A Systematic Review of Research on Faculty with Disabilities

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Abstract: *Faculty with disabilities are underrepresented both in the ranks of the professoriate and in higher education research compared to their peers without disabilities. We performed a systematic literature review to learn more about current research on faculty with disabilities. After applying inclusion criteria, we narrowed our initial pool of 313 journal articles reviewed to a final sample of 20 articles that focused substantively on disability. This review revealed trends related to geographic representation, focus on certain disability subtypes, models of disability, methodology, and journal quality for this area of research. Through identifying the contours of research on faculty with disabilities, we are able to suggest avenues for research to inform future theory and policy.*

Increasing numbers of students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education (Kimball et al., 2016). Research about students with disabilities has also significantly increased in recent years (Friedensen & Kimball, 2017); however, empirical research about faculty members with disabilities has failed to keep pace. The empirical research that does exist often displays limited attention to ableist academic structures and rarely treats disability as one of several intersectional identities that academics might hold (Dolmage, 2017; Friedensen & Kimball, 2017). The scarcity of empirical literature across multiple disciplines contributes to the seeming invisibility of disability in discussions of faculty experiences. It also makes it difficult to compare features of the academic environment that could result in more or less successful experiences for this population across disciplines, institution types, and international contexts. Insufficient empirical research means that we cannot gauge the differing impact of disability on individuals in their roles as scholars, teachers, and colleagues. In short, it is difficult to see the scope, depth, and breadth of what we know about people with disabilities in academia after their undergraduate years.

To begin to address this lack of empirical evidence, we performed an exploratory, systematic literature review of research that focuses on faculty with disabilities. While people with disabilities can occupy a variety of roles in the academic pipeline after their undergraduate years,

we focus here on faculty members because of the key role they play in encouraging the persistence of both undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities (Gladhart, 2010; Humphrey et al., 2011). Further, research focused on other minoritized populations has shown that having more faculty members who share their identities encourages minoritized students to continue in that field (Price, 2010); the same may be true of faculty with disabilities. Additionally, disability is a multivalent identity that can be fluid throughout out one's lifetime (Friedensen & Kimball, 2017). Since faculty careers can span decades and the frequency of disability increases with age (Crystal et al., 2016; Schuster & Finklestein, 2006), it is important to understand the experiences of faculty members with disability. Using a framework informed by ableism, disableism, and models of disability, we sought to systematically explore how this research is currently being produced and disseminated.

Disability in Higher Education Research

We are currently seeing an era of renewed and sustained attention to disability in higher education research. Stimulated in part by Peña's (2014) analysis of publication trends about disabilities, current research focuses predominantly on either conceptual examinations of disability or research about undergraduate students with disabilities (Evans et al., 2017; Newman & Madaus, 2015; Troiano, 2003). This body of research includes discussions about student experiences (Kimball et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2015), activism (Cory et al., 2010; Pasque & Vargas, 2014), and development of purpose (Newman et al., 2019). Other research has also examined the multivalence of disability identity (Friedensen & Kimball, 2017) as well as disability's intersections with other marginalized identities (Blanchett, 2010; Miller, 2018; Stapleton, 2015a).

While some research focuses on faculty and disabilities, much of this literature examines faculty perceptions, attitudes, or accommodations towards students with disabilities (Díez et al., 2014; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Lombardi et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2008). Overall, this research has found that faculty may hold attitudes that stigmatize students with disabilities and are skeptical of the accommodations process, which contributes to students' decisions to pursue accommodations (Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002; Kranke et al., 2013; Markoulakis & Kirsh, 2013). However, other research has also explored

the faculty members' development of inclusive pedagogy in response to the needs of students with disabilities (Moriña et al., 2020). Other research focusing on faculty experiences is scattered across the journal landscape. For example, Williams and Mavin (2015) explored the effects of impairment on academic careers through theorizing the boundaries of those careers. However, research on faculty with disabilities remains thin, especially in higher education journals. As our review shows, much of the research (though not all) about faculty with disabilities is being published in venues other than higher education journals; thus, higher education researchers and professionals may not access or utilize this research in their practice.

