being, and persistence for Latinx college students and college students with dis/abilities. The purpose of this study was to understand the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving Institution (Robles Private University; RPU) using critical ego network analysis. Guided by DisCrit, this study prioritized intersectional ontology and sought to highlight the voices of minoritized students while considering the interaction between the individual and their historical, socioeconomic, and cultural environment.

The study revealed that Latinx students with dis/abilities have unique social support needs; they may look to faculty and staff for emotional support, especially students with mental health dis/abilities. They will likely seek support that considers their multiply minoritized identities simultaneously and explicitly recognizes their educational needs and lived experience. Study participants exhibited a high level of ethnoracial homophily; regardless of relationship category (university, family, peer), participants sought support from Latinx (and Black in Linee's network) individuals. Moreover, collective responsibility requires a community of support, and ego network density and indirect connections may be valuable to understandings of social support. This study

advocates for a collective responsibility for supporting Latinxs with dis/abilities in holistic, humanizing, decolonizing ways.

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Preface

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1.0 Chapter 1: Introduction

The population of college students with dis/abilities in U.S. higher education continues to grow each year (Brown et al., 2017)¹. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2019a), nearly 4 million college students enrolled during the 2015-2016 year reported having a dis/ability, or 19.4%.² Of the nearly 4 million students with dis/abilities, 687,165 identified as Latinx, or 18.3% of all students with a dis/ability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). While national postsecondary data on students with dis/abilities and Latinx students is readily available, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) does not disaggregate dis/ability data by ethnoracial identity (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a; Taylor & Burnett, 2019). The lack of available data on Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education suggests that these students can be represented by their ethnoracial identity or their dis/ability identity, but not both.

Latinxs with dis/abilities are students with multiple minoritized identities who face challenges in higher education which have been shown to present barriers to their success (well-being, education; retention, graduation; García-Fernández, 2020; Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020).

¹ I use the term dis/ability instead of disability in order to disrupt normative understandings of the word and emphasize the social construction of a false binary between those who are “able” and those who are not (Connor et al., 2016; Goodley, 2014). I defer to the traditional term when referring to official laws, organizations, and publications.

² While not the definition I use, NCES defines dis/ability as “one or more of the following conditions: blindness or visual impairment that cannot be corrected by wearing glasses; hearing impairment (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing); orthopedic or mobility impairment; speech or language impairment; learning, mental, emotional, or psychiatric condition (e.g., serious learning disability, depression, ADD, or ADHD); or other health impairment or problem” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). See page 11 for the definition of dis/ability I will use in this dissertation.

As a result of constantly grappling with systemic forces of oppression such as racism, ableism, and disablism, Latinx students with dis/abilities may experience anxiety, loneliness, and frustration in higher education contexts (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2016). Additionally, support for Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education is often ethnoracially-neutral and consequently does not account for the needs of students of color with dis/abilities (Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020). Moreover, scholars suggest that a lack of ethnoracially-conscious support for students of color with dis/abilities may deter students from disclosing their dis/ability, leaving them without support that might help them in college (Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016).

Social support has been shown to improve the health, well-being, retention, and persistence for Latinx college students as well as college students with dis/abilities (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Murray et al., 2013). Social support is a unique social phenomenon that is fluid and inherently network-based (Song et al., 2011). A student's network represents the relationships that they have with others; in the context of higher education, these ties may be formal (from dis/ability services, professors, and administrators on campus) as well as informal (from family, peers, and mentors outside the university; Daly, 2010; Wellman, 2007).

Students with dis/abilities face numerous challenges in higher education, yet their social support networks have been shown to be smaller than those of their non-dis/abled peers (Eisenman et al., 2013). Latinx students and students with dis/abilities experience negative attitudes and bias from peers, faculty, and staff, and the impact of this stigmatization can lead to what Thomas (1999) refers to as “psycho-emotional dis/ableism” (Fleming et al., 2017; Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016). Similarly, Latinxs with dis/abilities who face oppression in higher education may experience “spirit murder,” which Williams (1997) describes as “disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard” (p. 234; Erevelles & Minear, 2010).

If Latinx students with dis/abilities feel their ethnoracial identity is not represented, this may be a barrier to dis/ability disclosure, formally (registering with dis/ability services) and informally (e.g. approaching a faculty member; Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016). As a result, students may not feel comfortable self-advocating for their needs or seeking out social support that may help them (Lindsay et al., 2018). Pearson and Boskovich (2019) note that students who are minoritized in terms of ethnoracial identity and dis/ability may be reluctant to disclose their dis/ability in order to avoid further stigmatization, leaving multiply minoritized students without accommodations as they to struggle to “pass” rather than risk additional discrimination (p. 6).

Another concern is that social support for minoritized students may be compartmentalized and fail to take into consideration students’ multiple minoritized identities (Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020). For example, dis/ability service providers have resources for students such as testing, technology, tutoring, and career preparation, but this support is often “whitewashed,” meaning multiple minoritized identities are treated as perpendicular roads that can be navigated separately (Bell, 2017). As such, dis/ability services offices content is often ethnoracially-neutral.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are degree-granting institutions that enroll at least 25% undergraduate Latinx students (Garcia, 2016). While HSIs are actively seeking ways to serve Latinxs, little effort has been made to address Latinx students with dis/abilities at HSIs who may seek additional support in order to have positive experiences and outcomes in higher education (Agarwal, 2011; Garcia, 2016). On average, 5.1% of students at 4-year, public HSIs are students with dis/abilities, compared to 6.2% at non-HSIs (Taylor & Burnett, 2019).³ However, these figures likely underrepresent students with dis/abilities, as over half of college students with

³ Taylor and Burnett (2019) note that “IPEDS does not disaggregate students with disabilities data by race, rendering it very difficult to specifically understand how many Hispanic students with disabilities are served by HSIs” (p. 5).

dis/abilities do not disclose their dis/ability (Murray et al., 2013). Currently, there is little knowledge of how to serve Latinxs with dis/abilities in HSIs.

Relatedly, it remains unclear whether dis/ability services offices at HSIs embrace their institution's HSI identity by providing Latinx-focused programs and services or explicitly acknowledging the needs of Latinxs with dis/abilities on their websites. In a previous study, I conducted a content analysis of the websites of five 4-year public HSIs in order to explore whether institutions' Hispanic-serving identity was evident through their dis/ability services providers. Only one institution indicated support for Latinx students with dis/abilities, and this was based on potential Latinx representation among dis/ability services staff; The Texas Tech University Student Disability Services homepage includes a "Meet our Staff" photo of a woman named Erika Valencia whose name and phenotypical characteristics present her as Latinx. Overall, the preliminary findings of this study did not reveal any formal structures for serving Latinx students with dis/abilities from university dis/ability services (Garcia et al., 2019).

Additionally, support for Latinx students with dis/abilities needs to come from individuals within and without the institution; this includes faculty, staff, peers, family, and others (Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016). Latinx students with dis/abilities have unique needs based on their specific dis/abilit(ies), ethnoracial identity and the way in which these identities (and others) influence each other. Ultimately, the burden of support and success often falls on students themselves as they negotiate and search for the social support they need, which may or may not involve dis/ability service providers (Riddell et al., 2005).

1.1 Higher Education Dis/ability Law

It is important to contextualize the study within the legal context of dis/ability in higher education in order to understand the legislative implications that these laws have on the students in the study, and consequently why social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities is important. Currently, there are three federal laws that protect students with dis/abilities in higher education: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA; reauthorized in 2009), and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA; Evans et al., 2017). Unlike the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which applies to K-12 students and exists to ensure student success, the goal of higher education legislation in the U.S. is to provide access to higher education. These laws define dis/ability as a “physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person’s major life activities” and require students to have documentation from medical professionals for their dis/abilit(ies) in order to qualify for accommodation (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

The first piece of legislation to require equal access to higher education for students with dis/abilities was Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Scotch, 2009). At the time, students with dis/abilities were referred to as handicapped and accommodation was largely focused on physical accessibility, particularly for military veterans (Evans et al., 2017). Section 504 requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to provide students with dis/abilities with equal access to programs and facilities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of dis/ability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Evans et al. (2017) note that equal access for students with dis/abilities was not the original intent of the law; rather, the law was designed to bolster vocational rehabilitation programs. Nevertheless, Section 504 is considered foundational and its language set a precedent for future laws such as the ADA.

Passed in 1990 and reauthorized in 2009, the ADA expanded protections for students with dis/abilities, and required postsecondary institutions to provide reasonable accommodations (see the Terminology section below) as well as recourse for students who experience discrimination (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2010). In practice, the interpretation of what constitutes reasonable accommodation has been debated and higher education institutions have been hesitant to make changes to programs that might compromise academic rigor (Evans et al., 2017; Scotch, 2009). Students must self-report their dis/ability, seek out resources from dis/ability service offices, and are responsible for paying for their testing in order to legitimize their dis/ability (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2010; Evans et al., 2017). In 2012, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) recommended that colleges and universities allow students' self-reports of their dis/abilities to serve as sufficient dis/ability documentation; the recommendations stated that "requiring extensive medical and scientific evidence perpetuates a deviance model of disability undervalues the individual's history and experience with disability and is inappropriate and burdensome" (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2012). Unfortunately, medical diagnoses and associated testing continue to be the legitimized form of documenting a dis/ability in U.S. higher education.

The third law that addresses postsecondary students with dis/abilities is the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), which is the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA; Madaus et al., 2012).⁴ While the scope of the HEOA is broader than dis/ability issues, the HEOA established a grant program to improve the recruitment of students

⁴ This is noteworthy in the context of my study because previous reauthorizations of the HEA established the Title V (Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions) and Title III (HSI-STEM) HSI grant programs (Garcia & Koren, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2018a; U.S. Department of Education, 2018b). Thus, the same law that established HSI grants is now being updated to address opportunities for students with dis/abilities.

with dis/abilities, assist students with dis/abilities as they transition to college, and provide training for faculty to develop accessible curriculum and teaching strategies (Madaus et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The HEOA also established the National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD; created in 2015) which conducts research on dis/ability services at U.S. colleges and universities and provides technical assistance to students, families, faculty, and administrators (Evans et al., 2017; Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008).

To date, the majority of U.S. higher education dis/ability legislation concerns access to postsecondary education for students with dis/abilities rather than success (Madaus et al., 2012). Overall, the language of this legislation is deficit-based, uses a rigid definition of dis/ability, and creates substantial barriers for students to receive accommodations (Evans et al., 2017). While these laws address equal access to physical spaces and academic programs, they do not mention access to social environments such as mentorship, student organizations, and recreation (Evans et al., 2017). I believe the ADA and other laws to be crucial legislation for college students with dis/abilities, however the functional impact has been to direct students to campus dis/ability service offices in order to receive specific accommodations recommended by medical professionals. The provisions of the HEOA are more aligned with fostering success for Latinxs students with dis/abilities at HSIs, but as this law is relatively recent, not enough time has passed to evaluate its impact.

1.2 Terminology

I use the following terms in this chapter and throughout this study:

Ableism: I use this term to describe the system of oppression that dehumanizes individuals with dis/abilities, treating us as broken and dysfunctional, not only on an interpersonal level, but systematically through law, policies and practices (Campbell, 2009).

Accommodation: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an accommodation as “any change in the work or school environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a dis/ability to enjoy equal opportunities” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011). I believe this term reinforces ableism within educational contexts and places an unfair burden on students with dis/abilities; however, I include it here because accommodations are the principal (and legally mandated) form of support provided by postsecondary disability service offices and as such are relevant to this study.

Apparent dis/ability: I use this term to describe a dis/ability that is evident. Apparent dis/abilities are usually physical, orthopedic, or mobility impairments, though some visual impairments may be apparent.

Disablism: Disablism refers to the exclusion and discrimination that individuals with dis/abilities experience as a result of our dis/abilities (Bê, 2019). Further, Thomas (1999) notes that disablism is “the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being.” Following the work of Hernández-Saca and Cannon (2016), I use this term to describe a form of dis/ability oppression that accounts for personal and structural mechanisms. Disablism is different from ableism because it accounts for contexts that produce and reinforce dis/ability as well as the effects that these experiences have on individuals, whereas ableism privileges normative notions of ability and marks individuals with dis/abilities as inferior members of society (Jun, 2018). I argue that these

systems of oppression coexist (along with other systems of oppression) and negatively impact the well-being of students with dis/abilities in higher education.

Dis/ability: I use the term dis/ability to indicate a fluid, ever-changing experience best described by the interaction between a person, their environment, and their impairment (Evans et al., 2017). According to critical dis/ability theory, dis/ability is socially constructed by environmental and sociohistorical conditions and is (re)produced rather than discovered (Hall, 2019; Myers et al., 2014). This means that dis/ability might affect students differently at different times and in different environments (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). The most common dis/abilities reported by college students are learning dis/abilities, mental health dis/abilities, physical dis/abilities, autism spectrum dis/order, hearing dis/abilities, and visual dis/abilities (Evans et al, 2017). I use the term dis/ability instead of disability in order to disrupt normative understandings of the word and emphasize the social construction of a false binary between those who are “able” and those who are not (Connor et al., 2016; Goodley, 2014). I defer to the traditional term when referring to official laws, organizations, and publications.

Ego network: In this study, ego networks refer to webs of relationships that provide social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities (Perry et al., 2018).

Hidden dis/ability: I use this term in reference to dis/abilities that are not immediately apparent. There is no universally accepted list of hidden versus apparent dis/abilities as individual experiences vary; however, hidden dis/abilities include mental health dis/abilities, learning dis/abilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Kranke et al., 2013).

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs): HSIs are degree-granting institutions that enroll at least 25% undergraduate Latinx students (Garcia, 2016). As of 2020 there were 569 HSIs in the

United States; HSIs enroll 67% of U.S. Latinx undergraduate students (Excelencia in Education, 2021). The majority of HSIs are four-year institutions (56%; 30% are private, 26% are public), while 44% of HSIs are two-year institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2021). This study focused on one 4-year, private HSI.

Latinx: Latinxs are individuals whose ethnoracial roots come from a country that was colonized by Spain and who are minoritized in U.S. society; I use this term as an inclusive alternative to Latina/o because it rejects the gender binary (Torres et al., 2019). Importantly, Torres et al. (2019) note that this term is monolithic and refers to descendants of over 20 countries in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. As such, the term Latinx does not convey information about the unique history and culture of any one country (Torres et al., 2019). Latinxs are the largest minoritized group in the U.S., comprising of 18% of the population. U.S. Census models predict that the U.S. Latinx population will reach 29% by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Latinx students are the fastest growing ethnoracial group in U.S. higher education and are projected to surpass 4.4 million students by 2025 (currently 3.6 million; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2021).

Multiply minoritized: In the context of dis/ability, the phrase multiply minoritized refers to individuals with dis/abilities that belong to another minoritized group, usually race, gender or sexuality (Erevelles, 2011)

Social network: The connections of relations that make up a social system; a set of individuals and the ties among them. For this study, this includes Latinx students with dis/abilities, their family and friends, as well as faculty and staff at one 4-year, public HSI (Perry et al., 2018).

Social support: Aid (tangible or intangible) that individuals obtain from the members of their network (Song et al., 2011).

Well-being: I use this term to describe what Smale and Hilbrecht (2014) refer to as “the presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression.” Well-being has previously been conceptualized as a composite of six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff & Singer, 2006).

1.3 Motivation for the Study

First and foremost, my motivation for this study is grounded in epistemological responsibility. I agree with Patel (2016) that research is relational, and that “ontological entry points” impact the presentation of and motivation for this study (p. 57). Therefore, I explain the motivation for the study according to Patel’s (2016) three core questions: “Why this?”, “Why me?”, “Why now?” (p. 57).

1.3.1 Why This?

As Karpicz (2020) notes, enrolling in postsecondary education is a form of self-advocacy for students of color with dis/abilities. As HSIs contend with how to best serve their Latinx students, I believe there is a greater need to understand Latinx sub-populations in order to serve all Latinx students. Exploring the support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities alongside Latinx students with dis/abilities can contribute to an understanding of educational environments that improve rather than threaten their well-being. My answer to “Why this?” is because this study is an opportunity to co-create what Mingus (2018) calls “dis/ability justice space” that recognizes

the complexity of dis/ability and the connection between the campus environment, the people that provide support, and students' own internalized oppression.

1.3.2 Why Me?

As a Jewish student with dis/abilities, I represent the dominant white dis/ability experience. It is my responsibility to challenge accepted understandings of dis/ability and the implications for student support in higher education. I believe that most of the support that is offered is not what students need, and that supportive relationships with faculty, family, and peers (rather than dis/ability services) can reduce emotional distress or disablism perpetuated by ableist, white-centered institutions. I agree with Bell (2017) that it is a mistake to confuse visibility with inclusivity, and I believe that the process of nurturing students' well-being has implications for being a learner, for learning, and for evolving supportive relationships into a supportive university community. Lastly, I am knowledgeable about dis/ability and servingness at HSIs, and this study presents an opportunity and responsibility to explore both concurrently.

1.3.3 Why Now?

As I write these words, the world is experiencing a global pandemic. In the United States Covid-19 has emerged in addition to extant systemic racism and white supremacy. Students of color and their families are disproportionately affected by Covid-19- emotionally, financially, and physically to say the least (Center for Disease Control, 2020). For example, the COVID-19 infection rate for Latinxs is four times that of white individuals (Center for Disease Control, 2020).

As I write these words, Latinxs with dis/abilities are making decisions about fall enrollment in higher education and whether it is possible or worthwhile to attend classes virtually. As members of two of the largest minoritized groups in the U.S., Latinx students with dis/abilities are enrolling in higher education in greater numbers each year (Evans et al., 2017; *Excelencia* in Education, 2019). I conduct this study now with the goal of conducting an “intercategorical analysis of intersectionality that . . . foregrounds the structural context of race and dis/ability” (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Since its inception, postsecondary education in the United States has privileged white, abled individuals who were typically men (Thelin, 2011). More recently, HSIs in the U.S. have begun to complicate Latinx students’ minoritized identities, particularly for low-income, first-generation, and undocumented students (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Ordaz et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, as Erevelles (2006) notes, members of other minoritized groups tend to distance themselves from dis/ability rather than build communities of shared support. Erevelles suggests that this is because members of other minoritized groups fear being labeled as biologically deficient or intellectually lacking, especially considering the troubling history of the eugenics movement in the U.S. and its contemptible treatment of race (Erevelles, 2006; Dolmage, 2017). Some individuals within the dis/ability community have even sought to distance themselves from the dis/ability community; for example, some Deaf individuals prefer to be labeled as a linguistic minority group rather than dis/abled (Peña et al., 2016). While dis/ability labels are complex and individuals have the right to self-identify however they choose, the desire to distance oneself from dis/ability labels suggests that having a dis/ability is a condition that should be avoided at all costs (Erevelles, 2006). This study is important now because the dis/ability support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities may represent a positive affirmation of students’ multiply minoritized identities

within an institutional environment that is in theory committed to serving them (Garcia & Koren, 2020).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one federally designated, four-year HSI using ego network analysis (Borgatti et al., 2018). Social support is defined as “an enduring pattern of ties that maintain the psychological and physical integrity of the individual over time”; having a strong social support network helps improve individual well-being (Song et al., 2011, p. 117). Ultimately, I tried to uncover what helps Latinxs with dis/abilities feel supported in college instead of feeling anxious, lonely, impostor syndrome, to name a few (Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016; Karpicz, 2020). I explored the social support relationships that help Latinxs with dis/abilities enter a class feeling hopeful and positive, which research shows improves well-being, retention, and persistence (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Murray et al., 2013).

Broadly speaking, this study centered the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities who attend a university that has expressed commitment (through federal grants, laws, and institutional offices) to serving their racial and dis/ability identities as an HSI. I aimed to shed light on the issue of social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education and situate the responsibility for these students’ well-being as the concern of all who participate in university structures (Brown et al., 2019). This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the composition (relationship, homophily, tie strength, frequency of contact) of the dis/ability social support networks of Latinx students at one 4-year, private HSI?

- a. What are the structural characteristics (size, number of isolates, density) of the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one four-year, private HSI?
- b. How do these dis/ability support networks differ by dis/ability and type of social support (emotional, instrumental, informational)?

1.5 Guiding Theoretical and Epistemological Perspectives

I used critical dis/ability theory (CDT), specifically through the lens of DisCrit to guide this study (Annamma et. al., 2013). DisCrit prioritizes intersectional ontology and seeks to highlight the voices of minoritized students while considering the interaction between the individual and their historical, socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment, particularly as they pertain to notions of dis/ability and education (Annamma et al., 2013; Connor et al., 2016). Using DisCrit enabled me to examine how dis/ability and race affect students' support networks at an HSI (Annamma et al., 2013).

By exploring the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI, my goal was to add to extant CDT literature and provide an example of disability support created for (and by) Latinx students. Moreover, this study sought to answer the call of CDT scholars who note that higher education dis/ability researchers must incorporate decolonial epistemologies (Brown et al., 2019). Importantly, CDT and social support theory share (at least) two core tenets that align with decolonial and indigenous epistemologies: first, the importance of local knowledge as a way to understand the lived “ego” experience (in this case feeling supported as a Latinx student with dis/abilities on a postsecondary educational journey); and second, the notion that dis/ability

definitions and social support connections are fluid and change over time, space, and place (Brown et al., 2019; McCarty et al., 2019; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014).

In order to examine the personal (ego) networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities I used social support theory, which posits that the aid individuals receive from relationships with others helps them overcome challenges (McCarty et al., 2019). A three-factor model of social support (emotional, instrumental, and informational) has been validated among college students of color and is appropriate for this study (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Small, 2017).⁵ Social support theory is not inherently critical, but it can be used to question normative conceptions of what social support looks like, especially when combined with other critical theories (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Ermis-Demirtas et al., 2018).

For the study, I used social support theory to distinguish between different types of social support that participants perceive as helpful as they navigate college as multiply minoritized students (Small, 2017). Additionally, social support theory is useful because it helps explain how supportive relationships can improve the short and long-term mental health of Latinxs with dis/abilities and help disrupt the psycho-emotional disablism perpetuated by postsecondary educational institutions and individuals (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2016). In this way, social support theory serves as guiding framework for examining the ego networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities.

⁵ According to House (1981), social support can be categorized in four ways: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. More recently, however, scholars have included appraisal support as part of emotional support (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Small, 2017).

1.6 Methodology

This study used ego network analysis to examine the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one public, four-year HSI. I used ego network analysis to discover and describe a phenomenon that was thus far unknown: the social support that Latinxs with dis/abilities perceive as essential to their experience at an HSI (Streb, 2010). I employed a single-site study design in order to prioritize depth and focus on the ego network as the unit of analysis, wherein all students attend the same institution (McCarty et al., 2019). This study served as a steppingstone to future research which might examine the ego networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities using statistical models or test theory at additional sites (McCarty et al., 2019).

1.6.1 Research Design

This study employed ego network analysis to describe and visualize the characteristics and structure of Latinxs' personal dis/ability support networks using a single-site, cross-sectional design (McCarty et al., 2019). Ego network analysis is a form of social network analysis which has been used by critical quantitative scholars to reframe deficit narratives in higher education (Garcia et al., 2018; González Canché & Rios-Aguilar, 2015). The unit of analysis was students' personal networks; specifically, the relationships between Latinx college students with dis/abilities and the individuals who they perceive as providers of social support. Ego network analysis is inherently mixed-methods, and data are often collected through multiple sources such as surveys, interviews, observations, or archival documents (Baker-Doyle, 2015). The quantitative analyses helped me describe students' personal network structure and composition, while the qualitative analyses allowed me to investigate students' perceptions of their network as well as contextualize

the networks within the individual and institutional learning environments (Hollstein, 2011; McCarty, 2019).

1.6.1.1 Participants

Participants in the study were current students who identified as Latinx/a/o and identified as having at least one dis/ability. Students were invited to self-identify as having a dis/ability and did not need to be registered with Disability Support Services. By limiting the sample to the personal networks of Latinx students only, I was able to more authentically understand the support Latinx students need and construct a network where the needs of white students are irrelevant (not the focus of analysis or even a reference category). In doing so, I recognized that the participants are Latinxs with dis/abilities as well as other important identities which were essential to consider such as gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, and others (Stienstra, 2013).

1.6.1.2 Data Collection

The site for this study was Robles Private University (RPU; a pseudonym). RPU is a private four-year university in the western U.S. that has been an HSI since 2016. RPU enrolls 4,000 students, 39% of whom are Latinx (*Excelencia* in Education, 2021). Since 2016 RPU has received four federal HSI grants (two Title III grants and two Title V grants; Robles Private University, 2021). Approximately 6% of RPU students are registered with Disability Support Services (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). I reached out to the Director of Hispanic Serving Initiatives at RPU for assistance in distributing the invitation to participate and gained access to the site through her networks.

Participants completed an online survey that gathered demographic and dis/ability identity data, followed by a virtual ego network interview and an optional focus group to reflect on study

findings. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants so that students could self-identify as having a dis/ability (hidden or apparent) regardless of whether or not they were registered with dis/ability services; this type of sampling is useful when the given population is not apparent and has been used in previous social network studies (Borgatti et al., 2018).

1.6.1.3 Data Analysis

In order to answer my research questions, I employed a tri-modal approach to data analysis wherein the data informed each other, served as reliability checks, and provided space for a rich comparative analysis (see Appendix A; Baker-Doyle, 2015). First, I descriptively analyzed the demographic and social support survey data, which helped me understand the demographics of my sample as well as evaluate the students' self-reported perceptions of self-advocacy, general social support, and use of dis/ability resources and accommodations (Hoy & Adams, 2015; Lombardi et al., 2011). Next, I analyzed the quantitative network data derived from the network interviews in three steps: 1) used alter attribute files to construct measures that describe the ego's network, 2) created a sociogram for each ego network that I used to analyze network structure, and 3) created an adjacency matrix for each ego that indicated the relationship (or lack thereof) between each alter and every other alter in a given ego network and was aggregated to provide summary statistics (Borgatti, 2018). Lastly, I analyzed the qualitative network data from the interviews using an iterative coding process in order to understand students' interpretation of their dis/ability support networks (Morel and Coburn, 2019; Penuel et al., 2009). I began inductively and used thematic open coding (first cycle) followed by a second cycle using pattern coding, which is appropriate for social network studies (Saldaña, 2016).

After completing all three modes of analysis, I returned to my descriptive analysis of the survey data and compared the results with the qualitative and quantitative network data (Baker-

Doyle, 2015). Throughout my analysis I used CDT and social support theory as guiding frameworks as I looked for ways to critique normative, race-neutral structures and make meaning from the social relationships that participants identify.

1.7 Study Significance

Thelin (2011) posits that while access to higher education has expanded over time, this access has not been equitable; that is, individuals have benefited from opportunities relative to their position of power in society (Thelin, 2011). Much of the extant research on Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education aggregates them among other students with dis/abilities, ignoring differences in terms of race. Further, much of the focus of empirical critical dis/ability research concerns students in K-12 educational contexts. Perhaps ironically, Evans et al. (2017) note that Thelin's (2011) text entitled *A History of American Higher Education* contains neither a discussion of students with dis/abilities (of any race) nor a reference to the ADA (the federal law that mandates the inclusion of students with dis/abilities in higher education).

To date, research has found that postsecondary educational institutions compartmentalize the needs of students with dis/abilities, and that academic departments view support for students with dis/abilities to be the responsibility of dis/ability services offices (Sniatecki et al., 2015). Consequently, academic departments may be reluctant to recognize the role faculty and staff play in ensuring equity and access for students with dis/abilities (Riddell et al., 2005). Prior research has also shown that the burden of support and success often falls on students themselves as they may need to negotiate and search for the social support they need (Riddell et al., 2005). As such,

it is important for HSIs to understand the role of both formal and informal support in the experience of Latinxs with dis/abilities, especially at the intersection of race and dis/ability.

Few studies focus specifically on students of color with dis/abilities in higher education, opting instead for color-neutral ideologies that perpetuate systems of oppression within educational spaces (Annamma et al., 2017). There is a paucity of research addressing the experiences of Latinx students with dis/abilities at HSIs, who are minoritized in multiple ways (in terms of both race and ability, among other factors). This study has the potential to be significant because it complicates the literature on HSIs as well as dis/ability in higher education and use student voice to suggest ways for HSIs to better serve Latinxs with dis/abilities who likely have needs beyond dis/ability services.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

In order to maintain my focus on the ego networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one four-year, private HSI, it is important to note several delimitations of the study. First, I do not provide an in-depth analysis of any one type of dis/ability, nor do I treat dis/ability (or Latinx identity) as a monolith. I asked participants to describe their dis/ability in their own words rather than the diagnosis that may or may not have been placed on them by others. As such, this study only sought to aggregate students' dis/ability identities if patterns emerged organically from the data. Further, I only collected data from Latinx students with dis/abilities from one 4-year private HSI and I did not collect data from faculty, staff, or administrators at my site. This means that other students of color with dis/abilities (for example, Black students who do not identify as AfroLatinx) were excluded from this study. More research is needed to understand the social support of Black and

other ethnoracially minoritized students with dis/abilities in higher education, however this study intentionally and exclusively concerned Latinxs because my goal was to understand their social support networks within the context of an HSI and without comparing them to any other race.

Second, because I did not collect data from a bounded group of students (such as an entire department or all students enrolled in a course), I did not conduct whole network analysis in this study (Borgatti et al., 2018). I also preserved participants' anonymity and asked participants to create use pseudonyms for themselves and their alters. This means that I was not be able to triangulate or make connections across participant networks.

Relatedly, using ego network analysis rather than social network analysis had distinct implications on my study perspective. That is, the egos, or Latinxs with dis/abilities were at the center of this study. In a typical social network analysis study, researchers may take a bird's eye view of the network and isolate the network from the participants for purposes of analysis (McCarty et al., 2019). Because the study used ego network analysis, each network that emerged was the creation and perspective of that individual- their interpretation of their social support grounded in their educational experience. Whether the ties were real or reciprocated was irrelevant; the important factor was that the participant felt that they were there. McCarty et al. (2019) note that this approach gives the researcher a "deeper lens on the social environment of each participant, however this comes at the expense of the ability to capture broader processes" (p. 8).

1.9 Conclusion

Latinxs with dis/abilities face numerous challenges in higher education that present barriers to their well-being and success (García-Fernández, 2020; Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020). Social

support has been shown to improve the health, well-being, retention, and persistence for Latinx college students as well as college students with dis/abilities (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Murray et al., 2013; Song et al., 2011, p. 117). The purpose of this study was to understand the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one federally designated, four-year HSI using ego network analysis (Borgatti et al., 2018).

I used CDT and social support theory as guiding frameworks for the study, which situate dis/ability and race as multiple intersecting identities that are accompanied by multiple intersecting oppressions, including but not limited to racism, ableism, and disablism (Stienstra, 2013). The study employed ego network analysis to describe and visualize the characteristics and structure of Latinxs' personal dis/ability support networks using a single-site, cross-sectional design (McCarty et al., 2019). I employed a tri-modal approach to data analysis wherein the data inform each other, served as reliability checks, and provided space for a rich comparative analysis. This study complicated the literature on HSIs as well as dis/ability in higher education and used the student perspective to suggest ways for HSIs to better serve Latinxs with dis/abilities, whose unique needs are often overlooked in higher education (Erevelles, 2015; Taylor & Burnett, 2019).

2.0 Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks and Literature Review

The great educational philosopher Friere (1993) writes that “Human activity consists of action and reflection . . . and as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it” (p. 125). I begin this chapter by presenting the theoretical frameworks that I used to guide this study. I provide a brief overview of each theory as well as theoretical concepts that will be relevant to subsequent analyses and discussion. Next, I introduce my literature review, which is organized thematically. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the theory and literature I have reviewed. It is my hope that this chapter will illuminate the contributions of previous scholars while revealing a gap that this study addressed.

The purpose of this study was to examine how dis/ability and ethnoracial identity affect Latinx students’ support networks at an HSI with the goal of understanding who Latinxs with dis/abilities perceive as providing them essential social support, how these support relationships are interconnected, and the role that students feel their own self-advocacy and campus environment play in supporting their multiply minoritized identities (Annamma et al., 2013). I used critical dis/ability theory (CDT), specifically through the lens of DisCrit to guide this study (Annamma et al., 2013).⁶ DisCrit prioritizes intersectional ontology and seeks to highlight the voices of minoritized students while considering the interaction between the individual and their historical, socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment, particularly as they pertain to notions of

⁶ I use the term dis/ability instead of disability in order to disrupt normative understandings of the word and emphasize the social construction of a false binary between those who are “able” and those who are not (Connor et al., 2016; Goodley, 2014). I defer to the traditional term when referring to official laws, organizations, and publications.

dis/ability and education (Annamma et al., 2013; Connor et al., 2016). In order to examine the personal networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities, I used social support theory, which posits that the aid individuals receive from relationships with others helps them overcome challenges and improve well-being (McCarty et al., 2019).

