

A Qualitative Investigation of the Motivation of College Students with Nonvisible Disabilities to Utilize Disability Services

Amber O'Shea¹
Rachel H. Meyer¹

Abstract

Students with disabilities experience unique challenges in college. Whereas universities offer support services to students with disabilities, students typically must disclose their disability in order to utilize such services. One important distinction regarding the disclosure of disabilities concerns the visibility of the disability, as students with nonvisible disabilities may have more choice concerning disclosure. Even students who disclose their disability, however, often either do not utilize the available support services or utilize them ineffectively. This study explored the motivation of college students with disabilities to disclose their disability and utilize university support resources. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the way students with nonvisible disabilities made meaning of being a college student with a disability and how these meanings related to their choice to use support services. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) was used as the theoretical framework to guide this study. The analysis identified six themes within which students' experiences were analyzed as more or less supportive of their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. An important conclusion of the analysis was that students' motivation and decision to utilize support services was framed by the level of acceptance of their disability; that is, their integration of their disability to their authentic self. Different levels of integration of the disability in students' narratives suggested different levels of support for the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, particularly by significant adults at home and in high school.

Keywords: *motivation, self-determination theory, higher education, students with disabilities*

A growing number of college students are reporting some form of disability. Whereas in 1995, roughly 6% of students reported having a disability, the number rose to 9% in 2000 and to 11% in 2008 (Hurst & Hudson, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Additionally, it is likely that these data underestimate the number of students with disabilities, as research suggests that many college students do not disclose their disability (Ryan, 1994; Sparks & Lovett, 2009). While the number of college students with disabilities is increasing, the unique challenges that face college students with disabilities span both the academic and social domains. For instance, in the academic domain, challenges include coping with traditional indicators of success, such as grade point average (Haller, 2006). In the social domain, challenges involve confronting and educating others about disabilities, including both

peers and faculty members (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Olney & Kim, 2001). It is not uncommon for students with disabilities to find themselves in a position of explaining to faculty details about eligibility for accommodations, the accommodation process, and the range of available support to students with disabilities on campus (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Ryan, 1994).

Similarly, students with disabilities often meet peers who have little familiarity with disabilities, hold stigmas about people with disabilities, or even consider academic accommodations for students with disabilities to be an unfair advantage (Olney & Kim, 2001). As the result of federal legislation concerning the rights of students with disabilities to equitable educational opportunities, most colleges and universities have established support services for students with disabilities with the intention of easing the transition from

¹ Temple University

high school to college while supporting students facing academic and social challenges in college. However, in order to utilize disability services, students must disclose and provide disability documentation that is often different from the documentation required in the K-12 system (Shaw, Keenan, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2010).

Despite the increased availability of support services to students with disabilities on campuses, and despite the increasing numbers of students who indicate that they have a disability on admissions applications or anonymous questionnaires, a large number of students with disabilities fail to register for disability support services (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008; DaDeppo, 2009; Getzel, 2008; Haller, 2006; Martin, 2010; Shaw et al., 2010). Previous research on disability disclosure highlights concerns about cultural stigmas of disabilities and apprehension of being discriminated against as reasons students avoid disclosing their disabilities and utilizing support services (Martin, 2010). Additionally, students who are conflicted about having a disability have been found to be less likely to utilize services than those who have accepted their disability as a part of their identity (DaDeppo, 2009).

One important distinction between types of disabilities concerns the “visibility” of disabilities, with nonvisible disabilities (i.e., learning or attention disabilities) constituting some of the most documented types of disabilities found among college students (Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Martin, 2010). Processes related to disability disclosure may be slightly different among students with nonvisible disabilities, since students with nonvisible or “hidden” disabilities could withhold disclosing their disability status, whereas those with “visible” disabilities (i.e., mobility impairments) may find it difficult or impossible (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010; Forman, Baker, Pater, & Smith, 2011; Martin, 2010; Olney & Kim, 2001). While researchers have aimed to develop an understanding of disability disclosure among students with visible and nonvisible disabilities, a number of gaps remain in the literature on the motivation of students with nonvisible disabilities to utilize disability support services.

A review of the literature on college students' motivation to use disability support services reveals a number of theoretical and methodological limitations. First, many of the previous studies have been descriptive and have not been guided by a theoretical framework. A solid theoretical foundation is important for translating findings into a comprehensive framework that can guide interventions and future research. Second, most of the previous studies in this domain have employed closed surveys that reflected

researcher-generated reasons for avoiding disclosure and utilizing services, thus limiting knowledge of students' own reasons for such decisions. Finally, the majority of the research has focused on college students with specific disabilities, limiting the generalization of findings to students with different types of disabilities (Anctil et al., 2008; Reed et al., 2009; Skinner, 2004; Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010). Students with disabilities are a diverse group with a variety of cognitive, emotional, and physical characteristics (Anctil et al., 2008; DaDeppo, 2009; Higher Education and Disability, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The current study aimed to complement findings and methods of previous studies and address some of the challenges of research in this domain by employing methods that give voice to the students with a diversity of hidden disabilities, while grounding the study in the established theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a comprehensive theory of human motivation that provides a framework for understanding choice of behavior, quality of motivation and engagement, and overall development and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory is founded on the premise that all humans have three innate psychological needs that are fundamental for adaptive motivation and development: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The need for autonomy refers to people's inherent need to feel self-determined and self-directing in their actions, to act in ways that actualize their authentic selves, and to internalize and integrate values and behaviors into their sense of selves. The need for competence refers to people's need to enhance their ability through action in their environment and to seek out opportunities that are congruent with these abilities. The need for relatedness describes the need to connect with, belong to, and feel cared for by others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, people perceive their source of action as autonomous or self-determined; that is, as emanating from and actualizing their deep sense of self. When one or more of the needs is frustrated, people either have no motivation to act or they feel coerced, externally or internally (e.g., by a sense of obligation or guilt), to engage in action.

Self-Determination Theory distinguishes between sources of decision-making and actions that can be described along a self-determination continuum. On one end of the continuum is a lack of motivation or “a-motivation,” seen in those situations in which a

person decides not to act. On the other end of the continuum is intrinsic regulation, in which decisions and actions are done for their own sake out of deep interest or enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). At the center of the continuum is extrinsic motivation, or engagement with the task to receive a tangible reward or avoid punishment (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Extrinsic motivation refers to four types of behavioral regulations: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, or integrated motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2008). Both external and introjected regulations are considered forms of controlled motivation, in which the person feels coerced to act, either externally or internally, respectively. Identified regulation refers to situations in which the behavior or goal is highly valued, and the person's actions are perceived to be personally important. Finally, integrated regulation refers to situations when individuals feel that engagement actualizes their personal values and needs (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In the context of college students with disabilities, "a-motivation" manifests as deciding not to utilize support services. External regulation might manifest through a student deciding not to disclose his disability as he risks facing unwanted consequences. Conversely, an individual who was motivated by integrated regulation might endorse her disability as part of who she is. This belief system would lead her to disclose her disability and partake in the support services, not only to support her academic success, but as an act of actualizing her identity. Students with and without disabilities use decision-making and problem-solving skills and apply goal-orientation skills to help guide their behaviors and actions. In other words, students act intentionally toward accomplishing a specific goal or task, thereby achieving a purposeful outcome. A large body of research over the past three decades strongly suggests that when people's actions are regulated by autonomous motivations, they are more highly motivated, have more positive emotions, engage more deeply, persist longer, and cope more effectively with difficulty and challenge than when they act from a sense of coercion and/or of being controlled (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