Conceptual Framework

We organized our study around the understanding that academia is comprised of intellectual and physical spaces hostile to those with disabilities. In so doing, we follow a long line of scholars of critical disability studies who have shown the profound influence of normative assumptions of ablebodiedness and ablemindedness in higher education institutions (Dolmage, 2017; Kerschbaum et al., 2017; Price, 2011). In academic settings, these normative assumptions result in two different oppressive ideological systems that disadvantage scholars with disabilities: ableism and disableism. As defined by Dolmage (2017), ableism is the affirmative valuation of people without disabilities—that is, the implicit or explicit statement that having a 'normal' body or mind is preferable to having a 'disabled' body or mind. In contrast, Dolmage (2017) defines disableism as the system of negative beliefs and behaviors associated with disability—in other words, the association of judgments of moral worth with a person's disability status. These oppressive ideological systems related to disability can be infused into academic life in the form of unwelcoming institutional climates, rigid tenure and promotion standards, policies that do not respond to the physical and mental health needs of faculty members, and campus environments that are not navigable to people with some types of disabilities (Dolmage, 2017; Price, 2011).

Although ableism and disableism shape the experiences of all faculty with disabilities, individual, institutional, and geographic variation in how disability is understood also shapes how profoundly these influences will be felt. Researchers focused on disability in higher education have

documented six major models that influence how people understand disability (Evans et al., 2017). These models are summarized in Table 1: Models of Disability. This set of definitions informs the way that we read and analyzed the literature in this systematic review. It is also important to note that these models do not represent ways of being disabled or developing a disabled identity; rather they represent idealized, oversimplified versions of the myriad ways that people have defined disability and its influence on experiences. In other words, we do not advocate in applying these models to the lives of disabled people; rather, we use them as way to understand the wide variation of definitions and constructions of disability employed in practice and research. Although some scholars have advocated for the primacy of one model over others (for example, emphasizing the social justice model over a medical model; Evans et al., 2017), many researchers have not carefully considered how they understand disability and can often display thinking drawn from two or more models (e.g., Godfrey & Loots, 2015). Nonetheless, the models represent a meaningful starting point in understanding the assumptions, values, decisions regarding inclusion of variables, and other orientations that a particular researcher holds.

Table 1

Models of Disability

Model	Explanation (Based on Evans et al., 2017)
Moral Model	Assumes that disability is a moral defect and person with disability and/or their biological progenitors caused it. Results in fetishization of people with disabilities who 'transcend' or 'overcome' their diagnosis.
Medical Model	Diagnosis by experts (, doctors, psychologists) leads to treatment. Views disability as 'flaw' or 'defect' in a person's body or mind. Goal to 'cure' or mitigate effect of disability.
Rehabilitation Model (also known as Functional/Limitation)	Similar to medical model but acknowledges influence of social world. Focuses on 'helping' people with disabilities to approximate 'normal' functioning to maximum extent possible.
Social Model	Regards disability as a social construct arising from the able-norming of society rather than variation in individual's mind or body. Views changing environment as a key way to address challenges associated with disability.
Sociopolitical/Minority Model	Rooted in disability rights movement. Best summarized by sentiment 'nothing about us without us.' Differentiates disability-as-environmental product from variation in the ways people's minds and bodies function.
Social Justice Model	Sees disability as result of ability-based oppression, which is experienced intersectionally. People without disabilities gain unearned power and privilege from ongoing, systematic mistreatment of people with disabilities.

Methods

Systematic literature reviews show both scope and depth about a particular area of research by identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing studies addressing a focused topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Grant & Booth, 2009). Systematic literature reviews do not necessarily focus on the content of the research reviewed; they can explore publication trends, methodological details, or even the theoretical constructs used to explore a specific topic or issue. Thus, this form of literature review can show both the breadth and depth of a field of research as well as suggest where researchers should move in the future.