I used Critical dis/ability theory as my guiding theoretical framework for defining, understanding, and complicating dis/ability and race in higher education. I used social support theory as a structural framework for thinking about and analyzing the nature of social support and its impact on students with dis/abilities at an HSI. Critical dis/ability theory helped me conduct a study that offers an alternative to normative, white, ableist narratives of dis/ability in higher education and social support theory helped me ensure that the focus of studying students' social support networks was on the well-being of the students themselves.

2.1 Critical Disability Theory

CDT seeks to emancipate individuals with dis/abilities from normative, oppressive conceptions of dis/ability as a medical condition (Corker, 1999; Hall, 2019). The medical model of dis/ability emerged during the middle of the nineteenth century when the science and medical fields classified dis/ability as a public health issue (Evans et al., 2017). The development of the medical model coincided with the beginning of the eugenics movement in the United States which considered people with dis/abilities to be deviant, defective individuals needing to be treated or cured in order to be accepted in society (Goodley, 2017; Myers et al., 2014). The medical model views dis/ability as an individual problem and does not view environmental, political, or sociohistorical issues as contributing factors (Dolmage, 2017). This model of dis/ability was the

guiding paradigm for the dis/ability legislation during the majority of the twentieth century, and was viewed as objective because it was legitimized by white male scientists who claimed to have pathological authority (Evans et al., 2017).

Critical dis/ability scholars were not the first to challenge the medical model of dis/ability (Peña et al., 2016). Two other models of dis/ability, the minority model and the social model, emerged in the 1970s in response to the medical model (Loewen & Pollard, 2010). The minority model presents individuals with dis/abilities as a minoritized, oppressed group who challenge societal expectations of beauty, intelligence, and autonomy; this approach has been successful in building community among individuals with dis/abilities who lobby for policy to combat discrimination (Evans et al., 2017; Hahn, 1994). Proponents of the social model view dis/ability as a social construct and seek to shift the focus of accommodations away from the individual and onto society (Myers et al., 2014; Oliver 1990). While these models are an important part of the evolution and history of dis/ability theory, they share two main flaws: first, they present false dichotomies that oversimplify the concept of dis/ability (individual/society and dis/abled/non-dis/abled), and second, neither model effectively accounts for the lived experience of individuals with dis/abilities (Evans et al., 2017; Loewen & Pollard, 2010; Peña et al., 2016).

2.1.1 Overview of CDT

CDT first emerged in the social sciences during the late 1990s as both a critique and extension of the social model of dis/ability (Corker, 1999; Evans et al., 2017). One of the earliest CDT scholars was Corker (1999) who theorized that the meaning of dis/ability is relational, temporal, and uncertain (Brown et al., 2019). As a method, CDT focuses on the lived experiences of individuals with dis/abilities, especially the emotional and physical impact of being labeled with

a dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2013; Goodley, 2017).⁷ Additionally, CDT asserts that the social, historical, and legal contexts of dis/ability reproduce oppression based on race, gender, class, and sexuality; CDT has been used to conduct critical analyses of power in relation to dis/ability and race (Erevelles, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Peña et al., 2016).

Asch (2017) acknowledges the CDT view of systems of oppression as the prevailing natural order of American life. A truly welcoming society, she asserts, addresses environments instead of impairments (Asch, 2017). Moreover, CDT asserts that dis/ability is socially constructed by environmental and sociohistorical conditions and suggests that dis/ability is (re)produced rather than discovered, and therefore fluid (Hall, 2019; Myers et al., 2014). This means that dis/ability might affect students differently at different times and in different environments (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

CDT is not really one theory, but a collection of interdisciplinary lenses that can be used to conceptualize dis/ability (Hall, 2019). One lens that emerged in recent years is DisCrit, which was first theorized by Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) within (and in response to) the field of special education. A branch of CDT, DisCrit establishes individuals with dis/abilities, many of whom are multiply minoritized, as leaders of their own scholarship (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). In the context of dis/ability, the phrase multiply minoritized refers to individuals with dis/abilities that belong to another minoritized group, usually race, gender or sexuality (Erevelles, 2011). According to DisCrit, intersectionality is an essential tool for humanizing students with

⁷ While person-first language (e.g. “student with dis/abilities”) is common in higher education, especially student affairs, some CDT scholars use dis/ability-first terminology (e.g., “dis/abled student”) in order to hold society responsible for the lack of accommodations and structural barriers to equity (Evans et al., 2017; Peña et al., 2016). Others use dis/ability-first language to show pride for their dis/ability identity (Loewen & Pollard, 2010). I prefer person-first language because I interpret the term “dis/abled” as a verb rather than an adjective and seek to prioritize my rights as person and student (Connor et al., 2016).

dis/abilities, especially those who are multiply minoritized (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). Intersectionality makes these multiple and simultaneous oppressions apparent, is also a tool that can be used to analyze oppression and privilege at the same time (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Cooper, 2015).

For the purpose of informing this study, I maintain that CDT through the lens of DisCrit was the most appropriate critical framework because of its commitment to disrupting the status quo in education, particularly by valuing multidimensional identities (Annama et al., 2013). I clarify my interpretation of the relationship between CDT and DisCrit below.

2.1.2 Relationship Between DisCrit and CDT

Scholars note that there has not been a clear epistemological distinction made between CDT and DisCrit (K. Brown, personal communication, February 13, 2020). For the purpose of this study, I considered DisCrit as a branch of CDT that helped me critically analyze the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities because it implored me to expose, deconstruct, and value students' historical-material and psycho-emotional realities. In their paper introducing DisCrit, Annama et al. (2013) complicate the interdependence of racism and ableism; specifically, the authors posit that the educational experiences of students of color are fundamentally different than those of their white peers with the same dis/abilities (Connor et al., 2016). When referencing CDT throughout this study, I employed it as a broad theoretical framework that is inclusive of DisCrit, and presented DisCrit as an exposition of CDT.

2.1.3 Relevant Theoretical Concepts

The following concepts were essential theoretical components of CDT that applied to this study. Although there are other important concepts related to CDT, ableism, whiteness as property, and CDT as emancipatory praxis were the three most relevant concepts to my research questions as well as the overall significance of the study. It is important for scholars using CDT to consider that CDT has only recently begun to complicate the intersection of race and ability; initial research, though critical of dis/ability oppression, was imbued with whiteness. It is crucial that future studies using CDT involve intercategory analyses of individuals' multiple identities (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Moreover, another limitation of CDT is that scholars tend to use overly complex, academic, and inaccessible language that prevents CDT research from being used by dis/ability activists, students, and practitioners (Evans et al., 2017).

2.1.3.1 Ableism

Ableism is a system of oppression that dehumanizes individuals with dis/abilities, treating them as broken and dysfunctional, not only on an interpersonal level, but systematically through law, policies and practices (Campbell, 2009). Connor et al. (2016) note that racism and ableism are interdependent systems of oppression. For example, a white student with a dis/ability may be educated within the general education classroom, while a student of color with the same dis/ability might be placed in a special education classroom (Annamma et al., 2013). From a critical dis/ability perspective, research that considers only those accommodations prescribed by clinicians (extended time, prescription medication, preferential seating, etc.) perpetuates a dominant ableist narrative by problematizing dis/ability, placing the burden on the individual, and assuming equal access to dis/ability testing (Weis, Dean & Osborne, 2014).

2.1.3.2 Whiteness as Property

CDT scholars recognize the need to reframe the dominant ableist narrative by adopting a more critical lens which recognizes whiteness and ability as property, meaning that claiming whiteness or “normal” ability bestows one with economic benefits (Campbell, 2009; Annamma et al., 2013). For example, some advocates of Deaf culture argue that they should be categorized as a linguistic minority rather than a type of dis/ability, and some CDT scholars have questioned the need to distance Deaf culture from dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2019). Furthermore, Erevelles (2011) notes that dis/ability was used to continue segregation after *Brown v. Board of Education* “officially” ended de jure racial segregation. Erevelles (2011) challenges these understandings of dis/ability as an impairment and dis/ability as a lack, among others. She posits that (and presents evidence for) dis/ability as historical rather than natural insofar as it is a social and political category of difference that has been used to abuse and segregate, individuals along racial and socioeconomic lines (Erevelles, 2011). This concept emerged through my interviews with Latinx students as they reflected on their dis/abilities.

2.1.3.3 CDT as Emancipatory Praxis

Erevelles (2011), a preeminent critical dis/ability scholar, suggests that dis/ability be retheorized as a “desiring machine” that does not lack anything (p. 50). According to this logic, we (dis/abled individuals) are exactly how we are meant to be. In this way, students with dis/abilities are not only humanized but empowered to be critical of environments, practices, and individuals that are dis/abling. This concept aligns with the broader goals of this study: to understand dis/ability-related social support in order to suggest and facilitate educational contexts where Latinxs with dis/abilities understand the unique characteristics of their own abilities to be assets.

Prior research suggests that critical, intersectional approaches to dis/ability have the power to liberate students from educational contexts that compartmentalize oppressions and identities without troubling the lived experience holistically (Peña et al., 2016). The notion of CDT as emancipatory praxis evokes the dis/ability rights mantra “Nothing about us without us” which was popularized in the U.S. by Charlton (2000).⁸ Perhaps the origins of this mantra are derived from Friere (1993), who wrote that “It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation” (p. 127). Relatedly, Brown et al. (2019) note that critical dis/ability research should ideally be directed by dis/abled individuals in order to “focus on the liberation that occurs through both the creation of new knowledge and by breaking down hierarchies of meaning that are used to control or exclude” (Brown et al., 2019, p. 24). For this study, I used CDT as both a theoretical and analytical lens.

2.2 Social Support Theory

Social support can be defined as aid, whether tangible or intangible, that individuals obtain from the members of their network, otherwise known as social relationships (Song et al., 2011). While social support and social capital are both network concepts (meaning they rely on relationships between individuals), they are fundamentally different. Social support is at its core about helpful relationships between individuals, while social capital refers to the resources that arise from these relationships (Heaney & Israel, 2008).

⁸ Charlton notes that he first heard the saying used by dis/ability rights activists in South Africa and Eastern Europe (Charlton, 2000).

The origins of modern social support theory are typically traced to John Cassel and Sidney Cobb, epidemiologists who began conducting research on social support during the 1970s (Song et al., 2011).⁹ Although social support theory is interdisciplinary, Cassel (1976) was interested in developing a theory of social support in order to prevent disease. He posited that social support reduces stress, which in turn protects individual health (Sarason et al., 1990).¹⁰ Cobb (1976) further developed the theory by working to understand social support as a construct; he believed that social support assists recovery from illness and generally leads individuals to at least one of the following sentiments: a sense of belonging, feeling cared for, and feeling loved or valued (Sarason et al., 1990).

Following the work of Cobb (1976) and Cassel (1976), numerous scholars from community psychology to sociology sought to categorize social support. For this study, I drew from House (1981) whose seminal work is still used to frame social support research in education and the social sciences (Perry et al., 2018). While it is unclear who first used social support in education research, it most likely evolved through the discipline of sociology (Perry et al., 2018). House (1981) conceptualized four types of social support: emotional (expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring), instrumental (tangible aid and services), informational (advice, suggestions, and information), and appraisal (information that is useful for self-evaluation such as constructive feedback and affirmation, for example; House, 1981). The types of social support describe the functional content of relationships and have been measured globally as well as individually

⁹ I use the phrase “modern” here to denote the origins of social support theory according to Western, colonial scientific research. It seems highly likely that the notion of social support improving individual well-being might also be attributed to indigenous ontologies that understand reality as relational and holistic (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014).

¹⁰ Lest we think our human species to be superior, it is worth noting that Cassel (1976) tested his theory on animals as well as humans, with similar findings.

(House, 1987; Song et al., 2011). I discuss the types of social support in greater detail below and situate social support theory in the context of the present study.

2.2.1 Overview of Social Support Theory

Proponents of social support theory argue that when people experience stressful situations (such as adjusting to college or disclosing a dis/ability to a professor), having relationships that provide resources (such as coping strategies, validation, access to information, or support communities) improve one's coping capacity and benefit both short and long-term mental and physiological health (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Social support theory is inherently network-based, as it involves the examination of relationships in order to make inferences about how these patterns of relationships help individuals cope with uncertainty, navigate challenges, and access resources (Perry et al., 2018).

When applying the theory to research, scholars note three important characteristics of social support: first, social support is intended to be helpful; second, social support is provided consciously; and third, social support is dynamic and can change over time (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Small, 2017). Small (2017), a sociologist of education suggests that in addition to psychosocial benefits, social support theory can be used to understand trust among individuals. He argues that, despite what common sense may tell us, our closest confidants- those who we seek out for social support regarding important matters- may not necessarily be our closest family and friends (Small, 2017). Lastly, social support theory encourages researchers to think about social support as a triangulation between social relationships, social support, and social networks; understanding the characteristics of each lead to a multidimensional conceptualization that can be

used to make inferences about the role and nature of social support that individual obtain from their contacts (House, 1987; McCarty et al., 2019)

I used social support theory to guide my approach to data collection and analysis with the hope of understanding existing support (or lack thereof) and creating pathways for future support and empowerment for Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs. Although social support was originally conceptualized as four types, recent studies validated a three-factor model of social support (emotional, instrumental, and informational) among college students of color that is appropriate for my study (Ermiş-Demirtas, 2018; Small, 2017).¹¹ In order to increase the social support available to Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs, the characteristics of social support for this group of students must first be understood. The goal is not merely to connect students with resources, but to holistically shape the experience and empower Latinxs with dis/abilities to feel supported through their postsecondary educational journey.

Social support theory has traditionally been used in white normative ways, and as such it must be situated contextually within understandings of systemic oppression and marginalization. Over the past 10 years, scholars have used social support theory with students of color and students with dis/abilities. I will discuss these studies in my literature review. A limitation of social support is that it is a broad, fluid and relational concept that has different meaning to different individuals (Son & Lin, 2011). While this may present a challenge to some, I see it as an opportunity: there is no one (white) version of social support. Participants in this study, as in other recent critical studies that use social support, defined what social support means to them.

¹¹ Scholars include appraisal support as part of emotional support (Small, 2017).

2.2.2 Relevant Theoretical Concepts

Below I explain two relevant dichotomies that were helpful in understanding the application of social support theory to my research: perceived versus received social support, and informal versus formal social support. As a result of social support theory being used for over forty years and across many disciplines, these concepts have been used in varying contexts, occasionally with ambiguous meanings (Song et al., 2011). Here, I clarify the meaning of these concepts with respect to the current study in the field of higher education.

2.2.2.1 Perceived vs. Received Social Support

When applying social support theory, scholars must choose whether they are interested in studying perceived or received (also referred to as actual or real support). Perceived support is the sense that others will provide aid (Wilcox et al., 2005). Perceived support is described as having a “direct effect” on well-being; social support theorists posit that the perception that support exists when it is needed leads individuals to have higher self-esteem and feel more in control of their environment than they would otherwise (Sarason et al., 1990; Wilcox et al., 2005, p. 709). Received support refers to the actual reported use of contacts for caring, affirmation, and help; social support theory suggests that received support has a “buffering effect,” meaning that it leads indirectly to health and well-being benefits by ameliorating an acute situation, thereby reducing stress (Perry et al., 2018; Wilcox et al., 2005).

It is important to reiterate that social support is a multidimensional, multidisciplinary concept (Song et al., 2011). Some scholars argue that perceived support is more important than received support because of its direct effect on health and wellness, while others caution that an individual’s beliefs about social support differ from their actual experience (Perry et al., 2018;

Small, 2017). Health and well-being are associated with several educational outcomes, such as a sense of belonging, self-advocacy, retention, and persistence (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Murray et al., 2013). The work of Small (2017) shows that by using structured social network interviews, perceived and received support can be studied at the same time.

2.2.2.2 Informal vs Formal Social Support

The distinction between formal and informal social support distinguishes the association between two individuals. In the context of higher education, these relationships may be formal (from dis/ability services, professors, and administrators on campus) as well as informal (from family, peers, and mentors outside the university; Daly, 2010; Wellman, 2007). This distinction describes the relationship itself rather than the situational context (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010). For example, a relationship between an advisor and advisee is characterized as formal, even if the support is provided in a casual setting.

2.3 CDT & Social Support

Using CDT as the guiding theoretical framework for this study will allow me to advance critical dis/ability scholarship on the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities in higher education, while social support theory will help me analyze social support within students' perceived personal networks. Because social support theory is not inherently critical, I maintain that in order to employ social support theory critically it should be paired with (and defer to) a theory that explicitly questions individuals relative positions of power in society, such as CDT (Brown et al., 2019). Nevertheless, CDT and social support theory share two important

principles that will be useful in this study: the belief that knowledge is situational and local, and the recognition that dis/ability and social support are fluid, socially constructed concepts (Brown et al., 2019; McCarty et al., 2019; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014).

Relatedly, Hernández-Saca et al. (2018) posit that scholars who answer the call for critical, intersectional dis/ability scholarship must acknowledge dis/ability as fluid and socially as well as temporally constructed. They note that,

When we view dis/ability at its intersections as a process within a sociohistorical context, wherein human bodies are represented and organized within social structures and everyday practices that are socially constructed, we can begin to understand how dis/ability is a fluid construct, concurrently a (re)presentation of what it signifies while its meaning is created and recreated over time and space. (Hernández-Saca et al., 2018, p. 290)

The sociohistorical context Hernández-Saca et al. (2018) describe is rooted in patriarchal systems of settler colonialism and white supremacy, which has important implications for ensuring the success and well-being of Latinx students with dis/abilities in U.S. higher education insofar as it instantiates dis/ability and racial oppression (Mingus, 2011; Shelton, 2020).

Consequently, I used CDT to approach social support in a more critical way; one that was grounded in the perceptions of students who are multiply minoritized and accepts and values their perceptions as truths. Moreover, I used social support theory to advocate for support that helps students overcome challenges created within this sociohistorical context. By incorporating CDT and social support theory, I hope that this study will contribute to a more humanizing, equitable, and inclusive understanding of social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI and position social support networks as examples of students' self-advocacy, resistance and success in higher education (Smith, 2012).

2.4 Literature Review

This literature review is divided into three sections; each section is organized using relevant themes from the literature. The sections are: CDT in educational research, students with dis/abilities in higher education, and social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities in higher education. I chose these sections because they provide essential background information for this study. To focus on the most recent scholarship, I attempted to limit this literature review to peer-reviewed studies published in the past decade (2010-2020). There was, however, one study from 2006 that I chose to retain due to its relevance to higher education, connection with other studies I reviewed, and authorship by two women with dis/abilities (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006).

2.5 CDT in Educational Research

In this section I explore how CDT has been used in educational research. Brown et al. (2019) posit that CDT is a “promising dis/ability model” for studying higher education, and scholars note that critical dis/ability projects are nascent in higher education research (Goodley et al., 2018; Peña et al., 2016). Therefore, I discuss how CDT has been used in educational research (including K-12 contexts) and organize the literature around three themes: Critical Dis/ability research methods, Critical Dis/ability research contexts, and Critical Dis/ability researcher and participant positionality.

For the purpose of informing this study, I specifically sought recent empirical studies wherein the authors explicitly named CDT and/or DisCrit as a theoretical framework. By reviewing the literature on CDT in educational research, my goal is to develop an understanding

of the ways in which CDT has been used to disrupt dominant narratives of ability in schools and universities (Annamma et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2019). Simultaneously, this review includes a racial analysis, with the goal of understanding how CDT, through DisCrit specifically, has been used to disrupt whiteness.

2.5.1 Critical Dis/ability Research Methods

This theme is important to highlight because it relates to how CDT has been operationalized through empirical studies. My literature review revealed that theoretical publications on CDT are abundant, but empirical studies are less so. By highlighting critical dis/ability methods that have been used by scholars thus far, I aim to provide a basis for my study. Indeed, one of the criticisms of CDT is that it is highly theoretical, which makes the methods even more important (Evans et al., 2017).

CDT has been used in both qualitative and quantitative studies of education, though qualitative studies represent the majority of the literature. Out of the ten studies I reviewed, seven were qualitative and three were quantitative, which suggests that quantitative have not (to the same extent) answered the critical call to reframe tired, dis/abling dis/ability narratives. All but two studies are case studies (one is multi-site) and autoethnographies, suggesting that site-specific and autoethnographic data are valuable to understanding the lived experiences of students with dis/abilities (Adams & Erevelles, 2016; Annamma, 2018; Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Goodley et al., 2018; Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019).

This point is further illustrated by the work of Gillies and Dupuis (2013) who conducted a participatory action research (PAR) study to draft a framework for creating an inclusive campus community at a Canadian university. The data from the interviews and focus groups allowed them

to identify six guiding principles (access for all, valuing the diversity and uniqueness of all, interdependence and social responsibility, diverse knowledge bases, voices, and perspectives, learning and education as tools for growth and change, value the whole person) and three characteristics (an interconnected campus community, a supportive and enabling campus community, an informed campus community) of a campus that is accessible to all students and, more importantly, provides opportunities for students with dis/abilities to engage in all facets of campus life (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013). Through different methods but with related goals, Hibbs and Pothier (2006) used a single-site, institutional policy analysis design to critically examine the dis/ability accommodations process at a large, public university in the Pacific Northwest. The focus of their analysis was to examine how students gain access to dis/ability resources and then critically contextualize this process within the University's stated approach and commitment to inclusive education. To do so, they analyzed the university documents, reports, websites, and course evaluations, as well as their own personal experience as alumni with dis/abilities. Their findings reveal that creating a campus culture of inclusion means enacting social change within an institution and relies on resources such as time, commitment, and problem-solving (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013). These studies demonstrate the value of using local knowledge to combat ableism in education and empower students with dis/abilities.

Centering the lived experience of students with dis/abilities was the explicit goal of some scholars who employed qualitative methods. Pearson and Boskovich (2019) used autoethnography to complicate understandings of dis/ability disclosure in higher education and shift the emotional, logistical, and structural burden away from the students and toward a model of shared accountability. They describe a "forced intimacy that occurs when disabled bodies are expected (or even demanded) to share personal information with able-bodied people in order to have basic

and safe access” (Pearson and Boskovich, 2019, p. 5). Viewed in this way, the continuous process of dis/ability disclosure serves to further dis/able and compartmentalize students’ dis/ability identities.

Though they represent distinct methods and educational contexts, Pearson and Boskovich (2019) and Annamma (2018) address how systems of oppression are perpetuated by those in power. In her study of incarcerated girls of color with emotional dis/abilities, Annamma (2018) used “counter cartographies” and interviews to uncover the ways that the school system had used deficit labeling and punishment to further dis/able the girls’ bodies and spirits (p. 23). Annamma (2018) uses educational journey mapping (EJM) to critically examine the school-to-prison pipeline. The girls were given a prompt, but encouraged to represent their educational journey however they saw fit (Annamma, 2018). The collaborative EJM process revealed that the girls see themselves as punished and criminalized throughout their educational experience for their race and dis/ability (Annamma, 2018). These studies align with the assertion that in order for CDT to be emancipatory it must honor the lived experiences of individuals with dis/abilities (Corker, 1999).

Using creative and non-traditional methods seems to be common in CDT research; I believe these types of methods are appropriate for engaging students with dis/abilities who may be able to participate more fully and substantially through visual, performative, interactive, and other methodologies. By engaging participants in education journey mapping and art-making, CDT scholars invite students with dis/abilities to contribute *to* a study rather than having collect data *from* them (Annamma, 2018; Goodley et al., 2018). For example, in their (2018) study of children with life-limiting/ life -threatening impairments (LL/LTI) Goodley et al. (2018) use multi-modal engagement that combine art-making with narrative analysis in order to explore the lived experiences of children with LL/LTIs. By combining CDT with affect theory, Goodley et al.

(2018) highlight the notion of “feeling dis/ability”, particularly the ways in which society creates meaning and emotion around the idea of being dis/abled.

Like Annamma (2018), Adams and Erevelles (2016) also use qualitative methods to understand how systemic oppression related to dis/ability, class, and race in special education impacts the school-to-prison pipeline. Data for their case study was collected over 2 years using open-ended interviews and observations at their site, which was an urban elementary school in New York (Adams & Erevelles, 2016). Their sample was comprised of 6 white women teachers, 1 white administrator, 1 Black social worker and 1 Black staff member. Their analysis revealed how special education students are further dis/abled through violent language and labeling that marks students as naughty, disruptive, criminal, and unfit for respectable (white, normative) education (Adams and Erevelles, 2016).

In their autoethnographic reflection of their experiences in special education as children, Hernández-Saca and Cannon (2019) investigated the emotional, spiritual, and psychological impact that dis/ability labels have on students of color. Their goal was to engage in a dialogue with their diagnoses in order to confront the trauma caused by childhood experiences with school where their intersectional oppressions were not addressed (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). Hernández-Saca is a gay, El Salvadorian and Palestinian male with a learning dis/ability (LD); Mercedes Cannon is a heterosexual Black woman with an S/LI (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). Although they have distinct ethnoracial, gender, sexuality, and even dis/ability identities, they share a sense of environment-based trauma and internalized oppression that has persisted throughout their educational trajectories, even in their doctoral studies (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). The authors personal experiences provide first-person accounts of the same trauma revealed by Adams and Erevelles (2016).

The studies I reviewed were largely qualitative with the exception of Fergus (2016), Robinson and Norton (2019), and Kozleski (2016) who employed a quantitative case study design and secondary analyses of state and national data, respectively. All three of these quantitative studies used a DisCrit framework to focus on issues of disproportionate representation of students of color in special education (Fergus, 2016; Kozleski, 2016; Robinson & Norton, 2019). Using a multi-site, quantitative design, Fergus (2016) employs correlational and descriptive analysis to investigate why students of color are disproportionately assigned special education labels. Fergus (2016) analyzed data collected from teachers ($n = 1600$) as part of the 2012-2013 Disproportionality School Climate (DSC) survey in a northeastern state. His analysis triangulates between teacher beliefs about student achievement, self-efficacy, and race; his findings support previous research exposing the negative, deficit beliefs that teachers have about students of color with dis/abilities as reasons for their overrepresentation in special education (Fergus, 2016). The teachers in his study reported feeling uncertain about their responsibility to be aware of cultural and ability differences (Fergus, 2016).

In her descriptive quantitative analysis of national school district data, Kozleski (2016) argued that the legitimized infrastructure for sorting and categorizing K-12 students according to race, gender, language, dis/ability, and socioeconomic status does not allow for within-category variability and consequently contributes to the overrepresentation of black and brown students in special education. Kozleski (2016) found that as a result of this sorting, dis/ability can obscure the possibility that race or other characteristics contributed to a students' special education labeling.

Further, her analysis suggests that systems of oppression based on race and ability were operationalized to label black students with dis/abilities differently based on geographic region (Kozleski, 2016). For example, although Black students were overrepresented in special education

nationally, southern states were more likely to label Black students as having intellectual dis/abilities, while northern states were more likely to identify Black students as having emotional and behavioral dis/orders (Kozleski, 2016). Similarly, Robinson and Norton (2019) calculated risk ratios to compare the diagnosis of Black students with Speech or Language Impairment (S/LI) to students of all other races nationally over a ten-year period (2004-2014). They found that 75% of U.S. states showed disproportionate representation of Black students in S/LI categories, suggesting that systemic racism and ableism actively work together to co-construct potentially false notions of impairment (Robinson & Norton, 2019).

Information about the participants of the quantitative CDT studies I reviewed was limited to demographic data based on questions asked from a previous survey administration (Fergus, 2016; Garcia, 2018; Kozleski, 2016; Robinson & Norton, 2019). Further, definitions of dis/ability and racial categories can vary from survey to survey, and this is likely out of the researcher's control. For example, Robinson and Norton (2019) used general enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for Black students with S/LI from all 50 states across a ten-year period (2004-2014). However, the U.S. Department of Education (DoED) only classifies students according to their *primary* dis/ability. This means that a student who has S/LI listed as their secondary dis/ability were not included in the sample despite having S/LI.

Still, an important trade-off is the ability to examine information about a large number of participants. Kozleski (2016) had access to participant school and school district, age group, dis/ability, educational environment (special or general education), and race. The analytic sample used in her study consisted of 3,814 special education students from one school district in Madison, Wisconsin. Although the district is split evenly between male and female students, male students make up 68% of special education students. Further disaggregation of her sample reveals that

Black students are overrepresented in special education, while all other racial groups are underrepresented (Kozleski, 2016).

These studies show that quantitative CDT research thus far have largely employed a DisCrit lens to focus on the overrepresentation of students of color in K-12 special education systems. Few quantitative studies I reviewed explicitly question the meaning of dis/ability, which is a problem. The present literature review revealed that a few CDT scholars have used quantitative methods (odds ratios, descriptive statistics, correlations) to study education (Fergus, 2016; Kozleski, 2016; Robinson & Norton, 2019). To date, there is a dearth of CDT research that employs critical quantitative methods to investigate ways to support Latinx students with dis/abilities (Garcia et al., 2018). Our understanding of dis/ability in higher education is not complete because previous work has yet to examine the dis/ability support networks of Latinxs, who are enrolling in higher education in greater numbers each year (Dolmage, 2018; Torres et al, 2019).

2.5.2 Critical Dis/ability Research Contexts

Thus far, CDT scholars have focused their studies primarily in K-12 educational contexts, though higher education is a growing area of research. Here, I highlight these two critical dis/ability research contexts because the literature I reviewed indicates that CDT has been applied differently in K-12 and postsecondary settings. CDT emerged as a critique of special education within K-12 contexts in the United States, and has been used to ask crucial, critical questions about who benefits from dis/ability studies (the school? the student? humanity?) and how special education actively segregates, abuses, dis/ables, and oppresses students of color in the public school system (Erevelles, 2010; Hernández-Saca, 2016). Though the number of empirical studies

are few, thus far in higher education CDT has been used to reconceptualize the concept of dis/ability within and across university policies, practices, and actors; this is especially true as it applies to educational access, outcomes, and career prospects for college students with dis/abilities (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Pearson and Boskovich, 2019).

Considering the interdependence of race and dis/ability, two studies collected data from elementary school teachers in order to understand the processes that lead to the overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Adams & Erevelles, 2016; Fergus, 2016). Adams and Erevelles (2016) employed DisCrit to investigate the “politics of dis/respectability” that lead black and brown elementary students with dis/abilities to be criminalized (p. 141). Their findings show that teachers mark students as deviants because of their race, class and dis/ability and support their argument that there is a connection between the normalization of violence among students of color with dis/abilities and the school-to-prison pipeline (Adams & Erevelles, 2016). Relatedly, Fergus (2016) used teacher beliefs about student achievement, self-efficacy, and race to understand why students of color are disproportionately assigned special education labels. He found a negative association between teacher’s pedagogical confidence and deficit thinking about students with dis/abilities. Additionally, the teachers that reported higher deficit thinking reported lower cultural awareness. The findings add to the body of literature supporting relational aspects of CDT that consider the educational environment and interactions therein as potentially dis/abling contexts (Peña et al., 2016).

These studies illustrate how teachers’ notions of race and ability are socially constructed and that special education labels can have harmful impact on the students they are meant to support (Adams & Erevelles, 2016; Fergus, 2016). The work of Hernández-Saca and Cannon (2019) contributes to the literature on childhood trauma caused by special education labels and serves as

a retrospective account of the issues raised by Fergus (2016). Kozleski (2016) showed that once a student is flagged for special education assessment, other characteristics such as race, gender disappear from reporting systems; she concluded that K-12 schools are not critically examining potential for dis/ability to mask impact of race and gender. The work of Robinson and Norton (2019) examines the same issues raised by Kozleski (2016; namely the disproportionate representation of Black students with dis/abilities in higher education) but over 10 a year period. These studies illustrate the way in which educational contexts at the macro and micro levels are represented in CDT literature.

Importantly, not all CDT research in K-12 education exists within a traditional school environment. Goodley et al. (2018) study children with LL/LTIs for whom school may or may not be a reality. Similarly, the girls in Annamma's (2018) study were living and attending school within a juvenile incarceration facility in the western United States. This context is important to CDT research because it acknowledges the violence that is imbued within the school-to-prison pipeline and problematizes the way in which dis/ability and race are at the center of systemic oppression in educational contexts (Annamma, 2018).

CDT has only recently been used in higher education research. Hibbs and Pothier (2006) analyzed the dis/ability accommodations process at one Canadian university and found that university practices and policies were based on the medical model of dis/ability. As a result, students noted the lack of flexibility with regard to negotiating equity (inclusivity from professors and other university actors once the proper paperwork was in place with the dis/ability office) and described a hostile environment that did not accept the changing nature of dis/ability over time and space (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). Previously, Corker (1999) theorized about the relationship between an individual's impairment and her environment. Advocating for a "paradigm of communication"

rather than a “paradigm of structure” she notes that dis/ability is constructed in the space between the impairment and oppression (Corker, 1999, p. 639).