When people perceive the context as supporting their three psychological needs, they are more likely to sense a higher satisfaction of these needs, make decisions and act autonomously, and internalize the value of the decision and action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People are likely to feel support for their need for autonomy when they are provided meaningful choice, when they understand and identify with the rationale for a deci-

sion or action, and when their personal perspective, experiences, and emotions, are taken into account. People are likely to feel support for their need for competence when they perceive that they are faced with manageable challenges, and that evaluation of their competence is intended to promote growth rather than be threatening. People are likely to feel support for their need for relatedness when they are treated as whole human beings rather than according to only one characteristic, when their personal backgrounds and life experiences are valued, and when social interactions with others affirm their belonging to a community (Reeve, 2009).

Self-Determination and Disabilities: The Special Education Perspective

Some researchers in special education utilize the term "self-determination" somewhat differently from self-determination theorists who follow Deci and Ryan's (2000) framework. Special education researchers (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Getzel & Thoma, 2008) hypothesize that successful students engage in self-determined behaviors, specifically, exercising academic choices (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). In 2006, Wehmeyer defined self-determination by suggesting, "self-determined behavior refers to volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agents in one's life and to maintain or improve one's quality of life" (pg. 3). The act of self-determination involves a student's actions devoted intentionally toward accomplishing a specific goal or task, implying the action is coordinated to achieve a purposeful outcome. Characteristics of self-determination have been identified as acting autonomously with self-regulated behaviors that are psychologically empowered, and as acting in a self-realizing manner. In other words, self-determination provides people the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that facilitate goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous behavior (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006). When students in special education use their self-determination skills to show others that they can be successful, they also tend to feel a sense of pride and personal responsibility for their positive actions, signifying a greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Field & Hoffman, 1999; Wehmeyer & Field, 2007; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).

Research on self-determination from the special education perspective has focused primarily on students in the K-12 years. As children and adolescents learn and develop skills that enable them to become causal agents, elements of self-determined behavior, such as the following, develop: choice and decision

making skills, problem-solving skills, goal-setting and attainment, self-regulation and management skills, self-advocacy and leadership, self-awareness and knowledge skills, and positive perceptions of control, efficacy, and outcome expectations (Test et al., 2006; Wehmeyer & Field, 2007). These elements are essential for students in special education to help promote self-determination and action. Students are taught these skills throughout their education with the hopes of implementation to further their careers, personal well-being, and educational aspirations. Understanding and using these key components can help promote self-determination among students with disabilities. Unfortunately, research is limited for post-secondary education students with disabilities and self-determination. However, researchers have suggested that if students transition into postsecondary education settings with a better understanding of their disability and their needs, they are more likely to succeed (Test et al., 2006; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Thus, the earlier students can enhance their self-determination and develop appropriate skills, the more positive their outcomes will be when compared to adults who are not fully self-determined.

Field, et al. (2003) investigated self-determination among college students with learning disabilities through the use of the Self-Determination Student Scale and interviews. Exploring this construct in a post-secondary educational setting, two themes emerged from the interviews: internal (personality) markers that consisted of autonomy, problem solving, and persistence and external (environmental) factors including the awareness of the disability by both the student and faculty member, support within the environment, and outside social support. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended that disability staff focus on self-determination and effective instruction and not just on accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities. Field et al. also suggested that, when there is more consistency between students' experiences in grade school and college, students would have better outcomes. Finally, the researchers recommended that success would also be established when students acquire high levels of self-determination and are able to clearly state their personal goals regarding the future.

According to SDT, we can assume that students who perceive disclosing their disability and utilizing support services as identified and integrated regulations, as opposed to external or introjected regulations, are more likely to utilize services adaptively. Additionally, we can assume that students would be more likely to perceive their use of services as being autonomously regulated when the college environment provides sup-

port for their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, the actual experiences of students' decisions and actions of disclosing their disability and utilizing support services are not clear. Moreover, it is not known what features of the college environment students with disabilities perceive to constitute support for their three psychological needs. Indeed, such motivations and perceptions of the environment may differ in different settings within the college environment (e.g., different courses and social groups), and among students from different backgrounds, with different characteristics, and with different disabilities. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the meanings that students with nonvisible construct of their college experiences; how these meanings are related to students' desire to achieve autonomy, competence, and relatedness; and how these experience and desires influence students' decisions about disclosing and utilizing support services. To this end, the researchers explored the following research questions:

1. What does it mean for college students with nonvisible disabilities to utilize the university disability support services and how do these meanings relate to their motivation to utilize these services?
2. How do college students with nonvisible disabilities perceive different features of the college environment as either supporting or frustrating their psychological needs?

Method

Research about college students with disabilities and their reasons for using support services is limited. Even with the available research, concerns arise regarding data collection and methodologies. One challenge to studies of college students with disabilities is low response rates. Invitations to participate in interviews (e.g., Marshak, Weiren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010) or mailed surveys (e.g., Forsbach & Rice-Mason, 2001; Martin, 2010) often garner less than a 20% response rate. Based on the experiences of previous research, it was deemed unrealistic to recruit a representative sample of students with disabilities. Consequently, the researchers employed narrative interviews to create multiple-case studies. This approach was chosen to promote an inclusive and in-depth understanding of the subjective meaning making and decision-making processes of college students with disabilities (Josselson, 2011).

Participants

Participants were 11 college students (6 female, 5 male) with diagnosed nonvisible disabilities from a large public university located in the Northeast. At the time of the study, all students were registered with the university's Disability Resource and Services (DRS). Students were selected using purposeful sampling with the goal of creating a diverse set of cases that would allow insight into various meanings that students with different characteristics make of their experiences. In order to answer the research questions and obtain a diverse sample of students with disabilities, participants were chosen based on disability, gender, class status, and ethnicity, which had previously been reported to DRS. The characteristics of these students, although not representative of the general population of college students with disabilities, appeared to be representative of the university as a whole. The DRS Center provided a list of registered students from which an initial group of approximately 800 students with different disabilities, gender, class status, and ethnicity¹ were selected. Although all students were identified using the DRS listserv, it was assumed that not all them actively utilized the DRS services. A formal email was sent to approximately 750 students on the resulting list, inviting them to partake in interviews about their experiences on campus. In the initial recruitment email, students were provided with information about the study's goals and purposes, informed that participation would involve engaging in one interview that would last approximately an hour to an hour and a half, and told that they would receive a \$15 gift card as an incentive for participating in the study and completing the interview. An additional email invitation was sent out to each student to encourage participation in the study.