Data Collection

Data collection for systematic literature reviews typically includes phases of systematic search for and review of research (Rodriguez et al., 2018). We developed and used several inclusion categories in order to assess what literature was relevant to the goals of this paper. Our use of these criteria ensured that relevant research would be found regardless of whether we were previously familiar with it or not (Slavin, 1995). Furthermore, having clearly defined inclusion/exclusion criteria enabled us to refine the purpose of the study and to be transparent in why any given study may have been excluded (DePoy & Gitlin, 1993). For the purposes of this study, we used the following inclusion criteria:

1. The study was published between 2008 and 2019.

2. The study was available in full-text and written in English.

3. The study was published in a peer-reviewed journal or published conference proceeding.

4. Faculty with disabilities in higher education contexts were the study's main focus or a prominent subsidiary population therein.

The seventh author performed the literature search using the ERIC database and the Web of Science. The search began with the ERIC database in order to capture the faculty focus in higher education journals, using the search terms 'aging AND faculty,' 'disab* faculty,' 'faculty member WITH disab*,' and 'faculty WITH disab*.' In addition, more specific terms drawn from Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA) were included in the search. While we recognize that disability identity is co-constructed by the environment, we also realized that not all researchers who have explored faculty experiences with disability view it in the same way. Therefore, while we acknowledge that reliance primarily on diagnosis is problematic, we wanted to capture as much research as possible. These search terms included: Autism, Asperger's, deafness, deaf, Deaf, health impairment, physical health impairment, chronic health, hearing impairment, learning disability, dyslexia, Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health, mental illness, orthopedic impairment, mobility restriction, mobility impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, TBI, PTSD, visual impairment, blind, and blindness (all terms included 'faculty' AND 'X term'). This search yielded 155 articles. The search was repeated using the Web of Science. Because Web of Science is a different interface than ERIC, initial searches yielded an overwhelming 5,000+ articles, many irrelevant to the focus of this systematic literature review. Many of these articles were tangential to the main topic of faculty members with disabilities in higher education insofar as they were about teaching students with disabilities or were about faculty members without disabilities. We decided to only use those articles with at least one search term in the article title as a method of data reduction. This approach yielded 158 articles.

The next phase involved reviewing the abstracts for each of the 313 articles included. The sixth author reviewed all abstracts, weighing them against the inclusion criteria listed above. This resulted in a set of 88 articles for full review. All authors participated in the full review phase. Each article was read in depth by two readers. This stage offered a final opportunity to exclude articles that did not fit the inclusion criteria (decided collaboratively between readers) or were duplicates; 68 articles were excluded at this point in the review, leaving a final sample of 20 articles that focused substantively on disability.

Data Analysis

The research team used a detailed spreadsheet to organize the data analysis process and cultivate transparency. As each author read each article in full, we noted information about each article. We developed this *a priori* coding framework from our review of the literature on the

characteristics of other groups of research on people with disabilities in higher education; it was also informed by our conceptual framework regarding the models of disabilities. Additionally, systematic literature reviews are useful in understanding where and how research is produced; therefore, we developed a coding structure that gathered descriptive and content-related information about each article. We also made sure that our coding process was flexible enough to allow emergent patterns to be noted, so we also adjusted some of the coding over time. Beyond the full citation of the article, we noted the *geographic location* of the research study (e.g., United States, India). We also noted the *type of disability* of the faculty members included in the study, including specific diagnoses (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder) or more general umbrella categories (e.g., physical disability) depending on how the information was presented in the study. A study could have one or more types of disability discussed. We coded the *models of disability* used in the study, whether explicit or implicit. Coding of model of disability was based on the framings of disability from Evans et al. (2017), summarized in Table 1 (previously noted). We confirmed the presence of an unstated model of disability only when two readers noted it as present. A study could be coded as having one or more models of disability present. We noted the *research methodologies* employed by each study, with a focus on identifying qualitative, quantitative, or other (e.g., review) approaches. We coded the *academic discipline* of the faculty members in the study. For this code, we were focused on coding studies with a focus on faculty in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields versus other fields. Lastly, we assessed the *article impact* based on the impact factor of the journal in which each article appeared (based on the Journal Citation Reports) and the number of times the article was cited (based on Google scholar).

