

## GENDER MATTERS IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: A SURVEY STUDY OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

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This survey study explored gender differences in transition imperatives and opportunities for youth with disabilities ( $N = 521$ ). Results indicated that males and females differ in terms of the adult outcomes they hope to achieve, transition training opportunities they have received, and their access to teachers and other nonfamilial adults to assist them. Youth and parents who responded to the survey indicated that gender stereotypes continue to exist and that these stereotypes result in lowered expectations for girls. Gender stereotypes were found to vary by ethnicity. Access to health insurance and a good doctor were rated as top priorities for all youth transitioning to adulthood. Implications for educators, psychologists, and counselors are discussed. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The developmental imperative of transitioning to adulthood (e.g., choosing a career; moving out of one's parents' home; establishing social networks, transportation, and recreational activities independent of one's parents) is a challenge for most adolescents, but for students with disabilities this transition may be considerably more difficult if adequate planning, support, and training are not provided (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). Among secondary students with disabilities, transition-related decisions such as where to live and whether to attend college may be complicated by special needs related to their condition and parental concerns for their safety (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). Furthermore, many transitioning students with disabilities must learn to negotiate multiple community agencies in order to access and maintain adult services. Historically, young adults with disabilities have fared significantly worse than their nondisabled counterparts on a number of indicators, which suggests that youth with disabilities were not being adequately prepared for adulthood (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). They are more likely to experience unemployment, limited access to postsecondary education, and social isolation than their nondisabled counterparts (National Organization on Disability, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005).

In response, transition planning for students with disabilities ages 16 years and older became mandatory with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1990 (IDEA; PL 101-476). Subsequent reauthorizations of this federal law served to strengthen the transition planning mandate. The IDEA Amendments of 2004 (PL 108-446) define transition services as "a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities." Individualized education program (IEP) teams are required to identify postsecondary goals based on the students' preferences and design an intervention, which may include direct instruction, community experiences, and related services, to achieve those goals.

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Since transition planning became mandatory, students with disabilities' high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, and participation in organized community groups have improved; yet, their achievement and participation in adult society remains below that of the general population (Wagner et al., 2005). A comparison between the two National Longitudinal Studies (i.e., NLTS conducted in 1987 and NLTS-2 conducted in 2001) highlights the improvements that have been made since IEP teams began to engage in transition planning. For instance, the dropout rate for youth with disabilities declined by 50%, more youth with disabilities were employed, and more youth with disabilities earned at or above the minimum wage in 2001 compared to 1987 (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003). The original 1987 NLTS study found females to have significantly lower rates of (a) paid employment, (b) school and work engagement, and (c) earning potential (Wagner et al., 2005). By the second NLTS, the sizable gaps observed in the 1987 NLTS cohort between males and females in (a) who had paid employment and (b) school and work engagement was gone (NLTS-2; Wagner et al., 2005).

Despite these gains, inequity in earned wages persists. In the NLTS-2 cohort, females were twice as likely as males to earn less than \$4.50 per hour, whereas males were twice as likely as females to earn \$6.50 or more; males also tended to work more hours (Cameto, Marder, Wagner, & Cardoso, 2003). This inequity in wages may be due to gender stereotypical job placement, given that males in NLTS-2 were more often employed in higher-paying maintenance jobs, accounting for about one-third of their employment, whereas females were commonly employed in lower-paying personal care jobs, accounting for almost half of their employment. In addition, although more females than males with disabilities attended college in 2001 compared to 1987, these gains in enrollment were at 2-year colleges, not 4-year universities (Cameto et al., 2003). A similar pattern was found in an analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS-88) data set; Coutinho, Oswald, and Best (2006) found that females with disabilities earned less, were employed for fewer months, and were overrepresented in clerical positions and underrepresented in skilled/technical positions compared to males with disabilities. Conversely, the focus of gender inequities in the general population has been on the "glass ceiling" effect, which bars women's access to highly paid, upper echelon jobs (see *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.*); meanwhile, overall University attendance by women surpasses that of men (Tyre, 2006). Thus, young women with disabilities may experience discrimination or a narrowing of opportunities that differs from women without disabilities.

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Gender-differentiated vocational training likely contributes to this inequity. For instance, Blackorby (1993) found that girls with disabilities were more likely to receive training around home economics, office work, and health care, whereas their male counterparts tended to be steered into agriculture and industry. Similarly, Powers et al. (2005) evaluated the IEPs of students in special education and found the transition plans of both females and males to reflect gender stereotypical career options. One-third of the employment goals listed for students conformed to gender stereotypes, whereas less than 1 in 10 (7% for females and 6% for males) of these goals represented aspirations that countered gender stereotypes (e.g., male nurse or female auto mechanic). The case study analyses of Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, and Zane (2007) suggested that a lack of involvement and vague articulation of career aspirations from the family may lead to gender-typical careers for youth with disabilities from low social-economic backgrounds.

Some stereotypical outcomes did not change in the 16 years between NLTS cohorts 1 and 2; females remained more likely than males to be married a year or two after high school. Similarly, an analysis of the NELS-88 data found higher rates of marriage and parenting among the young females with disabilities compared to their male counterparts (Coutinho et al., 2006).