Thinking about dis/ability in this way could lay the foundation for a collaborative approach to providing dis/ability services in higher education (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013). Like Hibbs and Pothier (2006), Pearson and Boskovich (2019) posit that universities need to go beyond what is mandated by law in order to serve dis/abled students; their findings show how multiply minoritized graduate students with dis/abilities experience stigma within the overall campus environment and feel as though they are “unexpected guests in higher education” (p. 20). Gillies and Dupuis (2014) suggest that higher education institutions should form “synergistic partnerships” with actors in the community at-large as well as local high schools in order to facilitate positive transitions and career opportunities for students with dis/abilities before and after their time in college (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013, p. 201).

2.5.3 Researcher and Participant Positionality

After reviewing the CDT education literature, I maintain that the authors who disclose their positionality, especially those with minoritized identities tend to be more critical. I think this is because CDT understands dis/ability to be relational, and positionality informs the relationship between an author, her participants, and the larger sociohistorical context (Peña et al., 2016). Across the publications I reviewed, each of the authors who mentioned their positionality with regard to race and dis/ability were individuals with minoritized identities; half of the 18 authors self-identified as having dis/ability and four authors with dis/abilities were scholars of color (Annamma, 2018; Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Hibbs & Pothier, 2006; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). This does not mean that the rest of the authors were white and

without a dis/ability, but it is noteworthy that authors with dominant identities did not explicitly identify as such.¹²

I believe that these omissions can perpetuate normative understandings of identity and are especially relevant in autoethnographic studies where the researchers are the participants. For example, in their autoethnographic study of dis/ability disclosure in higher education Pearson and Boskovich (2019) stated their positionality. Yet, Boskovich identified as a woman with Asperger's rather than a white woman with Asperger's while Pearson identified as a deaf Korean woman (Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Similarly, the term dis/ability is often assumed to denote physical dis/abilities unless noted otherwise (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006).

Participants in the studies that were situated in K-12 schools were predominantly white female teachers whose beliefs and practices were found to reinforce the notion of whiteness as property, as teachers were in a position of power to write referrals regarding students' academic achievement and behavior and pathologize minoritized students by labeling them as deviants (Adams & Erevelles, 2016; Annamma et al., 2013; Fergus, 2016). Adams and Erevelles (2016) interviewed one school administrator and one school social worker, but the rest of their participants were white female teachers.

2.5.4 Summary

CDT presents an opportunity for scholars to study dis/ability in higher education and problematize the medical model, which reinforces ableism in the academy (Dolmage, 2018; Evans

¹² Based on my familiarity with the scholars whose work I reviewed, I know that this is not the case. I refer here to positionality that was explicitly stated within the publication.

et al., 2017). As stated earlier and echoed by Hibbs and Pothier (2006), the medical model of dis/ability is the most commonly accepted model within higher education. This has implications for the way the process of disclosing is understood or misunderstood and which services are provided (Gillies & Dupuis, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Finally, it is noteworthy that none of the higher education studies I reviewed used quantitative designs. There seems to be an opportunity and a need for this. This study added to CDT literature by providing a multimethod, visual example of the ego networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI. To my knowledge, this was the first study use CDT and ego network analysis and the second study to focus exclusively on Latinxs with dis/abilities in the context of an HSI.

2.6 Students with Dis/abilities in Higher Education

Despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) three decades ago, students with dis/abilities are underrepresented in higher education research literature, particularly of the empirical type. Students with dis/abilities represent more than 10% of students enrolled in higher education institutions of all types yet are the subject of only 1% of peer-reviewed articles (Peña, 2014). This lack of research perpetuates an institutional culture of ableism in higher education that furthers microaggressive norms capable of undermining persistence (Museus & Harris, 2010).

In this section of the literature review I discuss recent scholarship on students with dis/abilities in higher education. It is divided into 5 themes that are relevant to this study: Latinx students with dis/abilities in higher education research, students with dis/abilities at HSIs,

dis/ability type in higher education research, faculty perceptions of students with dis/abilities, and experiences of students with dis/abilities in higher education.

It is important to note that I intentionally excluded studies about students with dis/ability in higher education that were published in medical journals. For example, in 2014 the *Journal of Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* published an article entitled “Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in postsecondary students” (Nugent & Smart, 2014). Nugent and Smart (2014) write that “students with ADHD have lower grade point averages and are more likely to withdraw from courses, to indulge in risky behaviors, and to have other psychiatric comorbidities than their non-ADHD peers (p.1781)” The authors conclude that college students with ADHD are more likely to have alcohol and drug addictions, and suggest that these students seek out dis/ability accommodations and pharmacological treatment (Nugent & Smart, 2014).¹³ These types of articles reinforce dominant, ableist, and deficit-based narrative about students with dis/abilities (in this case ADHD) and perpetuate the use of the medical model of dis/ability. They are without a doubt the antithesis of this dissertation.

2.6.1 Latinx Students with Dis/abilities in Higher Education

Currently, the majority of studies about Latinx students with dis/abilities are focused on special education in K-12 settings. Thus, there is a need for more empirical scholarship at the intersection of race and dis/ability in higher education. Few studies focus specifically on Latinxs with dis/abilities, opting instead for color-neutral ideologies that perpetuate systems of oppression

within educational spaces (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). For example, Madaus et al. (2014) reviewed every article published in the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*'s thirty year history. Out of 336 articles, only 11.7% ($n = 39$) described the ethnoracial identity of the sample; moreover, of the studies that described the sample approximately 50% ($n = 19$) included Black participants and only 33% ($n = 13$) included Latinx participants (Madaus et al., 2014).

This lack of compositional diversity in higher education studies of dis/ability is problematic because it excludes Latinxs with dis/abilities from the literature and reinforces a race-neutral understanding of students with dis/abilities. Further, while I reviewed one study that centers Latinx students with dis/abilities, the authors do not explore the intersection of dis/ability and ethnoracial identity. Specifically, Cardoso et al. (2013) use social-cognitive career theory (SCCT) to study STEM persistence among Black and Latinx students with dis/abilities ($n = 115$) at two 4-year public universities (an HBCU in the South and an urban University in the Northeast).¹⁴ Using hierarchical regression analysis, their model includes four tiers of variables: demographic variables in tier 1 (race/ethnicity, gender, advanced placement classes, father's education); contextual factors in tier 2 (social support and perceived barriers), SCCT items in tier 3 (academic milestone self-efficacy, barrier coping self-efficacy, outcome expectancy); and STEM career interest in tier 4 (Cardoso et al., 2013). They found that gender, advance placement classes, father's education (used as a proxy for socioeconomic status), social support, and STEM career interest are significant predictors of goal persistence; in other words, Black and Latinx women with dis/abilities are less likely to drop out of college, especially if they come from high SES backgrounds, are encouraged

¹⁴ Cardoso et al. (2013) do not indicate their positionality, nor do they provide information about multiracial students in their sample.

to persevere, and have opportunities to develop an interest in STEM fields (such as summer institutes or field trips; Cardoso et al., 2013). While these conclusions focus specifically on Black and Latinx students with dis/abilities, they reinforce normative and deficit-based understandings of race and ability in higher education.

From my perspective, Cardoso et al. (2013) use race and ability as categorical descriptors rather than meaningful, complex identities. Their quantitative analysis is rigorous, but shallow; we know nothing about how or why these identities influence one another to influence students' academic persistence within the context of the University. In other words, representation is not enough; research on students with dis/abilities in higher education should work to challenge deficit perspectives of students of color with dis/abilities because these perspectives instantiate whiteness and ability as property that leads to economic gains (by way of degree completion and career potential, for example; Annamma et al., 2013).

As a result, there is a call for a new generation of dis/ability scholars to do this work in critical and meaningful ways (Ferri, 2010). Ferri (2010) reviewed 99 dissertations that mentioned dis/ability studies in the abstract or title; twenty-four discussed race and/or ethnicity, but only 5 were from the field of education. Thus far I have only found one empirical, peer-reviewed study devoted entirely to Latinxs with dis/abilities, which I discuss below in the “Students with Dis/abilities at HSIs” section. I hope that this study begins to fill this void.

2.6.2 Students with Dis/abilities at HSIs

To the best of my knowledge, currently there are three studies examine students with dis/abilities at HSIs. Taylor and Burnett (2019) examine the web accessibility of 217 HSI websites and found that many were in violation of the ADA., suggesting that the websites are not inclusive

to Latinxs with dis/abilities. They contextualize their study within the Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Servingness* and posits that this “intersectional discrimination” represents an area where HSIs are not effectively serving their Latinx students (p. 15). At the time of this writing, Taylor and Burnett (2019) is the only study of Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs.

Agarwal's (2011) dissertation uses a mixed methods approach to examine the experiences of students with dis/abilities at a 4-year HSI. She specifically focuses on the interactions between students and faculty about dis/ability, and finds that students felt supported by faculty, but that these relationships could be improved (Agarwal, 2011). Although not peer-reviewed, this dissertation is valuable to this study because it is related contextually (a study of an HSI) and thematically (dis/ability support among Latinxs; Agarwal, 2011). Agarwal et al. (2014) used a qualitative case study design to understand the impact of a dis/ability student organization on social integration for students with dis/abilities. They show that informal social interaction between students with dis/abilities has a positive impact on the students' college experience; additionally, the creation of the student organization helped students without dis/abilities understand the struggles of their peers (Agarwal, 2014). Unlike Agarwal (2011) and Taylor and Burnett (2019), Agarwal (2014) does not operationalize the intersection of race and dis/ability; in other words, the University's HSI identity is the context for the study but not part of the content.

2.6.3 Dis/ability Type in Higher Education Research

Extant postsecondary dis/ability research has over-emphasized and ignored students' dis/ability type, both of which are problematic. Early research on dis/ability in higher education focused primarily on students with physical dis/abilities, especially veterans (Gelbar et al., 2015).

This is not surprising, as students with physical dis/abilities were the first to receive dis/ability services and accommodation at the institutional level (Gelbar et al., 2015). In their systematic literature review of research on students with physical dis/abilities, Gelbar et al. (2015) note that as more students with hidden dis/abilities - specifically mental health, ADHD, and learning dis/abilities (LD) have enrolled in postsecondary institutions in recent years, the focus of higher education dis/ability research has shifted accordingly and continues to grow. Many studies from the past 10 years focus on one dis/ability type in particular (e.g. autism, deaf students, ADHD); still, a considerable amount of studies address students with dis/abilities as one group without distinguishing between dis/ability type (Kimball et al., 2016; McManus et al., 2017; Sedgwick, 2017). Out of the 336 articles published in the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* over the past thirty years, only 45% (n = 151) of the articles described the students' specific dis/abilities (Madaus et al., 2014).

When specific dis/abilities are mentioned in higher education literature, prior research shows that dis/ability type is often categorized based on prevalence.¹⁵ In some cases researchers describe the dis/abilities of the students in their sample but do not incorporate dis/ability type in their analysis. For example, Cardoso et al. (2013; described above) note that “Most students reported sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental disabilities” (p. 274). Other scholars collapse dis/ability type into two categories (high prevalence and low prevalence) in order to create dichotomous variables (Lombardi et al., 2012).

In their study of the academic performance of first-generation students with dis/abilities at one PWI, Lombardi et al. (2012) defined a high prevalence dis/ability as either ADHD or LD and

¹⁵ While this may make sense logistically, I am doubtful of its epistemological utility where students well-being is concerned. Whether a dis/ability is common or not should not be the distinguishing characteristic. Moreover, these categorizations are meaningless when students have both a “high prevalence” and “low prevalence” dis/ability.

a low prevalence dis/ability as any other dis/ability type; they note that these categories are broad and suggest that future studies examine the needs of students using specific dis/ability type. Unsurprisingly, Lombardi et al. (2012) did not find dis/ability type to be significantly correlated with student's academic performance. Their findings suggest that first-generation student with dis/abilities have lower GPAs, family support, peer support, and greater financial stress than "continuing generation" students (non-first-generation students), even after controlling for gender, race, and dis/ability type.

In addition to using dis/ability categories that overly broad, I maintain that Lombardi et al. (2012) lack criticality in two important ways: first, the authors do not address the ethnoracial composition of the first generation students in their sample; and second, after explaining the results of their analyses, students' ethnoracial identities were neither mentioned in the discussion nor implications. The authors explain that 20% of their sample is first-generation students, and 22% of participants are students of color, but according to their correlational analyses being a first-generation student is not associated with being a student of color (Lombardi et al., 2012). This suggests that most of the first-generation students in their study were white, though the findings are not presented that way.

Distinguishing students by dis/ability type presents several problems in noted in the literature. First, by focusing on dis/ability type in higher education research, scholars may overlook the fact that many students with dis/abilities, myself included, have more than one dis/ability. Second, CDT scholars suggest that dis/ability is difficult to define, and as a result dis/abilities in higher education research have been classified in a variety of ways (e.g. prevalence, category, and visibility; Kimball et al., 2016). In their review of higher education dis/ability literature, Kimball et al. (2016) remind us that "there has been a shift away from a singular and homogenous disability

identity, toward an understanding of multiple disability identities in flexible social identity groupings” (p. 97). Third, dis/ability labels also change over time and context. For example, the criteria for autism spectrum dis/orders and ADHD have shifted such that scholars classified the same dis/ability in different ways depending upon legal definitions, university designation, and even survey instruments (Kimball et al., 2016). Finally, imposing categories on students with dis/ability can be dehumanizing and dis/abling because it prioritizes the relationship between the institution and sociohistorical forces over the relationship between the student and their dis/ability (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2016; Kimball et al., 2016).¹⁶

I followed the example of Vaccaro et al. (2018) who allowed students to represent their dis/ability in their own words. The authors use students’ self-identifications to create formal categories which they employ only to compare sample data to national data, with students’ descriptions taking precedence throughout the rest of the study. Their study employed grounded theory (using semi-structured interviews) to examine how 59 students from 4 institutions developed a sense of purpose (Vaccaro et al., 2018). Their results suggest that dis/ability identity factors (specifically sociohistorical constructions of dis/ability and stigma) play a central role in the “narrative of self” that students use to develop of a sense of purpose, which occurs through a process of imagination, exploration, and integration (Vaccaro et al., 2018). For example, university practices such as asking students to declare a major upon admission might hinder this process. In addition to allowing students to self-identify their dis/abilities, this study is noteworthy because Vaccaro et al. (2018) affirm dis/ability as a positive and unique social identity among other social identities such as ethnoracial identity, class, gender, and sexuality. This study is an example of

¹⁶ Fleming and Grace (2016) write that, the notion of distinguishing between physical and mental health is a colonial one. From an indigenous perspective, health is “holistic and all-encompassing” (p. 20). This point is a useful challenge to dominant understandings and classifications of dis/ability.

research that allows students with dis/abilities to shape what is considered acceptable knowledge about dis/abilities in higher education (Ferri et al., 2011).

2.6.4 Faculty Support for Students with Dis/abilities

To date, research has mainly found that postsecondary educational institutions compartmentalize the needs of students with dis/abilities. Faculty support for students with dis/abilities is important to this study because faculty represent an important source of support to be potentially observed in students' personal networks. Previous research has shown that academic departments view support for students with dis/abilities to be the responsibility of dis/ability services offices (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Ostiguy, 2018; Sniatecki et al., 2015). For instance, Sniatecki et al. (2015) surveyed 123 faculty members at a private liberal arts university in New York and found that academic departments may be reluctant to recognize the active role departmental actors play in ensuring equity and access for students with dis/abilities. Legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 exists to protect students with dis/abilities; the current versions of these laws envision an interactive negotiation process between students and faculty (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). In reality, however, the lack of faculty knowledge regarding this process has been shown to be a barrier for students with dis/abilities (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005). Relatedly, in a qualitative study conducted at a large public university in the Southwest, Barnard-Brak et al. (2010) show that faculty need to be more aware of the personal nature of dis/ability and accept that students with dis/abilities belong in college and should be treated as if they are worthy of postsecondary education.

In postsecondary contexts, ableism allows faculty and staff to assume there is a “normal” way of being, living, doing, and fundamentally existing in higher education institutions (Keller & Galgay, 2010). Moreover, Sniatecki et al. (2015) found that faculty are more likely to have negative attitudes toward students with hidden (learning, cognitive, and psychiatric) dis/abilities as compared with students with physical disabilities, suggesting that ableism may not affect all students with dis/abilities in the same way. Institutional actors have the power to reduce the stigma associated with dis/ability by facilitating dialogue about dis/ability that identifies faculty and administrators as support and success agents (Myers, Lindburg, & Nied, 2014). This is evident in Kranke et al.’s (2013) study of students with dis/abilities at an urban, private Midwestern university, wherein students reported that after having a positive experience disclosing their dis/ability to faculty they felt they could be more proactive with future dis/ability needs.

A considerable amount of scholarship on students with dis/abilities is devoted to questioning students’ need for dis/ability accommodations. Some scholars argue that student self-reports are not sufficient proof of dis/ability, and accommodations must be recommended by a doctor in order to be valid (Lovett et al., 2015; Weis et al., 2014). Weis et al. (2014) reviewed dis/ability documentation from 359 students at one community college in the Midwest; they posit that clinicians may be over-extending accommodation recommendations (such as extra time on exams and preferential seating) for students with learning dis/abilities, who then receive an unfair advantage over their non-dis/abled peers. The results of recent one quantitative study at a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania reinforce this view: 12% of faculty survey participants agreed that providing accommodations to students with documented disabilities provides an unfair advantage to students with dis/abilities and a disadvantage to the students in the rest of the class (Stevens et

al., 2018). Stevens et al. (2018) also found that 57% of faculty participants were unsure of their role in providing accommodations.

2.6.5 Self-Advocacy and Students with Dis/abilities in Higher Education

Thankfully, scholars over the past decade have examined more holistic ways to assist and advise students with dis/abilities. More specifically, self-advocacy and a sense of belonging among students with dis/abilities are important outcomes in several studies I reviewed. Vaccaro et al. (2015) used student narratives to construct a theoretical model of belonging for first-year college students with dis/abilities at a mid-size, public research university. They posit that for students with dis/abilities, developing a sense of belonging is a process that is highly dependent on social relationships, self-advocacy, and achieving academic success (Vaccaro et al., 2015). Prior research also shows that self-advocacy among students with dis/abilities increases their activism on campus, which in turn can improve their overall academic experience (Kimball et al., 2016). Kimball et al. (2016) interviewed 59 students (49 of whom were white) with various dis/abilities and found that when students were encouraged to advocate for their dis/ability needs they became more aware of the need to challenge the social stigma surrounding dis/ability.

Relatedly, in their multiple mediation study of students with dis/abilities at three large public universities, Fleming et al. (2017) found that students' sense of belonging and self-advocacy were positively associated with retention and serve as a buffer against adversity. It must be noted, however, that neither Fleming et al. (2017) nor Kimball et al. (2016) include a racial analysis of the students' experiences. I believe that research that employs concepts such as stigma and adversity should consider the racialized and socioeconomic experiences of their participants, as this would likely complicate the findings in a more meaningful way.

These studies suggest that when students with dis/abilities struggle academically, formal accommodations from dis/ability service providers may not be sufficient to overcome barrier to success. Research that moves beyond formal accommodations has the power to create intellectual space for prioritizing deeper social and environmental issues affecting students with dis/abilities. For example, scholars note that students with psychiatric dis/abilities are particularly vulnerable and may be less likely to seek out formal accommodations (Kranke et al., 2013). Kranke et al. (2013) found that when these students have positive experiences with informal dis/ability disclosure they are more likely to be proactive about their dis/ability needs in the future. In this way, social interactions with others play an important role in helping vulnerable students feel valued (Ostiguy, 2018).

2.6.6 Summary

In summation, research shows that postsecondary institutions still have a long way to go to ensure that students with dis/abilities have positive academic and non-academic experiences in school. To this end, institutional actors must critically examine the notion of responsibility in the context of educating students with dis/abilities. Serving dis/abled students without forcing us to assimilate to neurotypical and normalized ways of being should involve actors at all levels of the institution (Ostiguy, 2018).

2.7 Social Support for College Students: Latinx Students & Students with Disabilities

The literature on social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities is not extensive, but I attempt to synthesize it in this section. Social support has been shown to improve the health, well-being, retention, and persistence of Latinx college students as well as college students with dis/abilities, for whom social support also helps develop dis/ability pride (Bogart et al., 2018; Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Murray et al., 2013). To the best of my knowledge Agarwal's (2011) mixed methods dissertation is the only study that examines social support for Latinx college students with dis/abilities. As it is applicable to my study, I describe the study in detail below before situating it in relation to the study.

Although Agarwal (2011) does not focus exclusively on Latinxs, the sample for this study includes students with dis/abilities at one 4-year public HSI, and 71% of participants identified as Latinx or Hispanic. Agarwal (2011) explores social support as one component of her study, which investigates the perception of the overall campus climate among students with dis/abilities. She developed her own survey for the study and identifies the following social support items: "I have developed meaningful interpersonal relationships in college", "Nondisabled students are genuinely friendly toward disabled students", "I feel welcomed by other participants in activities" (Agarwal, 2011, p. 142). According to Agarwal (2011), 104 students completed the survey, and 11 participated in in-depth interviews. During the interviews Agarwal (2011) asked participants about the social support they receive from their family and friends.

Approximately half of the students in Agarwal's (2011) study reported feeling welcomed during activities ($n = 51$) and supported by their nondis/abled peers ($n = 53$), while 62% ($n = 64$) of the student participants indicated that they had developed meaningful relationships in college. Correspondingly, the qualitative data reveals that Latinx students view their family as their greatest

source of support during college. Some students were concerned that their family would be overprotective of their dis/ability and as a result limit their independence, but overall students felt that their family provides invaluable emotional support (Agarwal, 2011). Lastly, support from peers seemed to be somewhat lacking, as participants described feeling isolated socially due to their dis/ability. Interestingly, students with hidden dis/abilities reported feeling stigmatized by their nondis/abled peers when they disclosed their dis/ability (Agarwal, 2011).

Agarwal's (2011) dissertation is an important foundation for this study because the research context (a 4-year public HSI) and participants (Latinxs with dis/abilities, or mostly in her case) are the same. Agarwal (2011) complicates notions of what it means to be a Latinx student with dis/abilities and incorporates elements of Latinx culture into her analysis and discussion. As a first-generation immigrant from India who was, at the time of writing the Assistant Director of Disabled Student Services at the University, she is familiar with many of the barriers her participants face, even if she does not have a dis/ability.

Despite the similarities I described above with regard to context and participants, this study will differ from Agarwal (2011) in several important ways. First, she incorporates neither CDT nor social support theory, the latter of which is especially concerning. As such, her social support questions are not grounded in theory and seem arbitrary. Second, social support is not the main focus of her study, which is analytically broad but lacks depth. While her study covers many topics related to students' experience on campus, the results are presented descriptively, with minimal tables and no figures. Third, to me Agarwal (2011) reads more like an extended evaluation report than a dissertation. The study does not question normative understandings of dis/ability or identify with a specific model of dis/ability. Fourth, Agarwal (2011) does not present dis/ability as an identity to be valued, rather, she seems to identify and suggest ways for students to succeed in spite

of their dis/ability without offering ways that the campus environment might dis/able students. Nevertheless, this study will be useful as a reference and to compare my findings, particularly with regard to family social support and recommendations for the institution.

2.7.1 Social Support for Latinx College Students

Using social support to examine persistence and retention among Latinxs is the focus of two studies I reviewed. The lack of empirical studies on Latinxs and social support in higher education suggests that social support may be an outdated concept, as I limited my literature review to studies published in the past ten years. Despite this, the concept of social support continues to be used in social network research, research in health and psychology, and well-being (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Meng et al., 2017). It is a relevant concept that is useful when considering postsecondary students with multiply minoritized identities. As the next section will show, social support has recently been used to study students with dis/abilities in higher education.

Citing Tinto's (1993; white normative) theory of college student departure, Baker and Robnett (2012) argue that social support from the college environment leads to greater integration within the campus community, and consequently greater retention rates among Black and Latinx students. They posit that in contrast to high school, where social support from family is more important than social support from school, during college it is key that social support comes from the campus environment. Their quantitative case study was conducted at a 4-year public university in California; they use logistic regression analysis to examine the impact of race and campus social support on retention in college (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Their sample size was relatively large ($n = 7,417$), and 11.1% of participants ($n = 191$) identified as Latinx or Chicano (Baker & Robnett,

2012).¹⁷ Social support was measured in two ways: how often a participant studied on campus with other students, and whether the participant was a member of a student club (Baker & Robnett, 2012). There were no questions about off-campus social support, though Baker and Robnett (2012) did measure participants' "off-campus ties" which include working off-campus more than 20 hours per week and fulfilling family responsibilities more than 17 hours per week.

Results from their study indicate that Latinx students are 6 times more likely to stay enrolled in college if they are a member of a student club, and more likely than Black, Asian, and white students to have off-campus ties (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Rather than view these off-campus ties as potential social supports, Baker and Robnett (2012) conclude that Latinxs' off-campus work and family commitments inhibit their integration on campus, lowering their connection to the university and contributing to lower retention rates. Baker and Robnett's (2012) claim rests on the questionable assumption that joining a student group and studying with peers on campus constitutes campus social support. A more critical analysis might include additional social support constructs (especially family social support) as well as explore ways that the campus environment might oppress Latinx students. For example, Latinxs may prefer to study with peers of the same ethnoracial identity who also have off-campus ties, may not live near campus, or may not want to spend time on campus if they feel their values and identities are not reflected in faculty, staff, and students (Torres et al., 2019).

Unlike Baker and Robnett (2012) who did not use a theoretically-grounded social support instrument, Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) use the Perceived Social Support Inventory-Friends (PSS-Fr) to investigate perceived social support in their study of persistence among Latina

¹⁷ Baker and Robnett (2012) state that the population of Latinx students in their sample (11%) is representative of the population of Latinxs undergraduates at the time of data collection, which took place during the 2004-2005 school year.

sorority members from 9 different PWIs in the Midwest. The PSS-Fr asks questions about emotional, informational, and instrumental support from friends, though it is important to note that the instrument itself does not explicitly identify these constructs (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Procidano & Heller, 1983). Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) use hierarchical regression to examine the influence of self-efficacy, social support, and cultural fit influence Latina sorority members' persistence in college and find that perception of the campus environment was the strongest predictor of academic persistence. They observe that through participation in the Latina sorority Latina students develop networks of support that make them feel comfortable and welcome within a Latina community, especially when the university as a whole is primarily white (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). This study provides helpful information for me as I navigate my positionality as a non-Latinx student because it provides additional information about the social support that Latinas consider valuable to their postsecondary experience. It is also helpful in demonstrating how Latinas' well-being is affected by social support in higher education contexts, which is associated with educational outcomes.

Prior research on friend and family social support for Latinx college students further reinforces the findings of Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013). Ermis-Demirtas et al. (2018) assert that among Latinxs at one HSI in the South, social support from family, friends, and significant others helps reduce stress, increase self-efficacy, and protects them from challenges that arise in college. These findings contradict those of Baker and Robnett (2012) who argued that family and friends pull Latinxs away from the campus community.

The purpose of Ermis-Demirtas et al.'s (2018) study is to validate the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) among Latinx college students at one HSI. The MSPSS is a 12-item instrument that measures social support from three sources: friends, family,

and significant others. Sample items include “There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings” and “I can talk about my problems with my family” (Ermis-Demirtas et al., 2018, p. 476). Ermis-Demirtas et al. (2018) conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the MSPSS and show that the instrument is reliable ($\alpha = .92$) and supports the three-factor, 12-item structure. This study is relevant to my study because it validates a measure of social support among Latinxs at one HSI. While I was initially interested in using the MSPSS, I do not think it is the most appropriate instrument for my study because the items are not specific to dis/ability and its scope is limited to off-campus, informal relationships.

Finally, prior research also suggests that institutions play an important role in ensuring support for their students. In their study of Latinxs at one 4-year public HSI Gonzalez et al. (2020) found that Latinx students observed a connection between the University’s failure to embrace its HSI identity and a lack of holistic support at the individual level. Relatedly, In their (2015) study “Culturally Relevant Practices that ‘Serve’ Students at a Hispanic Serving Institution” Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) suggest that support programs and services for Latinx students should be institutionalized through funding, administrator advocacy, and integration within the core structures of the institution. These findings echo those of Torres et al. (2019) who show that in addition to support from family members, Latinx college students feel encouraged by positive relationships with faculty and cultural affinity (seeing your identities reflected in the university), which in turn affect students’ intent to persist.

2.7.2 Social Support for College Students With Dis/abilities

Positive relationships with faculty, cultural affinity, and college transition programs have also been shown to be crucial supports for students with dis/abilities, in addition to peer support

and dis/ability awareness (Lombardi et al., 2016; Riddell et al., 2005). Previous studies indicate that students with dis/abilities who have established support networks are more comfortable requesting accommodations and disclosing their dis/ability, which provides them access to important resources (Triano, 2003). Relatedly, social support has been shown to predict dis/ability pride, meaning that one's dis/ability identity is positive and affirming; scholars note that dis/ability pride among college students is rare and should be nourished whenever possible (Bogart et al., 2018).

Students with dis/abilities face numerous challenges in higher education, yet their social support networks have been shown to be smaller than those of their non-dis/abled peers (Eisenman et al., 2013). In their study of students with intellectual dis/abilities (ID) Eisenman et al. (2013) employ ego network analysis to describe the structure and composition of participants' social support networks across two time points.¹⁸ Participants (n = 12) were students with ID who were enrolled in the Career and Life Studies Certificate program at the University of Delaware, which is a specific program for students with dis/abilities (Eisenman et al., 2013). Eisenman et al. (2013) found that participants initially relied on family, caregivers (if applicable), and instructors for social support, but over time the authors observed an increase in the proportion of network members that were peers. Even those networks that remained the same size experienced "tie churn", meaning that network members who were caregivers were replaced with peers (Eisenman et al, 2013, p. 373).

This study is useful to my study because it employs similar analyses using similar methods among a relatively similar population, and the network maps are especially helpful to see in the

¹⁸ This study is an exploratory study. Eisenman et al. (2013) hope to use the protocol from this study to investigate the influence of social support networks on employment outcomes.

context of a related study. Unlike my study, the 75% ($n = 9$) of the participants in this study were men and 83% ($n = 10$) were white, which reveals that although the participants were minoritized in terms of dis/ability, their ethnoracial and gender identities afford them privilege in society (Eisenman et al., 2013). The authors do not provide any information about the ethnoracial, gender, or other background information about the network members, which to me seems to have an isolating effect on the participants.

Another social support instrument, the College Students with Disabilities Campus Climate survey (CSDCC) was developed in recent years by Lombardi et al. (2011) to measure perceived support from family, friends, faculty, dis/ability services as well as self-advocacy. In their initial validation of the CSDCC Lombardi et al. (2011) found that students perceive support from peers, family, and their institution to be important to their college experience. The 40-item, nine-factor measure performed well across gender and dis/ability type. The CSDCC is relevant to this study for two reasons: first, it asks specific questions about dis/ability-related social support for college students; and second, it is multifaceted, meaning it asks college students with dis/abilities about support from a variety of formal and informal sources within the same instrument (Lombardi et al., 2011). The CSDCC also addresses topics such as dis/ability stigma and perception of the overall campus climate (Lombardi et al., 2011). My main reservation is that the CSDCC has not been validated with Latinx students (4% of the participants in the initial validation were Latinx and 22% were students of color). Still, the instrument is shown to be reliable ($\alpha = .80$), theoretically grounded, and is appropriate for examining social support among college students with dis/abilities (Lombardi et al., 2011).

A subsequent application of the CSDCC provided additional information about building dis/ability-related social support. Murray et al. (2013) surveyed 179 students with dis/abilities at

4-year university in the Pacific Northwest. Their findings suggest that it is beneficial for students with dis/abilities to simultaneously receive assistance in two areas: improving the quality of their supportive relationships and gaining access to supportive individuals in order to form new supportive relationships (Murray et al., 2013). In this way, the authors show that students with dis/abilities who feel supported by a variety of individuals on and off-campus and are satisfied with the social support they receive have an easier time adjusting to college; moreover, social support can help students cope with financial stress (Murray et al., 2013).

These findings are consistent with those of Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) with regard to social support helping students overcome barriers to their postsecondary education. Students with mental health dis/abilities reported having fewer social support connections, though their satisfaction with social support remained consistent with other types of dis/abilities (Murray et al., 2013). Although they do not involve network analyses, the implications of these studies are important foundations for me to consider. The authors perform analyses across a wide variety of dis/ability types, but miss opportunities to complicate different types of social support. For example, it would be useful to know if students with dis/abilities perceive emotional support alone as helping them adjust to college, or if instrumental and informational support are essential as well. Additionally, while I appreciate the way that Murray et al.(2013) hold postsecondary institutions, faculty, and staff accountable for supporting students with dis/abilities and providing an inclusive campus climate, their study lacks an intersectional analysis of dis/ability support and as a result is another example of what Bell (2017) calls “white dis/ability studies” (p. 408).