Each article was read by two separate readers to establish consensus and full coverage of information. Our analysis produced both descriptive and interpretative data. We also utilized simple counting to provide descriptive, quantitative data about the studies reviewed, which we then subjected to various visualization strategies.

Trustworthiness and Researcher Positionality

Transparency is key to a trustworthy systematic literature review (Grant & Booth, 2009). Transparency both enables others to assess the

appropriateness of our decision-making and analysis and supports the replicability of the study (Grant & Booth, 2009). Accordingly, we have been transparent about the methods of data collection, review, and analysis that we used, including clearly communicating the criteria by which we included or excluded studies for review. Additionally, we used a detailed research log throughout the entire process to support our commitment to transparency.

Another part of transparency involves being clear about our own positionality(s) toward the topic at hand. As a research group, the authors inhabit a variety of social identities. These identities include different races/ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. The researchers' current professional roles include faculty members, staff members, and graduate students. Additionally, each researcher identifies as an individual with a disability, as someone who works closely with individuals with disabilities, and/or as someone who has family member(s) with disabilities.

Results

Consistent with our purpose and our conceptual framework, our systematic exploration of these articles about faculty with disabilities resulted in findings related to the models of disability deployed in the research designs, geographic location, disability type, methodology, and impact.

Model of Disability

Our review of the 20 relevant studies identified 29 different framings of disability consistent with major models of disability (as summarized in Evans et al., 2017). Nine of these models were explicitly mentioned and twenty were tacitly presented (see Figure 1). The most frequently occurring model of disability was the minority model, which regards disability as a form of social identity. The next most frequent models of disability included the social model and the functional limitation model. The least frequent model was the moral model, which appears explicitly in only one article. More than half (60%) of the studies we read explicitly discussed ableism as part of the experience of faculty with disabilities.
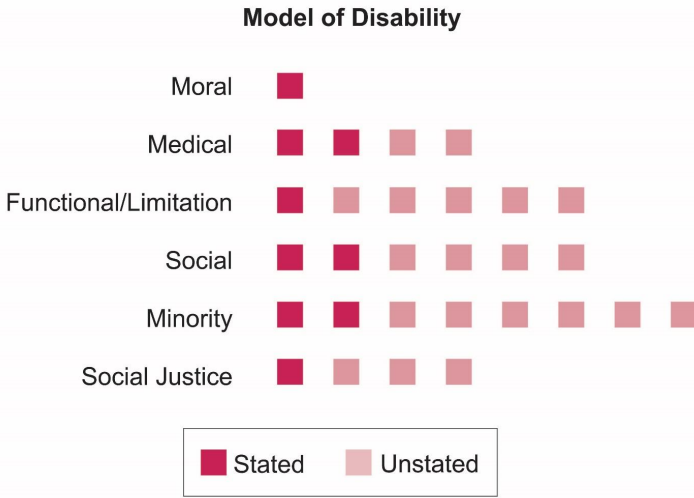
Figure 1. Model of disability. Note: each box represents one mention; some articles utilized multiple models.

Geographic Location

The geographic location of the research we analyzed is presented in Table 2. The vast majority of studies identified by our search parameters focused entirely or partially on the experiences of faculty members working in the United States (70%). Studies focused on other national contexts provided perspective on other major national university systems.

Table 2

Geographic Location

Location	Number of Articles
United States	14
Canada	3
India	1
South Africa	1
New Zealand	1