Disparate postsecondary outcomes between males and females with disabilities suggest that their transition experiences may be qualitatively different; however, little is known about the influence of gender on transition issues because most research to date has disproportionately represented males

with disabilities. For instance, in the NLTS-2, almost two-thirds of the youth with disabilities were boys (Wagner et al., 2005). Other nationally representative samples, such as the Office of Special Education Programs longitudinal studies of (a) infants and toddlers (Hebbeler et al., 2001) and (b) elementary and middle school students (Marder & Wagner, 2002) show that boys are similarly represented in larger proportions of children and youth with disabilities across the age range. Among adolescents, boys comprised particularly large percentages of those with autism (85%), emotional disturbances (76%), and other health impairments (73%).

Although the disproportionate number of boys among youth with disabilities was believed to reflect differences in biology that put boys at greater risk for disability, current research suggests that an interaction between gender and teacher bias regarding a student's response to stress contributes to differences in special education rates (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). For example, when students do not get their educational needs met, girls may be more likely to internalize their frustrations, whereas boys responded with disruptive behavior that is quickly noticed by the teacher (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001). In turn, teachers may become more observant of the academic performance of boys, which could contribute to boys having higher rates of referral for special education services (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 2001).

As such, it is important to understand that the experiences of youth with disabilities as a group disproportionately reflect the experiences of boys, and that important gender differences may actually be contributing to this overrepresentation of boys with identified disabilities in special education. It is also important to note that although the gender gap may be slowly closing in some areas, factors contributing to the outcomes of girls versus boys are likely to reflect these gender differences. For example, as Rouso (2002) pointed out, although the high school completion rates of girls and boys with disabilities are statistically the same, girls may be more likely to drop out of school because of family pressures (e.g., early parenthood), whereas academic failure may contribute more heavily to the dropout rates of boys. Focus groups conducted by Hogansen et al. (2005) found that although female students with disabilities report having a wide variety of goals and expectations for their future, they lack the opportunities to plan and prepare for the transition to adulthood. For instance, female youth with disabilities indicated that they lacked role models and mentors, they were not able to explore and train in jobs and careers of interest, and they often did not participate in their own transition planning meetings. Conversely, males with disabilities may be less likely to experience the strong relationships with a parent that females report (Hogansen et al., 2005; Lindstrom et al., 2007).

An examination of gender differences in transition for youth with disabilities is incomplete without exploring the ways in which gender differences may impact culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities. Minimal enrollment in postsecondary education and disproportionate unemployment rates have been noted for CLD youth with disabilities who recently left high school as compared to their peers with and without disabilities (Feam, 2001; Greene & Nefsky, 1999; Leake & Cholymay, 2004). The gap between CLD and non-CLD youth with disabilities on measures of successful transition outcomes suggest that "minority status may present further obstacles to successful transition beyond those that youth experience because of disability alone" (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996, p. 410). Although much more investigation is needed with regard to the role of gender in the transition experiences and outcomes of CLD youth, it has been suggested that CLD women and girls with disabilities are subject to "triple jeopardy," as they encounter negative attitudes and behaviors because of the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and disability. Indeed, some CLD youth may come from a cultural background that traditionally emphasizes gender roles to a greater degree than observed in the U.S. mainstream culture. This, in turn, may influence the transition goals of CLD youth and families, as well as teacher stereotypes about the goals that are valued by CLD youth and families. Thus, factors contributing to the differential outcomes of girls

compared to boys are likely to reflect gender differences; however, it is also important to understand if cultural/linguistic differences are associated with these gender differences.

This study explores the role of gender on transition planning for students with disabilities using quantitative data and a relatively large, culturally diverse sample gathered from two geographically distinct school districts. The following research questions are addressed:

1. Are there differences among males and females with disabilities in their goals and expectations for the future?
2. Are there differences between the transition experiences of males and females with disabilities?
3. If differences between males and females exist, how does this vary by culture?
4. What gender stereotypes exist to explain differences between the genders in their transition to adulthood?

Specifically, the relationship between gender and the goals and expectations to which students with disabilities are held, their transition planning experiences, and the perceived importance of certain transition planning activities are examined. In addition, the perceptions of gender and cultural parity in receiving specific supports or encountering challenges to transition are investigated.

## METHOD

### *Setting*

The research study took place in two large, urban school districts from two states in the western United States. The first school district (District 1) served approximately 52,000 students in 90 schools, and had a student population that was 60% European American, 17% African American, 11% Hispanic American, 10% Asian American, and 2% American Indian. The second school district (District 2) served approximately 90,000 students in 89 schools, and had a student population that was 45% Hispanic, 20% African American, 18% European American, and 11% Asian American. Approximately 12% of students in District 1 received special education services, with an enrollment of 869 students between the ages of 16 and 22 years. Approximately 8% of students enrolled in District 2 were served by special education, and 1,330 were between the ages of 16 and 22 years.

### *Participant Selection and Data Collection Procedures*

For each of the two districts, youth surveys were mailed to 300 randomly selected female and 300 randomly selected male students ages 16 to 22 years who received special education services, for a total of 1,200 youth surveys. Similarly, for each district, parent surveys were mailed to the parents of 300 randomly selected female and 300 randomly selected male students ages 16 to 22 years who received special education services, totaling 1,200 parent surveys. Households selected to receive the youth survey were also eligible to be selected to receive the parent survey. Across both districts, 2,400 surveys were disseminated. Survey participants were offered \$20 for completing the survey. Surveys containing English and Spanish translations were mailed to households identified by the districts' personnel as speaking Spanish in the home.

A total of 521 surveys (279 parent and 242 youth) were returned for a response rate of 22%. The return rate across the two districts was similar (24% and 18% response rates). Less than 3% of the surveys were completed in Spanish. Less than half (43%) of the respondents were European American, 25% were African American, 16% were Latino/a, 4% were Asian American, 2% were Pacific Islanders, and 2% were Native American/Alaskan. There were no significant differences in ethnic/racial makeup among the four groups of respondents (i.e., parents of daughters, parents of sons, male youth, female youth).

