

DISSERTATION

MAKING SENSE: THE ACADEMIC JOURNEYS OF WOMEN WITH LEARNING
DISABILITIES

Submitted by

Catherine Mary Blansett

School of Education

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2004

UMI Number: 3143813

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3143813

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346




COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

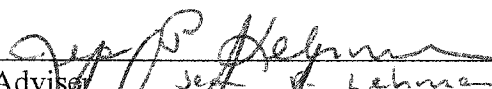
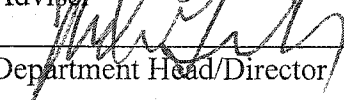
June 28, 2004

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY CATHERINE MARY BLANSETT ENTITLED MAKING SENSE: THE ACADEMIC JOURNEYS OF WOMEN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

(Please print name
under signature)

 Terry L. Deniston
 JAMES H. BANNING
 C.S. Schetz


Adviser Jeff Lehman

Department Head/Director RICK GINSBERG

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

MAKING SENSE: THE ACADEMIC JOURNEYS OF WOMEN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Postsecondary education for all students with disabilities has been encouraged by the trend to meet workforce demands, as well as legislation in support of education and the civil rights of children and adults with disabilities. Consequently, more women with learning disabilities are attending four-year public research universities. This qualitative study was undertaken to understand their academic success.

Thirteen women with learning disabilities who have attained the success of at least junior standing at a four-year public research university in the Southwest volunteered to share their academic journeys. Study participants are of varying ages, backgrounds, and differing disability labels. While participants differ greatly, still, themes run through their experiences that describe their paths to academic success. Their extraordinary honesty provides insight into how they compensate, from a very early age, when their perceptions of their experiences do not meet their expectations. Furthermore, their stories explain how they come to terms with this dissonance. Participant accounts portray a dynamic process that explains their journey, a process that helps them make sense of their experiences and allows them to move forward toward their goals.

Catherine Mary Blansett
School of Education
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Summer 2004

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the women who volunteered for this study. Their extraordinary honesty, self-determination, and courage are an inspiration to all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking the participants who volunteered for this study. I feel honored to have met them and to be allowed to tell their stories. Their willingness to be so honest has made a great contribution towards helping other girls and women with learning disabilities. A heartfelt thank you is also extended to the Resources for Students with Disabilities' director, and counselor, at the university from which participants were recruited. Their efforts and support for this project provided the needed exposure for potential participants, as well as encouragement for me.

Accolades also go out to my advisor and teacher, Dr. Jean Lehmann, for her consistent support and encouragement. Jean, you have taught me much more than you can begin to know. Your example will always be with me. I would also like to thank my committee members for their guidance. To begin, I want to thank Dr. Jim Banning for his lessons in qualitative analysis. Jim, your voice was a constant companion as I analyzed data. "Allow data to emerge" echoed in my mind as I read, and reread, transcripts of participant journey stories. Dr. Terry Deniston, a relatively new member on my committee, has offered suggestions that have allowed this study to grow beyond what I had originally considered; the final product is far better for it. Terry, thank you for your suggestions. Finally, my appreciation is extended to Dr. Mona C. S. Schatz. Thank you for your many years of support. We have a long history together. You have supported me in my M.S.W. program, as well as on my doctoral committee. The advice you have offered has always been invaluable.

I would also like to acknowledge the loving support of my family. Thank you Kelly for patiently, and lovingly, editing the journey stories. You held my hand till the very end with our frequent telephone talks and your words of encouragement. I am so lucky to have you as a best friend, as well as a terrific daughter. I also want to acknowledge the loving support of my son, Chris. He was always confident that I could go where my heart led me. His gentle push sent me on my way and his encouragement kept me going. I am also grateful for his, as well as my dear friend Annie's, willingness to keep copies of my work safe from harm. With copies squirreled away in Arizona, as well as Colorado, I was certain that my work would not be lost. Finally, I want to acknowledge my life partner, Jim. His love and support made this project possible. Thank you, Jim, for going on this wonderful adventure with me. I look forward to the next 20 years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VII
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	XIII
CHAPTER I.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Expanded Educational Requirements	2
The Changing Workforce and Individuals with Disabilities	4
Women, Gender Bias, Poverty, and Learning Disabilities	5
Gender Bias and Learning Disabilities	6
Unidentified Learning Disabilities in Girls.....	9
Identification of Learning Disabilities.....	9
Referrals to Special Education.....	10
Women, Learning Disabilities, and Longitudinal Studies.....	11
The Problem.....	12
Study Purpose	13
The Research Questions.....	14
Significance of this Study	14
Definition of Terms.....	15
Delimitation of the Study.....	16
Limitations of the Study.....	17
CHAPTER II.....	18
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Historical Background	19
Legislation in Support of Students with Learning Disabilities.....	20
The Definition Debate.....	22
Gender Equity and Gender Bias	25
Gender Equity	26
Gender Bias.....	27
AAUW - The Gender Gap	27
Gender Equity and Politics	29
A Chilly Climate for Women at College	31
Women Learn Less at College?	32
A Women's Voice	33
Communication, Gender, and Culture	34
Change and Postsecondary Students.....	36
College Students and Adult Success.....	37

College Students with Learning Disabilities.....	38
Accommodations, ADA, and Section 504.....	38
The College Classroom.....	40
The Expanding Classroom.....	40
Testing.....	41
Learning Outside the Classroom.....	42
The Library.....	43
Computer Labs and Technology Access.....	43
Programmatic Considerations.....	44
Internships and Field Placements.....	44
Course Substitutions.....	45
The Reality.....	49
Postsecondary Accommodations.....	49
Students in Postsecondary Education.....	50
A Chilly Climate for Students with Learning Disabilities.....	54
College Students with Unidentified Learning Disabilities.....	55
Differences Between Early Identified and Later Identified College Students.....	56
Learning Disabilities Diagnosis and a Sense of Self.....	57
Successful Adults with Learning Disabilities.....	59
Control.....	60
Internal Decisions.....	60
External Manifestations-Adaptability.....	61
Summary.....	62
CHAPTER III.....	65
METHODOLOGY.....	65
The Study.....	66
Research Questions.....	67
The Study Setting.....	67
Participant Selection.....	68
Data Collection.....	68
Data Analysis.....	70
Internal Validity.....	73
External Validity.....	73
Data Storage and Retrieval: The Database Approach.....	74
Investigator's Role.....	78
CHAPTER IV.....	82
JOURNEY STORIES.....	82
Naomi.....	82
Naomi's Background.....	83
Naomi's College Years.....	86
Learning Strategies and Accommodations.....	87
Naomi's Use of Technology.....	91

Success.....	91
Future Plans	91
Advice for the University.....	93
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	93
Christina.....	94
Christina's Background	94
Christina's College years	99
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	100
Assistive Technology:.....	104
Gender Issues.....	106
Success.....	107
Christina's Future Plans	110
Advice for the University.....	111
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	112
Dallas	113
Dallas' Background	113
Dallas' College Years.....	116
Accommodations and Strategies.....	121
Success.....	122
Dallas' Future Plans	122
Gender Issues.....	122
Advice for the University.....	124
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	124
Julia.....	125
Julia's Background.....	125
Julia's College Years	128
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	128
Success.....	132
Julia's Future Plans	132
Advice for the University.....	133
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	134
Abby.....	136
Abby's Background	137
Abby's College Years	140
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	143
Gender Issues.....	146
Success.....	148
Advice for the University.....	149
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	149
Samantha.....	149
Samantha's Background	150
Samantha's College Years.....	154
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	157

Roadblocks.....	163
Academic Success.....	165
Samantha's Future	166
Gender Issues	167
Advice for the University.....	168
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	170
Britt	171
Britt's Early Battles with Math.....	172
Britt's College Experience	174
Facing Her Learning Disability:	176
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	179
Gender Issues	181
Success.....	182
Britt's Future	182
Advice for the University.....	183
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	184
Lila.....	184
Lila's Background.....	185
Lila's College Years	188
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	189
Gender Issues	191
Success.....	191
Lila's Future.....	192
Advice for the University.....	194
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	195
Freya	195
Freya's Background.....	196
Freya's College Years	198
Accommodations and Strategies.....	204
Gender Issues	208
Success.....	209
Freya's Future.....	210
Advice for the University.....	210
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	211
Allison.....	213
Allison's Background	214
Allison's College Years	215
Accommodations and Strategies.....	220
Success.....	222
Future Plans	223
Advice for the University/Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities.....	224
Colleen	225
Colleen's Background.....	226

Community College	232
Attending a University	235
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	239
Colleen's Roadblocks	244
Gender Issues	246
Success	246
Future Plans	249
Advice for the University	250
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities	251
Maggie	252
Maggie's Background	253
Maggie's College Years	256
Learning Strategies and Accommodations	257
Gender Issues	258
Success	259
Maggie's Future Plans	259
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities	260
Zoey	260
Zoey's Early School Experiences	261
Zoey's College Years	262
Accommodations and Strategies	265
Success	267
Zoey's Future Plans	268
Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities:	270
Summary	270
CHAPTER V	272
THE DYNAMICS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS	272
Dissonance: Expectations vs. Experience	273
Personal Compensation Strategies	273
Being Quiet	274
Or, Not So Quiet	275
The Athletes	275
Sliding, Skirting, or Skating	276
Working Hard	276
Parental Intervention, or Hitting a Wall	277
Searching for Answers that Make Sense	278
Acceptance	279
Activation of New Strategies	280
Recap of the Dynamics of Academic Success Model	282
Summary	284
CHAPTER VI	286
FINAL THOUGHTS	286

Implications for Practice	287
Suggestions for Colleges and Universities	288
Addressing Differing Learning Needs	289
Self-determination Skills	292
Parental Support for Self-determination	293
Social Service Providers	293
Developing Compensation Skills.....	294
Further Research	295
REFERENCES	296
EPILOGUE	311
APPENDIX.....	314
LETTER OF INVITATION.....	315
INFORMED CONSENT.....	316
INTERVIEW GUIDE	318
HANDOUT/POSTER.....	319

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - General Information Screen	76
Figure 2 - Data Input Screen	77
Figure 3 - Report Choice.....	77
Figure 4 - Data Choice Screen.....	78
Figure 5 - Data Report	78
Figure 6 - Dynamics of Academic Success Model.....	282

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In today's economy, participation in postsecondary education is widely considered a necessary economic endeavor (Astin, 1993; Aune & Kroeger, 1997; Levine & Cureton, 1998). Desirable jobs are reserved for those with an education beyond a high school diploma or GED (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rodriguez & Ruppert, 1996). Students with disabilities aspire to enter professions or occupations that require postsecondary education (Henderson, 2001; Rojewski, 1996; 1999). Encouraged by the trends to meet workforce demands and legislation that supports the civil rights of individuals with disabilities, students with learning disabilities have become the fastest growing group of individuals requiring services at the postsecondary level of education; including college, university, vocational, and technical school settings (Gajar, 1998; Gajar & Smith, 1996; Henderson, 1999, 2001; Horn & Berkold, 1999a, 1999b).

Every year an increasing number of students with disabilities enter postsecondary education (HEATH, 1999; Horn & Berkold, 1999a; Lewis, Farris, & Westat, 1999). According to a U.S. Department of Education report (Horn & Berkold, 1999), successful college completers can expect careers and incomes comparable to their peers without disabilities. Data also show that earnings for students with disabilities who graduated from college are higher than for students who do not attend college. In spite of this need, there is evidence to suggest that girls with learning disabilities are slipping through the cracks and embark on their adult years with little understanding of their learning needs.

Many of these women become hopelessly enmeshed within the social service system. They have no understanding of why their efforts have gone wrong, or how to salvage their lives and that of their family.

Expanded Educational Requirements

Students with learning disabilities are attending postsecondary educational institutions at ever-increasing levels (Horn & Berktold, 1999a; Henderson, 1999). The transition of individuals with disabilities from secondary to postsecondary education has not happen within a vacuum, however. There have been three decades of development of supportive legislation, and two decades of government supported research that has been designed to understand and develop strategies that support the transition of students into a postsecondary environment (Smith, Dowdy, Polloway, & Blalock, 1997; Ward, 1996). Engaging in postsecondary education is an important aspect of these efforts. In addition, much of this effort has been spurred on by change in the national and global economy. These changes have made it clear that education beyond high school is necessary.

A rapidly changing global economy has not only fostered the necessity to engage in education beyond high school, it has also established the need for workers to continually upgrade skills. It has become widely accepted that education is a life-long prospect. In response to this need, postsecondary educational institutions have increasingly offered courses that allow adults to continually upgrade their skills. Changing economic conditions have shown that continued learning is a necessary

element of career planning in a global economy (Given, 2000; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Historically, formal education has proceeded in a linear fashion, with a clear endpoint: from kindergarten and elementary school, through high school, and (for some) to postsecondary programs, and finally the world of work. In the past, it was accepted that if individuals followed this path they would be rewarded with permanent employment and security for their retirement years. Economic change has forced many adults to reevaluate this view of the world in light of job cuts and corporate downsizing. These workers found that they were awakened to the harsh reality of having job skills that were obsolete and being in need of additional programs of study (Given, 2000). Further, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) found that “skills learned in preparation for a job or career cannot keep pace with the demands of the world of work, the ability to learn becomes a valuable skill in and of itself” (p. 13). Individuals with disabilities are no less affected by these conditions.

Stodden (2000) agrees that student's with disabilities must rise up to present-day standards:

The nation's labor market[s] have increased the importance of having a postsecondary education in order to be able to compete in the job market. Whether it is college, adult and continuing education, or technical preparation, postsecondary education plays a major role in preparing persons for employment and career opportunities. Students who continue their education after high school maximize their preparedness for careers in today's changing economy as they learn the higher order thinking and technical skills necessary to take advantage of current and future job market trends (p. 3).

The importance of supporting postsecondary efforts by people with disabilities is made even more evident by economic research.

The Changing Workforce and Individuals with Disabilities

Researchers have found that persons with disabilities are negatively and disproportionately affected by changes in general employment trends (Burkhauser, Daly, & Houtenville, 2001; Houtenville, 2000; Yelin, & Trupin, 1997, Yelin & Katz, 1994). During periods of recessions, 1970, 1974-75, 1981-82, 1990-91 (Steward, 2000), individuals with disabilities experienced a larger relative drop-off in employment in the areas of manufacturing than individuals without disabilities, while also experiencing a larger relative increase in employment services (Marty, 1997; Yelin & Katz, 1994).

People with disabilities, as with other minority groups, face labor market liabilities which often place them in the position of being the last-hired and the first-fired (Houtenville, 2000; Trupin, Sebesta, Yelin, & LaPlante, 1997). According to Houtenville (2000), the pattern of declining relative employment of those with a disability is both wide and deep. When the relative average employment rates during the expansion years of 1980s, specifically 1980 and 1983-1989 (Steward, 2000), are compared to those of the 1990s, 1992-1997 (Steward, 2000), the vast majority of states experienced declines in relative employment for both men and women with a disability.

Berkhauser and colleagues (2001) support these findings. Their research show that whereas employment and household income of all groups rose during the mid 1980s expansion, only the outcomes of working-age men and women without disabilities

continued to be procyclical (more positive in times of expansion, and negative in times of recession) in the 1990s. The employment rates of their counterparts with disabilities declined over the entire 1990s business cycle.

Stodden (2000) identifies these statistics as proof of the importance that postsecondary education plays in the lives of individuals with disabilities. In his view, access to postsecondary education becomes "much more critical" (p. 4). This stance is firmly supported when considering the clear relationship that has been established between disability, level of education, and adult employment (Benz, Doren & Yovanof, 1998; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Gilson, 1996; Reis, Neu, and McGuire, 1997). Gilson's (1996) research further offers support by showing that the completion of some type of postsecondary education, including vocational education, significantly improves the chances of men and women with disabilities of entering worthwhile and meaningful employment (also see Horn & Berktold, 1999). Accordingly, Stodden's (2000) research shows that the "employment rates for persons with disabilities show a stronger positive correlation between level of education and rate of employment than we see in statistical trends for the general population" (p. 4). Not all young women, however, have been allowed the choice to attend postsecondary education.

Women, Gender Bias, Poverty, and Learning Disabilities

In light of a continually changing workforce, there is a need for postsecondary education and the ability to participate in lifelong learning. However, there is evidence that girls have learning disabilities that are not identified in their early educational years

at the rate of boys (Shaywitz, 1996; Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Escobar, 1990; Vogel, 1990). Further, evidence suggests that these unidentified girls are disadvantaged as they approach their adult years and experience early parenthood and poor outcomes in the workforce. Unfortunately, this issue runs at cross-purposes to new welfare legislation. The focus on welfare reform and the subsequent passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) had as its main focus the time limitations for receiving TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) funds and increased workforce participation by all TANF recipients. These factors have caused the impact of learning disabilities experienced by poor women to become a national issue.

Studies of welfare recipients have begun to appear that support the claims that women are disadvantaged by undiagnosed learning disabilities (Giovengo, 1995; Giovengo, Young, & Moore, 1997; Giovengo, Moore, & Young, 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General, 1992; Moore & Snyder, 1994; Young, Gerber, Reder, & Cooper, 1996; Young, Kim, & Gerber, 1999; U. S. Dept. of Labor, 1991).

Gender Bias and Learning Disabilities

Young, Kim and Gerber (1999), in an analysis of articles relating to gender differences, have come to the conclusion that gender bias is experienced by girls who have not had their learning disabilities identified in the K-12 school years. Additionally, Young and colleagues present substantial evidence that there are long-term consequences as these girls advance into their adult years. It is these researchers' contention that:

Gender bias in the field of learning disabilities has put females at a distinct disadvantage during their school-age years and after they leave school. It has had an affect on how females are thought about in school achievement and in their classroom behavior. Ultimately, it has meant that females are at a higher risk because of lack of identification for special education services. The cumulative effects of gender bias contribute to an assortment of problems in adulthood that extend beyond the issue of learning disabilities and into broader social issues including poverty. Gender bias is also now part of the discussion of the federal welfare-to-work initiative. (p. 107).

According to Young and colleagues (1999), researchers concur that low-literacy skills, undiagnosed learning disabilities, teenage motherhood, and teen mother's use of welfare programs have been linked (Giovengo, 1995; Giovengo, Young, & Moore, 1997; Giovengo, Moore, & Young, 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General, 1992; Moore & Snyder, 1994; Young, Gerber, Reder, & Cooper, 1996; U. S. Dept. of Labor, 1991). In the eyes of these researchers, unidentified learning disabilities and learning difficulties have kept girls away from needed interventions and services and "greatly increased the likelihood of teen pregnancy, teen motherhood, school failure, and subsequent use of welfare programs" (p. 107).

These researchers have received support for their observations from a report from the Inspector General's Office of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services entitled *Functional Impairments of AFDC Clients* (1992). This report states that:

Many AFCD (welfare) clients (approximately 95% females) do not have a high school diploma or equivalent which...is due in large part to the widespread existence of learning disabilities...Many clients were...never identified as learning disabled and never received special education. Most were not even aware of their problems. (p. 7)

The Inspector General's report and a 1991 report from the U. S. Department of Labor, *The learning disabled in employment and training*, state that as many as 40-50 percent of AFDC (now TANF) and JOBS (a federal job training program) clients could have undiagnosed learning disabilities. The report suggests these participants with learning disabilities have had their ability to obtain work, and their life skills for self-sufficiency impacted by having learning disabilities that they are not aware of. More to the point, others who are directing the job seeking efforts on behalf of these women are not aware of these difficulties either and may be pushing these women into impossible situations (Brown & Gerber, 1994; Young, Gerber, Reder, & Cooper, 1996).

Responding to this information, the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and their Seattle Regional Office, in coordination with Washington State and several non-profit organizations, set out to understand if there were high rates of learning disabilities in populations serviced by ACF programs. Their findings showed high rates of learning disabilities in both welfare and runaway youth populations (Giovengo, 1995; Giovengo et al., 1997; Giovengo et al., 1998). Vogel (1998) reports studies of TANF recipients in both the States of Washington and Kansas indicated that the prevalence of learning disabilities among TANF recipients was approximately 30% for each state (Giovengo et al., 1998; Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, 1997, 1998).

Unidentified Learning Disabilities in Girls

Young and colleagues (1999) believe there are two issues that support gender bias in unidentified girls: (1) the widely held belief that males are more likely than females to have learning disabilities (Shaywitz, 1996; Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Escobar, 1990; Vogel, 1990) and, (2) referrals to special education in schools appear to be based more on oppositional behaviors in the classroom rather than poor academic achievement or deficits (Gregory, 1977; McIntyre, 1988; Naiden, 1976; Shinn, Tindal, & Spira, 1987; Vogel, 1990).

Identification of Learning Disabilities

While some women with learning disabilities are diagnosed at a young age, many slip through the formal educational system and remain unrecognized into adulthood. Vogel (1990) suggests that girls who are identified early often have behavioral characteristics that make them stand out, they usually have lower IQ scores, and experience more severe learning disabilities. Another factor for consideration is that not all children with learning disabilities are being allowed services. Some states deny the needs of children with this condition by limiting the number they "allow" to have this diagnosis (Anderson, 1994, Levine, 1989; Vogel & Adelman, 1993). Additionally, another factor in identification could be that the term "learning disability" and the diagnostic tools used for assessing this condition are relatively recent, and have been controversial (Brinkerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2002). Still, other reports offer significant support for the argument of gender bias.

Anderson (1997) reports that her findings show the population of students with learning disabilities is "predominantly male" (p. 150). She cites several studies as evidence: a US Department of Education study reported that 72% of the students with learning disabilities were male; Vogel's (1990) study estimated a ratio as high as 15 males for every female identified, and Kavale and Reese's 1992 Iowa study revealed that 70 percent of their sample of students with learning disabilities were males. These reports are in direct opposition to studies that show boys and girls are equally as likely to have learning disabilities (Shaywitz, 1996; Shaywitz, 1990; Shaywitz et al., 1990; Vogel, 1990).

Referrals to Special Education

Kavale and Reese (1992) found that 74% of the pupils in their Iowa study were referred by teachers. Additionally, Yesseldyke, and colleagues (Yesseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, & Deno, 1983) found that teacher referrals carried heavy weight regarding placements of students in special education, which resulted in 73% of the referrals being made by teachers.

Anderson's (1997) overview of the literature revealed factors that contributed to a teacher's referral such as preconceived notions and behavior. She cites Gregory's (1977) study which found that teachers who were told to make a referral of hypothetical students (information included gender) referred boys more often than girls, despite identical profiles. In addition, Yesseldyke et al. (1983) present evidence that teachers more often refer students that "bother" them in the

classroom. In line with these researchers, Shaywitz and Shaywitz (1985)

concluded:

A selected referral may represent an important factor in determining the sex ratio, i.e., boys with attentional problems and hyperactivity are more likely than girls to be referred for evaluation because they exhibit more disruptive behaviors that are troublesome to adults" (p. 801).

Vogel (1990) and Naiden (1976) also corroborate these findings.

Anderson (1997) offers findings by Sadker and Sadker (1994) to add another dimension to the gender debate. These researchers report that, on the surface, girls appear to be doing well. They often get better grades, receive fewer punishments, and are quieter and more conforming, passive and waiting (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Leinhardt, Seeward, & Zigmond, 1982). Conversely, boys are "more difficult to manage....The result is that girls receive less time, less help, and fewer challenges" (p. 155). Sadker and Sadker (1994) feel that these factors reinforce passivity and assaults girls' independence and self-esteem.

Women, Learning Disabilities, and Longitudinal Studies

Researchers (Giovengo et al., 1998; Giovengo et al., 1997; Seiler, 2001; Kansas, 1997, 1998; Vogel 1998; Young, et al., 1998; Young, et al., 1999) point to studies that conclude that women with undiagnosed learning disabilities are linked to teenage motherhood and long-term welfare dependency. The argument that special education services alone are the answer to success for these women, however, is not supported by the longitudinal data that is available. Longitudinal studies of special education students show that all individuals with learning

disabilities do less well than their peers without disabilities (Levine, 1993; Levine & Edgar, 1995; Rojewski, 1996; Vogel & Adelman, 1992). However, females are experiencing even less success in terms of attendance at postsecondary educational institutions, completion of their postsecondary degrees, and work outcomes, than their male counterparts (Haring & Lovett, 1990; Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989; Kranstover, Thurlow, & Bruininks, 1989; Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990; Wagner, 1992).

The Problem

Considering the demands of a changing workforce and the need for lifelong learning, as well as the 1996 welfare legislation that has required time limits and increased workforce participation by women receiving TANF funds, the impact of learning disabilities that are experienced by poor women has become a national issue. While research has linked the poverty of these women with learning disabilities, there is little research pointing to supports for success. Unfortunately, women with learning disabilities who have achieved success in their academic pursuits have not been visible. Studies of postsecondary educational supports for students with learning disabilities have not seen women as having specific needs and have combined data as though there is one universal gender experience - predominantly male.

Studies focusing on women with learning disabilities are virtually non-existent at every level of postsecondary education. Research has focussed on mixed-gender studies. While these studies have included women, the majority of participants were male. The result is that these studies contribute little to the knowledge of how women experience

their learning disabilities, or how women with learning disabilities support their academic success. By lumping both genders into one, researchers have assumed similar experiences.

Additionally, research has shown that unidentified learning disabilities have contributed to the lack of success for women entering their postsecondary adult lives. On the other hand, women who have had their learning disabilities identified when they were in their K-12 school years are also likely to experience the same poverty and unsuccessful workforce outcomes. It seems clear that we do not understand what contributes to successful outcomes for women with learning disabilities, whether they have had their learning disabilities identified in their early school years, or later in college.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is twofold: to explore how women who have learning disabilities and have reached at least junior standing in a four-year public research university perceive and describe experiences and factors that have supported their academic success during (a) their K-12 school years; and, (b) during their postsecondary education years. Through this investigation, the emphasis on the academic success of these women has placed a focus on success rather than failure. According to Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1993):

The voices of successful adults with learning disabilities are essential for understanding what can be accomplished and which kinds of approaches lead to success; in contrast, traditional perspectives have focused largely on what could not be achieved. It is essential that conceptualizations of learning disabilities recognize the possibilities for significant achievement. (p. 124)

By using a phenomenological research design, this study has given voice to the experiences and factors that have directed the academic efforts of these women and have offered meaning to their lives. It has provided an opportunity to discover the experiences that have informed their academic success and their ability to navigate their K-12 school years. This study has uncovered the voices of these women and has allowed them to tell their story. Studies have often focused on what has gone wrong; this study has focused on what has gone right. Through the voices of the 13 women who volunteered for this project, we begin to understand how women with learning disabilities make sense of their frustrations and reach their academic and personal goals. Participants in this study feel that gaining an understanding of their learning needs has caused them to make sense of their academic frustrations and has negated their feelings of being "stupid." Without this understanding most were floundering hopelessly and flirting with failure. Making sense of their learning challenges became a passion for them, and their salvation.

The Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

- (a) How do study participants perceive and describe experiences and factors during their K-12 school years that have contributed to their academic success?
- (b) How do study participants perceive and describe experiences and factors during their postsecondary education that have contributed to their academic success.

Significance of this Study

This study informs future transition efforts for all students with learning disabilities, their teachers, and administrators. Data from this research provides needed perspective that can inform programs designed at both K-12 and postsecondary educational levels that support girls and women with learning disabilities, as well as social service programs. This study also brings to light profiles of girls (and women) who do not represent the present understanding of characteristics that are considered diagnostic indicators. Finally, parents and families of girls with learning disabilities, whether labeled, or not, have the opportunity to gain new perspectives into learning disabilities and how girls and women respond to their challenges.

Definition of Terms

Academic Success: Success can mean many things. In essence, success could be identified according to the values and goals of each individual. Within this line of reasoning, the definition of academic success varies also. For the purpose of this study, however, "academic success" means having achieved at least junior standing (a minimum of 60 credits) in a four-year public research university and not being on academic probation.

Gender Bias: "Bias" refers to a "preference, or an inclination, especially one that inhibits impartial judgement" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition (1992, p. 181). Therefore, gender bias refers to an inclination toward a view of gender that causes a preference, or inclination that inhibits impartial judgement.

Gender Equity: Equity is derived from equal, "having the same privilege, status, or rights (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1992, p. 620). Therefore equity is the "state or quality of being equal" (p. 621). Gender refers to "sexual identity, especially in relation to society or culture (p. 754). Gender equity is allowing the same privilege, status, or rights to both socially and culturally described sexual identities.

Learning Disabilities: The participants in this study have self-identified as having one or more learning disabilities. The focus of a phenomenological study is to give voice to its participants. With this in mind, it is their individual explanations that define their experience of learning disabilities.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited by demographic features specific to the public four-year research university attended by the study participants. The university is located in the southwestern area of the United States. Research participants have met the highly competitive admissions requirements of this university. They have attained at least junior status (60 credits) and are not on academic probation. Participants have been recognized by this institution as having one or more learning disabilities and have met the criteria for qualification as a student with learning disabilities as established by the Disability Resources Office of the University.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study includes only women with learning disabilities at a four-year public research institution in the southwestern United States, the findings may not be relevant for women in other postsecondary settings. Additionally, men also have learning disabilities that may or may not have been recognized in early schooling, this study may not be representative of their experiences.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This study was initiated to explore and describe the experiences of women who have learning disabilities and have reached the success of at least junior standing in a four-year public research university. A review of the research literature has found that there are sparse offerings that specifically addressed success, supports, or learning strategies of women with learning disabilities at a four-year public research university. In addition, articles and books that discuss academic accommodations for these women are starkly absent from the literature. Therefore, in order to provide some context concerning experiences that could support women with learning disabilities at four-year institutions, we have explored topics that may have an affect on these women and their academic success. Our search explored the literature regarding: legislation in support of individuals with disabilities; gender bias in education; gender, communication, and culture; hopes and fears of college students; postsecondary education and supports for students with disabilities; postsecondary education and accommodations for students with learning disabilities; faculty attitudes; college students with unidentified learning disabilities; and, successful adults with learning disabilities. The literature for this review was identified in online databases provided by Colorado State University's Morgan Library. Databases used were: Dissertation Abstracts; Nexis Lexis; Wilson Select; Northern Lights; and, EBSCO Academic Search Premier. In addition, the World Wide Web was searched

which identified many organizational and government articles that offered valuable statistics and perspectives.

Historical Background

The focus on learning disabilities started at a 1963 conference sponsored by a group of parents who founded the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD). At this conference, Samuel Kirk, a noted leader in the field of special education, was the first person to use the term learning disabilities. Following the 1963 conference, advocacy groups, and professional and parent organizations, formed that focussed on learning disabilities, legislation affecting individuals with learning disabilities, and the rise of educational services for students with learning disabilities. Smith and colleagues (Smith, Dowdy, Poloway, & Blalock, 1997) explain that these groups were the key element in the rapid expansion of interest in learning disabilities. With the aid of their efforts, major pieces of legislation were passed that affected both children and adults.

Legislation included:

- (a) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- (b) Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act
- (c) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the 1990 reauthorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and its Amendments.
- (d) P.L. 101-336, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990.

These pieces of legislation resulted in increased services and protections for both children and adults.

Legislation in Support of Students with Learning Disabilities

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination based on physical or mental disability (29 U.S.C Section 794). It states that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Section 504, applies to all institutions, agencies and organization that receive federal funding, including preschool, elementary, middle, and secondary schools, postsecondary vocational educational institutions, adult education programs, and colleges and universities. Additionally, Section 504 mandates that auxiliary aids must be provided for students with disabilities attending these institutions. Failure to do so would be considered discriminatory and could result in denial of program funding. This was an important step in providing access for individuals with learning disabilities. However, there was much work left to be done.

Access to general education for students with disabilities was accomplished by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142). This law guarantees all children and youth with disabilities a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), in the least restrictive environment (LRE). It also mandates individualized education plans (IEP) and provides federal funding for special education. By the end of the decade, with PL 94-142 in place, thousands of children and youth with disabilities attended public schools for the first time (Ward, 1996).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), along with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, set the stage for a new phase of policy implementation. Through these laws, and their regulations, recipients of federal funds for special education were mandated to provide each child with a disability an education tailored to his or her individual education needs. Public Law 94-142 requires a free and appropriate education, in the least restrictive environment, and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Section 504 specifies a requirement for program accessibility for all public services, and it outlines regulations specifically for elementary, secondary, and higher education. Section 504 stipulates that institutions of higher education must avoid discrimination against otherwise qualified students in terms of admissions, educational service, housing, financial aid, and nonacademic programs. It also requires academic adjustments be made to ensure that normal educational requirements do not have the effect of discriminating against qualified students with disabilities.

These pieces of legislation began to make a new determination regarding the way people with disabilities were viewed and treated, as well as fostered increased numbers of students with disabilities seeking access to colleges, universities, and vocational technical programs (Vogel & Adelman, 1992; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Benz, Doren & Yovanoff, 1998; Henderson, 1999, 2001; Horn & Berkold, 1999; Stodden, 1998). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (Horn & Berkold, 1999), in the 1995-96 school year about 6 percent of undergraduates (includes both two-year and four-year institutions) reported that they had a disability. Taking into consideration all disability categories for women in this report: 31.4 percent experienced "learning

disabilities", 22.7 percent "orthopedic impairment", 18 percent "visual impairment," 22.5 percent experienced "other disability or impairment", 12.8 percent "hearing impairment or deaf", and 1.8 percent experienced "speech impairment" (Horn & Berkold, 1999, p. 8).

Lewis, Farris, and Westat (1999) reported that individuals with learning disabilities composed almost half of all students with disabilities at two- and four-year institutions. Additionally, Henderson (2001) reported college freshman with learning disabilities at four-year educational institutions continued to be the fastest growing group of full-time freshman. By 2000, two in five freshmen with disabilities reported having a learning disability. Although all students with learning disabilities were more likely to attend a public two-year institution (86,750 compared to 71,160) (Lewis, Farris, & Westat, 1999), men with learning disabilities were more likely to be full-time freshman at four-year institutions (43.2 males and 37.4 females) (Henderson, 2001).

The Definition Debate

While students with learning disabilities are flocking to postsecondary educational institutions, it is not always clear how they will be defined. Brinkerhoff and colleagues (Brinkerhoff et al., 2002) explain that definitions of learning disabilities have been controversial. This has caused a heated debate. While many definitions pertain to children, only a few have enough breadth to make them relative to adults (Mellard, 1990; Smith, Dowdy, Polloway, & Blalock, 1997).

In an attempt to align efforts, Brinkerhoff et al. (2002) have identified Hammill's (1990) review of 11 major definitions of learning disabilities and his subsequent model as

an important effort worth paying attention to. Hammill's synthesis found many of the definitions of learning disabilities included:

- (a) Learning disabilities exist throughout the lifespan.
- (b) There are intra-individual differences.
- (c) Central nervous system dysfunction may be involved with some learning disabilities.
- (d) Problems such as disruption in the process of memory, attention, or cognition make proficient performance in some skill or ability areas difficult.
- (e) Academic problems (e.g., problems in reading, writing, spelling, or math), language problems (e.g., problems listening, speaking, or writing), or conceptual problems (e.g., problems thinking or reasoning) can be problems of learning disabilities, and
- (f) Learning disabilities can coincide with other disabilities.

An aspect of existing definitions that Hammill (1990) left out of his model pertains to the aptitude-achievement debate. Brinkerhoff and colleagues (2002) suggest that problems arise when defining learning disabilities as a discrepancy between aptitude and achievement. Citing authors Mather and Healey (1990) and Swanson (1993), Brinkerhoff et al. report:

One major drawback is that, in some cases, a learning disability adversely affects performance on both the aptitude and the achievement measures used to diagnose it, resulting in a profile that does not meet discrepancy criteria but nonetheless is LD. (p. 112)

Putting these factors together, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 1994), which is composed of nine organizations, including the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Council of Learning Disabilities, and the National Association of School Psychologists, developed the following definition of learning disability as:

A general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities, but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of these conditions or influences. (NJCLD, 1994, pp. 65-66).

This definition is the one that is most accepted for adults with learning disabilities. Reflecting the understanding of many researchers (Buchanan & Wolf, 1986; Cowen, 1986, 1988; Gerber, Schnieders, Paradise, Reiff, Ginsberg, & Popp, 1990; Hammill, 1990; Rogan & Hartman, 1990; Spreen, 1988), the definition recognizes learning disabilities as a lifelong phenomenon, heterogeneous in manifestation, and coexisting with a number of other disabling conditions. Researchers also recognized that by adulthood, individuals usually develop compensatory strategies for coping with learning disabilities so the manifestation of learning disabilities in adults is more diverse than in children (Goldstein, 1997; Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1993, 1997). Additionally,

as individuals with learning disabilities age, and as life's demands grow and change, compensating for difficulties may become increasingly complex (Hill, 1984; Gerber, Reiff, & Ginsberg, 1997; Gerber & Reiff, 1994; Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1997).

Gender Equity and Gender Bias

Researchers know that children and adults may have significant problems with their ability to learn, or display their knowledge, in an academic environment. For women, this topic is made more complex by adding in other factors such as gender equity and gender bias.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (1992), gender refers to "sexual identity, especially in relation to society or culture" (p. 754). Gender encompasses not only the concept of sex, but also the social and cultural meanings attributed to being female or male. Equity is derived from equal, "having the same privilege, status, or rights" (p. 621). Therefore equity is the "state or quality of being equal" (p. 621). Putting these definitions together, gender equity refers to allowing the same privilege, status, or rights to both socially and culturally described sexual identities.

On the other hand, when looking at gender bias we consider bias as a "preference, or an inclination, especially one that inhibits impartial judgement" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1992, p. 181). Therefore, gender bias refers to an inclination toward a view of gender that causes a preference, or an inclination that inhibits impartial judgement. This section provides a brief overview of legislation that supports gender equity as well as an exploration of gender bias in education.

Gender Equity

Several pieces of legislation have made gender equity a legal requirement. The basis of this legislation is Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on gender in educational programs that receive federal funds. In 1974, Congress passed the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974 (WEEA) to fund research, materials, and training to help schools eliminate gender bias. WEEA projects ranged from helping schools comply with Title IX to recruiting girls into math and science. In 1978, the Civil Rights Act was broadened to include educational services to eliminate gender bias. This broadening allowed for the creation of 10 gender desegregation assistance centers to assist teachers, parents, and students in developing nonsexist programs (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Although the 1980s and a conservative administration derailed much of the efforts that were accomplished during the 1970s (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), the passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 emphasized making vocational education accessible to all students, including women. Grants were developed for single parents, homemakers, and young women. Equity program grants were intended to encourage self-sufficiency and eliminate sex-role stereotyping and discrimination in vocational education.

Gender Bias

Even though the 1980s brought the National Institute of Education, a federal research agency, into the trend toward gender equity by providing limited funding to investigate the nature of gender bias in schools, hopes for Title IX were being dimmed. While the laws were on the books, political forces set out to disassemble programs and many schools did not take the laws seriously. Cosmetology and secretarial courses for girls were still being recommended, rather than mathematics and science courses that would provide a platform for new workforce demands; pregnancy was grounds for expulsion of teenaged mothers, while teenaged fathers were continuing with their education; more money was being spent on athletics for boys; and, college scholarships were being awarded ten times as often to males rather than equally qualified females (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). It was clear; laws did not quickly change minds. However, the American Association of University Women offered added impetus for a continued focus on gender equity.

AAUW - The Gender Gap

In the 1980s, The American Association of University Women Education Foundation commissioned a study to understand if there was a gender gap within the educational system. This study involved a synthesis and analysis of all of the articles and studies that addressed girls in K-12 education up to 1992. The product of this effort, *How schools shortchange girls*, was published in 1992. According to the AAUW (1998), this watershed report catalyzed the educational community in their efforts to address this issue and prompted efforts to improve education for all students.

The AAUW Educational Foundation has had a long history of promoting equity for women. In the forward to their 1992 report, Alice McKee (AAUW, 1992), then president of the AAUW Educational Foundation, informs us that AAUW's first national study was held in 1885. This study was "initiated to dispel the commonly held myth that education was harmful to women's health" (p. i). Still working to dispel myths, the AAUW's 1992 and 1998 reports tackle girls' ability to gain the skills necessary to prepare for a changing workforce.

According to the foundation report (AAUW, 1992, p. i):

A well-educated [workforce] is essential to the country's economic development, yet girls are systematically discouraged from courses of study essential to their future employability and economic well-being. Girls are being steered away from the very courses required for their productive participation in the future of America, and we as a nation are losing more than one-half of our human potential. (p. i).

The 1992 report stated that for over two decades girls have been left out of the education debate. It was contended that the invisibility of girls was a result of "assuming girls and boys have the same educational experience" (AAUW, 1992, 1). The study found contributions and experiences of girls and women were marginalized or ignored in many textbooks used in schools, and girls were not encouraged to take math and science courses. Additionally, it was found that test scores provided an inaccurate picture of girls' and boys' abilities.

In 1998, the AAUW engaged in another study of the literature regarding gender and education. An analysis of approximately 1,000 research documents between 1990 and 1998 showed clear progress in the direction of research regarding girls in education

and showed that girls "were probably" receiving a fairer education than in 1992. This was good news, however there were still problem areas of concern: girls were still being tracked into traditional female occupations; they lacked access to computer technology knowledge; and, transition from school-to-work needed additional research. During the eight-year period of the study there was also a "profound reshaping of American education to address changes in the workforce and to address students' educational performance" (p. 1).

In an effort to comply with educational legislation that focused on the creation of high standards for all students within a rigorous learning environment, the educational landscape became more complex and diverse (e.g. home-schooling, vouchers, alternative forms of education). Additional concerns were changing demographics and a growing reliance on computer technology. Along with these new issues came a questioning of the single gender focus. Addressing this complaint, the 1998 AAUW report suggested that there is a need to define all students and what they need.

When equity is the goal, all gaps in performance warrant attention, regardless of whether they disadvantage boys or girls. Rather than hold girls to boys' standards, or vice versa, schools need to give students the resources each needs to achieve a universally held high standard (p. 2).

It appears that gender issues were set to take a back seat to new concerns.

Gender Equity and Politics

Sadker and Sadker (1994) explain that this is not the first time that gender equity has been shoved aside. As a result of a feminist backlash, the Reagan-Bush administration aimed directly at the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), a

program that helped to enforce Title IX. The Reagan administration reorganized the Department of Education into federal block grants in an effort to eliminate federal jurisdiction. Sadker and Sadker feel this was an effort to "consolidate WEEA out of existence" (p. 38). Relying on a panel of judges that now included members from Phillis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and Bob Jones University, which made the panel "extremely conservative" (p. 38), existing programs were not funded. According to Sadker and Sadker, "these new reviewers were neither education experts nor supporters of equity" (p. 38). Projects were rejected on the grounds that sex discrimination does not exist and that gender differences are the result of "the fact that boys and girls are born with certain desires" (Faludi, 1991).

The Reagan administration fired equity experts and transferred those who could not be fired. These experts were surprised at the lengths that were attained and the cleverness of the administration in dismantling their efforts. One educational professional was quoted as saying "their tactics were right on target. They knew just how to demolish the programs we had spent years building" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 40). Approximately 6 years after being fired by the Reagan administration, Leslie Wolf, the director of the WEEA program, won her sex discrimination complaint. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found in her favor and denounced "a pattern" of sex discrimination at the National Institute of Education during the 1980s.

A Chilly Climate for Women at College

Similar to conditions in K-12 education that were addressed by the AAUW, women in college also felt the effects of gender bias. In the terms of Hall and Sandler (1982), they faced a "chilly classroom climate." Hall and Sandler's research revealed that women sat silently as their male peers received the majority of the professors' attention. Professors made more eye contact with men, waited longer for them to answer, and were more likely to remember their names. This discovery led these authors to conclude that women were robbed of knowledge and self-esteem through their college experience. Similarly, Sadker and Sadker (1994) and Krupnick (1992) saw this gender divide, "where males performed and women watched" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 170). Further, Sadker and Sadker, in an evaluation of college textbooks, found that while all textbooks fell short in addressing women (1% addressed gender issues), science and mathematics books were the least likely to include images or references to girls or women. One book was found that offered information on how to pay females less money than males, and another author explained that "boys will not read 'girls books' but girls will read 'boy books.'" Still, another science textbook advised that girls "know less, do less, explore less, and are prone to be more superstitious than boys" (p. 174). Sadker & Sadker (1994) suggest that "women in higher education are frequently aware that their lives are left out of books, and they feel excluded from a recorded culture that is not their own" (p. 175).

While undergraduates were received with less than warm embraces, women entering graduate or professional education found their experience even more chilling. Sadker and Sadker (1994) suggest that "for women, higher education gets colder by degrees" (p. 186). As proof of this statement, Sadker & Sadker cite the accounts of educational experiences of women at Yale Law School which described their classrooms as "frozen in an icy climate zone, an extreme macho culture that they had never experienced before" and "laboratories for the release of aggression" (p. 188). Likewise, medical schools offered the same chilly climate beginning with admissions, which resulted in questions regarding a female's plans for marriage and children.

Women Learn Less at College?

Apart from the chilly climate that college women endure, recently researchers (Flowers, Osterlind, Pascarella, & Pierson, 2001) have found evidence to suggest that women do not learn as much in college. In order to understand how much undergraduates learned in English, math, science, and social studies, 19,000 students at 56 four-year colleges and universities in 13 states were included in research that used the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBASE) to examine learning between their freshman and senior years. Flowers and his colleagues came up with unexpected results: their findings showed that women appear to learn only two-thirds of what men learn in their college years. Pascarella, a co-author of this report, when interviewed (Clayton, 2001) stated that he was "disconcerted" by these findings, "we're the first to have found this gender effect, at least so far as I know" (p. 14). Pascarella was a bit skeptical of these

findings until they could be replicated. He did not feel that this indicated that males were smarter than females, "We don't know what the results mean. But we do know that lots of time, our [American higher education] is male oriented, and that may be part of what's happening here" (p. 14). Flowers and colleagues (2001) feel that their research tends to support the contention made by several researcher (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, Hall & Sandler, 1982; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Seymore, 1995) that postsecondary education is a gendered experience. If this is the case, Flowers and colleagues suggest that there may be sex-based classrooms, and organizational, or environmental differences "woven into the fabric of postsecondary institutions that lead to women making smaller knowledge gains than men" (p. 574).

A Women's Voice

The focus on gender equity in the 1970s caused formal theories of development and learning to come under attack and new theories brought forth to explain gender differences. One work that is often referred to along this line is Gilligan's (1982) *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan particularly singled out Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral development model and his account of women. Kohlberg projected that women were less moral than men. In Kohlberg's view, women were considered to be at stage three in moral development (this stage was characterized by caring about others), while men were more highly developed at stage four, which Kohlberg sees as behavior that acts in accordance with rules and laws that maintain social order. Gilligan took offense to this characterization and pointed

out that Kohlberg's model had been constructed from an all-male research sample. This prompted Gilligan to develop a new model in which women reasoned with a different voice, one of connection and caring. Gilligan's book reached cult status in the 1980s and reframed how women were seen (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). As Sadker and Sadker (1994) point out, the problem then was the "disconnected male who did not care or love enough" (p. 228).

Communication, Gender, and Culture

Wood (1999) considers present-day gender identity confusing. She explains that anyone socialized in America in the past 20 or so years is likely to have a number of attitudes about gender. These attitudes are not necessarily the attitudes of grandparents or even parents. In view of the cultural, economic, and technical changes that have taken place during these 20 years, it is doubtful that men would be described as "the" breadwinners or women's lives contained to that of a homemaker. Yet, according to Wood's research, these images still call to us. She contends that society is in a transitional period, which leaves participants with confused attitudes. Today's men and women are likely to think that both genders should engage in working and homemaking. However, Wood's research has shown that there are definite conflicts between what is traditional and what is modern. As an example, she cites a quote from a young man who has been asked to think about women fighting in a war. Michael, as Wood calls him, admits that he is really uncomfortable in thinking about this because as he puts it:

I think one way but I feel another. I do think that women should have to serve just as much as men do. I've never thought it was right that they didn't have to fight. And I think women are just as competent as men at most things, and could

probably be good soldiers. But then when I think about my mom or my sister or my girlfriend being in the trenches, having to kill other people, maybe being a prisoner who is tortured and assaulted, I just feel that's wrong. It doesn't seem right for women to be involved in killing when they're the ones who give life. Then, too, I want to protect my girlfriend and sister and mom from the ugliness and danger of war. But then this other part of me says, 'Hey, guy, you know that kind of protectiveness is a form of chauvinism.' I just don't know where I stand on this except that I'm glad I don't have to decide whether to send women into combat! (p. 17).

It is clear that there are new considerations. Wood suggests that in grappling with issues like this:

We discover that our attitudes are less than clear even to ourselves. On one level many of us think women and men are equal in all important respects; yet, on another level where deeply ingrained values and belief reside, we have some very traditional views. The conflict in our own attitudes and values--the clash between ideals of two distinct eras-- makes us unsure of what we really believe and of who we really are. (p. 18).

Wood contends that this dilemma of thought is proof that we are living in a transitional time in which former views are no longer embraced, yet new views are not comfortably in place.

In Wood's (1998) view, terms like "men" and "women" are troublesome because they "imply a sameness across all women and all men...thinking and speaking as if all women are alike and all men are alike." She feels that this practice is an attempt to reduce either sex to certain essential characteristics. According to Wood, relying on these descriptions of what it is to be a woman or a man "obscures the range of characteristics possessed by individual women and men and conceal differences among members of each sex" (p.19).

Wood is speaking to the need to be open to the idea of what a man or woman is in terms of ever-evolving experiences that are shaped by social considerations and personal needs. In this dynamic process, the present contains elements of the traditional sense of who men and women are, as well as elements of the need for these labels to contain something different than had been considered. Levine and Cureton (1998) also suggest a time of transition in which today's college students are losing their understanding about where they fit into the scheme of things.

Change and Postsecondary Students

Levine and Cureton (1998), in their book *When Hope and Fear Collide*, have presented a picture of the transition period that Wood sees, and the impact it has had on college students. This book continued from Levine's previous work, *When Dreams and Heroes Died*, which was a portrait of college students in the late 1970s. Levine was encouraged that a group that was so pessimistic about their country could be so optimistic about their own lives. This optimism of undergraduates continued through the 1980s. It was not until the 1990s that Levine began finding a drastic change in the yearly data he was collecting. Levine and Cureton's research through the 1990s shows that students, more than ever, believe in the American dream. They still want good jobs, financial success, meaningful relationships, and a family. While 90s students are still optimistic, they are also afraid and feel that everything is falling apart. They worry that they "will not be able to find jobs, afford a family, be able to pay back their student loans, or even avoid moving back home with their parents" (Levine & Cureton, 1998, xv). Levine and

Cureton suggest that the students of the 90s have broken the pattern that was seen through the 1970s and 80s. They believe that 1990s undergraduates are a "transitional generation in an era of historical discontinuity" (xvi).

College Students and Adult Success

Gender bias and change seem to envelop the experience of women in postsecondary education. In spite of these factors, there are women with learning disabilities that have overcome their sizeable problems and become academically successful college students. The literature, however, does not specifically address academically successful college women with learning disabilities that were unidentified in their K-12 school years, nor does it specifically address specific accommodations or strategies for women with learning disabilities. Many studies address accommodations for students with disabilities in general (e.g. Getzel, Stodden, & Briel, 2001; Henderson, 2001; Horn & Berkthold, 1999; Lehmann, Davies, & Laurin, 2000; Lewis et al., 1999; NCSPEs, 2000a; NCSPEs, 2000b; Stodden, 2000; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; Whelley, 2001), and some specifically address students with learning disabilities (e.g. Brinkerhoff et al., 2002; Gerber & Reiff, 1994; Scott, 2002; Warren, 1998; Weingand, 1990; Zwillenger, 1995). Studies of accommodation for women with learning disabilities in four-year public postsecondary institutions are non-existent.

