Transition Goals and Experiences of Females With Disabilities: Youth, Parents, and Professionals

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the influence of gender on the transition goals and experiences of female students with disabilities. Data were gathered from 146 participants, including female youth with disabilities (n = 67), parents of young women with disabilities (n = 34), and professionals who work with them (n = 45). Findings suggest that females with disabilities have unique experiences related to (a) type of transition goals established for them; (b) factors that shape these transition goals, such as self-perception, mentors, peers, family, and exposure to opportunities; (c) sources of support and impediments to transition to adulthood, such as special education personnel and programs; and (d) contextual issues, such as cultural and linguistic diversity. Practice and future research implications are discussed.

Since 1984, when the U.S. Department of Education first focused on improving the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities, numerous projects have pursued the goal of improving adult outcomes for these students. The 1990 Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) first mandated that transition services be addressed in the individualized education programs (IEPs) of students 16 years and older. Seven years later, amendments to IDEA required that transition plans include a coordinated set of services to prepare students for success in a number of postsecondary settings, including postsecondary education, integrated employment, vocational training, and independent living. A comparison between the 1987 and 2001 National Longitudi-
nal Transition Studies (NLTS and NLTS2; Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003) suggests these efforts have resulted in some progress for youth with disabilities. For instance, in 2001, as compared to 1987 the dropout rate for youth with disabilities had declined by half, more youth with disabilities were employed, and more youth with disabilities were being paid at or above the minimum wage (Wagner et al.). However, recent findings from NLTS2 suggest that not all groups have experienced proportionate levels of positive change. In particular, females with disabilities continue to lag behind their male counterparts on a number of indices of adult success. For example, only males with disabilities, not females, have enjoyed significant improvement in high school completion rates (Wagner et al.). Further, although more youth with disabilities are going to college, young women with disabilities are experiencing gains at 2-year colleges; more young men are attending both 2- and 4-year colleges. Moreover, only one third of young women with disabilities earn minimum wage or more, compared to more than half of young men with disabilities.

Gender inequities in transition outcomes have been documented in other research as well. Doren and Benz (2001) reviewed studies published between 1972 and 1998 that addressed gender, disability, and transition outcomes and found that women with disabilities were more likely to be unemployed, had significantly lower wages, were more likely to have unskilled jobs (e.g., little or no opportunity for advancement), and experienced less job stability than men with disabilities. Hasazi and her colleagues also summarized research investigating the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities and found similar trends; after exiting high school, young women with disabilities were more likely than young men with disabilities to be unemployed, underemployed, or employed in low status jobs (Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989). More recently, Coutinho, Oswald, and Best (2006) used the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 data set to examine the extent to which outcome variables were differentially associated with gender for students participating in special education. Evidence for several differential effects by gender was obtained, including that men with disabilities were more likely than their female counterparts to be employed for a greater number of months, earn more money, and receive a high school diploma.

The considerable evidence that young women with disabilities continue to lag behind their male peers on a variety of postsecondary outcomes suggests that reform efforts of the past 2 decades have not been equally beneficial to all. Yet, very few studies have attempted to identify the factors that explain and contribute to these gender differences. Rather, the research to date has primarily documented overall group differences between female and male students with disabilities in postsecondary outcomes. Attention needs to be directed towards understanding and meeting the unique transition needs and experiences of young women in special education. In particular, little is known about how (or even whether) gender disparity is reflected in transition planning and what strategies could be employed to advance the success of young women during the transition planning process.

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The few studies that have investigated gender differences in transition suggest that the experiences of females typically differ from those of males in a number of important ways. First, the career aspirations of many females with disabilities may be constrained to female-typical, low earnings jobs. NLTS2 results indicate that young women continue to be channeled into female-stereotypic occupations, such as babysitting, while their male counterparts have seen a significant increase in the types of jobs held (Wagner et al., 2003). In reviewing the transition plans (TP) of 399 IEPs, Powers and colleagues (2005) found one third (33.5%) of the employment goals on the TPs conformed to gender stereotypes; less than 1 in 10 (6.8% of females and 5.9% for males) employment goals represented aspirations that countered gender stereotypes (e.g., a female
auto mechanic or a male secretary). Stereotypic female careers tend to be less well paid and stable than traditionally male jobs (Lips, 2003); the opportunities for women with disabilities to earn a living wage may be compromised early on by transition planning employment goals based on gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypic employment goals may be formed or at least reinforced by differential vocational education opportunities. Female students have been found to be less likely than their male counterparts to take courses in agriculture and industry, and they are more likely to receive training in home economics, health care, and clerical jobs (Blackorby, 1993; Wagner, 1992). Researchers also have found that young women with disabilities exit school with less work experience than young men with disabilities (Doren & Benz, 1998; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Wagner), which may contribute to underemployment and unemployment as adults.

Finally, pressures on females to avoid risk and to begin a family early in life may contribute to the unique transition experiences of young women with disabilities. A survey of 521 youth with disabilities and parents found over half (56.6%) of the respondents indicated that girls are more likely than boys to be told that they must refrain from an activity because it might be unsafe (Powers, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers, & Gil-Kashiwabara, in press). Furthermore, transition-age females were significantly more likely than their male counterparts to rate having children within 3 years of high school as an important outcome. Interestingly, parents of females with disabilities did not differ from parents of males with disabilities in their opinions on the importance of their children having children soon after high school, suggesting that in some areas, gender stereotypes may hold more sway among the youth themselves than among their parents. A more in-depth understanding of the influence of preconceived notions about gender held by various stakeholders in the transition process is needed.

Existing studies on gender and transition provide an initial picture of how stereotypes may influence postsecondary outcomes of women with disabilities, particularly their employment, yet there is a paucity of data on how gender may influence attainment of nonvocational-related adult outcomes and what types of supports exist or are needed to assist young women transitioning to adulthood. Indeed, Oswald, Best, Coutinho, and Nagle (2003) specifically called for carefully designed research studies that elucidate the basis for gender differences. Studies are needed that move beyond male-female comparisons based on group averages in favor of careful investigations of the factors that explain the ways in which gender influences the transition planning process. Currently, females have been understudied in the transition literature because most research disproportionately represents males with disabilities. For instance, in NLTS2, almost two thirds of the youth with disabilities were males (Wagner et al., 2003). The current study focused on females exclusively in order to move toward a more complete and measurable understanding of the ways in which gender influences transition goals and outcomes for students with disabilities. Specifically, we extend the current research on transition by examining young women's transition goals, factors that shape those goals, supports and impediments to achieving those goals, and the role of cultural and linguistic diversity in female transition experiences.