Youth completing the survey identified themselves as having the following disabilities: learning (55.7%), other health impairment (7.4%), emotional/behavioral (6.5%), hearing (6.5%), visual (6.5%), mobility (2.6%), cognitive (1.7%), and other (13%). The parent respondents identified similar disabilities among their children: learning (53.8%), other health impairment (7.3%), emotional/behavioral (11.3%), hearing (5.5%), visual (4.0%), mobility (5.8%), cognitive (4.0%), and other (8.4%). There were no significant differences between parents' report of their child's disability and the type of disabilities reported by the youth participants (even though the parent and the youth samples are independent). Among the youth, fewer males than females responded (42.9% and 47.1%, respectively;  $\chi^2 = 24$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Eighty-three percent of the parent respondents were female; in one case (.4%), both the father and the mother completed the survey. There were no significant differences between the ages of the children the parents reported on and the youth respondents' own ages. The average age was 18.3 years of age; 82% of either the respondents (youth survey) or the subject of the responses (parent survey) were between the ages of 17 and 19 years. Half (54.7%) of the youth reported or were reported by their parent to have had had a paid job at some time; of those purported to have had a paid job, 72.1% were paid at least \$6.75 per hour (minimum wage in one of the states).

#### *Instrumentation and Data Analysis*

Two versions of the Young Adult Transition Expectations and Experiences (YATEE) survey were developed, including a Parent (YATEE-P) and a Youth version (YATEE-Y). The parent survey contained gender-specific language consistent with the gender of the respondents' child (i.e., daughter/her/she or son/him/he). The surveys were developed to measure the experiences and expectations of youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood. Based on previous research (Powers et al., 2005), the following themes were identified: postschool activities cited in the IDEA (i.e., independent living, community participation, postsecondary education), self-determination skills, barriers and sources of support for transition, and gender equity. Multiple items for each of these themes were developed. The draft surveys were pilot-tested by 30 youth with disabilities and 12 parents of youth with disabilities, revised, and pilot-tested again.

The YATEE is a 91-item survey that solicits respondents' opinions about the importance of various transition activities and whether those activities have actually occurred. The response option for 62 of the questions was a 4-point Likert scale ("not important," "sort of important," "quite important," and "very important"; or "not much," "sometimes," "quite a bit," and "a lot"), which was coded 0 to 3 (0 = "not important" or "not much" to 3 = "very important" or "a lot"). Toward the end of the survey, respondents completed a series of items related directly to gender equity (e.g., "Which students are more likely to get attention from teachers: Girls, boys or both the same?"). The final survey items addressed demographic characteristics of the respondent (if completing the YATEE-Y) or the respondent's child (if completing the YATEE-P). Internal consistency among items aggregated based on the developed themes (e.g., independent living, transition plans, self-determination) ranged from 0.71 to 0.80.

Because most of the variables were not normally distributed,<sup>1</sup> data analyses consisted of descriptive and nonparametric statistics. For each topic (e.g., goals and expectations for the future, transition experiences), means and standard deviations are reported for the highest and lowest rated items across both youth and parent respondents. Then, results from chi-square analyses comparing

<sup>1</sup> The response to most survey items and scales was not normally distributed due to a preponderance of respondents indicating that the transition-related activities listed in the survey were "quite" or "very" important (i.e., resulting in a negatively skewed distribution) while rating the occurrence of these same events as infrequent (i.e., a positively skewed distribution). Attempts to transform the data to become normally distributed were not successful.

the responses of young women to those of young men, and the responses of parents of sons to parents of daughters, are described. When an effect for gender was found for either youth or parents, additional analyses were performed to investigate whether gender differences varied by CLD status (i.e., comparing Anglo to CLD). Of the Anglo respondents, there were 109 youth and 113 parents. The CLD respondents were comprised of respondents indicating ethnicity status as African American, Asian American, Native American, or Latino/a. There were 132 CLD youth and 162 CLD parents. Only statistically significant results (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ) are reported.

## RESULTS

### *Goals and Expectations for the Future*

**Item Rating Results.** The mean and standard deviations for the 17 items on goals for the future are reported in Table 1. These data demonstrate a general consensus among participants' about the saliency of certain postsecondary outcomes (e.g., living on one's own, having a good-paying job, going to college, having reliable transportation) occurring within their (or their child's) immediate future (i.e., next 5 years). Of the 17 possible outcomes, 8 received an average rating greater than 2 ("quite important"), suggesting that many respondents rated this outcome as very important. The highest rated items by the combined youth and parent sample, on a scale of 0 to 3, were (a) complete high school or a transition program ( $M = 2.85, SD = 0.49$ ), (b) have health insurance ( $M = 2.79, SD = 0.53$ ), and (c) have a good doctor ( $M = 2.79; SD = 0.51$ ). The lowest rated items were (a) have children ( $M = 0.74, SD = 1.05$ ), and (b) live in the same house or apartment as my family ( $M = 1.02; SD = 1.08$ ).