Twelve students expressed interest in participating and were contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview. All but one of the students who participated reported having a nonvisible disability. In order to maintain a coherent sample with regards to the type of disabilities, interview data from the one student with a visible disability was excluded from further analysis. The remaining sample included 11 students with nonvisible disabilities. Interviews were conducted in a private office located within the office of disability services on the university's main campus by the corresponding author of this manuscript and a supervising faculty member.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants, including their gender, year in school, type of disability, and their age at time of diagnosis. Students' names are pseudonyms.

Instrument and Procedure

The interview protocol followed a life-history approach (Elliott, 2005) in which the interviewee was asked an initial leading question: "Please tell me about your experiences as a student with a disability at this university." Following the interviewee's response, the interviewer probed by asking the interviewee to elaborate on the various parts of the narrative concerning his or her experiences and to provide specific examples for more general statements (Bates, 2004; Elliott, 2005; Kielhofner & Mallinson, 1995). One of the authors of this study, along with one graduate student researcher, conducted the interviews. Both interviewers were advised on the interview protocol in order to better understand the context of the interviews and were trained in narrative interviewing techniques through doctoral level qualitative research methodology courses. Each student who agreed to participate in the study was interviewed privately by one of the two female interviewers.

Prior to beginning the interview, the interviewer explained the purpose of the study to the student, assured that participation is voluntary, and emphasized that the student could choose to avoid any question or withdraw from the study at any time. The student was encouraged to ask any questions he/she may have had about the study and was then asked to sign a consent form. At the end of the interview, interviewees filled out a short survey that collected demographic information (gender, age, academic level, and disability status). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed, while keeping any identifying information confidential.

Analysis

Analysis of interviews was framed by a combination of the phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1975) and the narrative approach (Josselson, 2011). The researchers utilized several analytic steps to derive each participant's construction of their experience and decision-making and actions regarding utilizing support services. This process included reading through the interview several times; identifying "units of meaning" as they emerged from the narrative; coding each unit of meaning for theme, content, and process; integrating the various themes into a comprehensive and coherent system for each participant; relating themes across participants; and anchoring dominant themes into a theoretical model of processes underlying experiences and decision-making of students with disabilities at a large public university.

Four researchers, including the two authors and two supervising faculty members at the institution, participated in the analysis and interpretation of the

interviews. The researchers were formally trained in the analytic approach at doctoral degree granting institutions and worked together to construct a coherent and integrated interpretation of the narratives. To increase inter-rater reliability, each researcher coded the same interview independently and then discussed the results, interpretation, and understandings to reach a consensus. The analysis of each interview involved listening to each interview multiple times and reading the transcripts to discover emerging themes and concepts. It was important to pay close attention to both the content of the interview as well as the structure of the narration to obtain as much insight as possible about the student's experiences, as "the process of analysis is one of piecing together data, making the invisible apparent, deciding what is significant and insignificant, and linking seemingly unrelated facets of experiences together" (Josselson, 2011, p. 227). The process involved coding parts of the narrative with codes from the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and regulated behaviors, from self-determination theory, or with codes that emerged as significant in the data. These codes were evident across the interviews, which increased the trustworthiness of the research.

Results

The analysis of the 11 interviews revealed six cross-case themes that undergirded participants' constructions of their experiences as students with disabilities that, in turn, framed their motivation to disclose their disability and utilize or not utilize support services. The six themes were labeled: (1) Disability Construction; (2) High School Experience; (3) Significant Adults; (4) Disability Resources and Services (DRS) and other Services; (5) Interactions with Faculty; and (6) Interactions with Peers. Categories were determined within each theme in an attempt to represent the diversity of students' narratives, personal experiences, and the role of processes within each theme in students' decision-making. Table 2 describes the six themes and their corresponding categories.

Theme 1: Disability Construction

The theme "disability construction" highlights cognitive and emotional ways students seem to have constructed the meaning of their disability. This "construction" emerged as significant throughout the interviews and, hence, also appears in the remaining themes. An example demonstrating students' construction of their disability is a statement from Brian, a male student with Asperger's Syndrome and

Seizure disorder: "When I was told about the accommodations, I was like, I don't need any special room or dorming or anything. I'm not that severely disabled." The way students understood their disability provided a frame and justification for their decisions in academic and non-academic domains. Three types of constructions of the disability were identified in the sample: as a self-attribute, as a minor irritation, and as a source of ambivalence.

The category of "Self-Attribute" refers to students' acceptance of their disability as a part of their overall sense of self. Three female students were categorized as constructing their disability as an integrated part of self. These three students had all previously received disability support services while in high school settings prior to entering college, and were very aware of the services they needed as well as having a clear understanding of their disabilities. These participants tended to elaborate on their disability in the interview and to relate it explicitly to their academic strengths and weaknesses. The words these students used suggested that they embraced their disability as a significant self-characteristic. For example, Brittany described her disability in the following way:

Like I never really looked at it as a disorder or a problem. I just thought it was a little setback. Because there are people who are worse off than me so I never considered it a disorder because I know there are people who are blind, who are deaf, who have autism. Who am I to say ADHD is a learning disability when there are people with autism who have to do the same thing as me.

These students also described rational considerations and decision-making regarding utilization of support services. For example, Julie described her use of the disability services as it related to her construction of her ADHD by stating "I know that it helps me and in the end I'll do better. I'm not going to advertise that I'm walking into the disability resources office. But I know inside that it helps me. It's nothing that I'm ashamed of." Students in the self-attribute category had a strong sense of their own competence within multiple academic environments and social settings, and appeared to demonstrate autonomous behavior when dealing with the disability.

Two students, one male and one female, described their disability as a minor irritation or aspect that they could overcome or that had an easy fix. Whereas these students acknowledged that they had a disability, they considered it played a significant role in their well-being or sense of competence. The following is an

example of minimizing one's disability through the reflective narrative by Marcus:

Interviewer: Let me go back to something that you said in the beginning. You said you have ADHD, and you don't really consider that a disability, or real disability.

Marcus: I consider it a disability, but I don't consider it as something that makes me disabled.

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about what that means.

Marcus: The way I see disabled is...I could study, but I have medicine that I can take to help me study like Ritalin and Concerta, but I haven't taken the medicine. I don't think I've taken it at all since I've been a (college) student honestly.

Both of these students indicated that with the use of medication, their disability did not seem to play a significant role in their lives. Rather, the students could see it as a minor irritation that had an easy fix or solution. Students in this category tended to get their needs met in order to satisfy academic demands.

The category of "Ambivalence Towards the Disability" included four male and two female students. Some of these students acknowledged their disability but explicitly rejected it as a self-defining aspect. As Tony said, "I consider my disability to be a technical foul." Other students denied having a disability. Brian discussed his Asperger's diagnosis with a sense of personal dismissal:

But considering how, I don't really feel effected by the Asperger's diagnosis at all really. Because the things that most people with Asperger's lack is a sense of humor and a sense of sarcasm, and like I have that. And it's not really interfering with my learning, really. Well, that's what I think[ing] anyway.