2.7.3 Summary

The literature I reviewed in this section shows that various instruments have been used to study social support in postsecondary institutions across the United States. Social support is employed as an independent variable used to predict academic outcomes such as persistence, retention, academic achievement, financial stress, adjustment to college, and self-efficacy. Social support can also be examined as a dependent variable, especially when using ego network analysis to understand more about the social support relationships. If existing scholarship demonstrates that social support improves the well-being and postsecondary experiences of students with dis/abilities, then there is need to examine the structure of the social support networks in order to understand specific sources and types of social support. This is particularly true for Latinx students with dis/abilities, whose experiences have largely been absent from research on dis/ability.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced and explained the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, including CDT and social support theory. Together, these frameworks helped me conduct a critical, intersectional, empirical analysis of dis/ability in higher education. I also reviewed extant literature related to three topics: CDT in educational research, students with dis/abilities in higher education, and social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities in higher education. There is a paucity of peer-reviewed research on dis/ability and ethnoracial identity in higher education, and CDT scholars note that this is an area of much-needed growth. The literature I reviewed suggests that students with dis/abilities in higher education benefit from support outside of the

accommodations provided by dis/ability services. Studies suggest that both informal and formal support enhances students' experience and likely retention in college. Thus far, however, research about college students with dis/abilities has failed to provide an intersectional analysis of the social support networks of Latinxs, and it appears that this exploratory study fills an important gap in the literature.

3.0 Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methods I used to collect data that allowed me to describe and analyze the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI. The purpose of this study was to understand the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one federally designated, four-year HSI using ego network analysis (Borgatti et al., 2018). The unit of analysis was students' personal networks; specifically, the relationships between Latinx college students with dis/abilities and the individuals who they perceived as providers of social support. I used ego network analysis to describe students' personal network structure and composition, investigate students' perceptions of their network, and contextualize the network within the individual and institutional learning environments (Hollstein, 2011; McCarty, 2019).

Broadly speaking, this study illuminates the perspectives of Latinxs with dis/abilities who attend a university that has expressed commitment (through federal grants, laws, and institutional offices) to serving their racial and dis/ability identities as an HSI. I shed light on the educational support experiences of Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education and situate the responsibility for these students' well-being as the concern of all who participate in university structures (Brown et al., 2019). By exploring the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI, this study adds to CDT literature and provide an example of disability support created for (and by) Latinx students.

Moreover, this study answers the call of CDT scholars who note that higher education dis/ability researchers must incorporate decolonial methodologies and epistemologies wherein "spaces of marginalization . . . become spaces of resistance and hope" (Brown et al., 2019; Smith, 2012, p. 4). Importantly, CDT, ego network analysis and social support theory share (at least) two

core tenets that align with decolonial and indigenous epistemologies: first, the importance of local knowledge as a way to understand the lived experience of social support; and second, the notion that dis/ability definitions and social support connections are fluid and change over time, space, and place (Brown et al., 2019; McCarty et al., 2019; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). Patel (2016) writes that,

We do not exist in isolation from social and material contexts, separated from each other. This is true in the sense of humans being connected as well as human and nonhuman entities being connected and coming into existence with each other. This is a long-standing tenet of much of indigenous knowledge systems . . . educational research has taken shape, continues to take shape, and will continue to take shape in dynamic relation, or intra-relation, as Barad would put it, with its sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts (p. 49-51).

The purpose of this study was to use a CDT framework to guide my understanding of the personal dis/ability social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities, knowing that students' definitions of dis/ability and the support itself are interrelated and dynamic. I begin with this point because it is important to acknowledge the epistemological overlap and compatibility between my chosen theory and method. That is not to say that all ego network research is decolonial, but the shared tenets offer an opportunity for critical exploration.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the composition (relationship, homophily, tie strength, frequency of contact) of the dis/ability social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one 4-year, private HSI?

- a. What are the structural characteristics (size, number of isolates, density) of the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one four-year, private HSI?
- b. How do these dis/ability support networks differ by dis/ability and type of social support (emotional, instrumental, informational)?

The first research question relates to the attributes and perceived social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities. The second research question asks about students' individual support-seeking actions and their perception of the HSI learning environment. This is especially important because according to CDT dis/ability exists on the continuum between individual impairments and the environment (Evans et al., 2017). In other words, environments can be dis/abling.¹⁹ Lastly, an additional goal of this study was to use Latinx students' social support experiences to assert their ethnoracial and dis/ability identities as shared positive identities while simultaneously dismantling the stigma perpetuated by racism and ableism in higher education (Dolmage, 2017). Miles et al. (2014) note that conceptual frameworks are useful for mapping the territory that was explored in a study. Appendix B presents the conceptual framework or roadmap for this study, wherein I situate the research questions graphically and contextually. This conceptual framework is also a visual representation of the social locations of the study as they correspond to the research questions.

¹⁹ The current global pandemic offers an opportunity for exposition of this point. My husband relies on reading lips as he is hard of hearing. Currently, we are required to wear masks in public spaces. While the masks may prevent droplets from spreading, they also prevent Eric from reading lips. Almost overnight, public spaces became (more) disabling spaces.

3.1 Methods

Ego network analysis (also called personal network analysis) is a form of social network analysis which is an interdisciplinary method that originated from the fields of sociology, mathematics, and computer science and has since been used in economics, psychology, and education research (Fuhrt, 2010). According to Borgatti (2018), network analysis allows researchers to examine the characteristics and structure of the relationships between actors in a given system. For example, Coburn et al. (2012) used social network analysis to understand teachers' advice networks within a school district in the southwestern United States. Their study used network analysis to map patterns of interaction between teachers in the district and describe the strength and depth of the ties between the teachers in order to determine which aspects of the relationships are most important to sustainable instructional reform (Coburn et al., 2012). Ego network analysis shifts the focus from a whole network (such as a school, district or organization) to the perspective of the individual their connection with others (Carolan, 2014; Perry et al., 2018).

Network research inherently blurs the line between qualitative and quantitative methods: while its foundation is quantitative, network data come from social relationships and require inductive modeling strategies such as “generating big ideas from small observations” (Carolan, 2014, p. 36). González Canche and Rios-Aguilar (2015) note that network studies can most effectively contribute to the field of higher education through critical, multidisciplinary, multimethod, and equity-minded research. For example, in their quantitative study of peer effects on course-taking at one community college González Canche and Rios-Aguilar (2015) complicated the relationship between peer influence and course-taking by constructing network variables that disaggregate students' ethnoracial, gender, and socioeconomic identities and account for interactions among these disaggregated identities. Through critical network analysis, the

authors found that Black and Latinx males benefit (complete more credits) when they take classes with peers with the same ethnoracial identity; the authors note that a qualitative network approach would be the next step in understanding the reasons behind this finding (González Canche & Rios-Aguilar, 2015).

3.1.1 Ego Network Analysis

To answer the research questions, I employed ego network analysis with the goal of describing and visualizing the characteristics and structure of Latinxs' perceived dis/ability support networks (McCarty et al., 2019). In the case of exploratory research, quantitative approaches to ego network analysis typically study the composition and structure of personal networks descriptively and visually as well as examine patterns across participant networks (McCarty et al., 2019). Other approaches use network data to construct variables that are then used in statistical models such as regression analysis (McCarty et al., 2019). Two common approaches to qualitative ego network analysis are grounded theory and content analysis (Hollstein, 2011; Penuel et al., 2009).

Appendix C shows an example of an egocentric network structure. Data were collected from the perspective of the ego, or the individual (for example, a Latinx student with dis/abilities) with the goal of identifying an individual's influential relationships related to a particular topic (Borgatti, 2018). Carolan (2014) notes that an ego's network can provide information about a variety of resources such as support, pressure, and influence, to name a few. Scholars suggest that personal network analysis is an appropriate tool for studying social support because it allows researchers to gain an understanding of the "functional content of social support" by measuring

the composition, structure, and practices of an individual's relationships (Eisenman et al., 2013; Fernández-Peña, Molina & Valero, 2018, p. 5).

Egocentric data are typically collected using surveys, interviews, observations, or archival documents (Baker-Doyle, 2015). It is common for researchers to use multiple data sources within a study in order to elicit information about the people in an ego's network as well as the characteristics and attributes of their relationships with others, who are known as alters (Fernández-Peña et al., 2018; Small, 2017). Alters are nodes (individuals) with ties to the ego; for example, the individuals that the ego identifies as providers of social support (Borgatti, 2018). An example of a tie is the role that the alter plays in the ego's life, such as father, advisor, or boss (González Canché & Rios-Aguilar, 2015). Appendix D presents ego network terms with definitions and examples that are relevant to this study.

Regardless of the data source, researchers usually gather ego network compositional and structural data in three steps: generate the names of alters; ask about the attributes of each named alter (e.g., ethnoracial identity, gender, age) and the qualities of their relationship with the ego (such as frequency of contact and closeness), and lastly ask about possible connections between alters (Borgatti, 2018).

Network data is unique and complex, and highly visual (Daly, 2010). Moreover, understanding network composition, context, practices and structure can help researchers, practitioners, and even participants (in the case of participant-aided sociograms) reflect on and leverage resources more effectively (Daly, 2010; Hogan et al., 2007). To this end, scholars also use surveys and interviews to collect network data regarding content, patterns, and motivation for interaction (Morel & Coburn, 2019; Baker-Doyle, 2015).

The egos networks that I examined in this study belonged to Latinx students with dis/abilities whose identities are not represented in white, ableist narratives of higher education. For example, the cultural value of *familismo* prioritizes reciprocity, loyalty, and family over individual interests (Delgado-Romero et al., 2008; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Therefore, I hypothesized that family support would play an important role in the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities. Relatedly, Kezar (2014) recommends that future studies on higher education that use network analysis should shift away from the campus as the network and instead examine networks that exist within and outside of campus. Applied in this way, ego network analysis allowed me to focus on the support relationships that Latinxs with dis/abilities perceive in various social contexts such as family, professional, and community (Borgatti, 2018).

While social network analysis has been used in higher education research for the past forty years, it has not been employed extensively and scholars note that until recently few studies focused on student networks (Biancani & McFarland, 2013; Daly, 2010; González Canché & Rios-Aguilar, 2015). I used ego network analysis to discover and describe a phenomenon that was thus far unknown: the social support that Latinxs with dis/abilities perceive as essential to their academic, social, and emotional well-being as a student at an HSI (Streb, 2010). I employed a single-site study design which focused on the ego network as the unit of analysis. I refer to dis/ability support networks as ego networks that provide social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities.

The ego network analysis design allowed me to explore Latinx-focused dis/ability social support by examining who Latinx students with dis/abilities perceive as supporting their learning experience, and what type of support they sought. Listening to and analyzing the perspectives of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI helped me suggest ways to more effectively meet their needs.

This study serves as a steppingstone to future research which might examine the ego networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities using statistical models or test theory at additional sites (McCarty et al., 2019). The institutional review board (IRB) application for this study was approved on December 14th, 2020 and the study number is 20050129.

3.2 Data Sources

Data sources for this study included a survey to gather demographic data, a 60-minute ego network interview using Zoom and Network Canvas software, and a follow-up focus group.²⁰ Network Canvas is a free, open-source graphic interface program that allows researchers to facilitate network data collection visually (McCarty et al., 2019)²¹. It was developed as a collaboration between Northwestern University and the University of Oxford and is managed by Northwestern's Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing (Complex Data Collective, 2016). While it is possible to collect network data using surveys, this has been shown to cause respondent fatigue and affect the reliability of the data (Borgatti et al., 2018; Hogan et al., 2007). Research shows that network interviews, specifically those that are visual and interactive, can reduce the respondent burden and even be enjoyable (von der Lippe & Gamper, 2016).²²

²⁰ Network Canvas staff state that it can be used with zoom. I emailed the project staff directly for more information; they replied that “the set up you propose via Zoom sounds like the best option given the current circumstances imposed by the pandemic. We are working on a new grant that would allow us to build out remote survey administration for the tool (like URL link you could send to someone) but at present, this functionality has not been implemented so workarounds, such as you describe, are the best option (Network Canvas, personal communication, May 24, 2020).

²¹ Though Zoom is preferred, Facetime, Skype, and WhatsApp were also options for the interview.

²² At the time of data collection, travel was restricted and some university campuses in the United States were operating online due to the Covid-19 virus. As a result, all data was collected remotely.

Critical dis/ability scholars Snyder and Mitchell (2010) write that “historically, disabled people have been the objects of study but not the purveyors of the knowledge base of disability” (p. 198). This study engaged in emancipatory praxis, which is a key theme of CDT that refers to the liberation of dis/ability identity from medical, deficit-based understandings (Brown et. al, 2019). The process of evaluating and co-constructing personal support networks was intended to honor the voices of Latinxs with dis/abilities and encourage participants to be critical of their environment and support structures. Data collection for this study was inclusive, accessible, and equitable. In service of this goal, the following practices were implemented:

1. The survey and the interview were offered in Spanish and English, however all interviews were conducted in English (with occasional Spanish references).
2. I coordinated accessibility features of the interview with the participants in advance to allow time to arrange for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, closed-captioning, or other adaptive resources. For students who are blind or have low vision, I described each step and screen using visual descriptions (National Center for College Students with Disabilities, n.d.). Participants utilized the captioning features; ASL interpreters were not requested.
3. The survey and interview were completed using a smartphone, tablet, or computer. If lack of wifi or technology was a barrier to participation, I coordinated with the participant and other university offices or individuals (such as the library or Disability Resource Center) to arrange a solution. If needed, data could have been collected via phone or mail using a printed survey and paper visualization (Hogan et al., 2007).

4. I briefly disclosed my positionality at the outset of each interview, which was important for establishing a degree of reciprocity in the researcher-participant relationship (Seidman, 2013).

3.2.1 Dependent Variables

Students' dis/ability support networks were the dependent variable for the quantitative portion of this study, as measured by network structure and composition (McCarty et al., 2019). The compositional characteristics included relationship category, tie strength, homophily, and frequency of contact, while the structural characteristics are size, number of isolates, and density (McCarty et al., 2019). Relationship category refers to the alter's relationship to the ego such as family, peer, university, or community member. Tie strength is a Likert-type variable that ranges from 1 to 4 (not very close, somewhat close, close, very close). Homophily is the tendency for individuals to share attributes such as ethnoracial identity or gender (McCarty et al., 2019). Emotional, instrumental, and informational support frequency are Likert-type variables that range from 1 to 5 (almost never, a few times per year, monthly, weekly, daily).

Network size refers to the number of alters in a given network that were named by the ego. The number of isolates is the number of alters that were only connected to the ego (had no ties with other alters in the network). Density is calculated using the number of ties expresses as a proportion of the number of possible ties (McCarty et al., 2019). I describe each of these variables in Appendix E along with relevant examples. In my descriptive analysis I present these variables visually (and concurrently, where appropriate) using sociograms (Perry et al., 2018).

3.2.2 Independent Variables

Further, I sought to understand how social support networks varied by type of support and type of dis/ability which were my main independent variables. Data on dis/ability type came from the survey; data on type of support came from the interviews. Emotional support refers to expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring (Song, 2011). Instrumental support refers to tangible aid and services, while informational support refers to advice, suggestions, and information (Song, 2011). I describe each of these independent variables in Appendix E. Additional control variables that I used included gender, first generation status, and registration with the Disability Resource Center; these variables were collected through the survey.

3.2.3 Survey

The Dis/ability Support Survey is a one section, 14-item instrument that I developed. It asked for demographic and enrollment information, as well as information about the participant's specific dis/abilities.²³ I anticipated that the survey would take 5-15 minutes to complete, and I performed accessibility checks in Qualtrics prior to distribution. The language of the survey allowed for a dynamic and personalized understanding of dis/ability, which is a core component of CDT (Evans et al., 2017).

This survey was administered using Qualtrics software. Participants accessed the survey using a personalized link I provided via email and completed the informed consent form prior to participating. Students who completed both the survey and interview components received a \$30

²³ Dis/ability types are presented in accordance with the National Center for College Students with Disabilities research briefs (<http://www.nccsdonline.org/research-briefs.html>).

gift card. I sent an email to participants at two weeks and four weeks reminding them to complete the survey. Prior to the overview meeting, I translated the survey into Spanish and asked two Spanish-speaking colleagues to check my translation. Appendix F presents the informed consent form for this study and Appendix G presents the English version of the survey as well as a letter introducing the participants to the study.

3.2.4 Ego Network Interviews

Network data collection using interviews and visualization (sociograms) has been shown to be reliable, especially for collecting ego network data (McCarty, 2019; von der Lippe, 2016). According to von der Lippe and Gamper (2016) this is because respondents are able to “re-assess the position and interrelatedness of an alter throughout the entire visualization task, thereby reducing unsystematic error” (p. 12). During ego network interviews, participants and researchers build the participant’s network together through a series of guided questions about the relationships between the ego (participant) and their alters (actors with ties to the ego), as well as alter-alter ties (Hogan et al., 2007; McCarty et al., 2019). Ego network interviews are designed to collect information about the participant’s personal network composition, content and structure (McCarty et al., 2019; see Table 2). I used the network data from the interviews to answer my research questions. Appendix H presents the interview protocol.

Although network data collection using interviews is time-consuming, it was appropriate for this study, especially considering that I conducted research with students with dis/abilities. I considered it my responsibility as a researcher to do anything I could to lighten the burden on my participants who were helping me through their participation. Moreover, CDT scholars implore higher education researchers to “critique disabling structures that permeate the educational

landscape” (Peña et al., 2016, p. 89). Asking detailed network questions through a survey might have been inaccessible to some students with dis/abilities who benefit from the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

I conducted the network interviews using Network Canvas software, which is an open-source project that enables researchers to capture network data in an interactive, engaging, and visually appealing format. Network Canvas was developed by the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing at Northwestern University. Interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length and were completed remotely using Zoom. I stated that I was comfortable conducting interviews in Spanish, however no participants requested this option. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.²⁴

At the outset of each interview, I briefly explained my researcher positionality and the interview process. The first step of building the participant’s network was identifying the alters, which I asked by type of social support. For example, first defined emotional support and situated it in the context of dis/ability. Then, I asked the participant to identify someone who they feel provides this type of support to them and provide this person’s gender and ethnoracial identity. The four questions that followed (for example, questions # 4-7) asked network characteristics or attributes such as closeness (tie strength), frequency of contact, duration of relationship, and social support satisfaction. Participants could identify more than one alter for each type of support. The process was then repeated for instrumental and informational support. The final step of network visualization was evaluating the relationships between alters. Using a drop and drag feature, participants assessed their understanding of whether alters knew one another. The final three

²⁴ I have submitted a proposal for a fellowship which would include money for interview transcription. If I do not receive this fellowship, I plan to apply for School of Education dissertation research grant in the fall. In addition, given that interviews will take place over Zoom, I may be able to use Zoom transcripts after checking for accuracy.

questions were open-ended and asked about received support, overall support, and missing support. For example, question #21 asks “Tell me about the last time you sought out support for your dis/ability. Who did you reach out to and how was this support helpful to you?”

3.2.5 Focus Group

Latinx students with dis/abilities are an important population of students in American higher education whose needs, voices, and place in higher education have traditionally been overlooked by scholars (Evans et al., 2017). As stated earlier, there is a lack of critical disability scholarship in higher education, especially research that considers the interdependence of ethnoracial identity and ability. Latinx students have been left out of discussion on findings about dis/ability in higher education, either by omitting demographic characteristics or due to few participants (Madaus et al., 2014).

In keeping with CDT as emancipatory praxis and in order to encourage as much participation as possible among study participants, I conducted a focus group. The purpose of this optional focus group was to share initial findings and invite participants to reflect, challenge, and engage with the results. The focus group took place in July 2021. Three out of the five participants (Linee, Susan, and Norma) attended the focus group meeting, which lasted 40 minutes and was conducted over zoom.

3.3 Research Setting

This study used a single-site, cross-sectional design which allowed for breadth and depth of analysis (Marsden, 2011). In network analysis research determining the sampling frame for a study is known as boundary specification because researchers must determine who is “in” and who is “out” of the network (Carolan, 2014). Ego network studies have two boundary specification issues to consider: the target population and the network to which they belong (Carolan, 2014). In this study, my target population was Latinx students with dis/abilities and the whole network to which they belong was one HSI. A single-site study was appropriate because it allowed me to prioritize the local knowledge of my participants who all attended the same university and work with the same disability services office. This was important because it controlled for institutional differences and maintained a consistent context across all participants. HSIs vary in their commitment to serving Latinxs, and disability services differ in their approach, commitment, and accessibility to say the least.

Using a single-site for this study offered a rich comparison between students’ personal support networks because although the alter-level was relatively boundless (participants received support from individuals who had no connection to the University whatsoever) the institutional context was the same (Marsden, 2011). The goal was not to have as many participants as possible, but many details about each ego network (Wellman, 2007). From a critical dis/ability perspective, a single site offered the opportunity to situate students’ local knowledge of one campus climate and more effectively understand their lived dis/ability experience with dis/ability (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Though not generalizable beyond my site, the findings from this study can be used to inform theory about Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs (Perry et al., 2018).

The site for this study was the Robles Private University (RPU; a pseudonym). RPU is a 4-year, private HSI in the western U.S that has been an HSI since 2016. RPU enrolls 4,000 students, 39% of whom are Latinx (*Excelencia* in Education, 2019). Approximately 6% of RPU students are registered with Disability Support Services (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Since 2016 RPU has received four federal HSI grants (two Title III grants and two Title V grants; Robles Private University, 2021). I reached out to the Director of Hispanic Serving Initiatives at RPU for assistance in distributing the invitation to participate and gained access to the site through her networks.

3.4 Analytic Sample

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where study participants recruit additional study participants (Merriam, 2009). I used snowball sampling to recruit participants for several reasons: 1) students could self-identify as having a dis/ability (hidden or apparent) regardless of whether or not they were registered with dis/ability services; 2) it was useful when the given population was not apparent; and 3) it has been used in previous social network studies (Borgatti et al., 2018). My sample was comprised of current undergraduate students who identify as Latinx/a/o or Hispanic and identify as having at least one dis/ability. Students could self-identify as having a dis/ability and did not need to be registered with the Disability Resource Center. By limiting the sample to the personal networks of Latinx students only I was able to more authentically understand the support Latinx students needed and construct a network where the needs of white students were irrelevant (or not the focus of analysis or even a reference category).

Five students participated in the required components of the study (survey and interview), and three of the five students participated in the focus group (see Appendix I for a table of the study sample). One student identified as AfroLatinx and four students identified as Latinx. Four of the five participants in the study identified as women, while one identified as a man. The ages of the participants were between 19-30 at the time of data collection, with an average age of 24. Four participants identified as first-generation college students, while two had transferred to RPU from a community college. Each participant identified as having more than one dis/ability. The five participants in this study self-reported having a total of 11 distinct dis/abilities: Autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, hearing loss, low vision, muscular dystrophy, Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), acid reflux, and scoliosis. Detailed dis/ability and other demographic information about the sample is included in Appendix I. All participants were full-time undergraduates at RPU at the time of data collection. Interviews were collected during Spring 2020 semester (at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic) and were conducted remotely using Zoom, and participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Sample sizes in ego network research tend to be smaller than most quantitative studies because the focal node is the individual (who identifies multiple alters) and the data is nested (ties within individual networks; Perry et al., 2018). Thus, the number of relationships analyzed was greater than the number of participants because each participant described alters as well as the perceived connection between alters (Perry et al., 2018). For example, McCarty et al. (2019) note that for one network with 10 alters, the participant may be asked to report information about 45 ties. I was unable to find a source that delineates a preferred or minimum sample size for ego network studies. The sample for this study included 5 participants who identified a total of 32

alters and 59 relationships. Please see Appendix J for the recruitment email inviting individuals to participate in the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Critical disability theory guided my analysis for this study. At each stage of analysis, I focused on reframing the politics of knowledge creation by valuing students' experiences as knowledge and looked for ways to critique normative, ethnoracially-neutral structures (Annamma et al., 2013). This was one of the main reasons I chose ego network analysis for this study: each student was in a position of power within their own network and, through support-seeking, made decisions about its creation and maintenance. Each student's experience was unique, and their networks were as well even if they share the same dis/ability and ethnicity (Annamma et al., 2013).

Social support theory also guided my analysis. Social support theorists posit that social support involves triangulating between social support, social relationships, and social networks (House, 1987). In this way, social support is not only helpful to individuals, but multidimensional in nature (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Following the example of Baker-Doyle (2015), my analysis mirrored the tri-modal structure of social support theory using a tri-modal approach to ego network analysis that examined "not only the characteristics of relationships, but also the critical moments and contexts in which these relationships become engaged" (Baker-Doyle, 2015, p. 80). In Baker Doyle's (2015) study, network data was analyzed alongside two sets of qualitative data which she refers to as "networks in stories" and "stories in networks". The data inform each other, serve as reliability checks, and provide space for a rich comparative analysis (Baker-Doyle, 2015).

Relatedly, I organized my data into three components or modes: the demographic information from the survey, the network data derived from the network interviews, and the focus group data (participant reflection of study findings). As I entered the methodological borderland, I prioritized criticality and resisted the temptation to conflate convergence with findings (Garcia & Ramirez, 2021). I used triangulation and comparative analysis to construct a bridge between the methods, theories, and data points (Baker-Doyle, 2015; Garcia & Ramirez, 2021). Appendix A presents a visual depiction of my tri-modal analysis.

3.5.1 Analytic Procedure

I began my data analysis by importing the survey data into a statistical software program, Stata (StataCorp, 2019). I cleaned the data and conducted a descriptive analysis in order to understand the demographic characteristics of the sample (Hoy & Adams, 2015). Next, I used my research questions to guide my analysis of the network data. The first step was to export the data from Network Canvas into R. Borgatti (2018) posits that the principal step in ego network analysis is to construct measures that describe the ego's network. The measures can then become dependent variables that can be analyzed statistically with other independent variables. The measures were constructed using alter attribute files, which are essentially tables that contain information about the ego's relationship with each alter organized by the network characteristics that were asked (Borgatti, 2018). This helped me answer my first research question regarding who Latinxs with dis/abilities go to for social support.

In order to answer research questions 1a (network structure) and 1b (how ego networks vary by dis/ability type and type of social support) I created and analyzed a sociogram for each ego network. Sociograms are the visual representation of the ego network (Hogan et al., 2007). I

will use sociograms to analyze network structure based on several structural metrics: network size (number of alters), density (the number of ties expressed as a proportion of the total number of possible ties), and presence of isolates (an alter who is not connected to anyone but the ego; Borgatti et al., 2009; McCarty et al., 2019). I color-coded each node by ethnoracial identity and used node shapes to indicate alter relationship categories (university, peer, family, community). In order to refine and develop the sociograms, I imported the Network Canvas data into Polinode, a web-based network analysis program. Polinode recreated participant sociograms using coordinates from the participant-generated network diagrams and allowed me to analyze and visualize the sociograms based on dependent and independent variables.

The answer to my research question 1a concerning the characteristics of students' ego networks involved multiple steps. I created an adjacency matrix for each ego, which indicated the relationship (or lack thereof) between each alter and every other alter in a given ego network (Borgatti, 2018). I aggregated the alter attributes for each ego and provided summary statistics (McCarty et al., 2019). Example of aggregated alter attributes in this study include the proportion of alters with the same ethnoracial identity (homophily) and the average duration of the relationship.

3.5.2 Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to ensure reliability and validity of my data. While I did not have the ability to perform test-retest reliability procedures, I compared the quantitative network data with the qualitative network data. (Hollstein, 2011). As network data is relational, it is constantly changing, so traditional reliability can be difficult to assess (Carolan, 2014). Von der Lippe and Gamper (2016) suggest that data collected through network visualization is often highly reliable

because participants have the opportunity to reassess their answers after seeing the visualization in real time. Moreover, I engaged in memoing throughout my analysis, which has been shown to improve reliability when returning to previous analyses (Miles et al., 2014). I found it helpful for keeping track of emerging thoughts as well as analyses performed on a given day (Saldaña, 2016).

In order to check for validity of ego network data scholars suggest paying close attention to the wording of questions and avoid asking about time-specific scenarios such as “who did you go to for social support this month?” I chose the wording for the ego network interview questions based on established network interview protocols (Borgatti, 2018). There has not been a great deal of research on validity checks for ego network data because the relations are intentionally based on one person (the ego’s) understanding (Small, 2017). Here, I called upon the work of Patel (2016) who frames notions of reliability and validity as colonial and objectivist and inspired me to question the authenticity and purpose of trustworthiness in the context of my sample and method.

3.6 Researcher Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the understanding of what constitutes knowledge and how it is created (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). Although I have been wrestling with these questions for my entire life, this is the first time I have formally written about it. I believe that knowledge is created from experience. I also believe that these patterns of experience can exist within multidimensional, concurrent, and sometimes conflicting layers of life such as systemic, political, socioeconomic, familial, and intrapersonal contexts. I agree with Tuck and McKenzie (2014) who note that from an indigenous perspective “knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and relational. Knowledge is not just mental, but physical, emotional, and spiritual” (p. 77). I am not indigenous, though I lived in

Quechua communities in Peru in my twenties and was highly influenced by the women I met in Huancabamba. I think that understanding knowledge as holistic, cyclical, and relational is something that was passed down to me from my maternal grandmother.

Ruth Goldberg Korn taught me that truth is relative, and that it is possible to know without empirical confirmation or validation. How ironic it seems now, especially given my career choice. But, maybe there is a window of a soul that has yet to be explored. As I comb through pages of scholarly work, I find myself searching- and occasionally finding – descriptions of knowledge that incorporate emotion and spirituality as indicators of truth. My mother, Ruth’s daughter, never told me what to believe, or how to arrive at a state of knowing. I see this as a gift. I have little doubt that the tendency of the women in my family (a family of mostly women) to view knowledge as a light that emerges from within the soul emerged from past suffering- the sort of deep suffering that forces you to question everything you know. This knowledge was and is co-constructed and reconstructed through stories and songs from Sayde to Vichna to Ruth to Lindy to Emily. These stories have been acts of survivance, or “intergenerational connection to an individual and collective sense of presence and resistance in personal experience . . . particularly through stories” (Vizenor et al., 2014, p. 107). Perhaps family memories of those who died in the Holocaust or were forced to wander in search of safety led them to question reality. I am not the one who suffered, yet these experiences seem to be passed down as a warning: question everything, think of the earth first because it is bigger than all of us, and use experience as your guide.

The colonial, hierarchical structures of higher education are designed to reproduce elitism and established epistemological stances (Patel, 2016). The indigenous epistemology that Tuck and McKenzie (2014) describe is the only stance I have read thus far that feels genuine in the context of this study, as the methods I used for this study were also relational and fluid. Ego networks,

though based on one individual, rely on the support of many. As stated previously, critical dis/ability scholars have called upon scholars to use decolonial methods and stances to challenge existing hierarchies that support the notion of dis/ability as located solely within the individual (Brown et al., 2019).

Indigenous epistemology relates to the methods and theories of this study. For example, the vast majority of social support research involves perceived support; most likely because it is this type of social support that has been shown to improve health and well-being (Song et al., 2011). However, Small (2017) prefers to study received support and doubts the accuracy of perceived support. As a person with dis/abilities, feeling supported is what reduces my anxiety and stress when I experience obstacles. Whether or not the support I receive matches the support I feel I receive is of little consequence to my experience- I only know what I perceive, and if I feel supported, that is enough. I chose to study perceived support because I feel that truth is relative and experiential. Personally, I do not believe that received social support is more valid than perceived social support.

Binaries are part of the problem. Must we be abled or dis/abled, normal, or abnormal, a person of color or white? With regard to both ethnoracial identity and ability, we have evolved to rely on classifications of difference that serve only the colonizers and yet we have been tricked into upholding them. I believe that there is a way to present empirical findings as one possibility within a multitude of possibilities, as one critical perspective situated in the context of dominant and counter narratives, and still suggest meaningful implications for research and practice.

In her chapter entitled “La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a new consciousness” Gloria Anzaldúa offers a vision for a future that is worth hoping for. In breaking down the subject-object duality that settler colonialism endorses, she provides an alternative, more critical path forward:

multiplicity of culture, knowledge and space. Anzaldúa is concerned with stewardship of the soul. “The work that the soul performs” helps us move beyond *el choque*, or the cultural collision of different and seemingly incompatible epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies (p. 100-101). It seems as though Anzaldúa’s “new consciousness” teaches us lessons about individual and collective ways of knowing and being, but importantly, about being human and humanity. It is from this baseline that my research began and returns.