With this in mind, and in order to provide context regarding accommodations and strategies, the literature that address ADA and Section 504 as it applies to college students with learning disabilities, as well as the reality of

accommodations in postsecondary education are briefly explored. Additionally, two studies are presented that provide insight into students with previously unidentified learning disabilities in a college setting. Finally, research exploring the success of adults with learning disabilities is provided.

College Students with Learning Disabilities

Scott (2002) has laid a framework for students with learning disabilities in postsecondary education. She has used the ADA and Section 504 as a basis for accommodation requirements and has discussed how these accommodations coincide with characteristics of students with learning disabilities. The second part of this section focuses on the reality of accommodations.

Accommodations, ADA, and Section 504

Getzel, et al. (2001) have found that access to services and supports while students are attending postsecondary education is vital to the successful completion of their program for all students with disabilities. However, Scott (2002) advises that provision of accommodations will vary somewhat to fit individual campuses. She suggests that it is important to approach the discussion of accommodations from an understanding of the principle behind the process. "The ADA and Section 504 have mandated that regardless of variation in mission or structure, colleges and universities must provide equal access for students with learning disabilities to the full range of college programs and service" (p. 296). When thinking about access, often thoughts turn to physical barriers that require

accommodations such as curb cuts, elevators, Braille signage, or the use of sign language interpreters. While accommodations for students with learning disabilities are not as apparent, Scott (2002) advises "the potential for discrimination based on disability and the mandate for equal access are just as real" (p. 296).

Because of the need to comply with ADA and Section 504, services for students with learning disabilities are evolving. According to Scott (2002), learning disabilities services have changed from the 1980s, when services were first becoming widespread. During this time, it was common for learning disabilities services to be highly centralized, and for the disability support office to be viewed as the sole provider of learning disabilities accommodations. Scott advises that access to the full range of college programs cannot come from disability support offices alone; programs and services must involve the expertise and efforts of many departments on campus. The accommodation needs of students with disabilities must be met by the entire college environment (Scott, 2002).

According to Scott (2002), access issues for students with learning disabilities fall primarily into four broad areas: (a) the college classroom; (b) testing considerations; (c) learning outside the classroom; and (d) programmatic requirements.

The College Classroom

The classroom environment has evolved beyond the traditional classroom. Today's classrooms include the traditional class, the traditional class that may contain online components, and distance-learning classes. Scott advises that students with learning disabilities need to be aware of how the instructions will be delivered as well as the instructor's expectations. Additionally, instructional staff must consider how accommodation can be accomplished. Some accommodations for a traditional classroom such as note takers, tape recorded lectures, laptop computers, FM assistive listening devices, as well as preferential seating at the front of the classroom would not apply to an online course. In addition to the traditional classroom accommodations there may be online components such as syllabi, class notes and overheads, a course Web page, Web-based question-and-answer sessions, as well as distance education classes that are presented entirely online.

The Expanding Classroom

The expanding classroom can present new opportunities and new barriers. Online learning offers a different learning experience. Students can access information on their own time and at their own location. Because digital information can be transformed from one format into another, it can be manipulated with significant ease and efficiency, and vast amounts of information can be accessed from a single site almost instantaneously (Scott, 2002).

While class content on the Web can offer opportunities because of the flexibility of approaches to digital format, it can also provide new barriers that must be taken into consideration. According to Scott (2002) students with learning disabilities can have visual-processing difficulties with frames, color, or text, as well as attention difficulties with flashing items, and auditory problems with speech synthesis (Scott offers 9 principles for accessibility compliance and accommodation--p. 305-306).

Additionally, digital presentation of classes can present a learning curve for service providers. These expanded learning opportunities necessitate that service providers become familiar with classroom technology, assistive software, and the environment of online classes, to provide online support for campus-based students as well as distance students with learning disabilities (Scott, 2002).

Testing

One of the most addressed accommodations for students with learning disabilities is testing. The complexity lies in the variety and nonconformity of classroom tests. Tests vary widely in such areas as format, length of time required, content coverage, and mode of presentation (visual or auditory). Unfortunately, each of these components of classroom tests has the potential to interface with the specific deficits of an individual student's learning disability. Scott (2002), referring to the research of Alster (1997), Dalke (1991), and Patton and Polloway (1996), advise that some college students with learning disabilities may have difficulty with reading rate or decoding, understanding test questions,

writing under pressure, organizing thoughts, or remembering the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, and syntax. Others may have difficulty with math calculation, fine-motor skills, memory, or language.

Additional issues that require consideration are the testing environment and the amount of time needed to test. Where a student engages in testing can present sizable barriers. Some students with learning disabilities are easily distracted by either visual or auditory stimuli. Therefore, a distraction-reduced setting may be all that is needed to circumvent the disability. Along with the testing environment, time demands can present a significant barrier. Students with processing speed difficulties, slower reading rates, or difficulty with writing fluency may need extended time to complete tests.

Learning Outside the Classroom

Scott (2002) reminds us that the college or university is responsible for providing accommodation based on individual student need. If books are offered to students without a disability, books must be offered in a format that can be accessed by students with learning disabilities. Universities support offices have offered tape-recorded reading materials as a means of accommodation. However, there are other areas of consideration such as access to libraries, and computer labs and technology.

The Library

The library is often considered the core of learning at colleges or universities. Weingand (1990) suggests, however, that many libraries are not aware of the access needs of students with learning disabilities. A student with learning disabilities may have a variety of information-processing deficits that could inhibit access to library resources. Problems with sequencing could make locating books on the shelf very difficult; memory deficits could impede learning the system for accessing materials; and visual-processing deficits could make using microfiche impossible.

Computer Labs and Technology Access

Computer labs are another important source of learning outside the classroom that has become increasingly important to students with learning disabilities. Computer labs have been used to access basic word processing for completion of class assignments, to register for classes, access on-line course components, and use the Internet for research. Accommodations are needed to circumvent deficits in reading, writing, or processing speed. Scott (2002) suggests that labs should be equipped to meet accommodation needs throughout the campus rather than just at one central location. The traditional centralized practice may run counter to the strong philosophy of fully integrating students with disabilities into the mainstream educational program that is found in Section 504.

Programmatic Considerations

Programmatic considerations can cause barriers to students with learning disabilities that may "require dynamic problem solving and creative accommodations in addition to institutional policies for nondiscriminatory treatment (Scott, 2002, p. 320). Among these barriers are program mandated internships and field placements, and course substitutions.

Internships and Field Placements

While not all students with learning disabilities experience barriers in field placement settings, many will. Scott (2002) offers as an example, a student with learning disabilities who engages in student teaching may face issues such as the need for accurate spelling on the blackboard, accurate reading of directions when conducting evaluations, or exemplary grammar and mechanics in letters to parents. Scott reminds us that students who are otherwise qualified to participate in clinical and field placement settings (e.g. meets academic requirements for participation such as minimal grade point average or specific technical requirements), according to the ADA, must be provided equal access within contractual arrangements. Colleges and universities must ensure that other educational programs or activities not operated wholly by them, but benefiting their students, are accessible to students with disabilities.

Course Substitutions

Section 504 specifically suggests that course substitutions are a possible academic adjustment (34 CFR, Subpart E, Section 104-44). However, this option has relied on litigation for clarification. The most famous case that represents this struggle is *Guckenburger v. Boston University* (*Guckenburger v. Boston University*, 1997).

Although more than 20 years have passed since the publication of Section 504 regulations and more than ten years have passed since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), higher education, like many other social systems, continues to struggle with implementing policies for providing reasonable accommodations (Tucker & Goldstein, 1995). Heyward Lawton, and Associates (1995) have proposed that a struggle has been underway between service providers and institutions of higher education over compliance with federal regulations and proper implementation of accommodations for students.

Urgency in determining guidelines has been hastened by the Boston University experience. Loring Brinkerhoff, nationally recognized learning disabilities specialist and noted author on the subject of transitioning into postsecondary education for individuals with learning disabilities, was at the eye of the learning disabilities support services hurricane at Boston University. His 1996 account documented the calm, as well as the storm that ensued.

In the spring of 1995, Brinkerhoff, then director of Boston University's Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), had just engaged in a successful fundraising

campaign. He had raise over \$300,000 for LDSS. This "great excitement" was leveled the next day when provost and newly elected president Mr. Jon Westling, lowered the boom on LDSS in a speech to the Heritage Foundation. The president-elect accused LDSS of lowering standards and swaddling students. Things were going to change. According to Brinkerhoff (1996), the actions that followed, including an Australian speech by Westling entitled "Disabling Education: The culture wars go to school" set the tone for the months to come. The following fall, the LDSS office was advised to revise procedures in identifying, serving, and accommodating students with learning disabilities. Using his own criteria, Westling, gathered and reviewed records of students from LDSS and overturned accommodations, waivers, and course substitutions. Additionally, he set new guidelines for testing requirements. He required that all LD testing documentation is updated every three years, and that all reports must be written by experts with training in medicine or neuropsychology. Additionally, all accommodations had to be based on medical and scientific evidence. In addition, all LD documentation had to be reviewed by the Office of the Provost.

According to Brinkerhoff (1996), Boston University's ADA/504 coordinator soon quit. Brinkerhoff followed close behind. Two weeks later, confronted by an inability to follow the new rules and in a gesture of support for the ADA/504 coordinator, Brinkerhoff resigned as well.

Boston University's decisions soon became the focus of national attention through *Guckenburger v. Boston University* (*Guckenburger v. Boston University*, 1997). This

case is "arguably the most important case ever litigated to a conclusion on behalf of students with learning disabilities" (Wolinsky & Whelan, 1999, p. 286).

Guckenburger v. Boston addressed the same issues that were presented to *Brinkerhoff* in the fall of 1995: (a) the newly implemented policies requiring retesting every 3 years for students with learning disabilities; (b) the revised requirement that a learning disability evaluator must be a "licensed psychologist, clinical psychologist, neuropsychologist, or reputable physician"; (c) the newly implemented policy requiring extensive documentation from evaluators and secondary schools; and (d) the refusal to allow course substitutions in lieu of math and foreign language requirements for students with documented learning disabilities (Wolinsky & Whelan, 1999).

According to Scott (2002), Judge Saris found Westling's decisions regarding BU's LD Student Services were partly based on an "unfounded belief that learning disabled students who could not meet degree requirements were unmotivated . . . or disingenuous." Judge Saris' ruling rescinded some of the Westling edicts that had been enacted after Westling's rise to power, such as retesting every 3 years, and requiring documentation be provided only through licensed psychologist, clinical psychologist, neuropsychologist, or reputable physician. However, BU was directed to implement a deliberative procedure for considering whether course substitutions in foreign language in the College of Arts and Sciences would fundamentally alter the nature of a Boston University liberal arts degree. In December of 1997, a dean's committee released an eight-page report finding that the foreign language requirement was fundamental to the liberal arts degree, therefore eliminating any waivers or substitutions for the foreign

language requirement. With this matter settled, BU's LD Support Services established an enhanced foreign language program to provide students with learning disabilities accommodations to support their success that were more usual such as: one-on-one instruction, spelling accommodations, additional time on tests, distribution of lecture notes in advance, oral examinations in place of written exams, and student tutoring at no additional cost (Scott, 2002).

During the 1990s universities had to regularly address issues of not only physical access, but other issues of access and eligibility for students with "hidden disabilities"(Brinkerhoff, et al., 2002). Administration had to consider who was qualified and how that could be determined, particularly in the area of learning disabilities. New roles and responsibilities had to be defined in order to provide access to student with hidden disabilities. In terms of learning disabilities, Brinkerhoff and colleagues (2002) suggest that most of the "heavy lifting" has been accomplished and that "most institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada are currently serving a population of students with "so call 'hidden disabilities'" (p. 486). The Guckenburger v. Boston incident speaks loudly for the development of firm definitions and procedures for accommodations.

The Reality

Scott (2002) has guided us through an exploration of how learning disabilities coincide with ADA and 504 mandates. Additionally, Brinkerhoff et al. (2002) have told us that all of the elements are in place to support students with learning disabilities, in spite of his unnerving experience with a conservative administration. National studies on postsecondary institutions and their accommodations tell another story altogether. Not all postsecondary institutions have accommodations in place. Additionally, the chilly climate that has been experienced by women in college, is experienced by students with learning disabilities as well. Not only do women experience a chilly climate because of their gender; they have the added factor of their experience as a student with a learning disability. As Wagner (1992) suggested regarding girls in K-12 education, being female may be a secondary disability.

Postsecondary Accommodations

While most postsecondary institutions (98 percent) provide some accommodations, they have not gone as far as Scott suggests. According to Lewis, Farris, and Westat's (1999) evaluation of the institutional data regarding 1996-97 and 1997-98 undergraduates in postsecondary educational institutions, 98 percent of postsecondary institutions enrolled students with disabilities, and had at least one accommodation. Following is an institutional breakdown according to accommodations: 88 percent provided alternative exam formats or additional time; 77 percent provided tutors; 69 percent provided priority class registration; 58 percent provided adaptive equipment or technology such as assistive listening devices or talking computers; 55 percent provided

taped textbooks; and 42 percent provided course substitutions or waivers. Supports were more likely to be found in public 2-year and 4-year institutions that were of a medium to large size. Larger institutions were more likely to provide a greater range of services and accommodations.

Apart from actual services that are provided, there are other considerations. Getzel and colleagues (2001) researched the concerns, needs, and satisfaction with services of students with disabilities (this included students with learning disabilities) attending 36 two and four year colleges and universities in Virginia (Virginia Commonwealth University, 1993). They found that nearly a quarter of the respondents indicated a need for information about service availability, career counseling and placement services, program modifications, assistive technology devices, and personal skills training (for example, budgeting, time management, and organizational skills).

Students in Postsecondary Education

Because of the foundation that has been laid in terms of supports and legislation, students with disabilities are continuing on to postsecondary education. However, students may not be prepared for their postsecondary experience (Getzel, et al., 2001, Lehmann, Davies, & Laurin, 2000; Stodden, 2000; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000).

Students will need to know what accommodations to arrange for, who to contact, and how to contact them. While Brinkerhoff et al. (2002) consider the field of learning disability support to have come of age, Stodden and Dowrick (2000) have found that students in all disability categories who embark on a postsecondary education may find that they:

- (a) Need more and better services, supports, and programs to successfully access and complete postsecondary education.
- (b) Face media stereotypes depicting persons with disabilities as victims, low expectations on the part of teachers and counselors, and a lack of positive role models in postsecondary education settings.
- (c) Need to advocate for themselves by requesting specific accommodations and supports to address their learning needs.
- (d) Need to be prepared for the “shift in culture.” They will face
 - (a) Decreased contact among teachers and students,
 - (b) Increased academic competition,
 - (c) Changes in student support networks, and
 - (d) Greater expectations for students to be responsible for their own learning.
- (e) Need to be aware that services, supports, and programs for students with disabilities in postsecondary education vary extensively across states as well as campus to campus,
- (f) Are not well developed as a program, and
- (g) Tend to lean toward advocacy, information services, or remediation of content.

Whelley (2001), agrees that there are inconsistencies in quantity and quality of educational supports and services for students with disabilities in the nations’ postsecondary institutions. According to Whelley, the dramatic increase in the number of persons with disabilities seeking access to postsecondary education is accompanied by an increase in the type and frequency of educational supports and services offered in

postsecondary education (Fichten , Goodrick, Tagalaskis, Amsel, & Libman, 1990; Gartin, Rumrill, & Serebrini, 1996).

Whelley (2001) suggests that the provision and use of postsecondary educational supports and services are rarely grounded in theory or documented by empirical data. She asserts that little is known about the effectiveness of postsecondary educational supports, particularly if the diversity of disability and of postsecondary programs is considered. The situation is further complicated by a lack of consensus about how to define and measure “successful” outcomes of educational support provisions.

In an effort to create a baseline of data for postsecondary students with disabilities, The National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings (NCSPEs, 2000a) identified the educational supports most commonly offered in postsecondary institutions/programs. The top accommodations that were identified were (a) note takers, (b) personal counseling, and (c) advocacy assistance. Additional supports offered were organizational skill assistance, study skills programs, and career related supports. Very few institutions offered: (a) assistance in transferring supports to subsequent work or employment; (b) disability related scholarships; (c) disability assessments or evaluations; (d) supports for study abroad; (e) accessible transport on campus; (f) real-time captioning; or, (g) assistive technology assessments.

To gain a better sense of student responses to accommodations a national focus group project was developed (NCSPEs, 2000b). Results from these focus groups showed that students with disabilities thought the type and timing of advocacy assistance

provided in postsecondary education was problematic. Additionally, the respondents requested that more focus be placed upon the development of self-advocacy skills rather than employing others to provide advocacy information to them. This was a concern that was voiced by Stodden and colleagues (2001) also. They found that there was an "overwhelming tendency for disability support coordinators to advocate for students with disabilities as opposed to teaching students to advocate for themselves" (p. 195). Of additional concern were adjustments or self-improvement areas such as study, memory, communication, organization and time management skills, and metacognitive strategies. Although these areas were commonly offered within many postsecondary institutions, student focus groups indicated that organization, time management skills, and the coordination of supports within and across their personal, educational, and social life were a major concern (Stodden, et al., 2001).

In addition to the institutional confusion that has surrounded accommodations that are offered, Hitchings and colleagues (1998) found that students with disabilities were often unaware of the potential impact of their disabilities on their future careers (Hitchings, Luzzo, Retish, Horvath, & Ristow, 1998). There was also reluctance to use services. They posited that a possible factor that may influence the reluctance of students with disabilities to use services could be attributed to the stigmatization that occurs when these individuals apply for services (Szymanski & Trueba, 1994).

A Chilly Climate for Students with Learning Disabilities

While studies have shown that colleges and universities are reasonably accommodating when it comes to ensuring the physical accessibility of buildings, classrooms, and other facilities (Blaqua, Rapaport, & Kruse, 1996; Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990), further evidence shows that faculty seem uninformed about the nature of disability, oblivious to the needs of students with disabilities, or generally lacking in terms of understanding what it means to have a disability (Greenbaum, Graham, & Scales, 1995). In fact, along with some students' general lack of preparedness for college and the absence of comprehensive support programs, negative attitudes of faculty are cited as a primary reason that students with disabilities fail at the postsecondary level (Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz, 1996).

Referring to research from the 1970s regarding a chilly climate for women (e.g. Frazier & Sadker, 1973; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1986), Beilke & Yssl (1999) found that students with disabilities that were in their study experienced the same conditions. They found a "chilly" or inhospitable climate. Their study participants were devalued by being overlooked, rather than corrected in their academic mistakes; students were encouraged to switch to a less rigorous major; faculty refused to establish eye contact with students; and faculty exhibited other similar behaviors that were generally condescending or patronizing.

While the majority of faculty seemed amenable to requests for assistance by students with visible disabilities, those with hidden disabilities were viewed suspiciously. The subject of students with learning disabilities, in particular, provoked heated debate.

Beilke and Yssl (1999) suggest as an example of this attitude a letter published in the Chronicle of Higher Education containing the following analogy:

Giving a 'learning disabled' student extra time on exams is like letting a blind person qualify for a pilot's license with the aid of a seeing eye dog in the cockpit. I don't think any of us want to fly in an airplane with such a pilot, or to find in the emergency room a doctor who owes his medical-school admission to extra time on exams" (Katz, 1998).

With the increased presence of students with disabilities in postsecondary education, a perceptual divide has been discovered between faculty and students. Beilke and Yssl (1999) suggest that while universities often profess to encourage a diverse student population, the reality as experienced by students with disabilities is somewhat different. This resistance can partially be attributed to the perceived institutional mission of colleges and universities. According to Deshler, Ellis, & Lenz (1996), priorities for faculty in higher education focus on scholarship and research, not the provision of social services.

College Students with Unidentified Learning Disabilities

In this section two dissertations will be discussed that are relevant to this study:

(a) Zwillinger's 1995 dissertation, *College students with learning disabilities: An investigation of differences between those identified prior to entering college and those identified while attending college*; and, (b) Warren's (1998) study of the *Impact of an initial learning disabilities diagnosis in college on an adult's sense of self as a lifelong learner*. These studies look specifically at postsecondary identification of students with learning disabilities.

Differences Between Early Identified and Later Identified College Students

Zwillinger's (1995) study examined two groups of undergraduate college students with learning disabilities at an urban university. Twenty-four students had been identified early (EI) in elementary, junior high, or high school. Thirty-six students were identified later (LI) in college. Diagnostic test records, questionnaires, rating scales and interviews were used to compare the groups in terms of IQ scores, socioeconomic status, gender, self-efficacy, and educational history. Zwillinger wanted to understand the consequences of early diagnosis in terms of useful interventions and perceptions of self-efficacy. The study sought to determine if self-efficacy was related to early diagnosis, and if special education helped students to develop an understanding of a specific area of deficit rather than incorporate a generalized perception of low self-efficacy.

Analyses of the accumulated data indicated that the groups did not differ with regard to I.Q. or self-efficacy scores. However, significant gender and socioeconomic differences were found. More males were identified and had received services before college, while more females were identified and served while in college. In addition, more of the EI group had attended school in suburban rather than urban or rural communities and the socioeconomic status of the EI Group was higher.

While the two groups did not differ significantly regarding self-efficacy, additional analyses indicated that those students who received tutoring at school had significantly lower social self-efficacy scores than those who did not receive this intervention and those who were not placed in special education classes. Zwillinger reported pullout students and students who received individual tutoring scored

significantly lower in social self-efficacy. Although, she noted that tutoring was highly valued by students. She surmises that the lower scores are attributable to the stigma attached to being pulled out of regular classes. However, some students with a high self-efficacy score spoke well of those situations. She felt that acknowledgement of identified strengths might mitigate the stigmatization felt by some students. Zwillinger's (1995) findings related to self-efficacy suggest that students' perceptions of their self-efficacy are negatively affected by interventions that separate them from other students (special tutoring programs and special classes) through the stigma of being labeled "learning disabled."

Learning Disabilities Diagnosis and a Sense of Self

Warren's (1998) qualitative study explored the experiences of nontraditional-aged college students who were not identified as having a learning disability during their K-12 school years. Ten adults were interviewed.

Four significant conclusions were derived from Warren's interview analyses: (a) initial adult diagnoses impacted the academic self in two major ways; (b) Adult assessments also impacted various arenas of the self in which learning occurs; (c) adult evaluations resulted in largely positive outcomes; (d) the impact of the diagnosis on the participants' sense of self is an ongoing process.

The first impact area noted was on the sense of "Academic Self." Warren found that many participants were empowered by their new understanding of their sense of strengths and weaknesses through employing new coping strategies and incorporating accommodations and modifications into their lives. On the other hand, five of the ten

participants revealed feelings of being disempowered because of their anger and frustration at testing, or faculty and staff who were uneducated or biased towards their new learning disabilities diagnosis. Warren felt that this finding underscored some of the difficulties faced in the assessments of adults with learning disabilities such as the lack of age-appropriate tests and trained evaluators, culturally-biased instruments, and inconsistent learning disabilities definitions and diagnostic procedures.

The second impact that Warren described was on the "Occupational Self." Impact was felt on career focus and the workplace. Warren discovered that the way participants saw themselves in the workplace changed in two ways. First, assessments exposed strengths and weaknesses, which helped to uncover appropriate, as well as inappropriate, occupational goals. Second, the occupational self was enabled in the workplace when participants were able to transfer compensatory strategies, accommodations, and modifications to their work situations.

How participants thought or felt about themselves, their "Personal Self," was also influenced by their learning disabilities identification. Many of the study participants had memories of painful experiences that resulted from their undiagnosed learning disabilities in their K-12 school years. These memories caused deep scars.

Through the evaluation process, both strengths and weaknesses were uncovered. This caused some participants to go through a process that Warren describes as grieving. All of the participants needed to take some time to own and internalize these aspects into their lives. Most participants came to own and internalize their abilities and disabilities.

As time went on experience increased confidence, and assertiveness, and participants had feelings of being "vindicated" and "validated" (Warren, 1998, p. 142).

The last area that was impacted was participants' sense of their "Social Self." According to Warren, participants indicated that they experienced a change in social interactions as well as how they felt and thought about themselves in social situations. After assessments, study participants reported that they felt they had more control over to whom, and how, they revealed their learning disabilities, they also felt they had the power to educate others, and experienced improved relations.

Warren's (1998) findings that participants valued their new sense of control supports the understandings gleaned from Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg's (1997) interviews with successful adults.

Successful Adults with Learning Disabilities

Researchers Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (1992) admit that their research into the success of adults with learning disabilities was spurred on by a wave of researchers who sought to understand how success and excellence were attained (Covey, 1989; Garfield, 1986; Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Though their research does not identify success attributes for each gender, the study does set out to provide first-hand evidence through retrospective interviews of 71 "successful adults" with learning disabilities (48 were male, and 23 female). The open-ended interviews they conducted allowed participants to "speak for themselves, to share their perspectives, to tell their

stories" (Reiff, Gerber, Ginsberg, 1997, p. xi). Through these interviews, they saw patterns of success.

Gerber and colleagues (1992) saw an overriding theme that was characterized by participant's efforts to gain control of their lives. This control was gained through "internal decisions" and "external manifestations." Internal decisions included a desire to succeed, being goal oriented, and an internal reframing of their learning disability experience into a more positive or productive experience. External manifestations took the form of adaptability which included individual persistence, learned creativity (coping strategies), a goodness of fit between abilities and environment, and a pattern of having a social ecology that included personal support and planned experiences designed to foster success (p. 479). These themes are the building blocks for their model for vocational success.

Control

Control was considered the key to success. Control is making a conscious decision to take charge of one's life (internal decision) and adapting and shaping oneself in order to move ahead (external manifestation).

Internal Decisions

- (a) Desire: Motivates and sustains action. At some point, a decision must be made to move on. This is the starting point.
- (b) Goal Orientation: important because it fosters a realistic attitude, achievable aspirations, and provides a sharper focus. Goal setting feeds on itself.

(c) Reframing: refers to the set of decisions that are necessary to see the learning disability experience in a more positive light. There are four stages to the reframing process:

- (a) First step - Recognition of the learning disability or disabilities ("if you can't deal with who you are and recognize your gifts and your disadvantages, you are not going to make it" p. 481).
- (b) Second step - Acceptance (cannot be attained without recognition)
- (c) Third step - Understanding (successful adults with learning disabilities recognize and accept their weaknesses and build on their strengths, therefore, an understanding of strengths and weaknesses is required).
- (d) Fourth step - Action towards one's goals.

External Manifestations-Adaptability

- (a) Persistence - the external expression of desire
- (b) Goodness of fit - a significant element of adaptability (participants fit themselves into environments in which they could succeed, use their strengths)
- (c) Learned Creativity - refers to the various strategies, techniques, and other mechanisms devised to enhance the ability to perform well. Considered the essence of adaptability
- (d) Social Ecologies: Support network (mentors, close friends, family, and others who can support efforts), and planned experiences designed to foster success. Individual must be willing to accept help.

Raskind, Goldberg, Higgins, and Herman (1999) brought similar findings forward in their study of 41 former students with learning disabilities who attended the Maryanne Fostig Center for Educational Therapy in Pasadena, California. This 20-year longitudinal study corroborated earlier findings (Spekman, Goldberg, & Herman, 1992), which described success attributes of 50 former Fostig students with learning disabilities. These success attributes include: self-awareness, perseverance, proactivity, emotional stability, goal setting, and a social support systems. Raskind, et al. (1999) found that success attributes remained relatively stable across time and, although, differently labeled, were similar to those reported by Reiff et al. (1997), as well as Wehmeyer (1996), and Werner & Smith (1992).

Summary

Attendance at postsecondary educational institutions has skyrocketed for students with learning disabilities; however, women are attending four-year research institutions at lower rates than men. In addition, the literature does not address the experiences or needs of women with learning disabilities at four-year postsecondary institutions. Disability categories are lumped together with descriptive statistics gathering overall numbers of students in each category, or all students with learning disabilities are considered together without consideration of the different learning needs of men and women.

There is also evidence that women in higher education are being held to male standards (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1998; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule,

1986; Flowers et al., 2001; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Seymore, 1995); standards that may not support men's own changing values and goals (Wood, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Attendance at institutions of higher education by women with learning disabilities has not happened within a vacuum. Other factors may have added an additional roadblock for women. Along with the chaotic environment that has been caused by global economic changes, gender bias has been addressed in education. While progress has been made in the lower grades, the same battle is being fought in postsecondary education. These gender battles have inspired new conceptions of the voices of women (Gilligan, 1982), which, in turn, have left men wondering. However, Wood (1998) points out, these are transitional times. While girls have not received the recognition and support they have needed, boys are also experiencing a change in the traditional sense of things that cause them to wonder how that affects their relationship to society. Therefore, global change, gender, and learning disabilities may combine to make issues much less clear than service providers are willing to admit.

In spite of the inroads in accommodations in postsecondary education, application has been imperfect and all students with disabilities are left with unanswered needs and questions. In addition, some faculty are fighting for their traditional role and feel their educational integrity is threatened by demands of students with disabilities, especially students with "hidden" learning disabilities. These issues combine to create a chilly climate for students with learning disabilities. In this regard, gender and disability may

combine to provide a double disability for women with learning disabilities in postsecondary education. Research in this area has not been addressed.

While studies have not directly addressed experiences of women with unidentified learning disabilities, two mixed-gender studies of students who have not had their learning disabilities identified until college, have been conducted. These studies show that students, for the most part, were able to navigate the system, but not without scars. They found that persistence and a sense of control were important for their success. Additionally, when looking at studies of successful adults we find that many of the factors that promote their success seem to parallel experiences of unidentified college students with learning disabilities.

When reviewing the literature regarding postsecondary education and women with learning disabilities, the outcome is disappointing. Many activities have taken place in times of deep economic and cultural change that have promoted changing roles for both men and women. While legislation has supported the efforts of women, and individuals with disabilities, issues concerning the academic success of women with learning disabilities at four-year public research universities have not been addressed.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The voices of successful adults with learning disabilities are essential for understanding what can be accomplished and which kinds of approaches lead to success; in contrast, traditional perspectives have focused largely on what could not be achieved. It is essential that conceptualizations of learning disabilities recognize possibilities for significant achievement.

Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg (1993)

The purpose of this study is to give voice to women who have one or more learning disabilities as they describe their academic journey toward achieving at least junior standing at a four-year public research university. The qualitative tradition of phenomenology was used as the design for this study.

Bogdan and Tayler (1975) suggest that the subjective nature of human experience is lost when people are reduced to statistical aggregates. Qualitative methodology allows researchers to be present while participants develop their own definitions of the world. By using the qualitative tradition of phenomenology, this investigator has been able to explore concepts whose essence is lost in quantitative research approaches (Bogdan & Tayler, 1975).

Levine and Nourse (1998) concur. In evaluating several longitudinal studies of outcomes of special education students, these authors found that focus on isolated factors, such as employment at a single point in time, did not provide an adequate picture. These authors suggest that "we need to employ qualitative analytic techniques to provide a

much-needed look at the factors that affect long-term adjustment and paint a picture of postschool life that is currently unavailable given the constraints of quantitative research methods" (Levine & Nourse, 1998, 231).

In answer to this call, this study provides needed qualitative data through the accounts of the academic journeys of 13 women with learning disabilities who have reached at least junior standing at a four-year public research university. Their descriptions of their journeys provide rich data for consideration. By using the qualitative tradition of phenomenology, the voices and experiences of these women have been heard loud and clear.

The Study

The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding human behavior from the research participant's own frame of reference. Creswell (1994) tells us in a phenomenological study there should be "no preconceived notions, expectations, or frameworks that guide researchers as they analyze data" (p. 94). Unlike quantitative studies, patterns inductively emerge from the interviews (Patton, 1990). In a phenomenological study the investigator examines how the world is experienced. For her, the important reality is what people imagine it to be (Kvale, 1996). Moustakes (1994) tells us that a phenomenological study searches for an understanding of "the dynamics that underlay the experience" (p. 22). This study has explored these dynamics.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research, "study participant" refers to women who have self-identified as having one or more learning disabilities and have reached at least junior standing at a four-year public research university. Each participant has received, or is presently receiving, services from Resources for Students with Disabilities, and is a student in good standing (i.e. not on academic probation). With this in mind, the research questions that guide this study are:

- a) How do study participants perceive and describe experiences and factors during their K-12 school years that have contributed to their academic success?
- b) How do study participants perceive and describe experiences and factors during their postsecondary education that have contributed to their academic success.

The Study Setting

The setting for this study is a four-year public research university in the Southwest. The university enrolls approximately 22,000 graduate and undergraduate students and offers a wide range of support services such as mainframe computer services, libraries, housing, medical facilities, that are typical of a major research institution. Mentoring and support services for underrepresented groups are available to students. Further, there is a university-wide effort to coordinate and communicate all information about programs for individuals with disabilities. This effort represents a multi-disciplinary consortium with faculty from the School of Education, the School of Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Exercise and Sports Science, Sociology, Psychology, and Anatomy.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample was used to select study participants. Patton (1990) advises that purposeful sampling allows for the selection of information-rich cases that illuminate the questions under study. To select this sample four criteria were developed: (a) a participant must be a woman; (b) a participant must have self-identified as having one or more learning disabilities, (c) the participant must have reached at least junior standing (at least 60 credits); and, (d) study participants must not be on academic probation. All participants met these criteria. Originally, it was intended that participant be juniors and seniors. However, two participants with prior bachelor's degrees came forward and it was decided to include them in the study also.

Data Collection

Kvale (1996) tells us that the qualitative interview is a research method that gives a privileged access to a participant's "basic experience of the lived world" (p. 54). In this regard, it is important to respect each participant by ensuring that she is fully informed of the process of the study, and any risks. It is important that she feels secure that her privacy will be respected, and protected, and that her right not to continue is expressed. Each study participant was shown the highest degree of respect.

While posters were hung in highly visible places on campus that advertised this study, best recruiting efforts were obtained through the Resources for Students with Disabilities office (RSD). RSD staff sent letters of invitation that were written by this researcher to all women listed by the RSD office as having one or more learning disabilities. The letter contained a brief explanation of the study as well as an invitation to

participate in the study. A follow-up email invitation, which replicated the information on the poster, as well as a short note from the director of RSD, was also sent. These first efforts proved to be meagerly fruitful and provided three prospective participants. This response led to opening up the study to include other learning disorders as well. New mailings and emails were sent to the expanded list that now included women with the labels of specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, math, and reading), as well as Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS), ADD/ADHD, and Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD). It should be noted that each prospective participant, with one exception, identified herself as having a learning disability, rather than by her specific professionally identified label. In many cases, participants described more than one label that fit under the generally accepted label of learning disabilities. This effort provided a total of 14 interviews.

I personally discussed the interview process, answered any questions, and verified criteria for inclusion in the study. Appointments were made with interested respondents and 14 interviews were held at a time and in a place that was convenient and comfortable for each study participant. Most interviews were held in a quiet room that had been previously arranged for in the university's Student Center, however, one interview was held in the privacy of a participant's home. Interviews ran between 45 minutes to 3 1/2 hours, depending on how long each participant felt she needed to explain her journey. Each participant was given an informed consent form (see Appendix for samples of all documents mentioned) to read and sign. This form described the study and informed the participant of any risks. Additionally, each study participant was assured of the utmost

confidentiality. She was also informed of her right to stop the interview at any time if she did not want to continue, and that she was under no obligation to continue the interview. With the permission of study participants, each interview was tape-recorded. To ensure confidentiality, code names were chosen by each participant. All tapes and any other documents collected were assigned the code that coincides with individual participants. The coding scheme was held in a separate location from the collected data (Kvale, 1996).

An interview guide was used as a starting point to provide open-ended questions. Participants were encouraged to offer personal views and opinions. According to Patton (1990), the use of open-ended questions is a desirable aspect of qualitative research design. The basic thrust of qualitative interviewing is to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data (p. 295). By using open-ended questions during the interviews, it was possible to allow participants to tell their stories as they have experienced them, and still provide for responses to basic questions that have been inspired by the literature (for a sample of the Interview Guide, please see the Appendix).

While 14 interviews were initially held, 13 women were chosen to participate in this study. One interview was set apart from this effort. This interview involved a woman who felt her ADD had evolved into borderline personality disorder. Her primary focus was on her recent experiences with this new diagnosis, rather than her experiences with her ADD. In listening to her story, this investigator was convinced a study on this topic would be important, however, it was felt that inclusion of this interview in the present study might take on more than the study could accommodate.

Data Analysis

A Phenomenological research approach is one in which the experiences of study participants are expressed through long interviews. Kvale (1996) states that "phenomenology is the attempt at a direct description of experience, without any considerations about the origin or cause of an experience. In phenomenological philosophy, objectivity is reached through intentional acts of consciousness and is an expression of fidelity to the phenomena investigated" (p. 53).

Kvale (1996) describes the investigation of essences as the process whereby one shifts from describing separate phenomena to searching for their essences as a 'free variation in fantasy.' This requires varying a given phenomenon freely in its possible forms. That which remains constant through the variations is considered the essence of the phenomenon (p. 53). A phenomenological reduction calls for a suspension of judgement as to the existence or nonexistence of the content of an experience. According to Kvale (1996), "phenomenological reduction does not involve an absolute absence of presuppositions, but rather a critical analysis on one's own presuppositions" (p. 54).

Moustakes (1994) has suggested that specific processes should be followed when conducting a phenomenological study. These processes are identified as epoche, phenomenological reduction (horizontalization), imaginative variation, and synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions.

The epoche is considered the necessary first step. Pre-judgements are set aside, and the investigator is opened to the research interview as an "unbiased, receptive presence" (p. 180). As mentioned by Kvale, this involves a critical analysis of one's own presuppositions (1996). Moustakes tells us that "the challenge of the Epoche is to be

transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner" (p. 86).

Moustakes describes the phenomenological reduction as the next step. This process involves 6 components. First, bracketing sets the topic or question aside. Next horizontalization treats each experience "in and for itself" (p. 34). The goal is to perceive each phenomenon in a fresh and open way. Complete descriptions are given of its essential constituents. Horizons are delimited whereby meanings stand out; non-repetitive, non-overlapping constituents are clustered into themes; individual textural descriptions provided; and, finally, composite textural descriptions are developed.

The next step, imaginative variation, is described by Moustakes (1994) as an integral part of data analysis. Similar to Kvale's (1996) description, the phenomenon is viewed from different vantage points such as opposite meanings and various roles. Moustakes explains "free fantasy variation" as considering the possible textural qualities, or dynamics, that evoke the structural qualities of the interviews. Individual structural qualities and themes are found and these themes and structures are synthesized into a composite structural description. Finally, the composite is intuitively and reflectively integrated to develop a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience (Moustakes, 1994).

A phenomenological design has the potential to arrive at a faithful, systematic, unbiased description of consciousness. Through this approach, the personal accounts of experiences and factors that have supported the academic success of research participants has been heard.

Internal Validity

Creswell (1998) could not find clear criteria for validating a phenomenological study. Resting on Polkinghorne's (1989) findings, Creswell tells us "validity refers to the notion that an idea is well grounded and well supported" (p. 208). With this in mind, Patton's (1990) suggestions for determining internal and external validity were used.

Patton (1990) suggests that internal validity can be accomplished through "member checks", "peer examination", and "clarification of researcher bias" (p. 159). Member checking was accomplished through reviews of transcriptions. Five study participants reviewed transcriptions of their interviews and felt the transcriptions were true to their recollection of their accounts. According to Patton, these methods have ensured the truth-value of these data. Peer examination also served as a process for determining the internal validity of this study. I have enlisted the efforts of colleagues in the School of Education and Human Resource Studies and the School of Social Work, as a peer examiners for this product. In addition to these two methods to check internal validity, I have provided a statement of my biases under the heading of "Investigator's Role."

External Validity

Patton (1990) has suggested that the primary strategy utilized in the study to ensure external validity is the provision of "rich, thick detailed descriptions so that anyone interested in transferability will have a solid framework for comparison" (p. 159). Direct translations of participant interviews provided a source for these descriptions. Additionally, a detailed account of the focus of the study, the research participants' basis

for selection, and the context from which data were gathered, aided in providing a clear picture of the study. Finally, the customized Access 97 database that was developed for use in this study, as well as data matrices, provided a clear, detailed, description of data analysis strategies and allows all phases of this study to be subject to the scrutiny of an external auditor who is experienced in qualitative research methods (Patton, 1990).

Data Storage and Retrieval: The Database Approach

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the main issues of data management in a qualitative study such as this are "ensuring (a) high-quality, accessible data, (b) documentation of just what analyses have been carried out, and (c) retention of data and associated analyses after the study is complete" (p. 45). To meet these requirements, this investigator relied on over 30 years of experience in database programming to create a custom *Access 97* relational database that allows accessibility to these data, provides documentation of the analyses, as well as a method for organized retention of data and associated analysis.

A relational database allows for maximum flexibility when analyzing data. Several different tables of information can be associated with a code that is common in each. Therefore, because of this common identifier, data can be retrieved through various similar codes either individually, or collectively, and eliminates the need for redundancy. The use of a relational database allows for within, and cross participant analysis to be effectively and efficiently accomplished.

The customized *Microsoft Access 97* database was made more effective through user-friendly interface screens (please see Figures 1-4). Participants were identified in

this application by their pseudonyms as well as a number that was automatically assigned to each pseudonym by the database application. This number became the identifier for each piece of coded data that was associated with a particular participant. With the establishment of an individual participant record, transcriptions of participant interviews that had been entered into the *Microsoft Word* word processing program could be used as a direct source of data for each participant. Transcripts of participant accounts were displayed through the word processing application and portions of each account were pasted into the data section (Figure 2) of the database interface. Each piece of data was referenced to the main participant record (Figure 1) through the automatically assigned number which was labeled *InterviewID*. Data were coded according to question focus, question facet (various aspects of the question focus taken from the Interview Guide), as well as specific focus (emerging codes), specific facet (an aspect of the specific focus), and specific facet modifier. This method of database design allowed coding that provided retrieval of each aspect that was involved with a particular interview, as well as across all interviews. Each coded unit from all of the interviews was eligible to be sorted, individually, or collectively, according to question focus, question facets, as well as specific focus, facet, and facet modifier (see Figures 3 and 4). The design of this database allowed for five different levels of investigative terms, each having a more specific focus. This method of drill down data analysis allowed for intensive analysis of different aspects of participant interviews at will. In addition, various reports displayed the coding designations mentioned above, either collectively and/or by interview code (participants chosen name), as well as disability label, and age grouping (please see Figures 3 and 4).

Reports within the database allowed for a readily retrievable audit trail that documents the process of investigation as well as further investigation of interviews.

Database Screens

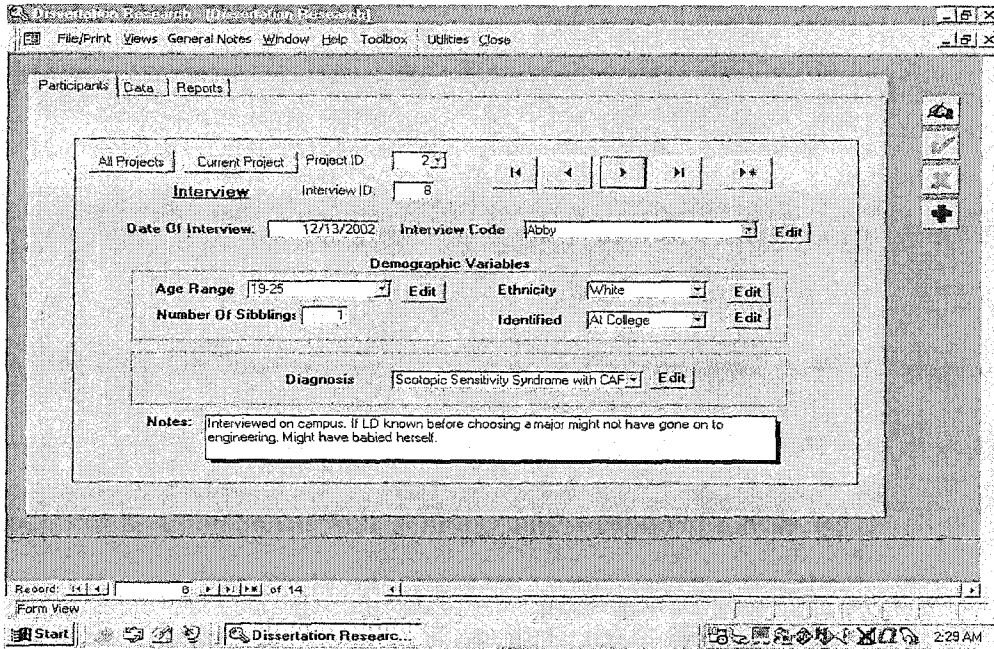


Figure 1 - General Information Screen

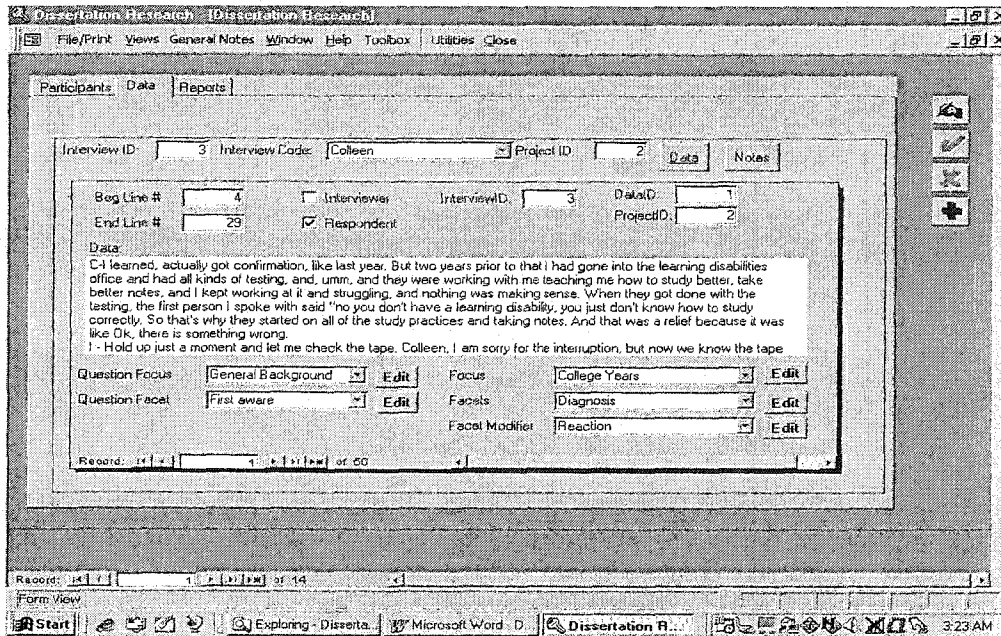


Figure 2 - Data Input Screen

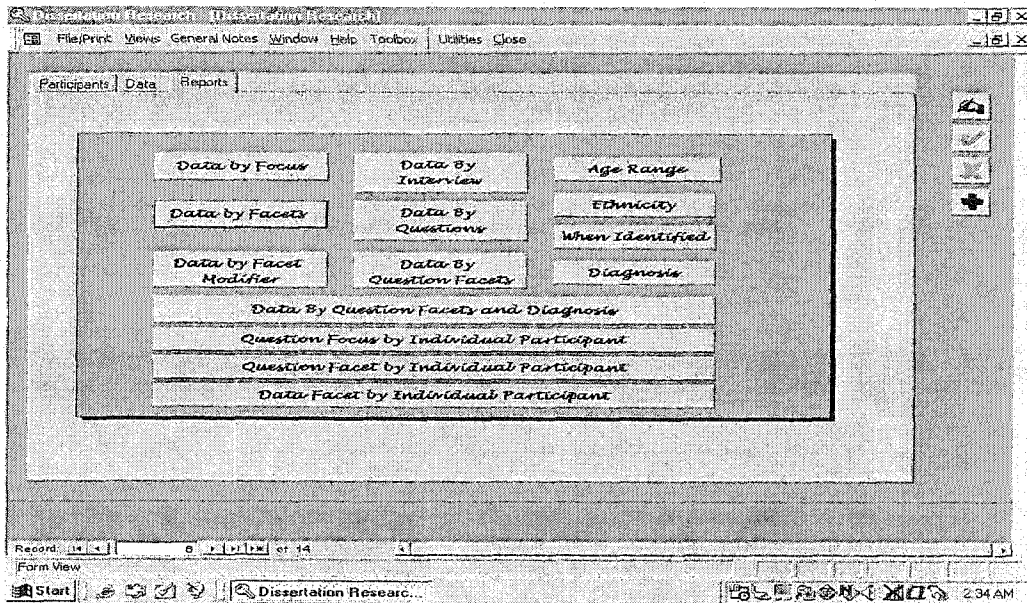


Figure 3 - Report Choice

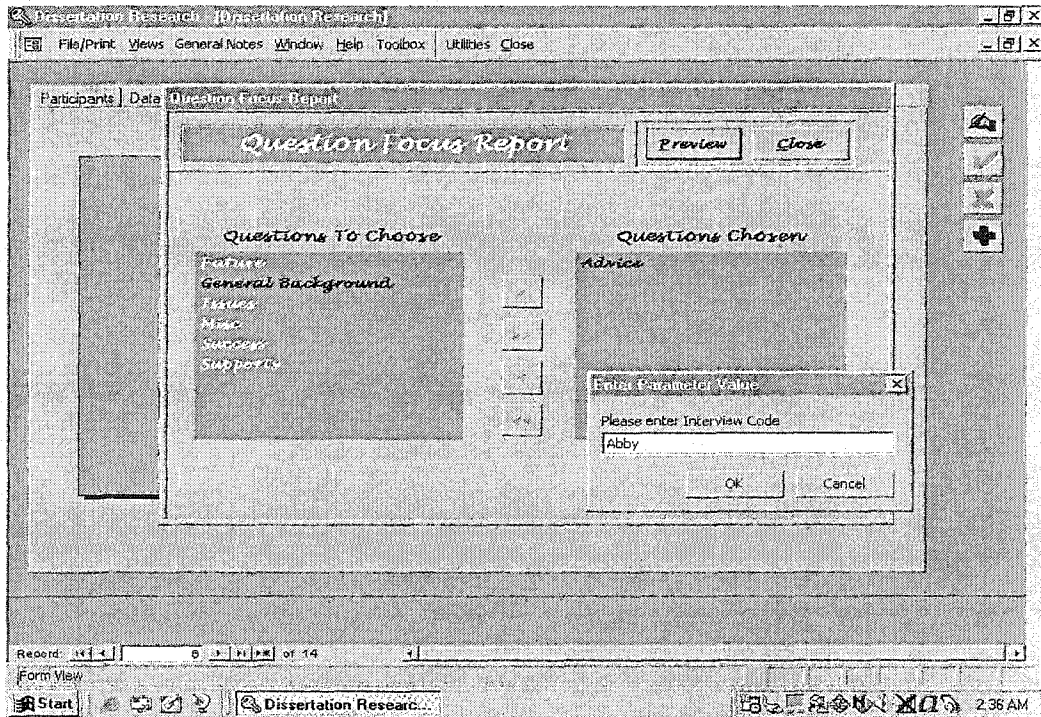


Figure 4 - Data Choice Screen

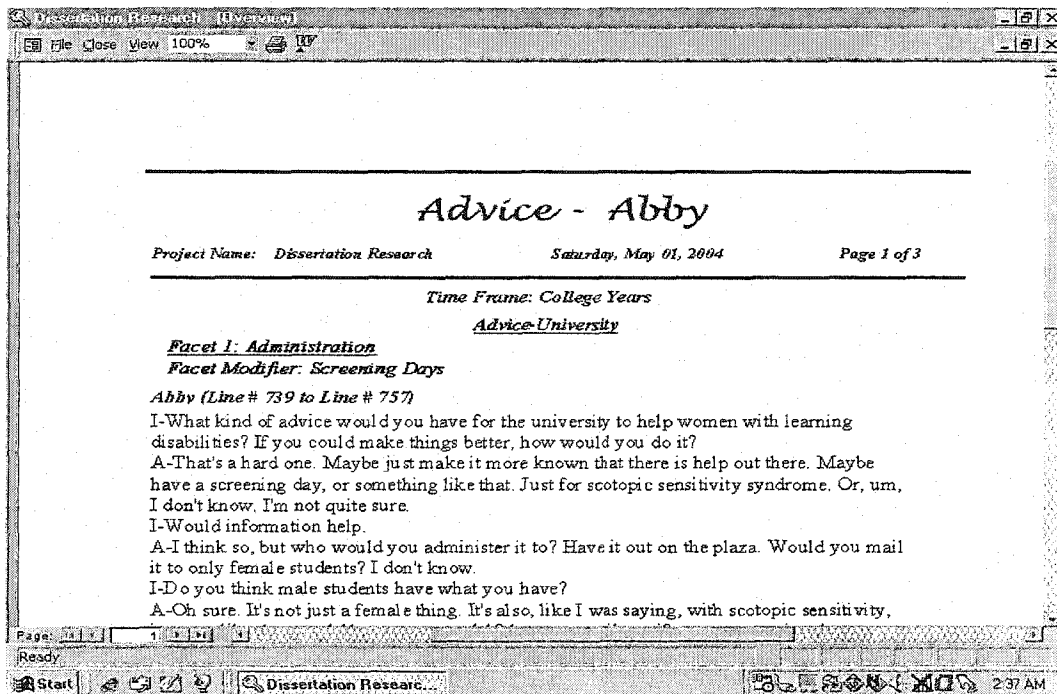


Figure 5 - Data Report

Investigator's Role

The investigator is seen as an instrument in qualitative research studies. Therefore, it is important to understand her perspective. Many experiences, both educationally and through the process of living life, have informed my perspective. I have a consistent interest in understanding change and how people adapt to it. Early work experiences have allowed me to view, first-hand, how layoffs and downsizing have affected workers. To me, attempting to understand what was happening absorbed my attention. I have dedicated most of my college years to understanding these changes.