Students who described their disability in terms that indicated more integration of the disability to the self also tended to describe deciding to disclose and utilize services in an argentic, flexible, and non-conflict manner. Whereas students who described their disability in terms that were not integrated—as a minor irritation, or in ambivalent terms—also described their disclosure and utilization of services in rigid, narrow, terms, and may be less willing to disclose their disability.

Theme 2: High School

Experiences in high school emerged as very meaningful in the participants' narratives. Several students described high school experiences with self-advocacy and interactions with high school teachers and guidance counselors that were formative in their constructions of the meaning of their disability. Students reported receiving strong support in high school for coping with their disability. For example, Brittany, who was diagnosed with a learning disability, said, "I was working with [the university] DRS before I even got here. I had a great support system even at my high school." Five students indicated that experiences in high school which had shaped their understanding of their disability led them to disclose to the university DRS and seek support services in college. Despite variability in the path to receiving such support, they reported feeling empowered by their high school experiences and supported by individuals in the high school context. For example, Gail stated:

Yeah, I would always ask for extra help until I actually got the documentation that said that I was allowed to have extra time and stuff. I always looked to the teacher.

Two female students indicated that they did not take advantage of the disability services in high school. Lori stated, "OK, well in high school I had not taken any of the disabilities advantages because I was at one of those high schools where you didn't want to be singled out." This example highlights the interconnectivity among the themes related to high school and peers (theme six), as it emphasizes an important context and a developmental stage within which students are developing their self-understanding and identities.

It is noteworthy that four participants, all males, did not mention their high school experiences during the interview. Participants were not directly asked about high school; hence, its absence in some students' narratives may mean that these participants' high school experiences were not significant in shaping their construction of their disability and subsequent decisions in college, or it may be that other experiences were more salient in the context of the interview and masked recollections of the high school experience.

Theme 3: Significant Adults

A third theme was interactions with significant adults, both in high school and in other life domains, which played an important role in several of the participants' narratives. Participants referred to significant adults such as the high school counselor, a parent, a

therapist, a teacher, or a doctor who may have helped them find available resources at college. Significant adults provided students with medical or psychological labels and definitions for the disability, emphasized to them specific domains of challenge, and arranged for specific support services to address the domains of challenge. For example, Mark reported, "So my mom looked into it more and then found out that it's DRS, you know, and then she made the meeting, she called them up and we went through that whole process." Julie stated, "It was more my advisor in high school that told me about it because I guess she knew that they had a good disability program." Analysis of the participants' narratives suggested these adults' authority and actions guided and shaped the participants' construction of their disabilities, as well the relevance or lack thereof of specific services. In turn, these adults guided participants' decisions and actions upon entering college to disclose their disability, register with disability services, and utilize certain support services rather than others. For example, as a result of a traumatic brain injury, Katie worked with her high school counselor on time management skills in order to be more efficient in terms of her daily obligations through the use of strategies. This student was able to take the tools and resources she received from her high school counselor and implement them in her college setting. Further, with the help of the disability office, she thought to request more time for test taking.

The analysis also suggested different types of student-adult interaction: (1) submission to adults' guidance and (2) collaborative empowerment with significance to the student's sense of agency regarding disclosing and utilizing services. Seven participants reported interactions with adults that were characterized by the student's submission to the adult's authority. The interaction involved the adult taking charge in seeking out services in college. The adults in these interactions were depicted as caring for the student, but at the same time failing to promote the student's autonomy and competence. The narratives depicted the student as passive or as submitting to the adult's directives to disclose and utilize services. Thus, while these students ultimately sought services, it was not due to self-determination. An example from Mark follows showing the control of the student's mother:

Um, so, it took a little bit of convincing me, well not a little bit, well yeah. Basically my mom continually, repetitively telling me that I needed to use a note taker in college because college was going to be difficult.

Brittany is included to show the importance of students' submission to adults' guidance:

Well, my mom was the main one who was like, you know that you are unfocused and you should probably handle it. And I wasn't trying to stay away from it. I was just so excited to get to college, I wasn't even thinking about it. So she really looked up the information for me. Being the mom she is she just wanted to make sure that, everything was okay, and I would enjoy college. But make sure you're able to have that relationship with the teacher, have someone to go to if you need help. She always wants to make sure that I'm okay with asking for help.

In contrast to students whose interaction with significant adults was characterized by submission to the adults, narratives of other students (1 Male and 3 Female students) indicated agency with regard to their disability and utilization of services. For example, Julie noted how she worked with her high school counselor to figure out what colleges had disability programs:

It was more my advisor in high school that told me about it (DRS) because I guess she knew that they had a good disability program. So I don't know if I necessarily would have investigated the disability program here. I probably would have just talked to my professors and I maybe found out that way.

Katie discussed how she worked with her high school counselor in order to contact the university's disability program. The student and the counselor found a way to work together:

So my advisor knew that since I had the 504, it transfers to college because I had just gotten reevaluated. So she was really that bridge. She gave me the numbers to contact. So I was connecting with DRS before I even came here to get the placement test done, I was working with them. So when I came in I was on the email roster. I was getting emails, I was getting phone calls. So yeah, I reconnected with them before I got here.

Although it is unclear if Julie would have sought out disability services on her own, it is clear that the student was the one who actually made the contact. Furthermore, Katie's proactivity allowed her to pre-register with DRS prior to the start of school. When students work collaboratively with significant adults, the student is encouraged to fully integrate his or her disability into an authentic sense of self.

Theme 4: Disability Resources and Services (DRS) and other Resources

Participants' mentioning of the DRS and other Resources at school emerged as a major theme across the interviews. Throughout the interviews, students addressed their utilization of disability support services. For example, Susan discussed the nature of her interactions with DRS staff by saying:

I always feel comfortable talking to my advisor. I know I feel comfortable with the people working there. I just talked to my advisor yesterday because I've been having problems in completing my essay portions for a lot of my, like, midterms and such.

In addition to using DRS for support, students also indicated that they used or were aware of other services provided on campus. Other students suggested that they did not have time to use alternative services, they formerly used the services provided, no longer utilized services, or were not always aware of other services provided on campus.

The analysis of the narratives indicated that participants differed in the amount of utilization and time they spent at the disability office and/or using other services on campus. Most of the participants seemed to have come to college with a prior understanding of the types of services they needed and were not typically open to exploring other possibilities. However, the analysis also suggested that students constructed the role of DRS in different ways, which affected how they used the services available to them. These different ways are represented in the different categories of this theme, including: "DRS as a Club," "DRS as a Service Provider," "DRS as a Mentor," and "DRS as Just Another Service."