**Differences Among Youth Respondents.** Females differed from males by being more likely to rate the following items as "very important": (a) go to college (73.6% v. 50.4%;  $\chi^2 = 14.77; df = 3, p < .001$ ), (b) go to church (41.1% v. 23.2%;  $\chi^2 = 10.56, df = 3, p < .05$ ), (c) have medical

Table 1  
 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parents and Youth ( $N = 521$ ) to Items on Goals for the Future

Item	Mean (SD)
Complete high school or a transition program	2.85 (0.49)
Have health insurance	2.79 (0.53)
Have a good doctor	2.79 (0.51)
Have good friends	2.63 (0.66)
Have a job in a career that I like	2.62 (0.65)
Have a good-paying job	2.52 (0.78)
Have reliable transportation	2.45 (0.79)
Go to college	2.24 (0.98)
Look good (attractive to others)	1.83 (0.99)
Live on my own or with friends (not family)	1.77 (1.067)
Participate in spiritual activities, such as prayer or attending church	1.68 (1.168)
Live near my family (not in the same house)	1.53 (1.02)
Go to college close to my family home	1.51 (1.11)
Get married or have an intimate, committed relationship	1.41 (1.14)
Take care of my parents, sisters, brothers, or other family members	1.40 (1.19)
Live in the same house or apartment as my family	1.02 (1.08)
Have children	0.74 (1.05)

Response options: 0 = not important, 1 = sort of important, 2 = quite important, 3 = very important.

insurance (85.9% v. 73.5%;  $\chi^2 = 8.30$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and (d) have a good doctor (82.0% v. 76.1%;  $\chi^2 = 9.33$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Females were more likely than males to rate “having children after high school” as either “quite” or “very” important (38.3% v. 21.4%;  $\chi^2 = 9.62$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A significant effect for CLD was found for “go to college” ( $\chi^2 = 13.34$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .004$ ), with 82% of CLD females (vs. 62% of Anglo females) and 56% of CLD males (vs. 44% of Anglo males) reporting this as “very important.”

*Differences Among Parent Respondents.* Parents of daughters differed in their responses from parents of sons on two items (a) have reliable transportation (61.5% of parents of daughters compared to 47.2% of parents of sons rated this item as “very important” for their child;  $\chi^2 = 8.67$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and (b) have health insurance (92.8% of parents of daughters compared to 79.2% of parents of sons rated this item as “very important” for their child;  $\chi^2 = 11.48$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For the item “have reliable transportation,” an effect for culture status was significant ( $\chi^2 = 8.70$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .03$ ): 68% of CLD parents of daughters (vs. 53% for Anglo parents of daughters) rated this as “very important.” This difference was not as great for CLD and Anglo parents of sons (49% v. 46%, respectively).

#### *Comparisons Between the Perceived Importance and Opportunity to Engage in Transition Activities*

*Item Rating Results.* Among all 24 transition-related experiences items, for which respondents indicated “how important” and “how often” a transition-related activity occurred in the past year, the importance of a particular activity or opportunity was rated higher than its actual occurrence (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations). Among the respondents, the largest gaps between the *importance* of an activity and their (or their child’s) *opportunity* to engage in the activity were for the following items: (a) find people who can help me (my son/daughter) get a job (mean difference = 1.21,  $SD = 1.16$ ), (b) learn how to get the services I (my son/daughter) need(s) to prepare for adult life (e.g., vocational rehabilitation; mean difference = 1.20,  $SD = 1.14$ ), and (c) teachers arrange for me (my son/daughter) to get work experience (mean difference = 1.08,  $SD = 1$ ). The items for which the gap between *importance* and *opportunity* were the smallest were (a) encouragement or help from my family (mean difference = 0.32,  $SD = 0.80$ ), (b) encouragement or help from my friends (mean difference = 0.55,  $SD = 0.91$ ), and (c) encouragement or help from other important adults (e.g., neighbors, religious leaders, family friends; mean difference = 0.52,  $SD = 0.90$ ).

*Differences Among Youth Respondents.* Males (12.8%) were twice as likely as females (5.2%) to report that “learning the skills to live as independently as possible in the community” is very important though it rarely occurred ( $\chi^2 = 11.32$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The larger gap between importance and opportunity to learn independence skills appears to be due to gender differences in opportunity rather than importance because both genders overwhelmingly rated this item as very important. Although not statistically significant, more males (17.4%) than females (8.1%) reported very little opportunity to learn these sorts of skills, and more females (33%) than males (24.8%) reported they had had a lot of opportunity to learn these skills. This gender difference is likely influenced by cultural status, with more CLD males (19.2%) than CLD females (4.5%) reporting a large gap between importance and opportunity on this item ( $\chi^2 = 11.805$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Gender differences in male and female youths’ opportunities (independent of the perceived importance of the activity) emerged. Females were more likely than males to report that they: (a) receive a lot of support from nonfamily adults (e.g., neighbors, religious leaders, family friends; 36% vs. 21%;  $\chi^2 = 10.08$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), (b) have a clear plan for what they want to do in the

Table 2  
*Mean and Standard Deviation of Parents and Youth (N = 521) to Items on how Important and how Often a Transition Event Occurred Within the Past Year (Ranked from Highest Mean Difference Score to Lowest)*