In 1993, I returned to college and my quest for answers. My undergraduate Liberal Arts degree focused on the social sciences. This focus, along with my work to obtain a minor in anthropology and an Asian Studies certificate, fed my curiosity for international development, women in development, Asian history, and economics. My entry into the Master's of Social Work program continued my quest to understand change. In view of the world economic climate, I was determined to understand how many of the international strategies for women to gain economic viability, such as self-employment, were transferred to low-income women in the United States. My study of self-employment for women receiving income subsidies (AFDC, TANF) evolved into a study of asset-based welfare policies that were presented in the 1996 welfare legislation (PRWORA, 1996). I have continued my research on change into my doctoral program.

In my doctoral program, I became interested in how students with disabilities have transitioned into adulthood, specifically postsecondary education. My recent education in the field of disability and transition into postsecondary education has become an integral part of me. While I can temporarily set my understanding aside, as

required for this study, I cannot undo the experience of this effort. Neither, can I undo my experience as an individual with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that has left me with formidable learning challenges (see Brinkerhoff et al., 2002 for understanding of how TBIs and learning disabilities coincide). However, I have persevered and I have experienced academic success.

Being an academically successful student, I can understand many aspects of an individual's need to develop strategies to support her efforts. I may have used many of the strategies that study participant have used. Additionally, after having spent that last nine years of my life in a university setting as a person with a learning disorder (CAPD), I can understand the need to rely on supports while still maintaining a sense of autonomy. I can understand having to negotiate with professors, and spending countless hours at the disability resources office. However, since I acquired my TBI when I was already an adult, I have no understanding of how study participants have coped with learning disorders during their early school years. This can make their experience very different from my own.

I also have a deep bias that has been fostered by my identification with the study that Reiff, Gerber and Ginsberg (1997) have presented in their work *Exceeding Expectations*. While every individual's experience is by definition unique, I have noticed that many of my experiences are similar to those described by these authors. They have identified persistence, reframing, ability to search out help, and the ability to choose environments that support strengths as components of the lives of successful individuals with learning disabilities. That has been my experience. Many of the characteristics

described by individuals with learning disabilities are part of my experience. The strategies applied by successful individuals with learning disabilities are represented in my life.

I find these strategies not only in my life, but I parallel the experiences of having to negotiate unimaginable change with the experiences of many everyday citizens who are waking up in a changing society. Many of us are dealing with our lives in unexpected ways. In this regard, we are all pioneers. This is the perspective I bring to this study - I believe the women who are in this study are also pioneers--pioneers in their own lives.

CHAPTER IV

Journey Stories

This study was initiated to understand the threads that run through the academic success of its participants. Thirteen women with one or more learning disabilities, who have achieved the success of at least junior standing at a four-year public research university volunteered to tell about their academic journeys. Participants come to this study from varying backgrounds, interests, and ages. Although an interview guide was used to provide a general direction for interviews, these questions were only a gentle guide and participants readily related their journeys in ways that made sense to them. The focus of this section is to present their individual stories in a way that represents their extraordinary honesty. Many quotations are used so that the reader can get a better understanding of each participant's story. As you will see, participants are much more than their individual, or collective, learning disability labels. Yet, certain similarities interweave within and between each accounting, that instruct us all.

Naomi

Naomi is a strong-willed and innovative twenty-one-year-old senior majoring in psychology. Her practical nature drives her to avoid "hassles," even if it means she will lose a couple of points on her scores. Her goal is to continue on to graduate school and obtain a doctorate in psychology.

Naomi is one of four participants who were diagnosed with a learning disability before they entered college. She was diagnosed with dyslexia when she was in fourth

grade. Naomi feels she received needed support in her elementary and middle school years from “really great” teachers, an understanding administrator, and her mother, the steadfast editor and typist for most of her written assignments. Unlike most of the participants in this study, the majority of Naomi’s strategies for academic success were developed during her early education.

Naomi’s Background

Naomi feels it was a stroke of luck that her older sister was diagnosed with dyslexia. Her sister’s diagnosis prompted Naomi’s parents to have her tested also:

My sister is dyslexic. And, when I was in third grade, I still couldn’t read. And, it started to become a huge problem because I was doing fine at all the other subjects and I couldn’t read, and I couldn’t write. And because of my sister, who is a lot older than me, they thought perhaps I was dyslexic too....And so, I got tested, I think in fourth grade, and I went to therapy on the week-ends...to try to learn how to work with being dyslexic. And to make sure that I could get back into a normal reading level. So, that was a lot of work to learn how to read....Yeah, I was really lucky because they knew, because of my sister, that I was showing the same things that she had done. And my father’s also dyslexic. Although, he refuses to admit it...He doesn’t think that he is, but he is. And, so I got kind of lucky because she had a harder time. They didn’t know what was going on with her. And they did with me.

Naomi counted on the testing to explain her inability to read and write:

I was really concerned that the tests weren’t going to show anything. I was a person who was at the high level of math classes, and I was doing really good at stuff, and I understood things. And it was so frustrating when I couldn’t write, and when I couldn’t read. I hated it! I hated going to remedial classes, you know. It’s so embarrassing to get up out of class and have to go to another room and, you know, like Special Ed kids. It made me furious! I didn’t want to do it, you know. And I was so pleased to learn there was a reason why this stuff was going on, and why I was struggling.

Naomi was glad to be labeled with dyslexia. The new label reassured her that there was now a remedy, as well as a reason for her reading and writing problems. She was also

thankful for “really great teachers” who helped her develop strategies to work with her dyslexia:

I was glad to be labeled as dyslexic...I had some really great teachers. Like in fourth grade, I had a really wonderful teacher. That was when I first started to read. She was great! She helped me out a lot. And, in fifth grade, again, I had another great teacher that helped. And, in fourth grade, my teacher used to let me tape record book reports and stuff. And then my mom would type them out. And she would let me talk to her and do it that way. And that made it a lot easier for me. They just made it very simple.

While Naomi’s elementary school experience was made simple by understanding teachers, her transition into middle school became more complicated; her teachers went “overboard” in trying to provide accommodations:

Sixth grade year, when I came in [to middle school] they did like a big conference with all my teachers and told them I was dyslexic and stuff...but, a lot of teachers think, “Oh! you’re dyslexic,” and put you in the front row. And I’m very tall, and for me, that was mortifying. I hated being in the front row. I hated people being, like, scoot down!...So, I would almost rather just ignore it. And, we won’t talk about it. Because then you won’t put me in a special place, you won’t make me do stupid things. You know. Like, teachers would try to accommodate, but then they would go so overboard that I felt really, like, embarrassed, you know.

Naomi chose to approach her teachers in a different way after that experience:

After that, I tried to do it by talking to my teachers specifically after class on the first day. Like this is what’s going on. And they have files at the office and you can read about it. And, you know, just working from there.

Another frustrating part of her middle school experience was an encounter with her

French teacher:

I had a really hard time with my French class. Actually, I think that language is really difficult for me to do. Like French. I don’t know if that’s because I’m dyslexic, or if that’s just who I am. But, and that teacher was not understanding about being dyslexic. That was really frustrating!

Fortunately for Naomi, the principal of her middle school understood dyslexia:

The principle of my middle school was dyslexic and she kind of helped the teacher to understand and made things easier. So that was really great! She was always, like, you know, "I'm dyslexic, and I'm the principle." Made it seem like you could do anything. She was always talking about people who were famous, or had done a great thing. So, she was really wonderful!

High school became easier for Naomi. She does not remember having many problems during that time, although, she was frustrated, at times, with her dyslexia.

However, depending on her mother for editing, and her own ingenuity, she developed strategies to get her through:

I don't remember having very much of a problem in high school at all, because, by then, most things were typed. And if it's typed I can type it and get it spell-checked. I always get my mom to look stuff over, because she isn't dyslexic. And a lot of times the most frustrating thing for me is that if I type a word it won't come up in the dictionary. And I don't know another way to spell it to make it come up. You know. Or, I think it's the right word that I see in the dictionary. So, I always get somebody to read over my work, even after I type it. But, typing it is fine. As long as I don't have to do handwritten stuff. You know. That's, to me, the worst.

Naomi feels her sister has a more severe case of dyslexia because she has to rely on taped books. Naomi, on the other hand, "figured out a way to read stuff and get through it:"

I wanted to make it so that I could be just like everybody else. And I was going to do, whatever, to get there. And once I started reading I found wonderful books that I loved. So I became a fast reader .

Her style of reading, however, caused concern for the test administrator that updated her testing for her college records. The test administrator felt that Naomi had taught herself to read incorrectly and doubted her potential for college success:

The guy said that I didn't read correctly. I read by looking at the shape of the words instead of looking at the letters, or something. I don't know. He was not pleased with how I was reading. But I've been able to get through, none the less. So I just kind of ignored it.... Yeah, he said that I was able to mask it. I was able

to move along. Like with standardized tests, I do just fine. But, whatever, I'm doing is really not what you are supposed to be doing.

In spite of this new information, Naomi feels her system works for her and is not planning on changing. Naomi explains her system of reading:

I know what the shape of the word looks like. You know, obviously, sometimes I get in trouble with things being wrong. But I 'm pretty good at using the context of the words around....And another thing is, I've talked about this with my sister, and I know that my father does the same thing, and I think it's kind of like blind people having better hearing. When I read something, that's it. It's in my brain. I have a very good memory. So, that helps a lot. So, if I can read it once then I can usually keep it in my head for a while.

Naomi's College Years

Naomi has always planned to go to college. However, applying to colleges proposed a dilemma when considering her dyslexia:

I didn't want to put on my application that I was dyslexic, because, I think it's frustrating. But, my mom, and several other people, and my advisor at school was like, no, you really need to put this on there. So, I did. And I put it out.

Naomi was accepted for admission at four different colleges throughout the United States. While her present college was her last choice, when she visited the campus, it felt right for her:

I ended up coming here because it's far enough away from home that it feels like you're away, and close enough that I could still go to see my family when I needed to. I liked [present college] a lot. It felt nice when I walked on campus.

In spite of her comfort with her new school, Naomi admits that her freshman year "was a blur:"

It was a rough time for me. But, I think it was not because of transferring to college and stuff. It was because of a lot of other stuff. It was like living in the dorms was incredibly difficult for me, cuz I'm from a dirt road in the country, with no neighbors, and moving into the dorms, and having roommates and people

around all the time was really, you know, new for me. And, that stressed me out. And, I had other stuff going on. My best friend committed suicide. So, to me the school stuff was all a blur freshman year. It took second place to a lot of other stuff.

It took a while for Naomi to settle into her college experience. It also took a while for her to focus in on her field of study. Naomi went through three major changes before finally arriving at her present psychology major. She feels psychology is a good direction for her and it continues to hold her attention.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Naomi already had an understanding of her learning disability when she entered college. Because of this understanding, she had the advantage of being able to register with Resources for Students with Disabilities when she first arrived on campus. Naomi immediately began to get advice about available resources and procedures for getting help and accommodations. However, many of the strategies that Naomi uses in college are an extension of strategies that have already proven to be successful for her in her earlier educational setting.

Naomi continued to contact professors at the beginning of the semester. While the procedure for obtaining testing accommodations had changed, because of protocol for the college, her intent remains the same. It is important to Naomi to make sure that her professors understand her circumstances and the kind of accommodations that are helpful for her:

What I've done ever since then is at the beginning of every semester I talk to professors. I tell them, this is my deal. This is how I am. And, I'll be fine on getting stuff done, but if it's going to bother you to look at stuff that is hand-

written, you know, can I either have time to type it, or can I use the learning center. But, I've never had a problem. I haven't had to use it at all.

As in high school, Naomi types everything she can and makes sure she has the time to have someone edit her work before she hands it in.

Naomi thinks her college experience has been positive. She feels part of this success must be attributed to the support she has received from her professors:

[Professors] here have been more understanding than, I think, have been in any of my other schools... Maybe because there are more students and they are used to seeing more dyslexic people. It seems to be just fine. And... I've tried not to get any special conditions made for me. But... my sophomore year I had an adolescent lit class, and we had to read an ungodly amount of pages. We had to read ten books for class, and then we had to read 3000 pages within the semester on our own. And that professor gave me an extra week to finish stuff up because I was a little bit behind. But other than that, I've been OK... But he was really nice about it.

Naomi does not want to go through the hassle of arranging for extra time for her tests and prefers to test in class:

I'm a pretty fast test-taker. And, I'm willing to lose a couple of points and just get it done with everybody else, rather than making a hassle out of it. And having to go and make special time and stuff... I guess I want the professors to understand and if it's going to be a problem for them, then I'll do what they want me to do – fix it. But, if it's not a problem and they can deal with the fact that stuff is going to be misspelled or letters flipped around, or whatever, then I don't care. I'd rather just go along like everybody else.

On the whole, Naomi is not willing to make waves:

I've only had a couple of teachers that really didn't get it. You know. And, for the most part, I can fake stuff well enough to get through. I'm not willing to get in a big argument about it. So, I just keep trucking.

The only accommodation Naomi requires is the understanding of professors, and that is only on "handwritten stuff in class:"

If it's out of class, then I take the time to get somebody to read it, after I've written it. And I always revise my papers first and try to make sure that words I'm using are the correct words, and that kind of stuff.

This strategy takes extra time. Although frustrated, Naomi has learned to accept that her work will take longer than other students. She explains: "It's kind of a frustration because I can't, like my roommates can do a lot more stuff than I can do. It does take me longer. But, I'm used to it now, so I can just accept it."

Naomi is a practical person, especially concerning her reading style. Although, she admits, her system is "not perfect," it has "worked well enough."

When I got tested for college, he [the test administrator] wanted me to go back for more sessions and relearn how to read again... And I just really wasn't that interested in doing it again [laugh], because what I've done has worked well enough. Perhaps it would have been easier if I'd gone again, but...I just let it go. You know. And I just accept that it's going to take me longer and I can't fill up my schedule as much.

Because of the time it takes her to accommodate for her learning disability, Naomi has to choose her credit hours and the hours she works carefully. She "usually takes from fifteen to eighteen credits" per semester and works a maximum of 20 hours per week. However, this semester she feels she "has it easy" because she is only taking fourteen credits, although, she is also involved in an internship that takes up a lot of time.

Naomi likes her internship at a local preschool. She enjoys working with the children. However, her dyslexia causes frustration:

Because I'm working with little kids, it's kind of frustrating to me when I'm supposed to help them with their homework and I don't know how to spell the words that they're trying to get spelled... And, I feel embarrassed to ask somebody for help. I just do that. I ask somebody if I'm not sure if this is the right word, or whatever.

Fortunately, she feels “comfortable enough” with some of her co-workers to ask for their help if she gets into a bind and needs help with spelling problems. However, she is very self-reliant and prefers to work it out for herself if she can. When reading to a group of children is involved, ideally, Naomi needs to be able to plan ahead:

They wanted me to lead a reading group, and I said, you know, if you can give me the stuff a head of time, and I can practice, then I can do that. But, if it’s just, you know, you come in on this day, we’re going to hand you this book. I can’t do this. I really, really, struggle with reading aloud. And if I know I’m going to have to read something aloud I try to read it over several times myself before I read it aloud. Cuz, I really get tangled up doing that...I don’t know. Probably next semester I will have to do a reading group. But, [laugh] I don’t know how we’re going to work it out.

In terms of organizing her time, Naomi finds the use of a planner indispensable:

“I use a planner, and I write everything down. I have to do that.” She feels she is “very disorganized” unless she puts “a lot of effort into it.”

Another strategy that Naomi uses to organize her schoolwork is to make sure all of the notes for her classes are in one notebook:

I can’t have separate spirals and folders for my classes because I won’t bring the right ones when I need them. It’s just too much. So, what I do, I’ve discovered through the years, I take all my notes in one spiral, all day long. And when it comes to testing time I pull out all of the notes from one class and staple them together, and study from that. And then I just label it test one, or whatever. And I keep that in a pile, because I can’t have a lot of stuff in my backpack. I won’t bring the right thing....That’s what works for me. And I just label all my papers at the top of the page, what class it is and the date. But, it took me a while to figure that out. [laugh]...in high school it wasn’t that big of a deal. But, now it is. So, that’s what I do.

Finally, when continuing to talk about the strategies that support her academic success, Naomi feels, “most of all,” she could not get along without someone to edit her work:

I just really need somebody who is not dyslexic to read it over and make sure the words I picked out of the list, you know when it gives you a spell check, are right....I really depend on that.

Naomi's Use of Technology

Naomi has tried to use specific computer technology to accommodate her dyslexia. However, apart from typing and the use of a spell checker, she has not found other types of technology helpful:

I tried, like, the software where you speak into the computer. But, I had a hard time getting it to work right. That didn't work very well for me. So, I've just --I'm a pretty good typer, so I just use that.

Success

Naomi feels success is doing what you say you are going to do, and doing it well. For Naomi, that means she will graduate within a certain period of time and will be the first in her family to graduate from college:

I guess, for me, success is doing what you say you're going to do. For me, it was getting done in four years. Nobody else, in my family, has been to college. So, doing it, and doing it well was very important.

Naomi would have preferred to be at the top of her class, however, in the end, "getting it done" is the most important factor:

I don't know, I'm kind of a perfectionist...I'd rather be at the top of my class...I'm not, but that's where I'd want to be. It doesn't feel right to not get an A, and that kind of stuff. So, success is just getting it done if I set my mind to it.

Future Plans

After graduation, Naomi wants to take some time away from school before she starts her graduate studies. This time away from school will give her an opportunity to gain both life, and work experience, and will allow her to save money toward her

graduate studies:

I want to take off a little bit of time because I've never done anything but be in school, and I'd like to know that I can do something else. And, also my parents can only afford to help me out these first four years.

Naomi's ultimate goal is to become a counselor.

When asked how she felt her dyslexia would impact her work, Naomi responds:

It's always there, and I guess, I just have to remember that. I don't know how to explain it right, but when I get tired, really overtired, I can't read. I can't! I look at pages and it just looks like graffiti. And so, for me, it has to be, I have to understand that I need more time, and take the time and not get frustrated, and not try to do everything. And, that, to me, is harder than any of the outside stuff.

Another issue facing Naomi is that she still has to address the same question that she had when starting college: Should she tell the school, or her employer, that she has dyslexia? In terms of a graduate school, this question seems unsettled and Naomi continues to argue for both sides:

It's kind of dilemma for me because I haven't received a lot of help in college. You know, for being dyslexic, and putting that on applications and stuff again is kind of ridiculous. But, I feel like, especially if it's going to be a harder workload, I'm gonna need to tell them that I'm dyslexic to make sure that it's known...they always say, you know, if you have any learning disabilities, or whatever, fill this in...but, I just, I feel like a fraud by saying I'm dyslexic when I'm probably not going to ask them for a lot of help. You know. And, I don't want to make it into more than it is...So, we'll see. [laugh] But, at the same time, if it's a lot harder, or there's a lot more reading, then I need people to understand.

However, in terms of employment, her strategy seems clear: "I don't think I'll let them know that I'm dyslexic." When considering possible problems areas, such as having to produce handwritten notes, Naomi confidently states "if it was that [a handwriting situation], I'd figure out a way that I could type stuff...there would have to be an understanding because that's just the way it is."

Advice for the University

Naomi feels there are two big things that colleges need to address when it comes to helping women with learning disabilities. Most importantly, she feels that teachers need to understand more about learning disabilities:

I think that the biggest help is just making sure that teachers understand disabilities, different disabilities. Because a lot of them don't know what that means when you tell them. And they should understand at least the main ones.

Additionally, along this same line, Naomi feels that teachers need to know "how to work the system:"

I think the other big thing is that the teachers need to know what their options are. Like, how to work the system... I think that they know you can take a test somewhere else, but they don't always know how that all works. That's probably why it's been easier for me to just avoid doing that, when I can. Because I have to go figure it out and set everything up and then go explain it to the teacher and get stuff a head of time, and you know, it's just not worth it. So, if they knew exactly what they could do, what their options were, that would be better, I think.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Naomi champions the case for women with learning disabilities to go to college. Her advice is: "Do it! Go to college!" Furthermore, she feels if women with learning disabilities want to go to college, they should not let anyone discourage them:

I think that it's very, very, possible to do college... When I first got tested again, right before [college], the guy acted like, you know, like me getting through college was iffy. And I thought, no it's not. I can do this!... I feel like they should do what they want. If they want to do it, do it!

However, she feels it does require techniques to maneuver the system:

Just make sure you let [professors] know what's going on... if you tell them after the fact, they're not as understanding. It should be right up front. I try to tell them within the first or second day, my professor, what's the deal, and what I need... And then, I think, people are understanding.

Naomi advises waiting until after class to talk with professors: “I do it after class...I just wait until people are gone. And if that’s not gonna work, I have a class back-to-back, then I’ll go to their office and tell them.”

In the final analysis, however difficult, Naomi feels it is important for women with learning disabilities to face their circumstances and understand how they work best:

I guess the hardest thing for me, I just had to realize that I had to give myself time; that I wasn’t like everybody else. I need to give myself the extra time to get stuff done and accomplished. And, if I do that, then I’m OK....I think that’s been the biggest thing for me. To make sure I have enough time to do stuff and get it done. I just accept that.

Christina

Christina is a traditionally aged senior in the human development program. She is an international student from Sweden who is attending the university on a swimming scholarship. Christina received her pre-college education in her native country where she was, finally, diagnosed with dyslexia when she was in high school. The process of diagnosing her dyslexia was not straightforward. For many years, peers called her “stupid” and teachers relegated her to classes that held no challenge. To Christina, this was unacceptable. She would not accept being treated as though she were “stupid” and fought to obtain the “piece of paper” that proved she has a learning disability. With her formal diagnosis, Christina felt she had the necessary clout to demand the help she needed to do her best.

Christina’s Background

Dyslexia was not a stranger to Christina’s family. Her father has dyslexia.

Although, his absence from the family as Christina was growing up prevented her from gaining from his experience. Like several other participant's mothers in this study, Christina's mother was divorced when her children were young and worked hard to make up for lost time. Her mother attended college while raising her two daughters and maintaining a home. Christina's mother was both an inspiration and a steady support:

I had a hard time...following stuff, and reading. And, she worked on it, she tried to teach me the alphabet, or the numbers, like one to a hundred, by playing different games. Like juggling with balls, and stuff like that. And, I never thought about it because my mom always read books for me. Always!. And she read for my sister too, who is really smart...she always read, every night...And, she tried to tell my teachers I'm dyslexic, I need special help, but, they never really [caught]up on it, or follow it through. They just thought I was stupid so I was put in this special class, this Special Ed class.

Christina received her basic education (kindergarten through high school) in Sweden. She feels she was thought of as "stupid" and not presented with challenging material to learn:

That was really discouraging because I was told I was stupid...I was told by classmates. And the teacher was trying to help...but the material...was way to easy for my intelligence level. Like the material was too easy. I mean it was for kids who are slow. So, it didn't challenge me at all. So, I was kind of misplaced because I couldn't read. I have a hard time reading, but it didn't mean that I didn't understand stuff. I was...smart.

Christina felt out of place. Her teachers did not understand her challenges, so she sought consolation wherever she could find it. She found it in the kindness of a "maintenance guy:"

He was a maintenance guy in our school. And he had his own office. But, he was supposed to do maintenance, mostly. But, he was smart, all the kids' friend, and support, and help. Like, if you wanted, you could come in his room, and he closed the door. And, it doesn't matter how many phone calls, or knocking on the door - even, that would, like, interrupt the conversation, he would just look for your best,

and look for solution. How to help you, the way you wanted to get help. He would never go over you and go talk to someone if you didn't want to. And he always tried to do the best with kids. It was pain free and less obvious to people around you. Kind of not like put this big stupid hat on your head... And, he really helped out a lot.

Although her elementary school experience was disappointing, Christina feels she started to "really have problems" when she got into seventh grade. In her words, "I went to seventh grade and I started rebelling a lot." In seventh grade Christina refused to read out loud in class. She "didn't want to be made fun of." Seventh grade was also a time when tests were given. Christina "flunked them." She was flunking classes, while at the same time, not being provided challenging material. Christina tells us that:

Everything was too slow for me, and the kids were just annoying. It was mostly guys, trouble boys, like trouble-making boys that didn't learn. So, I, more or less, told my teacher... that if she doesn't take me into English class [a more advanced class], I'm not going to go to school. And they can't really, in Sweden, cannot really deny your education. They kind of have to provide you that. So, I went to [regular] class. So, that was a big trouble for me, and I wanted to go [to] high school, this was junior high. You have to qualify for high school, like to different programs... And, when I turned in papers [I] got de-graded because of language.

Once again, Christina was put into a special class. This time, however, it did not seem so bad:

Luckily, I had a friend [in the class]... and we had a really young hot professor, so we didn't mind. [laugh]... and, he was open minded. And, he didn't put us down. He was "Hey I have six kids. We're gonna have fun, and we're going to learn." He didn't [say], "you're stupid." [It's] kind of like, you know, you guys have more opportunity,... we're going to have fun.

Unfortunately, the fun only lasted a couple of months. The teacher quit and Christina was, once again, rebelling against being put into a special room, and once again she was allowed to attend a "normal classroom." Christina was determined that she was

“not going to sit around in a special room again.” The fact that she was quiet worked to her advantage:

My teacher liked me because I was quiet. He was an old alcoholic teacher--a really bad teacher. Everybody hated him but he's been working for like fifty years and you couldn't really fire him. And I was the only one that was quiet in the classroom, because I always had a book to read. I always loved reading. Even if I can't, because my mom kind of got that interest into me. So that was always part of my stuff, and I was laying on the bench, facing against the wall, reading a book. But, by doing that, I was quiet and I didn't interrupt the class, so he didn't mind me in the classroom.

Fortunately for Christina, a learning disabilities specialist finally noticed her:

One day I was talking to my professor and this teacher walked by. And she was this teacher that evaluates, like learning disabilities, and I think she heard something in how I speak. Some words...I don't pronounce them with a special change in them,...sometimes I just cut it off. And, she asked me if I had been evaluated. And, she totally turned everything around because [she] actually put on paper that I'm dyslexic, not stupid, and she really...tried to work with that.

Again, this support was short lived, Christina moved on to high school. She had finally reached her objectives, she was allowed to move on to high school and the learning disabilities specialist provided proof that she was not stupid, uninterested, or lazy:

She helped me get a paper. That was the only thing she had time to do. She didn't have time to work with me really, because, I don't know, you've been evaluated, it takes a ton of time. So, I went there and worked with her and she helped me out. I got the paper. And, then I thought..., this is going to be awesome because no teacher is going to tell me that I'm so stupid, or I'm not interested, or I'm lazy again. You know, I was pretty sure that teachers were going to accept me because I had this paper of this doctor telling me, you know...I was really excited about that.

Even without instruction on how to work with her dyslexia, armed with her proof, Christina was ready to move on to high school.

Christina thinks that high school was just “OK.” Although, she enjoyed being able

to focus on her interest in human development, and choose her classes. She was, especially, happy that her homeroom teacher understood her learning disability and was an “open-minded and a really positive person.” However, problems continued to arise in her language classes:

And my problem was when I had Swedish and English classes. At home you have to pass. If you don't pass your classes, you have to retake them or they don't move you a long. And, I didn't pass my Swedish classes and my English classes... I needed to have the grade so I was really frustrated because I know I spoke better English than most of my friends. I knew I could read and understand stuff. I just couldn't read out loud, I jump over words, I throw it around. And I told her this. And she was like you know you're just a slacker, blah, blah, blah.

Christina was determined to get a fair chance to pass her language classes and stood up for herself:

And I said, no, you have a paper here, you cannot flunk me. And, I started to have a little more skin on my nose. I was kind of like, you know, if you're not passing me I'm going to the principle and telling him you're breaking the rules--a simple fact! I know the rules as well as you know the rules. You know the rules, a teacher can't flunk you if you have a disability. You have to help me. And she...really wasn't...willing to help me...and I talked to the principle and he talked to her.

Christina was allowed to take her exams orally. This victory was a credit to her tenacity and self-determination. In spite of her victory in the testing situation, Christina still had problems with her language classes:

I retook a couple English classes and she finally passed me, because she had to, more or less. Like, she knew it was the easiest way out of her misery... because I was on her case. Like, you're going to help me. I want to pass school...I wanted to get out of there.

Christina finally graduated, however the experience was bittersweet:

It was easier for her to just give me a grade so I could get out of there, then actually work with me, because it's not hard for her to give me a grade. Like, you know, just put a number down on a paper, then actually help me out.

Fortunately, Christina's inability to prove herself in school was pushed to the background when she was in a swimming pool. Christina's athletic ability as a swimmer held her life together. Little did she know that a sibling rivalry with her sister would foster the very haven she needed:

I guess that was my playground too. I could be better than her. She can't compete because she can't lose. So, I got that playground. That was mine. And I could prove myself there. And...I still have it. Like, I don't mix my friends from school with the rest of my friends...Even my family is not involved in my athletic. It's mine. I don't know. It's always been my second self. It's been my stronger, my more positive. Like, I knew what I was doing and I could do it pretty well. And in school, I didn't know what to do. I was always nervous and I didn't like it. I was really uncomfortable all the time. But when it came to the swimming pool I knew where to go. And I had good coaches. I had really good and accepting coaches.

This swimming ability became Christina's ticket to college.

Christina's College years

Christina had never had a burning desire to go to college. Her previous school struggles had been, at best, disappointing and frustrating. However, when confronted with a scholarship to swim and study in the United States, Christina was both enticed by the opportunity to swim and intrigued by the idea of going to college. She felt secure in her swimming, but she wondered if she really could attain a college degree. Christina could still hear the voices of her teachers and her peers telling her she was stupid. She decided to take a chance and accepted a scholarship at a Midwestern College. Christina had immediate support for her learning disability at her new college and began exploring accommodations and strategies. Later, when she accepted another scholarship at her

present school, she continued that exploration.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Christina contacted Resources for Students with Disabilities (RSD) immediately upon her arrival on campus. Through her previous exploration, she discovered that having her books taped only worked under certain circumstances. Christina found in classes where she had to do a lot of reading, such as her mythology class, it was nice to have her books taped, however, in classes such as astronomy or physics, where she had to jump back and forth, it just did not work. She also found that having a notetaker was not always convenient, and definitely not timely. Often, she would get her notes two weeks after a test, when their benefits were lost. She quickly stopped using notetakers and started relying on swimming team friends who were taking the same class.

While Christina does not have extra time for testing, she still needs special accommodations if she is going to be able to do her best. Unfortunately, Christina feels that some professors will not take the time to work with her:

Most of the time, if you have a big class, like one and 200 level courses, the professors are not [going to] help you. It's, you know, bad luck, more or less. They don't say it that way but that's kind of the outcome of it, you know.

Still, Christina usually makes an effort to talk with her professors to try to arrange for her testing and explain her situation. Unfortunately, an earlier experience with a professor who taught classes in her human development major had warned her off from asking for help:

I didn't talk to her [the biology professor] because I used to talk to my HD professor here in the university that's supposed to be specialized in learning disabilities, and she really gave me the cold-hand, and she really was not helpful

at all. So, I actually dropped that class because she was going to flunk me...she was not willing at all. I was talking to her, and I was trying. And she gave me a really cold-hand. So, I dropped the class to take it with a different professor. And, I'm gonna take it up next semester. So, this biology teacher, she should have [a very large number of] students in this one class. And I didn't think she would have the time or energy to help me, because this professor only had 25 and was specialized with learning disability, didn't care. I didn't feel like going to [the] biology teacher, who had so many students, and ask for help. So, I took the pretests and flunked them.

It was clear to Christina that she had no choice but to go to her biology teacher and ask for help: "I...have to go to talk to the professor because I know the material. Biology is fun, it's interesting, and I know the material. And I never missed any of the classes. And she was really cool." Christina's biology professor chose to work with her. She allowed Christina to take oral exams. Consequently, her test scores zoomed up to 98 percent correct from scores of 47s and 48s. Christina's professor read the test to her and allowed her to discuss her answers so that she could be sure she was using the correct words:

Yeah, and the words, she changed from the lecture....like you can use different words for the same meaning. And she hadn't used it before in the classroom. The words didn't come together to flow. And I could ask her about that. Or, if she worded something backward, I could reread the question for her and ask her if this is what she asked for.

This approach makes all the difference in the world for Christina, although, these changes may have come a bit late:

I just wished that all the teachers did that. Ok, I know it's a lot of effort. I mean it took her, probably, thirty extra minutes. But at the same time, thirty minutes, for me...I don't know...if I'm going to pass this class because I only have two tests left. See if I do 90-high-on this one it won't equal out the tests I already flunked...Hopefully, she will work with me. I haven't thought of that yet. There are a lot of classes I take a lower grade just because of things like this...I know the material, it's not like I don't know it. It's not like I don't understand it. I can't show it on a multiple choice test.

Multiple choice tests are hard for Christina.

Because, they're so similar. I can't see the words. Like I can't see the difference of them. They kind of confuse me. I see the form of the word. Like don't get me wrong, I can spell the word out, but I can't hear what it is...I see the shape of the word....so if you have a word that is long and has so many main characters like...Cs and...Ps...I can't tell which one is which, usually.

It could be a little easier if Christina faced an essay exam:

If you have an essay, at least I don't need to be confused by the question itself...And, I have a bigger opportunity to put down the information I know. Even if the teacher takes away a few points because [I] can't spell. When they read it, it doesn't 100% make sense. It's not grammar right.

However, whether a testing format will work is not as simple a matter as essay vs.

multiple choice. Under certain circumstances, a multiple choice test could be better:

It is easier if it is essay question, like explain your knowledge about this subject. Or, how would you face this problem. Or, how would you solve this problem. But if it's like can you write out...this man's theory, mention the six stages with name. I can say the six stages, what all of them stand for, but I can't say the name...So then multiple choice is easier because I have a bigger chance [to] recognize...I can recognize the form of them...Usually multiple choice is easier. Especially if I have a teacher who is willing to ask me the questions and I answer them.

Having the professor ask the questions proved to be helpful in one of Christina's psychology classes also:

I had a great teacher in psychology who did that. She says "Hey come into my office because I need to read the questions anyway as you write them down to give them the score."...She read the questions for me. And she just made sure I explained it for her and she'd put the score down on the sheet...It helped me out, but it maybe took a little extra time for her...But, usually, it took as long for her to listen to my answer as to read my answer.

Christina has also had a good experience with an English professor and is thriving on her understanding:

I have a great English teacher. She is, I love her. I never liked going to an English class before, and right now, I love it! And she's really helping me out. And she's so understanding. She's like I'm not going to reduce you down if you do your homework. I understand you can't go to the writing center every day. And sometime if I give you something one day and you have to turn it in the next day, I understand if you need extended time because you haven't gotten the chance to get a hold of a tutor.

Whether Christina has a format that can show her knowledge is up to individual teachers. This uncertainty is frustrating for her. That is why taking the time to choose the right teacher is an important strategy for Christina. She thinks that “you can scan the teacher after [the] first class, and you know if you are going to be able to pass the class or not...Some are really good. Some are not.” This strategy takes planning, however, and can backfire:

Some teachers are really helpful and some teachers just turn your back, they're like not helping you. Sometimes you have to take the classes because you usually can't drop like four classes in one semester. I usually try...where I schedule more classes than I'm actually going to take...Some teachers are good, some bad: Yeah. So, I schedule more classes than I'm going to take so I have the opportunity, if I meet one of these professors, I can drop it early enough and try to take it next semester from a different professor. And, hopefully, you can work it out so you can start out with 15 [credits].

Christina has no patience with a professor's lack of understanding about learning disabilities: “I think it's hard to see how a teacher is not knowing about a learning disability. Like, I can't work in the food industry and not know what a tomato is.” A lack of understanding on the professor's part is confusing for Christina. She wants to learn and does not want special favors:

I have a thing, knowledge is really good. The more knowledge you have, the more you can use it. I don't say that I should get special treatment, and sometimes I need to show my knowledge. I want to show my knowledge to the professor. I don't want him to give me a grade just because. I want to show them my

knowledge. I want to learn, and my grade is going to be approval for myself to learn... So, it's [professor's attitude] kind of confusing.

Assistive Technology:

Christina has to schedule a great deal of time to finish a class paper. She had hopes that the university's Assistive Technology Center could provide a miracle for her and lessen the time it takes her to write papers. In a visit to the center, while she did not find the help she had hoped for, she found the coordinator willing to go out of the way to help:

She's awesome person and she's open and she works with you. She's like this is what I have. Does anything sound interesting? And I will try to find something that will work for you. I will try to build a program for you... She's really cool.

According to Christina, the technology she looked at was not usable for her. The language program did not understand accents and other programs were very expensive.

Christina explains some of the problems she finds:

They have the program that will actually read what you write a different way. The only thing is that, I think, right now, they almost have everything out there. It's just really, really, expensive. And, you have it on, like, 20 computers on campus so you're kind of locked into one computer. And one computer gets to know you. Like *Dragon*, for example, gets to know you. It learns. The more you use it, the more it learns about you. So, it's extremely time taking in that kind of a way. So, it really works, it helps you out. It might take away 50% of your problems. I mean, that's a lot... But, in the same time, it might take you four times longer to do it. So, it's kind of a give and take kind of thing. If you're going to catch all the mistake you're going to have to go through like 20 steps. And I don't think the computer can be smart enough to think your thoughts... I mean, if it could read your thoughts and then organize it in a special way.

The assistive technology center did not have the miracle that Christina was looking for. Christina is left with facing her own writing process and the time it takes.

[If] I have a two page paper, that is not minor for me....[after writing the paper] I would still not be done because I still have to go back to the TA, or Writing Assistance, and they had to re-help me with the paper. It would probably take me like two hours. And then I have to re-write it. And then I would take it back and see if I actually made the changes that I was going to make, to see if I missed any changes...And it takes a lot of time. And then it's really, really, like now at the end of the semester you have a paper in every class. And, I mean, I live in the Writing Center and computer lab.

Christina wishes she were like her friends who take very little time to complete a writing project, however, she is philosophical about her difference and refers to her strengths:

And, some of my friends go, like, "Oh, you know, I'm going to do that tomorrow before class." I'm like, I just wish I could. You know, that's the time, like, I wish I could do that, but....at the same time, I learn, because I can comprehend the information. In the classroom, I go to every class. Because if I heard it in the classroom, its almost 90% sure that I know it.

Christina thinks she has such a hard time with her writing because she thinks in pictures:

I'm really visual, like, I think in pictures. Everything is picture. And it becomes really jumpy, like it doesn't flow, but for me it does...I don't put everything in it. Like, I have a hard time overstating stuff because I think it's obvious, that people know it. Or, I think that I already put it in because it's so clearly in my head...I have a hard time reading it and seeing what I wrote.

In addition, Christina has a hard time discerning one word from another. This makes the use of a computer program to check her spelling problematic:

The word problem,...that's one of my big pet peeves. People say that I can do well, because I...put something down on a computer [and] it can help me out. And the computer can give me 10 words that look the same. I don't see which one of the 10 I need. I don't know which one I need...it makes it even more confusing because I may use a word that doesn't really go with it.

Finally, Christina feels that one of her biggest assets is that she knows herself and does not doubt her understanding. Even if it is difficult to show that she knows the material, Christina explains that: "I know myself. That usually helps me a lot. Knowing,

myself, that I know the information.”

Gender Issues

In her early years of schooling, Christina admits to being quiet. Even though her mother fought to get her tested, she was unsuccessful, because Christina did not fit the profile of a student with a learning disability. Christina feels that part of the problem is that the evidence points to males as having dyslexia:

First of all, I do think that some handicaps, like it's proven that dyslexia runs more in the male population, than females. Some diseases, some things run more on one side like females or males... and one of those things are dyslexic. I don't know if boys are showing it more, and girls are more stubborn and we're allowed to not be able to read. We're not giving the same attention to it. Like a girl is usually not as [forward] and guys face problems different than girls do. I think that might do with people actually see guys problems more quickly and more clearly.... Yeah, they're like asking for it. They're more like, if a boy [has] problem in school he usually get[s] really loud and vocal, and trouble-maker. A girl more disappears. Usually like stereotyping. The guys making problems, they want to deal with that one. The girls are quieter in the classroom. They don't really want to, because she is not disturbing.

When Christina reached higher grades in school she took a lesson from the boys and began to act out to get the attention she needed: “I get kicked out of classrooms. Like teachers get mad at me. But, I get irritated and I learned it's the best way to go.”

Christina thinks another problem that women face is their lack of support for one another:

I think...it's harder for a female to come up to a female. But I always have problems with females...I don't know? I think females are so competitive against each other. It's the crab in the bowl kind of expression. If one crab tried to pull out of it someone else would pull it down before it gets out. And I think that that's the main difference between female and male gender in general...Guys, you know, they compete fairly; Girls [don't]... Guys are like,...if you get stronger by me getting stronger, we do it. But a female is like why should you get stronger. You know what I mean. We don't work off each other as much....You've been in

a girl's locker room. You know the talking. Like just go to Rec Center and sit down and listen there for five minutes and you hear it. I mean, it's kicking down, kicking down, kicking down... I think that's the main problem. I think that's the girls causing it themselves... But guys, [don't] do the same to each other. You know, they prove themselves and stuff, instead of kicking someone down so that they look better, they prove themselves. And that is what I found... I'm sorry, but I've a really hard time... I work with a lot of ladies and ... the only thing they do is picking on each other. They never try to help each other.... I think that's a major thing.

Success

It is easier for Christina to speak about success in a general sense, rather than academically. When speaking generally about success, Christina's thoughts quickly turn to an experience she had when she was in high school. While working in a kindergarten, Christina was able to turn the life of a young boy completely around:

I [worked with] a boy... for 30 hours a week. That's when he was there. And I was only there for him... because they said he was really violent and he was disturbing the other kids. He had a lot of issues. And what I found out, first of all, was that the label was mainly the thing that put him there, and the lack of support. So, he was a product of his environment because he was the sweetest, most loving kid ever. And he was really interested in social contact. He loved social contact. And, when I got there he had the label. He was really violent, really anti-social. And he was just the worst kid that you ever laid your hands on. And that... really made me want to go back and study more. You know. He was only five years old and he was already having this stamp on him. And what came out is that his mom stopped loving him when she got another kid. So, she put him in kindergarten rather than having him home by himself everyday. And she had the brother home. And she never spoke Swedish to him so he didn't know Swedish. And his dad was never home, so he didn't meet his dad... and he was put in this environment that he was supposed to speak Swedish, otherwise you can't survive, if you can't speak the language... So, it was kind of amazing. And that's when I really wanted to start working with kids.

In this account of success, Christina sets her mind to "study more" about the little boy's situation and make a difference in his life. In Christina's mind, success is being effective, either in the influence on another's life, or in the individual choices in her own. Simply

put, success is knowing she can do what she sets her mind to do and having the control to make that choice:

It's just knowing you can do it if you want to do it. Like, you're able to prove, if you want to do something you can do it. Like, you can make a difference yourself. Like that's why I am in an individual sport too. I don't need to depend on anyone else. It's me and no one else. And no one is going to be in my lane stopping me....And I can't fall back and say it's someone else's fault. I'm there. It's me, nothing else.

Most of all, Christina feels “success is just finding peace with yourself. Know you've done what you can do. You've done your best.”

When Christina's thoughts turn to academic success there is a sense of the struggle that she has experienced. Success, has been, and continues to be, a piece of paper—proof that she is not “stupid.” Christina's early experience of academic success was focused on her fight to have the opportunity to gain a challenging environment, and an arena in which she can prove her understanding. She was awarded the piece of paper that proved she has dyslexia. This piece of paper allowed her voice to be heard. Her final academic success will be another piece of paper—her college diploma. For Christina, her college diploma will offer proof to herself, and others, that she is, indeed, the intelligent human being that she suspected she was all along. Her college diploma will be the final proof of her academic success: “I think it's important for me, and my self-esteem, to realize I've done it.”

I think my degree is whole about myself. It's not for me getting a job. It's not for me finding a husband. It's not for me moving up in status, or anything...I think I'll still be the same goofy girl as I was when I got in here...I just have more to fall back on. I have more knowledge so I can actually help more, do more with my life.

Christina is not above flaunting this success. On a trip back to her hometown she paid a visit to teachers that had demonstrated so little confidence in her:

Yeah, it's cool... I got straight As in my English class I took here. And went home and kind of rubbed it in to my teacher's faces....I had to. I mean I think it could actually help some other student that comes after. The teachers...don't think I can pass 7th grade English, you know, and here I have straight As in English in college in U.S.

Christina took a moment to enjoy their discomfort and embarrassment, and then quickly added: "I hope they don't take me as an exception...That is, they see a student like me, the next time they might actually listen to the student and help him out."

Christina's success has changed her feelings about going home: "It's nice to go home now." However, the fragile image Christina's success has fostered is difficult to maintain:

You know, all my family knows. They never really hold me down just because I'm stupid, or not able to read and write. But still, they've known it. You know. It's kind of like, you don't stay involved but it's kind of a black spot you have. And, it's always going to be there. But, at the same time, if I come home and have higher degrees than anyone else in my family and better grades...I still have that unassertive girl who doesn't want to read or write...I still...really hurt....My whole week may have been perfect and you say one comment, you can take all the good stuff away. But, if you have that [the college diploma]I have something to fall back on.

Ironically, Christina thinks she will never use the piece of paper that she is fighting so hard to get:

Actually, I hate it, you know. I have proven that I am not stupid. I can do it. I probably will never even use my degree. I don't think, because what I want to do is not a profession. So, I'm going to use my knowledge, I'm not going to use my paper. And, I think knowledge makes you stronger and make you more certain...It's just gonna make you able to reason with yourself...Like, you couldn't be that stupid if you can do this.

Christina adds, "On a good day you can actually do it."

Christina's Future Plans

Christina's "dream is to help out kids." She does not picture that she will make a lot of money doing this:

My goal is to find a job to feel like I would do a difference and do what I want to do. Hopefully, I will have peace of mind and stay home with my kids and maybe, be one of those people who are on the sideline. One of those people who are just there. I don't want to be boxed down by hours and work.

She sees herself changing the system:

Hopefully I will be able to guide other people...I want to be able to take away some roadblocks from people and try to build up their self-esteem so that they don't, hopefully, never need to be put in a situation...go to Special Ed.

Christina feels the problem with being put into "Special Ed" classes is the labeling that it brings:

You can do it [have Special Ed] in a way that it's not...putting a stamp on us. Or, if you put a stamp on one, you have to put a stamp on everybody, because there's not a person that is good at everything. There's not!

Christina would like to work to have the traditional education changed and children encouraged to follow their interests and to focus on how they learn best.

Christina is looking forward to being married and having children. She wants her family to be her main focus, when the time is right. To Christina, however, being devoted to her family does not mean she will be totally dependent on a husband:

I don't want to be dependent on anyone... I don't think dependence is bad, but I would never end up that I would be so dependent on someone else that I can't do my own choices or do my own rules. Of course if I have a husband I am going to be dependent on him, but at the same time, if it's not working I'm gonna be able to stand myself. You can't trust anyone else to live your life. You have to set your rules. You have to build your frame. If you don't have your frame you can't really

be a good partner. I don't think. Like if you don't have your self-esteem and you don't have your security, you're just going to be leaning on your partner and that's gonna drag you guys both down.

Advice for the University

Christina has little sympathy for professors who are unwilling to teach and reach out to all of the students in their classes. She feels that, in the very least, women with learning disabilities should be forewarned about the “bad professors” and directed toward the “helpful professors:”

I think that...they should have this black book in the learning disability [office]. Writing down professors, helpful professors. Like, naming, ranking both good professors and bad professors. Like, kids coming in can actually be helped. I mean it's not cheating. If the professor doesn't do his job, why should he get credit for it. You know what I mean. Like, I don't want to be that teacher, but if I were the teacher on the black side... I know I need to do something about it. I know I can't continue doing what I do...I think that would help a lot of students...just knowing what professor to take and not take. Of course, you can't cover all the professors, but in a lot of classes you could probably narrow them down. Like what is a good professor. Which is the best one to take. What classes are good ones and bad ones...if there's a teacher who is not willing to work with you or not.

Christina offers, as an example, outcomes for classes taken from professors who were unwilling, and willing to work with her:

I took [an astronomy class], I was working, and working, and I still flunked it. I worked, and worked, and still flunked it!...And then you take physics, which I think should be harder, and I passed it without a problem because I had an energetic professor who helped you. Explained for you. Worked with you, and make the world of difference... Some teachers are really willing to help you. Really willing to work with you.

Christina would welcome the opportunity to start this black book and feels it would be only fair to provide this service:

I don't have a problem doing it. It would take me five minutes. And...other students would do it too... if there were 10 of us doing it we can benefit from each other....I mean, it's not like I put them [professors] down... it's not only my opinion. I mean, he [the astronomy professor] put me down by giving me an F. So, why can't I put him down by giving him an F. I mean, it's fair. It's not like he doesn't get opportunity to prove me different...I would only give the people I try to work with...the grade...I think it's fair.

Christina stops to think about her black list and then considers that maybe she would limit the list to "just good professors. Just give the A+ and A and B," but, then, reconsiders and adds:

I think a teacher that is a bad teacher should know about it. Why not? He's telling the student that we are not good enough for him. And he gets paid for being here. I pay him. And I pay him a lot of money.

Christina thinks another good idea would be to educate professors in how to work with students with learning disabilities:

I think it's important for professors to be educated enough to know... that once someone is actually coming up, they need help...well not really help, they need a different way to prove their knowledge. And they [professors] can be a little more open-minded to help them out and work with them. I think that's the most important...attitude of teachers....Like, just because I'm not blind, doesn't mean that I can read and understand...I can read...but that doesn't mean that I can read and understand like you want me to read and understand it so that I can answer your questions.