The category "DRS as Club," which included two female students (one diagnosed with a learning disability and one diagnosed with ADD) suggested students' desire for more social interactions to be provided by DRS, such as support groups for students with disabilities, outings to local attractions in the community, and help in developing friendships with other students with disabilities. These students thought of DRS as a place of comfort where they could get their needs met, a supportive environment, or a place of acceptance for someone with a disability. In the context of this research, a "DRS Service Provider" explains the types of services one can receive while at DRS. For these students, DRS is often thought of as a place of comfort, a place where students can get their needs met, a supportive environment, or a place of acceptance for someone with a disability. Several of the participants

(1 Male and 6 Females) indicated that they currently or have used multiple services that DRS provides, hence, "DRS as Service Provider." For example, students reported using testing accommodations or arranging for a classroom note-taker, which are common examples of services provided by DRS.

In several narratives, the analysis indicated that students wanted to see DRS as more than a mere service provider. For example, students indicated their desire to have the disability office serve as a sounding board, or assist them make decisions regarding their academic schedule. A male student described his experience working with a disability staff member at an initial meeting at the start of the semester, as providing students with a full array of service options in a comfortable setting, allowed the student to feel excited about his college experience. The narratives from the students in this category (three male and three female) indicated that they are seeking more than just academic advice, to wit an advisor who is attuned to their feelings and personal needs, providing positive feedback about their competencies.

Students might utilize other resources and services on campus, such as the writing or math center in addition to or in place of DRS, viewing DRS as "Just Another Service." It is important to keep in mind that these other services are available to all students on campus and not just those with a diagnosed disability or who are registered with the disability office. Still, some students (2 Male and 4 Female) indicated they either did not use additional services or were not aware of other services being offered. Students can individually control the frequency of utilizing the services provided by DRS. Participants' previous experiences, such as the types of services received while in high school or the amount of previous support received regarding their disability, tend to be reflected in students' utilization of the DRS and the other resources offered on campus to all students.

Theme 5: Interactions with Faculty

A common theme expressed throughout the narratives was the nature of students' interactions with faculty in regard to their disabilities. The role and efficacy of the faculty is guided, in part, by the relationship(s) that students establish with their professors. Analysis of the narratives suggested that most of the participants had constructive communication with the majority of their professors regarding their disability; as such, six female and five male students were categorized according to this theme. Students described their decision to disclose their disability to their professors as a significant step, suggesting the decision to take the

step and disclose to faculty was related to students' previous experiences of disclosing their disability in high school and to the support they received from staff in the DRS. The support by DRS in providing a letter of accommodation to be presented to the professor was noted as an important scaffold for students' initiating the interaction with faculty. Katie described disclosing her disability to her professors as having "the conversation" and touched on the role of DRS in promoting her motivation to have the conversation. She used the guidance of DRS as a bridge for identifying her disability, and although she did not need DRS to have this communication with her professors, she used phrases and words suggested by the DRS office to assist her in engaging in the conversation with faculty. Another student was hesitant to disclose her disability to her professors because she did not want to feel as though she was taking advantage of services and did not want to be viewed differently or with favoritism, when compared to other students. She exemplified how both the responsiveness from the professor and class demands dictated her decision-making process for disability disclosure.

The narratives suggested students' utilization of services related to the classroom or with faculty as an important construct for classroom performance. These services are provided by or set up by instructions in class. These services might include, accessible office hours, permission to have a note-taker, or collaborative in-class projects. The analysis indicated that students are more likely to utilize services within the classroom when they are comfortable discussing their disability. The narratives also indicate that both campus disciplines and individual faculty members do not have a uniform policy relative to the utilization of services set up by instructors in class. For example, Lori discussed her experiences attempting to obtain a note-taker:

Lori: No, I had a note taker request for Japanese, but um, nobody responded for that. It's very hard to get people to just copy the notes and paste them to an email or something like that. The law class is basically the biggest experience I've had with note taking and as successful that's been or not successful in this case.

Interviewer: OK. Were there any other times?

Lori: I don't believe I had one for communications, my communications class. Um, I never, it's very hard to actually just get people to, not that the teachers didn't try. Every teacher that I can remember sent out at least one email asking for a

note taker. And I had some math classes that would have been very helpful because the teachers had the thickest accents.

Interviewer: OK.

Lori: So it was, um, but most of the math and science classes I had, I never saw an email go out. But my English teachers have probably been the ones most concerned about it. They would come up to me after class and say, "Are you doing OK?" And the thing was that I usually was. Like I have some better classes, not so good in the other ones, but um. That's pretty much all I have to say about the note taking.

Theme 6: Interaction with Peers

The final theme that emerged from the analysis of the narratives was students "Interaction with Peers". The analysis revealed three categories within this theme: "Stigma", "Acceptability", and "Avoidance." The first category, "Stigma" included students who felt that their peers believed a stigma is associated with having a disability. Several students indicated that being associated with DRS or being seen walking into the Disability Office associated a person with having a disability and thus promoted a negative perception. "Acceptability" included students who accepted their disability and allowed it to be a part of their authentic selves among peers. Additionally, when a student personally accepts his or her disability, the likelihood of openly discussing the disability among peers is enhanced. One female student indicated that she and her best friend from high school had both been diagnosed with ADHD and it was just a part of who they were as individuals. These two students had a shared common experience, consequently easier to discuss and accept. The theme of "Avoidance" emerged from the narratives, which suggested that students do not want to talk about their disability, nor do they share with others that they have a disability. Some students do not want to advertise intellectual differences and risk being identified as different from their peers, whereas other students mentioned situations where they did not want to discuss their disability with peers. A common experience occurred when students had to share their disability with a roommate. These students specified that they discussed their disability with their roommate when students felt it was absolutely necessary or if a situation occurred where the roommate questioned a participant's behaviors as acting out of the norm of the college environment. One male's motivation for disclosure arose only when he felt the need to establish

a better relationship with his roommate. Tim shared his experience with his roommate:

Tim: The people who have had a bigger impact in my life I've had to explain to them what some of my disabilities are and how that affects things. Like I wasn't, I didn't tell my roommate about all of my problems until we had a little bit of a conflict. Um, like I'm ADD, I'm obsessive compulsive and I have symptoms of Asperger's syndrome, so I um, so like when it comes to socializing, Asperger's seems to be the problem that comes up most. My roommate told me I make weird facial expressions or that I'm unexpressive sometimes or that I don't seem to be expressing enough interest in the things that he is talking about. And like I often seem a little bit more normal here (in the interview), but for some reason I'm more comfortable talking to people who are more like an adult or someone who is in authority rather than people my age. It's very weird.

Interviewer: What was that like for you when you told your roommate whatever you did tell him?

Tim: Yeah, I first told him like when we first met, we didn't have much contact before move in day and so I did tell him upfront about the ADD and OCD and I wasn't sure at first if I wanted to tell him about the Asperger's syndrome. I didn't want to be pitied for being on the Autism spectrum since like when people think of Autism, like they think of Rain Man and that kind of thing and I don't want to be seen or thought of as being some kind of savant or that kind of thing. But like, when we had communication issues at some point, I felt like I had to bring it up.

Interviewer: How was that?

Tim: Um, he did become a little bit more understanding. I don't think that he fully understands what exactly Asperger's syndrome is but I did explain to him about some difficulties I have with understanding and interpreting some emotion because sometimes my face can become some kind of a mask, especially when I am nervous.