The present study is unique in its exclusive focus on the transition experiences of young women with disabilities, allowing for a large cross-section of women with disabilities to be examined, including women with disabilities who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), attend college, are at risk for high school dropout, have low-incidence disabilities, and so forth. The study addresses the lack of information on how transition is experienced and enhanced for females with disabilities by directly gathering data from various stakeholders, including the young women themselves, parents of young women with disabilities, and the professionals who work with them.

**METHOD**

We used collected qualitative information from multiple informants via interviews and focus groups, accumulating data from different contexts and varied perspectives. The focus group methodology also allowed participants to provide varied and in-depth responses, which could be clarified,
reflected or expanded upon by other members of the group. We asked participants first to describe their transition-related activities in general (as youth with disabilities, parents of youth with disabilities, or professionals), and then they reflected on how these experiences may differ for girls and women compared to boys and men.

**Participants**

We recruited participants through the special education programs of two major urban school districts in the western U.S., and through a Western public university's disabled student services office. The study was approved by institutional review boards at the participating institutions. We used purposeful sampling to recruit 146 youth, parents, and educational professionals to participate in 1 of 24 focus group sessions. Focus group participants included young women with disabilities (n = 67), parents or caregivers of young women with disabilities (n = 34), and special education professionals (n = 45). There were a total of 11 youth focus groups; 10 comprised young women who were still in high school or had graduated within the past month or two, and 1 was conducted with college students. We held 6 parent/caregiver focus groups and 7 professional focus groups. Across all three types of groups, group size ranged from 4 to 8 participants. Additionally, we conducted two individual interviews in Spanish for youth and parents with limited English proficiency. Participants across groups were not necessarily connected (e.g., a professional may not necessarily have worked with any of the youths in the youth focus groups), though this was often the case for the youth and parent groups; however, parents need not have their daughter participate in order to participate themselves.

**Youth.** The disabilities of the 67 young women participants (65 in focus groups plus the 2 individual interviews) ranged from mild to severe and included learning disabilities (n = 39, 60%); emotional/behavioral disabilities (n = 6, 9%); intellectual/developmental disabilities (n = 5, 8%); physical/sensory disabilities (n = 3, 5%); and disabilities categorized as "other" (n = 12, 19%). The racial/ethnic composition of the youth participants was 55% Caucasian (n = 36), 19% African American (n = 12), 14% Latina (n = 9), 6% Asian (n = 4), 5% Native American (n = 3), 2% multiracial/other (n = 1). The participants ranged in age from 15 to 23, with a median age of 18. One youth had a college degree (2%), 6 had some college experience (9%), 23 were post-12th grade or in a transition program (35%), and 5 had a high school diploma or GED certificate (8%). Of those youth in high school transition programs, 14 had completed 12th grade (22%), 9 had completed 11th grade (14%), 5 had completed 10th grade (8%), 1 had completed 9th grade (2%), and 1 had completed middle school (2%). Sixty-one percent of the youth (n = 40) indicated that one or more of their parents had attended college. Twelve percent of the youth were born outside of the United States (n = 8) and 31% were working part-time (n = 20).

**Parents.** Twenty-six of the 34 participants in the parent/caregiver focus groups were mothers (76%), 3 were fathers (9%), 1 was a grandfather (3%) and 4 (15%) were categorized as "other" (e.g., aunt, foster parent). The racial/ethnic composition was 65% Caucasian (n = 22), 24% African American (n = 8), 9% Latino (n = 3) and 3% Asian (n = 1). Nineteen (56%) of the parents or caregivers were working, and 6% (n = 2) reported that English was not their first language.

**Professionals.** The 45 professionals who participated in the study all worked in K-12 education, as special education teachers (n = 21, 47%); school staff (paraprofessionals, teaching aides; n = 9, 20%); transition specialists (n = 8, 18%); school psychologists (n = 4, 9%); a counselor (n = 1, 2%); a school administrator (n = 1, 2%); and a non-school staff member (n = 1, 2%). The length of time the individuals had held a position as an educational professional ranged from 2 months to 24 years, with a median tenure of 6 years. Of these participants, 36 (80%) were female and 9 (20%) were male. The self-identified racial/ethnic composition was 84% Caucasian (n = 38), 7% African American (n = 3), 7% Asian (n = 3), and 2% "other" (n = 1).

**Procedure**

We posted flyers at the participating schools to recruit potential participants. The collaborating school districts and university provided information to individuals interested in participating in
FIGURE 1
Youth Focus Group Questions

1. What are your goals for adulthood?
2. What are you doing to accomplish these goals? How are you getting there?
3. What have other people done to help you work towards your goals?
4. What has helped? What hasn't helped in terms of getting ready for adulthood?
5. Have you participated in transition planning at school? What has this been like?
6. Is there anything that's different/important for girls who are getting ready for adult life?
7. Is there anything that's different/important for students from culturally diverse families who are getting ready for adult life?
8. Maria/Miguel Scenario:
Let's imagine Maria/Miguel is going to be 16 years old. She/He is interested in the health sciences. Given everything you have said, if you could lay out the best transition planning for Maria/Miguel, what would it look like? What would be her/his goals for transition? What would Maria/Miguel do? What would the school/others do? What would the transition planning look like? (i.e., ask the above questions in response to the case scenario.)

Note. Focus group questions for parents and professionals were identical in content, but slightly modified to reflect the relationship of the student to the member of the focus group (e.g., What are your goals for your daughter for adulthood; What is your student doing to accomplish her goals?).

Each participant was assigned a number; names and other identifying information were not reflected in the transcripts. Thus, individual respondent comments were not coded with any demographic marker (e.g., race/ethnicity). Responses of participants from different backgrounds were not directly compared due to the focus on comparing the perspectives of youth, parents, and professionals.