Type of Disability

The frequency of types of disability represented in the research is presented in Figure 2. The most frequently occurring category of disability was hearing impairment/deafness, present in 60% of the studies, followed by physical disability/mobility (45%) and visual impairment-blindness (40%). The least frequent types of disability were ADD/ADHD (15%) and traumatic brain injury (5%).
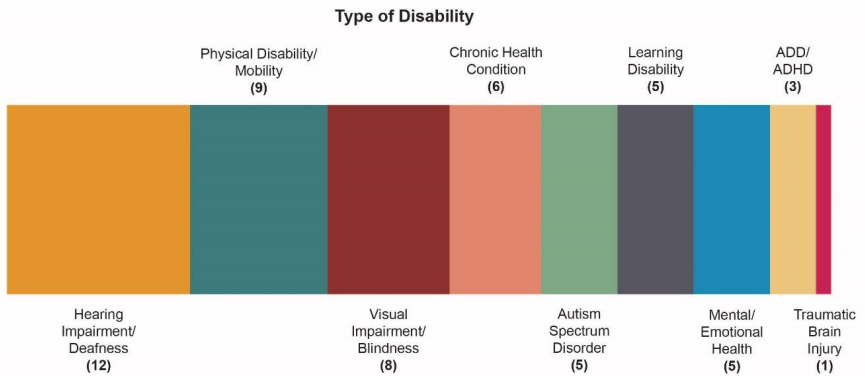

Figure 2. Type of disability represented in reviewed research. Note: most articles included more than one disability type; total number of types > 20.

Research Methodologies

 A variety of quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the studies examined (see Figure 3). Three quantitative studies relied on survey data—typically drawn from only a small, non-generalizable sample. No studies used experimental, quasi-experimental, or other causal methods. The qualitative studies that we examined typically had small sample sizes drawn from convenience sampling frames. In one such example, Waterfield et al. (2018) used interviews with five faculty members to create a case study focused on faculty members' experiences in Canadian universities. In another similar example, Listman and Dingus-Eason (2018) used dyadic interviews with mentor-mentee pairs in order to understand the professional identity development of D/deaf scientists. Only one mixed methods study appeared in our sample. Five

additional studies did not use formal methods but instead reported personal testimony or addressed disability conceptually.
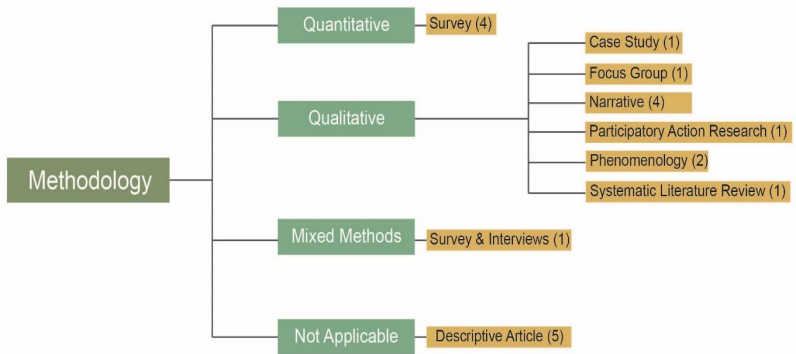

Figure 3. Methods utilized by reviewed articles.

Article Impact

 Half of the studies identified appeared in a journal with an impact factor reported in the Journal Citation Reports. Among those reported, the mean impact factor was $M = 0.9$ (*median* = 1.1; *mode* = 1.2). The average number of citations per article was $M = 7.68$, with a range from 0 to 24.

Discussion

The studies reviewed cover a wide range of disability statuses, fields, geographic locations, and approaches. As expected, the literature on faculty with disabilities remains limited. In this section, we discuss connections, patterns, and trends that we saw in the data.

The geographic representation of this research is limited to countries that are, or that include, former British colonies. Given the historical influence of British and American models for university (Dorn, 2017; Geiger, 2015; Taylor & Cantwell, 2015), it seems reasonable to assume that some similarities among faculty members' experiences may exist across international contexts. However, profound country-to-country differences exist in the way that disability is conceptualized, stigmatized

socially, and accommodated in higher education likely mean that transferability of study findings from one context to another may be limited (Gilson & Dymond, 2012; Kalyanpur et al., 2001).