This excerpt seems to be an example of uncertainty regarding norms. Tim's motivation for disclosure arose only when he felt the need to establish a better relationship with his roommate. This is an example of some of the complexities that might arise at the college

level in reference to communication and understanding of disabilities. As is demonstrated by the previous excerpt, college relationships are often complicated, and clear communication sometimes enhances peer relationships, and unfortunately, sometimes it does not appear to improve the relationship.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to understand the motivation of college students with disabilities to utilize university support services. Focusing on a small sample of college students with nonvisible disabilities, this study aimed to explore the ways students made meaning of being a college student with disability and how these meanings related to their use of university support services. The findings highlight the importance of the subjective experience of a match between students' with disabilities perceived needs and their motivation to utilize support services. When students with disabilities enter college, they are faced with experiences that challenge their sense of academic autonomy, their ability to do well academically, and their sense of relatedness to peers, faculty, and academic choices. In an effort to address these challenges, university disability offices can promote students' needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within the context of various support services (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

Overall, the findings point very strongly to students' experiences of disability support in high school as an important psychological foundation for their motivational processes related to disability disclosure in college. Experiences in high school seem to frame students' self-advocacy decisions in college. Specifically, the findings of the current study underscore the importance of early experiences with disability support in high school and highlight the role that high school counselors and other adults in the environment play in encouraging the early development of self-determination in students with disabilities. High school constitutes an important context within which students develop their self-understanding and identities. Interaction with significant others and strong support for their coping with disabilities seems to relate to meaning-making about a disability and to student's motivation for utilization of services in college.

In SDT terms, the high school context and the significant adults within it can have powerful roles in supporting or thwarting students' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This interaction can influence the integration of disability into students' identity and impact their utilization of

disability support services. In particular, the nature of feedback and support from peers, teachers, and disability staff is highly important. Self-Determination Theory suggests that the best kind of feedback enhances support for students' three psychological needs. Specifically, this could involve rewarding students with acceptable grades and praise for academic challenges they have overcome, providing feedback for students' autonomy as learners, and allowing students to choose topic areas of study they are interested in, thus enhancing the support of the students' three psychological needs (Koestner & Losier, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

The analysis suggested positive experiences while in high school contributed to student's motivation for higher education and academic success and for disclosing in order to seek support services in college. Illustrating the role that positive relationships play in supporting students' psychological needs, Brittany explained how the support she received in high school laid the foundation for her utilization of disability support services in college. Brittany described working closely with adults in high school to make decisions regarding her disability. This experience was essential in encouraging her to make decisions that supported her authentic sense of self as well as her need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Conversely, other students described experiences indicating that their self-determination was stymied by the actions and behaviors of significant adults that frustrated their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For instance, Tim and Mark described situations in which their parents assumed control of the decision-making processes related to seeking help, thus undermining these students' opportunities to act in a way that actualized and represented their authentic sense of selves.

The experiences recounted here provide support for Deci and Ryan's theory of self-determination and illuminate the ways that an individual's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can be either supported or thwarted by a number of internal and external factors. Specifically, the findings indicate that internal factors such as students' integration of their disability into their authentic selves, and external factors such as the actions of key figures in the context (i.e., parents, teachers, counselors, etc.), can play instrumental roles in facilitating students' sense of self-determination and subsequent actions. Furthermore, the findings from this study suggest that these factors interact in complex and dynamic ways. For instance, students' understanding of their identity, particularly with regards to their disability and academic needs, may be shaped by a myriad of personal and environmental factors, developing and unfolding

as students participate and interact with others in the college context. Environments that foster a sense of autonomy may help to encourage identity development, which can positively impact students' expression of self-determination. Thus, these findings suggest that it is important for adults in the high school and college environment to not only include students in important decision-making processes related to their disability but to encourage participation in the exploration of the environment as it relates to their emergent sense of self.

The training and professional competence of disability support providers emerged as a further factor affecting whether or not students with disabilities engaged with support services while at college. Well-trained disability support providers have been shown to empower a greater sense of self and well-being among students with disabilities, leading to a greater willingness to engage appropriate support (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009). It follows that disability support services staff at colleges should begin their work with students by asking them to articulate what services they have previously used and, accordingly, explaining to them what services are currently available. This concept was articulated in Mark's narrative by the following: "We went over a lot of different things, all the different options available to me, all the different types of help, all the different places that I could go. It was very resourceful..." This framing enhances a sense of autonomy for the student and supports their ability to tailor a service package based on what is available. When DRS acts to enhance autonomy and competence with general metacognitive variables such as, how to "break down" problems, best strategies for problem success, and a system for personally assessing efficacy of academic work, students are more likely to experience autonomy.

The two types of relationships with significant adults identified in the narratives reflect a clear distinction between controlling and autonomy-supportive interactions. A collaborative interaction, in which the adults scaffold the student's action rather than prescribe it to them, supports the student's needs for relatedness, competence and, eventually, the student's sense of self-determination. In contrast, well-intentioned adults who push for actions such as registering for support services may support students' needs for relatedness, but thwart their needs for competence and autonomy. Students who are submissive to adults' guidance are dependent on the adult and tend to allow the adult to control his or her decisions. When a parent, for example, sets up an appointment with a university's disability office for their child, as was the case with Tim and Mark, the par-

ent is in control of the student's actions; the parent has not necessarily taken the student's own internalization of their disability into account. In contrast, students who work with significant adults are more likely to have their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness satisfied through endorsing the authentic self, as we saw with Julie and Brittany. According to Ryan and Deci (2000, pg. 237), "By identifying with the value of the activity, internalization will be fuller, people will experience greater ownership of the behavior and feel less conflict about behaving in accord with the regulation, and the behavior will be more autonomous." Thus, interactions that are collaborative and empowering are more likely to promote autonomous decision-making and utilization of services.

Some students expressed a greater ease in discussing certain kinds of disabilities over others. This may have been influenced by public awareness and perception of the disability. For example, as ADHD has become a more widely discussed disability in our culture within the last decade (Perry & Franklin, 2006; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003), it might be easier to discuss with support staff when compared to other types of disabilities such as a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or Asperger's Syndrome. This was the case with Tim, who explained that while he disclosed his diagnoses of ADD and OCD to his roommate, he was more hesitant to disclose his Asperger's diagnosis, stating "when people think of Autism, like they think of Rain Man and that kind of thing, and I don't want to be seen or thought of as some kind of savant." Additionally, it is imperative the faculty be well versed in understanding a disability in order for the student not to feel uncomfortable about making use of accommodations. For instance, Gail described the importance of her interactions with faculty in her decisions to utilize classroom services, explaining that she always "looked to the teacher" for the "extra help" needed to meet her needs. Without a professor's understanding and support, it is possible students may not pursue accommodations and services.

Several students within this study construed the disability services and resources office (and staff) as a narrow, authoritarian environment rather than a support. Students use services selectively and in relationship to how the student constructs his or her disability, as we saw, for example, in Marcus' utilization of services. When students are engaged with support services that foster self-efficacy, they will broaden their needs, and support for autonomy may be satisfied.