Interactions with an understanding professor are paramount to the wellbeing of students in Christina's mind. From personal experience, Christina has found that "if they [professors] accept you and work with you they increase your self-confidence. That helps a lot with how you feel."

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

In spite of her struggles with college, Christina recommends that women with

learning disabilities should not hesitate to register. However, they should have a realistic attitude about what they will encounter:

Do it! Be stubborn. You know you're going to put in extra, like more hours and more energy than anyone else. Like, be aware of it....they need to put in probably 4 to 6 times more energy and time to it. Just learn to figure out...the resources you can use, and use them.

Although Christina has not started her little black book yet, she offers some interim advice. Christina thinks it is a good idea to "hook up with people." She feels the more people you know, the better. The end result is "knowing which teacher to take and to not take." She feels this networking "makes a huge difference. Going in and knowing to avoid this professor, or to take this class instead of that class... makes a huge difference."

Dallas

Dallas is a microbiology major who came into college directly from high school. She plans to graduate with her BS in microbiology in about a year and a half. After completing her undergraduate degree, Dallas will enter graduate school, eventually completing a Ph.D.

Dallas considers herself a "very determined" person that "loves a challenge." She explains: "I've always pushed myself, whether it was softball, or swimming, or grades. I always wanted to see how well I could do." Her determination alone, however, could not carry her through her college experience. She just "couldn't keep up." Her discovery of a "reading disability" forced Dallas to get help and redefine her sense of self.

Dallas' Background

Dallas knew from an early age that she wanted to reach for a Ph.D. She credits her mother's support for her interest in science:

My interest in science started really young....I had fun playing with bugs in the back yard, birds, snakes, and lizards, just anything I could get my hands on. I just wanted to know how they worked. My mom saw that when I was little, and she really...helped to cultivate that interest.

In addition to her mother's support for her passion, she also received support through an organized science program:

My junior year in high school I went to a science camp. Most people hear that and think what a nerd, which is, kind of, true. I am, which is fine. But, I went to that and did a research project there and...realized that if you want to go into research, you really do need to have that Ph.D. And, that's really what...motivated me.

Dallas' interest in college has always been supported by both of her parents:

When we were little our parents told us, we'd like to see you do whatever it is you want to do. But, we really think that college is going to help you with that....they didn't push the issue really, really, hard. But...they cultivated our interests.

While, both her mother and her father supported an interest in postsecondary education, Dallas' mother became her role-model:

My dad has always been incredibly supportive. He never went to college, my mom did. My mom, of course, waited until we were, I was in fourth grade, before she went to college...She's an incredible role-model. I don't know how she does it....She's a teacher....it's interesting hearing her story. She tells us that she didn't go to college right out of high school because she thought she was too dumb to....and that was, that was hard for me to hear, because I've always looked up to my mom like the smartest person in the world, and, I want to be like her. But, actually watching her go through college was one of the most incredible things, because, you know, we were really little at the time. We didn't really know how she was getting through it, and, what she was doing. We just knew that she was staying up late.

Dallas feels her mother is a role model for her siblings as well:

Yeah. Looking back on it, I appreciate what she did.... My brother is one year away from a math degree....I don't know how he does it. He has a math brain. He's a whiz!

Although Dallas is optimistic, she stills worries about her little sister:

My little sister is a junior in high school. She's really struggling. It's been really tough for her. I'm pretty sure she'll go on to college, but she has no idea what she want's to do yet. She's got such profound learning disabilities. But, she'll make it.

It is clear to Dallas that her little sister struggles, desperately, with learning disabilities. In fact, Dallas is aware that her mother and brother also have learning disabilities, and they all suspect her dad has dyslexia. However, when Dallas was in elementary, middle school, and high school, it never occurred to her that she had a learning disability. In fact, Dallas was in accelerated classes. Although, looking back, she admits that she knew she had to "work very hard" for the success she experienced. For the most part, Dallas attributes her success in school to her mother:

No. I was never, they had special education, they had kids with learning disabilities, they did sessions with those kids, but, I was never put into that group. And, I think a lot of that is because my mom started us reading at three or four.

However, she also thinks that, if she had been in a different school district, things might have been different for her:

My school system that I was in was real low income, not very academic.... it was mainly military and there was just a lot of kids that came in, and were in and out. The teachers were always helping to catch up. And, throughout my entire elementary, junior high, and high school years I was in the accelerated classes....I think, had we been in another area, I probably would have been toward the lower end of the classroom.

"But, you know" Dallas adds, "me and my mom are similar in that, we just don't take no for an answer." Although, her school system could be considered lacking, in Dallas' eyes, she also feels that another reason she was not identified with a learning disability until college is because she "refused to recognize it" herself.

Dallas' College Years

Dallas was determined to go to college and to be successful. She researched several schools and finally narrowed her choice to her present school, which has a "very good" microbiology program. However, Dallas was beginning to see that there might be a problem. When asked about her SAT's Dallas explains:

I don't even, don't want to remember those. I did awful on the SAT's. The only thing that saved me was my grade point average. I scored really low. I don't even remember what I really got.

These scores did not fit within Dallas' self-image, and were pushed to the back of her mind. All through her early schooling Dallas had been placed in accelerated classes, these scores did not fit in her life. However, there was more disappointment to come, Dallas' determination, and hard work, could not help her keep up with her college work:

It's kind of funny looking back. I spent hours, on hours, on hours, reading. It took me forever to read the stuff that others took, like, not even half the time I spent. And, a lot of, I was just, was really determined to get through it. When I got to college, I still had that determination, but I couldn't keep up.

In hopes of being able to devise a way to keep up with her schoolwork, Dallas attended a speed-reading seminar. Apart from a very low word-per-minute reading score, observations of a seminar consultant made Dallas stop and think:

It was actually kind of a way I figured out that I needed to go to the testing service center, you know, learning assistance...was that I went to a speed-reading seminar, and, they told us that the national average is 147 words. And, when we did mine, my reading was 60 words per minute...the guy came over and actually watched my eyes, and he said, you've got a tracking problem. Of course I didn't believe it...but, it, kind of, stopped there at the back of my mind through the semester and I actually went and got it checked out. He was right.

Dallas was beginning to put the pieces of these puzzling events together:

What I did was, well, it took a while because I was falling behind in my classes and really struggling getting the reading done, so, I went over to the Learning Assistance Center and I talked with them. And, they asked me, you know, does anyone in your family have a learning disability? And, that's when it, kind of, clicked. Well, my sister does, my mom does, my brother does, and my dad, he really struggled. So, I'm sitting there thinking, well, I may have one. So, they ran a couple of tests to see where I was compared to the national average. And, I was pretty low....as far as reading and stuff.

Unfortunately, Dallas feels this diagnosis "hindered" before it helped her.

She explains:

Just finding it out, that after being at the top of my class in high school, I dropped down to the bottom [emotion is welling up causing Dallas to find it difficult to speak]...It was hard. It's still hard.

At this point, Dallas found it difficult to go on. The tape was turned off until she was able to continue. After a few minutes, we decided to focus on the more positive aspect of her diagnosis. Dallas was asked if her diagnosis of a learning disability helped her. She explains: "I think it did. Knowing why I was so slow, and, ultimately, I think it's been incredibly helpful to know I have resources available."

Describing her learning disability as a "reading disability," Dallas explains her experience:

It takes me a lot more time to do my homework, to work through problems, to do things. I have a reading disability, and that's really where it hits me. So, other than really having to buckle down and working a lot harder than most, the average person, that's really all that I have. I mix numbers up a lot.

In spite of her low SAT scores, and her reading challenges, Dallas is doing well in her program and has gained the support of many of her professors. In fact, her present boss, and professor, has helped her to begin to accept her learning disability. She considers this a "kind of neat story" and a "big success":

He just, you know, this was just after I found out I really, kind of, had a learning disability, and I went up and I talked with him. And, he said, you know, "Dallas, you ask some of the best questions in the class." He said that "everyone processes information differently," and, he said, "if you need this resource I'm more than willing to accommodate anything that you need. But, I want you to know that you really have shown a good understanding of the material." He was really supportive....I don't think he really understood why I need the testing center in his class because I'd just been able to ask the questions that I lot of other people didn't. That it kind of, it was nice to know that somebody did understand that people do process information differently... Yeah, it was incredibly nice to know.

Dallas also feels her general chemistry professor has been very helpful and considerate:

My general chemistry teacher was one of the best people to work with. She, you know, if you forgot your test form she would tap you on the shoulder. Remember your test form. Gotta get those. And she just would bend over backwards for students. And, I don't think enough people realize that....Of course that's coming from a teacher's kid....But, she was really helpful.

However, in spite of this support, Dallas admits that there are professors that are, "not very good about working with you." She feels that she has "had a couple of those," an organic chemistry professor comes to mind. He "can be a real pain in the neck." Dallas explains:

Well, he just, there's been times when he's just asked, are you sure this is really necessary? In a really condescending tone. And, that's frustrating.... You know, the guy is incredibly intelligent, and I think it's hard for him to imagine what it would be like to have to not understand something.

Ultimately, Dallas has "just kind of brushed... off" this experience, rationalizing that "he's not a very nice guy anyway." Although, Dallas admits, it bothers her to accept a C in his class, she does not take it too personally. She has heard that if "you can pull off a C, you're doing good."

Dallas derives much of the support she receives for her struggles in school from her family. She has found that there is "not much" available, in terms of a supportive college network, on campus. Although, Dallas does have one roommate, who is in many of the same classes, that has been supportive. Dallas feels that her classes have been pretty hard lately, and, she feels "it's better if you can struggle though it with somebody else." Dallas explains the support she receives:

We work together, through a lot of the homework. She understands that things are harder for me than most people and she's been really good about working with me....she usually gets things a lot quicker....and, I don't....but, it kind of depends on the issue, what we're doing. Sometimes, I'll get it quicker than she does. And, I don't know if that's just because I have a different way of looking at things, or what it is. But, it's worked.... Yeah, we just kind of work through it together. She's been really patient, you know, it does take me a little more time. And, she works it out like most people and she understands, which is nice.

Dallas doesn't want to have a learning disability, but has found a way to turn it to her advantage:

You know, I look at mine, not as a learning disability, but as an ability. I know that sounds weird. But, if I didn't have my learning disability, if I were able to read as well as everyone else, be able to do math problems as quick as everyone else, I wouldn't be where I am. I would not have the work ethic that I do....All the

way throughout, even in grade school, my teachers always told me, you are so diligent. We've never seen anybody work as hard as you....To stay up with the rest of the class, I've had to. . .but, it gets you where you need to be. And, ultimately, it makes you a better worker, as far as doing what you want to do. Because, I think, employers are much more wanting to have someone that is, maybe, slower at getting things, but, maybe, pays more attention to detail, and not stop in the middle of a task, and just keep plowing through it. And, that's really why I say a disability is, mine, in a way, it's not something. . . I don't want it. I, kind of, more recently, that's a philosophy I adopted. It took me about a half a year to realize that. You know when I was first diagnosed I, kind of, saw it as a roadblock. But after some very heart-to-heart talks with my mom....I really realized this is not a disability. This is what I'm going to use to get me through...That's what has gotten me as far as I am.

Accommodations and Strategies

Through a referral to Resources for Students with Disabilities from the Learning Assistance Center, Dallas was able to understand the resources that were available to her.

Dallas explains this process:

I met with [name of counselor], who is and absolute angel. She's the world's sweetheart. Met with her and she told me what accommodations I was entitled to. And, from there, we went to taking my exams in the testing center, and, we got my books on tape.

Dallas feels working with Resources for Students with Disabilities for her testing and taping of her books has been "absolutely" helpful.

Regarding the books on tape, and her reading strategies, Dallas explains:

I read the book as well...I don't think it would be effective just to listen to the book, as it is to listen and look at the words. And, what I have actually found is that listening and reading, it not only, like, increases your comprehension, but it really helps your eyes track. And, I've noticed an incredible difference in my reading without tapes, just because I can hear how someone actually reads. I've just been able to follow that along. I don't know if that's a training? When I read by myself, I usually read out loud, or place a little marker underneath the words as I go. I think it's helped, with my reading on my own, without the tapes.

Dallas also receives between time-and-a-half and double-times to take her tests. She feels that this has been "a God-send." One drawback to this process, however, is that preparing to take the test at special facilities takes a lot more time to plan:

It's kind of funny to have to work your schedule because you know you're going to have to have this time to take a test. So, you're scheduling for next semester and you have to schedule, like, an hour or two for that test.

Success

Dallas has thought more about her idea of success lately. While, at one time, being in accelerated classes seemed to define her, she now admits that she does not "know if success was being in accelerated classes." She explains: "that was more just a challenge to keep me occupied." According to Dallas:

Ultimately, I think success is just being happy with what you can do. I know that I have a long road ahead of me, as far as school. I'm going for a masters and Ph.D. I kind of determine success as, kind of, being happy with where you are....I think it's just to be able to look back on what I've done, sit back, and be proud of it.

Dallas' Future Plans

Dallas is determined to work in research. She knows it is going to be a long road, but she believes "it's going to be worth it." Her plans include attending graduate studies at her present college:

I'm looking at applying to graduate schools here. There's a couple of other schools that I might look at, but, I know the department here, and, I'm very impressed with their undergraduate program. And, I've heard people who have just stayed here through their masters and Ph.D. and have done really well...unless I find something that really stands out, I don't think I'll be moving any time soon.

Dallas feels another deciding factor for staying in her present college is her ability to "work well with the department."

Gender Issues

Dallas has decided not to embark on a romantic relationship while she is in school. Her decision was made clear when she was confronted with outside expectations of the role of a women. Dallas explains:

I was dating this guy and we were pretty serious. I was in college and he was in the military. We met in high school. We'd been dating for two-and-a-half-years. And, I went home for Christmas and he was there. We went over to his parent's house, and, his mother was, she's an interesting lady, she's very set in traditional ways and thinks that the woman's place is in the home. And, she just flat-out said, you know, I don't think you should be going to school. I think you should be a homemaker...I didn't take that well. And, her son, the ex-boyfriend, we're really good friends now, but [laugh] really thought the same way. And, I, kind of, decided, you know, to heck with this. This is not gonna work. And, I think we'd better call this off--and we did. It's taken time to heal, but, I'm really glad that I did not let that decide that school was not for me. And, currently, I don't date...Not because I don't want that complication, the complication of people telling me I shouldn't be in school, more so because, while having a relationship is really, you know, there's a lot to be said for it as far as your individual growth and growth together...I learned a lot from that relationship, I just don't think it's worth the time while you're in school...It really takes your focus away. Not to mention, just the energy that is put into maintaining a relationship...A lot of work. And I just don't see any reason to put that energy in when my energy can be used on working for what I need to work for. That's not to say I'll never meet someone who comes along, but, I've just chosen not to date in college. With a learning disability and everything else, I think your energy, my energy anyway, is much more well spent focusing on school.

Dallas admits that she has "several guy friends, but, that's all they are, just friends." She doesn't believe having "guys" for friends is tempting, or hard for her:

I grew up with guys, as the only girl. I was the one who climbed the trees to put the rungs on the tree house, and then got told--no girls allowed!

However, Dallas does not think that she got the "no girls allowed thing very much." She thinks that, "men, today, are a lot more accepting of women in the work field." In fact, Dallas would really prefer to work with men. She feels that men "seem to be more focused on certain things. And, they don't bicker over tiny little things." According to Dallas:

Guys just forget about it the next minute. [laughter] They're kind of fun. But, I think a lot of my opinions come from the fact that there were no girls in my

neighborhood when I was little. And, I've always been more comfortable befriending guys, and hanging out with them.

Although, Dallas prefers to work, and hang out, with men, as professors, she finds "women are more accommodating than men, as far as a learning disability."

Advice for the University

The encounters that Dallas has had with the professors that have had a "hard time accommodating her learning disability" have left their mark. Her advice to the professors is tinged with pain:

I think professors need to be a lot more realistic, in that people do have learning disabilities. And, because someone brings a little form up to you for you to sign, doesn't mean that you have to look down on them. I've come across that in a lot of my classes....and, I think, people just need to be aware that just because I require this accommodation doesn't mean I'm a slacker, doesn't mean I'm stupid. I'm fully capable of doing this, but I need the extra time. That's something that I think happens all over the place.

Dallas feels that the professors in the "sciences" are the worst offenders of all.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

While Dallas carries her wounds close to the surface, she is filled with words of support and determination for her sisters with learning disabilities. She advises:

Don't let your learning disability get in the way.... I think one of the major things anyone needs to do with a learning disability is just to not let it stop them. You just can't use it as an excuse, or, you know, I can't do this because I have a learning disability, or, I can't do that....find something you are really interested in and go for it!

Since her diagnosis, Dallas has changed her thinking about the things that have stood in her way. She explains:

I don't know if I really believe in roadblocks. I, kind of, believe in obstacles, and, why you see something in your way. A lot of times I don't look at it as something that, you know, is blocking my way to whatever it is that I'm going to, but, rather, as a challenge to get over. And, I think with that philosophy, which may not work for all people, but, for me, it's just given me that extra boost to get over whatever, whatever I need to, to obtain my goals....And, I think that's something that, I don't think it's told to anyone who is given the diagnosis of a learning disability....I think it should be. You know there are definitely things that are going to get in your way, but, you can't let them stop you. And, when you get over them, boy it feels good!

To Dallas, that is success.

Julia

Julia is a traditionally aged finance major who plans to graduate in the spring of 2004. She was diagnosed with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS) when she was in first grade. Julia remembers memorizing the books her parents read to her so that she could fool her teachers into thinking she could read. When her SSS was discovered, supports were developed that continued through middle school. These supports "fizzled out" during high school, however, and her academic experience became difficult. When she entered college, Julia was determined to capitalize on her anonymity in a new geographic area and distance herself from the image that she had established as a person with a learning disability. In this new environment she became a member of a sorority and was elected as president. She was also able to confidentially arrange for needed supports for her learning disability through Resources for Students with Disabilities (RSD).

Julia's Background

Julia was very young when her learning disability was discovered. By the first grade her parents were receiving reports from her teachers about her learning problems:

I was actually first diagnosed when I was in first grade. And, what had happened is that my teachers were calling, and things. I was having trouble copying things off of the blackboard, and such. My parents, obviously, knew there was a problem, in that...I couldn't read. I didn't like to read. I never read anything. And I would memorize my books...so my teachers actually thought that I could read. But really, I was just memorizing the book and could recite it... Yeah... my parents read it at home and I could just go to school and...recite it. You know *Green Eggs and Ham*, because my parents read it, I could remember it.

A television program provided Julia's parents with a clue that led to the discovery of the source of her problems:

And so, my parents...one evening, saw this thing on 20/20 about Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, now called Erland's Syndrome. .. And, they saw it and they said "Gee, that sounds just like our daughter"...I'm not really sure, because I was too little...to remember what exactly it was. But, it was like kids having a hard time in school. Not being able to focus. And, what it is, is a problem with the florescent lights. And, when you read the black on white, like for me the words move off the page and things. And so, they gave a number and my parents called the number and found someone who lived in [state] we could go to...So we went, and I was tested. And they had different kinds of testing. Like you were under florescent light and you would be...counting boxes. And, you were told to read. And, then, once they decided that...you definitely have it, then you get colored lenses that you wear.

Julia wore the colored lenses all though her early schooling. In addition, she discovered that if she used pink paper it was easier on her eyes. Her teachers were especially helpful:

I've a lot of teachers that have definitely helped. I remember my sixth grade teacher probably helped me along the way the most. She was totally receptive to my needs and things...like handouts were on pink paper,...which was so helpful...I'd get the pink copy and I [didn't] have a problem reading it anymore. And I would always sit by the window in the class...she just went all out and totally helped me. It was great! And then when I went on to...junior high...My

parents and I made arrangements with my teachers...to make sure that I could get things on pink paper. And my tests would be on pink paper.

Unfortunately, the support she experienced in elementary and junior high school did not continue through high school:

In high school, it kind of fizzled because my high school didn't have the facilities for kids with learning disabilities...The problem was that, it's really large and...they don't have resources, or the money...to put the time into it. To develop a program where it could really benefit kids.

Julia considers high school as a roadblock, something she had to push through. Gone were the use of pink paper and the support of her teachers:

I think that, definitely, I did not like high school, at all. I think it's funny, because my parents are always surprised that I came to college. After my high school experience... Well, I think it was, I went to a very large high school, and there were just tons of kids. And I think that professors, I guess they were teachers then. Well, they aren't as receptive, and they have so many students and so much stuff to do, that it's hard for them to kind of give extra time to kids.... I remember I took a chemistry class and absolutely did not like it. I hated it. I did horribly in that class. I think I got a C or D...And, for me, I'm like, "Oh my goodness!" In chemistry,...I didn't understand it at all and it felt like the professor really wasn't there, accessible to help. It was just a horrible experience and I didn't like being there, at all! And so, I did everything not to be there...I think it was mainly that I wasn't getting the support from my teachers and there wasn't...a testing facility and that kind of thing.

Julia found it especially difficult to read her textbooks:

And I'd have to read the textbooks. Which, obviously, if I have to read them, I'm not going to read them. If I could listen to them on tape, OK!... For me, I didn't see the point of sitting and struggling through a textbook. I probably should have.

Even though Julia was wearing her tinted glasses, without the other accommodations she had received earlier, Julia found high school to be a "big struggle." She, especially, became frustrated with the amount of time it took her to finish assignments. According to Julia: "If I read it a couple of times...and went back over it...it was just too much."

Although Julia remembers high school with distaste, she does admit that her growing need to manage her increasingly busy schedule in high school led to one of her most valued skills, time management:

I became more active in school... Well, not that active in high school. But, I remember I used to ice skate and I was golfing and things. And so, it was definitely, like, "Oh Jeez, there's not always all this time to study." And then, I worked in high school too. So it was like, you have to find a balance. You have to find the time you are able to study. And I'm not one who enjoys staying up till three in the morning studying because that's the only time you have. And so, I will do anything not to stay up to three studying. So, obviously, I managed my time so I don't have to stay up really late.

Julia's College Years

Julia feels her high school experience took an emotional toll. She was ready for a different kind of experience in college:

I don't think I was emotionally ready for that at all. I really don't think that I cared either. And like, I was doing enough to get by, basically. And so, I think that was part of the reason why when I came to college I probably don't wear my glasses as much because I wanted to be more accepted as just me, and not someone with a learning disability. I used college as a starting over point. Where it was like a clean slate. I don't know any of these people. I don't know anyone and no one knows me. And so I can be whoever I wanted to be.

Julia took this opportunity to start over, however, she still felt it was important to contact RSD as soon as possible:

We actually came up here before school had started and met with [the counselor] who works over there. And discussed with her, and gave her all the paperwork and stuff. And she was so nice. And it was like, "Ok, Great!, bring us your class schedule. [The book taper] can start working on your books on tape and things." It's just gone from there... It's really nice because I know most of the people over there now. It's like "Hey! How's it going," kind of thing. Really nice, and I think they're just great! And I think they are so helpful, and so willing to help.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Julia contacted RSD when she first entered college, this approach provided her with immediate accommodations. While she relies on some of the time-tested strategies that she has developed through the years, she chooses not to wear her specially tinted glasses or use colored overlays. When Julia started college, she began to develop strategies so that she would not have to wear her glasses. She did not want to stand out:

Really, when I came to college, it was all through high school and elementary school, I wore them, and then it was kind of like, college, new people, I don't know anyone. It was difficult for me to stand out. And you don't want to be different than the crowd.

Julia explains her reasoning regarding her glasses:

I have to be honest. I don't wear them at college. I wore them through high school, and all through elementary school. But now it's really funny, because now during college... I probably should wear them, but I don't. And I think it's more like a self-esteem thing and I don't want to be singled out like that. I would much rather be recognized in other ways.

While Julia will not wear her tinted glasses, she continues to use pink paper. Julia thinks that most of her peers see the pink paper she uses as "cool:" This approval is important to Julia because she finds the use of the pink paper a valuable part of her strategy for academic success:

In classes,... sometimes the teachers will turn down the light lower just because they like it better that way. And so, with the one's who don't I can still take my notes – I use pink paper. And so I don't usually have a problem copyingI don't have to necessarily write down everything they're writing exactly on the board because I can hear and write it down. And so, it's not usually a problem.

Julia also receives special consideration for her testing. RSD provides a quiet room with non-florescent lighting, tests printed on pink paper, and extra time to take her tests. She feels these accommodations keep her anxiety to a minimum:

I have plenty of time to take the test, It's on pink paper, I don't have to feel overwhelmed by the lighting, and things like that, and I can just take my time. I can think through the stuff that I've already studied.

Without these testing accommodations it would be a lot more difficult for Julia:

I know that, probably, if I were to take my test in the classroom I would be much more frustrated. I have a problem, when you see other kids leave, and you're still like, go, "Oh my gosh! I'm only on question 10 and there are 30 questions and everyone's leaving." And you're like, everyone's going much faster than I am. And, you know, not that I think that many kids notice...that you were the last kid to finish, kind of thing. But, it's really...distracting. And you're like, am I different than the rest of these kids? I'm obviously reading slower than them. And, it's like the whole mind game you play when you're one of the last people in there...And then the lighting bothers my eyes... When I'm reading, I have to read the question three or four times to understand what it's exactly asking....And, most of these tests are multiple choice, and so, obviously, multiple choice tests, I'm reading all of the answers three or four times, and not really completely understanding what they are. What the question is asking because of the lighting and then having trouble reading it.

In addition, without special testing considerations, Julia gets headaches and becomes confused:

And then...I'm getting headaches...from the lights and reading and it's just not a good situation. I'm reading it over and over, and then it's taking...a long time cuz you're like, what exactly is this asking. And you get confused. And you're like, I guess I'll just pick this answer cuz it's the one that I guess makes the most sense.

While some may see having special testing accommodations as making testing too easy for students with learning disabilities, Julia finds arranging for testing is a lot of work and requires her to be proactive:

It's not like another student who has the leisure of just showing up to the test. It's like, a week in advance I have to figure out when I can go to their office hour. Go to their office hours and have them fill out the sheet. And, take the sheet to the resource center. You definitely have to be proactive to make sure the resource center works for you.

Julia finds one of the most helpful accommodations she receives is having her books taped. Taped books make studying easier and, she feels, fosters higher grades:

I think that, it's not a struggle for me to read the textbooks...Because I can put in the tape and listen to them and follow along and not get stressed out over, "Oh my god, I have to read 100 pages. There's no way I can read these 100 pages." Well, now you put in the tape, you sit, and listen to it. Everything is fine. The stress is eliminated...you can actually sit and listen and learn.

Julia admits to having a good memory for what she hears, but, when she reads the text, it takes her longer to understand the information. Because of the auditory nature of her learning, studying with her "really academic" sorority sister works well for Julia. Without taped books and studying with friends, Julia feels college would be much more difficult for her.

Having a community of women to rely on is handy, although, women with learning disabilities tend to be rather secretive. Until recently, Julia did not know that three of her sorority sisters had learning disabilities:

I'm in a sorority, and there's two girls that, no actually there's three, who have a learning disability. And it's funny because we don't talk about it. Until, recently we were talking about it, it was like, "oh my gosh!" We all go to the resource center, and it's funny now. I like living with these girls, because you have to have those sheets to fill out, and they remember. One day I didn't have a sheet and I needed to go to my professor's office hours and the resource center was closing in five minutes, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh! And I just asked a friend for a sheet...How convenient was that! [laughter]...It's very handy.

Other strategies that Julia finds important to her academic success are assertiveness, selecting optimum seating in her classes, attending every class, and making sure her professors know her:

I wouldn't be intimidated to ask questions on things if I'm confused...If I have a question I'll raise my hand...And usually I try to sit near the front. And usually

try to go to my classes, every class!...I think I missed two classes this semester. That's part of the academic success,...go to class, and make sure you're there every time. And I think that teachers know the kids who are there all the time, and know the kids who don't come all the time...And also I go into the office hours, so they know me better. Obviously, when it comes to grades and things, it's like "Oh, she shows up all the time."

Julia is happy to report that her efforts have paid off and most of her professors have been willing to "go all out:"

Success

Julia prizes learning. To her, success is: "succeeding in the classes and retaining the information when you leave the classroom, not simply going through the motions of the class and just getting the grade at the end." Success, to Julia, is more than just completing a class:

Being completely done after finals is, like, well I don't ever have to worry about that class anymore. I would say that is not academic success. I would say that you actually go to that class, and you learn, and retain that information, and you can carry it on forever. You can use it in the next semester to your advantage. So that when you go to classes, you can go, "Oh right, I remember learning about that in my other class."...you are one up on that area...that is definitely what academic success is, more than just grades and retaining the information long enough to take a final about it and leave school.

Julia is beginning to feel more academically successful now that she is focusing on classes for her business major:

Now that I am in classes for my major I'm, definitely, really focused on...making sure that I remember this information so that when I go on to the next level of classes...I can remember learning about that. I can repeat that information. I don't have to spend as much time going back and looking up things. Like, how exactly does that work.

Julia's Future Plans

Julia plans to volunteer for a couple of years after she graduates. She feels she can

gain experience, as well as use her personal experience as a person with a learning disability:

I know that when I graduate I'm considering ... Teach for America. That is where you go and teach kids at inner city schools, high school, junior high, or elementary school...I'm looking into that...I think that...will be really beneficial, because, if kids do have learning disabilities I can definitely relate to them and help them out in that respect, and be receptive, and make sure their needs are being met within the classroom so that they can succeed.

Ultimately, Julia plans to work in a brokerage firm, or "something in finance," depending on what she can find. She has not considered how her learning disability will affect her work, although reflection on the subject brings forth several ideas:

I think when I get into the business I haven't really thought a lot about what I'm going to do with the whole learning disability thing. Although, I would say that there's no more textbooks, so I won't have to read them on tape. And things that I need on pink paper...I can definitely make. I think that I'll have the resources open to me so that I can take matters into my own hands. And if I need something ...on pink paper so that I can read it better then I can go and run it off on pink paper. I can still write on pink paper.

Julia feels, for the most part, she has already developed many of the strategies that she will need. She feels sure that her assertiveness and experience in being proactive will play a major role. Julia does not see problems with her learning disability in her future.

Advice for the University

Julia has several suggestions for the university that would help women with learning disabilities. To begin, she would like the university to provide professors with a better understanding of learning disabilities. She feels, along with this understanding

professors could be “more receptive to women with disabilities and take them into account more.” In addition, Julia would like professors to be more willing to make little changes in the classroom. She advises that professors might “change one little thing. Maybe they could write on a white board instead of a blackboard. She feels it is important for professors to become “receptive” to making changes to their routines.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

It is obvious that Julia has thought about the advice she gives women with learning disabilities. Teaming with enthusiasm, when asked what her advice would be, she provides several different topics, almost in the same breath. Julia is more than happy to provide support for others:

I think, that they need to not be ashamed by the disability. Be proactive and make sure they use the resources that are available to them. That’s so important! And, not to be afraid to ask, and not to be afraid to go up to a professor and go... “Will you explain this to me?” And, I think that it’s important to realize that they’re just a professor. Just another person. And they’re not the scary person who you can’t approach. That’s really important to let women know that it’s OK to go and ask questions. And it’s OK to sit down with a professor and have a conversation. And to be proactive, and if you have a problem, bring it up...Get involved with the resources center...they’re great! And if you are uncomfortable with the resource center it’s important to tell them...I’ve had times when they have forgotten to run my paper off on pink paper. I just simply go, “Oh, this is supposed to be on pink paper.” No big deal! They go and copy it. “Oh, can I get a light in here, because of the florescent lights,” sometimes they forget...I think it’s so important to just face the things that you need and let people know the accommodations that you...need.

Knowing her strengths and weaknesses is an important part of Julia’s success strategy.

She feels women with learning disabilities need to know their strengths and weaknesses if they are going to be successful:

I think that it's definitely important to realize your strengths, as well as your weaknesses. With the weaknesses...you are able to recognize them, then you can work on them, and make them better...At the same time, know your strengths so that you can focus on those and not be overwhelmed by the weaknesses. You have to find...a good balance... As long you know what the weaknesses are you can work on them and make them better.

According to Julia, understanding your weaknesses comes from gradually becoming aware of things that get in your way:

When you have a weakness, and it gets in the way of things then you go, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to need to do something about this because I can't accept it as it is right now." And so, I think, definitely, it's just the recognition so that you can fix it and change it.

Julia offers an example:

I recognized that, obviously, I need to get my books on tape because it makes my life a lot easier. And so, I'm going to recognize that, "Hey I might not be able to read the textbook that great, but if I get out these tapes, that would really help me out." And so, I have to be proactive. And I have to be like, OK, how do I get my books on tape? How do I go about doing that? And, the resource center is great. You can just go there and you go...OK, this is what I need to do.

Julia works hard to maintain her focus on success and to stay positive:

I try not to think about the limitations that much, because I think that you set your own limitations. You know I can be like, "Oh my gosh, I can never do well in school." Well, obviously, that's my own limitation I put on myself. So, I feel that all limitations you put on yourself. So you can succeed in the area you choose. If you truly want to succeed and do well, and you will find every possible way to succeed, then you will... You will find every possible way to succeed, if that's what you truly want.

Overall, experience tells Julia that women with learning disabilities need to be determined and willing to make sacrifices:

I would say that you have to be very determined, and willing, and proactive. And be right there all the time, if this is what you truly want. To be in school, and to do well, you have to be determined. And, you have to be willing to make sacrifices, to be able to be here, and stay in school, and to do well.

Abby

Abby is also a very determined and tenacious woman. As a mechanical engineering student, she has had to prove herself in a male dominated field. Abby was diagnosed in her junior year of college with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS) and Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD). When talking about her learning disabilities and her need for accommodations she states that she is not looking for a way out, she just "wants to do her best."

Abby entered college directly from high school. She feels she did "very well" on her SATs. Abby attributes this success to her expertise in math, and the fact that there were not many "big huge" paragraphs to wade through on the test. Abby does not like to read. Abby feels her skills in math, and the fact that there were a lot of short answers, carried her through the "comprehending part," which she believes she "didn't do that well on."

Abby decided engineering was for her when, in high school, she had an opportunity to shadow a neighbor, a chemical engineer, at her work. Although chemical engineering did not appeal to Abby, the shadowing experience opened her up to possibilities in other areas of engineering. When Abby entered college, she was still undecided about her field of engineering. However, her interest in working with automobiles finally drew her to mechanical engineering. Abby feels that her major is fun and is convinced that this is the best field for her to be in. This belief in herself has paid off. Abby is a senior now and "if all goes well" will graduate in the spring. She has

gained the respect of her peers (both men and women) and has worked on a prototype of a car that is part of a national contest. Abby has also held various offices in prestigious national organizations. However, getting to this point has been a struggle.

Abby's Background

Abby has always considered herself good in math and science, although, her teachers were not always supportive of her effort. Abby explains:

In elementary school, they usually have the top ten to 15 percent, the smartest people in the class that get to go off to their genius group. I was never asked to join that--even though I thought I was smart enough to be in it. And then, about in fifth grade they decided whether or not you're going to go into high, regular, or low math when you went into sixth grade and so I was allowed to go into the high math just because I told them I was going to go into it. You'd better let me go in. [laughter]. I got decent grades and all. I think I got a B. But then going into junior high our teacher had to decide which math to allow us to go into. For some reason, just because I was shy, or what not, I don't know, he didn't feel that I was going to be capable enough of going into pre-algebra when I went into seventh grade. So, he just put me into the regular seventh grade math. That was where I got put in seventh grade. I was bored to tears in that class. It was pathetic. So, my folks and I went in and spoke to the upper math teacher and told her that I should probably be in the pre-algebra class and she agreed and let me go in. My very first day was actually a test day. They had their first pre-algebra test. And she said it doesn't matter how you do on this test. Just try it out and see where you are. I went and got a B on this test. Like I'd never taken this class before. [laughter] Other people in this class were still only getting Cs on it. So, OK, my other teacher was definitely wrong. I did good in accelerated math ever since. But, it was only because I pushed, and pushed, and I pushed.... that makes me mad....teachers just don't have confidence just because I'm not up in their face....I may know the [answers] but because I'm not showing it...It just didn't come across that I knew anything.

Abby was a quiet student all though her early grades. This caused social problems, especially in her junior high school experience. According to Abby, it was "just a terrible time for me. I just did not enjoy it at all. I'm so glad I'm done with junior high. I'd never wish that on anybody." Because Abby was "so shy," she was an "easy

target for people making fun" of her. She was constantly harassed in the halls. Peers began to call Abby "lezzie" because she did not have a boyfriend and "hung out with just a couple of girls." Abby ended up going to a school counselor about the problem. She did not know it at the time, but this counselor happened to be the only lesbian counselor in the school and took a personal interest in stopping this harassment. Abby received apologies from students whose parents had been contacted. Nevertheless, as Abby puts it:

You can't make all of the 50 students that are making fun of you apologize. You can't call all their parents. So, I just tried to do what I could to get out of there. I always sat in the front of the bus. And even then, that wasn't necessarily a safe place.

This experience served to exacerbate her shyness. The hazing "kind of chilled out a little bit after that." However, Abby felt she had already set herself up for not having a lot of friends because "everyone already knew who I was and they already weren't friends with me for a reason, or they heard about why not to be friends with me, so I still was having a couple of OK friends but that was about it."

In Abby's sophomore year, her family moved to the city where her present college is located. For Abby, it was a time to start over in a place where no one knew her. This anonymity allowed Abby an opportunity to ease the loneliness she felt:

Yeah. It was pretty lonely. And, then I moved up here, to a new school, and kind of forced to take on a new attitude, so....so, I took on a more outgoing person. It lasted for a little while....I think my senior year I kind of slumped back in to my being shy again and all that. I don't know, I had a kind of main core of friends when I got there. We were all new students, so....Then after about the first year we all kind of split up and went our different ways. And kind of, the smoker crowd kind of...fortunately, they seemed to be the most accepting of most of the groups at school....Actually, it was great. Um, we had, on campus, the circle is what they called it, and, everyone, whether you were a preppy, or jock, or you

know, pigs, or whatever, gangster, we all got along out there and that kind of filtered into school. You know. Cuz we all got along in school.

Unfortunately for Abby, her association with the "smoker crowd" broke up in the middle of her junior year and she "was kind of stuck with no one, once again."

The move to the new city brought other unexpected changes. Testing in her new school was more thorough. As Abby puts it: "they had a better way to weed you out in these high schools." Abby found out that she was an "extremely slow reader."

I hardly comprehended anything I read. So, I had to go through reading and learning. Reading classes and stuff like that to just get up to speed in reading. I was surprised that I wasn't tested in all the other high schools I went to.... They had more reading up here. I was realizing that I wasn't getting anything from the text.

On reflection, Abby feels she slid by in junior high and high school. She admits that she "always hated to read." In fact, Abby contends that she is not sure if she "ever really opened a text book in high school." Abby thinks that when she was growing up people thought she was just "this weird kid...that doesn't like to read."

Even with the reading problem, Abby feels she got fairly good grades in junior high and high school, with the exception of a short period in high school when she went through her "rebellious period" and refused to go to school. In spite of her good grades, Abby does not feel that high school prepared her for college. She feels that the teachers pretty much "just gave you the answers." Because of this, Abby feels it would have been difficult for anyone to notice if she had a learning disability. "I never really had to deal with it that much...It was pretty much if you're super disabled or you have an obvious dyslexia or something like that."

Abby's College Years

While Abby was able to slide by in her earlier schooling, college presented a new dedication to studying, as well as new obstacles. Abby became determined to do her best. In spite of this extra effort, in her junior year of college she had to face the real possibility that there was something keeping her from that goal:

Test after test, I just wasn't doing as well as I thought I was. You know, as much as I studied. You know, everyone else was doing OK, and I would study with them but I just couldn't get the same grade. So, I don't know. I just couldn't think when I was in class and I didn't know what I was doing. It was just like, something is not right. You know, if I'm putting this much effort to it, and I can do the homework fine, I understand it. And I go back and look at the test and I could understand the test in my own room, but trying to take the test, actually, with all those people, Um, it just--yeah, it wasn't good, and so I knew I needed help somewhere. But, what my problem was, I didn't know. I had no idea where to start.

Abby was also concerned about her inability to finish tests within the time allowed. She admits to having a great deal of "social anxiety" when it came to taking tests:

As soon as, you know, a couple of people start turning in tests, it was like, Oh no! You know, I'm going to look stupid if I sit here and I'm the very last person to turn my test in. You know, so then I feel like. I would focus on, Oh, I'm so slow. I must not know what I'm doing if all of these people are already turning it in.

These factors were too much to continue ignoring. Abby became determined to "go and figure out what was going on, because something wasn't right." However, the path to a reasonable explanation was not straightforward.

As near as Abby can recollect her journey toward self-discovery started with a flyer that was circulating around campus on "stress management." This gave her a place to start. She attended that meeting. Abby describes this experience:

They had their...mood tapes, you close your eyes and imagine a peaceful river, or something like that....and actually, I started talking with someone about it and that's when I started crying.

Realizing that Abby's concerns might be beyond the scope of the workshop, the workshop moderator referred Abby to the Counseling Center. The Counseling Center sent Abby to the campus Learning Assistance Center. Abby feels that they "just had their general [attitude], go get tested for all of this and then we'll see what happens." Abby took "all the basic tests and passed those fine." Although, again, reading comprehension was a weak spot. Abby explains:

The only part that I didn't do super well on, was the comprehension...it's like read for 60 seconds and then mark what line you are on, or what letter, or something, at the end of 60 seconds. I was way, way, way, below average. [laughter]...But, they said that was pretty much the only thing."

This factor seemed to flag Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS) as a possible explanation for Abby's problems. To Abby's frustration, she had to wait for two weeks before she could get an appointment to be evaluated. A strategy used to help people with SSS to lessen glare and contrast is to use a peach-colored plastic overlay over reading material. Therefore, after the evaluation she then had to "live with the overlay for a while" to see if it provided any relief. Abby was not singularly impressed with this explanation of the cause of her problems:

It just, kind of, seemed from everyone that I talked to, "Oh, well, we'll just test you for this. We might find something but there's nothing wrong with you"...with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, honestly, I thought it was kind of, if you can't find any other sort of learning disability we'll diagnose you with this....it seemed like, yes, I did have enough symptoms happening and I feel like, yes, I do have Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome. But, it seems like it's kind of a hard one to test for and it seems like most people, if you stare at the paper long enough, the words are going to move. I mean it's just kind of, kind of what eyes naturally do. When you

stare at those spirals and they start to move on you. So, it seems like that was kind of, more like a BS. [laughter]

In spite of this pessimism, Abby did find some relief from suggested accommodations. While the peach-colored overlay proved to be too cumbersome, Abby's initiative, eventually, led her to use prescription sunglasses in its place. The glasses seemed to help reduce the headaches that she experienced when she tried to read text on a white background. Abby explains:

Yeah, I definitely get headaches, looking at it...I concentrate on the headache more than the text. ... If I read for more than 10 minutes my eyes start getting really tired and start getting blurry and I actually fall asleep... basically, at least for me, I get headaches whenever I read text on white paper. It is very difficult. The glare is too much for me. The overlay, I find very hard to deal with. You're constantly taking it off the page, highlighting, and putting it back on. And it just makes for too much of a pain to be worth using it... Over the last year I've started using my sunglasses which have a peach filter on them and now I've got prescription reading glasses. I guess orange-colored ones, which have seemed to help a lot.... it makes it a lot easier....If you have a white sheet of paper that you're supposed to answer on it's kind of hard to answer with this peach overlay on it. So, it makes it a lot easier to read, and highlight while you're reading.

While Abby admits to "eventually" getting help from the colored lenses, she feels the biggest benefit was getting her "foot in the door" and realizing that there was "something going on here" and she was "not completely crazy."

Although the glasses helped, Abby was still having significant problems. Once again, her initiative and determination led her in a direction that provided a more complete explanation of the difficulties she was experiencing. Abby explains her journey:

So, on my own, well I did get the name from a resource at [disability resource office]of a woman who does hearing studies at the [name of center], so, my mother and I went over there for a couple of days of intensive study, audio study. And it came down to the fact that I hear above normal. So, I don't have a hearing problem in that respect, but I have a hard time drowning out different noises so I

process everything just as equally: the teacher, as well as the conversation next to me. So, that's why, I mean, looking back it explains a lot as far as junior high when I always missed an assignment with a teacher...even though I was sitting in the front row. I never talked in class. But, I'm sure it was because some person right next to me was having a conversation and I just couldn't differentiate between the two, so I missed what the teacher was saying. Um, I went back to [name of disability resource office]with that study as well and that gave me extra, what do I want to say, more evidence that I had a learning disability and that [disability resource office]was going to be able to accommodate my testing needs.

For once, Abby felt she had an explanation that made sense to her:

Once I got the results of that test that started making a lot more sense to me. It made me start thinking, I believed what's going on. It's not so much the reading thing, even though that is part of it. ...the hearing helped explain a lot of it. You know, junior high through college. Just like general and like schoolwork.

Author Elaine Aron provided another source of explanation and comfort in her book *Highly Sensitive People: How to Survive in a World that Overwhelms You*, (Aron, E. M., 1997). In this book, Abby feels she read about people who were like her. Reading this book brought a sense of acceptance for Abby, "it explains that it's OK to feel the way I do." In the past, at family situations, Abby explains:

I just want[ed] to bawl. Just because it's so much over-stimulation and so many people. And so, it's OK for me to leave for a while. [laughter]... You know, just go in the bedroom and just sit for a half an hour without talking to people. You know, that's OK. I'm not just being anti-social. It's just something that I need to do....that's probably also related to being shy at home.

These explanations have helped Abby piece together her experiences of the past. Rather than being shy, Abby feels it is very possible that she was just trying to absorb too much information.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Abby has found that the information she obtained through her journey has been invaluable:

Once you know what's going on you can start focusing on that and I can start using earplugs, because I know that's my problem. And using my glasses instead of just going out fishing for this and that. Maybe this will help, maybe that will help. I was actually able to focus on those particular things....It's definitely helped a lot.

Because Abby now understands the role that central auditory processing plays in her discomfort, she has been able to develop strategies that provide a certain amount of protection from being over-stimulated and allows her time to gather her thoughts:

I definitely have to have my area of quiet. I have to just get away from everybody for a while, at least a half an hour...I found myself...just going over and sitting in [name of building] if I know it's going to be [quiet] and just sit down and just take a deep breath and be quiet. Because I get way over-stimulated and with my other [engineering] group, breaking out and doing stuff at the last minute. I don't like that. It's just way too much stimulation. I don't do well with that at all.

Abby also knows that she has to take extra time to go over presentations so that she can be prepared. She tells us "there's no way I'm going to be able to think on my feet." Abby does not feel she can "just wing it" like her classmates. She has tried, but it does not work for her, "it's failed every single time I've tried to go in unprepared." Her peers accuse her of "thinking too much about it," and advise her to just go in to class and talk about what she knows. However, Abby knows she cannot bring up information without a lot of preparation so she continues to rely on her time-tested strategies to get herself "focused."

In addition to these strategies, Abby also practices breathing techniques to calm herself down and receives extra time on her tests. Abby has been advised to wear

earplugs, however, she finds wearing earplugs for everyday use disturbing (they close off too much sound). Her compromise is to use them when she is in a testing situation to provide extra protection from distracting noises.

Another strategy that Abby uses is the medication that she takes to help her to focus and relieve her anxiety. One medication that Abby has found helpful is called Neurontin. This medication was originally used as a seizure medication, but has been found to be helpful with other problems as well. Abby takes the medication on an "as needed" basis, but finds it helpful to take it every four hours when she is going to be "in a social situation." Abby has also taken Zoloft for her depression but feels there are too many side effects. She finds that SAME is a more natural solution that has fewer side effects. She feels the medications help her to "calm down" and "not feel so anxious around people." Abby explains:

I used to have a problem talking with professors or pretty much any sort of authority figure. I pretty much cried. If it wasn't Oh! You did a great job. You know, if it was asking about my test. Or, you know, why did you grade this way...I pretty much just bawled. It's been like that since high school. And, so now this medication has really helped a lot. Along with anti-depressants as well...I don't really like having social anxiety, which, I think kind of caused the depression instead of the other way around.

Abby would rather not take the medications:

I tried to go off some anti-depressant medication last September and within two weeks of being off of it, after I've been on it for two years, symptoms came right back...I was crying in front of everyone, and...and I've noticed since being on it though...I've taken on more authoritative roles. I'm president of [a National Organization]. I'm secretary of [another national organization]. As soon as I went off my medication, I could just see all that going right down the toilet. Just because I don't want to be around people at all when I feel like that. So, I'd go back on the depression medication and stuff.

Abby is hesitant to attribute her bouts of crying to depression. This is evidenced in the way she refers to the subject: "I guess, depression...if that's really what you call it." In spite of this doubt in her mind, she still feels that through the strategies she has developed, and the use of medications, both her anxiety, and "depression" are under control. This has given her a new lease on life. Abby explains:

I feel like I'm finally getting to the place where I can finally take charge. You know, I can go talk to people and tell them what I don't like. Or, what's going on, or what they're going to fix for me. And, what they need to change. Without feeling like I'm going to cry all the time.

Gender Issues

On top of the trials that Abby has experienced with her learning challenges, gender bias has also played a role in Abby's experience. Abby admits to a couple of experiences where she had to try harder as a woman, but the one experience that sticks out in her mind is her freshman design project:

Four of us were in the group. I was the only girl. My group decided to go one way with this project and I was telling them, just from intuition, you know, that it wasn't going to work because of ABC. And, they didn't want to hear it... so, I kind of brainstormed with this other kid about, you know, well what if we do this? What if we do that? He's kind of like, yeah, maybe. But the other two didn't want to hear it. No, this is what we're going for. So we go meet with our faculty advisor, he says, that's not going to work because of exactly what I told them, AB & C. And he's like maybe you should start thinking about it this way...and that was exactly what I had been telling them. You know, why not try this way versus that way. But, you know, they didn't want to hear it from a girl. But, when the faculty advisor says maybe if you go about it this way. Oh! OK. Because he's a guy and he knows what he's doing. But a girl, you know, well, she doesn't know what she's doing. And so, that helped me break my way in. Once, I was like, that's exactly what I told you. You know, then they are little bit more accepting of what I was saying. But, I had to have a man validate my ideas before other men would listen to me. [laughter]..Otherwise, they get mad that you can do anything and they just don't listen to you....I think by senior year quite a few of them had chilled out.

Abby thinks women need to be more qualified than male counterparts in order to succeed. She has noticed that a lot in her engineering classes. Abby provides a practical example when talking about promotions:

The guys will jump at a promotion immediately. When girls, we want to be more qualified before we even try it. You know, go after a job, because, I don't know. I don't know why but it seems that's the way we deal with things. [laughter]... we have to work so much harder to prove ourselves whereas guys really don't have to do much. We have to work about twice as hard to get the same amount of respect.

Abby feels that she will probably have to go through a similar process in the corporate world, especially if there are not other women engineers. However, as Abby puts it, "women also tend to be each others worst critics too. So, I think you're going to have to please the women even more than you have to please the boss man to get the women to accept you. [laughter]"

Abby knows that she will someday be in a supervisory role and feels that, as a woman, requires special skills:

Men are used to having a man above them and men below them and just, they're used to that hierarchical order. But, women, we kind of want to be buddies with everyone. And then, men, sometimes have problems taking orders from women and they can't read women. And we can't read men. And you know it gets to be a big problem in the corporate world. Just cuz men are used to being told to do by a man. But sometimes, they'll be damned if they're going to be told what to do by a women....And we, the word bitch gets thrown around a lot for women if they're demanding. The guy tells you it's like, Oh, he's just my boss. I guess women also want to be your friends. It's like, if you get this done by five for me, it would be great. When men take that as, Oh, I can do it when ever I want. And the women is like, why isn't it here by five. You know. Women also, I guess, have a lot more social interaction so male bosses see that as just being gossipy and not getting their job done cuz they're chatting on the phone or talking with friends here and there. I guess women need that to actually get stimulated to do their work. I don't know, just some thoughts from my women's studies class. They kind of seem to be accurate in the corporate world.

