

# Parents' Perceptions about Supporting Students with Autism to Transition to College

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# Background

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- In 2008-2009, approximately 78% of four-year public institutions enrolled students with ASD (Raue & Lewis, 2011)
- 30% of students with ASD who complete high school attend college (Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, & Anderson, 2015)
- Non-disclosure of disability leads to under-reporting of ASD numbers (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009)

# Statement of the Problem

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- College students with ASD experience increased challenges with emotional regulation, stress management, socialization, intimacy, and managing academic demands (White et. al, 2016).
- Educators and parents need to better understand how to prepare students with ASD for the transition to post-secondary education, and how to best support them during their college experience.

# Purpose

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- Research Study: To understand the self-reported experiences and perceptions of parents who supported their students with ASD with college transition planning
- Today's Presentation: To highlight major findings of the study from various phases of data analyses that have been presented in journals and conference presentations.

# Method- Participants

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- Participants: Thirty-eight parents (34 mothers, 4 fathers) of students with ASD who were attending college or in the process of transition planning to attend college
- A recruitment e-mail was sent to various university support service offices, clinicians, autism support groups and social networking sites.

# Method- Data Collection & Analysis

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- Brief demographic questionnaire
- Semi-structured, one-hour interviews
- Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed
- Open and analytic coding of significant statements by 5-person research team

# Limitations

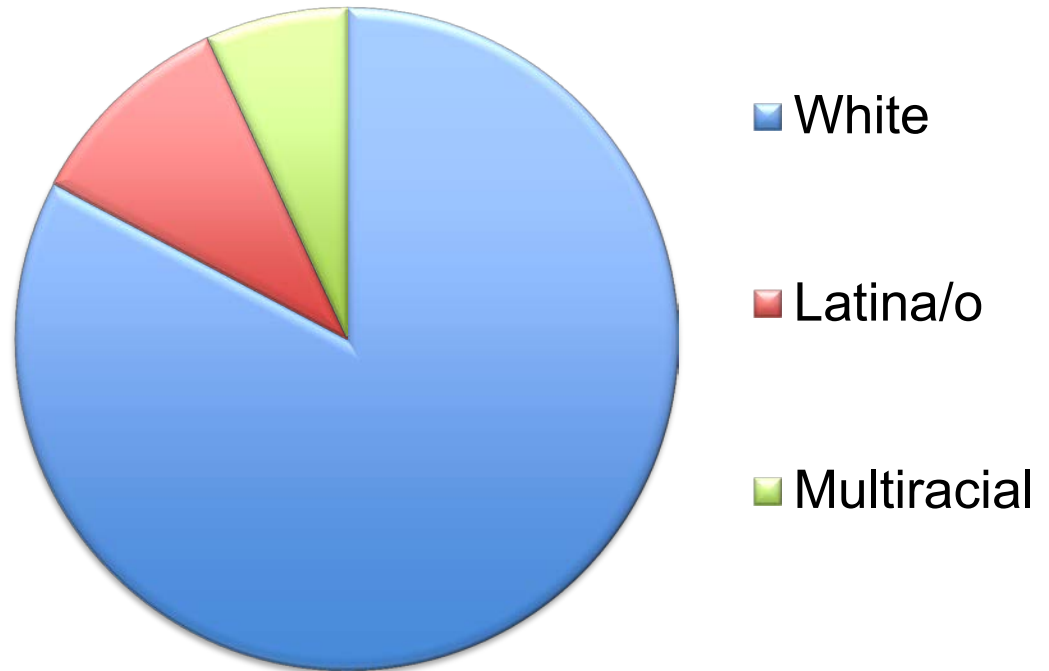
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- No college students with ASD were interviewed. Adding their voices to the data would enrich our conceptions about transition experiences.
- Findings are not representative of all families whose students with ASD pursue college. The purpose of the qualitative study was to get rich information through in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of parents.