Findings related to the diagnoses addressed by studies of faculty with disabilities reveal two major patterns of presence and one glaring pattern related to absence. First, studies focused on relatively low-incidence but highly apparent types of disability (e.g., hearing impairment, d/Deafness, visual impairment, blindness, mobility impairment, mobility restrictions) occur at much higher rates than their prevalence in the general population would suggest (Houtrow et al., 2014). For example, in the US population, rates of apparent disabilities range from 2% to 7%, with 2016 statistics reporting visual impairment/blindness at 2.3%, hearing impairment/deafness at 3.6%, and physical disability/mobility issues at 6.6% (Kraus, 2017). In contrast, 22% of articles reviewed here mentioned hearing impairment/deafness, 17% mentioned physical disability/mobility issues, and 15% mention visual impairment/blindness. Prior work has shown that overwhelmingly, public consciousness around disability focuses on diagnoses with associated functional impairments that can be readily perceived visually (Dolmage, 2017; Farone et al., 1998; Wolf, 2001), and our study supports the idea that perceptions of faculty with disabilities follow this trend.

Similarly, a cluster of studies focus on higher incidence disabilities like ADD/ADHD and learning disabilities (LD; White et al., 2011; Wolf, 2001). While these disabilities occur more often in the general population than those discussed above (9.4% for ADD/ADHD and 18.9% for LD), studies addressing them also appeared less frequently in our pool than their incidence in the population would seem to warrant (6% for ADD/ADHD and 9% for LD). At the same time, several of these studies also referenced Autism Spectrum Disorder (9%), while only 1.7% of the U.S. population receives this diagnosis. This pattern may reflect a broadening academic appreciation for neurodiversity, or, as some have noted, discourse that correlates this disability type with some types of faculty work (Wei et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2014).

As outlined by our conceptual framework, there are a wide range of models with which researchers and practitioners can understand disability identity. Similarly, a wide range of models of disability were evident in the reviewed articles, with the majority of references viewed

as tacitly presented. While unstated uses were the majority in all but two models, a majority of the overall tacit mentions were found among the functional/limitation model, which assumes that a disability's primary effect is a functional impairment that can be addressed through an accommodation or intervention. This recurrent tacit use of the functional impairments model reflects the extent to which a view of disability-as-deficit is normalized, even among those who seek to address disability inclusively. Appearances of the moral and medical models also reflect the normalization of disability-as-deficit in literature about faculty experience.

Acknowledging the existence of a system of oppression, such as ableism, is a key step in reconceptualizing the disparate experiences of minoritized populations as the product of inequitable systems rather than arising from an individual skill deficit. The minority model, which regards disability as a form of social identity, and the social model, which treats disability as the product of disabling environments, both appeared regularly, although tacitly. The social justice model appeared less frequently, but it also reflected a deeper commitment to disability as a form of diversity exemplified by social and minority models of disability. These treatments of disability-as-diversity were most often tacit. The authors failed to connect their discussion of faculty experiences with broader advocacy by people with disabilities, as Dolmage (2017) and Kerschbaum et al. (2017) have suggested should occur.

A variety of quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the studies examined, each with their relative advantages and disadvantages given the general paucity of research about faculty with disabilities. Broadly speaking, this literature review showed that there is a lack of breadth in the research on faculty with disabilities. Although local, exploratory survey research is a key way that knowledge about the experience of faculty with disabilities might be produced, the absence of quantitative work that connects those experiences with broader national trends is problematic. There was also a notable lack of experimental, quasi-experimental or other causal methods. Similarly, the qualitative studies that we examined typically had small sample sizes drawn from convenience sampling frames. Although several rigorous qualitative studies were included, their narrow foci mean that we neither have enough information about the broader experiences of faculty with a

variety of disabilities nor do we know enough about specific disability categorizations in the faculty context. The only mixed methods study present provided useful exploratory information but few conclusive results via which to effectively support faculty with disabilities. The remainder of the studies provided useful context but little concrete evidence-based direction. What is needed is more research from all perspectives to inform our knowledge about this population of faculty members.