According to the narratives in this study, some students tend to view DRS as a service provider. Rather than solely providing services, DRS staff should be educating students regarding their academic strengths and

weaknesses. Staff can scaffold services, in providing assistance, direction and guidance about self-advocacy relative to a student's particular intellectual strengths. In this manner, DRS would serve as an educator to help develop students' sense of self. Engaging with an educator-oriented DRS may encourage students to more actively utilize university support services and help them achieve their goals.

The findings of this study generally support Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination theory by illuminating the lived experiences of college students with hidden disabilities, particularly with regards to the degree to which their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were met in the college environment. The unit of analysis that emerged from the data is not college, but rather the context within which students relate to college. For different individuals, different contexts may thwart or satisfy different needs. Students construct their own meaning in their contexts and within those contexts the individual needs are dynamic and complex. Differences between faculty and their understanding of disabilities, or a the presence or absence of a friend's supportive nature towards a person's disability, or even a student's relationship or lack thereof with the disability support services office, can impact the creation of a positive sense of self. Support for the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy is dynamic and varied for students with disabilities. Yet, it is a critical factor.

Limitations

Several limitations exist within this study. One limitation pertains to the sample used. All of the participants in the current study were students with hidden disabilities who had registered with disability resource services at a large, public research university in the Northeastern United States. Future research should attempt to sample students with a wider range of disabilities in a variety of contexts. A second limitation involved response bias. Although the questions asked during the interview were open-ended, due to the sensitive subject nature, it is possible some students were less open to discussing their experiences than others. Another limiting factor in this study was that the research team did not employ member checking as a method for increasing the trustworthiness of the interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). While member checking was not used in the current study, several measures were employed to validate that our understanding of the participants' meaning-making processes was accurate. The structure of the interviews included features that help achieve trustworthiness,

such as adopting an open-ended and flexible format that allowed for a personal narrative to develop. Additionally, interviewing a number of participants allowed us to draw connections among participants' experiences and check the comments of each participant within the context of the others as a means of understanding how participants make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study provide insight toward the role played by the psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy in a student's experience and ultimate decision to disclose a disability and utilize university support services. The results indicated that when these needs are satisfied, students are more likely to disclose their disability and actively utilize university support services. However, additional research is still needed to better serve college students with disabilities and understand their motivation for disclosure and utilization of university support services.

Future research should investigate additional contexts and environments in which students with disabilities attend college or university. This investigation took place at a large public university. It would be important to replicate this study at a smaller, possibly private university, where there may be a smaller student-to-instructor ratio to see if findings would be similar. Exploring similarities and differences among students, and services offered, may provide additional understanding and guidance in tools for disability staff and faculty to help promote the satisfaction of students needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. As students' needs become more internalized, a more adaptive integration of the disability to the authentic self is likely to occur and result in stronger patterns for use of services.

The students who participated in this study were students with hidden disabilities. As is often the case, students with visible disabilities' identity is often determined for them; therefore, it would be interesting to note how students with visible disabilities integrate their disabilities to their authentic self and the different patterns of motivation and decision-making processes. Replicating this study to investigate students with visible disabilities would be of interest in order to understand this population's motivation to disclose and utilization of support services.

Implications for the Field

Prior literature has suggested that DRS policies, procedures, and staff may unintentionally create barriers to students' self-determination and use of services. According to Beck, Diaz del Castillo, Fovet, Mole & Noga (2014) there are a number of practices that disability service offices can implement in order to promote access to services. For example, students could have virtual registration meetings in order to prevent fear of stigma when walking into the offices. Disability service offices could develop new ways to reach students who otherwise might not seek services on their own. In order to satisfy students' need for autonomy and relatedness, DRS offices could provide information in orientation packets, post flyers throughout the universities in less public places, or email campus wide newsletters, allowing students to review the material in a private location without the perceived presence of stigma (Beck et al., 2014). Disability staff would benefit from further education related to SDT so they can help promote students sense of self and satisfying their psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2002a, b).

The training and professional competence of disability support providers is a further factor affecting whether or not students with disabilities will engage with support services while at college. Well-trained disability support providers have been shown to empower a greater sense of self and well-being among students with disabilities, leading to a greater willingness to disclose disabilities and engage appropriate support (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Levesque-Bristol & Stanek, 2009). It follows that disability support services staff at colleges should begin their work with students by asking them to articulate what services they have previously used and, accordingly, explaining to them what services are currently available to the student at the particular college.

References

- Anctil, T. M., Ishikawa, M. E., & Scott, A. T. (2008). Academic identity development through self-determination: Successful college students with learning disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Children, 31*, 164-174.
- Barnard-Brak, L., Lechtengerger, D., & Lan, W. Y. (2010). Accommodation strategies of college students with disabilities. *The Qualitative Report, 15*, 411-429.
- Bates, J. A. (2005). Use of narrative interviewing in everyday information behavior research. *Library & Information Science Research, 26*(1), 15-28.
- Beck, T., del Castillo, P. D., Fovet, F., Mole, H., & Noga, B. (2014). *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 27*, 209-222.
- Cawthon, S. W., & Cole, E. V. (2010). Postsecondary students who have a learning disability: Students perspectives on accommodations access and obstacles. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 23*, 112-128.
- DaDeppo, L. M. W. (2009). Integration factors related to academic success and intent to persist of college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 24*, 122-131.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology, 49*, 14-23.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227-268.
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage.
- Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1999). The importance of family involvement for promoting self-determination in adolescents with Autism and other developmental disabilities. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 14*(1), 36-41.
- Field, S., Sarver, M. D., & Shaw, S. F. (2003). Self-determination: A key to success in postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*, 339-349.
- Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). *A practical guide for teaching self-determination*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
- Forman, A. E., Baker, P. M. A., Pater, J., & Smith, K. (2011). Beautiful to me: Identity, disability, and gender in virtual environments. *International Journal of E-Politics, 2*, 1-17.
- Forsbach, T. A., & Rice-Mason, J. (2001). College students' utilization and perceptions of disability support services. *Academic Exchange Quarterly, 5*, 113.
- Getzel, E. E., & Thoma, C. A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 31*, 77-84.
- Getzel, E. E. (2008). Addressing the persistence and retention of students with disabilities in higher education: Incorporating key strategies and supports on campus. *Exceptionality, 16*, 207-219.
- Giorgi, A. (1975). An application of phenomenological method in psychology. *Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology, 2*, 82-103.
- Haller, B. A. (2006). Promoting disability-friendly campuses to prospective students: An analysis of university recruitment materials. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 26*, 14-31.
- Higher Education and Disability. (2009). *Education needs a coordinated approach to improve its assistance to schools in supporting students*. Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office.
- Hurst, D., & Hudson, L. (2005). Estimating undergraduate enrollment in postsecondary education using national center for education statistics data. National Center for Education statistics.
- Josselson, R. (2011). Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing story. In F. J. Wertz, *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*, 224-242. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Kielhofner, G., & Mallinson, T. (1995). Gathering narrative data through interviews: Empirical observations and suggested guidelines. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2*(2), 63-68.
- Koestner, R., & Losier, G. (2002). Distinguishing three ways of being highly motivated: A closer look at introjection, identification, and intrinsic motivation.