Item	Importance M (SD)	Happen M (SD)	Difference Score: Importance–Happen M (SD)
Find people who can help me get a job.	2.53 (0.80)	1.33 (1.074)	1.211 (1.157)
Learn how to get the services I need to prepare for adult life (e.g., vocational rehabilitation).	2.38 (0.95)	1.21 (1.089)	1.195 (1.135)
Teachers arrange for me to get work experience.	2.24 (0.95)	1.19 (1.193)	1.08 (1.115)
Learn skills to live as independently as possible in the community.	2.65 (0.67)	1.68 (1.00)	0.97 (1.034)
Learn about careers that interest me.	2.65 (0.68)	1.72 (1.07)	0.94 (1.067)
Learn what accommodations or support I need for my disability or condition (e.g., a seeing eye dog, extra time on a test).	2.34 (0.98)	1.42 (1.054)	0.93 (1.07)
Teachers help me better understand my disability or condition.	2.30 (0.97)	0.97 (1.155)	0.87 (1.08)
Learn skills to take care of myself as much as possible.	2.80* (0.59)	1.945** (0.96)	0.86 (0.95)
Have a clear plan for what I want to do after high school.	2.58 (0.72)	1.73 (1.085)	0.86 (1.08)
Learn to protect my safety.	2.76** (0.56)	1.91 (1.012)	0.85 (1.032)
Learn about parenting and family planning.	2.14 (1.067)	1.39 (1.087)	.769 (1.070)
Teachers listen to me and they are interested in my opinions.	2.41 (.789)	1.67 (.956)	0.75 (0.96)
Teachers encourage me to take the classes that I want.	2.39 (0.81)	1.67 (1.05)	0.73 (1.00)
Speak up for what I want.	2.63 (0.65)	1.91 (0.98)	0.73 (0.95)
Have reliable transportation to places in the community.	2.63 (0.66)	1.93*** (1.025)	0.71 (1.033)
Teachers respect my family’s point of view.	2.36 (0.87)	1.67 (1.028)	0.71 (1.00)
Get involved in clubs, sports teams, and other groups.	1.93 (1.09)	1.31 (1.17)	0.65 (.985)
Learn about sexuality.	2.21 (1.00)	1.58 (1.01)	0.63 (1.08)
Learn the traditions and values of my culture or family background.	2.13 (0.98)	1.53 (1.061)	0.62 (0.92)
Teachers share their experiences with me.	1.90 (0.98)	1.31 (0.99)	0.59 (0.98)
Teachers respect my culture or family background.	2.28 (0.92)	1.75 (1.05)	0.56 (0.98)
Receive encouragement from my friends.	2.16 (0.88)	1.60 (0.99)	0.55 (0.91)
Receive encouragement from other important adults (e.g., neighbors, religious leaders, family friends).	2.25 (0.90)	1.75 (1.02)	0.52 (0.90)

“Importance” response options: 0 = not important, 1 = sort of important, 2 = quite important, 3 = very important.

“Happen” response options: 0 = not much, 1 = sometimes, 2 = quite a bit, 3 = a lot.

\*Received highest ratings in its category (i.e., “importance” or “happen”).

\*\*Received second highest ratings in its category.

\*\*\*Received third highest ratings in its category.

future after high school (51.6% vs. 33.3%;  $\chi^2 = 8.20, df = 3, p < .05$ ), and (c) had “quite a bit” or “a lot” of instruction on protecting their safety (74% vs. 58.7%;  $\chi^2 = 8.25, df = 3, p < .05$ ).

*Differences Among Parent Respondents.* There were no significant differences among the parents of daughters and sons in the *importance/opportunity* gap on the 24 items. Fewer parents

of daughters (4.7%) compared to parents of sons (14.0%) reported that their child's teacher rarely listened to their child or showed interest in her opinions ( $\chi^2 = 9.09, df = 3, p < .05$ ). On a separate item, twice as many parents of daughters (63.9%) compared to parents of sons (36.1%) reported that their child's IEP was helpful ( $\chi^2 = 8.44, df = 3, p < .05$ ).

*Self-Determination*

*Item Rating Results.* Study participants responded to 7 items about how often they (or their child) had experienced certain opportunities to gain or demonstrate self-determination and 13 items about activities or attitudes that may hamper self-determination. Overall, the means for these items were lower than those of all other comparable items (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations of the responses). Study participants rated items such as "I (my child) was proud of how I (he/she) looked" ( $M = 1.99, SD = 0.93$ ); "I (my child) felt good about my/her/himself" ( $M = 1.88, SD = 0.97$ ) and "I (my child) felt comfortable speaking up for myself (himself/herself)" ( $M = 1.87, SD = 1.02$ ) more highly than they rated "I (my child) was proud of the ways I (he/she) am different because of my (his/her) disability or condition" ( $M = 0.84; SD = 1.03$ ). A highly rated barrier to self-determination was "My family did not want me (son/daughter) to do certain things because they

Table 3  
 Mean and Standard Deviation of Parents and Youth ( $N = 521$ ) to Items Regarding Self-Determination

Item	Mean (SD)
<b>Barriers</b>	
My family did not want me to do certain things because they were worried about my safety.	1.44 (1.144)
Teachers expected me to behave a certain way in school, which was not really me.	1.12 (1.086)
Teachers had different ideas about my future than I did.	1.04 (0.96)
Teachers did not understand my condition or disability.	1.01 (1.026)
I was picked on, teased, or put down.	0.92 (1.089)
Other people wanted me to be interested in jobs or careers that were different than what I wanted.	0.90 (.984)
My family had different ideas about my future than I did.	0.85 (0.98)
I kept quiet about what I wanted because other people expected me to go along with their ideas (e.g., family members, teacher, friends).	0.85 (1.021)
People (family, friends, neighbors) expected less of me because of my disability or condition.	0.80 (0.96)
There were problems in my day-to-day life, such as poverty, family illness, or discrimination, that kept me from planning the future.	0.74 (1.00)
People kept me from doing things that I believed were important.	0.74 (0.91)
People expected less of me because I am a female or male.	0.50 (0.83)
People expected less of me because of my race or culture.	0.44 (0.84)
<b>Assets</b>	
I was proud of how I looked.	1.99 (0.93)
I felt good about myself.	1.88 (0.97)
I felt comfortable speaking up for myself.	1.87 (1.019)
I received the same supports and opportunities to prepare for adult life as other students.	1.66 (1.039)
I was taught work skills that will lead to a successful career.	1.33 (1.106)
I was comfortable asking people to make accommodations for my disability or condition (giving me extra time on tests or doing something else).	1.06 (1.030)
I was proud of the ways that I am different because of my disability or condition.	0.84 (1.033)

Response options: 0 = not much, 1 = sometimes, 2 = quite a bit, 3 = a lot.

were worried about my (son/daughter's) safety" ( $M = 1.44, SD = 1.14$ ). The barrier that occurred with the least frequency was "People expect less of me because of my race or culture" ( $M = 0.44, SD = 0.841$ ).