3.7 Researcher Positionality

I am a critical quantitative researcher with multiple hidden dis/abilities. I come from a middle-class Jewish family, and I am white. My journey in postsecondary education has certainly been a factor of my ethnoracial identity and socioeconomic status as well as dis/ability. I experience a wide range of emotions with regard to my dis/ability identity, including the shame and privilege of hidden dis/ability, fear of being misunderstood and accepted, anxiety related to disclosure, the pressure to be faux able, and the implications of my educational journey as a white woman with dis/abilities.

I value indigenous ways of knowing because they are open to immeasurable and spiritual realities. My family is made up of Russian and Middle-Eastern immigrants. We have been visiting this land since the turn of the 20th century. As I stated above, I have worked and lived with Quechua women on their land. I have chewed their coca leaves, killed their chickens, and harvested their potatoes. I listened to stories of Pachamama and I believe in her powers. These experiences changed me and forced me to question the way I conceptualize my place in the story of my ancestors. This work taught me how to apply the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, the importance

of respecting local issues, resources, language, culture and environments when providing opportunities for learning.

As a scholar committed to equity and justice, I understand that my own experiences with dis/ability are the same narratives that I challenge in my work. As I write the methodology for this study, I ponder the interdependence of ableism and racism, and how being a white woman with dis/abilities complicates this axis of privilege and oppression. As a student with dis/abilities, I can relate to my participants; as a woman racialized as white, I must confront my privilege. It has taken over twenty years for me to find my voice in order to be able to advocate for myself. My positionality is an asset; it motivates me to take responsibility in a deliberate effort to transform the postsecondary educational climate for students with dis/abilities. I grew up in a Jewish household that valued education above all else. Now I endeavor, as Dillard (2000) suggests, to conduct research as responsibility rather than recipe. Furthermore, my lived experience as a learning dis/abled student informs my scholarly work because I possess intimate knowledge of the ways in which ableism operates in educational spaces. I am at the beginning, as I ever will be.

My goal is to achieve what I was told I would not: earn a PhD and become a tenure-track professor in education. I envision that my long-term research agenda will focus on issues of equity and justice in postsecondary and community education, specifically concerning students with hidden dis/abilities. I aim to conduct research that includes dis/abled student voices and engages university actors at all levels in conversations about equity and inclusion for dis/abled students (Pearson, 2015). Accommodating neurodiverse students without forcing us to assimilate to neurotypical and normalized ways of being should involve actors at all levels of the institution (Lovett et al., 2015). Only then can dis/ability justice be pursued with a genuine possibility of success.

3.8 Limitations of the Method

I must acknowledge several limitations of ego network analysis. First, the data was self-reported and therefore represented the perspectives of the egos (students) and not the alters (individuals providing support). Second, the sample was not representative of Latinxs at HSIs and is consequently not generalizable beyond my site. Third, this study involved a cross-sectional design; as such I am not able to assess the change in social support networks over time. Lastly, this research was completed during a global pandemic and the impact of Covid-19 on data collection is unknown. The pandemic influenced survey and interview responses because support that was normally provided face-to-face was remote and structure of networks may have been affected. Relatedly, there were significant equity issues that may have affected study participants such as access to technology, fall enrollment, and unstable living situations, among others. Despite these limitations, this study has the potential to explore an important phenomenon, and the contribution of the findings to the field outweighs these limitations.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the methods used to implement this study. I provided detailed explanations of the survey and interview protocol, as well as the research site and sampling frame. I discussed my analysis and related it to my epistemological stance and researcher positionality. In doing so I attempted to justify the utility of the study design and method for answering my research questions about social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities. Kezar (2014) notes that lasting change in higher education relies on individuals to incorporate new patterns of interaction.

My personal faith in and theory of change centers around the relationships people have with one another. People can use social support to rebel against and reform inequitable structures. The methods used in this study allowed me to suggest ways to address the problem of insufficient support for dis/abled Latinx students in higher education. Not much is known about the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education settings, particularly at HSIs. This exploratory study planted a seed (or two) for future critical dis/ability research that is conducted at the intersection of minoritized identities.

4.0 Chapter 4: Findings: Networks in Stories, Stories in Networks

For this study I used trimodal ego network analysis (Baker-Doyle, 2015) to explore the dis/ability support networks of five dis/abled Latinx students at Robles Private University (RPU; a pseudonym). Through a brief demographic survey, interactive interviews, and a focus group, participants co-constructed and reflected on their support networks. The purpose of this ego network analysis study was to determine the composition (relationship, tie strength, homophily, frequency of contact) and structure (size, isolates, density) of the dis/ability social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one 4-year, private HSI, including the structural characteristics of the social support networks. Moreover, the purpose was to determine how dis/ability support networks differ by dis/ability and type of social support (emotional, instrumental, informational). I begin this chapter by providing details for each participant including: 1) student demographics (i.e., their dis/ability and Latinx identities); 2) a participant sociogram and description of ego network composition; 3) findings regarding structure of their dis/ability support network; and 4) participant interpretations of aspects of their support networks that emerged from the interview and focus group data. After describing the findings for each participant, I provide a summary of the compositional and structural characteristics across all participant networks and describe network patterns by dis/ability and type of social support that participants seek from their interpersonal relationships (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012). All names are pseudonyms.

4.1 Stories in Networks

I call this section, “Stories in Networks” because similar to Baker-Doyle (2015), the focus of the findings is the story that emerges from each participant’s individual ego network. Sociograms are presented within the text of the chapter for accessibility reasons in order to have the visual elements as close as possible to the written descriptions (see Appendix D for description of the ego network terminology). Quotes from participants’ interpretations of their support networks are presented as poems for accessibility reasons, as poetry has been shown to enhance empathy and understanding of the lived dis/ability experience (Rogers-Shaw, 2021).²⁵ I compiled the poems using direct quotes from participants, which were verified by each participant. Appendix I presents demographic information for the study participants.

4.1.1 Joseph

Joseph is a 30 year old cisgender man who identifies as Latinx and Hispanic. At the time of data collection Joseph was a senior multimedia major with an emphasis in high definition cinema. He is a first-generation college student who transferred to RPU from a local community college. Joseph was diagnosed with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and Bipolar disorder in his early twenties and was registered with Disability Support Services

²⁵ There are additional accessibility justifications for presenting data in poetic form. First, the readability is enhanced as the lines are concise and there are fewer words to read per line (As someone who has a hard time distinguishing letters when there are many words, I support this; Rogers-Shaw, 2021). Second, disability activists have been advocating for alt-text (descriptions read by screen readers for individuals with low or no vision; for example, “a Black woman wearing glasses and a red shirt is sitting at a desk”) in the form of poetry, suggesting that text as poetry provides an engaging experience that enhances individuals’ overall sense of belonging in the moment (<https://www.washington.edu/doi/alt-text-poetry-promising-practice-reimagining-alt-text>). Alt-text is often bland and boring, and using poetry to describe an experience is another way of disrupting normative understandings of dis/ability and accessibility.

(DSS) at RPU. Joseph relies heavily on DSS at RPU and is a member of LASO (Latin American Student Organization) and CCEI (Center for Cultural Engagement and Inclusion). He has had a hard time making friends his entire life and said that the isolation he feels in college is similar to his experience as a K-12 student. Joseph's parents, who both work minimum wage jobs, want him to continue his education. He lives with his parents and commutes to RPU.

On the afternoon of our virtual interview Joseph was sitting in a dark room with the lights off. He noted, "It's been a long week." He was preparing to graduate in May 2020 and was in the process of applying to an MBA program at RPU. His dream was to move from his hometown, which is 30 minutes from Los Angeles, California and work in the film industry, but his parents were not supportive of him living by himself and moving away. He felt frustrated that his parents doubted his ability to earn money and to manage his dis/abilities on his own, noting "I don't think they (his parents) thought I would go to college and graduate and have my own career." He is particularly close with his mother, which contributed to his frustration and feeling isolated in planning his future. Joseph talked about the notion of time, expressing that because he was 30 it was time for him to move on, live on his own and pursue his professional dreams.

4.1.1.1 Joseph's Dis/ability Support Network Composition and Sociogram

Joseph named six individuals (alters) that he feels provide him support as a Latinx student with dis/abilities at RPU. Of the six alters, four identified as Latinx and two identified as white. Joseph indicated that he relies on his mother, Pam (Latina woman), his father, Joseph Paul (Latino man), and his RPU staff mentor, Jessie (Latino man) for emotional support. In addition to his parents, he seeks out his friend Chelsea (white woman) and Wendy (white woman), the Director of Disability Services at RPU, for informational and instrumental support. He mentioned that

despite only feeling somewhat close to his father he does look to him for emotional support.²⁶ He named his aunt, Lola (Latina woman) in his support network, but indicated that he does not feel close with her and rarely seeks out her support. Figure 1 represents a sociogram for Joseph's social support network.

Figure 1 shows each of Joseph's alters arranged spatially in terms of closeness. That is, individuals to whom he feels closer are positioned closer to his ego node. Joseph is closest to his mother Pam, followed by Jessie, a mentor, and Chelsea, a friend who also identifies as having a disability and is registered with DSS at RPU. Joseph is somewhat close to his father Joseph Paul and Wendy, the Director of DSS, and not very close with his Aunt, Lola. In terms of homophily, or the tendency to prefer those with similar attributes, two thirds (67%; $n = 4$) of the alters in Joseph's network share the same ethnoracial identity, and 50% ($n = 3$) of the members of his network are family. Joseph's network homophily indicates that he values support from individuals with the same ethnoracial (Latinx) identity as well as family. Joseph does not appear to prefer support from same-gender individuals, as 67% ($n = 4$) of his alters are women. Appendix E presents a description of the variables used in the study.

²⁶ Tie strength is a Likert-type variable that ranges from 1 to 4 (not very close, somewhat close, close, very close). Joseph rated his father 2, or somewhat close.

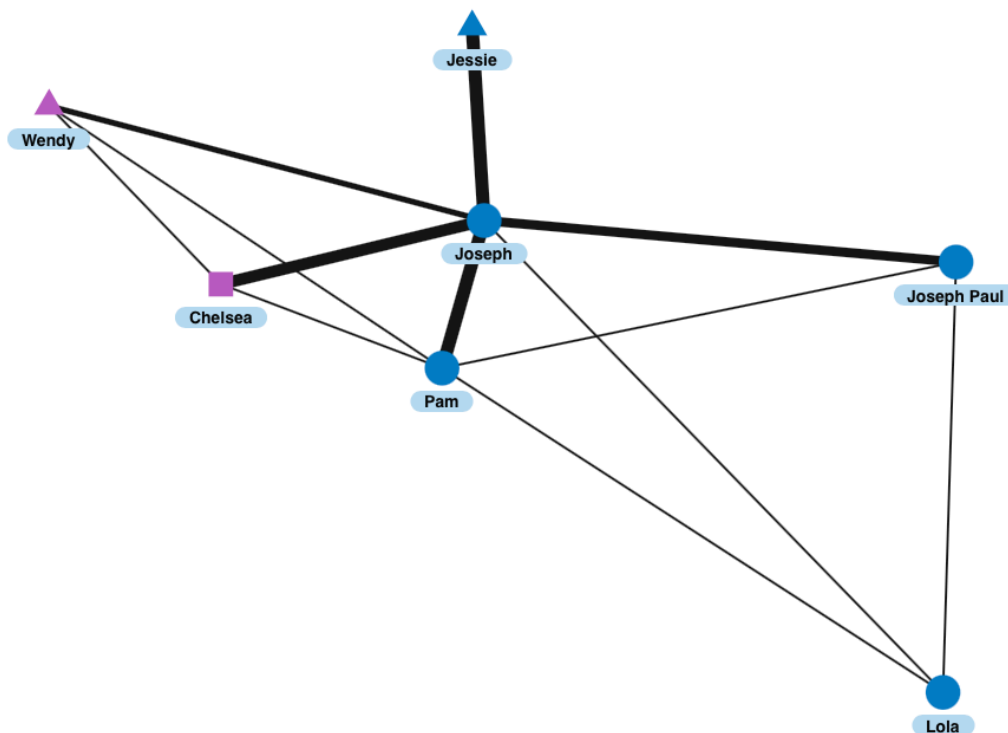


Figure 1 Sociogram Showing Joseph's Dis/Ability Social Support Network

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals, and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego (Joseph): circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff. Edge thickness indicates the average combined frequency of support (emotional, informational, instrumental) seeking from ego (Joseph) to each alter²⁷.

4.1.1.2 Structural Characteristics of Joseph's Network

Joseph named 6 alters, or individuals who he seeks out for social support related to his dis/ability, meaning that the size of his network is 6. Joseph has one isolate in his network, Jessie. Jessie is not connected to any other alters except for Joseph. McCarty et al. (2019) suggest that maintaining isolates takes time and effort for the ego and also puts the ego in a position to serve

²⁷ Tie strength is a Likert-type variable that ranges from 1 to 4 (not very close, somewhat close, close, very close). Emotional, instrumental, and informational support frequency are Likert-type variables that range from 1 to 5 (almost never, a few times per year, monthly, weekly, daily).

as a broker of information between the isolate and the other alters in the network. In other words, Jesse does not know anyone in Joseph's network but Joseph, which places the burden of maintaining the relationship and conveying information about Joseph exclusively on Joseph. Jessie's position as an isolate increases the structural holes in Joseph's network (the absence of ties among a nodal pair) because Jessie is not connected to any other nodes besides Joseph (Borgatti et al., 2009; McCarty et al., 2019).

Researchers suggest that structural holes can have both positive and negative effects on an ego depending on context (Carolan, 2014). For example, the presence of structural holes means that the ego may have access to new and different information that other alters could not provide. On the other hand, the isolate (Jessie, in this case) is not connected to the other alters in the network and can therefore rely on the ego to provide information about himself and other alters. In ego networks contexts isolates are typically viewed as beneficial for information and for social control (brokerage, autonomy, different presentation of self (Perry et al., 2018). Figure 2 presents Joseph's sociogram with the ego node excluded in order to emphasize Jesse's position as an isolate. This view of Joseph's network also emphasizes Pam's role as a central member of the network who bridges separate groups of alters. In addition to being Joseph's mom and important source of support, Pam's relationships with other members of Joseph's network makes it possible for her to her support him by communicating with and between RPU alters (Chelsea and Wendy) and family members (Joseph Paul and Lola).

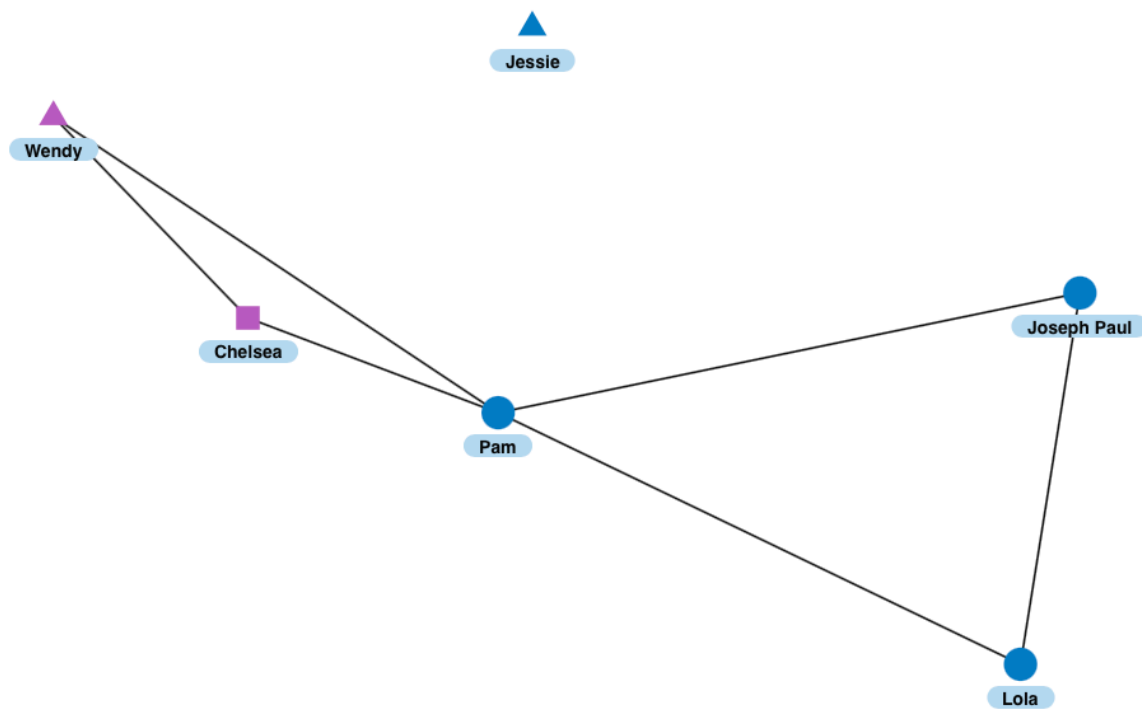


Figure 2 Joseph's Sociogram with the Ego Node (Joseph) Removed

Density is another structural network characteristic: the number of ties expressed as a proportion of the total number of possible ties, or the “degree of connectedness among alters in a network” (Perry et al., 2018, p. 174). The density of Joseph’s network is .40, meaning that 40% of the possible ties among his alters are present. This is not inherently high or low; it reflects how many of his alters are connected to one another and is context-dependent. While a density of .40 may seem low (60% of possible ties in Joseph’s network are absent), it may not be realistic for alters to know one another (such as Wendy and Lola, for example). Like structural holes, density can be advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on social context (McCarty et al., 2019). Highly dense networks are seen as stable and able to provide a strong safety net, which is important for multiply minoritized college students. However, networks with low density can force individuals to develop coping strategies that foster resilience and adaptation when dealing with

challenges (Perry et al., 2018). It is rare for personal networks to have a density of 1 (where each alter is connected to every other alter; Carolan, 2014).

4.1.1.3 Joseph's Interpretation of His Support Network

While Joseph has six alters in his network who he goes to for social support, upon reflecting on his network and specific instances when he has needed help, he noted that he often relies on himself when he needs support. Joseph has people in his life that he feels close with such as his mom Pam, Chelsea, and his mentor Jessie, but he feels that he has a hard time making friends on campus and is currently feeling frustrated with his parents' lack of support around his career choice and desired independence, saying,

I took care of it
I looked at the code of conduct
I contacted the disability office
and the chairman of the department
I had resources
I was able to take care of the situation
before it got worse.

I would think my parents would be supportive
My mom and I, we're very close
I guess they didn't realize
I was going to go to college
I would graduate someday
and I would have my own career

I'm not the person
that will introduce myself
I would prefer if others
introduced themselves to me
that's the way I look at making friends
It's a challenge.

I describe the pattern that emerged from Joseph's reflection of his network as "approaching challenges on my own." Joseph's interpretation aligns with the structural network findings insofar

as he spends time and energy maintaining his relationship with Jessie, for example. Additionally, 50% of his alters are family and the only friend in his network is someone who does not share his ethnoracial identity. If for any reason Joseph's relationship with his family becomes strained his support network density and stability would decrease.

4.1.2 Linee

Linee is a 20 year old cisgender woman who identifies as AfroLatina. At the time of data collection Linee was a junior communications major at RPU. She began her postsecondary studies at RPU (she did not transfer to RPU from another college), and she does not identify as a first-generation college student. Linee was diagnosed with chronic depression and anxiety during middle school and was registered with Disability Support Services (DSS) at RPU at the time of our interview. She is also a member of the Black Student Union (BSU) on campus.

Linee joined the zoom interview from her residence hall room at RPU, which was filled with colorful artwork and decorative lighting. She is interested in advocacy work and plans on starting a Master's in Public Policy after college. She feels that as an AfroLatina she is a "double agent" (her mother is Black and her father is Mexican) and noted that growing up in suburban San Diego she was the only Black or Mexican person in her class at school multiple years in a row. Linee came to RPU because she "wanted something different," did not want to be at a primarily white institution (PWI) and was interested in RPU in part because it was an HSI. During our follow-up focus group Linee told me that her mother works in the mental health field and regularly speaks to Linee about anxiety and depression. Linee says that the Mexican side of her family is less comfortable speaking about mental health issues.

Linee's anxiety and depression worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in fall 2020 she attended an intensive outpatient program five days a week for three hours each day in addition to being a full-time student at RPU. She sought out dis/ability services at RPU and was successful at receiving accommodations as well as a medical incomplete for one of her courses. In 2019 DSS staff helped Linee complete the necessary paperwork to adopt a cat for mental health reasons, and on several occasions they have helped her communicate with professors. Linee has experienced microaggressions from faculty and students at RPU as a result of her dis/ability and ethnoracial identities which she feels exacerbated her anxiety and depression. She is highly critical of RPU faculty, administrators, and white students.

4.1.2.1 Linee's Dis/ability Support Network Composition and Sociogram

Linee named eight alters that she feels provide her support as an AfroLatina student with dis/abilities at RPU. Of the eight alters, four identified as Latinx, two identified as Black, and two identified as white. In terms of type of relationship, four alters were employed by RPU, two were family and two were friends. Linee indicated that she relies on her friends Eric (Latino man) and Serena (Latina woman) most often for emotional support, along with her parents Teesha (Black woman) and Ben (Latino man). In addition to Teesha and Eric, she seeks out her boss Cynthia (Latino woman) and occasionally Urael (Black man), a Student Success Counselor for informational and instrumental support. Linee seeks out Colleen (white woman), her academic advisor and Monica (white woman), a professor, less often for all types of support. Figure 3 represents a sociogram for Linee's social support network.

Linee indicated that she feels very close to her parents Ben and Teesha and her friends Eric and Serena. She is close with Cynthia, and somewhat close with Colleen, Urael, and Monica. Her network has a high degree of homophily: 75% ($n = 6$) of her alters are either Black or Latinx and

63% are women. The homophily in Linee's network is highest among the alters with the strongest ties (closest).

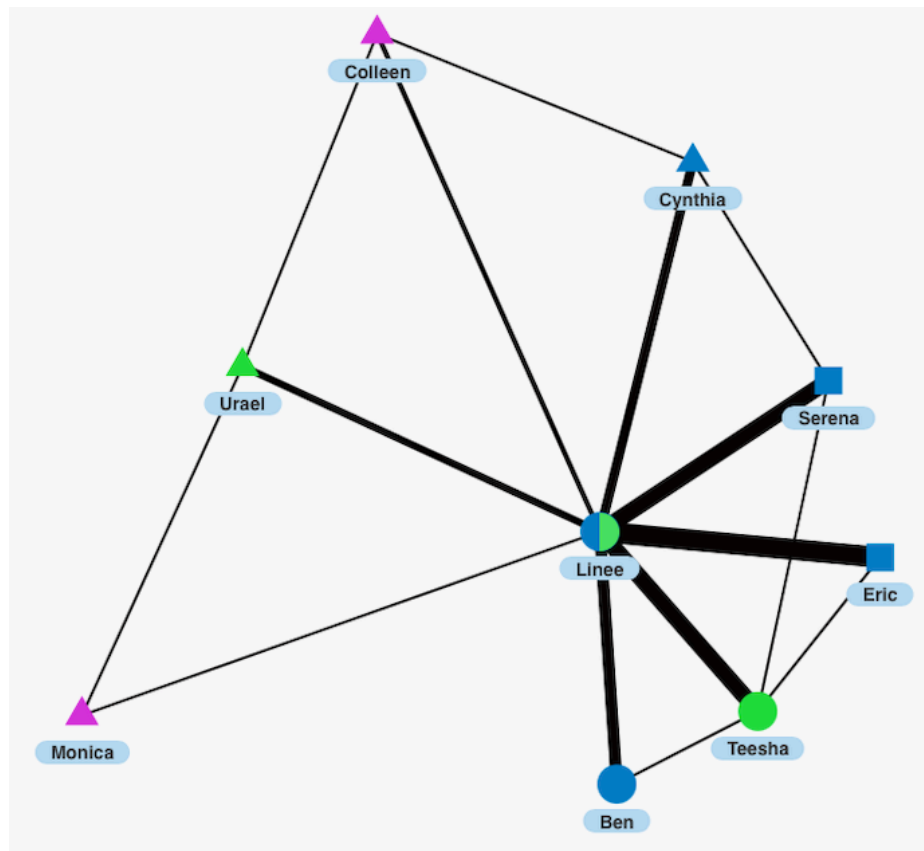


Figure 3 Sociogram Showing Linee's Dis/Ability Social Support Network

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals, green nodes are Black/African American individuals, and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego: circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff. Edge thickness indicates the average combined frequency of support (emotional, informational, instrumental) seeking from ego to each alter.

4.1.2.2 Structural Characteristics of Linee's Network

The size of Linee's network is 8, meaning there are 8 people who she relies on for social support. Each of her alters are connected to at least one other alter, so there are no isolates present. Directly or indirectly, all of her alters know one another. This is especially obvious looking at her network with the ego node (Linee) removed (see Figure 4).

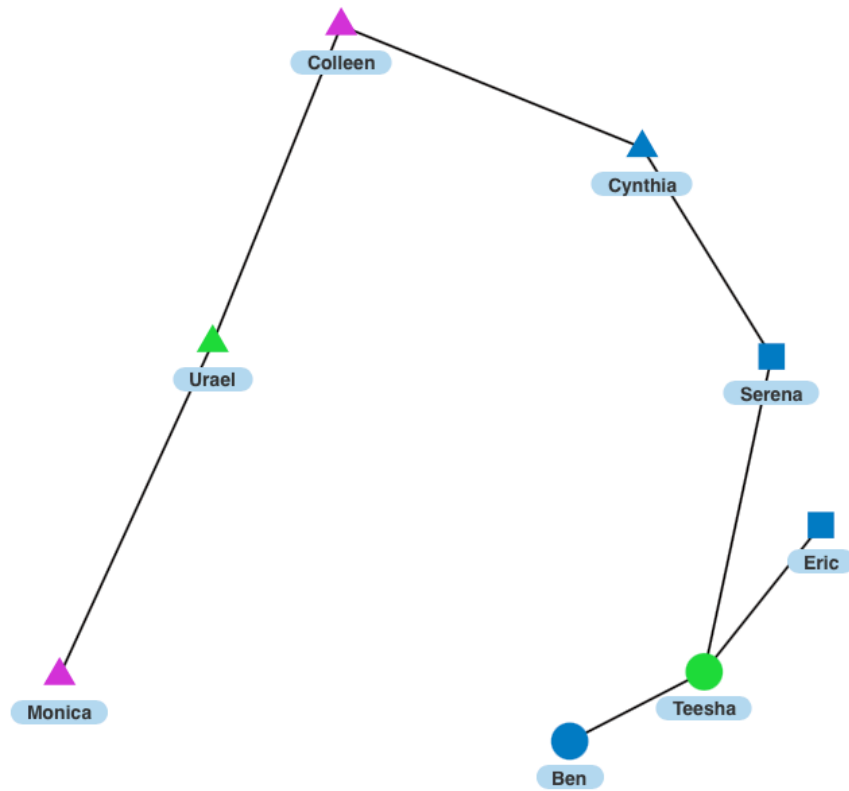


Figure 4 Linee's Sociogram with the Ego Node Removed

The density of Linee's network is .25, meaning that 25% of the possible ties among her alters are present. Like Joseph, Linee's mother Teesha occupies a central position in her network because she is connected to Ben, Eric, and Serena. Small (2017) writes that while it is a pleasant idea to think that the alters with strong ties to the ego would be close to one another, this does not always make practical sense. Linee is very close with Ben, Eric, and Serena even though they do not know one another. Small (2017) posits that having an individual to turn to is more important than the overall connectedness of alters.

4.1.2.3 Linee's Reflection of Her Support Network

Linee receives emotional support from her family and friends often (daily & weekly) but less frequently from alters that work within formal university structures such as Cynthia and

Monica (a few times per year). Linee feels that on campus she often finds herself seeking out support related to her dis/ability and ethnoracial identity separately even though she recognizes that her lived experience with intersectionality cannot be approached additively.

I wear both hats [dis/ability and ethnoracial identity] personally and internally 24/7
but I have learned to code switch
according to what group aligns best
with what I need
to achieve
to get the benefits
that I need
on campus.

I'm not able to seek out benefits
as a Latinx woman with a dis/ability
even though it's HSI campus
that has DSS
I have to seek out help as a Latinx person
and
then
separately
seek out help for mental health.

The pattern that emerged from Linee's reflection of the individuals she turns to for social support was "compartmentalized and additive support." She would like to be able to receive support as an AfroLatina woman with a dis/ability without having to compartmentalize her identities due to functional or institutional (structures) purposes.

4.1.3 Susan

Susan is a 27 year old cisgender woman who identifies as Hispanic and Latina. At the time of data collection, she was a senior at RPU majoring in chemistry and Spanish. Susan is the first person in her family to go to college, and she transferred to RPU from a community college. She

was diagnosed with general anxiety disorder while she was enrolled in community college after having a “mental breakdown.” She also has a self-diagnosed hearing disorder.

Susan was registered with Disability Support Services (DSS) at RPU at the time of our interview, but only for her anxiety. She receives no services for her hearing disorder, and she cannot afford testing. She reached out to DSS for help with her hearing issues because she felt that her dis/ability was impacting her in class. She was told they couldn’t provide her with any resources without documentation and directed her to her insurance company. Susan does not feel that she should have to see a doctor in order to get accommodations and stated that she wishes she could submit self-documentation.

Susan joined the interview from a brightly lit room and positioned herself close to the computer camera. At the beginning of the interview she stated that the reason why she wanted to participate was because of the lack of support in her life at RPU. She asked if she could name herself as an alter and could not immediately name anyone else who she relies on for support as a Latinx woman with dis/abilities. She initially stated that “there really isn’t anyone who helps me or understands,” but as we spoke more about her experience several alters emerged.

4.1.3.1 Susan’s Dis/ability Support Network Composition and Sociogram

Susan’s dis/ability support network was consisted of five alters. Of the five alters, three were women and two were men. Three of her alters identified as white, one identified as Latinx, and one identified as Asian. Susan’s father, Martin (Latino man) was the only family member in her network; during our conversation Susan stated that there were no other family members she felt were part of her support network. Similarly, her friend Katherine (Asian woman) was the only friend she named. The other three alters, Professor K. (academic advisor; white woman), Professor

H. (research mentor; white man), and Pauli (Director of Disability Services; white woman) work for RPU.

Susan indicated that she seeks emotional support from Professor H. weekly, and from her father Martin a few times per year. She rarely turns to Katherine, Professor K., or Pauli for emotional support. Professor H. provides Susan informational support on a monthly, as Katherine provides informational support a few times per year. Lastly, Susan relies on Martin daily for instrumental support in the form of housing and food security. She relies on Katherine, Professor H., Professor K., and Pauli on a monthly basis for instrumental support. Figure 5 represents a sociogram for Susan's social support network.

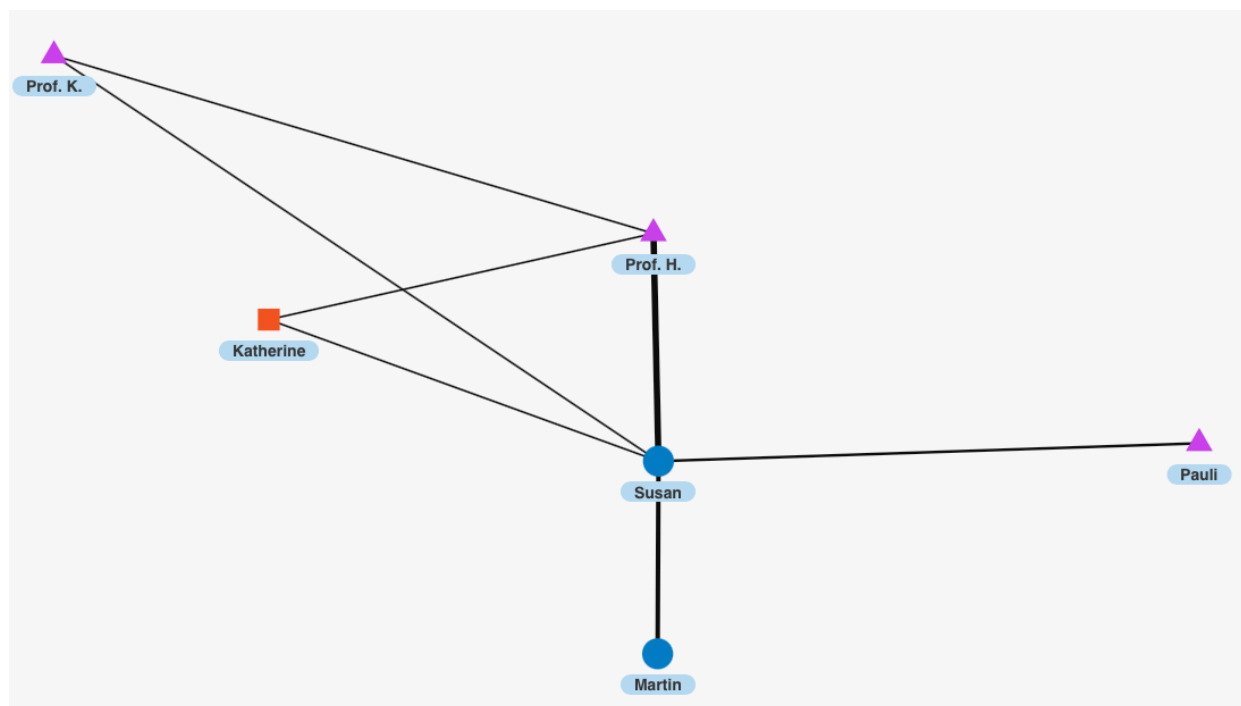


Figure 5 Sociogram Showing Susan's Dis/Ability Social Support Network

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals, orange nodes are Asian individuals, and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego: circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff. Edge thickness indicates the average combined frequency of support (emotional, informational, instrumental) seeking from ego to each alter.