Abby seems to have an understanding of some of the nuances that will help her to be successful in her future work. When asked how she will work with her learning disability in her new life she thinks that it will be different from school in that "you don't really have tests in the corporate world that you need to get a separate room for." She knows that one drawback is the fact that she will be expected give presentations. Abby states that she "will just have to learn to deal with it." She is also sure that she will only disclose her learning disability on an "as needed basis."

It puts too much on you from the beginning to just let everyone know. "Oh, guess what? I have this," you know. Then some people start expecting you to have a problem, or just use it as a cop-out, or, you know. It seems like it's a kind of "as needed" basis for telling people. So, it's not really something that I need to make public. Nor, do I want to. But, I'm not ashamed of it. It's just not going to get me anywhere to tell people if I don't really need them to do anything for me.

Other than that, Abby is unsure what to do except continue doing what she has learned to do.

Success

There is no doubt in Abby's mind that she is successful:

I think the fact that I'm doing well on tests again, because of the accommodations I've been given. I feel like academically I've been successful, finally, because now I know what my learning disabilities are and how to deal with them.

Abby also points out her role in national organizations and the work she does with these organizations as further proof of her success. However, she counts her impending graduation as one of the greatest successes of all. The fact that she is about to graduate draws Abby's attention toward her early school experiences, and especially to the "teachers in high school that did not really feel that I was smart enough to go into any

technical field. And now, I'm about to graduate in a semester. I feel like that's definitely a success." Abby is just a bit tempted to go back and tell them "see, I told you I could do it."

Advice for the University

Abby is concerned that women will go through what she has gone through and would like to see the university make learning disabilities more visible so that women who are struggling will get more information. She thought a screening day might be a good idea.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Abby feels the best advice that she could offer other women with learning disabilities is to "get it figured out soon." This is serious advice for Abby. As she explains:

If I wouldn't have figured that out I would have just thought I was too dumb for engineering. Just because I wasn't doing well on some of the 200 level classes...So,...just make sure you have accommodations right off the bat.

Samantha

Twenty-six-year-old Samantha is a junior in landscape management. She considers this "hands-on" program a perfect match for her. Samantha describes herself as an "extreme athlete." She gained attention for her skiing when she was very young and eventually was accepted into a ski academy where she could focus on her sport, as well as her studies. While she never went on to national acclaim, her love of the sport, and hopes for recognition, were not tempered until she had to face her own mortality. A

recent skiing foray with extreme skiing friends, where Samantha admits to "showboating," resulted in her careening off a rocky cliff, bouncing off of boulders, and finally, a very expensive week's stay in a hospital. This was not the first hospital stay for Samantha because of her skiing:

I put myself in the hospital every two years. I blow my body up--severely! More than most people would ever. And, I don't think anything is wrong with it, because all my friends are the same way. All my friends are extreme athletes.

However, this accident "was a big one." Samantha's hospital stay caused her to reconsider her life choices, and make plans to redirect her life:

It was because of that accident that I finally decided to go to the resource center. I decided, OK, if you're going to blow yourself up, your going to figure out college. You know, this is ridiculous! I barely made it through last semester.

Samantha feels the concern of three professors helped her to understand that she needed help, as she terms it, they "red-shirted me." Through her testing, Samantha discovered that she did, indeed, have learning disabilities. Testing showed she had ADHD and Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS). This understanding allowed many of the challenges Samantha has faced throughout her life to begin to come into focus.

Samantha's Background

Samantha describes her family as "probably solid middle class and well educated. Extremely well educated." Samantha's mother is an executive, and writer, and her father, a social worker. Both of Samantha's parents highly value education. In fact, if a family outing took Samantha and her two younger siblings out of school they were required to write about it.

Samantha's academic problems began when she entered kindergarten. At that time, her teacher suspected that Samantha may be "retarded" because, as Samantha explains, "I was freaking out in the overcrowded classroom." Testing revealed that Samantha had an "extremely high IQ," so the idea of retardation was dropped. However, Samantha was kept in private schools for most of her K-12 school experience, where she was prompted to participate in extracurricular activities to keep her active mind busy. In her middle school years, Samantha engaged in the "extended gifted program."

Samantha felt fortunate that she was put into ski racing at the age of 10 and was able to prove her prowess as an athlete. As she explains: "That took off immediately, and I excelled. That was probably my saving-grace through everything, and especially, in retrospect, I think athletics are a key to a kid who is hyper."

While her brother and sister were sent to public schools, Samantha attended private school and, in high school, was sent to a private prep school. She feels the attention that she received at the boarding school "saved her," while at the same time masking her learning disability:

I was a really good skier and they sent me to a boarding school--a prep school. And I was sent away at 14...I got to go to a school [that costs]..18 grand, and I got to go for three, because I was such good ski racer. And, I don't know what the thing about that school was, but I really felt that it differed from my sister's and brother's education. They're younger. They went to public school the whole way through. And my class sizes, there were only 12 people, at most, per class. [In] most of our classes, you were seated [at] a round table. None of [the desks] were in rows. You know, so you always were facing the people, your peers. And, we had planning books from the first day of classes. Like a day-planner...And, I was taught to use a day-planner and I think that, that probably saved me. It prepared me for the future, as far a planning what I need to do...and there were just little things like that, that, I think, kind of, masked my learning disability.

Although Samantha's mother knew she had a high IQ, there were still worries that Samantha had a learning disability. As Samantha puts it: "I wouldn't say I was failing, but I was definitely praying for Cs." In her senior year, again, there was an attempt to test Samantha, but it was stopped short when the psychologist suspected her of taking drugs:

I was tested in high school for learning disabilities but the results came out that the lady, the psychologist that tested me, told my mom that I was doing drugs. And, actually, I was a professional athlete. So, my mom pretty much stopped it at the testing. Stopped it at her analysis of it and said this is ludicrous. Because I was ski racing at a level where you either go on the US ski team or you race division one. And, I was on the division one track. I was in a private boarding school in [New England]. Extremely prestigious! And I was racing at the fifth level. Two levels below world cup. So, doing that in high school, plus going to an extremely prestigious prep-school was very demanding. And, obviously, something was giving. She [the psychologist] didn't pick up on that and so that's where the testing stopped.

This was fine with Samantha because, when comparing herself to her peers, she was convinced that she was very different from the students who were taking drugs for ADHD:

Since I entered private schools, I had grown up with kids who had learning disabilities. I know kids who had ADD. I couldn't have [ADD], based on what I thought. There was just no way. So by the time that senior year came and I was failing stuff, and my mom had me tested again, I probably convinced myself that I didn't have anything, and acted normal. I mean, I don't know how I adapted, but, I do know, that the kids that I knew that were on Ritalin, and such, they were just--they needed it. I had a male friend, and he would literally, if he wasn't on it, he'd probably beat somebody to death. He was that violent. And he was the extreme end of it. And this kid, when he was on it was totally fine....I was in a school where these kids were all on something. And, I wasn't, but I didn't think anything was wrong, whereas I probably should have been. But, I'd say probably a good 70 percent of my school, in both schools, both the different academies [were taking drugs for ADD/ADHD].

In spite of her failing grades in her senior year, Samantha feels the hands-on education that she received in the ski academies was beneficial for her:

I lived, ate, and breathed skiing. But the neat thing that they did in education was those tutors related everything to skiing. For instance, my wax was taught to me through chemistry. We had tutoring from like eight to eleven in the morning, and then we skied for four hours, and then we worked out for four hours. And then we did our homework. And, had to be lights out at nine o'clock, no matter what. And you were getting up at five to work out again. It was super, I mean, they ran you into the ground. But, the few months that I spent there, I mean, that just saved me.

The ski academy brought another benefit to Samantha--she was not able to cheat:

I was also one of those kids. I cheated. I cheated my butt off during high school. I was better at cheating than anything else, as far as academically. I would cheat for the thrill. I would cheat because I thought I didn't know stuff, when, actually, I probably knew it better than most. I was in honors classes. In honors English and a history class. And you know, I excelled at stuff like that. You know, I can write a paper in five minutes. But, when it came to something like a science class, I just stunk! And I would cheat. I came to that school and you couldn't get away with cheating. I mean, you took a test with your teacher right next to you. You know, and that wasn't going to happen. So, I think that was pivotal. ... you had to face it, and also the tutors were able to accommodate my lessons to my learning style. So, whether or not it was obvious to them that I had something going on...it worked. What ever they taught worked.

Samantha thinks that her outgoing nature also kept her learning disability from being discovered. In reflecting on her experience in the prep school she explains:

In one sense, you'd think they'd be able to pick up on it [her ADHD]. But, in another sense, I was so loud, and so creative, and so strong in skiing and, you know, just a dominating force in school. I was captain of every sports team. The best athlete I could possibly be in every athletic thing. And I played sports all year round. In the summer, it was all training for ski racing. And, I was also on student council. If there was something in front of me I jumped in and joined it.

Her outgoing nature also got her into trouble:

For the first two years, you had study hall in a classroom. Well, I got kicked out of that. I sat in the back of the row and I was the girl making fart jokes with the boys. And that was me. I was a total tomboy. Just absolutely disgusting! Anything to get a laugh...so...I got kicked out. And, as a punishment, I had to have study hall one-on-one, it was me and my dorm parent. And I sat at her kitchen table every night for two hours. And that's how I studied. Well, I think my grades were better then.... I needed the one-on-one...I was removed from the study hall. And

that was probably the best thing. I wasn't in a row. There weren't ten boys to laugh with, you know, or throw things with, so it did help my grades.

These experiences gave Samantha clues into what would, eventually, become her repertoire of strategies. It would be some time, however, before Samantha's focus would be on strategies for her academic success.

Samantha's College Years

Samantha was able to avoid facing her learning disabilities because she attended smaller schools that provided more individualized attention, however, when entering a larger college, her problems could not be avoided:

I was diagnosed just last year at the age of 25. And, it was rather late in my life. I've been in and out of college since I was 18 and definitely have struggled with test taking for as long as I can remember. From the time I was in elementary school it has always been a problem. But, last year I came to [name of present college] for the first time and it's considerably larger than my previous school which... only had about 1200 pupils in the entire school. And, my classes were larger and I was thrown into a lot of multiple [test] types of situations... And so... right off the bat, I failed a considerable amount of quizzes and tests, almost instantly. And... being older, I did speak to the professors and I wanted to know what I could do about it... We would work on it and I would do this and that.

The extra work was not enough. Finally, Samantha's horticulture professor suggested there was a definite problem and advised she be tested for learning disabilities. Samantha did not respond immediately:

I, kind of, blew it off because I didn't want to go through the testing again. And, I thought there's nothing wrong, I'm probably not studying hard enough. Well, last fall I studied harder than I had ever studied in my entire life. I had tutors. I had friends that were in the same program helping me. I mean, I sought out every resource I could.... And then finals came. I, pretty much, bombed every single

one. As well as all the other ones, and I had two more professors tell me something's wrong here....and then through the testing that I went through in February I came to find out I have ADHD.

Samantha was grateful to begin to understand the source of her learning problems, however, she feels the process of being diagnosed is "extremely painful" and left her feeling "extremely stupid" and "intimidated:"

I don't feel like there was a clear path in the testing. I was pretty intimidated by the amount of testing I went through, the questions that were being asked. Some of them were extremely personal... When you go through the review of the results, I found that extremely, extremely, painful. I felt really dumb,...extremely stupid.... You know, you get your results back, it's kind of an intimidating session.... Yeah, this is who you are. This is what this test says. Well that's not it! So, maybe if there was something to soften that process a little bit. I don't know what a suggestion could be for that but, that would probably be pretty crucial for getting the person to return for a follow-up visit, or call the school counselor, if that's what they are recommended to do, because I hesitated to call him [the psychologist]. I'm pretty sure I procrastinated that too.

Samantha explains further:

Yeah, I think it's a lot harder than people realize. Because it is something, you know, you internalize it and you think there is something wrong with you... But it's no different than having a purple toenail or something. It really isn't. You know, whoever said we had to be perfect? And who said that this is perfect?

The support she has received from her professors, and time to sort out her priorities, were instrumental in helping Samantha overcome her embarrassment so that she could reach out for help:

If...I hadn't had the time in the hospital to see what was going on, ...and had the support of professors, I wouldn't have gone to the testing center. I was embarrassed! I mean, there were so many things that went through my head.... It's not a comforting thing to know that there could be something wrong with you...to think that I'm not like everybody else.

However painful the process, she feels the diagnosis has led to a "tremendous amount of self-reflection:"

I thought about things I'd done as a teenager. I thought about why I dropped out of college in the past. I thought about all the dumb jobs I've taken. I've thought about the bad things - all the partying I've done. I mean, I thought about everything. It made me realize the potential that I [wasted].

Samantha feels a bit cheated that she did not have this information earlier:

I was on the track to Ivy League schools, in prep school. Yeah, everyone goes to one. If they don't, they go to a major university. I don't know that it would have been such an extreme skier, or an extreme athlete. I think I probably would have still been, but I think I would have acknowledged that I was acting out a bit. It might have been like, "OK, it's one thing to jump off this cliff, but lets talk about why you're jumping off this cliff".... You know, I went skiing two week-ends ago with the boys and it was the first time in my life I took the girls run. You know. I didn't need to jump off a bigger one [mountain] than them. Not only that, I went around.

Samantha is clearly bitter about the treatment she received in high school and the time that was wasted by not being properly diagnosed:

Yeah. If I had been told that [about her ADHD], are you kidding me, I would have probably not dropped out of college when I did. Not that that was a bad thing, but I probably just would have done things different. And, who knows what the potential could have been. I definitely think it was hindering. And also to have a testing counselor...tell me I was on drugs when I was seventeen and I was training for the U.S. ski team....that was the ultimate insult, you know, especially for me. I mean, I was as clean as I could possibly be, and I was proud of that.... that kept me going. And when a counselor, when you're in there because you're failing tests considerably, that's why I went, because I did have the exact same problem in high school. When they told me that, it's like, your crazy! Screw you! Screw the idea that there's something wrong with me! You know, forget it all! And, my mom had the same attitude. That's when she stopped reading about it. That's when she just said, they're nuts! There's nothing wrong with you.

Samantha admits that now that she knows about her ADHD, her ideas about why she has done some of the things she has have changed: "I...think...that I did a lot of

things for attention, to make up for where my weaknesses were. And, my weaknesses were definitely in my classes."

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Samantha has come to the conclusion that she uses distraction as a coping mechanism to deal with her learning challenges. She explains:

I'll be the one that's distracting everyone...I'm not a tapper. I see a lot of kids with ADHD that are totally just bouncing. I'm not a bouncer. But...I will shove stuff here, shove stuff over there. Sprawl out. You know. If someone has their hat on I might say something about their hat, or distract them. I mean, I'm definitely a distraction to other people. I think it's almost better for me to remove myself. And I know that now. But...I'm a back of the class kind of person...and even when I sit in front of the class, I have no problems and no fears with making the class clown from the front row.

Now that she understands some of her learning challenges, and the effects of some of her mannerisms, Samantha takes her tests in the testing center and is allowed extra time. Samantha explains how this works:

I, now, take my tests in the testing center and...they're time and a half. I think I am going to request to get double-time just because some tests...I might have to draw a picture for 20 minutes to get my brain, yeah, before [the focus] comes.

While Samantha tests in a quiet location, she is still faced with many distractions and comments on this fact:

I do believe it is ludicrous that they have the testing center set up the way that they do. Because if you walk in there, there's a room with these little blocks, but, every kid in there is either bouncing, or tapping, or fidgeting. And that is not quiet, and if anything, it's even more distracting because, I mean, it's one thing to be in a room with normal people who are just sitting there, but these kids, and myself included, I'm sprawled out, I'm knocking chairs over. I'm a mess. That's how I test. But I need space. And I just make a big mess and make a mound around me.

When asked if she has asked for a separate room, Samantha explains: "I haven't because I didn't know if it was possible. And...I'm so busy that I just kind of feel like I have to set apart a time to deal with all of this."

Samantha also finds it difficult to work under fluorescent lights and to tolerate the high contrast of black type on the white paper found in textbooks. Through her testing, it was discovered she has Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS). Samantha explains, "I pretty much get sick under fluorescent lights." To remedy this problem, it was suggested that Samantha put a "yellow filter" (overlay) over the pages of her books. As with other participants in this study, Samantha refuses to use the recommended colored overlays. She comments that a former roommate who was diagnosed with SSS refused to use the overlays also. Although, Samantha feels if she had a "tremendous amount of reading with white textbook pages" she might consider using them. Otherwise, the overlays are too cumbersome to use.

While colored overlays do not prove to be practical for Samantha, other suggestions offered by the "resource center" have proven to be helpful:

I did buy yellow pads of paper. This semester is the first semester I've done that and I only did it for one class, and it helped. It just made it soothing on the eye and I'm more likely to actually take notes than draw a picture... I don't like white paper and I do like the yellow paper... and if I have any more note-taking classes I will continue to have yellow paper.

She has also found using colored pens to be useful:

I also like colored pens...it just seems a little more soothing to me.... I have one of those pens with five colors in it and I highlight, not highlight, but one thing will be in red and one thing will be in blue. That seems to help in making things colorful and also when I flip back through my notes and stuff.

Samantha finds the use of medication an important strategy for her academic success. Speaking of her diagnosis and her subsequent medication, Samantha explains:

I love to read, but the extent of my reading previous to this diagnosis was I would read every magazine and every short story I could... but, after 3 or 4 pages, I'm done! I can't sit there. I can't read any more. I'd rather go play. Um, and the same thing for my studies...it was obvious, it was the biggest struggle in the world for me to sit down and read my textbooks. So, after that diagnosis, or after being on the Ritalin, and after the counseling through the services, I can definitely take care of that. I mean, I am much stronger. I can read for hours on end.

Although, Samantha finds it more beneficial to “read for 30 minutes, take a break, and then get back to it.”

Samantha is happy the Ritalin has worked. The medication not only helps her concentrate, it also relieves her fears of having inherited her father's bipolar disease.

According to Samantha, the school psychologist has suggested that if she has inherited bipolar disease, Ritalin may “set it off”:

My father is bipolar, and by him being bipolar, the medicine they give you [for ADHD], the Ritalin, will either set it [bipolar characteristics] off, it will trigger that, if you're bipolar, or if I do have ADHD,...it will cure it, not cure it, but help it. They put me on Ritalin in, I think it was February, and I just started out with a small dosage, half the dosage. And it worked instantly. I mean, um, you know, well I'm not on it right now, for instance, and my thoughts are bouncing around....And the only thing that I can tell you that I notice...when I'm on it I can zone in on one thought.

However, the “drug is expensive” and, due to her recent expense for her skiing accident, Samantha has to ration her supply: “I'm trying to hold back on taking it. I will just take it for exams.” Samantha, almost apologetically, explains: “I took it this morning but it's obviously worn off. It wears off in four hours.”

Samantha feels the use of Ritalin is an important part of her strategy for academic success, in spite of pressure against its use. Even her boyfriend, her staunchest peer supporter, whom she refers to as her “soul-mate,” does not approve of the use of Ritalin:

He's not too fond of taking medication. He's extremely well read, and if he reads another book that tells me I shouldn't be taking them [Ritalin] I might strangle him, because I believe it works for me. I don't think I will take Ritalin as a profession. I don't think I will take it after college. But, at the same time, I'm studying landscape architecture, and if I find myself in a firm that is really high-paced, and I have to be on the ball, and they don't let me run around and be creative and talk to everybody, well then, obviously, I'm going to have to seek it out or stay on it.

The school psychologist has suggested that Samantha may have to stay on Ritalin the rest of her life. Samantha is suspicious of his counsel:

He, um, told me [I] will have to be on it forever, But he's also tried to get me to take other things. He's tried to tell me that I am bipolar, and manic depressed...or he didn't say I was, but he's really emphasizing I could be, that I could have inherited it...I've never had a manic fit. I've read all about it, and my father, clearly, is. And I just refuse to believe that I am. Especially when Ritalin works. After being on it now for almost a year, I really just don't think that's it.

Samantha also uses exercise and meditation to calm her down and devotes an hour a day to practicing yoga. She thinks this is “key” for her.

Another of Samantha's personal strategies is to rely on a trusted peer to provide feedback on her social interactions. Samantha's boyfriend serves this purpose and is both her ally and coach:

He recognizes when I get really hyper. And, um, most people don't tell me. Most people let me carry on. And maybe it's because...they're intimidated, because I do come off really strong. But really I'm not. I'm a big huge softy. If anything, I'm actually insecure about more things than people could ever imagine. I can be very well-spoken, at times, and very demanding. And he, you know, puts me in my place, basically, not in any bad sense of the word. He makes me realize, “Hey...why don't you take a time-out. Why don't you go run around the block,

and come back.” You know, he says things like that... He also acknowledges everything that I say. He supports me.... Like right now I'm not doing well in a couple of my classes and he says you know what, that's fine because you're getting that A in you LA studio. That's what you're going to do.

Samantha's mother is also her supporter, as well as confidante and role model:

I've always told her I cheated. I've never been dishonest to her about anything. And she's always been trying to find a way to make it so I would just learn... I tell her one thing and she reads as much as she can about it and educates me quicker than I can even say I'm thinking. I mean, that's my mom. She's always there for me. She's an extremely strong, independent woman. You know, she's always been the financial backbone of my family. When my parents got divorced, she was the strong one--the leader. “We're going to make this work. We do have a family and this is going to [work]”... she's just always been the backbone to everything in my life, as well as my brother's and sister's... She's always said to me that “you're always going to have mountains to climb.” You know, “you're just going to have to do it. That's life! It's not ever going to get easier. It's just going to be how it is. You're going to have challenge, but you're going to know how to deal with it.” That's basically what she's said about education. You know, “you have to have that”... She's just always my best friend and the first person I tell anything to. You know, my role model. She's everything!... My mom has just been absolutely essential in everything. She gives me the strength for so much.

The advice that Samantha's mother gives comes from experience, “My mom has debilitating arthritis, she walks with a cane. And, the arthritis has eaten both her knees, her hips, and her spine.” Samantha's mom is still working in the corporate world and has also taken on the role of surrogate mother; Samantha's younger sister is living at home with her small child.

While having a support network is important, Samantha has discovered that it is also important to be passionate about her study focus. Samantha has managed to extend her support network to her professors, and is passionate about her program. In retrospect, her present focus, landscape architecture, Samantha admits, is a natural for her. She has a “strong construction background,” experience operating heavy equipment, a “loud

voice,” and an “outgoing personality.” All of these factors, in her mind, are suited to working in the outdoor environment of landscape management. As an added benefit, there are no tests:

There aren't any tests in the program. You don't get tested. You have to do projects....For instance, for my final, I'm doing a project that - it has to be an 11 by 17 piece of paper with, it has to encompass [name of state], the holidays, and what I've learned this semester.

Samantha feels that there could not be a better program for her. She feels the flexibility of her classes, and the support of her professors, are perfect. Her professors have gone the extra mile:

They do things for me like, I sit in a corner with no windows and no distractions. And they do that for me special. And they said that they're going to continue to do that through the program. They also, if I have problems getting the project done they don't give me a deadline. They say, when you can get it done. I've also got the option to not finish the semester right now. I don't have to be done. I could finish it later. I guess I have a year to finish it... That's not to say that they don't expect me to work sixty hours a week. They do.

Samantha feels she needs flexibility in her study schedule also:

You know, I don't work in the same pattern of anybody else that I know. I do the most bizarre scheduling in the world. I will, I know, I was a bartender for years, and I don't know if this is why, but I'm definitely a night person. But then also I'm not. It's so weird, some weeks I will bust out the most impressive work at 3, or 4, or 5, or 6, in the morning. And then, you know, weeks like this, like today I was up at 5. But, I'm tired and I'll probably study for a few hours tonight and go to bed early.... And do it again. And then tomorrow night, I suspect I'll be up all night. I think tomorrow will be an all-nighter

While Samantha has found a really good fit with her present major, she puts in a lot of work:

I definitely work way more than most people cause my boyfriend is constantly telling me, and I see what other people do... they come in at 2:00 in the

morning...bust out these projects that are just as good as mine, if not better!
Where, I'll have spent, literally, 30-40 hours on the same project.

However, Samantha is philosophical about this extra work:

I don't care because some day I'll be faster. You know. But right now this is what it takes for me. And I know that. And I'm also like, this is who I am. I don't need to go out and party. I've done that, I've been there. You know, I'm at a different place in my life.

Samantha has accepted that she is in a different place in her life than she has been.

She also thinks that, at this point in her life, "school, is much more important than skiing," and she is willing to put in the extra effort. Samantha feels the "two biggest things right now are fitness and school." Her focus on fitness is to try to mediate the pain that she is experiencing from her skiing accidents, "I'm trying to just keep the pain to a minimum."

Roadblocks

Samantha is almost to the point where she will only be taking studio classes, her favorite classes, however, she still has to complete the dreaded mathematics requirements (math mods). She has been trying to pass the math mods for a while now. At least, long enough to have develop a definite dislike for the program, and almost everyone associated with it.

One thing I definitely have to point out...I absolutely hate the math program here. I hate it! It's horrendous! I don't know what you're supposed to do to do it. But, I've built roads for a living. Granted, I was on the ground, and I was a laborer, but I was shooting great and I was doing math in my head. Busting out numbers right and left. Math that mattered! Math that I made a lot of money on, and the highway department depended on. You know. In my early twenties, I was doing that. I come here...and, this math mod program is just disgusting! I mean, they cram you in like you're cattle... every time I go into that...room where you have these tutors, the tutors are like, there's maybe one for every 20 students. It's a social

hour, it's loud. There's nothing about there that makes it conducive to learning. I mean, there's nothing!

Samantha is particularly frustrated with the program because she is a supporter of math, especially in her field:

If the university does anything, they need to fix that, because math is essential in life... We need it in everything. And, it's literally like a cattle grazing thing. Get you through. Get your stamp. Move on. I don't think anything is retained.... I think it's clear if you're sharp. If you're not, if you don't pick up on their system right away you can definitely get lost.... Oh, it's not only boisterous, but, it's crowded. People are literally, you touch the person you sit next to when you take the test. You're that close... The person that paces up and down the isle, that checks to see if people are cheating, that person should be out of there! That's totally unacceptable! I mean, there is somebody pacing and staring at you the whole time. That is not a good testing environment! There's nothing good about the testing environment. And, I bet you, you can get every kid in this entire school to agree with that.

Samantha feels the math mods are a problem for nontraditional students also:

I think, if you interview a lot of older, nontraditional, students you'll get similar responses, because I've had this discussion with many, many of my friends... it is definitely a common discussion... when I meet somebody, another peer, and we have something to talk about it's usually a math discussion.... It's kind of like a joke, "Ah, did you finish math?" If you walk around my studio you will see that people have little signs, reminder signs, all over the place... "Remember to take your math mods." So, it's kind of like a joke. I mean it really is!

Samantha feels a lot of people put off the math mods:

I have been through the school for a year and a half. I've signed the waivers. I've done all the little tricks that you can do to keep postponing taking these prerequisites. And we all do it. In my entire program, I have fifth-year students who are in their 30s who are still trying to pass this program before they graduate. And these are guys who build things. They need math. Especially trig, especially geometry... I mean we use formulas. We have calculators. But I'll be damned if we can pass the math mods... I mean, I just think, there's nothing in there that's supportive. If you're lucky, you get a good tutor on a good day, who has more than 30 seconds to sit with you... their hours aren't even good! You know, nine to four. If you have a job and you're taking alternative courses once a week or on-

line, how does that fit in? That doesn't fit in... There's nothing good about it. That's my opinion!

While the director of the program is “sooo supportive,” Samantha has given up on the program and has decided to get the books and try to teach herself over the Christmas break. She hopes to “come back and take all those tests within one week, and be done.”

Academic Success

As with many of the participants in this study, to Samantha, academic success, does not necessarily mean getting a top grade:

To me, academic success is not necessarily getting an A or high mark on something. But, it's when I feel that I've done the best that I can do. And, for me, I get that from a reward of some sort. Whether it's from a teacher telling me, you know, you did a great job. Or, a student telling me, I like your work. Um, that's the kind of stuff I thrive on.

Samantha has gotten a taste of success. She feels she is, now, aiming at the top and getting results:

I am aiming for the top, and the result of it is, I've been told by my professor, this semester, that I'm at the top of my class. I also know that I'm a leader. I know that not only because I've always been one, but, I've gained a lot of humility in the last year. Going through this process, realizing that I'm different. Realizing that these kids are all eighteen around me and I've lived. I'm older. I've done some crazy things that people will never do. I've got those little seeds planted in my head. I'm going to have those visions in my designs. And, I know where I'm going with it. I realize that and I've definitely accepted it. And, I try to remain quiet and do a really good job at what I do. Not only for myself, but for my peers. You know. I don't know. ... I feel like I'm in a really good place in my life right now. And I love school! You couldn't get me to say that six months ago.

Samantha has come a long way. Overall, when looking back on where she was at eighteen, and where she is today, Samantha tells us that she feels like she is definitely an academic success. She is excited about her program and feels that her education polishes

her character and allows her to see the big picture. As Samantha explains: "That, to me, is what my education is about...looking at the big picture, not just getting a degree."

Samantha's Future

Samantha takes her learning disabilities and the things she has learned about herself very seriously. Her understanding will play a big part in her future:

It's extremely important...I'm not good under the testing situation where you do multiple choice, or any sort of cramming situation, I don't do well in a tight, close, environment. I am very loose...and sprawled. I know this from school...I, therefore, know that I probably will not be...working in a cubicle type of a situation.

Samantha also realizes that she learns well in a small group setting and will work to incorporate this into her work environment.

Samantha sees an adventurous mate, and children, in her future. Because of this, her working life will have to be compatible with family life:

I will seek out an employer that has a lifestyle environment. And by that I mean one that supports me, well, having children, that's important! And, one that just believes and understands that you're human and not just part of a big machine of the company.

Ultimately, Samantha wants to have her own company, and live in a rural (preferably mountainous) area. Her experience with her present college has shown her that she does not "do well in crowded areas." Samantha feels she will never give up her love of adventure, though, and hopes to use her skiing expertise in some way.

Ideally, Samantha would like to earn a master's degree from Harvard in landscape management. The thought of getting a master's degree is something that would not have been a consideration earlier:

I don't know if it was the downtime from the ... ski accident, or, I just didn't want to return to school so frustrated. I mean, I did spend a week in the hospital in February, but up until that point I was still approaching school the same way I always had. It was kind of like a fight or flight for life type of situation where "Oh God! Here I go again." Absolutely dreading every second of it. Telling myself "You can get through it! You can get through it! Dah dah, dah dah." Where now, I feel that I embrace it. I'm excited!

In spite of her excitement for her education, she admits it would not be an easy proposition to be accepted for admission to Harvard. Samantha imagines that she would have to have a superior business reputation and outstanding letters of recommendation to accomplish this. In the very least, Samantha hopes to continue her education in some form. She believes "you should be learning your entire life."

Gender Issues

Samantha thinks that women "get buried" and "need to be strong in so many situations." They need to "learn to adapt, overcome." She is thankful that she came to this college, and learned about her learning disabilities, instead of getting married:

When you said women, that strikes home because I think we just repress things. Not only because of society, but, for our own reasons. We put everyone else's causes in front of ours, and everyone else's needs. You know, for me, being an adult, and finally acknowledging it [learning disability], I think, it was a big deal. I was with that guy [her former fiancé] for five years and almost married him. Had I married him and lived in [Mountain Town] and had a wonderful life there, I would not be where I am today. I wouldn't have the aspirations that I have today. And, I certainly would be living with ADD and struggling with bouncing from job to job like I have been. Never ending a job on a bad note, but never being happy at a job. I don't think that I would ever find happiness in a career had I not come to [present school] and basically, my professors pointed [learning disabilities] out to me.

Another issue that Samantha sees is that men get more attention in classes. She thinks that professors should be educated to pay more attention to women:

Tell them that they have to pay attention to the women in their room. It's gone on for decades where women have always been suppressed. And I still feel they are. I absolutely feel they are, especially in the sciences and math. Definitely in math....I just think they stay quiet. And I think the boys in the class will get called, even if you have a female professor. She'll pay attention to the boys. I don't know why that is that way. But, I really believe that.

Advice for the University

Samantha feels that services for women with learning disabilities should be more visible. She suggests that the University could "even go so far as to put a little article on the opening [web] page," or create "something that would catch the eye." Samantha's concern comes from the trials that she has gone through:

I didn't know much about ADHD, except for the kids I went to school with. And, I really didn't think I had it. I didn't think I had anything. I thought that I was just out there. I don't know, ditzzy...and, I think if you can find a way for somebody who might be wondering about themselves, to quickly grab 'em. It's got to be a quick thing. Somehow grab their attention.

Samantha further explains her concern and the need for professors to be educated on this topic:

I have a couple of girlfriends that I've made friends with in this school that are pro athletes. And they say the joke is that we're ADHD inflicted--athletes. And, they say every extreme athlete is. And they joke about that....But, the truth is, I'm actually getting help for it. And, the testing center has been crucial in my success. And, they don't have that. And, I have one friend, she's about to drop out. They've changed their majors a couple of times....Just kind of,...Not kind of, definitely educate the professors because...the professor is more than a professor lots of times. They're going to end up being a parental figure and they don't even know it. They really don't. And they are going to have to see things like that. And they are going to have to be trained in that...training a professor is key!

Samantha finds that graduate students, especially, need to be educated about learning disabilities and testing protocol:

If I have a graduate student, and I've heard this from other people who have learning disabilities...I don't know if they [graduate students] just aren't educated on it, or what, but, instantly, there's an attitude. And maybe because you're in the same age bracket most of the time, or what it is. Or they feel threatened by the fact that you want to take your test somewhere else, I don't know. But, they're the only ones I've had any sort of friction with.

Samantha thinks “professors need to be held accountable to tell whoever they're employing that you might have students who need to take tests separately. And, don't suggest they come in 15 minutes early.” This is a sore spot for Samantha because she backed down to a graduate assistant who suggested this accommodation and wound up hurting her scores:

I did back down on one grad student, and I shouldn't have, because it did hurt my scores. And I know that. You know. Coming in 15 minutes before class, I kind of feel like I'm being punished. I have to sit in the same room. The kids all come in, in 15 minutes. But, I'm not anywhere near done with my test and they're so loud. And she gave them 10 extra minutes to study and I didn't get that 10 extra minutes. It's things like that...it just wasn't handled well.

Another area that needs attention is based on Samantha's own experience, and that of her friends who have learning disabilities. Samantha is convinced women should have more support to help them understand the ramifications of their learning disabilities and to be able to identify supports:

I think if the school could find a way to make it more comforting. You know, make you feel special. I have a friend that's a lot older. She's in her late thirties and she went back to school this year. And, she just went through the whole testing process. And, she's freaked out. And, she doesn't even know what to think about it. ...She just got her first tests that were untimed and she's just so relieved now. But, I think she's going through a lot of the whole personal thing, like, what's wrong with me? How could I make it ten years, fifteen years, or even one year out of high school. I mean how could you make it all this time and there be something wrong with you?... You know, especially as a woman. Because you feel like you need to be so strong in so many situations. At least I do. And, I know my girlfriends do. I mean, don't get me wrong. I definitely run with a strong group

of women, but, we all have, everyone has so many insecurities, and if they could just make that more comforting. The more the word is out there that there is a resource center and, ...maybe on the front web page say something to the effect: Are you having problems with your tests?... Are you struggling in your classes? And, then, [provide] an immediate link to the resource...Even if somebody was to just walk in there, at least get in the door. At least they'll understand that it's a really smiley, happy place....I do think that they could do more to get people in there. My girlfriend, the older one that went through testing, she didn't know about it. I told her.

Finally, Samantha thinks that it would be a good idea to have mentors available, either for in-person contact, or through email. She thinks that she probably would have benefited from a mentoring experience:

I probably would have asked, Hey, how do you deal with the chemistry class that you have to walk up in front of and you don't want to whip out the form in front of all these people next to you.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Samantha is a staunch advocate of college for women with learning disabilities.

When asked what advice she would give women with learning disabilities, Samantha replies:

College is the best place for them...absolutely! And I'd say, don't hide it, you know....And be proud of who you are. You're not any different, at all. If anything, it's kind of a gift.

If a woman knows she has a learning disability, Samantha suggests she get in touch with resources the "very first week of school. Go right to the Resource Center." She also feels that there are so many programs on campus that may be helpful, that it is important to spend some time getting acquainted with the campus. As she explains:

Find, not only the resource center, but...find something else that relates to you. I think the more people you can relate to, the more you're going to find. You might

find that best friend in the women's club, or in the track club...and she might be going through the same thing...don't be afraid, talk about it.

Samantha feels it is, especially, important to talk with professors. As she explains: "You don't have to tell your peers, but talk to your professors, quietly. Go to their office hours. So many people make it through a semester and they don't even ever know their professor's name."

Samantha has searched out, and found, many of the resources she needs. The process has not been easy, but she is tenacious, and dedicated to her own success. She has also found a network of support through family, friends, and her professors. Knowing about her learning disabilities has offered Samantha new possibilities, instead of a wasteland of failed classes and frustration. In the end, Samantha offers this wisdom: "the key is knowing yourself."

Britt

Britt is a twenty-two-year-old psychology major who plans to graduate in the fall of 2003. She turned to Resources for Students with Disabilities in her junior year of college after finally being forced into facing her need to complete university math requirements. Britt knew of her problems with math early in her school experience and attributes her problems with math to a genetic link to her mom (Britt's "inspiration" and role model):

My mom, I...got it genetically from her. We both have had big problems with math...my dad is actually the one who got my mom through her math [for her MBA].

Britt received help for her math problems as early as grammar school, however, she did not have a formal diagnosis of her learning disability until her senior year of high school. Even with this official diagnosis, Britt finds it difficult to separate herself from her fear. She still attributes her math problems to a "phobia of math:"

I've always been very scared of math. Anything to do with math...I shy away from. And, you know, that could include any kind of activity, board games...where you have to do quick calculations in your head. Things that should be really easy for people. The first thing that comes up is the phobia. I'm scared, really scared that if I mess up I'm going to get yelled at for not understanding. And, it also makes me feel kind of dumb when I don't know it.

Britt's Early Battles with Math

Britt admits that in elementary school she was always slower in math than the other kids were. Because of this slowness, she attended special programs designed to help kids with math problems. These special programs "kind of helped." Although, for the most part, Britt still "really didn't do well in math."

Britt's father, an environmental biologist, tried to help her get up to speed in math starting in the sixth grade and finally ending in her sophomore year of high school:

I think he had the best intentions, but...he's like "OK. We're going to sit down at the table and do math tonight." And, so, he tried to explain it to me. You know, he's a whiz at that kind of stuff, and, he would try to explain it to me and he wasn't getting through to me...it's not good to have a parent teach you. And, so, I would end up not understanding and he would start to become angry because he was trying his hardest to teach me and maybe it seemed to him that I didn't want to learn and it was just that I couldn't understand it. So, it got into big ordeals where I would be very upset and crying...really upset about that kind of thing. And, that happened several times with my father. That's where, at least, my phobia of math started.

In middle school, Britt was enrolled in a private school. Her entry exam showed a high verbal score and a very low score in math. She was advised to "work on her math," but was able to get through classes without this work because she was "quiet" and "didn't ask questions." According to Britt, they "just kind of tried to pass me by." The teachers seemed to understand that Britt was intelligent, just not in the area of math. While her teachers "skimmed over" the math with Britt, their main goal was to pass her through her math classes. Finally, in Britt's senior year of high school, she had to come to terms with her inability to work math problems. Britt was taking algebra and "failing horribly." She became "very embarrassed" because she was a senior in high school and freshmen "were just whizzing through the problems," To address this problem the school arranged for one of Britt's favorite teachers to tutor her. She met with her tutor three times a week in the library to go through practice problems as well as tests. Britt thinks that "it was a great system" for her to participate in if it would have been possible for her "to get that phobia out of the way." Britt admits that she did not have enough confidence in herself to follow through with the home study that was required. She did not feel that she "could do the math at all." Britt says she "just wasn't ready." This attitude was supported by Britt's belief that math was not relevant to her field of interest, psychology. When confronted with math problems, Britt "found ways to avoid it pretty well" with calculators borrowed from friends. Now, Britt always carries a calculator with her.

After this failed attempt to tutor Britt in her senior year of high school, she was finally referred to a neuropsychologist for testing. The testing substantiated the earlier testing of her private middle school. She scored very high verbally, but math was very

low. However, this time, her neuropsychologist documented these findings for Britt. It was official, Britt had proof of a diagnosed learning disability, as well as suggestions for her success in college. Britt explains:

One of the first suggestions that has helped me a lot is to take the math problem and convert it into something verbal and that way I can understand it. Some people...just have those numbers in their head and they can do that. I have to write it down and I have to rewrite it and look at it and kind of memorize it, that way, in a verbal way....The other suggestions they gave me were not to put on a huge class load my freshman year...and that I should definitely seek counseling,...they talked about things like the Academic Advancement Center and things like [Resources for Students with Disabilities].

Britt's College Experience

While Britt's diagnosis in her senior year of high school was proof that early impressions of Britt as "stupid, or lazy, or just not trying hard enough," were not correct, and provided suggestions for her college journey, Britt was still hesitant to get help for her learning disability. Unfortunately, Britt was able to avoid facing the implications of this diagnosis until her junior year of college. By her junior year, Britt had received several holds on her school account because of her avoidance of math. Semester, after semester, she turned in waivers for her math requirements. According to Britt:

It was getting really bad. I had to get over it, or get more consent forms to keep taking classes because they were supposed to cut you off from taking classes if you haven't finished your math mods.

Britt feels her inability to face her learning disability stems from her father's alcoholism and the death of her mother:

It's really hard. I guess you would have to know a little bit about my life history. My mom died when I was fifteen so I lived with my dad. I was physically and emotionally abused by my dad. My grandparents died when I was twenty and then my dad died just not even a year ago....So, I've had a lot of anxiety. It was very

difficult....I'm on antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs because that's something that I've struggled with...since age fifteen, and I probably will the rest of my life. And, I see a counselor. And, so, my dad was an alcoholic, and the thing with alcoholism is to hide....and so, I've kind of learned to try to hide any problems with math by just avoiding it as much as possible.... Yeah, I think I didn't approach them [math mods] because I was ashamed. And, it was very hard for me.

Britt felt ashamed to get help:

I'm very ashamed....I remember the first time I went in to the Resources for Disabled Students...it was my counselor that told me to go and talk to, I think it was, [Resources for Students with Disabilities] and I met with.... [Name of counselor]... And I met with [head of Resource Center]. And, that was just a hard thing to do. I remember coming out of there kind of crying because I wanted to be normal. You know....And, I always strive to kind of make it look like that because I've had so many loses and I don't want people to feel sorry for me....just because, I didn't want to be a student with a disability.

Even before her head-on confrontation with her math problems in her junior year of college, Britt's life was beginning to take a new turn. It was her father's intervention and show of support that set her on a different track:

Well, I think part of it, I remember, my first semester my sophomore year. I had just come off of summer. Wasn't doing well with my dad. Was in a lot of depression. I was drinking a lot. And I was like, I'm good. Just take the semester off and quit school, because, I was trying to work too, as well as go to school. And, it was just too much for me, you know. And I said, "Dad, I'm going to quit and take a semester off and just work." And, he was just like, "No. It can't happen and I'll find a way so you can go to school." You know, you won't have to work anymore. I'll pay for everything. I'll give you a monthly allowance. I'll put you up, not in the dorms, anymore, cuz that's where I was. I'll put you up in a nice house. But, you have to stay in school. And that....semester I got the highest GPA that I've ever gotten. I got a 3.8....I didn't have to work and I was in a good environment...I didn't have to worry about money and bills and everything like that. And, he said... you have to stay in there. And, now I'm, kind of, doing it. A big part of it is...I have to get it done. I have to do it.

Her father's show of support and Britt's off-campus move, away from the party atmosphere of the dorms, proved to be important to her success:

I moved in with a girl who could still have fun, but was very responsible and she and I became good friends. And, she taught me a lot....It was just a nice quiet household. And, there was another roommate who was...in her senior year.... So I moved...into this condo with well-balanced people who...I could just model their behavior. I really modeled this girl Leslie's behavior...the way that she got things done just amazed me. And, that really helped... Yeah, it was way too much, being in the dorms and working and trying to go to school. And, yeah, I mean, showing that someone really cares that you're, that you're in school helps, I think.

Facing Her Learning Disability:

Britt was finally ready to face her learning disability. Her first step was to pass the Entry Level Mathematics Exams (ELM):

I put it off until, I think, the beginning of my junior year. I couldn't even pass the ELM, which is the test we have to pass to be able to take math courses at school....Actually, I saw a counselor here that was in the health center, and, she'd had a lot of problems with math too...and I told her that I have a diagnosed learning disability but it's not, you know, I think most people would be like, that's BS, there's no name for it--it's not dyslexia. And she said go to the Academic Advancement Center and...I went there and you apply and get a free tutor for doing that...so, I worked with a tutor and she was really great, and I was able to pass the ELM. I worked with the tutor for the whole semester to be able to pass that...and, of course, this whole time I'm getting holds on my registration because you're supposed to have three math mods due for freshman year.

With her ELM exam under her belt, Britt still had to face the three required (pre-calculus) math courses taught through the Individualized Mathematics Program (IMP):

So, after that, I avoided it for another semester. And, I decided one semester to take, your supposed to take M120, M121, and M124....so...I tried to do it in one summer. I had just gotten together with my boyfriend, my fiancé now, whose just wonderful at that kind of thing...I mean, he has no problems with math or sciences or anything like that. I thought he could really help me out during the summer, but it turned out it was just too much information during too small a period of time. And, I thought that maybe if I went into a class setting that would work better. So, I tried to get into a class setting for M120 and they gave us, they really gave us the run-around. But, basically they said, there's no classes. We're phasing that out, M120 and M121. And, I'm like, I need a class. I need someone to teach me....so, they were able to tell me that I could take M117 and

M118....So, I tried to take the M117, which is kind of like applied mathematics. And, the teacher, I think she was nice and I think she was probably a good teacher, but, it didn't work for me. Especially, they were doing things like applied math...I was at the point, and I'm still at the point, where I just want to get it over with--all my requirements for it over with. You know, and use my calculator, use whatever I can to kind of avoid it. I'm not going to go looking to be a mathematician or anything like that....Well, I got through, I got through...117, 118, and 124....I ended up being done with all my math classes.

This time, however, tutors from the Academic Advancement Center did not prove to be the answer:

Actually, my boyfriend taught me....I tried a tutor from the Academic Advancement Center, a different one because the other one had left. And, she was one of those people who was very good at math but can't teach it. She was like, "Write down this equation." And, you know, when someone tells me something I have to write it down. Look at it. Think about it. And, then be able to respond. And if I have to learn it I have to write it several times....And...we met one session and the next session she's like, "Did you remember what I wrote down last time?" and I said "no." And she said, "OK, you need to learn this!" and I was, like, OK I need to go, actually....That doesn't help me. So I decided to drop out of the classroom setting and just have my boyfriend tutor me in this and he's just an absolutely wonderful tutor...and teacher...He's definitely what got me through those three courses. But, I cannot tell you the pain and suffering I went through to get through that. I had, oh, so many problems. They're, I think they're pretty unorganized. There's supposed to be like a tutor hall where you can go in and get tutoring help. And, there should be tutors there all the time. The tutors are very unfriendly. And, even with the Academic Advancement Center...it's like, "let's sit down and get to learning on this." They don't say, "you know, what's your learning style? What have you been having problems with?" and that kind of thing....but yeah, eventually I got through my three required math classes and I still have statistics to take.

Britt has passed her pre-calculus math requirements, however, she does not have many good things to say about the Individualized Mathematics Program. She feels the program is unclear and the tutors are unfriendly and need to have better training:

Some are pretty good at just...handing out the tests. But, with the tutoring, I don't think that they train their tutors. I'm not positive, I can't say for sure, but the tutor just kind of walks around the room and answer a quick question. Whereas, there

are some people who need to sit down and have something really explained to them. Um, and the tutor, you know, doesn't get time to, doesn't even ask you your name. "Hi....What are you having problems with here?" Just on a little personal level.... I think the university neglects those people who cannot pass the ELM, or, that...barely pass it, that aren't good at math.

In spite of the problems that Britt faced, passing the pre-calculus college math requirements bolstered her self-esteem and helped her feel "a lot more comfortable with math." However, Britt still has one more hurdle, she plans to take the much-dreaded statistics class with her fiancé next semester. Britt hopes his tutoring abilities will, again, carry her through. To hedge her bet, she plans to use an Academic Advancement Center tutor also--if she can find a fit.

On the whole, Britt feels that her experience of having a learning disability has made her feel "sad and kind of worthless," because she "can't even do the simplest of problems." However, Britt is finally starting to come to terms with her learning disability. She feels this new turn of events has a lot to do with her present therapist and the fact that she is becoming more comfortable with herself:

I am just becoming more comfortable with myself as I grow older. That, this is me, and if you think less of me because I have a learning disability and can't do math, that's unfortunate...But, I can't help it. This isn't something I'm making up. This is something I have a hard time with.

Britt feels that a math disability is a hard concept for people to understand, "there's not a name for it." She feels that others would think her diagnosed learning disability is "BS." When other students ask Britt about her learning disability, she finds it very difficult to explain. They ask "is it dyslexia with numbers?" The most successful

way that Britt has found to explain her learning disability is to describe her personal experience:

I always mix up the difference between a nickel and a dime, and their value, and what they look like. And, I don't know, I just can't process that the right way. The multiplication tables, you know they drill that into your head in elementary school and there's still some numbers I can't do. It's like the sevens and the nines multiplying. Those kinds of things.

Britt is convinced that others can benefit from being diagnosed:

I think that this is a really new thing. Um, that, you know, they just figured that people that weren't good at math were stupid or just lazy. Didn't try hard enough. Which is kind of how I was made to feel for along time. And, this is something new that I think a lot of people could be diagnosed with that could be helped by using the resources on campus.

While Britt is coming to terms with her learning difference, it is still not an easy thing to become accustomed to:

It's scary, it's really scary to admit, you know, that there's something wrong with you. And, it's scary in a classroom situation. Just last week I had a social psychology lab, and it was demonstrating just the effect of how quick you can do something when someone's watching you, as opposed to when someone's not watching you...these were math problems. And, boy, I just put my head down like this, you know, and I'm not volunteering...I just looked at her, please don't pick me... because I can't do math either way.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Britt continues to find it helpful to keep regular personal counseling appointments and take medication for her depression and anxiety. In addition, she appreciates the academic accommodations that she is now receiving. Britt considers the individual academic counseling that she receives from the Academic Advancement Center to be invaluable. She feels the tutors that they have provided can be "great," when there is a fit. Britt also finds the testing accommodations provided by the Resources for Students with

Disabilities to be "really great." The testing accommodations allow Britt to test in a quiet room and have time-and-a-half to take her tests. She feels this is "really helpful" and keeps the distractions down.