Focus Group Questions. The focus group questions (see Figure 1) focused on youths’ transition experiences in general, and the transition experiences of females in particular. Two independent community advisory committees composed of adolescents and young women with disabilities, parents of daughters with disabilities, and special education professionals assisted the researchers in developing these questions. The protocol for each focus group centered broadly on four areas: (a) goals for adulthood, (b) sources of support for and impediments to preparing for adulthood, (c) formal transition planning at school, and (d) gender and cultural differences in transition—and included a transition scenario designed to focus participant responses on the practical implications of gender and CLD on transition planning. Initial questions were intentionally open-ended to per-
mit each participant to share his or her own perspective or story without being immediately affected by possible biases from more focused questions about gender and cultural differences. After the group responded to broad questions, the researchers asked specific follow-up questions to prompt more in-depth answers and to encourage more detail regarding the transition planning experiences of young women. The two individual youth interviews used the same questions and techniques utilized in the youth focus groups.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

We coded the transcripts of each focus group session using a qualitative analysis software program (Ethnograph v5.08) designed to organize and retrieve data, utilizing content analysis techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Possible categories were initially generated based on a thorough literature review of educational and transition planning experiences of youth with disabilities. Then, the five-member research team independently reviewed a transcript from one of the youth focus group sessions to create an Ethnograph “codebook” (listing codes and their definitions). This process of investigator triangulation contributes to the internal validity of the project by ensuring cross-checking and verification of the interpretation of the data by more than one researcher (Thurmond, 2001). We identified additional categories according to the constant-comparative procedures described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and updated the codebook to accommodate these new categories. All coders achieved consensus on a final list of 26 codes (assigned positive, negative, or neutral value labels) organized into four broad categories.

Each author/coder was randomly assigned a minimum of five focus group transcripts for coding. To establish coding reliability, one third (35%, \( n = 9/26 \)) of the transcripts were reviewed by both a primary and a randomly assigned secondary coder. Subsequently, an independent third party examined both protocols for discrepancies. Any discrepancies were resolved between the primary and secondary coder, achieving consensus on the final coding of the protocol.

We ensured reliability throughout the study by using a variety of strategies: (a) multiple data sources, (b) multiple researchers and analysts, (c) verbatim transcripts recorded and transcribed by an independent agency, (d) coding checks, and (e) member checks at the end of each focus group. The two independent community advisory committees that assisted in the focus group question development also reviewed and evaluated the interpretative fairness and validity of the research team’s analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); they did not suggest any major revisions to the results.

**RESULTS**

The transition goals for young women with disabilities espoused by the youth, parents and educators are presented separately because they often diverged. For the remaining three themes (factors that shape those goals, sources of support/impediments to transition, and CLD influences), representative comments by all the stakeholders are collectively presented to elucidate subthemes identified through this research.

**TRANSITION GOALS**

Transition Goals of Young Women With Disabilities. Young women identified numerous transition goals for themselves. Most youth identified goals related to specific careers (e.g., doctor, nurse, animal care, counselor, food service, computer programmer, engineer, teacher, etc.). As well, a number of youth acknowledged the value of education, including the goals of graduating high school, pursuing scholarships for college, and, for several, attending graduate school. Some young women considered family and relationships important goals, especially getting married and/or having children. Economic goals for a few participants included saving, earning, and managing money. Several participants indicated that independence was an important goal; one youth stated that she wanted to “provide for myself so that I don’t have to count on someone else.”

Most young women had multiple, rather than single, goals. For example, one youth reported her goals were to “go to college, get a job, get married, have kids”; another answered, “all the standard dreams, having two kids, house, car, job.” A major theme that emerged from these data was the goal of *having it all*, meaning the
dream of having both a career and a family. One participant stated:

I want a family, and I’m going to pick a career that I can raise a family. I want to be able to be home with my family . . . And as much as I want a career and be able to succeed, I find having a family and career together would be the ultimate way that I would be able to succeed.

Transition Goals of Parents. Important similarities and differences existed between the transition goals identified by parents and their daughters. Similar to their children, a number of parents described goals for their child related to education, family and relationships, and independence. In some cases, the goals of parents were congruent with those of their daughters. For example, a parent said, “I was really happy to hear that . . . she wants to go to college.” For many parents, however, their transition goals contrasted with those of their daughters. One parent said:

She’s always wanted to be a mom. And there’s no way. She doesn’t even have the patience for us grown-up people. She’s not—you know, it scares me to death that she’s going to have a child, and I’m going to raise it. I don’t want to do that.

Important similarities and differences existed between the transition goals identified by parents and their daughters.

Another stated, “I’d like to see her go to college, if possible. It’s hard to get a good job without her going to college anymore. We’re having problems with her even to finish high school. She wants to drop out.” A number of parents identified the reason for this discrepancy between their goals for their children and their children’s goals as the “unrealistic” nature of the goals youth have for themselves: “(Name) is unrealistic in some of her thoughts about the future . . . the other day she said she wanted to be a veterinarian. She made up her mind. There’s no way she can be . . . I think reality eludes her.”

Transition Goals of Professionals. One of the more striking differences for professionals, compared with parents and youth, was their relative lack of specificity of goals for the youth. For example, one professional indicated, “My goals are for the students to be able to contribute to society.” Another stated, “My goal is that they’re able to have choices in life.” Perhaps this generality was due to educators reflecting on goals for young women overall, whereas parents and youth reflected on specific goals for themselves or their daughters. Like the parents, the professionals acknowledged the often marked difference between their own goals for their students and those held by the youth:

There’s our goals for them and then there’s their goals for themselves and there’s not a whole lot of intersection between the two often. Because what we want is for them to learn job skills and take the kind of jobs we know that they’re able to do, attain some degree of independence.

Indeed, a number of professionals said that their students want “lofty” and “glamorous” careers, such as an NBA basketball player or rock star.

The challenge expressed by many professionals was balancing their own goals for the youth with those of the parents. Many professionals described the goals of parents as “unrealistic,” noting that their own job is often to “shape” expectations. One professional reported, “I’ve had parents come in when their child was diagnosed with retardation and want them to have a 4-year degree and couldn’t understand why (not).” Another explained, “Some of the parents are unrealistic with the children. They want them to be much more than some of them are going to be capable of being.” Some described their job as being the “realistic” person who consequently “bursts bubbles” for families. As one professional noted, “that’s a hard thing to go tell a special needs student . . . somebody is just telling you that you’ve got to go get a job at [a fast food restaurant].”

Factors That Shape Transition Goals

A major focus of our study was to determine the factors that shape the transition goals of young women with disabilities. Categories emerged that included the influence of (a) mentors, (b) peers, (c) family, (d) teachers, (e) and exposure to opportunities.
Influence of Mentors/Role Models on Transition Goals. Many of the participants noted the importance of having someone in the young woman's life to encourage and support her transition goals. They considered mentors and role models critical to exposing young women to expanded opportunities. For example, one young woman stated: "I want to become a child psychologist. And the reason I want to do that is because the school psychologist ... influenced me in becoming one because she said I—I really have a potential for that."