Susan has strong ties with Martin (very close) and Professor H. (close), and describes having weaker ties with Katherine (somewhat close), Professor K. (not very close), and Pauli (not very close). In Figure 5, tie strength is evident by the distance between Susan and her alters. In terms of homophily, 20% ($n = 1$) of Susan's alters share her ethnoracial identity, while 60% ($n = 3$) of her alters share her gender identity. When we were co-constructing her network, Susan stated that she doesn't have many friends in her support network because her friends "don't come from same background so it is hard to communicate problems to them." Susan explained that some of her friends are not Latinx, and that some of her Latinx friends do not identify as having a dis/ability. She also stated that some of her friends were "better off financially" and offered that socioeconomic background may have affected her relationship with them as well (Susan identifies as low-income). Even though the ethnoracial homophily in Susan's network is low, it is something she values and would like to have.

4.1.3.2 Structural Characteristics of Susan's Network

The size of Susan's network is 5, as she named 5 alters. There are two isolates in Susan's network: Pauli and Martin. Neither one of them is connected to any other alter. Professor H. is connected to both Professor K. and Katherine, though Katherine and Professor K. do not know one another. Figure 6 presents Susan's sociogram with the ego node (Susan) removed.

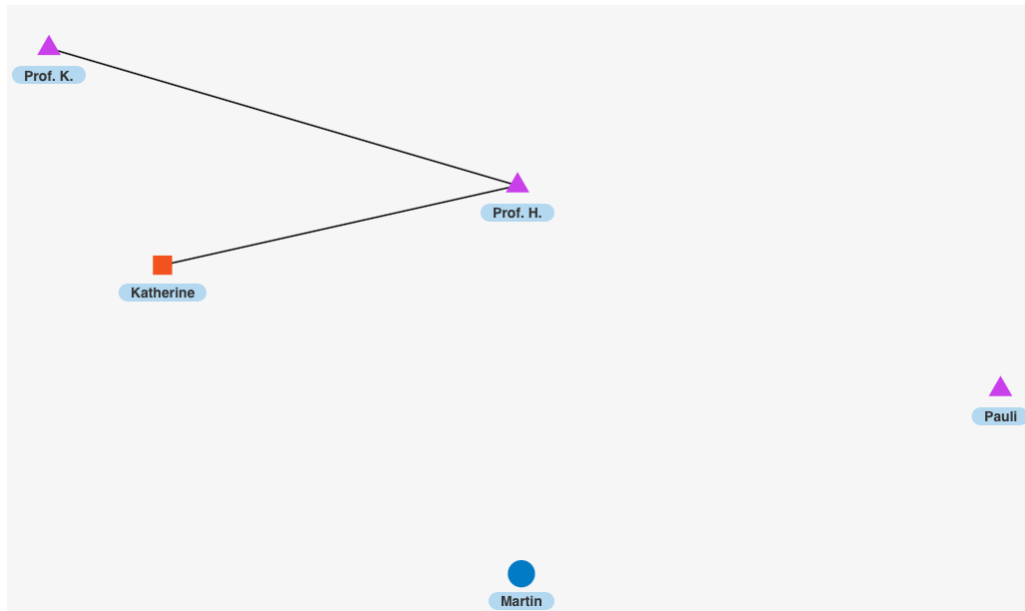


Figure 6 Susan's Sociogram with the Ego Node Removed

The density of Susan's network is .20 which means that the alters in her network are not very connected to one another, as mentioned in the discussion of isolates. Susan's network has many structural holes which may indicate the lack of a safety net around dis/ability support. On the other hand, the low density in Susan's network may also mean that she has had to develop "a diverse set coping strategies that foster adaptation and resilience" (Perry et al., 2018, p. 174). Another advantage of low density of ego networks is that there is typically less redundancy of information because there are fewer clusters of alters (Perry et al., 2018). As with Linee's network, for Susan, having few people to turn to for emotional support is likely more of a support issue than the low network density, with Small (2017) noting that having someone to turn to is more important than connectedness among alters.

4.1.3.3 Susan's Reflection of Her Support Network

During the network-building portion of the interview, Susan mentioned that her positionality as a Latina first-generation transfer student with multiple dis/abilities influences who,

when, and if she seeks support. She feels that her parents cannot relate to school and mental health challenges she experiences. Susan stated that even if she talked to them, they would not have resources to help her, as “therapy is non-existent in Hispanic households.” She reflected on her support in college.

You wanna ask for help
but you also don't wanna
who do I ask
how do I ask for it?

When you're first-generation
you think you can do everything
When you're fucking up
you don't let yourself admit it
You keep going
until you break down
which I did.

Luckily, I had a good McNair director
I wanted to quit the program
I just couldn't balance it
She wouldn't let me go
She was like
“I know you can do this
I'm not gonna let you go
We could create a plan
we can get you back on track”
If it wasn't for her
I would not be
where I'm at
She's not here anymore on-campus.

Sometimes
you want to feel like your emotions
are valid
“It's okay to have a mental breakdown,
it's okay to cry”
does wonders for someone
to know that they're being seen
They're being heard
and not just pushed away
and weak.

Susan's transition from community college to RPU was particularly challenging. She had a hard time adapting to RPU's curriculum, had little emotional, instrumental, and informational support and no help for her hearing dis/order. The pattern that emerged from her interpretation of her network was "wanting to feel seen." As a senior in her final semester of college, Susan reflected on her experiences with social support. Emotional support in particular is important to her, and she would like to feel seen, heard, and uplifted. Her reflection indicates that feeling seen might allow her to move through mental health challenges and validate her experience. Susan wants to feel seen, not weak.

4.1.4 Yeya

Yeya is a 25 year old cisgender woman who identifies as Latina. At the time of data collection Yeya was a senior biochemistry major at RPU. She began her postsecondary studies at RPU (she did not transfer to RPU from another college), and she identifies as a first-generation college student. When Yeya was four years old she became sick with the flu which led to muscle weakness and nerve damage. These issues began in her left arm and spread to the rest of her body. A few years later she had a tracheostomy because she could not exhale and has been in physical therapy ever since. All of her dis/abilities (muscular dystrophy, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, acid reflux, scoliosis) are physical. Yeya was registered with Disability Support Services (DSS) at RPU at the time of our interview.

Yeya joined the interview using audio-only, an option that was presented to all participants. I was not aware that she was a wheelchair-user until she told me. She lives with her parents an hour and a half away from RPU. As a commuter she was not able to fully participate in activities, fairs, and clubs on campus, but she speaks highly of her experience at RPU. After graduation she

is hoping to go to graduate school to earn a master's in bioinformatics. Yeya was not aware that RPU was an HSI.

4.1.4.1 Yeya's Dis/ability Support Network Composition and Sociogram

Yeya named seven alters that she feels provide her support as a Latina student with dis/abilities at RPU. Of the seven alters, four identified as Latinx and three identified as white. In terms of type of relationship, two alters were employed by RPU, three were family, one was a friend, and one was a local community member. Yeya relies on her mother Mary (Latina woman) and her friend Michael (white man) most often for emotional support, along with her father José (Latino man) and her uncle Marco (Latino man). In addition to Mary and Michael (who she relies on weekly), she seeks out José, Marco, and Robert (white man), a professor for informational support at least once per month. Yeya asks for informational assistance from Wendy (Director of Disability Services at RPU; white woman) and Marlo (State Rehabilitation Counselor; Latino man) a few times per year. Mary provides Yeya instrumental support daily, while José, Michael, Marlo, and Wendy provide instrumental support at least once per month. Robert and Marlo provide Yeya with instrumental support a few times per year. Figure 7 represents a sociogram for Yeya's social support network.

Yeya is very close with Mary, Jose, and Marco. She feels close to Michael and Marlo, and somewhat close to Wendy and Robert. Ethnoracial homophily appears to be important to Yeya: 57% ($n = 4$) of her alters are Latinx. She is closest with her family alters, who share her ethnoracial identity. This is evident in Figure 7 because the blue circles (Latinx family) are closest to the ego node (Yeya). Gender homophily seems less important in her social support network, as 43% ($n = 3$) of her alters are women.

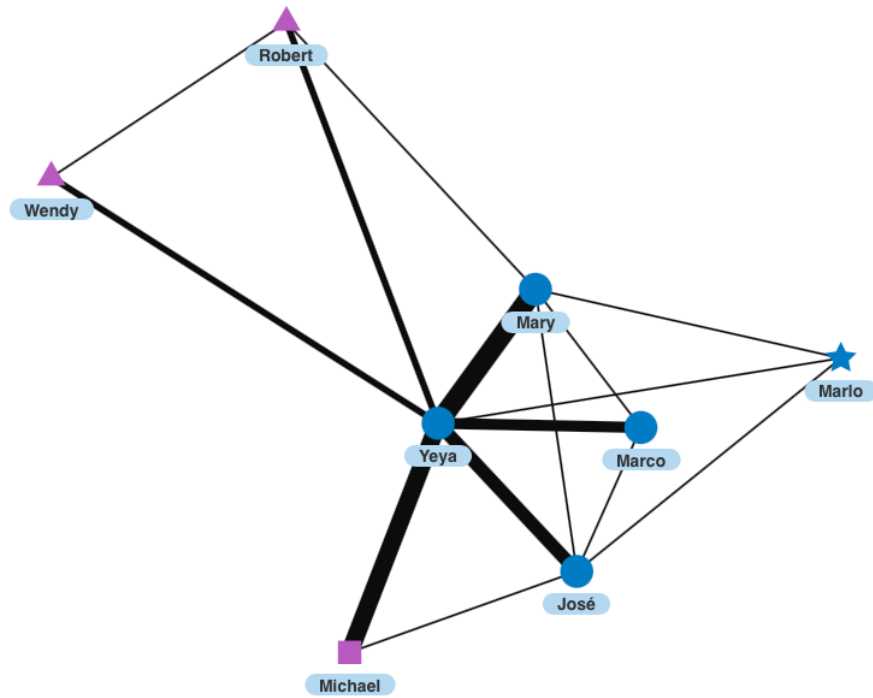


Figure 7 Sociogram Showing Yeya's Dis/Ability Social Support Network

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego: circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff. Edge thickness indicates the average combined frequency of support (emotional, informational, instrumental) seeking from ego to each alter.

4.1.4.2 Structural Characteristics of Yeya's Network

The size of Yeya's network is 7. There are no isolates present in her network; her family alters are connected to one another, her parents know Marlo, her father knows Michael, and Wendy and Robert know one another. Figure 8 shows Yeya's network with the ego node excluded.

The density of Yeya's network is .38, meaning that 38% of her alters know one another. Density is a structural network characteristic that measures social cohesion, or clustering. While Yeya's network does have structural holes (missing connections between alters), the clustering among those she is closest with is high. This means that Yeya has a strong base of support from her family alters in addition to the other 'pots' of support which she accesses.

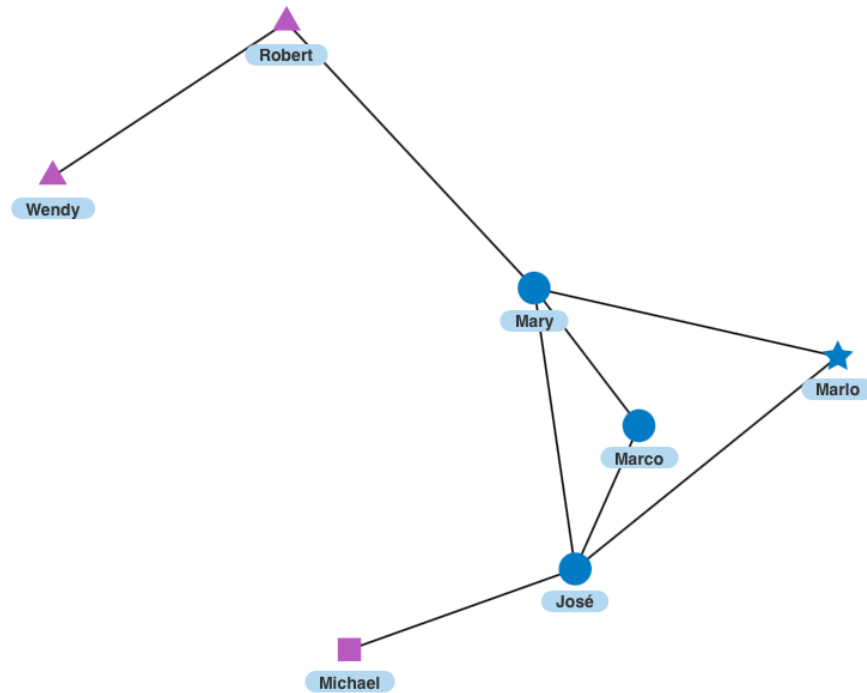


Figure 8 Yeya's Sociogram with the Ego Node Removed

4.1.4.3 Yeya's Reflection of Her Support Network

As reflected in her network findings, Yeya relies on her family for social support. In addition to emotional support, her parents in particular provide her with instrumental support. For example, her father drives her 1.5 hours each way to campus and her mother helps her with her daily hygiene. This became evident as Yeya reflected on her network.

My mom is the main one that helps me get around
 She helps with personal hygiene
 My dad drives me to school
 And then goes to work
 Last week I needed to go to a doctor's appointment
 I didn't have transportation
 My dad took me
 Even though he had work
 But he cancelled work
 And took me
 My uncle helps when my dad can't.

The pattern that emerged from Yeya's reflection is "surrounded by support." Yeya has multiple layers of support in her network: she has backup instrumental, emotional, and informational support. In her reflection poem her instrumental support is evident. Unlike other participants in this study who felt the Covid-19 pandemic made navigating classes with dis/abilities (hearing, participation, working in groups) harder in the context of their dis/abilities, the Yeya felt that the pandemic made taking classes remotely easier. This was because she did not need to find a ride to get to campus and no longer had to worry about classroom wheelchair accessibility and location (if classes are located far away from one another and she has to travel across campus).

4.1.5 Norma

Norma is a 19 year old cisgender woman who identifies as Hispanic. At the time of data collection she was a sophomore environmental science major at RPU. She began her postsecondary studies at RPU (she did not transfer to RPU from another college), and she identifies as a first-generation college student. Norma has low vision and depression. Her low vision has become worse over time, and she found out about her depression during high school. At the time of our interview Norma was not registered Disability Support Services (DSS) at RPU because she does not have medical documentation for her dis/abilities. Norma participates in Student Support Services (SSS) and Allies in STEM (a Title V funded program) at RPU, both of which she says are programs for low-income students.

Norma joined the interview from her bedroom. She spoke quietly and appeared to be rather shy. Norma has thought about trying to register with DSS and acknowledges that it would help her in school, but she cannot afford to pay for the testing needed to get diagnosed. She knows students that are registered with DSS and receives as much information as she can from them but receives

no official accommodations. Norma tries to communicate with her mother about her dis/abilities, but there is a language barrier between them because Norma does not speak Spanish fluently and her mother does not speak English fluently. Norma also feels that there is a cultural and generational barrier that impacts their relationship, especially in the context of dis/ability.

During high school Norma had a math teacher who would tease her about her dis/abilities in front of other students, even dis/abilities she did not have. For example, he would show her a piece of paper and ask if she could see it, knowing she had low vision. When she said she could see the paper, he would ask her if she had dyslexia and then say he was joking (Norma does not have dyslexia). This experience made her feel insecure about her learning skills. At RPU she has had professors take points off her grade on days when her dis/abilities prevent her from participating in class discussions, an issue which worsened when the Covid-19 pandemic forced learning to move to online.

4.1.5.1 Norma's Dis/ability Support Network Composition and Sociogram

Norma named six alters that she feels provide her support as a Hispanic student with dis/abilities at RPU. Of the six alters, three identified as Latinx and three identified as white. In terms of type of relationship, three alters were employed by RPU, two were friends, and one was family. Norma relies on her mother, Alicia (Latina woman) and her partner, Tony (Latino man) for emotional support daily. Professor O. (her professor and supervisor; white woman), Professor F. (white woman), and Katie (student support counselor; white woman) provide her emotional support weekly and Ashley (friend; Latina woman) provides emotional support a few times per year. Norma seeks out informational support from Tony and Katie weekly, from Professor O. and Professor F. monthly, and from Ashley and Alicia a few times per year. In terms of instrumental support Norma relies on Tony weekly and Professor O., Professor F., and Katie monthly. She relies

on Ashley for instrumental support a few times per year and Alicia almost never. Figure 9 represents a sociogram for Norma's social support network.

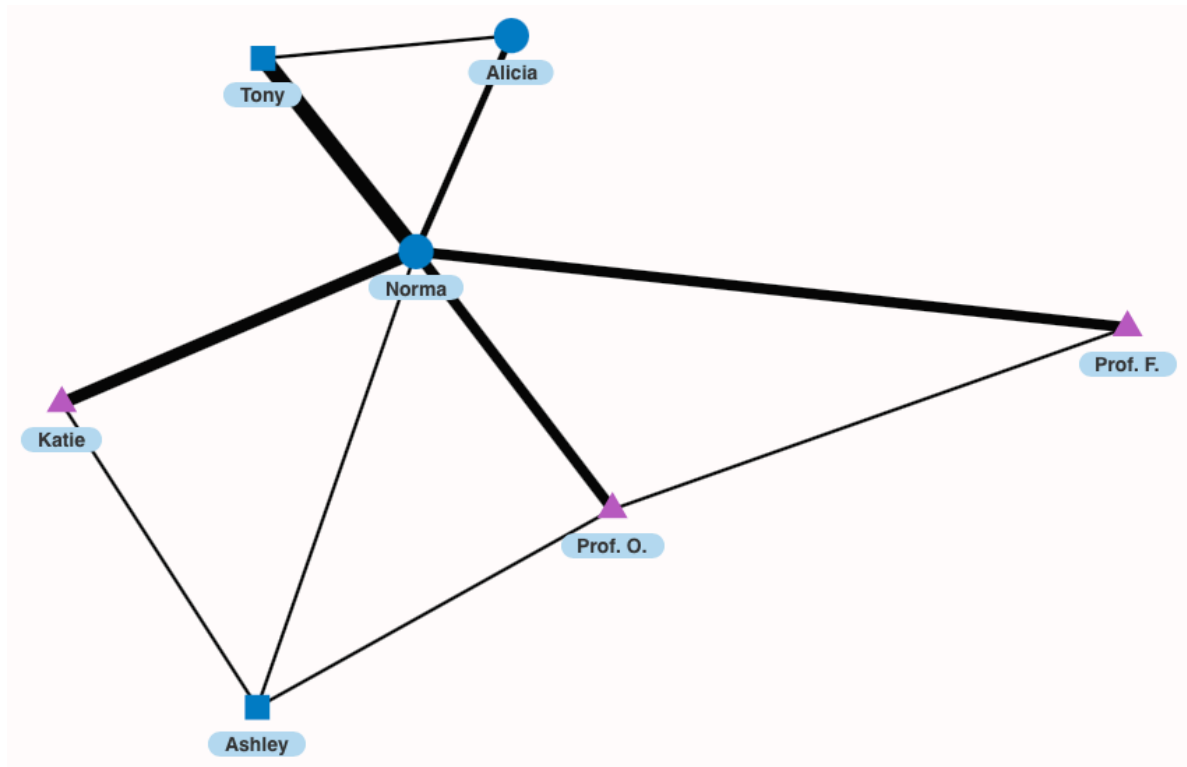


Figure 9 Sociogram Showing Norma's Dis/Ability Social Support Network

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego: circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff. Edge thickness indicates the average combined frequency of support (emotional, informational, instrumental) seeking from ego to each alter.

Despite their language barrier, Norma feels very close with her mother Alicia, as well as her partner Tony. She feels close to Professor O. and Katie, and somewhat close to Professor F. and Ashley. Norma seems to value support from other women, as 83% ($n = 5$) of her alters are women. Half of her alters ($n = 3$) are Latinx, so ethnoracial homophily is present in her network and seems to be somewhat important. As with Yeya, those Norma is closest to share her ethnoracial identity.

4.1.5.2 Structural Characteristics of Norma's Network

The size of Norma's network is 6. There are no isolates present. Her network has two distinct clusters, with Tony and Alicia being separate from Katie, Ashley, Professor O. and Professor F. The latter four alters do not all know one another but are connected indirectly. Figure 10 shows Norma's network with the ego node (Norma) removed. It is possible to see the two clusters and the relationships that exist among her alters.

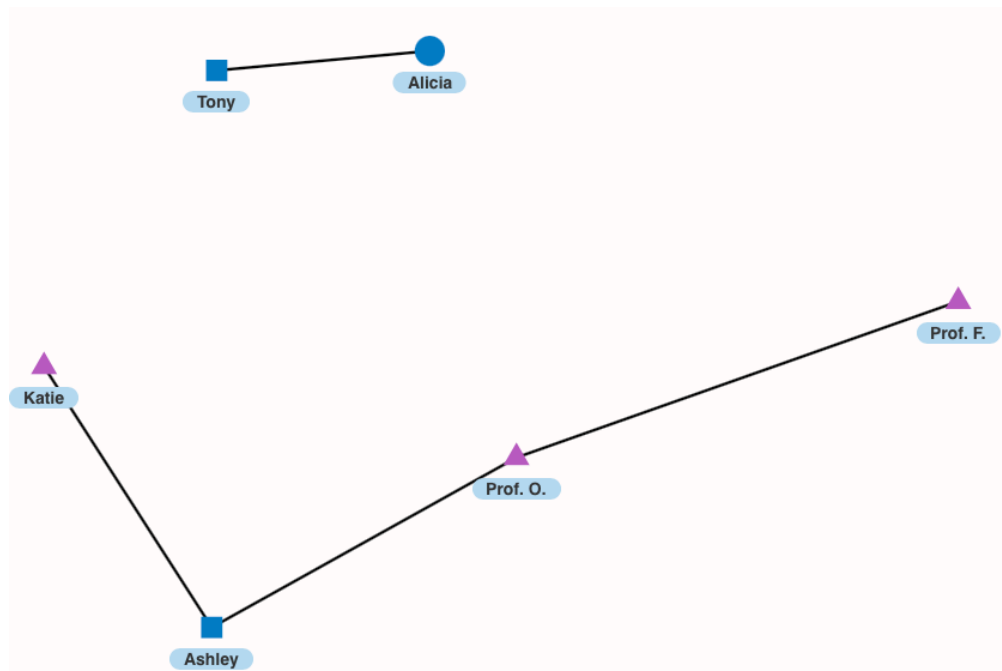


Figure 10 Norma's Sociogram with the Ego Node Removed

The density of Norma's network is .27, which means that 27% of the ties that could among alters are present. This leaves structural space for gaps in connectivity, which is evident in Figure 8. Carolan (2014) notes that dense networks reinforce accepted norms and have high social closure. In the case of Norma's network, which has relatively low social closure she has access to several different perspectives and likely greater independence of thought. Conversely, this may mean that she relies on her own beliefs and actions in the face of adversity.

4.1.5.3 Norma's Reflection of Her Support Network

While constructing her network during the interview, Norma discussed her relationship with Professor O. in more detail. She appreciated that Professor O. disclosed her own mental health dis/abilities and was generous with emotional support and care for Norma's well-being. It is clear from her reflection that she would like more of this type of support from others:

I'm close to a faculty at RPU
And it's because she went through
what I go through
which is therapy
and depression
and anxiety
and so on
she really does care about mental health
I'm very appreciative that she's that type of supervisor

One day I had to take a mental break
I couldn't handle it anymore
with everything that's been going on
I had to take a break from work
I told her about it
she was very open and understanding

I would like it if there was more people like her in the campus
it's mostly work, work, work
"you're an adult"
"do it on your own"
stuff like that
especially coming from a Latino household
it's mostly just independence
and finding out on your own with your problems
it made me feel insecure about searching for help.

The pattern that emerged from Norma's reflection is "self-reliance and self-care." It is important to note that this reflection was in the context of building a social support network, which is supposed to be about Norma's relationships with others. Here she illustrates a positive example of support at RPU while also noting that she feels somewhat alone navigating dis/ability challenges

and attributes part of this to how (she feels) mental health dis/abilities are approached in Latinx culture.

4.2 Networks in Stories

This section is called, “Networks in Stories” because I present the findings based on overall relationship patterns (Baker-Doyle, 2015). Aligning with DisCrit, this study has sought to prioritize the unique perspectives and experiences of five Latinx students with dis/abilities who attended RPU as full-time undergraduate students during the 2020-2021 academic year. The focus of this chapter has been each participant’s network and the story that emerged from co-constructing the network. Thus far I have used critical ego network analysis to each participants’ story while simultaneously centering them literally as the focal node of their social support network. While the emphasis of this study is largely on the individual networks, it is important to examine the patterns across all five participant networks. The purpose of this final section of the chapter is to summarize the compositional and structural findings and examine patterns based on dis/ability and type of social support.

4.2.1 Overall Network Composition Patterns

The five participants in this study named a total of 32 alters in their networks. Across the five participant networks presented in this chapter, nearly two-thirds (63%; $n = 20$) of the alters were women. Fifty-four percent ($n = 17$) of the alters were Latinx, 41% ($n = 13$) were white, 6% ($n = 2$) were Black, and 3% ($n = 1$) was Asian. Across all networks, 44% ($n = 14$) were employed

by RPU as faculty or staff, 30% ($n = 10$) were family members, 22% ($n = 7$) were friends, and 3% ($n = 1$) was a local community member. This means that across all participants, most support comes from RPU faculty and staff. Participants relied on more mentors, professors, and University counselors for dis/ability support than friends and family.

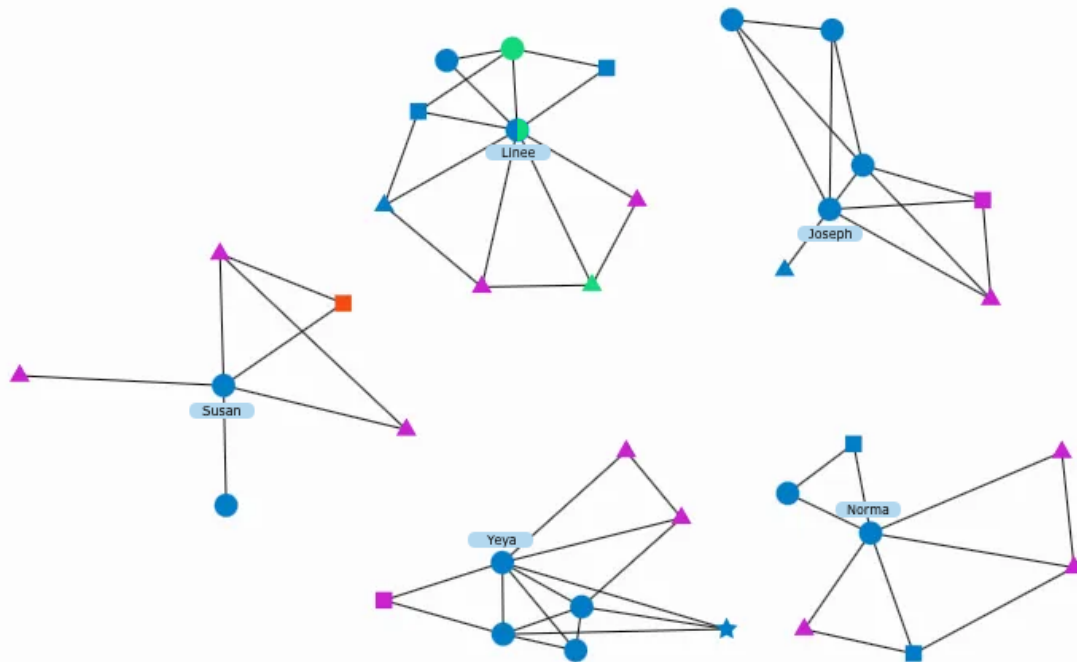


Figure 11 Participant Ego Networks That Emerged from This Study ($n = 5$)

Note: Node color indicates ethnoracial identity. Blue nodes are Latinx individuals, Green nodes are Black individuals, orange nodes are Asian individuals, and pink nodes are white individuals. Node shape indicates the relationship to the ego: (circles indicate family, square represents friends, and triangles represent RPU faculty and staff).

The average tie strength for all participant networks was 2.79 (on a Likert-type scale out of 4), meaning that on average participants felt pretty close to their alters. Homophily seemed to be relatively important to participants; 56% ($n = 18$) of alters shared the same gender identity as their ego, and 56% ($n = 18$) shared the same ethnoracial identity. Ethnoracial homophily and tie strength seemed to be related throughout the data, as the homophily for each participant increased

when only considering alters to whom the participant felt close or very close. For example, the ethnoracial homophily in Linee's network was already high at 75%, but increased to 100% when considering her closest alters. Similarly, Yeya's network ethnoracial homophily was 57%, but increased to 80% when considering her closest alters. This is important because it indicates that participants feel closest to alters that share their ethnoracial identities. Figure 11 shows the participant ego networks that emerged from this study.

4.2.2 Overall Network Structural Patterns

The average network size in this study was 6.4. The smallest network was Susan's ($n = 5$) and the largest network was Linee's ($n = 8$). Only Joseph and Susan's networks have isolates, with a total of 3 for this study (see Figure 12). McCarty et al., (2019) note that maintaining isolates takes time and effort because the ego is the only tie to the alter, the only connection to the network. Researchers suggest that an ego networks with many isolates may indicate that the respondent does not belong to a larger group, or this case social support cluster (McCarty et al., 2019). Susan's network is relatively small and two of her five alters are isolates. Appendix K presents descriptive network statistics across all participants.

The average density of the networks in this study was .30, meaning that on average 30% of the possible ties between alters exist. Susan's network is the least dense (.20), and Joseph's network is the densest (.40). Density in personal networks is not inherently good or bad; like most network characteristics the implications for network density are highly dependent on context.

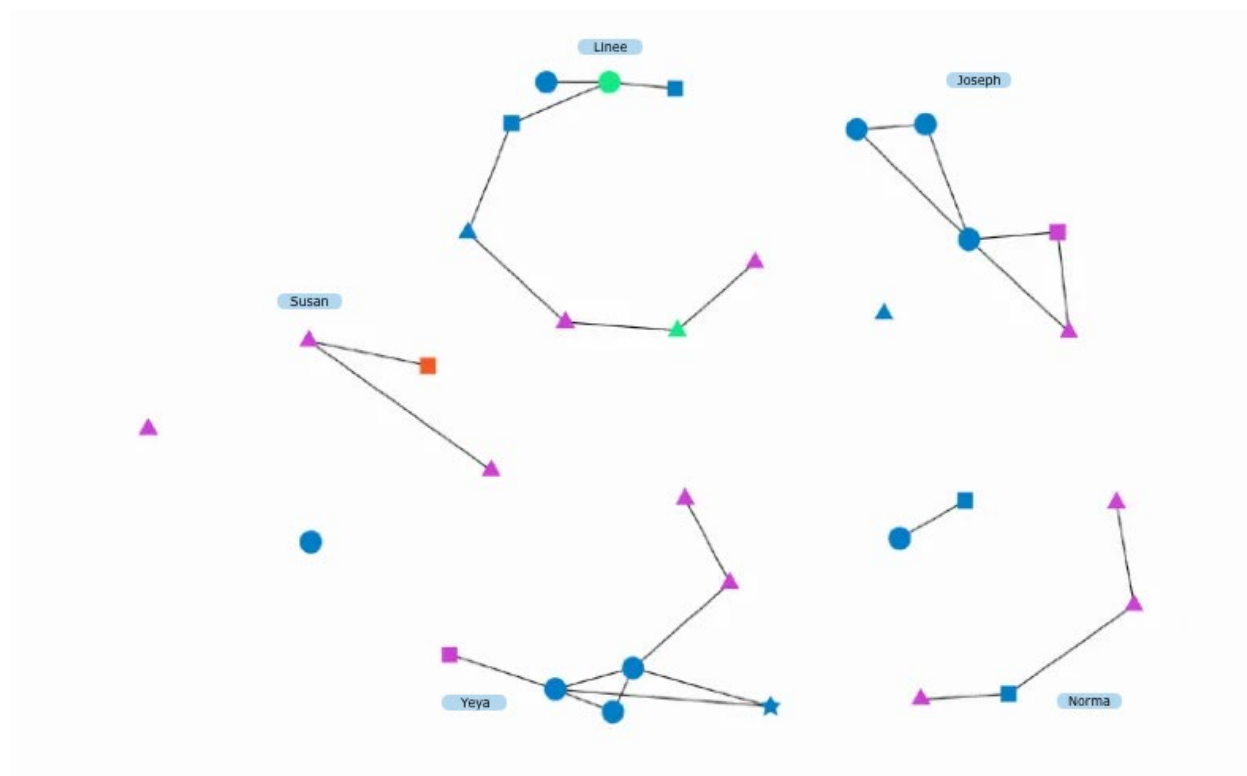


Figure 12 Participant Networks from This Study with the Egos Removed (n = 5)

When networks are dense they exhibit social closure, which can be helpful in providing a stable support ‘team.’ Based on the networks in this study, participants seemed to feel supported when they had multiple clusters of support from different sources (especially family/friends and RPU). That way they have access to unique information, experiences, and perspectives but also are not solely responsible for maintaining their relationships and have alters who can work together to support them. Joseph’s network has two clusters, one comprised of RPU and friend alters, and the other comprised of family. The clusters are connected by one central alter who bridges the support between the two clusters (Carolan, 2014).