# Race/ethnicity of Participants

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- White = 24
- Latina/o = 3
- Multiracial = 2

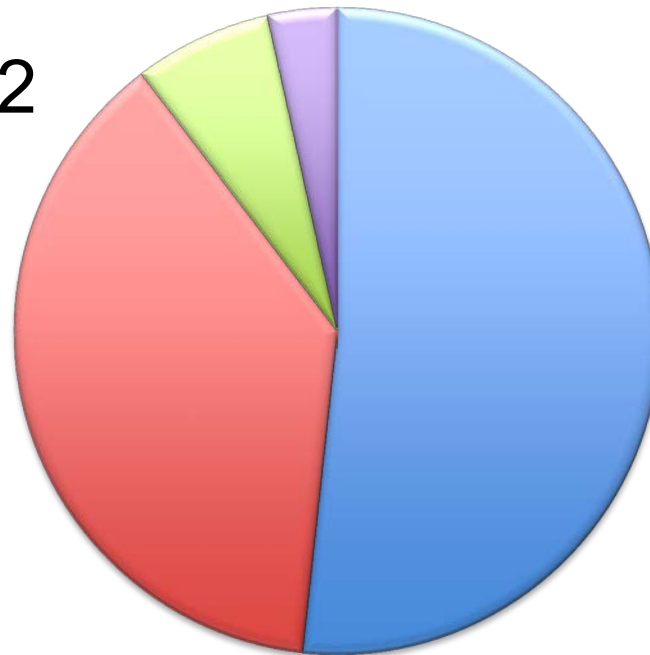




# Educational Background

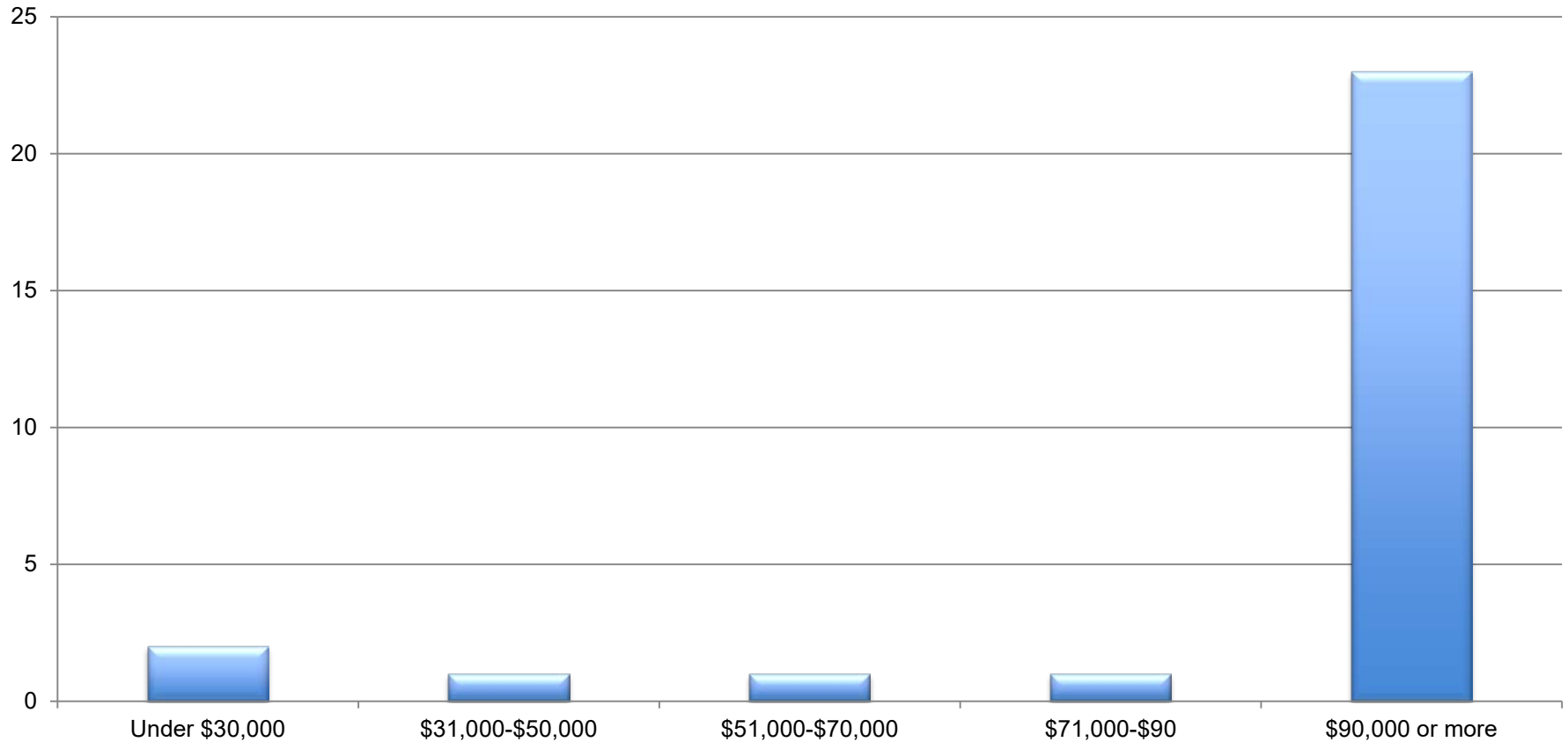
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- Graduate degree = 15
- Bachelors = 11
- Some college = 2
- No college = 1