Parents were more likely than their daughters to note a dearth of mentors in their daughters' lives. One father said:

I got mentors throughout my life. You know, 10 years with this older guy and 15 years with this guy that taught me this and that. And my son did the same things—baseball coaches, football coaches, people he's worked for. And for the life of me, I cannot see my daughter doing that, nor can I see many of the girls doing that. I don't see them getting these mentors that teach them these skills that we all sit here talking about, going where'd you learn that? ... [My daughter] doesn't come to me to be mentored and she doesn't come to my wife.

One parent recommended that schools and families could address the lack of mentors by recruiting people to become involved in their children's lives to "try and see the positive side of their struggles and be supportive of the little successes that they make."

Professionals also suggested that females with disabilities lacked role models, particularly CLD young women.

With the Latins and Asians, I don't see the women working. And so our [Latin and Asian] girls have no role models. Our boys have some, an uncle or somebody who is working in the family. ... A lot of them have dads that are mechanics or whatever.

This quote reflects the perception that CLD females are disadvantaged in terms of career mentors; interestingly, the mentorship CLD females with disabilities receive in other areas of adulthood (e.g., independent living skills, community involvement) was not discussed.

Influence of Peers/Friends on Transition Goals. Not surprisingly for this age group, the youth often spoke about the influence of peers on their goals. One youth recounted that her friends provided her with the "courage" to establish meaningful goals. Another youth talked about the support her friends provided during a critical period in high school:

After my freshman year, from my sophomore to senior, I started to figure out my goals... and my friends helping me out with socialization... [they] just encourage me, say, "It's going to be okay. If you do it, you'll pass." They encourage me to do stuff that I was afraid to do.

The major concern about peers for both parents and professionals was sexual activity and family planning. Parents worried that the transition goals of their daughters were influenced by their relationships with males, and the topic of pregnancy was often broached, "I worry about future sexual activity and about consequences. I'm 57 years old. I do not want to raise a baby or help my daughter raise a baby." However, several youth expressed resentment at such expectations; for example, one youth exclaimed, "See that's what guys say, 'You stay home and take care of the baby, and I'll go make the money.' But, see, we want our own jobs. We can go make our own money too."

Influence of Family on Transition Goals. Although family members have the potential to be significant inspirational role models to young women in transition, youth also talked about the difficulty their parents seemed to have in "letting go" and allowing them to become more independent. One youth explained, "I don't think I'm going to move out because my mom doesn't want me to. I know she's afraid ... she doesn't think I'm ready for this. She thinks I don't know how to do anything."

Some youth felt that their parents were overly concerned about their safety. For example, a few talked about wanting to learn to drive and the fact that their parents would not allow them to:

I don't even have my permit, and my mom won't let me really get it because she thinks I'm not capable of driving. And I tell her—I say, "Mom, at least I can try." And she's like, "No, you can't" ... because of my disability,
she thinks I won't ever be able to drive . . .
and I'll probably have to take the bus my
whole life.

Many parents acknowledged their fears and
concerns for their daughters' safety. One parent
said, "My daughter will never be self-sufficient.
And when you ask what my hopes are for her, I
want her to be safe." Another commented, "You
know, I think whether or not a young woman has
a disability, I think they're more vulnerable in our
society. And my daughter has certainly run into
that already." Professionals articulated the dichoto-
mous influence of families, noting that at the same
time that families can be "amazing," they can also
be "enabling" dependence by not providing their
daughters with opportunities to practice the skills
necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.
Some professionals talked about the fears of par-
ents, and how many "don't want to let go" of their
children, "Parents and the families are afraid for
their girls. We're living in an urban society. It's
'Don't be letting my kid out.' That's especially if
they're girls . . . . So they are fearful."

Some professionals noted cultural dif-
ferences in parents with regard to this fear of letting go of
their child. For instance, one parent commented
"But I think culturally, there's just a legitimate fear
of letting go, I think. And I think that's very com-
mon, maybe in a lot of different cultures, within
the family." Another professional gave an example
of how the practical need for some CLD youth to
help their families navigate language barriers could
be a barrier to their own transition goals:

I think that a variable here is also the amount
of English language ability in the home. I
don't know if that's what is keeping some of
the students or what's making the parents
want to keep them: because they are the
bridge to the English-speaking world. So I
tend to think that families as a whole who
have stronger English language skills might
have long-term goals versus those who are,
you know, wholly dependent on their kid
who is the only one in the family who can
translate.

Influence of Teachers. Many youth recounted
instances in which teachers were a positive influ-
ence on forming transition goals. However, many
young women reported being hurt by their teach-
ers' low expectations. Some even suggested that
their teachers treated them like children, believing
them incapable of making decisions for them-
selves. One student explained that her teacher
would talk to her parents instead of her, whereas
another commented, "My teachers don't really lis-
ten to me that much." Likewise, a number of
youth recalled teachers telling them "You're not
gonna do that," "You can't do that," or "You're
never gonna be able to do that." This commentary
by the youth is consistent with the reflections of
teachers who, as described previously, viewed
themselves as "bubble bursters." Teachers were also
described by the youth as having the ability to not
limit just dreams, but opportunities as well:

I was taking business, something that I really
wanted to do, and next thing I know, I got
taken out of the class and they told me I had
to be in special ed . . . . and she [general educa-
tion teacher] was like—she was, like, "I don't
think you can do it. I think you're just gonna
fall behind" . . . . and it just made me, like, re-
ally frustrated because, like, they won't give
me a chance to do, like, what I want to do.

Some youth felt that teachers had limited ex-
pectations for them, not only because of disabil-
ity, but also because of their CLD background.

I felt being Hispanic, plus with a disability,
I've felt a lot of like people would look down
on me, like in high school when I dropped
out. And I felt that the teachers didn't help
me enough. I felt that there was a lot of
racial thing going.

Exposure to Opportunities. We asked the
youth to comment on their exposure to opportu-
nities that would help prepare them for the transi-
tion to adulthood. Some youth said that males
and those without disabilities had more advan-
tages and opportunities than females and those
with disabilities. Reflecting on gender bias, one
youth said, "It just seems like it would be easier
for a guy to get the job [than females]," and "It's a
lot easier for them [males] to get a scholarship
than it is females."