4.2.3 Patterns by Dis/ability

One of the research questions I hoped to answer for this study was to investigate social support network characteristics by dis/ability. After collecting and analyzing the data and engaging the participants with the findings I realize that this question might not be possible to answer to the level of depth I had hoped. The reasons for this are twofold. First, my sample size is small and therefore I lack the statistical power to conduct critical quantitative multiple regression analyses or even t-tests to check for differences by type of dis/ability; and second, every participant in this study identified as having more than one dis/ability, which makes analyzing differences by specific dis/ability type more nuanced and complicates the distinction between hidden and apparent dis/abilities.

Despite this realization, there are two important findings based on patterns in the data. The first is that there were similarities in network composition and structure between participants dealing with depression and/or anxiety. Norma, Linee, Susan each identified as having either anxiety or depression, or both (along with low vision and hearing loss for Norma and Susan respectively). These three networks had the lowest proportion of family alters. Given that at least one of their dis/abilities was anxiety or depression, this means that these participants are not able to talk to and receive support from family about their dis/abilities and how they impact their lived and learning experiences. This does not necessarily mean that Norma, Linee and Susan aren't close with their family. For example, Linee's stated that her father and father's side of the family aren't as comfortable talking about mental health issues even though they are close and she does go to him for support. The findings of this study support the notion that there may be a disconnect or missed opportunity to talk about mental health in some Latinx households, even those that value familismo (Delgado-Romero et al., 2008; Torres & Zerquera, 2012).

Relatedly, Joseph and Yeya's networks have a lot in common. These are the only two participants in the study who do not identify as having anxiety or depression.²⁸ Their networks have the highest density, the highest proportion of family alters, and the lowest proportion of friend and University alters. All of Yeya's dis/abilities are physical, and Joseph has autism, ADHD, and bipolar disorder. Both participants identify as first-generation college students, live with their parents and rely on them for social support. Taken together, these findings may indicate a higher "acceptance" of physical dis/abilities and learning dis/abilities as compared with mental health dis/abilities, or a greater understanding of them in general.

4.2.4 Patterns by Type of Social Support

Emotional support was most frequently sought out type of support by study participants (3.34 on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5) followed by instrumental support (3.12) and informational support (2.96).²⁹ Each participant had at least one alter in their network who they relied on for emotional support on a weekly or daily basis. The unique experience of each participant makes it difficult to aggregate types of social support in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, the finding that emotional support was the most sought out is important.

²⁸ This feels like an appropriate place to reiterate that dis/ability is fluid and changes over time, environment, and other factors. Identifying with certain dis/abilities at the time of data collection does not mean that the participant's lived experience has stayed the same.

²⁹ Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring. Instrumental support is typically thought of as tangible aid and services, and informational support refers to advice, suggestions, and information (Ermiş-Demirtas, 2018; Small, 2017).

Participants in this study received emotional support from alters they were closest with as well as those they were not close with. Four out of the five participant networks have at least one alter who they are somewhat close with or not very close with (a tie strength of 2 or less on a 4-point Likert-type scale) who they seek out at least monthly for emotional support. Regardless of relationship type, the alters that participants relied on for emotional support on a weekly or daily basis (4 and above on a 5-point Likert-type scale) were Latinx. Taken together, these findings suggest that Latinxs with dis/abilities in this study sought emotional support from alters regardless of tie strength, but those they sought out most often were likely to be Latinx alters to whom they felt close. This supports the earlier finding that ethnoracial homophily and tie strength are related among participants in this study. The findings also suggest that faculty and staff played an important role in supporting the participants, and made up a majority of the alters in the participants' networks (more RPU alters were named than family or friends).

The findings also suggest that, in general, instrumental support is more likely to be received from people on periphery of network, or those with weaker ties to the ego. One example of this is the Director of DSS who was named in three of the five networks. This person was not someone that participants felt particularly close with, and in most cases they relied on her support a few times per year. The importance of an alter in a dis/ability support network is not based on closeness or frequency, but the tie itself.

4.3 Chapter Summary

The purpose of identifying, visualizing, and analyzing students' networks was to understand who Latinx students with dis/abilities seek out for social support and what type of support they seek (network composition; research question #1) and describe the structure of participant networks, allowing participants the opportunity to reflect on the support they seek (research question #1a). After describing the structure and composition of each participant's support network I presented overall findings across all five participant networks, examining compositional and structural network patterns as well as patterns of social support (emotional, instrumental, informational; research question #1b). Throughout this chapter I have maintained a focus on the individual ego networks, centering each participant in a position of power within their own network. As such, the primary focus of my research questions and findings was each unique network.

5.0 Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

As representation among Latinxs and students with dis/abilities in postsecondary education increases, the need for higher education institutions, and particularly Hispanic Serving Institution (HSIs) which enroll nearly 70% of all Latinx students, to ensure the well-being of students that are multiply minoritized becomes ever more important. Social support has been shown to improve the experiences of Latinx college students and college students with dis/abilities in terms of health, well-being, retention, and persistence (Ermis-Demirtas, 2018; Murray et al., 2013). Understanding social support for Latinx college students with dis/abilities involves triangulating between social support, social relationships, and social networks (Small, 2017).

In this study I examined the compositional and structural characteristics of the ego networks of five Latinx students with dis/abilities who attend Robles Private University (RPU), a HSI located in the Western United States. The purpose of this endeavor was to investigate the social support networks of Latinx college students with dis/abilities with a focus on the composition (who is in the network) and structure (size, density, and connections) of students' networks, including the types of social support. Furthermore, participating in this study was meant to be empowering for the students who participated as they visually co-constructed their social support networks; critical dis/ability scholars suggest that positioning dis/abled individuals as “purveyors of knowledge” rather than objects of study represents emancipatory praxis which has historically been ignored (Snyder & Mitchell, 2010).

Dis/abled Latinx college students' social support is the heart and soul of this study. It is the why, how, and what for. Cultivating relationships that provide ethnoracially-conscious social support improves students' coping capacity in stressful situations as well as physical and mental

health (Hernandez-Saca & Cannon, 2016; Small, 2017). This support has also been shown to help students develop dis/ability pride and reduce stigmatization (Bogart et al., 2018). The individual network findings along with patterns across all five networks in this study are useful in adding to the scant literature on social support for dis/abled Latinx students who attend an HSI. In this chapter I first discuss the findings, expounding upon and making meaning of the results presented in chapter 4. Then I offer the major contributions of the study, suggest ideas for future research, and describe the institutional practice and policy implications of the study.

5.1 Composition of Latinx Dis/ability Support Networks

The first research question examined the composition of Latinx students' dis/ability support networks. This question sought to discover *who* participants went to for social support, whether they sought support from individuals who share their ethnoracial identity and how close they felt to the individuals that supported them, called, "alters." Participants named three categories of alters (relationship types) in their networks: University, Family, and Peers.

5.1.1 University Alters

The importance of faculty and staff as providers of social support is a major finding of this study. Across all of the five ego networks studied, RPU faculty and staff were represented more than family and peer alters. Further, in three of the five networks faculty and staff made up at least half of their network. One participant noted a particularly positive experience when a faculty member shared their own experience with dis/ability, which was a meaningful shared connection.

This is not to say that students' interaction with all faculty and staff was supportive; rather, the findings from the study suggest that Latinxs with dis/abilities at RPU sought social support from faculty and staff more than family and peers. I hypothesized that university alters would be important sources of support for Latinxs with dis/abilities, but I did not expect university alters to be represented to the extent that they were.

It is important to note that social support should not be confused with accommodations or compliance. Each of the participants in this study require support in order to overcome the challenges they face, and official accommodations are only one form of support. More specifically, participants indicated that they seek out emotional support more than any other type of support. Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring ((Ermis-Demirtas, 2018). Conversely, Stevens (2018) found that faculty may doubt students' need for dis/ability accommodations, even if they are registered with Disability Support Services (DSS). Several participants in this study expressed feeling resistance from faculty in particular about their dis/ability needs. More specifically, the students in the study are all multiply minoritized and multiply dis/abled which affects the support they require from faculty: namely, the need to accept the fluid nature of dis/abilities as sensitive to the overall learning environment as well as an understanding of students' identities such as transfer student, age, first-generation student, among others. Corker (1999) refers to this dynamic as a "paradigm of communication" rather than a "paradigm of structure" whereby supportive relationships between Latinxs with dis/abilities and faculty allow for co-construction of their needs. For example, Robert, a professor in Yeya's network knows her mother, Mary and as result multiple individuals may communicate Yeya's needs and experience. Similarly, Wendy (another RPU alter in Yeya's network) knows Robert and

can check-in and share information that may be helpful in understanding how to best support Yeya. In both cases, relationships are tools that increase the potential for holistic student support.

Out of the five students in the study, four identified as first-generation college students. Research shows that first-generation college students with dis/abilities have lower GPAs, lower family and peer support, and greater financial stress, even after controlling for race and dis/ability type (Lombardi, 2012). Several students in the study felt that being the first in their family to go to college affected their support-seeking behavior and mental health. Susan stated that “When you’re first-generation you think you can do everything. When you’re fucking up you don’t let yourself admit it. You keep going until you break down.” Additionally, DisCrit studies reveal the internalized oppression and childhood trauma that many students with dis/abilities experience in K-12 settings (Connor et al., 2016). For example, Norma was repeatedly teased by a teacher in high school and noted how that affected her willingness to ask for help in college (she is still not registered with DSS due to financial barriers). Similarly, Susan’s transition from community college to RPU was challenging and she noted that the transition was exacerbated by the fact that she had little social support from RPU for her hearing dis/ability. Three of the five alters in her network were faculty, and she worked hard to establish supportive relationships (especially given that she does not have many family members in her network).

Students in the study who were aware of RPU’s HSI designation revealed that this influenced their expectations for university support. For example, Linee came specifically to RPU because RPU was an HSI and as an AfroLatina she wanted to connect with her Latinx identity. Given that RPU is an HSI, students hoped that faculty would be aware of Latinx student needs. This pertains to white faculty as well as faculty of color. White faculty play an important role in supporting Latinxs with dis/abilities; Out of the 14 RPU alters named across all networks in the

study, 11 (79%) were white individuals. In the example of Susan's network, all of the faculty were white.

While RPU's HSI identity is not the focus of this study, it does provide an important context and raises questions about the institutional responsibility for providing holistic support through representation and awareness (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) note that creating a culture of inclusion requires time, resources, and commitment. In their recent study of faculty representation and resource allocation at HSIs Vargas et al. (2020) found that the average Latinx student to Latinx faculty ratio at HSIs was 146:1, whereas the average ratio of white students to white faculty at HSIs was 10:1. The authors argued that HSIs should facilitate "co-ethnoracial interactions" between students and faculty and one way to do this is to allocate resources to hiring more Latinx faculty (Vargas et al., 2020). While I agree with Vargas et al. (2020), the results of this study show that students seek out faculty that they find to be supportive and although students mentioned that ethnoracial homophily is desirable, it is not sufficient if the faculty is dis/ability-evasive or does not provide the support students need. Ethnoracial homophily was most salient among family and peer alters in the study.

5.1.2 Family Alters

Research has shown that for Latinx college students support from family helps reduce stress, increase self-efficacy, and protect them when challenges arise (Ermis-Demirtas et al., 2018). The concept of *familismo* is well-documented in the literature and suggests that the family might play a large role in providing social support for Latinx college students (Delgado-Romero et al., 2008; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Given this cultural value, while also recognizing that Latinx

culture is not a monolith, I hypothesized that family alters would be important sources of support for Latinxs with dis/abilities.

The findings here were surprising because family alters were more present in some student networks than others. After faculty and staff, family alters were the most represented in participant networks and made up one third of total alters across the five networks.³⁰ Yeya and Joseph's networks were comprised of 50% and 43% family members, respectively. Yeya's family provides her with essential support for her physical dis/abilities, such as help with daily hygiene, transportation, and encouragement. Joseph's parents are highly involved in his life and decision making and his mother has relationships with other alters in his network. They are key sources of support for his Autism. On the other hand, Susan and Norma named only one family alter and do not feel that their family provides social support for their dis/abilities, which are primarily mental health dis/abilities. I discuss these differences by dis/ability type in greater detail in a subsequent section (Dis/ability and Social Support Distinctions), but the findings suggest that dis/ability identity complicates social support for Latinxs in college.

These findings are in contrast to Agarwal's (2011) qualitative study of 11 Latinxs with dis/abilities which found that students view family as their greatest source of support during college. While it is hard to pinpoint the difference in these seemingly contradictory studies, I posit that one explanation is the difference in methodology and study design: it is possible that students will say their family is their greatest source of support in a qualitative interview where social support is one question but not the focus of the study. However, when participating in an hour-

³⁰ The family alters that participants named were parents, aunts, or uncles; it is interesting that no siblings were named.

long interactive interview exclusively about social support and co-constructing their visual support network (being asked to name specific individuals), the results appear to be different.

5.1.3 Peer Alters

Another relevant finding from Agarwal's (2011) study was that Latinxs with dis/abilities did not feel supported by their peers. In particular, students with hidden dis/abilities felt stigmatized when disclosing their dis/abilities to their non-dis/abled peers (Agarwal, 2011). The findings of this study support this; peers are the least-represented group across all five participant networks and comprised of 22% of named alters. In a subsequent study of Latinxs with dis/abilities Agarwal (2014) found that informal social interaction between students with dis/abilities has a positive impact on students' college experience.³¹ Relatedly, the creation of a dis/ability student organization on campus helped students without dis/abilities understand the struggles of their peers (Agarwal, 2014). Conversely, students in this study did not feel that their dis/ability identities were supported or reflected in student organizations such as LASO (Latin American Student Organization); LASO and other student organizations seemed to be dis/ability-evasive (dis/ability was not discussed or acknowledged) and students joined primarily to connect with their ethnoracial identity. There were no student organizations at RPU for students of color with dis/abilities.

In their study of social support among Latina sorority members, Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) observed that Latina sorority members develop networks of support with their Latina

³¹ This, of course assumes that students are comfortable disclosing their dis/ability to one another.

peers, and these communities make them feel comfortable when surrounded by white peers and faculty. The experiences of the students in this study are in contrast to the experiences of Latina sorority members; for example, Joseph was a member of LASO but did not seek social support from any of his peers there. As a commuter with dis/abilities who relies on her parents for transportation to and from campus, Yeya indicated that she was not able to fully participate in activities on campus and engage with peers.

5.1.4 Homophily and Tie Strength

The concept of homophily, which is used in networks to represent the tendency for egos to select alters with similar identities, is not exclusive to social network research. For example, Torres et al. (2019) show that Latinx college students feel encouraged by positive relationships with faculty who share their ethnoracial identity. Research has shown that for students, seeing their ethnoracial identity reflected in the university affects student persistence in college (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Torres et al., 2019). While not entirely surprising, the students in this study exhibited a high level of ethnoracial homophily. Regardless of relationship category (university, family, peer), students in this study sought support from Latinx (and Black in Linee's network) individuals.

Small (2017) notes that "homophily is everywhere" and is one of the most important concepts in social network analysis. For the students in this study, representation of Latinxs in their networks was important. This finding has thus far not been explored in the scant literature on social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education, but homophily is generally understood to speed up information flow, with the risk being exposure to a narrower set of ideas (Kezar, 2014). Across the five networks I studied, the homophily ranged from 20% (Susan) to 75%

(Linee). Kezar (2014) notes that off-campus ties are more likely to exhibit homophily, which is the case in this study. Students in this study valued receiving dis/ability support from individuals who share their ethnoracial identity, though this became more limited among university alters.

Homophily in this study also appeared to be related to tie strength, or closeness. For example, Linee's closest alters are either Black or Latinx. In their social network study of minoritized master's in social work (MSW) students Mauldin et al. (2017) found that ethnoracial homophily was higher among alters that students felt close with, which was peers. Ethnoracial homophily was lower among academic relationships, which is consistent with the findings of this study (Mauldin et al., 2017). The authors argue that homophily is greater among peers because friendships are more intimate relationships. Regardless of relationship type, the proportion of same-race alters in this study increased when considering alters that students reported feeling "close" or "very close" with. This is likely because most of the close alters in the networks I studied were family members who tend to share the same ethnoracial identity.

Still, it is worth noting that research shows that Latinx peers may be potential sources for social support for Latinx college students with dis/abilities. Thus far much of the research on Latinxs in higher education is dis/ability-evasive, or neutral at best. In their recent study of crip neutrality and student resistance Ho et al., (2020) argue that neutrality reinforces ableism in higher education and can limit the presence of dis/abled students. Though she is not known as a dis/ability scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa had multiple dis/abilities (DeMirjyn, 2020).³² She acknowledged that her dis/abilities impacted her in intersectional ways, stating "My resistance to gender and race injustice stemmed from my physical differences. I was extremely shy and vulnerable, and it all stemmed

³² Anzaldúa was born with a rare hormone disorder that led to menstruation during childhood and an eventual hysterectomy. She also was a type 1 diabetic (DeMirjyn, 2020).

from the fact that people saw me as flawed” (McMaster, 2008, p.103). Neither color-evasiveness nor dis/ability evasiveness are acceptable, and when intersections of ethnoracial identity and dis/ability are ignored it is harmful for multiply minoritized students. The results of this study show that the intersections change the support structures. According to McMaster (2008), looking at Anzaldúa’s work in the context of dis/ability offers insights on how to consider dis/ability and race together: by being a neplantera. Neplanteras are “bridge-builders” who see multiple points of view and create opportunities for transformation (DeMirjyn, 2020). Through this bridge-building work, non-dis/abled Latinx peers may be encouraged to recognize dis/ability and provide additional support.

5.2 Structure of Latinx Dis/ability Support Networks

Research question 1a for this study allowed me to examine the structure (size, density, connection) of Latinx students’ dis/ability support networks. Answering this question presented an opportunity to visually map participants’ dis/ability support networks using their lived experience, their truths, and their perceptions of the support they receive.

5.2.1 Network Size

The five networks in this study ranged in size from five (Susan) to eight (Linee). More data collection would be needed to study the significance of network size in the context of social support, and while that is of interest, it is beyond the scope of this study. However, prior research

on network size among college students with dis/abilities shows that ego networks of dis/abled college students tend to be smaller than their non-dis/abled peers (Eisenman et al., 2013).

Perhaps most relevant to this study, Murray (2013) found that students with mental health dis/abilities reported having fewer social support connections. The findings of this study support those of Murray (2013), and this is concerning. Based on the findings of this study and the relevant literature, it seems that the importance of an alter in a dis/ability support network is not based on closeness, homophily, or relationship type, but the presence of the tie itself. In other words, having someone to turn to is key.

5.2.2 Isolates and Density

Examining participant sociograms revealed important findings about their network structure. One finding is the presence of isolates in students' networks, or alters that are not connected to anyone but the ego. In sociograms with the ego removed, these individuals appear to be on their own, without any lines connecting them to anyone else (See Figure 12 in chapter 4). Two networks in the study contain isolates: Susan and Joseph. I posit that the isolates in these two networks have different meaning despite being the same network variable.

Joseph has five alters that are connected to one another, with his mother Pam serving as a connection between two clusters of alters. At .40 (meaning 40% of his alters know one another), his network is the densest of all participants in this study. Jessie, a Latinx mentor at RPU is not connected to anyone else in Joseph's network. Based on his structural position in Joseph's network, Jessie may be a source of new information and an opportunity for Joseph to present himself as he chooses. In addition, to Jessie, Joseph has a solid base which includes family, a friend, and the Director of DSS, and these alters are directly or indirectly connected to one another.

Susan has five alters in her network. One alter, Professor H knows both her friend Katherine and Professor K. The other two alters in her network, Pauli (Director of DSS) and Martin (Susan's father) are isolates. Susan is responsible for communicating information and maintaining relationships with both Pauli and Martin. While this provides opportunities for Susan to access new information, maintaining the relationships takes time and effort. Given that her network is relatively small, lacks a cluster of family or friends, and is not dense (.20, meaning 20% of her alters know one another) the presence of isolates in Susan's network may be stressful.

In a study assessing the stability of ego networks over time, Hogan et al. (2020) found that "structurally embedded alters are more likely to persist over time" (p. 215). This makes sense because maintaining the tie with the alter is dependent upon the relationship with one person. González Canché (2019) notes that isolates are often omitted from social network analyses due to their lack of connections and therefore lack of impact on network measures. However, I argue that in small ego network studies isolates can provide useful information and that discussions about isolates are highly context-specific, as evidenced by Susan and Joseph's networks. Network density also becomes important when thinking about collective responsibility for supporting Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education, and especially at an HSI. This is because collective responsibility requires a community of support. That is not to say that all of the alters in a Latinx dis/ability support network should be connected, but that density and indirect connections may be valuable to understandings of social support.

5.3 Dis/ability and Social Support Distinctions

The final part of the research question (1b) considered differences by type of dis/ability as well as type of social support. Below I discuss these distinctions as they presented in the current research. Using the findings as a guide, I discuss differences that emerged between students with mental health dis/abilities and those without in addition to differences by type of social support.

5.3.1 Dis/ability Distinctions

The five participants in this study self-reported having a total of 11 distinct dis/abilities: Autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, hearing loss, low vision, muscular dystrophy, Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), acid reflux, and scoliosis. Two participants, Susan and Norma were either partially registered with DSS (registered for one dis/ability but not the other) or not registered at all due to financial barriers that prevented them from acquiring the required medical documentation. Due to the small sample size and given that each student had more than one dis/ability, I was unable to analyze the networks by specific type of dis/ability. As a multiply dis/abled critical dis/ability researcher, this was an important moment of pause and pondering about the utility (or futility) of making meaning from single dis/abilities. Taking the students as they are, holistically, is more aligned with DisCrit and humanizing educational research. This study showed that even distinctions such as hidden and apparent are complicated. Apparent to whom? When? Under what circumstances?

While it is not surprising that the ego networks of students with mental health dis/abilities might have different network composition and structure than those with learning and physical dis/abilities, the lack of perceived family support among students with mental health dis/abilities

was somewhat surprising. The students with mental health dis/abilities had the lowest proportion of family alters in their network and the lowest network density. Taken together, this may mean that their family members do not understand their dis/ability experience or may not know how to support them. Norma mentioned that she feels alone navigating challenges relating to her dis/ability, and that there is a stigma surrounding mental health dis/abilities in Latinx culture. Similarly, Susan expressed doubts about her family's capacity for providing social support for her mental health challenges, doubting that they would have the resources to help her. Linee noted that the Mexican side of her family (her father's side) are not comfortable talking about her anxiety and depression.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that Latinx students with mental health dis/abilities feel they lack an important source of social support and ethnoracial homophily in their networks. Kranke (2013) observed that students with mental health dis/abilities were less likely to seek out accommodations for their dis/abilities if they are not encouraged and supported. Relatedly, research has shown that college students with dis/abilities and Latinx college students have an easier time adjusting to college if they feel supported by individuals on and off-campus and are satisfied with the support they receive (Murray, 2013; Vaccaro et al., 2018).

Returning to the tenets of DisCrit, it is important to recognize that environments and relationships can be disabling, and new dis/abilities can develop over time as a result of not being supported (Koren & Evans-El, 2020; Koren, 2021). Although the present findings are not generalizable, it appears that students with dis/abilities that are more accepted and widely understood (such as physical dis/abilities and Autism) receive more social support. Sniatecki (2015) found that faculty are more likely to have negative attitudes towards students with hidden and mental health dis/abilities, which suggests that ableism and disablism may not affect all

students in the same way. Additionally, research suggests that white students with mental health dis/abilities will be treated differently than students of color with dis/abilities (Annamma et al., 2013). The findings from this study suggest a stigma surrounding Latinx students with mental health dis/abilities, specifically in terms of the support they receive from family.

5.3.2 Social Support Distinctions

This study asked participants about the social support they receive, considering three specific types of social support: emotional (expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring), instrumental (tangible aid and services), and informational (advice, suggestions, and information). While each type of support was important in students' networks, students sought emotional support most often, followed by instrumental support and informational support. All participants relied on university alters for support (all three types), but this was especially true for students with hidden dis/abilities. Relationship category did not seem to be associated with type of social support, as might be expected. That is, students sought emotional support from alters they were close with as well as those they were not close with. Participants sought emotional support from family, faculty, and peers. It is important, however, that the alters that participants relied on most often for social support were Latinx. In Agarwal's (2011) study students reported that their family provided them with emotional support. The findings from this study tell a more complicated story.

Prior research supports these findings. Small (2017) found that that emotional support doesn't have to come from close alters. A study of social support for graduate students in their first year of study revealed that people may prefer to avoid seeking emotional support from those they are closest with because strong ties may be more complicated than other relationships and (Small, 2017). The individuals we are closest with are more likely to know other individuals we are close

with, and trustworthiness may be an issue. Additionally, weaker ties may provide more objective support (Small, 2017).

5.4 Major Contributions of The Study

Several dimensions of this study amplify current understandings of the social support networks of Latinx college students with dis/abilities. First, this study adds to the scant literature about Latinx students with dis/abilities in higher education and establishes an exploratory understanding of the experiences of Latinxs with dis/abilities who attend an HSI. The study revealed that Latinx students with dis/abilities have unique social support needs; they may look to faculty and staff for emotional support, especially students with mental health dis/abilities. They will likely seek support that considers their multiply minoritized identities simultaneously and explicitly recognizes their educational needs and lived experience. The findings of this study align with the recommendations of previous researchers: ethnoracial identity should be considered in ensuring success for college students with dis/abilities (Madaus, 2014; Ramirez-Stapleton et al., 2020).

5.4.1 General Contributions to Critical Dis/ability Research in Higher Education

This study supports previous research that positions the university environment as a key source of social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities (Baker & Robnett, 2012). Baker and Robnett (2012) note that this is in contrast to high school, where social support from the family is more important than social support from school. The importance of social support from faculty and staff

in particular was a major finding of this study. This is true for white faculty as well as faculty of color. This finding is supported in critical dis/ability research studies and HSI literature, as positive relationships with faculty, cultural affinity, and campus clubs and programs have been shown to be crucial supports for students with dis/abilities and Latinx students who attend HSIs (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019; Lombardi et al., 2016). Prior research also suggests that within the campus environment students with dis/abilities benefit from support outside of the accommodations provided by dis/ability services (Ostiguy, 2018).

The results from this study echo Kranke et al.'s (2013) study findings; Latinx students with dis/abilities seek social support from faculty, especially faculty that share their ethnoracial identity (Latinx and Black faculty in the context of this study) and receiving social support from faculty encourages them to be more proactive about their dis/ability needs. While critical dis/ability studies in higher education may be nascent, there has been a tradition of social support research in education for nearly five decades (Perry et al., 2018). This study sought to bring social support into the literature by looking at relationships that help Latinxs with dis/abilities navigate challenges and feel a sense of collective responsibility for their success in college.

5.4.1.1 Contributions to HSI Research

Currently, there is a lack of research on how to serve Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs. Serving a Latinx student without a dis/ability is not the same as serving Latinx students with dis/abilities, yet a majority of HSI research has treated the “H” like a monolith. The support students receive from faculty and staff may be ableist or dis/ability-evasive, meaning dis/ability is ignored, disregarded, or treated as one broad category rather than acknowledging specific dis/abilities. A Latinx student with a dis/ability will not be served at a HSI that operates through a dis/ability-evasive lens any more than they would be served through a race-evasive approach. HSI

research should consider the intersections of identity that Latinx students have in order to fully understand the various ways that the campus must adjust in order to become Latinx-serving, with this study making an important contribution in this regard.

Garcia et al. (2019) argued that servingness encompasses both structures for serving and indicators of serving. This study complicates notions of servingness by suggesting that the intersections of ethnoracial identity and dis/ability change the structures for serving Latinx college students. The findings from this study show that students depend on programs and services on campus as well as opportunities to connect with faculty and staff that can support them as Latinx students and students with dis/abilities. They also want more opportunities for student clubs that support their multiply minoritized identities. Additionally, the study shows that students with dis/abilities at HSIs may view HSI designation as superficial if they are not supported for their dis/ability *and* their ethnoracial identity.

An important contribution is to extend previous HSI research that supports deepening the connection between university structures and family, especially and explicitly concerning student mental health (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Garcia et al.'s Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Servingness includes engagement within the Latinx community, HSI grants, and compositional diversity as several structures for servingness (Garcia et al., 2019). The results of this study suggest that intentionally engaging with multiply minoritized individuals within the Latinx community (naming dis/ability, for example) and using HSI grants to specifically improve the lived experiences of Latinxs with dis/abilities (the creation of a dis/ability cultural center or funding for wellness needs) may benefit Latinxs with dis/abilities. Further, compositional diversity is not sufficient to create a culture of collective responsibility for Latinxs with dis/abilities. Faculty, staff, and administrators should be encouraged to learn more about the Latinxs with dis/abilities (and

their other identities) they are committing to serve. Engagement needs to come from within the university as well as with the families and in local communities.

This study asks HSIs to recognize that dis/ability is not well understood and accept (name and claim) the responsibility for supporting Latinxs with dis/abilities. Participants in the study sought emotional support most often; a further contribution of the study is to offer that acts of love and caring need not be limited to interactions between individuals. Drawing from Garcia et al. (2019), the indicators for serving that this study identified as crucial are validating experiences and liberatory outcomes. In particular, student mental and emotional health and community interdependence might be added as additional liberatory outcomes. This study echoes the call of Garcia (2021) that HSI leaders should embrace liberatory outcomes as important indicators of serving. If possible, this indicator for serving might be modified to focus on liberatory experiences rather than outcomes, to emphasize the importance of these indicators throughout students' time in school. As institutions, HSIs have the power to acknowledge Latinxs with dis/abilities and engage in what bell hooks refers to as love as a practice of freedom (hooks, 2001).

5.4.2 Contributions to Theory

A theoretical contribution of this study is to move away from race-neutral approaches to dis/ability and “white dis/ability studies” which continue to dominate higher education dis/ability scholarship (Bell, 2017; Madaus, 2014). As a result of race-neutral studies of dis/ability in higher education, Latinx students with dis/abilities have largely been excluded from the literature. In response to and in defiance of these trends, this study exclusively focused on Latinx college students with dis/abilities and asked participants to self-report their dis/ability and ethnoracial identities in their own words. This study also added to the scant CDT higher education literature

and showed that CDT can be employed to gain a rich, focused understanding of the experiences of dis/abled Latinxs at one HSI.

DisCrit scholars have noted that both race and dis/ability are socially constructed and attempts at categorization are ephemeral at best (Artiles, 2019). Intersectional approaches to studying dis/ability in higher education involve ever-changing contexts and fluid, messy realities (Stapleton & James, 2020). This study offers implications for intersectionality in dis/ability higher education research. The results of the study indicate that Latinx students with dis/abilities want to receive support for their multiply minoritized identities without having to compartmentalize their needs. Several participants stated this during their interview, specifically insofar as it was absent. For example, Linee said “I’m not able to seek out benefits as a Latinx woman with a dis/ability even though it’s HSI campus that has DSS. I have to seek out help as a Latinx person and then separately seek out help for mental health.” According to DisCrit, “racism and ableism position unwanted bodies outside of the category of normal in order to justify their exclusion, segregation, and even termination” (Annama et al., 2017). Annama et al. (2017) posit that the way to resist master narratives of race and dis/ability is through intersectional counter-narratives, such as the student networks included in this study.

5.4.3 Contributions to Methods

Methodologically, while it is common for network researchers to use social support as an independent variable to predict outcomes such as academic achievement and retention, this study employed social support as a dependent variable in order to critically investigate the relationships that Latinxs with dis/abilities view as essential to their college experience. This allowed for a deep analysis of support for Latinxs with dis/abilities in the study, including but not limited to who

provided support and what type of support was provided. By employing ego network analysis in this way, the focus and burden of support shifted from the individual to a more collective sphere of influence.