- Graduate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Some College
- High School Graduate

# Household Income of Participants



# Cultural Capital

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- Cultural capital is known as accumulated cultural knowledge that brings about social mobility, status, and power (Bourdieu, 1986).
- Parents exercised cultural capital by assisting students to
  - research postsecondary options
  - navigate policies for transition and admission
  - advocate for access to resources to support their college success and retention

# Social Capital

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- Social capital involves the development of networks and relationships to others in order to gain access to important resources for social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986).
- Parents generated social capital through relationships with educational advocates, disability coordinators and academic advisors to access opportunities, information, & resources

# Coaching Students to Navigate College

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Parents described themselves as  
*“orchestrating from behind the scenes.”*

*“The phone is very difficult for him; he is a very visual person. So I had to call to make an appointment to schedule an assessment or a counselor meeting... It is really hard for him... This [financial aid issue] is a really complicated thing.”*

# Encouraging Independence

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*“You want to build the independence and you want him to learn to take these things over... So sometimes I let him fall a little bit because that’s a learning process.”*

*“I’m not interested in jeopardizing graduation over having him learn a lesson. So we’ve tried to balance.”*

# Major Challenges

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- Navigating the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): *“I received the message to ‘back off, mom!’”*
- Finding Supportive Faculty: *“Teachers at the college are not prepared to deal with his particular type of disability.”*

# Discussion of Findings

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- Findings suggest a pattern of inequitable educational access to college for students with ASD from low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented racial minority backgrounds
- According to Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, & Anderson (2015), 41% of White students with ASD attend college compared to 23% of Black and 29% of Latino students with ASD.



# Discussion of Findings

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- While the challenges related to FERPA are unique to the post-secondary setting, parents' difficulties with school professionals, faculty, and feeling alienated are consistent with previous research regarding barriers faced by parents and students during transition planning (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Roberts, 2010).

# Implications for Practice

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- High school and college professionals should involve parents and their students from marginalized backgrounds to develop cultural and social capital that will enable students to access and succeed in higher education
- Colleges can develop proactive partnerships with parents to define relationship boundaries (e.g. FERPA)
- Professional development for faculty

# Future Research

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- Include the perspectives of people with ASD. Without their voices, an incomplete body of knowledge about college opportunity, access, and choice is constructed.

# For more information...

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- Peña, E.V. & Kocur, J. (2013). Parenting experiences in supporting the transition of students with autism spectrum disorders into community college. *Journal of Applied Research in Community Colleges*, 20(2), 5-12.
- Kocur, J. & Peña, E.V. (2013). *Parents' Experiences in the Transition of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders to College*. American Psychological Association (APA). Honolulu, HI.
- Peña, E.V. & Kocur, J. (under review). A Spectrum of (In)Opportunity: An Exploration of College Transition Experiences Among Students with Autism and their Families. *Journal of College Student Development*.

# Thank You

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