An analysis of the articles' impact factors revealed that these studies appear in journals that are infrequently cited. Indeed, these figures suggest that the typical study in these journals is cited about once per year. It is also important to note that the extent to which publications in this area both occupy marginal spaces in academia and are spread over broad academic terrain (see Schuster & Finklestein, 2006 for discussion of faculty productivity patterns). As a result, with only a few exceptions, even those publications that do exist have little chance of being seen by a broad readership who could use them to affect change (Agger, 2007; Love, 2012). Possible exceptions come in the form of journals that published more than one piece related to faculty with disabilities (*Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, Academe*, and *Disability & Society*) and wherein this work could connect with a broader social justice framework among readership. Other possible exceptions come in the form of specialized journals focused on disciplinary education that will likely be read by other faculty members within the same discipline (*Journal of Statistics Education*, *Social Theory and Health*) or in specialized journals focused on the experiences of people with disabilities more likely to be read by faculty with disabilities (*Deafness & Education International*, *Sign Language Studies*).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the search was limited to full-text articles in English. These delimitations may have biased the studies we were able to include and puts forward an analysis more focused on the U.S. and British Commonwealth contexts, which may both impact the findings and may miss relevant research. Another limitation was the number and kind of databases we searched. We used two databases— ERIC and Web of Science. Accessing more and different databases would undoubtedly yield a greater number of articles to be considered.

Finally, we took a narrow interpretation of the inclusion criteria stating that faculty with disabilities were to be the main focus of a study. We took this stance in order to provide as much information about the faculty members themselves as possible. Taking a more expansive approach to this particular criterion, especially in terms of disability definition, may change the findings of a future study.

Implications

Compared to research about women, people of color, and other historically marginalized populations in the professoriate, our empirical knowledge of faculty with disabilities is sorely lacking. The research that does exist is uneven with respect to method, focus, geographic context, disability type, and discipline. The main implication of this systematic literature review is that we simply need more research that is inclusive of faculty with disabilities and attends to their experiences. This potential research agenda has a wide variety of possible foci and should be taken on by researchers across the globe in order to represent the full diversity of disabled experiences in different geographic, social, political, and cultural contexts. As shown above, the current research is unbalanced in its emphasis on different disability diagnoses, with low-incidence but very apparent disabilities overrepresented and high-incidence, invisible disabilities, such as ADD/ADHD, underrepresented. We need to research the impact that all disability types or diagnoses can have on faculty members or potential faculty members. Attention also needs to be paid to faculty with multiple disabilities as well as those for whom disability is one of multiple, intersectional identities. Furthermore, this future work needs to engage much more explicitly with the model(s) of disability with which it is operating. Research that engages with models foregrounding social justice is particularly important. Finally, this research needs to explicitly center ableism and/or disableism in the analysis. With ableism and/or disableism centered, researchers will be better able to understand why some faculty members with disabilities progress through the professoriate and some do not and will be better positioned to suggest effective interventions, procedures, and processes. Ultimately, research like this will illuminate inequitable structural characteristics of the professoriate pipeline and suggest ways to change them.

Additionally, we need research that focuses on the experience of faculty with disabilities in different disciplines, such as STEM, the humanities and social sciences, and the professions. All academic disciplines present the possibility of being exclusionary spaces for people with disabilities. Looking at STEM and non-STEM fields will also lend insight into ways that some fields may be more hospitable for faculty with disabilities and whether their practices could be translated to other disciplinary environments. Research of this kind would contribute not only to efforts to make the professoriate more equitable for many historically marginalized populations, but would also illuminate ways to improve educational environments with students with disabilities as well as improve the pipeline of people with disabilities into the professoriate.

It is important to note, in light of our recommendations for future research, that researchers are not the only ones who need to more explicitly center disability. Journals—especially those considered broader in scope and more prestigious—need to also center these topics. We found that many disability-focused journals are publishing research about faculty members, while journals with no disability focus are not, potentially contributing to a narrow sense of who is disabled in the academy. Furthermore, broader audiences may not engage with disability-focused journals as often, even those who could benefit from learning about the ways in which disability affects the work life of a faculty member. Including disability in more journals may contribute to continuing efforts to bring this marginalized population to the center and reduce stigma and discrimination.

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