This study also offers an important contribution to the extremely limited quantitative CDT higher education literature. I respond to Kezar's (2014) recommendation that higher education network analysis studies examine networks within and outside the campus rather than using the campus as the network. Using a single-site design I recognized the importance of place and site-specific context while prioritizing the lived experiences of participants who, despite differences in their networks attend the same institution. This study also benefits from the disclosure of my own ethnoracial and dis/ability identities, a transparency which is lacking in current CDT literature.

5.5 Future Research

This study presented an opportunity to explore the social support networks of Latinxs with dis/abilities at one HSI, a topic that is relatively new. As such, there are myriad ways to continue adding to the HSI literature. Future studies might partner with the university's HSI task force or other campus offices, as doing so might increase participation and communicate that meeting the needs of Latinxs with dis/abilities at HSIs are a priority. These studies might involve a faculty and staff interview component in order to understand how practitioners are actively and explicitly conceptualizing support for Latinx students with dis/abilities through their HSI grant applications, campus programs, mentoring, and pedagogy. A qualitative study might use the *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness at HSIs* to examine how administrators at HSIs include Latinx with dis/abilities in the structures for serving (Garcia et al., 2019). Similarly, it would be

useful to collect student data based on the indicators for serving, such as academic, non-academic and liberatory outcomes for Latinxs with dis/abilities.

Additionally, this study should be expanded to include more HSIs and participants. This would allow for a quantitative multiple regression study using network data and may be generalizable beyond the specific participants. A study dedicated to 2-year HSIs would also be important to understandings of support for Latinx students with dis/abilities, especially given that 2-year HSIs may be more digitally accessible (Taylor & Burnett, 2019). Moreover, future studies should consider the mental health needs of Latinxs with dis/abilities and include students in the research process through participatory action research. Given that the university support is particularly salient, it would be useful to learn from students' lived experiences and know more about how and when support is needed as well as their overall perceptions of their school's HSI environment.

In gathering network data from more students, future studies might employ quasi-experimental quantitative methods to further investigate the relationship between network characteristics and social support. Another option or model for such a study would be to analyze the networks at the relationship or dyad level, comparing relationships between the ego and a peer to an ego and a family member, for example. Ideally such studies would include a participatory aspect such as a focus group that invited students to reflect on the findings. Multiple regression, descriptive analyses, content analysis, and testimonios are additional methods that should be prioritized in future studies.

The majority of DisCrit studies have been focused on PK-12 contexts and the majority of dis/ability higher education research has been color-evasive. Therefore, there is a need to add to the scant DisCrit higher education literature across all institutional types. This study is a beginning.

It is important that future studies incorporate theories that disrupt white-centered understandings of the dis/abled student experience (Stapleton & James, 2020). Collaborations with dis/ability community organizations such as Latinxs with Disabilities (<http://www.latinxdisabilitycoalition.com/about-us.html>) are also valuable. DisCrit is one important framework might be used to examine faculty perceptions of students with dis/abilities, allowing for differences by ethnoracial identity and dis/ability type.

5.6 Institutional Practices

The *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Understanding Servingness in HSIs* is useful for contextualizing the implications of this study. The Framework includes indicators of serving (such as experiences and outcomes), structures for serving (HSI grants, programs and services for minoritized students, compositional diversity), and external influences on serving (legislation, alumni, advocacy groups; Garcia et al., 2019). The *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Understanding Servingness in HSIs* can be used to evaluate, adapt, and disrupt institutional structures and indicators of serving (Garcia et al., 2019).

Based on the findings of this study, there are several implications for the structures for serving. In order for HSIs to serve their Latinx students with dis/abilities, they should do away with any medical documentation (and consequently financial) requirements that present barriers to dis/ability accommodation. Universities across the nation have done this already, and it should be standard practice at HSIs. The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) published recommendations allowing students to self-report their dis/ability in order to register with dis/ability services nearly ten years ago (Association on Higher Education and Disability,

2012). While receiving accommodations represents only one basic form of support, it is crucial that every student who believes they may have a dis/ability be eligible for accommodations.

The findings of this study have important implications for transforming structures through training faculty and staff. As a major source of social support, faculty may need training on ableism and dis/ability. This training should focus on students of color with dis/abilities so that faculty are educated about the experiences of Latinx students with dis/abilities prior to enrolling in (or transferring to) college and the social support they might be asked to provide. During this process, faculty might consider how their own dis/ability, ethnoracial and gender identities influence the support they provide to students. It is also important for faculty to consider their curriculum, syllabi, and critically examine the how they provide accommodations.

Whenever possible, effort should be made to hire Latinx faculty and staff at HSIs in order to increase representation and provide more opportunities for homophily in students' support networks. Given the results of the present study, it is crucial that all faculty understand the lived experiences of Latinxs with dis/abilities in order to break free of understandings of dis/ability that are rooted in settler colonialism, white supremacy, and medical models and recognize that their multiply minoritized students have likely been engaged in "fugitive learning" whereby access to education has been withheld or diminished (Patel, 2021, p. 113). Faculty should also be supported if they wish to disclose their own dis/abilities.

HSIs should critically examine how they are actively serving their Latinx students with dis/abilities at the intersection of multiply minoritized identities. In the case of RPU, the University received the federal HSI designation prior to adopting an HSI branding strategy or defining goals for becoming an HSI in a strategic plan. Essentially, RPU received a Title III, Part F grant in 2016 to fund its Allies in STEM program before it had established its University-wide commitment and

vision for operationalizing its HSI identity. As a result of this history, it makes sense that RPU has yet to conceptualize how it will specifically serve Latinxs with dis/abilities. One way for RPU and other HSIs to accomplish this is to establish a dis/ability cultural center (DCC). DCCs have been established at Syracuse University, the University of Washington, and the University of Arizona, to name a few. They are separate from dis/ability service offices and provide students with dis/abilities a safe space to receive support from peers and ideally develop a sense of dis/ability pride (Chiang, 2020). A dis/ability cultural center at an HSI might dedicate itself to supporting students with multiply minoritized identities and could partner with other Latinx-focused organizations on campus. Federal HSI grants and university programs are two important structures for serving that can help HSIs more effectively serve their dis/abled Latinx population. Though they are hard to measure and take time, altering the structures for serving to be more inclusive has the potential to affect students' experiences and influence perceptions of institutional commitment for serving Latinx students with dis/abilities (Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia & Koren, 2020).

Lastly, HSIs should expand efforts to involve family members in campus events and educate family about dis/ability support and mental health. Doing so has the potential to break down the stigma surrounding mental health as well as introduce family members to members of their child's social support network. Building community with the goal of breaking down barriers and paying attention to formal and informal connections within the HSI environment may lead to greater self-efficacy for Latinx students with dis/abilities (Beltran et al., 2020). Prior research has shown that engaging family members in university programming improves servingness by validating students' cultural experiences (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Engaging family of dis/abled Latinx students can build connections between family members and university faculty and staff who may then work together to provide support. In these contexts, it is important for mental health

to be discussed and prioritized; if the support exists and is legitimized by the institution, family members may be more likely to discuss mental health at home.

5.7 Policy Implications

This study offers several policy implications that may improve the postsecondary educational experiences of Latinx students with dis/abilities who attend an HSI. One policy implication of this study is for federal higher education dis/ability policies such as the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) to expand the definition of dis/ability and move toward view of dis/ability that understands dis/ability as dynamic, meaning individual needs may shift over time and space (environment). As part of this reframing, federal policy might also place responsibility for support on higher education institutions rather than students and recognize multiply minoritized students. The goal of the policy expansion should not focus on compliance but empowerment. For example, at present the HEOA focus is on technical assistance and curriculum. It addresses equal access to physical spaces and academic programs but does not mention access to social environments such as mentorship, student organizations, and recreation (Evans et al., 2017).

Another important policy implication for intersectional dis/ability research is the need to disaggregate national postsecondary dis/ability data (such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS) by ethnoracial identity. This will provide a more accurate and transparent representation of Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education research and allow researchers to use large datasets to complicate and add to the scant literature on Latinxs with dis/abilities in U.S. higher education.

Lastly, the Department of Education might consider expanding its federal HSI grant activities to prioritize dis/ability justice on campus and include support structures and programs for Latinx students with dis/abilities. This policy change would be relevant to both Title V and Title III grants. Another modification to the HSI grant activities would be to provide funding for dis/ability testing at institutions that still require medical documentation so that any Latinx student who is required to provide medical documentation can do so at no cost.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated how this study advances our collective knowledge about Latinx students' dis/ability support networks in higher education, and specifically in the context of one 4-year private HSI. This study represents an effort to add to the limited research about social support for Latinxs with dis/abilities in higher education as well as an invitation to future scholars to contribute to this important topic. Throughout the study I advocated for a collective responsibility for supporting Latinxs with dis/abilities in holistic, humanizing, decolonizing ways. I learned from and with the five study participants who are “disabled by injustice and oppression of various kinds” (Davis, 2002). I conclude by returning to the spirit of this study, which was to investigate supportive networks and relationships as one way to empower Latinxs with dis/abilities at RPU.

Appendix A The Tri-Modal Ego Network Analysis Model (Baker-Doyle, 2015)

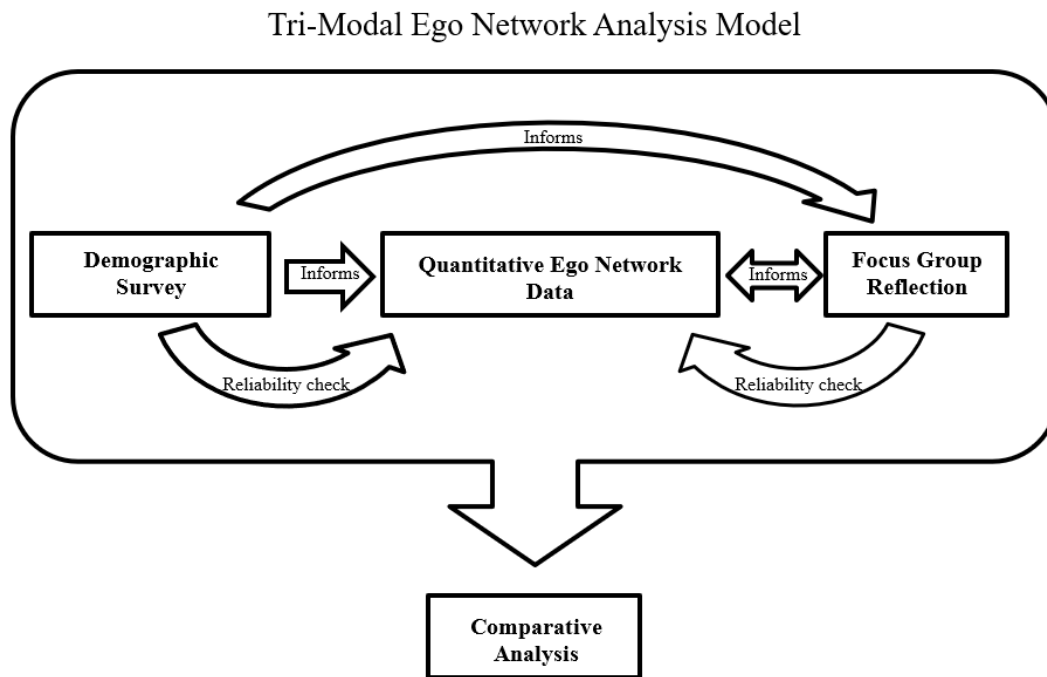


Figure 13 Tri-Modal Ego Network Analysis Model

Appendix B Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework for an Ego Network Study of Latinxs With Dis/abilities at One Hispanic Serving Institution

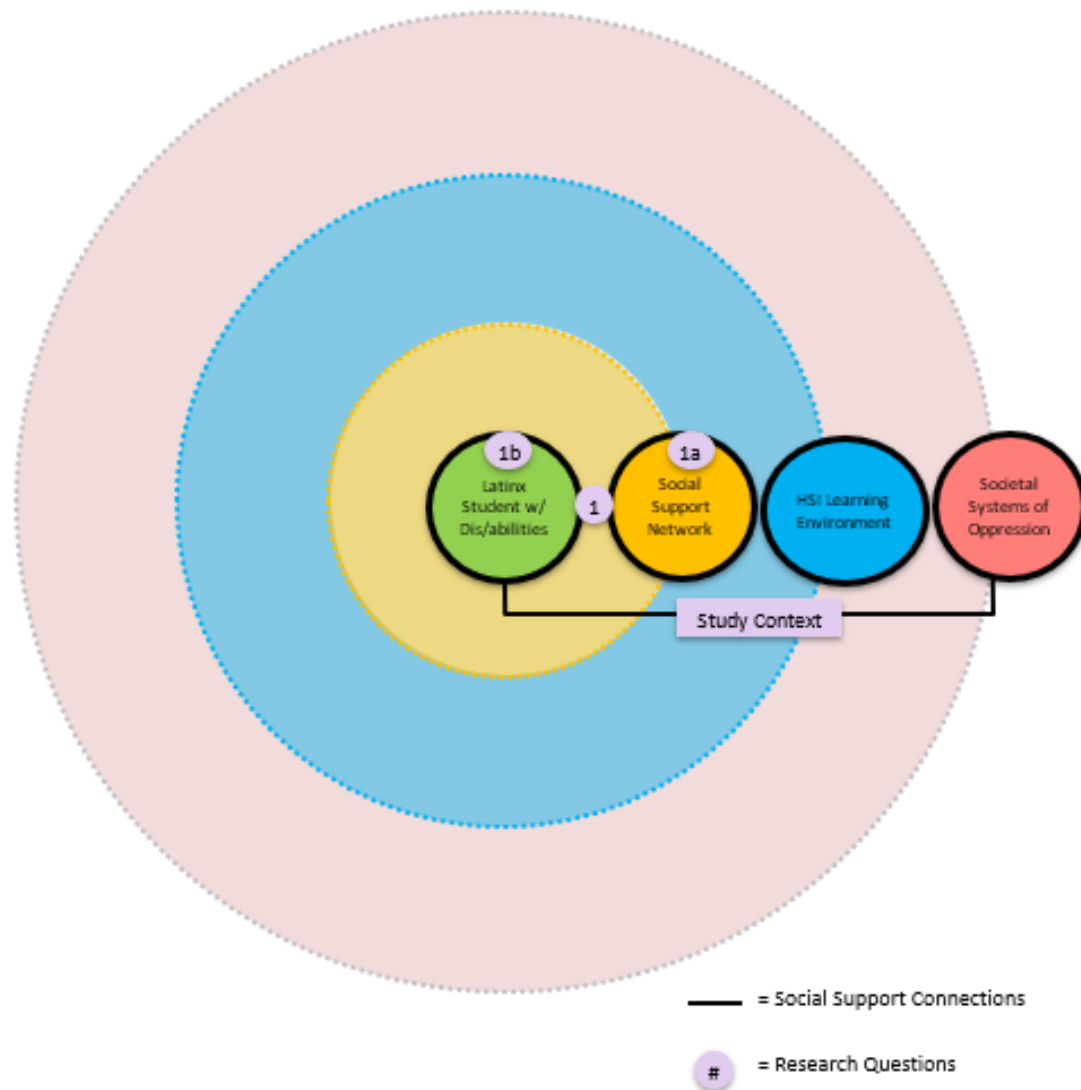


Figure 14 Conceptual Framework for an Ego Network Study of Latinxs with Dis/abilities at One Hispanic Serving Institution

Appendix C Example of an Egocentric Network Structure

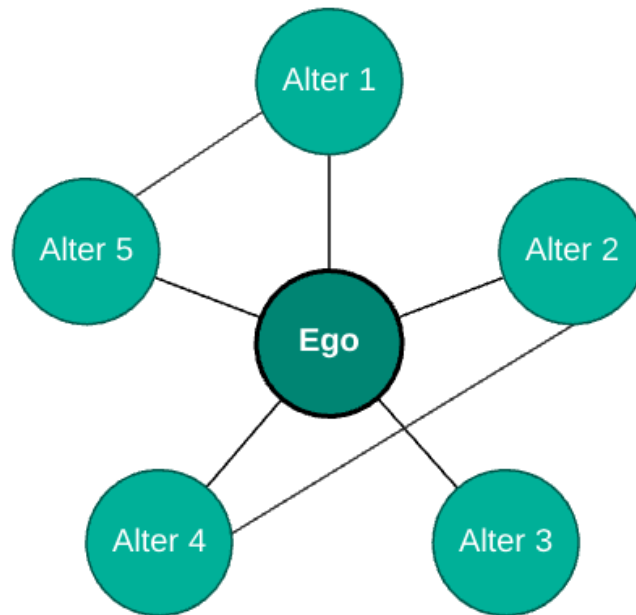


Figure 15 Example of an Egocentric Network Structure

Appendix D Ego Network Terminology

Table 1 Ego Network Terminology

| Term | Definition | Example |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Network | The connections of relations that make up a social system; a set of actors and the ties among them | Students, faculty, and staff at one 4-year, public HSI as well as their families and friends |
| Network diagram | A visual representation of the relationships among members in a network; also known as a sociogram | Figure 1 |
| Node | A unit (usually an individual) that is connected through networks | People that provide social support to a Latinx student with dis/abilities as well as the student themselves; each of the circles in Figure 1 |
| Ego | The focal node of a personal network study | A Latinx student with dis/abilities who attends a 4-year, public HSI |
| Alter | An node (individual) with a tie to the ego | A parent of the above student |
| Ego network | A network that represents alters with ties to an ego as well as ties between alters; also called a personal network | The social support relationships of a Latinx student with dis/abilities at a 4-year, public HSI; see Figure 1 |
| Tie | The connection between two nodes; also referred to as an edge | The connection between Ego and Alter 1 in Figure 1 |
| Structural hole | The lack of a tie between two alters in an ego network | The space between Alters 4 and 5 |

Note: Definitions are based on Borgatti et al. (2018) and Perry et al. (2018).

Appendix E Description of Dependent and Independent Variables for My Quantitative Research Questions

Table 2 Description of Dependent and Independent Variables

| Variable | Description |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>Dependent variables</i> | |
| Ego network composition | |
| Relationship to Ego | Alter's relationship to ego (e.g., parent, advisor, religious leader) |
| Homophily | The tendency for individuals to share attributes such as race or gender |
| Tie strength | Closeness of ego to alter (e.g., not very close, somewhat close, very close) |
| Frequency of contact | How often ego seeks support from alter (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) |
| Ego network structure | |
| Size | Number of alters in the network |
| Isolates | Number of alters with no ties to any other alter (ego only) |
| Density | Number of network ties expressed as a proportion of the total possible ties |
| <i>Independent variables</i> | |
| Dis/ability | Specific dis/abilit(ies) named by ego |
| Degree program | Program affiliation with the University (graduate or undergraduate) |
| Type of social support | Type of social support provided to ego by alter (emotional, instrumental, informational) |
| Other control variables | |
| Gender | Gender identity named by ego |
| First generation status | Whether the ego is a first-generation college student |
| Registered with DSS | Whether the ego is registered with Disability Support Services on campus |

Note: Descriptions of network composition and structure variables are from Perry et al. (2018) and McCarty et al. (2019).

Appendix F Informed Consent Form

CONSENT TO ACT AS A PARTICIPANT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Social support at the intersection of minoritized identities:
An exploration of the ego networks of Latinxs with
dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving Institution

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Emily R. Koren
5500 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA
15260 Phone: 716-208-8841
E-mail: erk68@pitt.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: Department of Administrative & Policy Studies

Why is this study being done?

To examine social support for Latinx students with dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Latinx college students who identify as having at least one dis/ability and are willing to discuss relationships that provide them with social support.

What are the procedures of this study?

1. Complete a survey about social support (20 minutes), which includes a brief survey about yourself (additional 10-15 minutes)
2. Participate in one 60-minute, one-on-one interview (virtually or in-person)

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to do the following: (1) Fill out a survey; and (2) participate in one 60-minute interview via Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp, Skype, or in-person. All interviews will be recorded. Accommodations can be arranged ahead of time by emailing the Principal Investigator. The procedures are offered in Spanish and English.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. No invasive procedures or medications are included. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but we will do everything possible to protect

your privacy. To reduce the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy. One additional risk is that discussing your dis/ability support may cause anxiety. Every effort will be made to reduce this risk, and the Principal Investigator will put you in contact with additional resources should you need any following your participation in the study.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

There are no guaranteed benefits for participating, although there are a number of indirect institutional benefits that may result from the implementation of this study. It may also be beneficial for you, on a personal level, to reflect on the social support you receive. Additionally, many individuals find the interactive interview enjoyable, and you will be able to see the visualization of your support network. The research team is trained to be active and sensitive listeners and will validate you as a person.

How much will I be paid if I complete this study?

You will receive a \$30 gift card (similar to a Visa card) for participating in both the survey and interview portion of the study.

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and any data that include your identity will be stored in locked files or encrypted on the principal investigator's computer. Neither your identity nor that of individuals you mention will not be revealed in any publications of this research.

It is possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office (including the University of Pittsburgh IRB) may review your data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study.

Is my participation in this study voluntary?

Yes, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in it, or you may stop participating at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the University of Pittsburgh or the university in which you work and/or study.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the principal investigator listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

- ☐ I have read the consent form and any questions I had, including explanation of all terminology, have been answered to my satisfaction. A copy of this consent form will be provided to me.
- ☐ I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that those questions will be answered by the researcher listed on the first page of this form.
- ☐ I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to refuse to participate or to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in this study at any time without affecting my future relationship with this institution.
- ☐ I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual had about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix G Dis/ability Support Survey

Letter of Introduction

The goal of this study is to better understand and support Latinx students with dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The researcher is a graduate student with multiple hidden dis/abilities. As a student with a dis/ability, you are invited to take this survey. You have valuable information that can inform the study of dis/ability and social support.

Although there is no time limit for this survey, it is expected to take about 10 minutes for you to complete. Your response should reflect how you feel; there are no 'correct' answers. Your responses will be anonymous and no identifying information will be collected. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in the survey.

Participation includes the following activities, although you may opt in or out at any time:

1. Complete a brief demographic survey (10 minutes), which includes information about yourself
2. Participate in one 60-minute, one-on-one interview (virtually or in-person)

If you take the survey and complete a follow-up interview, you will receive \$25 as an incentive bonus. While there are no direct benefits to you, it is our hope that the results of this study are able to force important conversations regarding how universities can help foster positive educational experiences for students with dis/abilities. As these questions relate to your experience as a student with dis/abilities, it is possible that some of these questions can trigger anxiety symptoms. If this occurs you may pause and/or restart the survey at a later time. Should you need additional support, you are encouraged to contact the University Counseling Service at (831) 459-2628.

Emily R. Koren from the University of Pittsburgh is conducting this study. Her email address is ERK68@pitt.edu and she is available to answer any questions about this study.

Lastly, participation in this survey is voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any time by closing your browser window.

Thank you for your participation!

By clicking on the next button below, I am indicating that I have read this consent form and am willing to participate in the research activity above.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your age in years?

2. What is your racial/ethnic identity?

3. What is your gender?

4. What is your degree program?

Undergraduate Graduate Other

5. Which best describes your student status?

Full-time Part-time

6. Are you a transfer student?

Yes, community college
Yes, other 4-year University
No

7. What is your current student classification?

Freshman/ first-year
Sophomore/ second-year
Junior/ third-year
Senior/ fourth year
Other (Please specify) _____
Prefer not to say

8. Academic Division (Please select one from the drop-down menu below)

Arts
Humanities
Physical & Biological Sciences
Social Sciences
Baskin School of Engineering

9. What is your major?

(Please specify)_____

Undecided

Prefer not to say

10. Are you the first in your family to attend college?

Yes

No

11. The highest level of education of my mother or father (or primary caregiver) is:

Some K-12

High school diploma/GED

Some college

Associates degree or vocational certificate

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., M.S.W., etc.)

Professional or Doctoral degree (PhD., M.D., J.D., D.D.S., etc.)

Unknown/ prefer not to say

12. In your own words, please list your dis/ability or dis/abilities.

13. About how long ago were you first diagnosed with a dis/ability?

2-4 years ago

5-9 years ago

More than 10 years ago

Self-diagnosed

Unknown

Prefer not to say

14. Are you currently registered with the Disability Resource Center?

Yes

No

Appendix H Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. For this study, I am interested in your dis/ability-related social support network, which is the web of relationships you have created in order to navigate your experience as a Latinx student with dis/abilities at Cal Lutheran. I am going to ask you a series of questions, and together we will build a visual display that represents your network. If we are not face-to-face, I will share my screen with you so you will be able to see the questions in the network software. Please be as specific as possible with your answers. You will also be able to see me input the network answers in real time. If you are a student who is blind or has low vision, I will describe each step and screen to you using visual descriptions.

Every effort is being made to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of these interviews. If there is a way I may support you throughout this interview, please don't hesitate to let me know. As stated in the consent form, I will be recording the interview and taking notes. Please be assured that everything you say will remain confidential. If for any reason you need to discontinue the interview or state something off the record, please feel free to ask me to stop the recorder. Any questions?

(Start recording)

1. To start, please clearly state the pseudonym that you indicated on your participant information form.

Eliciting Alters (Network Members) by Type of Support

The first step in visualizing your support network is to find out who provides you with support for your dis/ability. I will explain the type of support and ask you to name individuals who fit this description. Then, I will ask basic information about each individual. You will be asked to name each person, and are encouraged to use pseudonyms. If you feel that no one provides you with a specific support, please let me know.

Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, trust, and caring.

1. Who provides you emotional support related to your dis/ability? For example, someone who helps reduce your anxiety about dis/ability issues or someone who makes you feel that you have what it takes to succeed in college.

2. (Answer the following questions for each named individual; see Network Canvas example) What is this person's relationship to you?

a. Probes: family, friend, priest, professor, advisor, DRC counselor

3. What is their gender identity and ethnoracial identity?

4. About how long have you known them?

a. Probes: number of months or years

5. How close would you say you are to them? (options appear on screen)

a. Probes: not very close, somewhat close, pretty close, very close

6. How often do you seek them out for emotional support related to your dis/ability?

a. Probes: daily, weekly, monthly, a few times per year, rarely

7. How satisfied are you with the support you receive from this person?

a. Probes: dissatisfied, barely satisfied, fairly satisfied, quite satisfied, very satisfied

Instrumental support is typically thought of as tangible aid and services.

8. Who provides you instrumental support related to your dis/ability? For example, someone who connects you with adaptive technology, closed-captioning, or other dis/ability resources, someone who provides testing arrangements or takes notes for you in class or a ride to a doctor's appointment.

9. (Answer the following questions for each named individual) What is this person's relationship to you (family, friend, priest, Professor, advisor, DRC counselor, etc.)?

a. Probes: family, friend, priest, Professor, DRC counselor

10. What is their gender identity and ethnoracial identity?

11. How long have you known them?

a. Probes: number of months or years

12. How close would you say you are to them? (options appear on screen)

a. Probes: not very close, somewhat close, pretty close, very close

13. How often do you seek them out for instrumental support related to your dis/ability?

a. Probes: daily, weekly, monthly, a few times per year, rarely

Informational support refers to advice, suggestions, and information.

14. Who provides you informational support related to your dis/ability? For example, someone who helps you think of strategies for focusing in class or someone who connects you with a helpful office, organization, course, or individual.

15. (Answer the following questions for each named individual) What is this person's relationship to you (family, friend, priest, Professor, DRC counselor, etc.)?

a. Probes: family, friend, priest, Professor, advisor, DRC counselor

16. What is their gender identity and ethnoracial identity?

17. How long have you known them?

a. Probes: number of months or years

18. How close would you say you are to them? (options appear on screen)

a. Probes: not very close, somewhat close, pretty close, very close

19. How often do you seek them out for informational support related to your dis/ability?

a. Probes: daily, weekly, monthly, a few times per year, rarely

Relationships between named individuals (alters)

20. Looking at the circles on the screen, you will see a circle for each individual you mentioned. Please tell me if the individuals you mentioned know each other. We want to place them closer together if they know each other well, and farther apart if they do not. We will add a line between them if they are friends with one another. If you don't know, that is ok too.

Social Support Example/Story

21. Please tell me about the last time you sought out support (of any kind) for your dis/ability. Who did you reach out to and how was this support helpful to you?

22. On your survey, you indicated that you (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) that the overall HSI campus environment at Cal Lutheran is supportive of Latinxs with dis/abilities; can you please tell me more about your response and why you feel this way?

Missing Support

23. What, if any support do you need in order to have a positive experience in college that you currently do not receive from anyone?

Thank you for participating in this study! ¡Gracias por su participación en esta investigación!

Appendix I Participant Demographics for This Study (n=5)

Table 3 Participant Demographics

| Participant | Gender | Age | Dis/abilit(ies) | Registered with DSS | Years since first diagnosis | Transfer | First Gen | Year in School | Major |
|-------------|--------|-----|---|------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Joseph | Man | 30 | Autism, ADHD, Bipolar | Yes | 5-9 | Yes | Yes | Senior | Multimedia Studies |
| Linee | Woman | 20 | Depression, Anxiety | Yes | 10+ | No | No | Junior | Communication |
| Susan | Woman | 27 | Hard of hearing, Anxiety | Yes | 2-4 | Yes | Yes | Senior | Chemistry/Spanish |
| Yeya | Woman | 25 | Muscular Dystrophy, COPD, Acid Reflux, Scoliosis | Yes | 10+ | No | Yes | Senior | Biochemistry |
| Norma | Woman | 19 | Low Vision, Depression | No | 2-4 | No | Yes | Sophomore | Environmental Science |

Appendix J Invitation to Participate

SUBJECT LINE: Seeking Participants for a Research Study: Latinxs with Dis/abilities

Dear Colleague,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Emily Koren, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. I am also a student with multiple hidden dis/abilities.

I am reaching out to see if you would be willing to disseminate the study information below to any students you know who may fit the criteria, or any colleagues that may know of students who fit the criteria (see below).

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at erk68@pitt.edu or 716-208-8841.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Emily R. Koren, M.A.
Ph.D. Student, Administrative and Policy Studies Department
University of Pittsburgh School of Education
Doctoral Advisor: Dr. Gina A. Garcia

Dear [Name of prospective participant],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Emily Koren and I am a current doctoral candidate at University of Pittsburgh and a student with multiple hidden dis/abilities.

I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation study. The purpose of this research study is to understand the social support networks of Latinx students with dis/abilities at one Hispanic Serving Institution- that is, the support you receive from individuals that helps you have a positive experience in school. In order to participate you must:

1. Identify as Latina/o/x or Hispanic
2. Identify as having a dis/ability
3. Be a current UCSC student

You do not need to be registered with the Disability Resource Center, nor do you need a formal diagnosis to participate.

Participation in this study involves:

1. Filling out a survey that includes a short demographic questionnaire
2. Participating in one 60-minute interview via Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp, or Skype

If you meet the above requirements and are interested in participating in my study, please email me to confirm eligibility. The interview and the survey are available in English and Spanish, and adaptive resources are available by arrangement.

If you choose to participate, you will receive monetary compensation at the end of your interview. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to leave the study at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in order to protect your privacy.

Lastly, please forward this email to any other students you know who fit the criteria and may be interested in participating.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at erk68@pitt.edu or 716-208-8841.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Emily R. Koren, M.A.
Ph.D. Student, Administrative and Policy Studies Department
University of Pittsburgh School of Education

Appendix K Descriptive Network Statistics Across All Participants (n=5)

Table 4 Descriptive Network Statistics Across All Participants (n=5)

| Participant | Proportion of Female Alters | Proportion of Same-Gender Alters | Proportion of Same-Race Alters | Proportion of Family Alters | Proportion of Friend Alters | Proportion of University Alters | Average Tie Strength | Emotional Support Frequency | Informational Support Frequency | Instrumental Support Frequency | Density | Size |
|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Joseph | 0.67 | 0.33 | 0.67 | 0.5 | 0.17 | 0.33 | 2.5 | 3.67 | 4 | 3.17 | 0.4 | 6 |
| Linee | 0.63 | 0.63 | 0.75 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.5 | 3.13 | 3.5 | 3 | 3.25 | 0.25 | 8 |
| Susan | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.6 | 2.2 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 3.2 | 0.2 | 5 |
| Yeya | 0.43 | 0.43 | 0.57 | 0.43 | 0.14 | 0.29 | 3.14 | 3.71 | 3 | 3.29 | 0.38 | 7 |
| Norma | 0.83 | 0.83 | 0.5 | 0.17 | 0.33 | 0.5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2.67 | 0.27 | 6 |
| Average | 0.63 | 0.56 | 0.54 | 0.30 | 0.22 | 0.44 | 2.79 | 3.34 | 2.96 | 3.12 | 0.3 | 6.4 |

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