Young women were able to find training in
child-care positions, such as day care and elemen-
tary schools, but youth with goals other than
child care encountered more difficulty when they
tried to gain vocational experience. One young
woman shared her experience applying for an internship. She felt like the interviewer really liked her and wanted to hire her until she told him about her learning disability and that it might take her a bit longer to do certain tasks. She concluded, “It was solely because of my disability that I didn’t get the job.” In another poignant story, a youth related her vocational training experience in the animal care field, “All I did was get stuck at [a pet store] stocking shelves. I thought I was going to be like bathing and feeding animals and having fun.”

Parents also were aware of their daughters’ lack of exposure to opportunities. As one parent stated, “They often don’t have a lot of the same options as regular kids do.” Professionals echoed this concern, noting that gender bias exists in school-based work experience programs:

With boys, because society says the man is supposed to have a job and this and that, they [the schools] prepare the boys a lot more than the women. I think that’s a big problem. Because I’ve seen where they’ll put the boys in work programs a lot faster than women.

Sources of Support and Impediments to a Successful Transition to Adulthood

Our final goal was to examine what could be done to help young women with disabilities make a successful transition to adulthood. Participant responses suggested seven major themes: (a) special education, (b) self-perception, (c) work experience, (d) social support, (e) collaboration, (f) self-determination, and (g) relationships.

Special Education Experiences. We asked participants to discuss their experiences in special education, particularly formal IEP transition planning meetings. Unfortunately, it was common for the youth to report that their special education classes had not helped them work toward their goals; some felt that their special education classes did not provide them with “real education.”

Yeah, my IEP, they’re, like, “We’re gonna be here to focus on your math and this,” and then, like a month goes by and I’ve learned nothing. They’re, like, “Well, we see that you’re doing good.” And I’m like, “I—I don’t even know what two times two is. How am I doing good?”

Indeed, some youth felt that they missed out on certain opportunities because they were in special education. One student commented:

At school, I just take special ed classes but I don’t feel like they help us to the point—the point that we need to be helped at . . . . I took special ed all this year and they just—they never asked me did I want to be in the classroom.

When youth were queried directly about their IEP/TP meeting, many appeared to know what it was, but typically seemed only to have a vague understanding of the meeting’s purpose and intent. One youth said that, “My teachers felt that it wasn’t necessary for me to be there because it was just them talking about how—my achievements or anything, or I don’t know.” Another youth reported, “I’m not allowed to sit in those meetings.” Others described the meeting as “pointless,” as summarized by one young woman, “It’s not really getting me anywhere.” Another youth said of her IEP, “I don’t feel like talking [in the TP meetings], and I feel like I don’t have anything to say. I don’t have any say-so.” For some, the meeting was a negative experience, where they were uncomfortable, frustrated or embarrassed:

I stopped going because I will cry every time . . . I did not like them . . . they say, “Oh, well, we know your child best. We know what your child (needs)—and it’s like do you live with us? I mean yeah you see us at school every day but you don’t see what we go through every day.

In addition to special education not meeting the academic needs or transition goals of youth, many of the young women suggested that young men were more likely to act out in special education classrooms and, as a result, teachers had different behavioral expectations for them:

They [young men] don’t do nothing. They do what they want to do. Girls especially, we work more than the boys. You’ll see girls sitting down doing the work while boys are all rowdy and stuff like that.

Teachers acknowledged this bias as well, admitting that male students in special education may
receive more attention and services because their disruptive behavior makes them stand out, “As long as a girl keeps looking like she’s working hard, we’re not pushing to get them into enclave because we got these guys that, God, we’ve got to get them out of the building. They’re driving us nuts.” Parents also expressed concern about gender bias in the classroom:

It's the difference of expecting a girl to behave, and you don’t expect a boy to behave. [Child’s name] was sharing a tutor in one of her classes and she never got any help because the boy was always causing such a ruckus that they had to be attending to him constantly.

Teachers further indicated that, because of the gender roles and expectations in certain cultures, they felt that CLD males and females had different experiences in their work/vocational training activities:

Well, there’s the other cultural differences for boys and girls, how females and males talk to each other. And we . . . ran into that with a Chinese family where women are not supposed to contradict men, women are not supposed to talk back to men. So the whole concept of advocacy and going up to the boss and saying, “I can’t do it this way. I need to do it that way” or . . . “I need this to be changed,” no, you don’t do that. A girl doesn’t go up to a man and say that. But the [work training] boss happens to be male, so she can’t do that. And she is not comfortable doing that because that’s the culture she was raised in.

Influence of Self-Perception. A dominant theme throughout the discussions was the impact of the youth’s self-perception on her transition goals—and a young woman’s views regarding her disability seems to be an important factor in shaping self-perception. Across the groups, young women talked about their feelings of being “different” from others because of their disability. In focus groups with young women who were transitioning from high school to adult life, these feelings of difference were often described as a detriment: “Just being different . . . everybody else, you know, I feel like I’m not normal and I feel like I’m—I’m not the same as most people.”

A large number of the youth talked about how other people’s negative perception of their disability took a toll on their self-esteem. For many, having a disability was connected to teasing and a negative self-image: “I don’t remember a lot of positive stuff people say because so many people have said negative stuff that, that’s like all I think about and all I know.” The impact of these disapproving messages on youth confidence may be especially influential in their ability to achieve their future goals:

I’d like to have more motivation in my self-esteem because it seems like we all here have been hurt easily by what people say so I think that’s one thing girls need to work on, especially when you have more motivation and doing what we want to do—do, and what you want to do because girls get—seems like they get hurt easier than boys.

In contrast to the negative experiences and perceptions of high school youth, the focus group held with 6 college students emphasized the importance of acknowledging one’s strengths and accepting or even valuing disability:

With what I have, I learn different. I kind of put my focus on the fact that I may not spell the best, but I can do something else better. And that kind of became my outlet . . . you find something that’s your niche, and you put your heart and soul into that, and you realize that’s what you’re good at.

These college-attending women reported that they encountered negative stereotypes and insensitivity from others regarding their disability, but described themselves as inoculated against the perceptions of others.