- Kurth, N., & Mellard, D. (2006). Student perceptions of the accommodation process in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 19*, 71-84.
- Levesque-Bristol, C., & Stanek, L. R. (2009). Examining self-determination in a service learning course. *Teaching of Psychology, 36*, 262-266.
- Marshak, L., Weiren, T. V., Ferrell, D. R., Swiss, L., & Dugan, C. (2010). Exploring barriers to college students use of disability services and accommodations. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*, 151-165.
- Martin, J. M. (2010). Stigma and student mental health in higher education. *Higher Education Research and Development, 29*, 259-274.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *Theory and Research in Education, 7*, 133-144.
- Olney, M. F., & Kim, A. (2001). Beyond adjustment: integration of cognitive disability into identity. *Disability and Society, 16*, 563-583.
- Perry, S. N., & Franklin, K. K. (2006). I'm not the gingerbread man! Exploring the experiences of college students diagnosed with ADHD. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 19*, 94-109.
- Reed, M. J., Kennett, D. J., Lewis, T., Lund Lucas, E., Stallberg, C., & Newbold, I. L. (2009). The relative effects of university success courses and individualized interventions for students with learning disabilities. *Higher Education Research & Development, 28*, 385-400.
- Reeve, J. (2009). Why teachers adopt a controlling motivating style toward students and how they can become more autonomy supportive. *Educational Psychologist, 44*, 159-175.
- Ryan, A. G. (1994). Life adjustments of college freshman with and without learning disabilities. *Annals of Dyslexia, 44*, 227-249.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychologist, 25*, 54-67.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*, 68-78.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York, New York: Teachers College Press: Columbia University.
- Shaw, S. F., Keenan, W. R., Madaus, J. W., & Banerjee, M. (2010). Disability documentation, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, and the summary of performance: How are they linked? *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22*, 142-150.
- Skinner, M. E., & Lindstrom, B. D. (2003). Bridging the gap between high school and college: Strategies for the successful transition of students with learning disabilities. *Preventing School Failure, 47*, 132-137.
- Skinner, M. E. (2004). College students with learning disabilities speak out: What it takes to be successful in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 17*(2), 91-104.
- Sparks, R. L., & Lovett, B. J. (2009). College students with learning disability diagnosis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*, 494-510.
- Troiano, P. F., Liefeld, J. A., & Trachtenberg, J. V. (2010). Academic support and college success for postsecondary students with learning disabilities. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 40*, 35-44.
- Test, D. W., Aspel, N. P., & Everson, J. M. (2006). Transition methods for youth with disabilities. U.S. Department of Education. (2009). National center for education statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Washington, D.C.
- Wehmyer, M. L., & Field, S. L. (2007). *Self-determination: Instructional and assessment strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Palmer, S. B. (2003). Adult outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities three-years after high school: The impact of self-determination. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 38*, 131-144.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1998). The relationship between self-determination and quality of life for adults with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 33*, 3-12.

Footnotes

¹ Upon registering with the DRS, students provide consent to be contacted by the DRS for reasons related to support services.

About the Authors

Amber O'Shea received her B.A. degree in Psychology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and her M.S. degree in Counseling from Florida State University. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Temple University. Her experience includes working as a mental health counselor and instructing courses on adolescent development and cognition and learning. Her research interests involve understanding the psychological, social, and motivational processes related to learning, particularly among individuals with disabilities in higher education. She can be reached by email at amber.oshea@temple.edu.

Rachel Meyer received her BA in Psychology from the University of Denver, a Masters in Counseling from John Carroll University and her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Temple University. Her experiences include working with severe and persistent mental illness, teaching in higher education and running a disability office at a small college in Cleveland, Ohio. Currently, she is a school psychologist at Denver Schools of Science and Technology (DSST) in Denver, Co. Her research interests include motivation, transitioning from high school to college, and college students with learning differences. She can be reached at: rachelhmeyer1@gmail.com.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Year	Disability Type	Timing of diagnosis
Mark	Male	Freshman	ADD, OCD*, Anxiety Disorder*	Pre-College
Tim	Male	Sophomore	Asperger's, OCD*, ADD*	Pre-College
Brian	Male	Sophomore	Asperger's, Seizure Disorder*	During College
Tony	Male	Junior	ADHD	During College
Marcus	Male	Junior	ADHD	Pre-College
Katie	Female	Sophomore	Learning Disability, Cognitive Short-term memory loss*	Pre-College
Lori	Female	Sophomore	ADD	Pre-College
Brittany	Female	Sophomore	ADHD	Pre-College
Susan	Female	Sophomore	ADHD	Pre-College
Julie	Female	Junior	ADHD, Test Anxiety*	Pre-College
Gail	Female	Junior	ADD, General Learning Disability*	Pre-College

Note. *Listed as second and third disability diagnosis.

Table 2

Themes and Categories in Students' Narratives

Theme and categories	Brief Description	Participants endorsing the construction
(1) Disability Construction		
(A) Self-attribute	Disability as a significant and stable self-aspect that requires significant attention	3 students (3 F)
(B) Minor irritation	Disability as a minor issue that can be addressed with a very specific service	2 students (1 M, 1 F)
(C) Ambivalence towards disability	Ambivalence regarding identifying oneself as having a disability	6 students (4 M, 2 F)
(2) High School		
(A) Positive support in high school	Utilized support services for disability while in high school	5 students (1 M, 4 F)
(B) Non-utilization in high school	Indication of disability in high school with no service utilization	2 students (2 F)
(3) Significant Adults		
(A) Submission to adults' guidance	Students relied on the assistance of significant adults.	7 students (4 M, 3 F)
(B) Collaborative empowerment	Students were empowered by the interaction with significant adults.	4 students (1 M, 3 F)
(4) Disability Resources and Services (DRS)		
(A) DRS as Club	Views DRS as a social setting for networking	2 students (2 F)
(B) DRS as Service Provider	Customer of disability resources and services	7 students (1 M, 6 F)
(C) DRS as Mentor	DRS staff as supporting and promoters of growth	6 students (3 M, 3 F)
(D) DRS as Just Another Service	Views DRS within the general services for students at the university	4 students (2 M, 2 F)
(5) Faculty		
(A) Constructive communication	Interaction with faculty, typically regarding a students' disability	11 students (5 M, 6 F)
(B) Service utilization	Other services provided by or set up by instructors in class, like note taking and office hours	7 students (2M, 5F)
(6) Peers		
(A) Stigma	Stigma associated with disabilities	6 students (3M, 3F)
(B) Acceptability	Open to disability disclosure	9 students (4M, 5F)
(C) Avoidance	Non-disclosure of disability or minimal peer interactions	4 students (2M, 2F)