*Differences Among Youth Respondents.* One in 5 (20.5%) females compared to 1 in 10 (11.6%) males reported that people expected less of them because of their gender ( $\chi^2 = 9.95, df = 3, p < .05$ ). Likewise, females (31.8%) were almost twice as likely as males (16.1%) to report that people expected less of them because of their disability or condition ( $\chi^2 = 8.28, df = 3, p < .05$ ). Surprisingly, CLD males were least likely to report that people (defined in the survey item as "family, friends, and neighbors") expected less of them because of their disability (10.9% compared to 21.4% of Anglo males, 29.4% of Anglo females, and 33.3% of CLD females).

*Differences Among Parent Respondents.* The responses of the parents indicated that the parents of females (42%), compared to parents of males (35%), were more likely to discourage their child from doing something due to safety concerns ( $\chi^2 = 15.73, df = 6, p < .05$ ). Furthermore, 43.1% of parents of females, compared to 29.0% of parents of sons, reported that their child received "quite a bit" or "a lot" of support in developing skills that will lead to a successful career ( $\chi^2 = 11.75, df = 3, p < .01$ ). Conversely, on another item related to work, parents of daughters (43.0%) were less likely to report that their child had held a paid job than the parents of sons (55.6%;  $\chi^2 = 4.30, df = 1, p < .05$ ). Finally, parents of daughters (13.9%) were almost twice as likely to report "quite a bit" or "a lot" of people expecting less of their child because of gender than parents of sons (7.2%;  $\chi^2 = 12.04, df = 3, p < .01$ ). There appears to be a significant culture effect on this item because CLD parents (16.1%) were five times more likely than Anglo parents (3.6%) to report that people often expected less of their child because of his or her gender ( $\chi^2 = 13.797, df = 3, p < .001$ ). Moreover, CLD parents of daughters were more likely than any other parent group to indicate that people expected less of their child because of gender (CLD parents of daughters = 19.6%, Anglo parents of daughters = 5.1%, CLD parents of sons = 11.6%, and Anglo parents of sons = 1.9%;  $\chi^2 = 9.15, df = 3, p < .05$ ).

#### *Perceived Gender Equity/Disparity*

*Item Rating Results.* Participants' responses to the nine items about gender parity in transition supports or expectations for adulthood suggest that most (from 35% to 77%, depending on the item) reported "both the same," indicating no perceived gender bias (Table 4). Some notable exceptions include more than half (56.6%) of the respondents indicated that girls are more likely than boys to be told that they cannot do something because it is not safe; more than one-third indicated that expectations to have children (42.0%) and to get married (33.0%) after high school are stronger for girls than for boys; twice as many indicated that boys (31.4%) compared to girls (12.4%) were more likely to live on their own after high school; and 18.4% believed that the expectation to get a job was stronger for boys compared to girls.

*Differences Among Youth Respondents.* Differences among male and female youth were found for two gender equity items related to teachers' attention and future career opportunities. Among the females who perceive gender inequities in who teachers pay attention to, half indicated males (13.2%) were more likely to be paid attention to and half indicated females received disproportional amounts of teacher attention (14.7%); however, males who indicated gender bias in teacher attention overwhelmingly suggest that girls (31.0%) rather than boys (1.8%) receive extra attention from teachers ( $\chi^2 = 17.311, df = 2, p < .001$ ), and (b) female youth were twice as likely as male youth to indicate males are more likely than females to get a job in a career that they like (18.9% compared to 7.1%;  $\chi^2 = 8.522, df = 2, p < .05$ ). Finally, CLD youth (23.7%) were three times more likely

Table 4  
 Responses to Gender Equity Items

Survey Item	Survey Response Option		
	Girls	Both the same	Boys
Which students are more likely to be told that they cannot do something because it is not safe?	56.6% (293)	34.9% (181)	8.5% (44)
Which students are expected to have children after high school?	42.0% (212)	54.3% (274)	3.8% (19)
Which students are expected to get married after high school?	33.0% (168)	62.7% (319)	4.3% (22)
Which students are more likely to be involved in planning their IEP goals?	30.2% (156)	63.4% (327)	6.4% (33)
Which students are more likely to get a job in a career that they like?	22.3% (115)	62.3% (321)	15.3% (79)
Which students are more likely to get attention from teachers?	22.0% (114)	65.3% (338)	12.7% (66)
Which students are expected to go to college?	14.7% (76)	77.0% (399)	8.3 (43)
Which students are expected to live on their own (not with their parents) after high school?	12.4% (64)	56.2% (290)	31.4% (162)
Which students are expected to get a job?	5.7% (29)	75.9% (388)	18.4% (94)

than Anglo youth (7.3%) to indicate that girls (vs. boys or “both the same”) are expected to live on their own after high school ( $\chi^2 = 11.82, df = 2, p < .01$ ). Twelve (9.4%) CLD youth, compared to no Anglo youth, indicated that boys were expected to have children after high school ( $\chi^2 = 12.39, df = 2, p < .005$ ).