I had an experience this semester, actually, with a geography teacher. I was asking him about a note taker and finding a solution to somehow keep on the same page with his lecture. He, in front of the entire class, said, “Oh, note takers. Those are for handicapped people right?” And it was really embarrassing. And if I hadn’t had the experience of being able to have that inner strength from being young and building it up, I really think I would have just burst into tears.
Parents also emphasized the relationship between transition goals and a youth's self-perception. One parent said, "Without that self-esteem . . . they feel inside they're not worthy to succeed or to learn." Professionals also talked about the connection between self-perception and special education: "A lot of kids feel a lot of shame because they are special ed. They're embarrassed, and they develop a really negative self-concept." One professional even suggested that the schools should develop programs specifically for increasing the self-esteem of these youth. Other professionals talked about how many young women with disabilities seemed to be searching for something that they could do well. A few professionals hypothesized that this may put female youth with disabilities at higher risk for getting pregnant; valuing being attractive to males and having a child who loved her may lead to embracing early family responsibilities as a transition goal:

It is low self-esteem and that she's trying in some way—she—she wants something to love her, to make her feel better . . . And of course, with a girl, it's a baby, you know, that kind of a thing . . . it's really scary.

Work Experience. Participants indicated that the employment chances of young women with disabilities would likely increase if they received more exposure to job training opportunities and paid work experience in their areas of interest. One youth noted that

Job shadowing in high school would be a good way to give them an introduction to and maybe clarify for them exactly what that area they're thinking about is all about. Not something they've read about in a brochure or, you know, a textbook or something . . . but they actually experience it themselves.

Professionals also discussed the importance of providing young women with opportunities such as job shadowing, informational interviews, and "trying to network, giving kids reality-based opportunities to look at other individuals who have had disabilities and who have disabilities who are actually working and see what kinds of tools that they use." With regard to CLD youth, professionals noted the importance of also working with the families to help them to understand the importance of the work experience and how it fits in with school and transition planning:

This other [Hispanic] girl . . . when I talked to her mother, it was a real selling game to try and get her involved because [the job training] it's an after-school activity. It will be a Saturday activity after she gets in 280 hours. And she's like, "Well, I just want her to pass high school." Well, she's credit deficient already. There is a connection that she will be earning credits through this, too. So, you're working on the parents as well as the students. Because the mind set of the families are, "Well, she's just got to do school. She's so low, she can't do anything else, and don't encourage her to do anything else right now."

Social Support. A number of youth expressed the importance of social support for feeling confident. For example, one young respondent said, "My mom. She's always, like, behind me 100%. Like, whatever I want to do, she's right there." A few parents, as well, recognized the importance of supporting the hopes and dreams of young women. One parent offered the following advice:

Allow them [young women] to determine how high they go or how low. I mean, don't just automatically say, well you're disabled. You'll never do this or you'll never do that. You have to give them this feeling that anything is possible.

Beyond providing emotional support and encouragement, the young women identified the possible networking benefits of a strong social support system; as one youth described the assistance her older sister offered to support her goal of working with wild cats, "(My sister) has many friends who work with wild cats . . . she wants me to meet her friends and speak to them and ask them how they got this far and learn from them."

Collaboration. Parents and professionals frequently blamed each other for failures in transition planning and outcomes. Parents described teachers as less than helpful in setting and working on goals, and in the overall transition process. Although a few parents expressed appreciation for teachers who had a relationship with their child and ultimately collaborated with them on transition issues, most parents expressed frustration with the lack of support they felt from teachers:
We're having problems right now with the teacher. They made her new schedule for this coming term and it's all messed up. They're giving her classes she doesn't even need, that she's already taken so they're not paying any attention to the IEP or anything.

Conversely, some professionals suggested parents should provide more assistance in preparing for transition, "I think the parents maybe could help more with helping the student manage—not manage, but like, you know, 'When you get a job, this is what you have to do with the job.'" Some teachers expressed a desire to do more, and talked about the challenges they face in helping the youth reach transition goals, such as a lack of resources, huge case loads, time pressures, as well as a perceived lack of parental support. A few teachers expressed concern about what their colleagues in middle schools were teaching. For example, one teacher reported, "We keep trying to explain to the middle school teachers what's really going to be needed in high school. We can't get through." Most parents and professionals agreed that transition planning would be much improved by greater collaboration.

**Self-Determination.** A principal strategy that emerged across focus groups was that of self-determination, or the opportunity and capacity for young women to determine and direct their own lives to the greatest extent possible. When successful high school graduates were queried about how they achieved their goals, most emphasized the importance of believing in themselves as a necessary precursor to self-determination: "Have confidence in yourself when doing things, believe that you can. Not wait until someone tells you that you can't do it. Believe in yourself saying that you can do it because anybody can do it if they try." Students emphasized the importance of developing self-determination in order to request the supports and accommodations needed for success:

I truly worked really hard on something and I wasn't able to complete it by the date it was due, then coming to realize and saying "that's okay" . . . I was able to start going home and say "I can't do this. This is what I need to change" or "I need to take my test in here. I'm going to take my test in here, I'm going to have them done, though, this is what I need." I think it'd just kind of being comfortable with it [the disability] and knowing what I need to succeed.

Youth highlighted the importance of having the opportunity to direct or, at the very least, be a partner in decisions impacting their lives. For example, in contrast to the majority of youth who described school-based transition planning as not meaningful, one noted that the chance to contribute made her meeting feel relevant, "Knowing what was going on and being able to affect it was a valuable thing . . . and getting a word in on what's an important process."

Several youth acknowledged that this confidence and belief in one's self does not always evolve naturally, as young women with disabilities are continuously exposed to the negative stereotypes and narrow views of others. One youth expressed great frustration with this negativity stating, "People are always saying you're not gonna to do that, or you can't do that, or you're never gonna be able to do that. Don't tell me what I can or can't do. I know what I am capable of." Given the extraordinary challenges facing young women and their self-assuredness, one participant underscored the usefulness of assertiveness training:

[College] provided me with a counselor, and she taught me a lot of the social things: how to say what I feel, how to stand up for myself and be assertive. Because I wasn't assertive, I would just let people say and do whatever they wanted . . . . I learned a lot of things from the counselor that they provided. I cried when she left.

Parents described themselves as needing to engage in a careful balancing act regarding self-determination and safety. As discussed previously, they often expressed concern for their daughters' safety and a desire to protect them; however, many also recognized the need for young women to experience life, and its pitfalls.

There is, I think, in my perspective, a degree of ability to make their own choices and they've got to be empowered to make those choices within that realm of their abilities . . . there's some choices where it's really hard for her and she struggles greatly at it and because I've given her the freedom, she'll—she's starting to come to me wanting to—my perspective, wanting to understand how I feel about...
this or what I think about that. Doesn't mean she'll always take my advice but she does see that she has to be accountable. It's her responsibility. It's her success, her failure. And I think that has empowered her tremendously.