Tutors have been a very important part of Britt's success in working with her learning disability, although, she could not always rely on a tutor working out for her. To pass the IMP, Britt relied on her fiancé when other tutors failed her. Britt has had to understand what works for her. Presently, she is taking a chemistry class where she is using a "really good" tutor. Britt explains that a "really good" tutor is:

Really...patient with me....and [says],..."look at this problem, what do you think you...would do here." And also with word problems, learning that they are pretty much asking the same thing. You know, you just have to find those numbers and plug them into the equation that they have given you....Then,...I could ask a question and answer that. But, not just, like that one awful tutor I had..."write all this down!"...A tutor has to [point out] "here's the rule for this" so I have to go to my notebook and I have to write down the rule for this. And, I'll have to do this a couple of times. Really slowly....to be able to learn it.

Britt feels that a tutor needs to understand ways that people learn and not expect everyone to learn in the same way. She was disappointed to find that this was not always the case, even at the Academic Advancement Center:

I thought that the academic advancement center guy got that because they,...at the beginning of this year, had you take a little, just a short little test to see...what was the way you best learned. You know, visual learner, auditory,... different things. The best way to learn for me was visually... writing it down and stuff. But, it doesn't seem to me that if it was told to the tutor, they don't want to talk about it...the tutor is not really interested in talking about this is the way...you learn best....I mean, they say this is your learning style, and I say, "Well, yeah. I know that." But,...I think it would be wonderful, I think the tutors just need to be trained a lot better....that's the biggest thing...trained. First of all, sit down and say, "yeah...what's the problem here? What are the best ways to get through it?"

Britt offers a piece of advice for tutors:

I've found...I can't work on it for too long because I get frustrated and frazzled and pissed. You know....Probably, a half an hour is my limit with math....Working beyond that, I have to go away for a while...and do something else and then come back to it. And, then I seem to settle down a bit.

Britt feels the flexibility she has with her present tutor works very well:

My teacher and I just email each other back and forth, I mean my tutor. We just email back and forth. Some days I just don't need to be, I just understand it. And, she's very understanding when I say, "OK. I'm done....we've gone a half an hour. I have all the questions answered," or, "I'm done for the day. I can't do anymore."

Britt likes the fact that her present tutor has taken the time to know her and feels that the IMP could benefit from that approach:

That's one of the problems with the IMP...it's very impersonal. Tutors aren't very happy to be there. They don't know you. And, they don't care about getting to know you....If you're not going to get it right away, they're not going to mess with you....for some, for most, people who are really pretty competent in that, that works. It's like "Hey, I'm just having this quick question on this problem." How do you go to one of those tutors and say I don't understand a word of what this is saying. You have to teach me, kind of from the beginning.

Gender Issues

Britt is still trying to fit the pieces of her life together and understand why she finds math so difficult. She feels that a fear of math is a socialization problem for women in general. This is new information for her that has been added by her psychology classes. Her psychology classes reinforce the idea that women have not been socialized to be good in math. This notion is also reinforced by her observation that she knows of no male students that have had problems passing the math requirements, "You know...I really haven't met men that have had that problem; it's been the women that can't pass the ELM." Britt thinks that "it's just socialization" that explains the problem:

Women are supposed to be better, or, you know, just stereotypes. Women are supposed to be better at the writing and the reading and men are supposed to be better at math and the sciences. And, it seems like that. I mean that's apparent from, I learned that in my psych classes, you know. The enrollment in the engineering college, there's maybe five or less percent women....so, I think a lot of women are scared of math because they're not, they haven't been raised to be...very good at that.

Although socialization is part of what Britt thinks provides an explanation for the problems women are experiencing with math, she did not think she got this message in early grades:

You know, I don't think I did. I can't think that I really did. It was more of just me. But,...from what I've learned from psych classes it's men that are better. I don't think that personally that I got that message.

Success

Britt feels that balance is the measure of success for her. She explains:

In life, you know, sometimes you look at, well I used to ice skate, and I used to be very serious...about ice-skating. And you look at, I spent pretty much all my time...doing that...and, I'd like, for me, success would be a balance between a family life, a career, exercise, and friends. You know, and feel like, at the end of the week if I can look back and...hey, maybe I didn't get an A on my test, but I got a B on my test, and I was able to hang out with my friends for an evening, and I had time to go out to dinner with my fiancé,...things like that would really be my idea of success.

Britt's Future

Britt feels that her life has been very "tumultuous," and what she likes, right now, is balance. She wants "steady, reliable, things in her life." Ultimately, Britt sees herself getting a graduate degree in counseling psychology. She wants to help others as much as she has been helped through her present counseling. However, she feels she needs to take some time off and "grow in maturity a bit more" before she makes that step. She

feels she still has a "lot of problems with anxiety" that need to be addressed. Fortunately, her inheritance from her father's estate will afford her the time she feels she needs.

When thinking about her life with her fiancé, Britt feels that both she and her husband-to-be will be working and that she will not take on the traditional role of a homemaker. She explains:

I've heard people come to college to get their Mrs., but, that's not what I'm looking for. My mother was very, very, smart and was a long way up in Kaiser Permanente....and, was able to get her MBA. I'm sure she probably had this sort of disability. It just takes a lot of hard work.

Advice for the University

Britt offers specific advice about ways that the university can help other women with math learning disabilities. She is concerned about women passing the university math requirements and feels help from the university will set women who are experiencing difficulties with math on a more productive path. Britt offers advice to address the preliminary test (ELM) that determines whether students can take other math courses at the university:

Have someone look at those people who can't pass the ELM, or barely passing the ELM and maybe set up something for them. Some kind of ground work. Let them know. Send out something, and email or letter or something and say, you know, you didn't do very well on math, in a nicer way, and these resources are available for you. And, we're really willing to help you.

Britt, then, turns her attention toward professors and uses a personal example to show how important professors are in the lives of students:

My chemistry professor [announced]at the beginning of class if I know there's some people with learning disabilities, and if you have that, there are a lot of resources on campus that help. And she wrote down the names and websites for resources and the academic advancement center. And, that's how I...first learned

that I could get extended testing time, which has helped so much. So, to educate the professors that these things are available. That really helped that she said that. You know, or else I would have had no idea.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Britt advises women with learning disabilities "to go and get a counselor at the Academic Advancement Center" who is "knowledgeable and helpful" and "then use any of the resources you can." She feels the advisor that she was appointed when she first entered school, " was this old jerk....this German professor." She found that he didn't help matters at all. Britt also advises to "let your teachers know...at the beginning of the semester," even if that is "hard" to do. She feels it is "important to let your teachers know you have a learning disability."

Britt had good success with this direct approach when she tried it in one of her classes. She was concerned that the teaching assistant would not be able to meet her needs when she had to use graphs and Excel in a class. Britt tells us:

That just totally scared me. I went to the professor and said that I have a learning disability and your TA needs to know about that and I need time for all of this. And so, I received it...I needed the extra time.

Britt has come a long way. The fact that she has needed help has been a hard pill for her to swallow. Because of this experience, Britt offers this final piece of advice:

I don't know if this would be the same way to other people, but it was a blow to my pride. You know, I thought if I just worked hard enough it would be OK. And, you have to understand that it's a disability...that you kind of have to put some of that pride away and look for help. And these people really do want to help. Because, most of them have been through pretty much the same thing....And, not to be so scared of it...you're not stupid and less of a person if you have to utilize those resources.

Lila

Lila entered college directly from high school. She is now a junior with double majors in equine science and dance. She considers herself “pretty laid back,” while at the same time, “strong willed,” and “very stubborn,” in pursuing her interests. In spite of her monumental commitment to these interests, she still feels she has never pushed herself as far as possible regarding her schoolwork. Lila was diagnosed with ADHD at the end of her freshman year, or the beginning of her sophomore year, she is not quite sure. For Lila, ADHD causes problems with math and her ability to hold abstract concepts in her mind.

Lila's Background

Lila was taken out of school right after kindergarten. Her parents felt the school system was not challenging enough for Lila and her brother:

My problem was that I was already reading...I finished *The Yearling* in the summer between my kindergarten and first grade year...I was about to turn five...And, so, my mom took me out of public schools because I wasn't learning anything...I was teaching the teacher how to teach the kids. So, she started home-schooling me. She got the books from a college...And then she kept teaching me until I was about in eighth grade...ninth grade. Then from ninth grade on I taught myself. I would put out my own lesson plan. I would follow it, and do the work. My mom would give me the quizzes and the tests. Or take the papers, or whatever, and then she'd grade them. And she'd give them back to me. And that's how we did that.

Lila was home schooled until she was in her senior year. She feels her home schooling taught her a lot about independence:

I don't think there are many people at this university who can honestly sit down and write out a lesson plan and follow through it. I mean, honestly, sometimes my mom would, like she'd go to the neighbors, and she'd be like, you need to finish your history and your science by the time I get back...this was when I was, probably, like eighth or ninth grade...and I was like, OK. And I don't think many people at, like, twelve years old would be like, OK, I'm going to go and do homework now... I would sit down and I would finish it. So, I think independence and perseverance are a big thing

Both of Lila's parents are "enormously supportive:"

They have always believed that me and my brother have been...they think that we're out of sight. I just tried to hide the fact that we're not. They read to us. They never talked baby talk to us. If we had a question, like why is the sky blue, it wouldn't be because, like, god made it that way. It would be like, well, because the atmosphere is made up of all these parts, space is actually black, and then, so they would explain. They were always really up front about it. They would read books to us that were really in-depth books. Me and my brother watched the news at night and then before we went to bed we would always discuss it...like, current events. A six-year-old talking about the Middle East, you don't really hear about that.

When explaining the support that her parents provide for her, Lila explains:

Just think of a momma bear and her cubs, that's my mother! And then my dad has pretty much the same personality as me, pretty laid back. But anything that he's passionate about he's right there standing his ground.

Lila's parents have always kept her busy and challenged:

I've been dancing since I was three years old. My mom enrolled me in dance classes because any time any music came on the TV, I would dance on the table...I loved it. And so, I started dancing. Then I stopped when I was eleven. When I was eight my parents bought my first horse, for my brother as part of his physical therapy [Lila's brother has cerebral palsy]....[I] fell in love with the horse world. Moved to [present state]. Then I started dancing again because I got into the Nut Cracker, in [a nearby city]. So I started dancing again at fifteen.

Lila has been supported in her interests, although her activities have not been without incident. Lila feels she is clumsy and has suffered multiple broken bones because of this:

I sprained my feet and my ankles and my wrists numerous times. Broken all my fingers, all my toes, at least twice. Broken my right kneecap. Had knee surgery on my left knee. Torn my left quad. Pulled my hamstring, my left hamstring, so bad they tried to put me in a cast. Two broken ribs on my right side. One broken rib on my left side. Broken my nose about, oh, seven times....Just through sheer clumsiness, honestly. Um, like, a door would open into my face. I would be running around into the shoes around my horses. Yeah, stuff like that. Sheer clumsiness. My own fault

While Lila admits she is clumsy, she also attributes many of the injuries to her love of dance:

Most of those injuries, most of the sprains and the torn quad and the pulled hamstring, those are a direct result of dance. And the broken ribs...we were doing a lift, for my broken ribs. We were doing a lift and somebody dropped me, somebody fell on top of me.

When asked if she thought she might push her body a little harder than the average person, Lila answers "Oh, yes! I do. I do." As an example, she explains:

I pulled a hamstring during a performance one night. And then I continued to dance. Finished the 4 minute piece, then I came back and danced about twelve more minutes that night, like, really intensive dancing. The next day I danced, off and on, for about twelve hours at a competition....So, yes. I definitely push my body...And then, I tore my quad as a result of my hamstring. I ended up going to nationals...4 days after I tore my quad. I could barely walk to get on the plane and I went to nationals. But, I won third in my division, with fourteen entries.

It is no wonder that Lila describes herself as a "strong willed" person. She also feels she is "a stubborn person" and if she really wants something she "will go for it," even if that means she has to push her body beyond its limits. She likes to push to see how far she can go.

Lila thinks that most of her studies were easy. She admits to "skating by" and doing as "little work as possible." However, math caused her problems. Lila began having troubles with math in the eighth grade, although, her math problem became more real when she took her exams for college:

I first started realizing I had troubles in math when I took my ACT and I got a 29 overall, 29 in science, 29 in composition, 36 in reading, and a 22 in math....My SAT scores were the same boat. I got 760 out of 800 for English. And a 560 out of 800 for math....Kind of clued me in that something was wrong.

Lila's College Years

When Lila entered college it became clear that she needed to address her math problems:

I came to college and I started taking the math courses here and wasn't doing very well in the math mods. I didn't know what was wrong. I ended up taking a B in college algebra, which upset me because that was the only reason I didn't get a 4.0... So, I went over to the math department and asked a couple of tutors to help me and they told me later on that I might have a math learning disability.

Lila went to the testing center to be tested and found that the tutors had led her in the right direction, she did, indeed, have a math learning disability. Her testing confirmed she has a "math learning disability as a result of having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder." Lila is secure that she has "pushed past that kind of roadblock of finding out at nineteen that you have a learning disability." She attributes this to her personal understanding of disabilities:

My brother has cerebral palsy, he's had it since he was born. And so, in my family, a disability isn't necessarily looked upon as a weakness. Just, kind of a chance to try harder. And, I've never really had to try for anything, any scholastic part of my career, at all... I've never really had to try in any part of my scholastic career until it came to math. So, having to try actually made it more rewarding when I succeeded in it.

However, Lila admits it took her a while to arrive at this conclusion:

At first, I did end up... I wouldn't say falling into a depression is the right word, but I was upset over it. I was depressed. It didn't affect the rest of my schoolwork, but it affected the way I looked at myself. For, probably, about three weeks to about a month... I'm a very forthright person, and so I realized that trying to skirt the issue to just skate away from it and not paying attention to it wasn't working. So, I sat down one day and just thought through it. "Well, so I'm not good at math. All right, why am I not good at math? Well, it's because I have to sit down and actually think about it?... Oh, that might be the problem".... So, working through, sitting down and actually paying attention to it, and actually working through it, realizing that I don't have to label myself. That way I don't have to

think of myself that way. It's just a part of me...Not, I'm part of it. Does that make sense?

Lila was also afraid that having a learning disability could be used against her:

At first...I thought it could hurt my chances to get in to vet school, or grad school...Right now, I don't really care. Like, if they find out, all right. If they are going to judge me for something that it says on paper, rather than who I am, it's their problem, kind of thing...I'd rather tell a person, "Hi I'm proud. Look at me, I had this, I had an issue, Oh no! I'm working through it. Look at me, I'm still getting good grades. I've gotten one B and two As in my math courses here at [name of college]...and then an A- in statistics."

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Grades are important to Lila, however, she feels she needs few accommodations.

While she has chosen not to use extra time for her math tests, it is a comfort to know the option is available:

With my math mods they gave me the option, well they told me I had thirty extra minutes on each test... To alleviate some of my test anxiety..."Oh my god! What if I forget it. I'm never going to remember it"...And, I still finished the test under the original time....Yeah. But then telling me, yeah you have thirty extra minutes. Don't stress about it. That really helps....Yeah. Because I'd get in there and I'd freak out. It would be like, yeah got to get this done and OK, what's next. So, once I figured out I could relax.

Although Lila does not use extra time for testing, she has found that she has needed extensions on two of her math classes. Without having the corroboration of her learning disability by testing services, she was met with skepticism:

I've taken three [math] course here. I've had to get extensions on two of my math courses. And the assistant director was incredibly helpful in getting the extensions...She was unbelievably helpful. And I appreciated that so much. The director was understandably skeptical about me having a math learning disability. She, I don't blame her because I know that, you know, a lot of people are going, like, well, I couldn't take this because of this happening. You know....but, once I went to [disability services] and got that figured out, then it was a lot, everything pretty much found a place.

Lila has learned to balance her need for activity and her need for mental stimulation. This is the reason for her double majors of dance and equine science: “The main problem with one major, or the other, is, with dance, there’s not enough to keep my mind busy, with science, there’s not enough to keep my body busy.” She explains how these needs worked together through an explanation of fairly recent experience:

I went to a camp between my freshman and sophomore year in college...It was a performing arts camp. I was bored out of my mind. I was thrilled at the chance to dance. There was faculty from Julliard. It was really a very, very, excellent opportunity for me dance-wise. I was bored out of my mind, because I just needed a chance to do something with my mind. So, there were stables there, they gave some of the guys, like, private lessons. So, I started to work with the barn crew...I started working with the vet too...So, I ended up getting part internship credit for being at this camp and working with the vet.

Lila is definitely involved in figuring out how her experiences can work to support her needs. For Lila, understanding how she needs to learn is important. She has been “stubborn” in looking for strategies that would allow her to learn:

I’m extremely stubborn...I do, like studying wise, I just reread my notes...I used to rewrite them...and use different words. Just like, the whole Mary had a little lamb thing. I would put, the lamb that was owned by Mary, and try to switch the words around, or the concepts around so then it said the same thing, but totally different words...I just started doing it one day. And I was like, well, if I put this word, it means the same thing...And you know what? I guess I understand it better because I can actually say this...So, I realize that if I don’t understand something, I can’t do that. And then, I’ll go back and go over that, whatever it is, more in depth, and then I’ll come back.

Lila also feels an important strategy is to be assertive with professors and makes herself known to them:

I’m really not timid about going up to my professors and asking for help. If I don’t understand something, you better believe I’ll be at my professor’s door during his office hours. Going, OK, please explain this to me. Or, emailing him.

Or, I'm notorious for this, I'll go up and argue for extra points on my test. Like, say I get a question marked wrong, I'll go in and argue for it. I'll do research on my own. It will be, like, this is true because. All my professors know me by name, because I do this... So, I get a little spoiled about that. I don't know if it irritates them, or what. Actually, one professor here at college, he's a political science professor, he use to give me extra credit for coming in and discussing things with him.... I'm sure they get kids coming in and being like, well I think you should give me extra credit because I'm a nice person. You know, I'm sure that can get really tiring.... But, when they see that I'm presenting them with facts. Like a hard copy fact. Not just going, well I dreamed this. They're actually, really, really nice about it... some can be egotistical, especially in the chemistry department.

Gender Issues

Lila has had a difficult experience in the chemistry department and finds one professor, in particular, "very, very, chauvinistic:"

There's a professor, over at the chemistry department. He's very, very chauvinistic, and so, he'll talk down to women. It doesn't matter if you know what you're talking about, or not. He'll just talk down to you. And so, I think that's very egotistical of him.... it's happened to several people... He sometimes does it to men too. So, I can't say he's a complete chauvinist. But, he will do it to, mostly, women.

However, always the optimist, Lila feels his attitude makes her "more creative." It makes her "look for other avenues of getting the information... like tutors, doing more research, contacting friends that have already taken the course." The most important factor for Lila is that she learns, in spite of being treated with disrespect.

Success

Like many other participants in this study, success, to Lila, is doing the best she can. Although, Lila still focuses more on grades as an indicator of her best:

Academic success, to me, is just trying my absolute best. Like, seeing how far I can go. Unfortunately, I haven't reached that point yet. I have a 3.7 GPA, 3.6 GPA right now... This semester I'm probably gonna get any where from a 3.8 to a 3.9.... That's pretty high, but I have not pushed myself as far as I can go.

Lila does not believe that she studies hard enough and feels she is “an extremely lazy person.” She feels to really know academic success she will have to gather together the courage to see where her limits are:

I study for finals and that’s it...so I think my definition for academic success is that I will push myself as far as I can go, and, I will actually have the courage to see where my limits are.

Lila continues to explain this concept:

I have lately realized that having the courage and the integrity, like push on....It’s really important! So, I have been doing that. And, I’m really surprised, like, every once and a while I’ll be like, “Oh, I can’t do this.” And then, I’ll...somehow just get through it. And I’m like, “Oh, what’s my next challenge”... just seeing where my roadblocks are going to be and how I can overcome them.

Overall, while Lila does focus on grades as an indicator of her academic success, when she explains further we gain a perspective that seems more in line with Lila’s passion for learning: “Learning is...my biggest thing in college. Like, I could get a 1.7, and graduate with a 1.7. I don’t care, if I’ve learned a lot. That’s fine. That’s what I’m here for.”

Lila’s Future

In terms of her immediate future, Lila feels she is facing “a dilemma.” She needs to decide whether she is going to join a dance company, transfer schools to pursue dance further, or stay in her present college and finish her equine science degree. Her primary leaning is “to go out and find out what the professional dance world is all about.” As Lila states:

I want to dance...dance my heart out until my body falls apart. Then, once my body falls apart, hopefully, my brain will still be in tact, and I want to continue with, like genetic research, especially with horses, or fowl management. I really love babies. So, I want to work with the babies and see what I can do for them.

It appears Lila will have her choice between “a couple of professional dance companies,” as well as a couple of “extremely good dance departments,” at prestigious schools, which are actively recruiting her. However, her dilemma is still the need to have both the mental and the physical stimulation. Lila feels that she can have both. Her intent is to dance and continue her equine science degree:

I think what I’m going to do, if I get to a professional dance company, I’ll take my courses either on-line, or at night, and finish up my equine science degree while I’m dancing. It’s going to be difficult, but I don’t care. I’ll still do it.

Lila sees herself traveling and being in the dance world for 6 or 7 years.

After her dance career, Lila envisions working from her home, because, most of all, she wants to be home with her children. Lila’s “number one goal,” and her “biggest aspiration, is to become a mom.” Although, the discovery of her learning disability has left her with doubts as to her ability:

I want to be a mom, above all other things. And, the one thing I’m afraid of is that my kids are going to be so smart, and then I’m not going to be able to keep up with them...Like, OK, you guys, stop reading. I just want to watch cartoons. [heartly laughter]... Something like that...I hope that they don’t end up seeing my struggles with the whole math thing and going, well she struggled with it and I’m afraid of it now too...Like, I don’t want them to be afraid of anything. I don’t want them to be, I guess, cautious of trying anything. I just want them to go for it...And...I want to be able to help them every step of the way. I don’t want to have to be like, let me go get the dictionary before I can explain this concept to you...You know, I know it’s a very foolish thing to think, but I want to answer what they’re going to ask. Answer it, instead of going, I don’t know. Go ask your dad.

In regard to her learning disability and her work career, Lila does not see herself “broadcasting” the fact that she has a math learning disability.” According to Lila: “If people want to get to know me then they can sit down and get to know me.”

Advice for the University

Lila has several suggestions for the college to address. First, she would like the college to provide more information on learning disabilities to relieve the anxiety that women may feel when they are first diagnosed:

I would say education is a big thing. Like, when I found out I had a learning disability, I was like, "Oh my god! What does this mean? Does this mean I'm gonna flunk out of school?" Like, there's a certain amount of, not terror, but fear of the unknown associated with that...I really didn't know what the possible consequences were. I didn't know of anybody else who had one...I didn't know how it could manifest itself.

In addition to the first request, Lila would like to request that the college "be more aware of disabilities" and "try to plan for them more." This request is precipitated by her mother's inability to visit Lila in her residence hall:

There's really no handicapped accessibility anywhere on campus, hardly any wheelchair accessibility. Like, the residence halls, there's none...So, that is definitely, definitely, needed. My mom can't visit me in my residence hall because I live on the third floor and there's no elevator...She's got degenerative arthritis...So, yeah, so she can't handle stairs.... stairs are very difficult for her. So, that is a huge issue on campus. There are hardly any cuts in the sidewalk. What little there are, are concentrated in just a few areas on campus.

Lila would also like to see more campus awareness of disability, in general:

They have awareness for pretty much every other group. Like...days for different ethnic groups. But they don't really ever focus on disability. I think if there's...disability awareness all over campus that would definitely assist in people not looking so worried when people with a disability do show up.

She thinks putting up posters may help women with learning disabilities:

I think education is a big thing. Like, maybe, putting up posters. Like, you didn't know this but this such and such person had a learning disability and they still accomplished this, dah, de dah, de dah.

Finally, Lila finds that the RSD office is out of the way and in a generally run-down section of the campus:

I have a big issue with the general services building, because, it really is a disgusting building! There are dead flies everywhere, it's really dirty. Even with the custodial crew constantly cleaning, it's always really dirty... So, maybe moving [disability] resources out of there. .into a more accessible office... Because, I know that the university is not doing everything it can for disabled students... So, I think that moving that into a more central location, maybe even the student center, would draw more attention to it... People wouldn't be thrown off by [the building].

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Like many of the women in this study, the first suggestion that Lila has when considering other women with learning disabilities going to college is "Do it! Go to school. Learn as much as you can." In addition, Lila offers support in the face of many of the roadblocks that can be thrown in their path:

Don't accept no for an answer.... Don't accept the limitations that other people are setting on you. If somebody is saying, like, you have a learning disability, you're stupid, that person's ignorance is getting in the way. You're not stupid, it's just that their ignorance is in the way. That's it!

Lila feels that women with learning disabilities need to:

Face it. Don't run from it. If you do have a disability instead of looking at it, "Oh, it's a disability," look at it as a challenge.

Freya

Freya, a 35 year-old biological science major, is one of the two participants in this study that already has a bachelor's degree (also see Allison). Freya was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD/ADHD (she is not sure which label to use) during her enrollment for

her second bachelor's degree. She, "somehow," was able to complete a liberal arts degree and has come back to college to follow her interest in the biological sciences. Although Freya has earned a bachelor's degree, she does not consider her experience a success:

I think that that's part of the real reason why I didn't succeed the first time I was in school. I was always on academic probation. Always!...I wasn't a bad student, per se, I just never did what I was supposed to do to get the grade I needed. I was a very skimming kind of person. I mean, I look back and I still have stuff in folders, you know, books that I have saved from that time-period, just because they were very good books. And I came across little quizzes and things, and I have As and Bs on them, but the overall grade I got was a D or a C...because I just didn't apply myself all the time. So, I was kind of a roller-coaster kind of student [laughter].

Freya's Background

While Freya feels a lack of discipline is to blame for her school problems, when looking back, she concedes that she was "the perfect ADD child." In spite of this, she did not receive treatment for her learning problems. She attributes part of this to the attention that her sister received for her dyslexia, and having a personality similar to her father's, which, considering the rift, between her father and mother, was not an envious position to be in:

I was the perfect ADD child...and, that's probably why I got overlooked...Yeah, because I was very opposite my sister. My sister was very quiet in class. She hid a lot of her problems, but, they found it. They've known she had dyslexia for years...I do emulate more of my father's personality than I do my mom's. And, because mom was having a lot of problems, in that point in life, with him, she just didn't want to deal, and I did get overlooked, a lot, in that respect. Not that I didn't have freedom, because I did, but, that cost me a lot too. I mean, I always got into trouble because of it. That is where, when my sister was diagnosed with dyslexia, that, realistically, I should have gone into some kind of testing as well. It wasn't just about me being the bad kid, or the one that was acting out all the time. Or, the one that was always getting in trouble, which was the case, it was, seriously, because I just didn't have somebody directing me...I just had no direction and no discipline in my family. Imagine! I'm surprised that I'm even here at all. [laughter]

Freya feels that during her high school years teachers and counselors saw her as "misdirected." She imagines them saying,

This kid is just misdirected, unguided. Has her head in the clouds constantly...always in trouble because of it, because she can't see beyond the roses on the other side of the path that she wants to pick,...always meandering around, never staying in one place.

When talking about her grades, Freya confesses, "I was always at the academic performance level, the border. I mean, there were times when I had to repeat classes because I was just like [puts here tongue between her lips and blows]."

In spite of these high school problems, Freya never doubted that she would go to college. First of all, she was born into a family of women who valued a college education, however, this value, alone, did not motivate Freya's continued drive to obtain a college education:

My mom and grandmother...they're from the Cornell area. They are from [a very prestigious part of New York].... Well, my mom was going to Ithaca, which was another expensive private college, and, she dropped out after her associates degree. Just chose to not go any further. Married my dad, who was in vet school at the time... Having just gone the two years, and just getting the associates degree, my mother realized latter on in life, being married to my father, it wasn't enough to be married to him and have his income. She needed to have something too. So, she started going back to school in her adult years. So, as a kid in high school, I watched her taking classes...she was caught up in raising two kids, which my father barely did anything... I'm sure, because you come from that time period too, you know. You've seen it happen to just as many of your friends as my mom had seen, you know, with hers. And, the outcome on the kids is not always good. But, they become stronger in character and they have more visions for their future and their kids future because of it... I think that's what my mom started to realize, being an adult student going back to school. So, case in point here, anyway, it was her that pounded into my head that I needed to go to school because I couldn't always rely on a man in my life to provide for me and my family.

Along with this motivation, Freya's interest in college was further fortified by the fact that her grandparents had set up a trust fund for Freya and her sister's college expenses. Unfortunately, the trust fund was waylaid by her father for a failed business venture. Freya's mother, eventually, through a court battle, had it repaid. The bitterness held by Freya's father over the repayment resulted in his eventual estrangement from both of his daughters and culminated in a recent announcement that he has disowned them both. The immediate result of having the trust fund stolen was that Freya had to put her college education off for a couple of years. This left her feeling older than her peers and out of step.

Freya's College Years

Freya feels that her delay in attending college and being unaware of her learning disabilities were definite disadvantages:

I still didn't know I had ADD, or whatever. So, I go to college and I'm in this environment where I'm a little bit older than everybody else, not a whole lot, but for whatever reason it was a big deal to me...and, I got caught up in the same kind of stuff when I was in college that I was doing when I just had gotten out of my teens years and out of high school. And, that was pretty much not doing anything. Like why was I really at college? I couldn't really have told you....I partied, all the time!

Still, Freya did manage to graduate with a Bachelor's of Arts degree. This event and a "bad relationship" set off a longing to begin to know herself and the world through travel:

When I left school the first time, graduating, basically, well, I was in a bad relationship at the time so I wanted to leave the state and go do something. So, I went down to Nantucket, came back home, went to Vail, came back home, went back to Nantucket, went down to Florida, cruised up the coast, kind of bounced around a little, was in California and Arizona a little bit here and there. It was

kind of like off-season stuff...I actually spent...two months in Mexico, just traveling.

After a five-year period of traveling, working in "hands-on" jobs such as waitress and EMT technician, along with just generally gathering life experiences, Freya was ready to go back to school in a more disciplined way. She was convinced that her love of the biological sciences would finally lead to her life-focus. Freya enrolled in a small, rural, two-year college and began to gather credits toward a biological science degree. Unfortunately, there were still problems settling into her major, despite her well-thought out direction. It was not until a biology professor forced Freya's hand that it was evident learning disabilities were promoting her problems. With a mixture of indignation and curiosity, Freya finally agreed to be tested for learning disabilities when her biology professor recognized her problems and offered to raise her grade if Freya went in for testing. Freya was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD/ADHD in 1997:

It was a professor of mine in a little two-year college that actually said something to me. She was, kind of, nasty about it, and I disliked her pretty highly after that. And, I stuck with the class, and I basically kissed her ass, because I really wanted the grade, and I knew I deserved the grade. However, she made a bargain with me over the course of this particular semester and said that she would boost my grade another notch if I went and got diagnosed.

Freya, clearly, rebels against the idea of being labeled. She explains,

I don't even consider myself as being labeled. I just consider myself somebody who is aware of it. There are so many people out there that are probably just as learning disabled as I am...the only difference is they just haven't chosen to get diagnosed, or haven't known to.

Freya admits that knowing that she has a learning disability has helped her develop strategies, "but if I had a chance to do it again, I wouldn't want to be labeled....I

think it's stupid to label somebody." Part of her attitude toward labeling may be an outcome of her experience working with people with developmental disabilities: "My developmental guys,...I have a great time hanging out with some of them, but some of them...are really challenging. But, again, they're labeled. They're in special programs, they're funded by the state, blah, blah, blah. All special, special." When asked if that was what labeling meant to her, Freya replied "Yeah. It's stupid." Freya explains her fears about being labeled:

You know. I had my moments of, whatever, with all this learning disability crap. You know, for the most part, it doesn't bring me down. And it never will.... Maybe it's not the fact of the label that bothers me, it's the fact that if anybody were to use it against me, that's what would piss me off. Because, I am not developmentally disabled....I'm learning disabled....There's a difference. I still have the capacity to learn like everybody else does, it just takes me a little longer in some areas....I just need to approach it differently because my learning style isn't quite what somebody who doesn't have dyslexia, or ADD, would be like. And that's the whole thing right there.

Freya is clearly ambivalent regarding her diagnoses:

I started to figure it out when I left college the first time. But, when I came to college the second time, and started in '96, this person was like, this is what you are. I think, to some degree, I was almost relieved. Cuz, I was looking for a reason as to why the hell I was the way I was. I mean, no one else is like this. I'm out of control sometimes. You know, like downright hyper....So, I guess, to some degree, it was kind of a relief. But, at the same time, I didn't like being labeled. I still don't like being labeled....I'm still a person outside of that and still normal in a lot of ways. I'm very normal anyway.

In spite of this ambivalence, Freya is looking for ways to accept the label that has been placed on her. Referring to her learning disabilities label, Freya tells us:

It's becoming more the norm now than it was ten years ago...if you're labeled with something people don't typically do one of those...shun you kind of things...the body reaction that you see from people, or hear,...are very different, it's more acceptable.

Freya's learning disabilities interfere with her math and writing abilities and "once and a while with...spelling." In addition, she feels she has ADD characteristics that leave her misunderstood:

I think people with ADD have a tendency to be so hyper at times that... they're always in that mode where...everything is rushed...I mean I can't explain it because there's different levels of ADD for different people, you know... Things come out sort of rushed, you know. So, to someone else that rushed tone might sound like condescension or "come on lets get it done. Answer the question now please." You know, that kind of stuff.

When comparing herself to her sister, she feels that her sister's spelling is "horrible" and she transposes numbers and letters a lot. In spite of her sister's more severe dyslexia, Freya feels that her sister, a mortgage broker, is the most successful person in the family. According to Freya, while her sister, like herself, bounced "around in school for a while trying to figure out what the hell she wanted," she finally said, "you know what? I'm never going to figure it out so I need to pick something out that I'm going to be able to deal with, and just do it!"

In spite of her pride over her sister's accomplishments, Freya's frustration over being overlooked is evident in her reference to this fact several times during the interview:

I think I probably had it through high school and in my first years of college but just never really knew, and, no one in the family, my family, actually took the time to even see if I did have a learning disability. Even though my sister had dyslexia, which is something that I have. And, I also have ADD, or ADHD, or whatever you call it. . . So, being diagnosed in 1997 was kind of a surprise.

Although, undetected, Freya suspected she had learning problems. However, she attributed them to her personality, "I just knew that I had to make certain accommodations for my personality."

While Freya considers herself to be a "happy person," she admits to being depressed. She does not attribute her depression to her learning disabilities, but to her conflict with her father, and concern for her mother, along with other life events. When speaking about being happy Freya tells us:

Well I just am [happy]....well, for the most part. I'm not going to deny I have my moments, you know. I do get down and I go through periods of time, especially, like this past year where I can't get myself out of bed because it's just too painful. Things are just too painful.... Sometimes, when you get older, and with these crazy experiences happening to you, at an older age, it, kind of, takes the rug out from underneath your feet. It's not something that you really expect....Especially...when your father decides to write you and your sister letters telling you both that he no longer wants to be part of your life.

Her father's attitude toward her learning disabilities is especially troublesome:

He just doesn't care. He was the one who actually was like, "so you're ADD, just another excuse. Huh. Just another thing that they can label kids with today to make an excuse for blah, blah, blah, or, blah, blah, blah. And, I was just, kind of, like, "OK".

Freya is also concerned for her mother who is having a hard time accepting that she gave up her education to be married and is now working on a production line. Freya explains:

She's a laborer. She doesn't have a degree. She doesn't have a specialty....She's a physical laborer. She's fifty-eight years old, going into her sixties, and is still working on a production line...And she hates it. She's miserable...she's suicidal!

Freya finds it difficult to talk about her mother's situation, but feels she needs to explain:

This is a really hard thing for me to talk about, but, and it's nothing that I haven't already discussed so many times with other people, even with her... She's given up. She's almost sixty and she's like, it's not there for me. "This is what I have to look forward to everyday for this amount of time." And we're like, "Mom. You can do other things. Just because you're sixty doesn't mean that you should be hanging your towel up so-to-speak."

Talking about her mother's situation causes Freya to reflect on her own:

When I think about it, I have ADD. I have dyslexia. But, you know what, I go out into this world everyday. I'm not embarrassed to tell people that I have problems with it. I'll be like, "this is the reason I am the way I am. I do have a tendency to be this way but this is why." I'm very honest about it. And, I don't really see my disability as something that should hinder my ability to go forward, whatsoever. And nor should it be the reason why I should give up on something.

Freya's continued drive to achieve her life goals, which include a biological science degree, and to understand how to work with her ADD and dyslexia, is fueled by her mother's plight:

I'm not going to be like my mom and be like "well, I'm stuck. I'm going to be working with developmentally disabled people at eleven dollars an hour for the rest of my life. I'm never going to have anything else because I'm ADD, or because I'm dyslexic.

In addition to these stresses, Freya cites several other life events that have resulted in considerable stress. She has been involved in: automobile accidents, with resultant medical expenses for wrist and back surgeries; the loss of two grandparents; her cat's very expensive illness; recent car repairs totaling one-thousand dollars; and, a friend's experience with his recovery from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Freya feels that dealing with these stresses make it more difficult for her to work with her learning disabilities because "you just... get your head up in the clouds with emotions too, so it makes it worse."

However, she feels, when considering everything she is working with, the fact that she has maintained "a 2.8, 2.9, 3.0 average" is, in her words, "Wow!"

Accommodations and Strategies

It was not until Freya was working for her second bachelor's degree that her learning disabilities were discovered. However, she feels there were accommodations that were extended to her even without being labeled. Freya attributes this needed flexibility to her choice of a smaller college. Her first bachelor's degree was earned at a small New England college and when she started college the second time she chose a small, rural, two-year college to take the biology prerequisites for her new major. Freya explains:

I knew I was an easily distracted person. I knew on some exams, I needed extra time. And coming into the end of my first college, I graduated in 91,... in the last two years there, it became more apparent to me when I got into the harder math classes and couldn't do them properly, that there was a reason why. So, I talked with professors and never once did ADD or dyslexia come up. I just said that I am having problems reading these questions and understanding them. I actually got extra help. I didn't have to be labeled in order to get that extra help. I didn't have to go to an Academic Advancement Center or your Resources for Learning Disabled Students. I could just go to this place and be like, "I need help. There's free tutors, free help, free questions....and that's the only reason why, after failing a math class two or three times, I actually passed it. It's because, like, I need the extra help here...I don't understand why, but this isn't working for me. And because I was putting a lot of time and energy into it, and again, another small community. I think the small community was the reasoning here. I mean, even here, I've found when you start to know your professors they're more apt to help you succeed and give you what you need, within reason, of course.

Freya "did not ask for a lot of special accommodations," although, extra testing time was offered in some classes, "but, only because the woman who made that deal with me was the biology professor."

Freya receives the accommodations of extra time and the opportunity to take her

tests in a quiet room at her present college. Depending on the class, she feels these accommodations are critical to her success:

If it's the kind of class that's so technical...I know I will need the extra time to like read through the questions rather than the forty-five minutes that it actually becomes to be. I mean, fifty minute class periods. You know, you get in there and you get ready to take your exam and after five minutes, ten minutes of explanation you have like, less time to answer fifty questions. You know, and it's like aarg! That's distressing...I don't like to be that pressured. I mean I don't mind it if I'm moving around, but I'm sitting there and I'm having to do this and...that's not like an ADD personality. An ADD personality is up, moving, using your hands, you know, whatever. And, that's how I do it. So, when I go test in the...testing center [Freya is describing a quiet room offered by Resources for Students with Disabilities],...I can actually stand up and pace with my papers...that's how I study at home too...I talk to myself...I've had professors actually come up to me [Freya is holding her finger up to her mouth in a quieting gesture like her professors do], and, I'll sit there talking to myself with my pen up in the air and my eyes up at the ceiling going "OK so if that's that, and this is this, and OK, Oh! that's the answer." And it's like everyone just heard me say that. That's how I get myself through an exam. [laughter].

Another academic accommodation that Freya has begun to use is a tutor, which is provided by the Academic Advancement Center (AAC), for a calculus class. Freya is "not a fan of math", however, calculus was especially trying:

I loved trigonometry, I didn't mind algebra, but, coming into calculus I had to work my ass off to get through that class. It took up ninety percent of time. In fact, other classes suffered because of it. But, I was determined, and...I got a B. I worked my ass off for it though. I was in tutoring three nights a week because of it. That was when I first started with AAC. I couldn't have passed it without that help.

Freya does not always depend on the AAC for tutors. An example is her physics class. She enjoys her physics class, in spite of its math orientation. Her joy of physics is the result of a physics professor and an outreach program that he has created that provides "hands-on" learning opportunities and support for differing learning styles.

However, despite her interest, she has recognized that she needs to be tutored in this subject. Freya feels secure that she can utilize the tutors involved in this program for help instead of going to the AAC. As she states: "because I am a part of [special physics program], I have all those people to my disposal if I have a question. And they love doing that stuff." Freya has not needed many accommodations in physics "because [name of male teacher] has been really good about allowing an extra half an hour here and there, or, even forty-five minutes." She feels she "always [has] plenty of time."

In addition to academic accommodations, Freya's personal strategies, even though she does not care for it much, include taking medication. Like other women in this study, she has found her arrival at a satisfactory medication to be a process of trial and error:

Well, I was prescribed Ritalin [when Freya was first diagnosed]...but now I'm taking Wellbutrin, because it does two or three different things all at once. And for me it's the best, the best thing, because I don't want to take like eight million medications every day. I don't like taking medications.

Freya feels her medication allows her to think more about her actions and tempers her "tendency to be so scattered," as well as offers help for her depression, and aids her attempt to quit smoking.

Freya also likes to study with others and feels it is necessary for her success to have that opportunity. However, she feels that her study-mates may not necessarily feel the same about studying with her: "I was the one who, if I came into the library and people were studying together, they would always like "oh my god! Here she comes. Scatter! She'll distract you the whole time."

Care about choosing classes is another strategy that is important to Freya.

Speaking on this subject, Freya tells us:

It just depends on how you pick, and choose what is a priority....you have to be very conscious of what's going to be easier for you and what's not going to be easier for you. Like this semester I took a gross anatomy class that was five credits and it was a really hardcore intense class. I loved it though. So, I put the time in.

Even with this care, Freya cannot always depend on doing as well as expected:

I didn't always do well on my exams, regardless of that, but that's just because I might have studied it wrong, or I might of over-studied in one area and under-studied in another and didn't...get all the information in my head that I was supposed to have gotten.

Freya finds it difficult to make work and school coincide. She works 35 to 40 hours a week at two jobs and confesses that “sometimes my studies take a little dive because of it.” Her personal strategy to handle this challenge is to make sure that she develops a relationship with her professors. Freya explains:

I work as an American Red Cross instructor for CPR and first aid, and I work with developmentally disabled people, and I do respite care, and I have regular consumers that I work with every week....I probably teach once a week, sometimes twice. And then, the other one I have is the two consumers that I work with regularly, every week....anything extra that comes up. Like, someone wants to go out of town and leave her daughter behind, that's where I come into play. So, I'll do overtime....There will be weeks at a time where I won't even be at my own house. And those are the times when I'm at school that I'll have to take a different approach. And, I'll talk to professors and I'll be like, I really need to do this work....This will set me up for the next month, month and a half, financially. So, if I don't do it, and I have to...adhere to your strict test policy...Maybe, can I take it before? Maybe, can I take it just after, rather than in the middle....And, they've always been pretty good about working it out.

Freya feels the fact that she has to work so hard puts her at a distinct disadvantage when considered against traditionally aged students.

While Freya does not choose to use technical assistance, such as spell check, to accommodate her spelling challenges, "I'll use a dictionary, but not a spell check...I typically write everything down first," this is not because she is afraid of technology. On the contrary, Freya feels she is especially suited to use computers:

Well, it's funny that you say that because, for whatever reason, I'm a self-taught computer person, and I pick it up very easily. I started doing a project for physics two, three, weeks ago...And I used a digital camera to film my project. So I filmed it and I had to download it into an IMAC, which I had never used before. So, I did the whole import, export thing, and I imported to the IMAC and put it into an I-Movie. I, literally, was only shown two or three things, literally, and then I was just off on my own figuring it all out. And, my friend was like, your picking this up really fast. And, I just looked at her and said "really, this just comes really easy to me, and it always has"...for whatever reason, I have that brain that just picks certain things up really easily... Yeah, a computer is no challenge to me. I love it actually. It kind of like goes hand and hand with the whole ADD, the flashing screen thing. It just works for me. [laughter]

Freya has found another strategy that is important is obtaining knowledge about her learning disabilities. She has, especially, found the book *Driven to Distraction* (Halloway & Ratey, 1994) helpful. Through reading this book, she has been able to identify and separate her personality from her ADD. Reading *Driven to Distraction* has allowed Freya to begin to figure out "a lot of...personality quirks that [she hasn't] been able to understand." She explains the importance of doing this:

It is literally in a book...like *Driven to Distraction*. So, you read it, you know, like, "Oh! Maybe I should try that...I probably would have figured it out anyway, at some point in time, but having a book to...reference, which I still have on my bookshelves, pull it out and, kind of, like, "Why does this always happen like this. Is this a recurring pattern for me?" It's kind of nice. I don't like being labeled, but it's still kind of nice to know that there's a reason why this keeps happening everyday, or every week, or whatever. You know....Regardless of what everyone else might think about it.

Gender Issues

Freya feels that there "probably is gender discrimination that goes on." However, she does not feel that she has been touched by it much. Although she is older, Freya believes that she fits in better because she looks and dresses younger. In addition, she is assertive, and "chooses her battles." These factors keep her away from many problems that might be experienced by other women.

In her personal experience, Freya finds there are "a lot of really good [male] professors on this campus" (she names three, in particular) that are, as she terms, "so with the times." According to Freya, "they're not stuck somewhere in the dinosaur ages...they really believe that whatever women can do to further themselves, then, by all means, do it!"

At times, it was difficult for Freya to accept the focus of this study on the needs of women with learning disabilities. In defense of males with learning disabilities, Freya explains, "there are a lot of men out there who are learning disabled who have a worse time than women...Because, men aren't supposed to be...they're supposed to be the strong ones, according to society."

Success

For Freya, success has to be looked at within the broad scope of her life. When talking about her grades she tells us:

My GPA is pretty good. It's not...fantastic. It's, like a 2.9, 3.0...I'm happy with that.... I know I could do better if I didn't have to work so much. I'd have more time to study. I'd be a 4.0 student, easily. Cuz I love what I'm doing...and to be honest, academic success is, you know, when you've been through as much shit as I've been through in the last five years, you're stoked to even be able to say that you have a 2.0, plus. [laughter]....That's success!

According to Freya, academic success is "kind of what you make of it." For her, "it hasn't

been the grades." In the final analysis, Freya feels what she knows is a better measure of success for her.

Freya's Future

After Freya finishes her biological science degree she intends to "get into a teacher licensure program." Freya explains her reasoning for this direction:

It was monetary as to why I wanted to do the teacher licensure program...so that I could afford to, then, go into a nurse practitioner program later on....I am already a certified American Red Cross instructor and I've been an EMT,... and I like that stuff....I really want to get into...hospital work because that's going to, again, give me the kind of salary I want to afford the things and the kind of lifestyle I want. Plus, I can have the free time that goes with it.

Freya chose this direction because she feels it suits her natural inclinations:

I've always leaned toward sciences ...I was an EMT in [rural town]. I did the outdoor emergency care stuff...I did backcountry stuff....I've always kind of liked it. It's just a gravitating thing. There's no one thing that pulls me in that direction it's just something I like. It's something I'm good at...And, it's something I relate to because it's a hands-on thing. It just comes naturally to me.

Freya seems to have a vision of her mother in mind when talking about her future and her dogged determination to obtain her goals. When asked why she is so determined, Freya explains:

I don't want to be my mom. I don't want to end up like that. I want a better life for myself. That's probably the reason I'm not married and I don't have kids. But, I'm willing to sacrifice that for this. I mean, right now it's like there's a certain lifestyle I want for myself...In order to have that...I have to be able to have a specific kind of job and I have to be able to make certain money.

Advice for the University

Freya has advice for the college. She finds the university "bureaucratic," and suggests that treatment of people with learning disabilities could "be a little more

sensitive." She also thinks the college should address the needs of people with learning disabilities better through making resources more visible. Freya thought papering the campus with flyers might help, although it would be important not to address only women's needs. She also thinks that women counselors should be provided for women with learning disabilities.

I think if it's a woman coming into school with a learning disability,...the one way the school can help somebody like that...is, first of all, set them up with a female counselor, not a male counselor...I hated the first counselor I had, and, thank god, I was assertive enough to say something... that's how I wound up with my counselor...over there at the AAC.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

"Be assertive!" Freya finds that, "sometimes," women with learning disabilities "tend to get a little insecure because they are being labeled." In this regard, she feels it would be important for "the female counselors [to] start brainstorming and getting assertion classes going." She also feels counselors should "try to get them to understand that the laws really are on their side if some professor is really unwilling to help them." Freya encountered a situation where her understanding of the law and her "assertiveness" were needed:

Like my one professor, and I'm going to say his name [name of professor] I liked him as a professor, he was a great professor, but he was an asshole, such an asshole. I walked into his office [because] I'm used to taking his exams over in resources for disabled students and I would have the room by myself so that I could talk myself through the exam... I told him that I wanted extra time... He said... "how much extra time?" And, I was like, as long as it takes to finish the exam. "Well, if your going to be looking at an hour and a half or more," he's like "I won't allow it." And, I was like "you don't have a choice"... Yeah, and he got pissed. He was like this, dominance person standing up with his hands on his hips, little neo-Nazi guy, "Well, we'll see about that." And I was like, "Yeah, we will. I am actually going to go call this person now and have them get in contact with

you and we will see about it. Because according to the American Disabilities Act you have no right to say that to me. And, if you want to make a big stink about it, I'd love to go the mile with you."...He didn't want that kind of trouble because he was getting ready to take his sabbatical and ...he was trying to get the dean's position. He just didn't want the trouble. And I would have made the trouble, and I think he knew that.

The professor backed down, because according to Freya she "was not going to take it sitting." Freya explains:

You know, I'm not going to do like, "OK. You're right. Just wipe your feet all over me because you're so right." I'm paying for my fucking education and your salary is coming out of the money I'm paying you, so you get your head out of your ass, and, you know, you let me do what I need to do to get through this class.

Freya thinks that he may be thinking that having extra time is the equivalent of cheating:

I think a lot of professors...think that way, to be honest...I don't know how they could think that...It's not like your pulling notes out of everything...because they make you leave your backpack outside...and they do have people [checking], and they do have cameras. It's not like you're sitting there cheating. Cuz you're not. You're going, "I know, I know this." And you're talking to yourself out loud. How is that cheating? That's just how I get through it.

This is the only professor that Freya has had to go to this length with, she feels that it may be because he is from a country outside of the United States:

Yeah, Well he's from Canada....I just don't think that, there's a lot of countries, even the one professor that I had for genetics, who was from London, she wasn't really into that either. I mean, they're really different when they come from other countries and other cultures. I mean, we as Americans, we see things one way, but what we see as being, whatever, for us doesn't necessarily work in other cultures and other country's eyes. And, that's pretty understandable...and that's fine...but there's a lot of people who have to appease the academic policies of this school, regardless of how they feel about them.

Freya's encounter with this Canadian professor, clearly, points to the need to be aware of relevant laws that apply to women with learning disabilities in college, and to be able to

stand up for yourself. While Freya thinks that women may be getting a little more assertive, she sees some of the older women she encounters as "not very flexible":

Women are actually becoming more assertive, to some degree. But, then, again, I don't know because I don't talk to all twenty year olds, I only talk to a few...I see a lot of older women who have problems...they're kind of, their just kind of rough around the edges. [laughter] Not very flexible.