*Differences Among Parent Respondents.* Like the youth, twice as many parents of males (30.6%) compared to parents of females (14.5%) indicated that girls are more likely to get their teacher’s attention ( $\chi^2 = 10.55, df = 2, p < .005$ ). In addition, parents of CLD youth were more likely to indicate that girls are expected to live on their own (14.5% vs. 1.8 % of Anglo parent;  $\chi^2 = 13.84, df = 2, p < .001$ ) and were more likely to consider that boys may be expected to have children after high school (4.5% vs. none of the Anglo parents;  $\chi^2 = 8.51, df = 2, p < .05$ ).

*Discussion.* The findings highlight a number of important similarities and differences among male and female students with disabilities in transition imperatives, sources of support, and potential barriers to coming of age. Points of consensus among this varied group, which included male and female youths with disabilities, as well as parents commenting on the needs and experiences of their children with disabilities, identify some universal deficits in transition preparedness. The results also point to the need for differentiated transition experiences for young women, particularly those who are CLD.

*Consensus About Transition Priorities, Sources of Support, and Potential Barriers*

All participants agreed on the importance of completing high school, having a good doctor, and having health insurance. The finding that access to health care is a more critical postschool outcome than having a good-paying job or living on one’s own is understandable given the potential for poor health to jeopardize educational, job, and independent living goals (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2006). Previous studies have demonstrated that nearly one in four (22%) young adults with disabilities, including those with health impairments, are uninsured; this is twice the proportion of children with disabilities who are uninsured (Fishman, 2001). As they approach

adulthood, youth with disabilities age-out of parental private health insurance coverage, and public coverage offered to children through Medicaid is often not extended into adulthood, particularly for those with chronic illness (Fishman, 2001). Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a clear message for students and their parents on where to turn for help around transition in health care. Geenen, Powers, and Sells (2003) found parents and health care providers to rate the item “*helping him/her get health insurance as an adult*” as one of the most important areas of transition; however, there was considerable confusion about who is responsible for assisting with this transition task. Likewise, in their study of transition plans, Powers et al. (2005) found that health and medical goals were included in only 36.3% of the plans, and only 6 of the 399 plans had a detailed plan for how the health and medical goals would be achieved.

The respondents almost unanimously reported that learning skills that promote independence and safety, as well as receiving encouragement from family, were very important for transitioning youth. Indeed, both the “importance” and the “opportunity” to receive encouragement from one’s family was rated highly. These findings are congruent with others that have documented the necessity and importance of active family encouragement (e.g., McNair & Rusch, 1991; Schalock & Lilley, 1986). Similarly, Trainor (2005) found that students identify parents and family members, rather than teachers, to be key contributors to transition planning. Likewise, Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) indicated that family support around transition often includes parents talking to their children about life after high school, in addition to skills such as teaching children to use transportation or to accommodate their disability.

Youth and parents consistently rated the importance of transition promotion activities higher than their opportunity to engage in each activity. The largest gaps in their importance and opportunity ratings were for accessing work experience and paid employment and learning how to find adult services. Regarding employment, only half of the youth had ever earned wages, even though the average age of the respondent was 18 years. Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) noted that participation in paid work experiences is associated with favorable transition outcomes. With respect to learning how to find adult services, Powers et al. (2005) found that few transition plans address accessing and sustaining adult services.

Youth and parents shared similar perceptions that young people often do not feel proud of the differences associated with their disabilities or feel comfortable asking for accommodations. Teachers were also implicated as potential barriers to the transition process; they were viewed as holding expectations for the students’ behavior or future outcomes that differed from those held by the youth themselves. Previous research has indicated that divergent expectations between teachers and their students may actually inhibit the development of self-determination and damage the transition planning process (Trainor, 2005).

#### *Gender Differences in Transition Priorities, Sources of Support, and Potential Barriers*

Youth and parents agreed that worries about youth safety make their families reluctant to permit youth to engage in activities, particularly among the young women. Although this study is consistent with earlier research that underscores the importance of family involvement in transition, it presents a more complex picture of girls and young women than past research. For example, Rousso (2002) described how parents may thwart the transition process by discouraging autonomy and independence for fear of compromising their daughter’s safety. Responses from parents of daughters to the current survey reflect this same concern. For example, parents of girls, compared to boys, were more likely to limit their child’s activities due to safety. Transportation appears to be a touchstone in the balance parents of females strike between autonomy and safety. Parents of daughters, particularly CLD daughters, were more concerned than parents of sons about their

children's access to reliable transportation. Hogansen et al. (2007) found focus group participants to articulate the tension between young women with disabilities and their parents as a push toward independence (and the risk taking that accompanies burgeoning autonomy) by the young women, while their parents respond with limits, constraints, and precautions out of concern for their safety. The tendency among some parents toward protection of their son or daughter with a disability, in combination with a lack of specific goals for the youths' adulthood, may actually thwart attainment of the youths' postsecondary outcomes (Lindstrom et al., 2007) Q5

When asked to rate their experiences around transition, female youth reported receiving greater support and having greater clarity than did their male counterparts. For example, females were more likely to indicate that they receive a lot of support from nonfamily adults, have a clear plan for what they want to do in the future, get instruction on protecting their safety, and report more opportunities to learn the skills needed to live independently than did males. This trend was echoed by parents, who reported that daughters were more likely than sons to learn work skills necessary for a successful career, have a teacher who listened to them, and have IEP meetings that were helpful.