Another mother discussed her daughter's challenges as a CLD youth in special education and how that experience helped her daughter to be her own advocate:

We're of color. She was attending a predominantly Caucasian school learning a second language being pulled out to go into special ed. And if that doesn't teach you to challenge yourself, to push yourself to be your own advocate—and just by her own life experiences, she learned her voice early on.

Relationships. The young women in our study seemed to want teachers to take more time to get to know them and hear their voices. One described how a teacher's time and attention had a positive impact on her self-esteem:

She took the time to know who I was and to know what kind of problems I had and took the time to say, "Look, this is what she needs" . . . and I think that's what made it a lot easier for me . . . because I had somebody that cared enough to take the time out . . . and that was bringing my self-esteem up and saying she really does care.

Many parents, as well, seemed aware of the importance of personal connections in the lives of their daughters, especially relationships with teachers: "If she doesn't make a personal, emotional connection with whoever is trying to instruct her, then she blows them off."

**Other Transition Issues Relevant for CLD Young Women in Special Education**

There were some findings specific to the issues faced by CLD young women with disabilities in special education, including: (a) stereotypes/discrimination toward racial/ethnic background, (b) different cultural definitions and ideas about disability between professionals and families, and (c) professionals not reflecting the population that they serve.
families], but they just don’t have the skills to help the kids.”

**Different Cultural Definitions and Ideas About Disability Between Professionals and Families.** Professionals frequently commented that CLD parents of certain backgrounds did not understand what it meant for their daughter to be in special education. Such comments highlighted a lack of understanding of the perspectives of CLD families, and at times a low tolerance for the ways in which CLD families might approach, address, or experience disability issues:

When her [a CLD special education student] mother came into the IEP meeting, she couldn’t speak English, had a translator. That got a little bit confusing. Then come to find out that she thought that her daughter was retarded and had all these problems that she didn’t have. And it was just, you know, mass confusion for the first 20 minutes, half hour until [name of person] came over and helped out and explained to the mother that her daughter wasn’t retarded, that she was a normal-functioning child. She had a learning disability. But it was really sad. The parent just didn’t understand special education. She didn’t understand her daughter’s disability.

Rather than think about how the translation issues or the context impacted this parent’s perception of the issue, rather than considering it “sad” that the system is not adequately communicating with or trying to understand the cultural issues for this family in relation to disability, the professional concludes that it is sad that this parent doesn’t understand.

Another professional described how some CLD families might interpret intervention from the special education system:

They [members of a CLD family] don’t understand the nuances. They, they, it’s very black and white and it’s very frightening. And so that’s a cultural barrier. They don’t want their child labeled that. They’re afraid they’ll lose the child, someone will take it away, they’ll punish you for being a bad parent, it’s your fault or they treat the child like “you’re dumb, you’re dumb,” you know, and the child knows they’re not dumb but everyone feels bad.

**Professionals Do Not Reflect the Population They Serve.** Another important issue mentioned by professionals is the cultural differences between teachers at school and the students they serve, thus impacting the way in which students and their families relate with the teachers. One professional noted, “They’re black, Hispanic [students], or whatever, and the teachers mostly are white. Then it’s hard for the kids to relate to them, and it’s hard for the teachers to relate to the students.” An African American school professional shared her experience, supporting the view that CLD students and parents are more comfortable with CLD school staff:

So, you know, most of them [CLD families and students] will seek out to speak to me, because I’m one of the few black people that work at the school. They reach out to speak to me because whatever they say, I can either relate on a personal basis or I don’t see it as a negative thing.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to generate information about factors that influence the transition goals and experiences of young women by collecting in-depth information about the goals of young women with disabilities, the factors that shape these goals, the supports and impediments to achieving those goals, and the role of cultural and linguistic diversity in females’ transition experiences. In our analyses, five broad categories emerged from the data: (a) type of transition goals that are established for young women with disabilities; (b) factors that shape these transition goals, such as self-perception, mentors, peers, family, and exposure to opportunities; (c) the role of special education in helping these students pursue their goals; (d) sources of support for and impediments to a successful transition to adulthood; and (e) the role of contextual issues, such as cultural and linguistic diversity.

The goals for adulthood expressed by the young women with disabilities in our study focused on gaining an education, career, and their own family. Their parents held similar goals, except they tended to deemphasize or even express alarm about the possibility of their daughters...
starting a family in early adulthood. Powers et al. (in press) found young women and parents to be at odds about the importance of starting a family within 5 years of high school. The comments of our focus group participants expand upon this finding by suggesting that young women with disabilities may be overly influenced by the expectation that women “should have it all” (career, independence, education, family, etc.) whereas their parents are (possibly unduly) concerned that their daughters’ choices in life would be limited by early motherhood or the parents themselves may be burdened by raising their grandchildren.

Our study found a significant schism between the youth and their parents and educators in terms of perceptions of what is attainable and sensible. Parents and professionals reported that they often held more “realistic” adulthood goals than those espoused by young women with disabilities. A common theme among professionals was that it was their job to dissuade young women with disabilities from goals for adulthood that were significantly disparate from their current performance. Although young women expressed their desire for increased opportunities to experience career options and expand their social networks, parents and educators were more likely to cite the necessity of restricting such opportunities in order to preserve the young woman’s safety. Providing direct instruction in self-determination to young women with disabilities may bridge this divide by increasing their skills in articulating and working towards personal goals. Similarly, parents and teachers may become more sensitive to supporting the aspirations and preferences of students with disabilities if self-determination were routine in IEP planning. Whereas parents are supportive of self-determination training, particularly in terms of their daughters’ involvement in IEP planning, teachers generally lack the preparation to deliver self-determination instruction (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003).

Our finding that many young women with disabilities are dissatisfied with their IEP meetings and the educational opportunities available to them within their special education program is probably not unique to females. The young women reported a disconnection between their interests and academic needs and their special education programming. Furthermore, youth and educators reported that teachers tend to direct more attention toward male students in special education programs in order to curb disruptive behaviors.

It is interesting that many of the young women emphasized the importance of others believing in and supporting them in attaining the goals they select. In fact, several of the young women emphasized the role of support from others as inoculation against negative perceptions and expectations related to their gender and/or disability. This finding is consistent with conclusions offered by the American Association of University Women, “Young women also are confronted with different expectations from teachers, family and friends; a support structure consisting of teachers, family and friends seems important in how young women view themselves and what they believe they can do” (Doren & Benz, 1998, p. 426). Self-perception and self-esteem appear to be powerful influences on the transition goals for young women with disabilities. Perhaps due to self-esteem issues, young women reported that the explicit encouragement of another person provided many of them with the impetus they felt was necessary to start exploring their transition goals. This work underscores research findings regarding the importance of the development of collaborative partnerships between parents, youth, and professionals (Adelman & Taylor, 1997). Support in the transition to adulthood from “teachers, family, and friends” is the quintessential component in the achievement of positive postsecondary outcomes.