Freya also advises women to "get as much information as you can," and to find, and use, all of the resources that are available, "there's a lot of different resources you can use around campus...not just one."

Freya found that her in-your-face style of assertiveness works for her. She feels, in the very least, women with learning disabilities need to be able to advocate for themselves and search out every available resource at their disposal.

Allison

Allison, like all of the participants in this study, is extraordinarily determined. Although, she prefers to describes herself as "very stubborn," rather than determined. Allison is the second study participant who has earned a bachelor's degree. Her bachelor's degree is in vocational rehabilitation. After an unsuccessful attempt to work in this field, Allison has come back to college to obtain a minor in history so she can enter the university's master's program in public history. This shift of focus is prompted by her present employment at a local museum. Obtaining a master's degree will allow Allison to continue working in a museum, or library, environment, an atmosphere that she feels is better suited to her nature and interests. Her ultimate goal is to work for the

Library of Congress where she plans to focus on military history. Allison has recently been diagnosed with ADD.

Allison's Background

Allison has a history of determination and “stubbornness.” When she was born, Allison was not expected to live. She was born with spinabifida, and her prognosis was not good. According to her mother, Allison was not expected to walk, and it was expected that she would have severe learning disabilities. Allison attributes her ability to beat the odds to her “sheer stubbornness” and the support of her parents and caregivers.

In spite of the dire predictions, Allison persevered:

I'm stubborn...that's the best way to describe myself. I'm just stubborn. I don't like to listen to other people...I had a physical therapist who was pretty tough....So, she pretty much got me up in braces and walking around and stuff like that. My parents, they wanted to protect me...but, at the same time, they wanted me to do as much as I could...and the doctors...wanted the best for me too. They were just saying...don't get your hopes up...Work with what you've got.

Although elementary school was quite a while ago, Allison remembers being embarrassed by the special treatment she received:

I just couldn't keep on track...I do remember back in elementary school, I had to turn my desk around towards the window or towards the back of the room and they put like a little carrel around my desk....Because I would be watching everybody else and not working on my paper, my homework and stuff.

This was a particularly difficult time for Allison:

In grammar school I had a nervous breakdown...I had a very mean first grade teacher and I was scared to death of her...Everybody says I was a really outgoing kid, but...still I was easily intimidated and she just scared the daylights out of me...So I started getting physically sick everyday before school. I had to see a psychiatrist, or a psychologist, about it...I don't think I ever really recovered from it. I got to the point that I wouldn't get physically sick before school,... which was a good thing, but...I think, something like that, having a nervous breakdown at

such a young age, I don't think you ever recover from that. And, my mom says that, I never was the same. I used to be really carefree and really outgoing...And now I'm really timid...a lot more cautious...I'm just, a lot more anxious. I used to not always be anxious, but now, I definitely have an anxiety problem.... She yelled at kids a lot and I think she was just very loud. And she was extremely tall. And, I remember...I was a very tiny kid, so...I was always looking up and...she kind of looked like the wicked witch from the *Wizard of Oz* to me....She was scary for sure....They did give me the option of going to a different class, but I was stubborn and I learned to stick with it, because I didn't want to be away from my friends.

As difficult as elementary school was for Allison, she “hated middle school:”

I don't know if it had a lot to do with my ADD, but...I hated it with a passion. I hated my teachers... they were just, well, I think they were just jerks. Idiots!...I think in junior high it was more of my social life, or lack there of,...that made it just miserable. I just felt out of place and I didn't belong and I just hated it....I hated it so much I just wanted to block it out....So, I can't remember much of it. I do remember being on the year book staff and that was a lot of fun.

Allison remembers that she was never a “terribly great student” when she was growing up. She thinks she could have done better if she had gotten over the “habit of just being lazy:”

I was always the average, slightly above average student...I was on the honor role a couple of times during junior high and high school. But, it was only when I took...the easy classes...like Home Ec, or something like that,...and that boosted my grade average up...I probably could have done better but I didn't try. I have a habit of just being lazy....part of it is...I get too frustrated and...just want to throw my hands up in the air and say "OK. Forget this!"...But, part of it is...I want to go out and have fun more....I'm growing out of that, but,...I was never a terribly great student.

Allison's College Years

In spite of her early difficulties with school, Allison had always planned to go to college. She was disappointed, however, when testing showed that her first career choice was unrealistic for her:

I think it was never an option not going [to college]. I always thought "I'm gonna go to college and get a job." I wanted to be... a nurse. That was always my career goal, an obstetrical nurse. I love kids. But, then I had tests done, and I couldn't physically do it...I couldn't carry around babies and walk.

Allison started out at a community college:

I started out at [name of area community college] because, one, it was cheaper...and coming from a small high school I wanted to make the transition...slowly to a big university. ..Plus, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I thought nursing, the medical field, psychology, something like that... That has always been my passion because I wanted to help people...But, now, looking back at it, I think my mom just pretty much told me. She didn't tell me "OK, you're going to go to [community college], but she kind of really put the idea in my head that this is the way you're going to do it... This, I think, will be the best for you.

Allison feels that her mother has subtly influenced her:

I don't really resent her doing that, but I think it was, in a way, good, but it was just another way of her subtly...influencing my decisions without me really thinking about it. But, now, you know, hindsight is always twenty-twenty...I look back on it and I definitely know that it was her plan for me and I just kind of basically went along with it.

Even though the decision to go to a community college was not wholly her own,

Allison thinks this direction, "for the most part," worked for her. The time she spent at the community college allowed her to explore different career possibilities:

I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do. I kept taking classes. I thought maybe going into computers...I found out that I'd have to take calculus and trigonometry and I did not want to take that...I liked beginning algebra, but, other than that, uck! I don't know what trig and calc entail, but...I don't want to do that. So, yeah, ...I just kept on going back to my passion, biology, psychology, or what I thought were my passions.

Considering her passions, Allison decided human rehabilitation counseling might work for her:

I had a friend who had done that and she was talking to me about what all I could do. And, I thought, Wow! This just sounds like a good thing...it just felt like a good fit to me because I could relate, obviously, to people with physical disabilities....I've always been partial to people with mental impairments.... I've always been fascinated by mental illness, or brain injuries. And I thought, "Man, this is right up my alley.

With a career direction chosen, Allison transferred to an area university and began her studies in vocational rehabilitation. She moved away from her home and began living in the dorms. Initially, Allison enjoyed her studies, when she attended classes. However, the depression that she had begun to identify while she was enrolled at the community college came to the forefront:

I started having problems with depression. Right after, the first couple years right out of high school, actually, when I was in [community college] I started noticing my depression, and that just got worse and worse. I was diagnosed with clinical depression, gosh, it's probably been ten years or so...right after high school. And, it just got really bad because when I got to [first university] I wasn't living with my parents. First time away from home, cuz I lived in the dorms. Even though I really wasn't that far...But, it was just that big change, and I had to become my own advocate, which I wasn't good at. I'm very needy, emotionally. I don't, I don't deal well with reality. God, that makes me sound so psycho, but, I don't....But, I, I just wanted things to be more fun and interesting, but in reality, it wasn't. It was harder and more stressful.

In addition, Allison found she did not have anything in common with her popular roommate:

I didn't get along with my first roommate. Nothing wrong with her, I totally blame myself. Cuz, I was a witch. I'm sorry...Ok. I was basically a bitch to her....She became friends with everybody who knew her. She was a very nice person. I feel like the scum of the earth for being such a bitch to her. But, I was older than everybody in there. I was in a predominantly freshman dorm. I was, oh God, I think I was like twenty-six and everybody else was eighteen. Partying....And, that was a lot of the problem. And, I was extremely jealous of her. She got boys left and right. I couldn't get a guy to look at me for a second. I was completely jealous....Yeah, it just hurt like crazy. And, I had no right to treat her like that. She ended up failing out of college and I actually blame myself, partly. Because, I

was just a bitch toward her. That's all that I can say is that I was a complete bitch toward her. Um, and I know I can't blame myself totally. She failed out of college. But, I can't help feeling that I didn't exactly help because she was further away from her parents than I was and she was right out of high school in a completely different, well, I don't know, totally, I think she was more mature than I was, actually. And she was only eighteen.... It just didn't work out.

Allison's second roommate worked out better. She found she had much more in common with her new roommate and both her social life, and grades, improved:

And, then, I got another roommate...later. And that worked out a lot better. I loosened up. We were closer in age. She was a couple years younger than me, but, we lived right next to another girl who was disabled. And...the three of us, we were like the three musketeers. It was awesome! It was a really fun time. They were, my roommate and the disabled girl,...they were better friends, and so I felt like a little bit of an outsider, but not that much...I just kind of went kind of wild. Not wild, but I loosened up, finally!...And, I did a little bit better in school because I had somewhat of a social life. I had friends. But, I still was maintaining like Cs and Bs. I was passing.

When Allison's roommate left, her life began to fall apart again:

And then she left and I started rooming by myself and that didn't work out because I became a hermit...I started becoming depressed... I didn't reach out to anybody and became completely introverted. You know. I closed everybody out. I don't know if it was completely intentional, it was just, it just happened. I am sure a lot of it was, I knew what I was doing...I was more set on staying in my room. Watching TV...I don't have cable at home. I was being a real pig about having cable. And, I didn't have self-discipline. I never have a lot of self-discipline... very big problem of mine.

Allison thinks she still has a "lot of growing up to do." Although, she feels she "has been doing better" lately. Still, Allison is disappointed that she has missed out on so much of the college experience:

I look back at my [former university] days,...and I've figured out that Oh boy! I screwed up. I need to just kick myself in the rear and I just need to tell myself to do that. It's gonna be hard. I don't want to do it. [laughter]. I just want to have fun in life. Which I know, I never did the regular college, like partying and stuff like that, which I probably would have never done because I wouldn't have been into

drinking and getting drunk, but, I kind of missed that. I want to go back and loosen up...I know I'm not old, but, I missed out on all the fun in life.

Allison managed to graduate with her bachelor's degree in vocational rehabilitation. She moved in with two friends and got a job as a support coordinator for people with developmental disabilities in a nearby town. However, this job did not work out for her: "I ended up getting fired and having to move out. And, that was a horrible, big, mess." Allison thinks her ADD may have been instrumental in the loss of her job: "Yeah, that actually had a lot to do with my lack of organizational skills. I'm not assertive. I got overwhelmed and I couldn't get organized. I think that had a lot to do with why I got fired."

While Allison's lack of organizational skills caused difficulties with the "tons of paperwork" that was required for her job, she feels her "big heart" was also a problem:

At the risk of sounding extremely vain, my heart's bigger than my brain. I wanted to do everything to help my clients. I couldn't grasp the idea that I could only do so much. It was too hard for me. I just wanted to do everything for them... help them out. And,...there's only so much I could do. And, I wasn't really ready for that kind of job. It was too stressful... The only good thing that came out of it was the fact that I lost a lot of weight. I was too nervous to be eating.

Allison's new career focus circumvents many of the problems she found in her first job, and, in spite of all of the reading and writing, focuses on her love of research:

I love doing research...A lot of history is doing research, even though it's a problem because of all the reading and the writing, but, I'd still be working with people a lot. But, I wouldn't necessarily be responsible for their lives...I don't think I'm that type of person... [I] shouldn't be in such a supervisory type of thing, especially with people with developmental disabilities. Even though I loved the population. I just shouldn't be working with them on a day to day basis, maybe voluntary. I still like the field.

Allison is grateful that she started working in her present job at a nearby museum:

If I hadn't started working at the [name of college town] museum, I wouldn't have ever known that you could actually major in something called museum studies. And that's like the biggest thrill for me. I've always loved history a lot and I've always loved museums.

Still, Allison is “keeping [her] fingers crossed,” while trusting that all will work out for her in her new career direction.

Accommodations and Strategies

When talking with Allison about her strategies and accommodations, one gets a feeling that she is in a Catch 22. She has experienced so many interventions in her life that she wants, desperately, to be her own person, “I'm sick of people butting into my life and trying to help.” Despite “barely” graduating from her previous college, Allison still finds it sufficient to rely on her “good memory” and ability to take pretty good notes to get her through. Unfortunately, Allison’s “I'd rather do it myself” attitude may not be sufficient, she finds it “really hard” to concentrate when there is a lot of reading to do, and is unable to organize her thoughts and studies effectively.

Allison is in a quandary as to how she can be helped:

I just figured that there's only so much that they can do...I don't need extra test time. I know that's nothing that would help me. I just have to rely on myself. It's going to take a while to really get that, comprehend that, that I need to do it myself. I can't rely on anybody else to really help me. I have to do it myself. People are there to help me. I've had tremendous support systems. I have really good teachers. I have good friends on campus...I've just been really lucky. And, I have a lot of people who care about me. But, in the end, I think it's only up to me...to do the dirty work.

Allison has talked about her problems with organization with a counselor at RSD.

When provided with a possible resource, she found it difficult to know how to ask for help:

When I first met with [name of counselor] she told me about this lady who helps people with their organization. And, she gave me her card, I have her card, but I never got around to calling her because I don't know what to tell her. I don't know what to say, "OK, help me organize." I don't know what I need to tell her. Organize, come, and help me organize. I don't know.

Allison loves doing a really good job with her research projects, however, her inability to organize her research gets her "bogged down" when it comes to writing a paper:

At the beginning of the year I'm really on top of things. I read everything. I just really study, really hard. Then, after about a month or so I just kind of start getting overwhelmed and I start procrastinating.... This is a good example ... I go and I do tons and tons of research because I find so many interesting things, that like... I have this mindset like I'm going out for the Pulitzer prize or something. I want to do a really good, outstanding, research paper. And, I get completely bogged down by the research. I get too much research done and then it's time for the paper to be handed in and I don't know how to organize it.

Allison has gone to the Writing Center for help:

I went to the Writing Center and they did help me a lot on how to just get... what I wanted to say on my paper. But... it's still hard because, does this piece of information fit in this section, or this section, or this section? And... my thoughts start racing and... I get anxious,... getting nervous... And that happens all the time. I always tell myself it's going to be different. I'm going to really work. And, I really worked hard this semester,... But, it happened again.... I don't know how to get my thoughts in order after I do all my research.

One strategy that could be an important support for her lack of organization is the use of a day planner. Allison has been exposed to day planners, although, she confesses:

I get 'em, but I never seem to get in the habit of actually using them. Which I know would help, but it's just, I don't know why I can't get into the habit of doing stuff like that, which comes so easily to other people. It drives me crazy.

As of the time of Allison's interview, she was awaiting a determination as to the medication that would be appropriate for her ADD. Allison is hopeful that the proper

medication will help to hold her thoughts together.

For me, I think the only thing that will help me is that I need to be on some sort of medication... Because my thoughts get, really rambled, and just really go kind of crazy in my head. My thoughts start racing and stuff like that. And,... with my ADD, I think it's along with my anxiety and depression it all kind of intermixes... I think that makes it even worse because I get overwhelmed so easily. Stressed out. I go full force at the beginning of the year and then all of the sudden I go "oh my gosh. What am I doing." And I get, I just burn out and I get so overwhelmed that I can't function. I can't do anything... Yeah, it seems, well, I like to try to get somewhere where it's really quiet... I get distracted so easily. It's really hard to find a quiet place in [name of college library]. But even if I'm in someplace alone, I start messing around and you know doing other things, because I can't keep on track.

One support that Allison is open to is the idea of a support group. Allison has been a part of a campus focus group and liked the experience of learning and sharing with other students with learning disabilities. She explains her experience:

Basically, they were just saying the same kind of things. Like you get over in your little corner where it's very quiet. And, you know, maybe put earplugs in, or something like that. Which, I haven't tried. I think I will... but, it was really nice to hear people my own age, well, they were all younger than me, but, they had the same kind of problems. They were going through the same kind of crap [laughter]. And, it was just so nice to [know] I'm not the only one who is feeling like this." It was so nice. It was awesome... I would love to get into a support group to meet, maybe not weekly, but just a couple times a month. Just to talk... just to talk about your feelings-- You're not alone.

The idea of being alone is very close to Allison, tears welled up in her eyes and she became choked with emotion. The tape was turned off to allow her time to regain her composure.

Success

Allison counts attaining her bachelor's degree in vocational rehabilitation as a "near success." She also feels getting a B on tests that she is not quite sure about as

evidence of academic success. However, Allison sees her greatest success as beating her doctors predictions by having the ability to move through her life with intelligence:

I was told that I would probably never walk and I would be really severely learning disabled. And, I have a wheelchair and never use it...I walk everywhere, go up and down stairs...and sometimes I have to slow down for other people because I'm walking so fast...I'm no Einstein, but I have a bachelor's and...I can carry on political conversations with people.

Future Plans

In spite of her problems with organization, Allison "loves" her new career focus in public history: "I love it! I love doing research, historical research. It's like the biggest thrill for me. It's the most fun." Allison discovered her new love while working in a museum: "I just completely fell in love with getting my hands on old artifacts. Things that people have touched over hundreds of years...It's just like a big adrenaline rush for me." Allison is convinced that she will do well in her new career focus. Although she is not completely sure of her future direction, she knows there are many interesting options:

With public history, you can focus on historical preservation, archives, and museum studies...I don't know what I like out of three. I'm thinking about doing all three rather than an emphasis. But, I'm already interested in...museum studies and archives...So I think I just might do that...I've really gotten into...military history. It's just really cool. And, I'd love to work someplace like the Library of Congress....The federal government somewhere. It would be a lot of fun....the Library of Congress, or the National Archives Records Administration. That would be the ultimate place, I think.

While Allison envisions herself working in Washington, DC, she would also be willing to work in a branch office, as long as it is not too close to home. Ultimately Allison's goal is to be financially independent and on her own:

What I want is to be financially independent and not rely on anybody else to, you know, foot the bill for me. Pay the way.... I can earn my own living without

having to rely on a husband. I don't even know if I want to get married... and, just be completely independent. Be my own person... Yeah, and not have to answer, well, not have to answer to so many people as I do now.

Allison has received steadfast support from her parents, however, this support has come at a cost and Allison is fighting for her independence. Allison feels threatened and intimidated by her parents. She would rather do things by herself:

I get threatened. I mean personally, and I get all defensive. She's butting into my life and I don't want her to... I'm sick of people butting into my life and trying to help, and ... Getting me out of trouble. That's not going to help me grow up... I'm very easily intimidated by people. Even though I am 29 years old, I still feel like I need to do what my mommy or daddy tells me to do [laughter]. Constantly! I know I've been raised to respect authority, which, is a good thing, but, I'm like, I don't know how to think for myself.

Allison acknowledges that her parents are her greatest supporters, and she knows they love her, however, she feels “completely confined and constrained” and “smothered” by them. Allison thinks part of the roadblock to her independence is that she does not want to “disappoint” her parents:

It's just my mom has this amazing ability to put out guilt trips [laughter]... just by the look on her face when I tell her, "No, I don't want to do this. No, I've got to do this instead. I can't go out with you guys." I mean, little trivial kinds of things... And she has this look of hurt on her face, the tone of her voice. I just want to be a good little girl, a good daughter... And, my dad, I'm totally intimidated by him. He's a nice guy but he's very, you know, to the point. Everything is either black or white with him, and, I'm more gray. And, he's just, he's very strict. I'm a very, or I'd like to think of myself as, free spirited. I like to just do my own thing... it would be so much easier if I wasn't in the house.

Advice for the University/Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Allison has been recently diagnosed with ADD and, because she is new to the experience of having this label, feels it is difficult to offer too many suggestions for either the university, or women with learning disabilities. However, she does see one area that

could use improvement. Allison finds there are very few opportunities for women with learning disabilities to support one another. She thinks it would be a good idea if more opportunities were provided:

It's still nice to talk to people because you can have the same exact diagnoses as someone else but you still don't think that anyone else thinks that same way you do...It's just so cool to hear people talking about how they feel. What their brain is doing to them. It's the same thing that you're going through. It's just so nice to be able to talk to people and they can give you ideas. You might be able to give them ideas...referrals to people who might be able to help them, and stuff like that.

Colleen

Colleen is a 44-year-old single mother of two daughters, one of which has dyslexia. She has spent much of her adult life as her daughter's steadfast supporter and advocate. Married right out of high school, Colleen soon realized this was a "big mistake." However, she persevered until it was clear she had to prepare a life for herself and her daughters on her own. Colleen found the courage to gain an associate's degree, even though a "hairy divorce" left her temporarily homeless and struggling for survival.

Colleen started her college career at a community college. When she realized she was having significant challenges with her schoolwork she applied for testing. However, she was unsuccessful in receiving the help she needed. Every year she applied for testing, and every year Colleen did not fall within the maximum of 200 students that would be tested. She could not afford to pay for the testing herself, so, as she explains, she "just had to kind of wing it." Presently, Colleen is a senior in apparel design and development in the University's College of Applied Sciences. She is determined to graduate, in spite of

the feelings that her professors in her chosen major do not support her. Although tested when she first arrived on campus, Colleen has only recently had confirmation that she has ADHD and is working overtime to begin to develop strategies that will allow her to make sense of her academic struggles. Colleen describes herself as “very self-reliant and independent,” with “tons of energy.”

Colleen's Background

Colleen grew up in a military family. Following after her father's military career, the family experienced frequent moves. Consequently, Colleen attended schools in several states within the United States and various foreign countries. Her schoolwork suffered because of the lack of stability:

Part of my problem, I thought, is because we moved so often. We moved a minimum of every three years, every year, sometimes, every six months. So, I was continuously changing, going from school to school. And when you do that,...I am sure you realize just even within one city, going from school to school, how the curriculum is set up different from school to school, if you are going from state to state, and from the United States to a foreign country, you're yo-yoed around because sometimes you are a whole year ahead of the class. And, sometimes, you are almost a whole year behind the classes. So, you are either playing catch-up, or your waiting for the classes to catch up to you.

Colleen remembers being quiet and melting into the background:

I was so shy. I would never raise my hand and ask a question in class if I didn't understand, let alone, I'm having a problem, where do I go...you know, I would just kind of melt into the background and disappear...as best I could, because I didn't want the teacher to draw a lot of attention to myself cause I didn't know. I didn't know the answers. I didn't ever know the questions I should be asking.

Colleen found that her friendships suffered too:

It was hard making friends. Because, one, you move so often, and two, you don't do well in school. You know the other kids know it. You know, they know. They tease you because you are the new kid. They tease you because dress differently,

because you come from another state, or country. So, you're really different. Or, you have an accent, because being a military brat you picked up accents fast because you are trying to...fit in as quickly as possible. So, if you live in the South, you pick up a Southern accent, fast. If you live in the North, you pick up a Northern accent, fast. It's just to...fit in,...to be part of the group, like you've been there for twenty years. It's just trying to fit in enough so that you don't feel ...ostracized by everybody else....It is not easy to try to maintain friendships, because you move so often.

Colleen imagined that her peers thought she was “stuck up” because she was so shy:

It was the same thing at grade school, and high school. Being picked for team captain, or stuff like that, you know, you're not always picked. And if you're shy because of your disabilities in anyway, or you're shy in general, they look at you like they think you're stuck up. They think you're, nose in the air, because they think you're better than anybody else. I said, had you ever thought, really stopped to think why they are that way. That maybe it's because they're shy? It's not because they're stuck up. But, most kid don't think that, if you're shy, they think you're stuck up...And I was very, very shy.

She tried to break away from her shyness when she got to high school:

When I got into high school I tried to change that. I joined speech classes. I joined drama classes. I joined anything I could to help draw me out. Because I hated being the wall-flower. I hated being so shy that it was painful to talk to people. And, that's when I started reading books on every subject. Because, I felt if I knew a little bit about everything, people would talk to me. Cause I could talk about these things with them...so I really worked hard at that in high school. Just trying to bring me out of my shell, and get me out with people so that I could be a part of life around me.

Looking back, Colleen can see how her ADHD added to the problems she was having:

Having...a disability just magnifies the problem...Because, if you can't spell well, or can't read out loud, or whatever it happens to be, that's just added ammunition for the other kids in the school. Kids are malicious, oh I can tell you. Every school I have ever been to, kids are extremely malicious.

Colleen's parents were not aware of her ADHD. They were supportive, but not pushy about school and grades:

My parents never really were big on education. They weren't big on how I would have to get straight A's or how I've gotta go to college. They tried to encourage me to get better grades, I got like Cs or Ds, they would really say, you know, "you gotta do better." Looking back, I don't think my parents were big on pushing scholastic. My dad now says he wishes he had. But, ...growing up it was, you know, just go to school and do well.

She would have liked her parents to be a little pushier; Colleen wanted to feel smart:

I don't know about everybody else who has ADHD, but I have a problem with - I don't feel smart. Traveling around you always feel stupid talking to people...because you feel like you can't fit in scholastically because you don't get great grades. So I used to read all the time. Read. Read. Read. Read. And my mother didn't like me reading. She would try and take the books away from me and kick me outside and tell me I needed fresh air and sunshine. And, always take the books away. And, I was just trying to, I felt, to improve myself, learn more about things. I started reading anything in print because I wanted to be well versed in topics so that I would feel smarter.

In spite of these early challenges, Colleen graduated from high school. Although, her struggles have left their mark:

It's really bizarre, because, when I was in high school, I wanted to be a career woman. And, I wanted to go to college. And, I had so many plans for myself. And, I decided in my senior year that I was going to marry this guy...we got married right out of high school, which...was a big mistake.

In retrospect, Colleen feels, by getting married, she had hoped that she would be leaving her frustration with school behind:

Then, I didn't have to go to college. I didn't have to go out there and find a career. Because, I am so tired of struggling. . .I did secretly want a career and to be out there like everybody else in my class who didn't get married, but I think, in a way, getting married was a way out. I didn't have to go out there and struggle.

Colleen's new husband was a military man, like her father. Colleen confesses "It did work for a while." However, soon, she found herself with two little girls, little money to work with, and a husband that was away on duty the majority of time. Familiar with this

lifestyle, Colleen drew on her experience, ingenuity, and endless energy to continue to learn:

All through my marriage I constantly studied, not that I was thinking, "I'm going to study," it was "I want to learn this, I want to learn that." I would find things that would interest me and I would read about it. Every book I would get on the subject I would read on it. Crafts. Sewing. I taught myself hundreds of crafts and I would research the beginnings of the crafts and I would become really good at them.

Colleen credits her circumstances with providing a foundation for the development of her self-reliance:

We had no money. In the military you are poor. You are dirt poor. You qualify for food stamps you are so poor. So, you have to learn how to be self-sufficient. And, if you, luckily, get a network of other wives together, you teach each other what you know...and you help each other. Like if someone knows how to sew, she teaches all the other women how to sew. And if someone knows how to really cook well, she teaches all the other women how to really cook well. Because the guys are gone so much you have to do that. And so, we teach each other how to survive. How to take care of the kids, when the kids get sick. We had a networking thing going when the kids got sick and we didn't know what to do, we called the other wives and they would say, well try this, or they would come over, they'd help, or they would take the kids for the evening. Get a breather. Because, you don't have a spouse to lean on, so, you have to lean on a friend to help you through the points where you feel like you could have a nervous breakdown because you are dealing with so much and there's no one there. So, you learn how to do that.

Colleen was also busy advocating for her daughter, and other children with learning disabilities, during this time. It was difficult for Colleen to support her daughter's academic challenges because of her own, as yet undiagnosed, ADHD. However, she quickly learned how to contribute, and was her daughter's greatest advocate:

I never realized that I had a disability of any kind because I was focusing so hard on my daughter and her disabilities. And, I became a major advocacy at the school. I even pulled my kids out of school at one point did home-school because I was not getting the help from the teachers that my daughter needed. And I said, OK, if you're not going to help her I'm going to teach her at home. So, I pulled my kids out and did home-school for a year.

Colleen was especially frustrated with her husband's inability to help:

He is, like, photographic memory. And so he doesn't deal well with people who struggle. And my daughter, through school, I'd ask him help me, I can't do the science, I can't do the math, I can't help her. I don't know how to help her. I don't understand this. I never had this. And he knew all this stuff. And I go, I need your help, and he didn't have the patience to help her. So, they ended up fighting, so I had to try to help her and I ended up going to girlfriends and teachers and saying please help her because I don't know how to help her. And, that was really hard.

Colleen went to great lengths to use her energy, and intelligence, to support her daughter.

She was determined that her daughter would receive an education and "not slide through the doors" like she did:

By the time she got into the third grade she started to get some help. But, I mean, I went to school, I sat in on classes, I went to the principal's office, constantly. I was finding out what walls were. I mean, all the teachers and principal knew me by name. When they saw me coming they'd say "Oh my god, here we go again." Because, I was not going to let them slide, not giving my kid an education. Because, I said, I know what I went through and I thought, I didn't have a learning disability, but she does, and I am going to make you work for this. I am not going to let you slide through the door like I did. So, I went after the schools like you would not believe.

Colleen became a source of organization for other parents of children with learning disabilities. Together, they put pressure on the school to change:

When I found other parents who had problems, I actually found out the kid's names and contacted the parents, and started getting together... We started going in force to the school and sitting in the classrooms. Because I went in one time and sat in on the [Special Education] class and I was appalled. The teacher had absolutely no control of the kids, and they were learning absolutely nothing. So,

then, I started volunteering my hours. I started contacting other parents, "We need you, the kids need our help" and I struggled with this at the time.

Colleen, reminded of her own problems with peers harassing her, was dismayed to find that peer bullying was a devastating problem for her daughter also:

In [Western State], they have this mainstream thing, you know where the kids have to be 50% [Special Education class], 50% mainstream. The mainstream was killing them. It was totally killing them...the other kids in the school, if they found out you went to [a Special Education class] they were tremendously hard on you. They told you that you were mentally retarded because you would not be in a classroom the whole 100 percent. So, obviously, you were retarded. You can't be in here all the time, so you're retarded. And, so you add that to already struggling emotional states that the kids were in, it was unbelievable.

Colleen reached out for help to build up her daughter's self-esteem:

I was taking my kid to psychiatrists and everything. How do I deal with emotional moods? How can I help build her self-esteem? Because, she's hard enough on herself, and when the other kids were calling her names and picking on her, you know. It's like I am picking up putty off the ground and trying to make her stand on her own two feet and be somebody when everybody around her was beating her down...And, I know she's having a hard enough time as it was.

In spite of the difficulty advocating for her daughter, Colleen did not give up:

I am sure they hated me at the school because I was constantly...going to board meetings and PTAs and screaming and yelling about getting better help for kids. You know, this is not right! You're not meeting these kids needs and their bright, intelligent kids, and. The whole time raising my kids that was all I ever did was go to the school and rattle the schools to make sure the kids got a good education.

Colleen's work paid off:

By the time my daughters were in high school, they had a pretty good [Special Education] program started. And the teachers were really accountable...Parents were constantly monitoring the classroom to make sure that the teachers were following through on what they said they were going to do...The kids were actually learning things...They could actually mainstream in public when they got done with high school.

Colleen's victory was sweet when she saw her daughter graduate:

I can't tell you how hard I cried when she graduated high school and she did the cap and gown and the whole thing. I cried so hard, it was unbelievable because of the struggles that she and I went through the whole time she went through school. It was like, you did it! You got this far!

Colleen's determination and energy allowed her to advocate for her child, as well as other children with learning disabilities. She accomplished this without the help and support of her husband. Even his own children did not reap the benefit of his superior academic ability. When considering his treatment of Colleen, however, he provided even less support; he proved to be sadistic and demeaning. Colleen explains that her husband went out of his way to make her feel stupid. She had hoped being married would allow her to escape the feelings of inadequacy. This was not the case. Finally, Colleen had reached her limit; it was time to face her demons and register for college:

He used to always make fun of me and make me feel really stupid because I couldn't... pull the numbers out fast enough. I couldn't even figure out 20% of a tip in my head, and so, he would tease me about it. So I just quit doing math completely. I quit doing a bunch of things that he would make me feel stupid about. I quit doing them completely! And then, towards the end of the marriage things were getting a little bit rocky and I decided, well, I'm going to go back to school.

Community College

Colleen knew she had to prepare herself to make a new life for herself and her children. She decided what she needed to do was to go to college. It took five attempts before she could stave off the guilt that was elicited by her husband and was successful at staying in school:

I had attempted to go college five times, at the community college, and he would talk me out of it. Every time I would go, I would go for maybe a month, or two months, and he just make my life hell at home so I would quit college. And, the

last time I started he, again, tried to talk me out of going to college. "It costs too much money, driving time," anything he could think of to make me feel guilty for going to school. And, I finally started to stick to my guns, because things weren't working out at home and if things happened, I wanted to have, at least, an associate's degree under my belt...I didn't want to work at McDonalds for the rest of my life and try to raise kids. So, I started going to school. My first semester at school, we split up...I would not quit school and that was just more fuel for the fire, so we split up.

Colleen was finally able to stay in college. However, she felt older and out of step. Fortunately, soon she found students eager to help her:

Part of the problem, too, is that when I went back to school there was a huge twenty years between high school and college. Things change and the only way I think I survived through the community college was most of the students who were eighteen, nineteen, twenty, years old at the community college, were very helpful....They were very open to me being a non-traditional student. Partly, I didn't look old. So, that helped. But they were very open to non-traditional. And I said, "Well, I don't understand. How does this system work at school. How do you pick your classes? How do you know what teachers are bad, good teachers? And how do they grade?" I didn't know any of this stuff. I didn't even know what a friggin Scantron was. What is that? What is Scantron? I didn't know it was a piece of paper. So, the kids really helped with me. Just getting me to...understand the school system and how to take tests, and how to study for the tests. They were a big help.

Even with this help, college was not easy for Colleen. The thought that she would continue on to a university was the last thing on her mind:

I did not have aspirations to go to a university of any kind. My main goal, at the time, was to get my associate's degree. And, if I did that, I was going to be as happy as a clam. Because,...once I got into college, it was not an easy road for me. And, I tried every year at the community college to get tested for a learning disability. And, it was just, they only test the first 200 and that was it. And then you are out of luck, and I didn't have insurance, I didn't have money, I couldn't go get tested by the doctors outside school - it was too much. So, I just had to kind of wing it.

Winging it turned out to be relying on tutors:

I would have students tutor me. I would have four and five tutors for each class I was in. Hoping that out of the five, or so, tutors I had someone would help to get something to click so that I would get the information in that I need to get in to get through that class. And, it seemed to be working. I didn't get all straight As but I passed all my classes.

However, Colleen still wanted to get "straight As."

I was frustrated, because I was aiming for all straight As. I wanted to be 4.0. Still didn't know I had a real problem, except...it was a struggle and I thought if I had all these tutors and help, I'd get the 4.0. I didn't manage to get the 4.0, but I did manage to graduate on the honor role. I belonged to Alpha Gamma Sigma honor society. And, I did that the whole three years I was there. And I don't know how I did that with all the stuff that was going on in my personal life.

Considering the turmoil in Colleen's life at that time, she wonders how she "managed to pull it off:"

I was going through community college. I was going through one hairy divorce, and kids bouncing around from him, to me, and back. And, I don't know how I did it. I look back and I am just going, "Oh my God, I don't know how I did it." My parents tried to help through all this. They tried to help me through school, they couldn't help me financially, but they tried to encourage me, but you don't always take encouragement from your parents

Life got pretty rocky for Colleen:

There was a point, when I was going through my divorce, that I was actually living out of the back of my truck. I went through living this married life, two cars, two kids, a nice house, and all the sudden, he cut off all my money. All my credit cards. I had no job, and no one would hire me. It took me eight months to find a part-time job, and I was going to school full-time, so I ended up living out of the back of my truck for a while, and, taking showers at the beach, sleeping on other student's floors in their apartments, and taking showers at their place when I could. And, when I got the job, the only time I ate was at work, because the boss would allow me to buy a really large lunch. I would eat it for lunch and then take the leftovers home and have it dinner. And that was how I ate when I didn't have any money coming in.

Colleen was ready to quit school. Fortunately, she took the time to visit with a favorite teacher:

The one person that helped me, at that point in my life, was a teacher at school. Struggling with school, struggling to get my homework in on time. Emotionally, I was a wreck because of the divorce. My ex-husband was not making it easy for me. And I went into her office one day, I was in tears, and [I said] "I just don't know what to do. I'm falling apart." I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown. And she let me cry my eyes out in her office. Then afterwards she got me calmed down and...And, she said, the only place you have control of your life is in school. Why give up the one place you have any control of your life? Which made a lot of sense at the time, because I was ready to quit school, because I just couldn't handle everything that was going on in my life and she talked me into staying in school.

Colleen still finds comfort in this relationship:

She's been one of my biggest supporters, and mentors, and friends, ever since because still, still to this day, we're in constant contact, to this day! And, she still encourages me...she's asked me to be involved at this college where she teaches, on this fashion advisory board, because I was a past student of that school and I have gone on to the University...Using me as role model for the students in her classes. Look how far she has gotten.

Attending a University

After Colleen graduated from her community college, circumstances took her to a different part of the United States. She had a new life, and an associate's degree. The thoughts about attending a University to obtain a bachelor's degree that could not be entertained earlier, now, filled her head. She had actually graduated with her associate's degree. Her world was opening up:

I was back and forth wondering whether or not to get a bachelor's degree. Because the journey of college was initially a journey of exploring who I am, and where I'm going. You know, it was a self-journey of learning about myself...It started because I wanted to show my ex-husband that I was actually intelligent. I mean, that was my initial, besides I want to support my kids, it was, I'm going to show him how smart I am. And I went back to college. And then,...the reasons

for being in college evolved into, I don't care what he thinks about me. I don't care if he thinks I'm a stupid person for the rest of my life. It doesn't matter anymore. It's what I think about myself, and how I feel about myself when I get the degree. And I was so proud of myself when I finally got my associate's degree. And, then, when I decided to go to [present college] and they accepted me, I was blown away cause I didn't think I would ever get into the school. And, when they accepted me I thought Wow! I'm going to go to a University, and I got real excited that I actually even got accepted. And, nothing could be further from actually graduating, it was more, I can't believe I got in.

Although, Colleen found attending a university turned out to be quite different from her community college experience:

The whole feeling at a university is different than at a community college. Community colleges are a lot more laid back, and a relaxed feeling, just an overall feeling within the school, than the universities are. And it may be just my own personal perception, universities feel a lot more uptight. More structured. Even though there are all of the organizations, and there's party, party, fun, fun going on,...everything about it is far more structured. Far more uptight!

The University is not only "uptight," the work is a lot harder for Colleen:

Universities are even more difficult than community colleges, and community colleges are more difficult than high school. But, I thought if I could get decent grades at the community college, I figured I could probably get decent grades at the university because I am willing to put in the time. I mean, I have been putting in the hours for homework.. My computer classes about killed me because I didn't know anything about computers. I wasn't raised with computers. The teachers say that for every hour in lecture you have to put in so many hours in the lab for the homework. Most of the student would go in an hour a week, and I was putting in five hours for five days a week just to pass the class. And, I had tutors and I still didn't get an A in the class, but I managed to squeak by and pass the class. But that's been true of almost all my classes...chemistry and math, things like that . I had chemistry last semester. The teacher was tutoring me through the class, just to get through the class. Because, I don't get it. And, I still have to take the chemistry lab, and I am going to take it at a community college and transfer it in. because, I just can't get it! It doesn't make sense to me. It's like you are speaking Russian to me all day long. I just don't get it!

Colleen received testing for learning disabilities right after she arrived on campus. Unfortunately, Colleen's path to finding out why her schoolwork was so challenging was frustrating and her diagnosis was subject to human error:

I learned, actually got confirmation, like last year. But two years prior to that I had gone into the learning disabilities office and had all kinds of testing, and...they were working with me teaching me how to study better, take better notes, and I kept working at it and struggling, and nothing was making sense. When they got done with the testing, the first person I spoke with said "no you don't have a learning disability, you just don't know how to study correctly. So that's why they started on all of the study practices and taking notes.

Colleen had gotten the message that, somehow, she is not working hard enough, or smart enough. This set her to trying to work even harder:

After you have all the tests and they talk with you about the results of all the testing...the person that spoke to me, that day, said that I didn't have any learning disabilities...that I needed to study harder and learn how to take better notes, yatta, yatta. And so, I got really upset and said "OK. Well maybe I just need to study harder." So I kept studying harder and harder, and my grades were not improving. You know if you get angry because you are studying so hard and it doesn't show up on your tests scores and everybody else in the classroom just kinda, you know, "Oh, I just studied for about an hour," they go and take a test, and ace the test. And here I am putting in five hours to their every one and maybe I'll make a C.

Finally, Colleen had enough, she became determined to understand her challenges:

I finally got so angry, because I was struggling so hard, and went back and talked to them in the office again. I said "there's got to be something wrong," I said, "I feel like I am beating my head against the wall. Can you help me?" And the lady, that time, looked at all my test results and she said "Oh my god!...I can't imagine why the person before told you that," because, she said I was totally classic ADHD, and sent me, immediately, over to talk with the doctor...about getting on some kind of medication. And that was a relief because it was like, OK, there is something wrong. Because I was putting in all of the hours and I was getting frustrated when everyone was saying study harder! Study harder! Put in the time, work harder! And I was working around the clock and I am going, I can't do any

more. Physically and mentally, I can't do any more. I am going to collapse. I need some help.

Colleen had persevered and she was, finally, at the point of understanding her challenges. At first she felt relief, and then, she became extremely angry:

It's funny, because I struggled my whole life and I found ways to deal with my struggles, not knowing I had a problem... It was a relief to discover that I had a learning disability, that would explain all the struggles. But following the relief, was extreme anger. And I was angry at everyone when I found out I had a learning disability. I mean, I was angry at the schools, I was angry at teachers, I was angry at my parents. I was angry with myself. And so there was a tremendous amount of anger when you discover that you have a disability... The first thing you say is, like someone who gets something that's life threatening, it's not fair. It's not fair. Well, life is not fair. And it isn't. Life is not fair.

Colleen worked through the anger, only to find depression:

You have to work through the anger, because there's a heck of a lot of anger that you go through. And then you go through the depression, after you get through the anger. You get so depressed because I've got this disability now. How the heck am I going to deal with it? I don't even understand what it is. And then you get really depressed because you work so hard every day.

To Colleen, having a disability is like trying to climb a mountain of sand:

With a disability, not necessarily just mine, but with a disability, for me it feels like you've got this rocky mountain high pile of sand. And, you are trying to climb this mountain of sand.... I don't know if you've ever tried to climb sand? You can just climb, climb, climb, climb, and you're not getting very far up that mountain. And all the sand is falling down and you just never seem to reach the top because you're struggling through the sand, trying to get to the top. And so, that's what my day to day life feels like. That you're trying to, everyday, reach the top of that mountain. And no matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, no matter how hard you think, no matter how hard you study, no matter what you do, you just don't seem to be able to reach that top.

Colleen feels this analogy gives a hint of the amount of frustration and anger she feels:

And, if you can relate to that analogy than you can relate the volume of frustration and anger that somebody with a disability goes through on a daily basis. Because no matter what I say, you know, I've got this anger, I've got this frustration, and

you know all these other emotions that are going into a depression. You really can't totally relate to it until you have some kind of an analogy that you can relate to...then you go, Oh! Wow! That is huge, because, it is a huge thing to discover. And it's really huge when you discover it this late.

On top of the anger, frustration, and depression she felt, Colleen needed someone to show her the ropes. She did not know what to do next:

OK, I've found out ways to get around it to this point, but, now, how do I deal with it? Because even though you get tested, and they maybe, or maybe not put you on medication, to help you with your disability.

Colleen had to wade through the information about ADHD by herself:

There's not always someone saying, OK, now that you have this particular disability this is what you need to do. And this is exactly what this is. And this is how you can possibly deal with it. I have yet to run across who is, supposedly, an authority. Who said OK, you've got this problem. This is exactly what it is. This is how it's caused. This is a possible route for you to deal with it. Because, and I've felt that, and this is probably where I need some help because, myself, when they said you've got this problem, First thing I do, as I do with every single thing in my life, I go to the bookstore. I start buying every book on the subject...I go on the internet...I get reference books. Whatever I need. I research the heck out of the subject. And that's what I've been doing with the ADHD because nobody's came up to me and said, Oh! Then that means you've got this problem, you've got this problem, and this a suggestion on how you deal with this problem, like forgetfulness.

Colleen has discovered that there are some basics that could have been conveyed to her when she was diagnosed:

This last year, it's been a learning process on just how do I deal with this problem. How can I work around this problem in my day to day existence. Like balancing the checkbook. I call this how can I trick myself to get through my existence with as little struggle as possible and deal with this disability. And that's not an easy thing, because ADHD there's different levels. There's more severe than others. But there's a basis, I think, with the disability. There [are] some basics, and if we can aim help at those basic needs.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Colleen has just begun to find strategies to help her work with having ADHD.

However, even before she had discovered her ADHD she was teaching herself strategies.

She found she has had to find “the tricks” that would allow her to get to where she wanted to go:

One of the things I discovered about myself, prior to discovering I actually had a disability, was, and I used to teach this to my daughter, you have to find the tricks in order to get to the end. And, she'd look at me like I was crazy, and I'd go, “Well the tricks are, if you have a math problem and they tell you to do it this way, and you can't do it this way, but you found a different way to come out with the right answer, that's what you have to do in life. With everything that comes your way.”

When Colleen did not know she had ADHD, she thought she was just “slightly unstable.”

Now that she knows what she is up against, she is doing what comes naturally for her, she is fighting to develop strategies to manage her life and her studies:

I didn't know that was all part of ADHD. I just thought I was slightly unstable, or something,...because, I couldn't get these things right no matter-- and I was constantly apologizing to people because I couldn't figure out how to get around what the problem was, not knowing it was a disability. Well, since then I've learned it is a disability. I've recognized, “OK, forgetfulness is a key thing. So, how can I beat myself as forgetfulness, so that I can remember these things that I need to remember. What kind of system can I come up with to trick myself so that I can be at appointments on time? To be at doctors on time, to be at class on time? To remember which class I'm supposed to be in this week, and what time I'm supposed to be there.” I mean, the first couple of weeks of school is total pandemonium for me, trying to remember what class I'm supposed to be in, what time I'm supposed to be there. What day I'm supposed to be there. I live by my class schedule the first two weeks of school until I get a feel for the system. Because I can't remember from one day to the next what classroom I'm supposed to be in at what time.

Colleen has become a great fan of Day Planners, Postit Notes, and color-coding to help her remember.

Apart from organization techniques, Colleen is exploring different medications

that could be of help. One of the first things the second testing evaluator did was send

Colleen to the school psychiatrist:

When she sent me to the doctor, the doctor put me on one medication and we are still working through medications, trying to find which one works best for me...they also got me on Wellbutrin, and that helps with mood swings.

Colleen has learned that mood swings and depression come with the territory, they are “heavily a part of having the ADHD:”

I have mood swings but they are not really severe. Mood swings evolve around depressions....you work so hard and you see other people flying right by you, excelling, people younger than you, quicker than you. ... [I'm] putting in all the hard work and they still seem to fly right by me...I know I've got the knowledge. I know I've got the talent, but I can't get other people to see it. And that gets frustrating.

Colleen has begun to understand her ADHD. This understanding has helped her to realize she has to know about her weaknesses, as well as her strengths. Resorting to a bit sarcasm, Colleen explains: “It's like, I'm going to be a math major when I suck at math?...OK, well you might as well shoot me now cause I'm never going to achieve that.” She feels that people do not take their strengths and weaknesses into account:

I know there's a lot of people out there that don't even consider that. They don't even consider what their strengths and weaknesses are. And they just go full-bore ahead and stumble and fall a lot and then they can't understand why they've had so many failures in their life, because they're not focusing on where their strengths and weaknesses are. And that's a key thing for everyone.

However, Colleen finds she has needed to elicit outside help to gain the perspective to see just what her strengths and weaknesses actually are:

You need to focus on really listening to yourself and asking those people who are supportive of you. How do you view me? What do you see when you look at me? Where do you see my strengths and weaknesses? And that has been the biggest learning tool of all, trusting enough to ask someone close to you, who is

supportive of you, to give you some really critical advice. They say, you know, you really suck at that. And you get hurt sometimes when they say that. Now that you said that, I'm thinking about it. You're right. I really do suck at that. And, it takes things like that to help you focus on knowing your weaknesses and strengths. Because, I don't think we're automatically born knowing what they are. We have to discover what they are. You know, going through school, you discover that, well, I can't draw, but I can do math. Or, I can draw better than this person, but I'm not as good as that person. And, not to take that personally because there's room for everyone to do something at some level. And just because I can't draw like Michael Angelo doesn't mean I'm a horrible artist. And, I can't do math but that doesn't mean I can't do it on paper with a calculator. I just can't do it this way.

The book *Driven to Distraction* (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994) has helped Colleen allow trusted supporters into her life. In fact, this book has been the main source for many of the strategies she has developed. One of her most important strategies is the use of a "life coach." For Colleen, this position is held by her fiancée. As her life coach, he discusses her strengths and weaknesses and makes a commitment to call her at intervals to see if she has met her appointments, and just generally check in. He also tutors her in math and has introduced a computer-based program to help her manage her bills. As Colleen finds strategies to help her, she is realizing that her life does not have to be so unorganized and she is beginning to be less guarded.

Colleen has learned that she needs to allow other people into her life to provide support for her general, overall, success. She feels you do not need a lot of people, one or two key people will do. However, in terms of support from professors and her academic success, she feels you cannot have too much support there. It has been difficult for Colleen to get the information she needs to understand what academic accommodations will work for her. Her idea of possible accommodations just recently grew when her

chemistry professor helped her through a class:

My chemistry teacher, she actually tutored me herself...I gave her such rave reviews on the student evaluation...I've had all my testing done over in the testing building. And I was setting that up for my final in her class. And she said no, I think you might do better if we do your final in my office. And I panicked over that. I'm going, "Oh my God! Sitting in the teachers office...Oh, I'm going to panic and I'm going to just totally blow the test." I didn't have a lot of faith in passing the test anyway because, science, I just don't get it. But it's funny because sometimes some things click and sometimes other things don't. And, so I took the test in the office, and she sat there with me and went through every single question and asked me "Why did you answer it this way? What does this mean?" And she, actually, went back, after she talked to me about it, and she changed my answer...I actually knew the answer, I just didn't put it right on the test. So she gave me credit for it. And other ones where I just kind of guessed, cause I really don't know, and it was wrong, she didn't correct it. But I passed the test because she went back with me, one by one, and asked me the questions again, and discussed it with me. And I gave her the correct answer then. And so by doing that, I passed the test. Otherwise, I would have failed the test....She said she worked once before with somebody with a disability and this happened to work. And I said nobody's ever given me a test that way before. So I don't know if it works. And so we did a combination of the two, and it worked--the two, doing a written and an oral exam combined, worked.

Colleen is not the first woman in this study that has been helped by an understanding professor that was willing to go the extra mile to help their students succeed and understand their own mechanisms for displaying their understanding. If it had not been for her chemistry professor's willingness to help her, she might never have known that she actually did understand a majority of her chemistry lessons. For Colleen, it was the way the questions were presented that posed the problem.

Unfortunately, many professors do not show this sensitivity. Colleen still has to pass a chemistry lab and finish up the final classes in her major. She has tried to pass the chemistry lab on three different occasions and has dropped it each time. Colleen explains:

It's such a struggle for the information to go in and I can't find the help that I need to get through the class. When I've tried to talk to some of the teachers, "I don't know what to do, I don't know where to go. I'm struggling. Help! Help! Help! Help!" The teachers are like, whatever. It's like you drop the class because I don't know what else to do at that point. Because you get so frustrated because you go the teacher initially.

Colleen thinks that part of the problem is that professors do not know how to help:

The teachers just don't have the information themselves. If you say, 'OK I've got ADHD and I need help,' and you go to the teacher with that, most of my teachers don't know what to tell you from that point on.