Although female students and their parents report greater support around transition, they also describe greater barriers. For example, even though females were more likely to learn work skills, they were less likely to have paid jobs. Females were more likely than males to indicate that people expect less of them because of their disability, and both females and parents of daughters reported diminished expectations because of gender. CLD parents of daughters were more likely than any other parent group to indicate that people expected less of their child because of gender, and CLD females were more likely than any other youth group to report that they encountered reduced expectations because of their disability. These findings highlight the salience of the triple jeopardy experience (the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and disability status) for CLD females, who, as a result, may encounter stereotypes that are more complex and limiting.

In addition to gender differences in transition supports and barriers, males and females also differed in their goals and expectations for the future. The young women placed more emphasis on two seemingly opposing goals: having children and going to college. Although twice as many females emphasized college (73.6%) as parenting (38.3%), it is still interesting to consider how these goals may be interrelated. Female students may not see starting a family and pursuing postsecondary education as an "either/or" scenario. Perhaps if more guidance counselors and postsecondary education programs shared this view, more mothers with children would consider enrolling in postsecondary educational institutions.

Although both male and female students with disabilities face challenges in obtaining health insurance and transitioning to adult health care, the young females in this study appear to be slightly more concerned about securing medical insurance in their near future; 86% of females compared to 74% of males rated having medical insurance to be a very important goal. This finding is supported by previous work by Nosek, Howland, Rintala, Young, and Chanpong (1997), who found that women with disabilities often experience difficulty accessing information and health care services around pregnancy, sexuality, childbirth, and other issues related to reproductive health.

### *Gender Bias and Stereotypes*

Finally, the participants shared some perceptions of gender bias. For example, societal expectations to curb one's activities in order to remain safe, to marry, and to have children young appears to be much stronger for females than males. Conversely, young men were deemed more likely to be expected to live on their own and get a job. In some cases, a participant's understanding of gender bias was influenced by his or her own gender. For example, male parents and male youth were more likely to say that female youth get more attention from teachers than do male youth. Conversely,

female youth reported stronger bias favoring males in acquiring a job in a career they like. The perceptions of gender bias in independent living and marriage differed for CLD youth and their parents. For example, CLD youth and parents were more likely than Anglo youth and parents to indicate that girls are expected to live on their own after high school, and more CLD than Anglo respondents suggested that boys, rather than girls, might be expected to have children after high school.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations exist in interpreting the findings from this study. Foremost is the representativeness of the sample. Although students and families were randomly selected from each school district based on their representation in each district, one should not assume that these two districts are representative of other school districts or that the youth and families who participated necessarily represent those invited to participate. For example, it is possible that youth and families who had the strongest feelings about their transition experiences were the most likely to return a survey. Similarly, females with disabilities were overrepresented in our sample relative to national rates. A second sampling limitation for the survey relates to the collection of data from primarily urban settings. Students and families from rural communities may report different transition experiences or perceptions than those from urban areas. A third caution relates to the independence between our parent and student samples. The data were not collected from parent/student dyads; therefore, the data reflect the transition experiences of two overlapping, but distinct groups of youth. Although individuals who are the subject of the parent and youth surveys are not the same, they do not significantly differ in terms of gender, race, and disability characteristics. Also, due to the number of chi-square analyses conducted in the study, the experimentwise probability of a false positive (Type I error) is somewhat elevated. Finally, the focus on identifying gender differences obfuscates the many similarities across the genders; on many of the items, survey participants' responses indicated that transition needs, expectations, and experiences transcend gender.

### CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings reported in this survey sample highlight the subtlety of the impact of gender-related factors on transition. Although some obstacles to transition success may be lessening for males and females with disabilities, both groups of students continue to face restricted opportunity to engage in activities important for transition success. In addition, gender-focused expectations and concerns differentially limit access to some transition supports and opportunities for young women and men (e.g., safety concerns limit young women's participation in activities). Perhaps most important is the interaction between these gender expectations and the lack of access to transition supports for young men and women. For example, most survey participants indicated that young men are expected to live independently after high school, whereas young men indicated that they do not have commensurate opportunity to learn skills for living independently. Likewise, as already discussed, young women may be differentially impacted by lack of attention to health care planning during transition.

Traditionally, gender equity efforts have focused on equalizing opportunities and expectations for young women and men. Although this approach is highly valued, school counselors', psychologists', and educators' efforts should also be directed at recognizing differences that may exist for young women and men for which equalization may not be their goal. Most discussion in this area has focused on honoring unique transition goals for CLD youth and providing culturally responsive support. However, there may be further instances in which transition supports need to flex with the individualized goals of young women and men, such as responding to some young women's desires

to simultaneously attend college and marry. Our world is becoming increasingly complex, and as life opportunities expand for young women and men with disabilities, the range of supports available to them will need to become increasingly responsive to their individualized goals.

As confirmed by this study, more can be done to assist young people with disabilities in being able to identify and address disability stigma, as well as stigma related to gender and/or culture. Psychologists and related professionals can be instrumental in assisting students in learning to recognize and respond to bias, as well as becoming comfortable in asking for accommodations related to disability, gender, culture, or other life circumstances. It is hoped that as young people have increasing pride in themselves and voice in their lives, such bias will give way to increasing appreciation and support for diversity.

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# Author Proof

QUERIES

- Q1:** Author: Add year of case in text and add case itself to References.  
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