Our findings also call attention to additional barriers facing CLD families and students, some of which are exacerbated for female CLD students with disabilities. These barriers include stereotypes about CLD families having “different” or “lesser” goals. In actuality, though, recent literature emphasizes the similarity between the goals of CLD youth and families and Anglo families (Blue-Banning, Turnbull, & Pereira, 2002; Cinorio & Chust, 2001). We found that although CLD youth and family goals are often similar to others, the way in which goals are defined or arrived at may be different. For example, self-determination may be expressed by a young Latina woman in her decision to attend college close to home so that she can remain involved in supporting her family,
whereas an Anglo girl may decide to attend school in a community away from home.

Several of the young women emphasized the role of support from others as inoculation against negative perceptions and expectations related to their gender and/or disability.

Previous research has well established the problems for CLD groups when damaging stereotypes are held about them, especially in the educational setting, as this can result in a biased approach and negative outcomes (Chang & Sue, 2003). Our findings extend this work for CLD young women, and suggest that ethnic and racial biases about CLD youth likely erode their self-esteem and access to opportunities and supports, establishing a pathway for their achievement of poorer outcomes. Our findings further suggest that CLD young women and their families’ response to special educators is often pathologized as revealing “wrong” interpretations of the way the family or community functions, when actually these youth and their families may have very different understandings of both the meaning of disability and acceptable roles for families and youth within the school setting.

LIMITATIONS

The most important limitation of this study—and qualitative research in general—is that the findings of our research may not directly reflect nor adequately represent all comments and opinions of young women with disabilities, parents of young women with disabilities, or professionals who work with young women with disabilities. At the same time, though, a noted strength of the work is the relatively large number of participants within and across participant types; moreover, the participants reflected different types of disabilities, age groups, and cultures. Another limitation is the fact that some participants may have expressed views thought to be consistent with social standards; this social desirability bias may have lead respondents to censor their actual views because of the group setting. To counter this characteristic of focus groups, particular care was taken by the group facilitators in our study to encourage different points of view. As well, in the report of the findings, the authors of this study included not only quotes that reflected the majority of the comments expressed by the participants, but also quotes that represented different points of view. Even so, the most important implication of these limitations is that researchers should refrain from drawing any conclusions about the actual prevalence of specific concerns, attitudes, or beliefs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings from this study provide the field of special education with some important recommendations regarding the education and support of professionals who work with young women with disabilities. Overall, we found evidence from young women, parents, and professionals supporting practices that have been previously found to be effective in promoting successful transition (Hasazi, Furney, & Destefano, 1999). These include youth involvement in transition planning, participation in extracurricular activities and general education, career planning and work experience individualized to the student’s career interests, instruction in skills such as self-determination, self-advocacy and independent living, and mentorship.

We want to highlight the fact that the findings herein emphasize the importance of transition planning from a youth-directed perspective, a concept supported by a body of previous research (Agran, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000). The young women in our discussion groups had a wide variety of goals and dreams. Although these goals often differed from those of their parents and teachers, it is important that the young women’s choices be honored; in this way educators and professionals can help them to become active agents in determining their future. The transition planning process provides a valuable vehicle to listen to young women’s ideas, needs, wishes, and perspectives. Professionals may want to encourage young women to speak up, particularly during transition planning events; the young women in our study said that they often remain silent for fear of social rejection. Valuing their ideas will likely have a significant impact on their
self-esteem, which the findings of this study suggest in turn affects their actual goals.

There are also important implications regarding the transition planning process for CLD young women. Our work suggests that transition planning teams should attend to issues of gender and cultural context in order to provide transition supports that are meaningful and applicable. For instance, professionals participating in transition planning should ask families and students about their gender expectations, cultural traditions, and family background so that these factors can be considered in the development and implementation of successful, IDEA-compliant transition plans.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In addition to implications for practice, the findings reported here offer some potential avenues of research. First, and central to the overarching goals of our research team, our qualitative findings provided the foundation for a quantified measure of the experiences and expectations of youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood: the Young Adult Transition Expectations and Experiences survey, with both a student and parent version (see Powers et al., in press). In particular, the data from the present study was used to create survey items pertaining to barriers and sources of support for transition, gender equity in transition planning activities, and self-esteem and self-determination issues. Based on the results of our work to date with this measure, we find the survey to be an important addition to the field.

As well, our reported findings illustrate the value in gathering information about the transition goals and experiences of CLD young women. As suggested by Blackorby and Wagner (1996), minority status often presents obstacles to successful transition beyond those that youth experience because of disability alone. Our own interest in this area continues in an ongoing project by members of our group (Helping All Latinas Achieve, the HALA project; see Cil-Kashiwahara, 2006). There is a pressing need to develop a clear understanding of the transition experiences and needs of Latinas in special education, especially given the fact that Latinos are now the largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The purpose of the HALA project is to examine more closely the transition planning needs of Latina young women in special education in order to identify more effective and culturally appropriate supports that will facilitate their success.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The findings from this study suggest that gender influences the transition goals and experiences of young women with disabilities in important ways. Based on the comments of participants, transition planning approaches are needed that recognize the existence and impact of barriers faced by young women, their families, and professionals. Youth, parents, and educators would benefit from establishing relationships that enable them to genuinely work together in encouraging and supporting young women to identify and reach toward their dreams, build skills and confidence, and access a range of nonstereotypic life opportunities and networks.

Such outcomes are actually more dismal for CLD young women. Minority women are identified with disabilities at a disproportionately higher rate and greater severity compared to Anglo women. For example, Glenn (1995) indicated that 9.5% of all 16- to 64-year-old African American women in the United States have severe disabilities, more than double the rate of 4.0% for Anglo women. As well, CLD women seem to experience a higher rate of disabilities that prevent them from working; Glenn reported that 13.8% of African American women have disabilities that prevent them from working, compared to 7.7% of Anglo women. Indeed, the term "triple jeopardy" has been used to describe the disadvantage experienced by CLD women because they experience three dimensions of minority status: gender, race, and disability.

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