When making this statement, even though Colleen is struggling with her chemistry lab, her thoughts turn to the professors in her major. Overall, she feels professors in other areas of study seem to have a better understanding of learning disabilities:

The teachers...in chemistry and sciences and stuff—they deal with kids—you know, they have 200 kids in a class. They have the information, more so than the teachers in my department, where I go "I need some help." [If I said] "I don't know where to go." They didn't know where to tell me to go.

Colleen's Roadblocks

Colleen does not feel she receives the support of her professors that teach in her major. When talking about her situation, she is reminded of advice she has given to the children she has helped:

We used to teach the kids that if somebody puts a brick wall front of you, what do you do? And a lot of kids would say, well we'd stop. And I go, no. There's no such thing as stopping. I said if somebody puts a brick wall in front of you, you find a way to dig a hole under it, you go around it, you climb over it. But, you don't let that brick wall stop you, no matter what that brick wall is, or who put it there. You don't accept no for an answer the first time. I said, you keep plugging away. If you have a dream or goal, don't give up on it. I said, if you have to take detours, and you have to take the back doors, and you have to climb mountains to get there. Always keep that goal in sight and find a way, because there is no one way to get there.

She believes that this is a strategy she has employed all through her life:

I have done that my whole life. I get angry, because I believe my self-esteem has always been really low. And, so, I get mad when people say you can't do that. You're not allowed to do that. You can't go there. You can't do this. I get really ticked at 'em. I go, how dare you say that I can't do something. And, then I get mad, and when I get mad, I fight. And when I fight, I find a way to get to where I want to go.

Colleen finds it difficult to adhere to her own advice though. She is struggling to continue on with her classes:

In the process of trying to get from point A to point B I can't tell you how many detours I've had to take, how many frustrations, how many times I feel like I'm beating my head against the wall. And a perfect example is with [present school]. Since I've started at [present school] I feel I've had people putting walls in front of me every other week, if not every single semester. And, it's taking a lot of soul-searching and pushing to continue, each and every semester, let alone, each and every single day to make it to class, because, it's not an easy road in the first place. But, when people throw bricks at you, and say how you can't do that, or you can't go that way. You can't go this way, or you're not qualified enough, or you're not smart enough, or your not, whatever. And, you know, it's like, I would think a lot of people would just say "check it." And say, "Hey I don't feel like beating my head against the wall." But, you know, then I would be defeating what I was teaching those kids all these years about how you can't allow other people to dictate your life. You have to control your life.

Colleen continues to work hard, however, she feels her department has a culture that is overlooking what she has to offer:

I feel...[excluded]...in my department. I don't feel it over in the fibers department. I go over in arts, I go, "This is great!" The art department is so laid back, you're included in everything. There's no such thing as a learning disability over there. No problem! But, my department, I feel like it's very much kissy, kissy, you know. If you're like the cheerleader type who's miss popular, and your involved in everything, it's like you get all the really cool stuff that gets offered. They offer it to them first. Whoever is the most popular in the class. There's all kinds of bickering going on between the professors about this, and about that...I can't tell you how many times I feel I've been excluded from something fun that's coming up, or being involved in things, or being asked to do anything in the

department. It's like, OK, well fine. This is a bunch of BS. So I just say give me my bachelor's degree and I'm out of here!

Gender Issues

In this study, it is not unusual for participants to feel that working with women puts them in a position to experience bickering and pettiness. From Colleen's account, it appears that her department thrives on it. Colleen is the only participant, however, who was discouraged from doing well in math and science when she was growing up.

They [teachers] really didn't work with you. And then too, I was still of a generation where...you weren't encouraged to excel in math and science. And those were my weak spots. I like science and math, but you struggle in it and the teacher says "Oh you're a girl and you are just going to grow up and get married," you know, "don't worry about it." You know, that just adds to your frustration, because you feel, like I am already struggling scholastically, and then if a teacher says don't worry about it because you're not going to need it because you're a woman. You know, you start feeling less, and less like I am worthy of this, or I am worthy of that. I am not intelligent enough. Because, you're working so hard and not getting ahead and just a minor statement by a teacher can set you back far.

Success

Colleen has been chasing a piece of paper; a paper that proves to the world that she is intelligent and worthy of being heard—that she should be taken seriously. Success has been her associate's degree and will be her upcoming bachelor's degree. The proof that she knows what she is talking about. Colleen explains:

It's...been a very personal journey for myself, going to college and getting these degrees. And, you know, I know it's really bad that our society is placing so much on that piece of paper, for the bachelor's degree, because I've got so much experience in my field, prior to ever coming to school. And, a lot of people out there don't take you seriously that you really know what the heck you're talking about unless you have a stupid piece of paper that says, "Hey, I've got this bachelors degree." And they go, "Oh! Gosh! You're so smart! You're so brilliant! You've got this piece of paper." I'm like, "you guys are morons." You know. Cause anybody out there that has been the stuff I have in the industry for twenty

years has just as much knowledge as somebody who just went to college, if not more. But, you're placing it all on that bachelor's degree. So, I decided, it was partly my inspiration for getting the bachelor's degree was well, who's going to take me seriously unless I get that piece of paper... I am an intelligent person and people can take me seriously because I've this paper now to prove that I'm not some stupid person out there.

Although, with her new understanding about her ADHD, Colleen is redirecting her focus:

I think that even if I went for my masters degree, or a doctorate, or whatever, I still would feel that I'm not smart enough and I would still be trying to prove to the world that I'm an intelligent person. And, I base a lot of that, now, on the ADHD, that you are constantly battling with yourself, trying to feel smart. I mean, other people around me tell me I'm really intelligent, but I don't feel intelligent, so I'm constantly struggling to improve and get smarter, and get smarter, because, I don't feel smart. And, I think, for me, it's all a self-issue. Whether the learning disability, or, you know, women in society... I think it's a combination of proving to yourself so that you can prove to society that, "Hey! I matter, and I'm important!" And you have to prove it to yourself, before you can ever prove it to society. And, I'm still trying to prove it to myself before I get done with school. And, hopefully, when I get done with school, I can... People will take me seriously and believe that I can do the things that I say I can do.

At this point in Colleen's college career, success is not quitting:

I wanted that piece of paper. And..., for me, I got to a point at [name of present school] where there's no turning back. Because I have already invested this much time here it would be stupid of me not to follow through. But, even with that, even this semester, I can't tell you how many times I've said I want to quit. I'm going to walk away. I can't do this any more. I'm tired of this baloney that goes on in the school. I'm tired of beating my head against the wall. I just want to get a job and make some money.

The point that Colleen is leading up to is that, even though she is not the most confident right now, success is sitting down and seeing her way through her confusion. Taking the first step:

I don't always feel self-confident. There's time when, pandemonium is going on inside. I'm like I don't know where to go. I don't know what's right. I don't know

what's wrong. I don't know how to do this. And, when I get to this point I have to sit down and say, well OK, what would be the best first step to take in order to take control over the situation and to turn it around to be a positive thing. And I don't always have the answers. Then I have to sometimes ask questions, I have to sometimes research it. I have to sometimes really dig deep within myself to find the answers. And, it's a whole combination of different things that you find in order to see the successes.

Colleen has learned that it is the little successes that count, like doing the day to day things that she sets out to do:

And I know, with ADHD, you have to see little successes. Little time ones. Little bunches of them. In order to feel the total end success...And, it's a daily thing. You know, like successful, oh yeah, like making sure I get to this interview and be there on time and follow through with this interview it's like, that's a little success. Many people may not see it that way, but for me, I actually did it and I followed through with it and I did it. That's success!

Ultimately, Colleen's life has been liberally peppered with significant successes.

Colleen feels she has been especially successful in nonprofit organization:

I've had quite a few successes in my life...And I feel like most of my successes, ... to this date, have been through non-profit organizations. And actually, I've seen myself grow through these non-profits because when I get involved in these non-profit organizations, you hold offices, you hold positions of power. You work your way up the ladder to where, eventually, you're the president of the club. And, being president of the club, and actually having a good year while you're in office, that is a huge success. And to me that's a huge pat on the back that I made it to that point, let alone to have a good year while you're in that office.

Colleen's seemingly boundless energy has given her ample opportunity to experience success. However, this energy has its problems too, and has offered Colleen an opportunity to rethink her definition of success to include knowing when to back away:

You know, when I was nineteen, twenty-five even, I didn't see that. I think some of that comes with age. Because...this is an ADHD thing, I know, you take on all

these projects. I'd take on everything. I wanted to belong to all these clubs. I wanted to hold offices. Because, you know, everything is interesting to me. My interests are so wide spread that I have a hard time focusing because I like to do everything! And I want to be part of everything, and I want to do everything. Mentally and physically, you can't...But when I was nineteen and twenty, I didn't listen. I would join fifteen clubs and then I would get overwhelmed. Because of all the commitments I had made, I would panic. And, I would quit everything. Just walk away from everything. With years of trying to find who I am, I discovered, even at [name of school], I would take on too many things. Then, one by one, I would start weighing which one was most important. Which one I would get the most benefit from, and eliminating one. And then, if I was still overwhelmed, I would reevaluate and then eliminate another thing until I found a balance for me. And the key thing for everyone in life is balance. Balance between school. Balance between home. Balance between the two. Balance within your life. I think the key thing is really listening to your self.

Future Plans

Colleen realizes that clothing design is a very competitive field, however, she has been designing clothing for twenty years and feels she has a good chance. Her dream is to develop her own clothing line, to become a Versachi or Donna Karin. But, first, she wants to be able to pay her bills:

I want to work for someone else for a while, because I want to pay my bills off. But ultimately I want to be self-employed. I know I could do it...I know my designs are good. I know my sewing is good. I know that I have been studying the markets for so long, and fashion for so long, that I feel I've got everything it takes in order to make it...just give me the opportunity.

Colleen is not leaving anything up to chance, she is accepting every opportunity that comes her way. She has recently placed a children's clothing line in a coffee shop in Japan:

I'm selling little kids clothes in Japan, but...it's through a friend that has a coffee shop and is willing to sell these things out of her coffee shop. And I go, you know, I know some people would say...that's not exactly what I want, and they'd

pass it up. I'm going, you know, who cares? I'd be no worse off then I was before. And that's been my whole attitude.

Colleen is preparing herself for the competition and keeping herself focused on her goal:

I haven't been able to take no very well...and now, I'm looking at it, like what the heck! I don't care. I'm no worse off. They can say no until they are blue in the face. No keeps me right where I was. So if I keep sending out enough stuff, somebody's going to say yes, eventually. You're no worse off. So, it can't hurt you to send your stuff over there and say, whatever happens, happens. And I'm looking at it...I want to be my own boss. I want to have my own company. I want to design my own clothes. And, do what I want, the way I want it

Advice for the University

Colleen has several pieces of advice for the University. First, she addresses a main point of her frustration:

I think it would help if more of the teachers knew what to do when a student went to them with their scholastic problems they are having. I found that most of my professors in my major had no idea how to deal with someone with LD or even know what to suggest on where to go for help.

She also thinks that advisors “should be better informed on how to help you if you aren’t sure you have a LD.”

Support for students is a main theme in Colleen’s advice. She advises that support groups, life coaches, and/or mentors, be offered for women with learning disabilities.

Colleen finds that support groups are a “great way to share short cuts on how we solved problems we deal with on a day to day basis.” However, having a life coach has been her “biggest help:”

A life coach, or mentor, while at school would be the biggest help. I found, for myself, that a life coach was the biggest help. The person reminded me of when I was supposed to have things done. Called and made sure I was going to all my classes. Gave me pep talks when I needed them. Talked me through depressions

so I would not get so bad. Laughed with me when I made up words when I could not think of the word to say ... Never made me feel stupid when I messed up.

Colleen thinks it would be important to provide training for these volunteers. She is willing to offer her services if the University wants to address this need.

Her last two pieces of advice address a general support and a specific suggestion for her department. Colleen would like classes on how to use Quicken (a computerized money management tool) to be offered to students. She feels this would take a great deal off stress off of women with ADHD. And finally, she feels it would have "been nice if they [her department] had a better tutoring system for the computer and sewing portions of the classes. Maybe break down the computer portions into two semesters instead of one."

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Feeling supported in her department has been a major challenge for Colleen. Looking back, she feels she should have been less overwhelmed by the fact that the University accepted her, and more selective in her choice of universities. In this regard, she advises women with learning disabilities to take their time to find the right school for them. She advises going on campus and meeting members of the faculty and listening to themselves in terms of warning signs and comfort level. This is advice she has followed through with her daughters. She has taken both of her daughters to visit a prospective college and is giving them time to explore different colleges and make up their own minds as to when and where they want to attend.

Colleen believes it is important to have “someone you trust to help you through tough spots.” She advises that women with learning disabilities “find a mentor (or a life coach) who understands depression.” Because, “even with medication, there is still depression.” She also advises that they need to learn how to give themselves their own “atta boys.” She suggests that by finding something that they are good at, like a hobby, they will have a diversion from the stress of academics, as well as a boost to their self-esteem. Colleen uses her crafts for this purpose. She feels they are therapy.

Colleen has found that being organized helps her to “deal with the chaos” in her life and helps her focus:

I organize my pantry, I organize my linens, I organize my day by a calendar, and color code it (color coding seems to help). I organize my life with Postit Notes to remind me. (I know that I am forgetful). I color code my files to make it less stressful for myself. I use Quicken to organize my finances. I can't handle clutter in the house, if it is cluttered, I cannot seem to focus on daily work.... The organization seems to help a great deal.

She feels it is important for women with learning disabilities to work to get themselves organized also.

Finally, Colleen offers this last piece of advice: “It is really difficult, in society, dealing with your learning disability. The best advice I can give is NEVER GIVE UP! NEVER TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER!”

Maggie

Maggie describes herself as a person who "just doesn't quit." She is a "nontraditional" traditionally aged student. At twenty years of age, Maggie feels she is nontraditional in the respect that she is Hispanic and comes from a family that does not

have the means to provide the financial support that she observes other students her age receiving. Maggie majors in computer information science and plans to graduate in May of 2004. She was tested for learning disabilities after "failing test after test" in her freshman year. Testing showed that Maggie has ADHD.

While Maggie likes computers and math, she modestly explains that there are others in her classes that are better in math than she is, but she's "fairly good." In high school, she was "one of the better ones at it." However, Maggie has reading problems. She thinks that what she reads "doesn't stick...I just don't get it." She feels she puts a lot more work into her studying:

It doesn't stick. I mean, even when I read math problems or something, it doesn't stick. But, just the numbers, I'm able to do that because I understand it.... I know I work harder than most of my peers. I actually have problems with that. A lot of people just don't understand why I study so much. They, you know, you're going to be fine, your grade, you know. They don't understand that they may be able to get off studying like they do and be fine. But, I can't do that. I won't make it. I'll fail out of school.

Maggie professes that a big motivating factor for her is that she wants to "beat the odds:"

I think it was just that my mom had me at eighteen, and she didn't go to college until I was ten or eleven, so it was important for me to kind of beat the odds being Hispanic and being out of, whatever. She had me before she went to college. So, just kind of beating the odds with my peers, and whatever. Most of my peers didn't go to college.

Maggie's Background

Maggie loved to run, and play basketball and soccer when she was growing up. This interest earned Maggie the label of "athlete" of the family, so grades were not expected of her. Her mom, a special education teacher, expected Maggie and her brother

to get Bs, and her sister, Maggie feels "mom was rather critical" of her, was expected to get As.

It was clear that Maggie had difficulties with her schoolwork. However, her mother attributed these difficulties to Maggie's lack of effort; it was her brother that carried the label of ADHD. In Maggie's family several males have ADHD, "but it's usually just not the females." Her brother got the majority of attention because of his ADHD. According to Maggie, "it was obvious to everybody that something needed to help him." It just wasn't as obvious for her.

The fact that so much attention was placed on her brother's problems caused Maggie's difficulties to be ignored, and left Maggie feeling "not smart. Like I just couldn't do it." Maggie's statements generally applaud her mom's effort, you can tell there is a great deal of respect there, however, Maggie admits that "sometimes" her mom was "negative....She would put a negative image on things." Maggie feels her mom was plagued with guilt over her divorce from Maggie's father and often blamed Maggie's school problems on the divorce. On the other hand, Maggie's mother would also "blame it on herself, that she didn't spend enough time [with Maggie] when she was really little because she was going to school herself to get her degree." For the most part, Maggie's difficulties were attributed to a lack of effort and inability to apply herself.

Maggie attributes any success she had in her earlier grades to her mom and "those darn workbooks:"

Since my mom worked with me a lot, like over the summer and stuff, she always made us do those darn workbooks! And, my grades stayed pretty well until I got to college.

According to Maggie, her brother "had the hyperactivity part" of ADHD. He was "really hyper" and got himself in "a lot of trouble," However, for Maggie as she explains:

I was just kind of the spacey one, I guess. I was made fun of for being called the ditz in high school, or whatever. I really wasn't a ditz, like I just, some of the things I just couldn't help. But it kind of made me seem ditzzy I guess. But, in actuality, I was just kind of zoning out.

While Maggie feels she was quieter than her brother when she was growing up, she still managed to earn her nickname as "the mouth" in her family:

I've always been known as the mouth in my family.... Because I speak way before I think. Yeah. I was just kind of caught off guard sometimes with stupid stuff.

In middle school and high school, Maggie admits that she did not find the time to do her homework. She feels she got through her high school years by doing "a lot of copying" of homework from other students:

Honestly, the way I got by, through, was more, let me copy. I did a lot of copying. But, I don't know exactly how I got through that part because I really don't remember doing a whole lot of work. I think I just copied a lot. But, I mean, it was something I didn't want to do in college, so. You know I want to be able to prove that I can do it by myself. I mean, it makes me sound like I copied everything, but I did things on my own too. But, it's just that I wouldn't get to the homework so I'd copy somebody else's. Or, just normal high school, middle school stuff.

For the most part, Maggie feels that she slid through high school because of the school that she went to, and the district it was in. She thinks that if she had been "in a different district, it might not have happened so easily." Whatever the cause of her getting through high school, Maggie was certain of one thing, she did not want her behavior in high school to continue into college, and she did not want to continue being called the

"ditz."

Maggie's College Years

When Maggie became a freshman in college, it was clear to her that she could no longer accept her mother's evaluation that she was "just somebody that just has to try harder." Maggie confronted her mother:

My freshman year I was just, I told my mom, who was a Special Ed teacher, that I just, I've always told her that I just have a hard time with school. And she's like, you're just somebody that just has to try harder. She's a Special Ed teacher so she...pushed me a little harder, and worked with me a little more, in the summer, or whatever. And, in my freshman year in college I was just like, I'm just not smart. I can't do this. I'm not going to graduate if it continues.

Maggie's panic sent her to Resources for Students with Disabilities to find out what was going on:

I went to the center here. The disabled student's services, I think it's called....and, they ran through, oh my goodness, so many tests. But, what it came down to is that I do have attention deficit disorder and it, kind of, made sense, in the back of my mind though, because coffee [a stimulant] always just kind of helped me, kind of concentrate.

Although Maggie has found answers to her questions about her problems in school, she feels uneasy about needing help:

Sometimes I get kind of, I don't know, I don't really, I don't have a problem telling people I know that I have a learning disability, but, it's people that I don't know. Sometimes I'm kind of, I don't know really, I don't really want them to know. Like, and I kind of feel self-conscious, sometimes, going to learning disabled services. Like, if I was going there for community service, or to help someone else out, that would be great. But, inside, I know it's because I need help. And sometimes I'm a little self-conscious about that.

Part of this feeling toward needing help may be fostered by her father's attitude about her diagnosis:

My father, my real father, he blames it on other things. I don't know...he's really Godly so he blames it on me not being right with God and, just weird stuff. He thinks it's kind of all in my head. I don't know, he's told me growing up that my brother needs more...whoopins.

Her father's attitude, Maggie confesses:

Kind of makes me confused. All of it, when I think about it. I think maybe, maybe it is in my head....But, then I know...I know that inside that I'm so much better overall, with the medication. Not necessarily saying that I couldn't succeed without the medication, but it's just that extra little crutch that helps me do better and kind of see positive rewards for my hard work.

Maggie finds balancing work and school difficult, and feels her grades suffer because of it. She thinks her grades "could be better." In fact, Maggie feels her GPA of 2.8 "should be better " because she's "worked way too much." But, her schoolwork, according to Maggie, is not all that she has to consider. Maggie explains:

I think there's a lot of variable stuff around in my life that has happened....I was an RA last year so that really hurt my GPA because it's like a full-time job and school. So balancing that was hard. Um, but I also got an internship with IBM this summer. So, I've continued that through the school year on top of another job I have so I'm working 35 hours a week....and going to school. But, I have to pay for stuff cause I don't come from some place where it's given to me, so....Just kind of what makes me, me....If I get by with a 2.8 and graduate, you know.....it's that piece of paper [that counts].

While Maggie's internship could have turned into a job, unfortunately, it is doubtful that Maggie will have the 3.5 GPA criteria that will be required.

Learning Strategies and Accommodations

Maggie uses a daily planner and applies study skills and test-taking skills that she learned from the testing center, which "really helps a lot." She also receives testing accommodations, which provide a quiet environment for testing and 1 1/2 times the

normal test time to work on her tests. One strategy that Maggie finds very helpful is the use of medication.

Maggie has been prescribed Adderall and feels that this medication is working out well for her:

Medicine has kind of helped me to make things a little more realizable. Like, this can happen because I'm actually doing OK in school....I just seem to, it's, I don't know, before, I didn't really know what was going on in class. I'd just kind of go and do whatever to get by. But now, I'm actually, you know, I feel intrigued with the subjects, and. I listen to the whole lecture and I'm not off in whatever else land I was in before.

In spite of the fact that "a lot of people have a negative outlook on it," Maggie feels her medication is important and has helped her do her best:

Everything seems more realizable, like it could happen in reality as opposed to a little dream....I'm thinking of getting my Masters. Like, I thought before that there was no way....I could do all that reading and whatever else you have to in your Masters.... I wouldn't have made it if I hadn't gotten the medication that I'm on now.

Gender Issues

"For the most part," Maggie does not feel there is gender bias in her classes.

However, she does feel that:

Sometimes in some of my computer classes that sometimes it's harder because there's more males doing the programming, or whatever. That some of the teachers sometimes don't kind of have the sensitivity, I guess, towards females. I guess maybe that would be, but not necessarily like gender bias...I don't really know how to explain it. It's just not that friendly kind of feeling that you get. But, most females are, you know nice, friendly people, maybe not all females. But, that caring, it seems like they don't care as much.

While Maggie may not recognize gender bias in her college studies, she definitely recognizes it within her own culture:

Well, for the most part, like, I think there's a lot of different things that shape why I have the determination that I do. But, I think that, you know, one of them might be because Hispanic women, everybody on my dad's side, nobody really. I don't know a female who went to college. You know. It's just not something that Hispanic women do, for the most part. I'm not saying all Hispanic women, but it's just kind of something that hinders.... isn't valued. I mean it goes for most over-all values, because...most people on my dad's side that have graduated, but, um, just being Hispanic, and people telling me because you are, you have less of a chance of graduating.... Just kind of have more odds to go against. It, kind of, makes me want to work harder. So, I don't know....I haven't had people come out and just say it, like you can't do it. Just more, like how they infer things....I guess, maybe it's a mind-set. It's just maybe the way society is. It's kind of, somehow, I get all this stuff in my brain and kind of feel it's against me but I just have to keep working harder.

Success

While Maggie does not know exactly where she gets her determination, "it's just what makes me, me," she, definitely, feels she gets much of her motivation, and her sense of success, from the lack of support she experienced while she was growing up. For Maggie, success is:

Not only beating the odds and just proving to everybody that said she wouldn't be able to do that. "She's that ditzy girl from high school," or just my mom who's like, "your not going to make it Maggie." It's more than proving them wrong, it's just proving that I can do it. I mean, if I don't get the best grades in the world, the world is not going to end. I'll probably still get a job....And, life will still go on.

Maggie's Future Plans

Maggie is interested in teaching. She has been tutoring a twelve-year-old boy in math and has found she has a love for teaching. Maggie explains: " it just gives me joy to be able to help someone else. Just because I know so many people have helped me." However, Maggie has promised her mother that she would not become a teacher. It is obvious that Maggie is fighting this decision not to teach:

My grandma was a teacher, my mom's a teacher. Just, teachers aren't, for the most part, appreciated in our society. Just kind of a job that nobody, really kind of, I don't know. Doesn't pay very well either.... Yeah. If I decide, if I actually get on with IBM, another road is to hopefully be a project manager some day. That's kind of interesting to me. I could always substitute teach, a substitute teacher, or something. I don't know, on my time off.

Maggie also has plans to go to graduate school. She is not sure what area she wants to study yet. Her plans are to work for a while and then start her Master's degree when she is clearer about her direction.

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities

Maggie feels that women with learning disabilities just "can't give up:"

I really don't know how to explain it. I just have this determination and I see so many people, so many females, so many people that I relate to that just kind of throw things away because they don't have that inner determination. And I don't know, really, how to give it to them. Just kind of, you can't give up. You know.... I think it's something that you learn from your circumstances.

Most of all, Maggie wants people to know she is "not stupid!" She thinks it is important for other women not to feel stupid either. Maggie feels that "everybody's, born where they are, and they really shouldn't be ashamed for it.... just don't give up going towards that goal, because you will get there."

Zoey

Zoey, a natural resource management major, is a traditional-aged college student. Zoey was diagnosed with ADHD in her sophomore year of college. This diagnosis came on the heels of her younger sister's diagnosis for ADHD. When it was discovered that her sister, who was then in middle school, had ADHD, it was only natural for Zoey to be tested; Zoey's younger sister exhibited many of the same symptoms that Zoey did when

she was attending elementary and middle school. Medication and understanding have helped Zoey gain a new perspective on her life. Her diagnosis of ADHD opened a new world of possibility, and has allowed her to "use her disability to her advantage."

Zoey's Early School Experiences

School was a discouraging prospect for Zoey:

I think it was a discouragement that my grades were never good. If I have a passion about something, I'll get it done. That's not been a problem for me. But, I think school was discouraging. I mean, [home state] is a small, small state...teachers always think, well she just doesn't have it in her. She just needs to work harder...It actually, kind of, got to the point that it was the same thing every year. So, it was...always the last 2 weeks, or 4 weeks, of school I was scrambling to make ends meet to go on to the next grade. But, I, kind of, got to the point that I accepted that that was how I was, and ... I just didn't have it, [laugh] basically, and I couldn't do it.

Zoey's family members have been her staunchest supporters. While she is "very close" to her whole family, talking with her dad about three or four times a week, she talks to her mom and sisters everyday. Zoey credits her parents with her ability to persevere when she had such a hard time in school:

My parents were the ones saying, oh you have it in you. We know you, and you're really smart. And your teachers say you're smart but you just, it's not there. You just don't have it. But, we don't think that. We know you can do it. So, it was more of a, like, it would make me, instead of putting that bar up there, like the school did, and me going I can't reach it, my parents said because we're putting it up this high, we know you can do it...It was a better expectation.

Zoey admits that she had an "inability to sit still" in class and was "really quiet, just a day-dreamer." Although, she doesn't know why her ADHD wasn't caught earlier:

I remember as far back as I can in school, like, almost every year I was going to be held back. And my teachers were always, like, "she's got it in her,...she daydreams, she doesn't pay attention. If she's interested in something she'll do it, but other than that she just doesn't do it"....I don't know why, my mom doesn't

know why either, that it was never thought of earlier, that I might have a disability.

In spite of her problems with grades, Zoey's SAT scores were high and she had her choice of colleges that would allow her to move toward her goal of working in the family business:

I had a high SAT score. I got accepted, I applied to ten schools and I got accepted to seven of them... I decided to go to [small Midwestern college]... it's not really an option to not go to school in my family. My grandparents and my parents are helping pay for school. So, I couldn't imagine not taking advantage of that opportunity, because there are so many people who don't have that. So, it was never really an option to not go to school. I started to go to school for business, because that's what my dad was in, and, I know I wanted to do something in the [family] company.

Zoey's College Years

Zoey was enrolled in two colleges prior to her present enrollment. She has also changed her major from marketing (business) to natural resource management. She feels her new focus still supports her goal of working in the family business. Zoey's first college was a small college:

The [name of college] was good for me...that was good for me: small town, small school...My freshman and sophomore year, I really enjoyed it. And then, towards my junior year, I like, I don't really like my major, and I was going home all the time; driving nine-and-a-half hours, just for the weekend, sometimes. So, I decided I wanted to be in a bigger school closer to home.

While Zoey was deciding on a bigger school closer to home, and a new major, she attended a college in her home state so that she could keep up with her education. She still had a declared marketing major so she was able to take classes to fill in a few holes in her studies. Zoey explains,

I wanted to keep on with my education. I knew that I wanted to go home for a semester, but I knew that I didn't want to go to school in [home town]. So, it was important to my parents for me to graduate in four years, so just to kind of keep with the education.

It was during this time that Zoey was sent to a psychologist to be tested for learning disabilities. She feels it was a "big relief" to understand what was causing her school experiences to be so challenging. Zoey explains,

I was diagnosed with ADHD about two years ago. It was the summer of my sophomore year in college. So, that was a big relief to me. It's helped a lot. I was diagnosed through testing in [home state]. She [a psychologist] tested specifically for learning disabilities. And, my sister, my younger sister was tested...she's a lot like me...she was in middle school at the time. And so, we decided to have me tested. ...the conclusion was, ADHD. There's inattentive and hyperactive, and I have inattentive.

Zoey thinks the biggest effect of her diagnosis, and subsequent medication and accommodations, is reflected in her grades. Even without accommodations for her ADHD, her grades were slightly better in college than the 1.98 GPA that she graduated from high school with. Zoey attributes this to her ability to take classes that interest her:

That's the biggest effect it had on me, was grades. It was just discouraging, I just didn't think I could do it. And, in college you get to pick classes you're interested in. You know, so that's why my grades were a little better.

Zoey found college more engaging and interesting:

College is a lot easier for me because I'm interested in it. I just fit more into college, I think, than I did in high school, middle school, or grade school....Just because I wasn't into it....I wasn't really into any extracurricular activity. I mean I had friends and stuff, and, I had fun, but I wasn't really into the whole experience. And so,...I really embrace change and I like change a lot, it's critical to me...because I made that change [going to college], I was nine-and-a-half hours from home, I didn't know a single person, and so, I had to put myself out there, and meet people, and go to class. I liked my classes so I think that is what, kind of, turned it around.

Although, with the understanding, accommodations, and medication that her diagnosis has brought, her grades have become "better than they've ever been."

Zoey believes that knowing she has ADHD has helped her overcome the idea that she "just wasn't smart":

It's helped me with my confidence in school. Because, I went through 14 years of my school career thinking that I just didn't have it. You know, that I just wasn't smart. And now, it's, I know that I can do it. That's really helped.

As Zoey is beginning to know herself better, she feels that her disability can really be seen as an asset. She explains,

I've...learned to use it [ADHD] to my ability. I'm really good at multi-tasking [Laughter]...I can jump from one thing to the next and still know what's going on, and, I think, because of my disability, I can do that. Otherwise, if I spend too much time on one thing, I don't retain anything or get the full benefits.

Zoey has relied on her family support system for help. Her pediatrician has played a vital role in her diagnosis and support:

Actually, it's funny that my pediatrician is a person that still, I mean, I still go in every time I'm home. And, it's just for the ADHD, not anything else. He's known me since I was really young and he says he still wants to treat me and monitor my medication so that I'm not having too much, or too little....he's helped a lot. And, his son has it. And, his son's a medical doctor in college. So, he gave me some pointers.

Zoey's diagnosis of ADHD has brought her life into focus:

When I found out I had it, it really made a lot of things click...I read a lot about it, and I found out as much as I could on the Internet, and in magazines, and stuff like that. It just made things make sense. You know, it's not that I'm not smart, or it's not that I can't do it, it's just that I have this hurdle I need to get over, and, once I do, I can use it to my advantage. [laughter]

Although, Zoey's experience of having ADHD is not all positive:

Sometimes I have, I've always been like this, I don't sleep very well, because, at night...seems like my minds going like that at all times--a hundred miles an hour. Another thing I have, like public speaking, or getting out all my thoughts...I have so many and I'll be five steps ahead of my sentences when I'm speaking...especially when I get nervous. I have a hard time talking with people sometimes....Sometimes I get tears, because, when I'm not on my medication, and I'm all over the place, I'm really talkative, really energetic, and sometimes I get teased. Not meanly, but sometimes it's, kind of, it makes you, kind of, go should I not be like that, or should I be more calm.

However, Zoey finds the support of her doctor and her close friends comforting when she has to deal with her ADHD:

Like I said, my doctor has been really helpful and, for the most part, friends are supportive and understand...close friends. Yeah. Especially the ones I study with...But, yeah, usually it comes up. [laughter]

Accommodations and Strategies

When Zoey arrived at her present college it was not obvious to her where she had to go, and what she had to do, to arrange for accommodation. Although, she did not find it particularly difficult to figure that out:

I just looked up the Disabilities Department, and went in there and said I have ADHD and I was just wondering what the process is. What do I have to do? I was wondering what services were available. They had me meet with someone, I don't remember who, and I had a doctor's note.

In spite of Zoey's ability to quickly figure out the process for students who have need for the Office for Students with Disabilities, she feels that it could be clearer:

I didn't have any clue if they even offered services for disabled students. It wasn't anything that came to me during the admissions process. And so, I didn't know where to look and I kind of went in to the office not knowing if that was the place to go. And, that was kind of intimidating to have to walk into someplace and say "Oh, I have ADHD, and I was wondering if I needed help," and having them say, "well this isn't the place to go [laugh]. Go say that to someone else." You know. So, maybe they could put it out there more. I think when people see disabilities they think of more severe, either handicapped, or either people who are very,

very, mentally disabled, or physically disabled....That's more or less what I would have thought of before I found out that it was also learning disabilities.

Zoey's meeting with the Office for Students with Disabilities proved important for her academic success, even though the only accommodations she receives are having a quiet room and a longer time period for testing:

The only thing that I really thought I needed was testing, alternate testing. We got that arranged....I have a quiet room and twice the amount of time, so, I can just stop the test if I have to and just sit back and relax. You know, clear my mind...that's helped a lot.

Zoey's professors support her needs and have offered extra help if she needs it.

An invaluable personal strategy for academic success, for Zoey, is the use of medication for her ADHD. However, deciding on a medication has not been a clear path, Zoey has had to work with her healthcare professional to determine the type of medication, and dosage, that provide maximum benefits for her:

I've gone through a couple of different medications, first off, just to see [what worked]... This last one that I've been on is Adderall and it's helped the most. First, I was on Wellbutrin. That's supposed to, it's an anti-depressant. But, I guess it works in adults for adult ADHD...and I went on a different kind of anti-depressant, like Wellbutrin, and I just didn't feel like that helped. I'm not depressed at all so I didn't need that, really. And, then, I went on another form of stimulant like Adderall and this didn't work like Adderall.

Another very important part of Zoey's success is that she positions herself to take the very best advantage of her school experience:

I always go to class. Sit in the front row. I establish a relationship with the teacher right away. I have a sheet that the disability office gives me that says that I have my disability, so, the teacher understands and knows.

It is important to Zoey to keep up with the schoolwork. She is especially invested in assuring this will happen. As an example, Zoey makes sure she attends classes and

reads assigned chapters. The reading is difficult for Zoey since she feels that she has "to put twice as much effort into work as normal people do." Another example of this extra effort is the way Zoey treats her class notes: "I take notes in class on a separate piece of paper, and then, right after class, I go and copy my notes in the notebook." Zoey has accepted that she has to put in the extra effort and feels "it pays off in the end."

As Zoey is beginning to know herself as a person with ADHD she has had to come to terms with managing her time. She finds that her class schedule needs special attention:

I try not to have Tuesday and Thursday classes because it's hard for me to sit in class for an hour and a half or two hours....That's the one thing that's hard for me. After an hour I won't be there, so [laughter].

Zoey feels her medication, and working in an area that she is passionate about, work to her advantage, especially if the people she works for understand her needs. She experienced this in a summer internship:

I think that it helps when you get into something that you're passionate about. Because, if you get excited about it, it almost seems like you're that much more focussed on it, then if it's something that I'm just doing for a job...I was a manager. I actually hired my two sisters. It was a really fun summer. And they understand my disability, having ADHD. That helps a lot with me. But, it was something that I was so passionate about. My medication helps me a lot too.

Speaking about her ADHD and her experience with her summer internship she states: "It didn't really seem to get in the way. Sometimes it almost helps because I get more excited about things."

Success

Zoey believes that success is being happy. She has also developed a philosophy about "delayed gratification" and success:

Big thing is, I believe in delayed gratification. A lot! I think that you can have success. To feel that accomplishment, you have to put a lot of work into something that you're going to be successful at, and, you have to feel good about it and be happy. I think that those are the keys to success and support. There's not a lot you can do on your own, but, success just means that you know that that's something that you did and you're happy with the point that you are in life. Whether it be long term success or short term...But, the end result is happiness. I think that's success

When speaking directly of academic success, now, Zoey doesn't want to "settle for less." Zoey explains,

It goes back to delayed gratification. This semester I'm on the verge of As and Bs in all my classes, and that's just the best feeling in the world to me. It's the first time in my life that my grades have been this good, and, it really makes all the work pay off...I think that...with academic success is just doing the best you can...I think the more you get a taste of it, you can do it...I know I can be that good. Now, I don't want to settle for less!

Zoey's Future Plans

Zoey is unsure of how she will apply her degree in natural resource management, but feels this major suits her well and supports her desire to work in the family business.

Speaking of her major, she explains that,

I can go into anything like reclamation for a mining company, or parks ranger, or forest ranger...it's kind of a general degree...it has watershed sciences, range land management...all the degrees in natural resources built in to one.

It is especially important to Zoey that she is able to work outside, which, her experience shows, is an excellent environment for her:

I had an internship last summer and I got to work outside. I assessed land that was going to be used for mining and identified the minerals that were on there. You know, accessibility, and if people were using it...I really like to be outside.

Zoey knows that she "couldn't sit at a desk for eight hours a day doing the same type of job," and imagines herself aligned with the family business in the "environmental area." She sees her job dealing with everything from "before mining to after mining." However, Zoey has not put the idea of a forestry job completely out of her mind. She feels there is still time before she has to decide, Zoey is about a year-and-a-half away from graduation. In the meantime, Zoey wants to gain as much work experience as possible before she chooses a direction.

Apart from knowing the environment that Zoey wants to work in, an added benefit of her understanding of her ADHD is that she has more confidence in herself as a scholar:

After graduation, I am pretty sure, I am going to go on to a graduate degree... Don't know where, don't know what. But, that's a point on my mind.

Zoey feels that, without her new understanding of her ADHD she "probably would still be in business, kind of, trying to get it done, muddling through it...like, put my head down and getting it done, and not have to look back at school ever again." Knowing that she has ADHD has caused Zoey to "turn it and apply it in areas, instead of having it work against" her. Zoey feels that her new understanding of how to work with her ADHD, having the help of the disability office, along with her medication, are the three areas that have helped her the most. Zoey's new understanding and academic success have not only helped her to be "ambitious" in terms of future plans for her life, these factors have also helped, as Zoey puts it, "to know that I can do anything I put my mind to."

Advice for Women with Learning Disabilities:

Zoey feels that medication has been an important part of her success. She also feels that taking the medication has met with disapproval. In this regard, Zoey advises,

There's a lot of people that have said ...that they are against taking Adderall or Ritalin, but I think that if, used in proper doses, and properly monitored, that, that's one of the things that has made a huge difference for me....I mean, that it's really, it's something that, at first, it's hard to get used to because it makes your heart race and you get dehydrated, but...I don't think that I would be where I am without it. I really think that it's helped me a lot. And so, if you're going to do something like medication, make sure it's monitored and make sure that your doctor is interested in you as a person, or get a close relationship so that they don't over medicate you, or under medicate you....It's helped my sister a lot, too... There's a lot of people who don't like it, or say that it's bad for you, but I think that it can be really helpful if used in the right amount and in the right environment.

Overall, Zoey feels that the most important thing that she can advise for women with learning disabilities is to "find something that you're passionate about and use your disability as a stepping stone instead of a roadblock. Use it to your advantage. Turn it around---that's the best way to overcome it."

Summary

The women in this study have varying backgrounds. They also represent a wide spectrum of ages and experiences. When accompanying participants on their journeys we find that each participant is much more than her individual learning challenge/s, she portrays a sense of self-determination, courage, and persistence. In addition, when looking more closely, a dynamic process is seen that provides an important perspective on their academic success.

Women in this study, at some point, began to understand that they were not

meeting their own academic expectations. This sense of dissonance between their expectations and experiences prompted them to develop compensations that downplayed their academic difficulties. These compensations, such as being quiet, or not so quiet, and "sliding," "skating," and "skirting," allowed participants to continue their education, while protecting themselves from appearing stupid, or being attacked by their peers. Although, at some point, either with their parents' help, or by not being able to continue with their usual compensation strategies, it became clear to participants that they needed to find answers to their continued academic frustrations. Participants searched to take control over their experiences. They did not want to be considered incapable of reaching their academic goals. "I can do it" was echoed throughout this study. Their careful decisions, as well as their self-determination, allowed study participants to make decisions that aligned their experiences with their expectations. Making sense of their past and present struggles, acceptance of an explanation (label), as well as development of new compensation strategies, afforded participants the opportunity to take control and feel assured of their academic futures. The following chapter explores the dynamics of their academic success.

CHAPTER V

The Dynamics of Academic Success

This phenomenological study was initiated to discover the underlying structures that support the academic success of women with learning disabilities. Participants in this study do not have the same disability labels and are of differing ages, backgrounds, and interests. Moustakes (1994) advises, a phenomenological study searches for an understanding of "the dynamics that underlay the experience" (p. 22). Explorations of participants' journey stories reveal the dynamics that have contributed to their academic success.

Initially, participants became aware of a dissonance between their experiences and their expectations. This led to their development of compensation strategies that preserved their public image. These compensations were continued until either their parents intervened with a possible explanation, or they ran into a situation where their present compensation strategies were ineffective in obtaining their academic goals (they hit a wall). In either case, a period of searching and attempts to make sense of their academic struggles in the light of a possible explanation (learning disability label) ensued. When an explanation that made sense was arrived at, participants went through a period of acceptance as well as development of new compensation strategies. If the explanation did not make sense, or was incomplete, however, the search process was, again, entered and further explanation was found. Finally, participants were able to actively apply new compensation strategies, as well as refine or change them to allow

their academic experiences to meet, or exceed their expectations. Following is a more in-depth understanding of these dynamics.

Dissonance: Expectations vs. Experience

The starting point of this dynamic process is the realization that something is wrong. It was discovered that participants in this study felt there was a discrepancy between their expectations and their personal experiences at an early age. Naomi and Julia described this dissonance as they share their experiences in elementary school. Naomi was confused because she could not read or write very well, even though she did very well in math. Likewise, Julia expected to be able to read like other students so she memorized the books that her parents read her and recited them in class. In addition, other participants refer to this recognition when they reflect on their early experiences. This initial part of the dynamic is experienced by girls with learning disabilities, but can be observed by parent/s and teachers. Remediation of this dissonance can be accomplished at different ages, often depending on involvement of parent/s and if a supportive educational environment is available. However, most study participants battled with this discrepancy in silence, maintaining persistence in their academic efforts in the face of, often, extreme pressures and assaults to their self-esteem. Their learning differences were not discovered until they reached postsecondary education.

Personal Compensation Strategies

Within this study, there is no single explanation as to why many of the study participants did not have their learning disabilities discovered when they were in their early school years. It is clear, however, that participants developed and used

compensation strategies to mediate their struggles whether they were identified in their early years, or not. These compensations allow participants a certain amount of control over how they will be perceived. Julia pretends to read, and Naomi teaches herself to read fast, they both want to look like the other students. Other participants “melt into the background” by being quiet, as well as work extra hard, and skirt, skate, and slide. This section reviews some of these compensation strategies.

Being Quiet

Appearing normal or minimizing visibility was a popular compensation strategy among study participants. Many of the participants were quiet, and/or did not ask questions. As an example, Zoey was not an in-your-face kind of person and had a reputation as a daydreamer. Additionally, Colleen confesses to “melting into the background” Even “outgoing” and “loud” Samantha recognizes this compensation strategy in women with learning disabilities when she advises professors, especially in math and science, to “pay attention to women in their rooms.” She thinks that women with learning disabilities are ignored because they are quiet:

I just think they stay quiet. And I think the boys in the class will get called, even if you have a female professor. She'll pay attention to the boys. I don't know why that is that way. But, I really believe that.

Christina began to understand this fact and chose to change her strategy. She admits to being quiet, or, not like the “trouble-making boys,” during her early years so that she would be left alone and allowed to stay in the normal class. However, by junior high school she realized that the trouble-making boys were getting the attention she needed so she decided to change her strategy and began to be rebellious and disruptive.

Or, Not So Quiet

Christina shows us that being quiet was not always the compensation strategy of choice. Samantha, when looking back, admits that she would sit in the back of the class with the boys and make “fart jokes,” or take on the role of the class clown to avert attention away from her weak areas—her school work. Freya also feels the fact that she was not quiet kept her learning disability from being discovered:

I was the perfect ADD child...and, that's probably why I got overlooked... Yeah, because I was very opposite my sister. My sister was very quiet in class. She hid a lot of her problems, but, they found it. They've known she had dyslexia for years....I do emulate more of my father's personality than I do my mom's. And, because mom was having a lot of problems, in that point in life, with him, she just didn't want to deal, and I did get overlooked, a lot.

Freya was not like her sibling that had been identified with a learning disability. Her means of compensation were different.

The Athletes

Organized athletic activity was also a means of compensation for some participants. Samantha provides insight into the role athletics has played with her ADHD and her ability to compensate for her weaknesses. She wonders if there is some kind of connection between sports and ADHD because all of her friends with ADHD are extreme athletes. Samantha also wonders if her life would have been different if she had known about her ADHD:

I don't know that I would have been such an extreme skier, or an extreme athlete. I think I probably would have still been but I think I would have acknowledged that I was acting out a bit. It might have been like, OK, it's one thing to jump off this cliff but let's talk about why you're jumping off this cliff.

Christina acknowledges the role athletics has played in her life as well:

That's how I knew I wasn't worthless. Cause...I proved myself in athletics. And I got recognition in athletics. It helped me to stay out of problems. Because your self-esteem is really low and instead of seeking recognition doing stuff you're not supposed to do, the training in the group there took you in and they didn't look [at you] any different if you could spell, or not. First of all, they wouldn't know if you could spell or not. And they wouldn't care...you were on an equal basis with them. For once you were on the same level as everybody else. And, that helped a lot. I think,...without my sport I would not be where I am. I would not!

Sliding, Skirting, or Skating

The metaphors of sliding, skirting, and skating were also used to explain how participants get through school. As an example, Lila explains that when she discovered her math learning disability in her junior year of university study she realized that “trying to skirt the issue or just skate away from it, and not paying attention to it wasn’t working.” A further hint regarding this compensation strategy is revealed in her early school experience when she confesses: “I would do as little work as possible and take the test and skate by.” Abby, who does not like to read, also feels her school let her slide by. She explains:

Teachers pretty much just gave you the answers so I don't think that was a very good place to notice I had a learning disability. I never really had to deal with it that much....It was pretty much you're super disabled or you have an obvious dyslexia or something like that. They're willing to help you if you're a genius, but if you're in-between you just get through.

Likewise, Colleen feels that by the time she got into high school she did what she had to do and just “skated” by. She had “totally lost interest in school because it was such a struggle.”

Working Hard

The theme of working hard as a compensation strategy is brought out many times

during this study. Britt thought “if I just worked hard enough it would be OK.” All of the study participants have worked very hard. However, when confronted by university rigor, and counsel to work harder, participants complied and often became more frustrated and confused than ever. Hard work was not enough.

Parental Intervention, or Hitting a Wall

Early compensation strategies were kept in place until parents discovered an explanation for their children's difficulty, or participants were forced to develop new strategies because usual compensations could not continue to help them attain their academic goals (they hit a wall).

Julia and Naomi, as elementary school students, had the help of their parents, as well as a supportive educational environment to support their new strategies and help them attain their academic goals (i.e. learning to read). Successful labeling of siblings will also give rise to this search. However, little success is experienced by parents without the support of schools (see Samantha and Christina for attempted parental support with no school backing). An exception is Colleen's courageous advocacy for her daughter.

For other participants, their early compensations remained in place until they hit the rigors of postsecondary educational standards when they faced math requirements or found themselves failing test, after test. Participants hit a barrier that could not be overcome without help. The series of events leading up to this insurmountable wall sent participants searching for explanations for their frustrations, and most of all, new compensation strategies that would allow them to continue on toward their academic

goals.

Searching for Answers that Make Sense

When participants felt the need to look for answers they were determined that their answers made sense. A good example of this is found in Abby's journey. Abby's quest for understanding was fostered by her inability to get the desired results from the amount of work she was putting in. Even though she understood the material being tested, she could not present that understanding when confronted with tests given in her classrooms. Her grades were falling. In her mind, there had to be an answer to her struggles. Immediate testing did not reveal the hoped for answer. Her diagnosis of SSS left her confused. SSS did not seem like a serious learning disability, one that could explain her difficulties. Certainly, she met the criteria for this diagnosis, but she found the overlays cumbersome and recommended remedies did not account for many of her struggles. Finally, Abby found an answer that did make sense. Testing of her central auditory system revealed that it was not handling all of the sensory information that she was receiving. She was being overloaded with sensory information. Her struggles began to make sense. This explained why she could understand material when she was in the quiet of her own room and would fall to pieces in the classroom with all of its distractions and noises. Abby began to apply this understanding to her early experiences at family gatherings and in school where she would get overwhelmed and become quiet and withdrawn. She was accused of being antisocial, or shy. Having a label that made sense to her was a welcomed relief and put many of the puzzling pieces of her life together. Additional research further described her experience and supported her new

understanding that she was “not completely crazy,” and that “it's OK to feel the way [she does].” Similarly, other participants were able to put to rest many of their learning frustrations by overlaying their new understanding onto their past and present experiences.

Acceptance

When participants have made sense of a label that they have chosen as a reasonable explanation, the next task is acceptance. Acceptance, however, is not always an easy proposition and many of the participants went through a difficult period of adjustment. This is particularly vivid in Colleen's description of her experience when she describes her encounter with anger and depression:

It's funny, because I struggled my whole life and I found ways to deal with my struggles, not knowing I had a problem... It was a relief to discover that I had a learning disability that would explain all the struggles. But following the relief, was extreme anger. And I was angry at everyone when I found out I had a learning disability. I mean, I was angry at the schools, I was angry at teachers, I was angry at my parents. I was angry with myself. And so there was a tremendous amount of anger when you discover that you have a disability... The first thing you say is, like someone who gets something that's life threatening, it's not fair. It's not fair. Well, life is not fair.

Colleen continues to explain her experience:

You have to work through the anger, because there's a heck of a lot of anger that you go through. And then you go through the depression, after you get through the anger. You get so depressed because I've got this disability now. How the heck am I going to deal with it? I don't even understand what it is. And then you get really depressed because you work so hard every day....OK, I've found out ways to get around it to this point, but, now, how do I deal with it?

Having the ability to integrate their understanding into their past and present experiences is a priority for participants in this study. This part of the dynamic allows

them to renew the vision of their lives into something that makes sense. However, acceptance calls on a need for more information. Participants insist on having the information available that will ease their efforts and pain. Once they have made sense of their struggles, acceptance requires the information that is necessary to allow them to develop new compensations strategies that will insure their ability to reach their academic goals. Most participants engage in a concentrated research effort that includes reading books, searching the Internet, and other personal efforts, as well as eliciting the help of trusted friends, family, and professionals. This aspect of the academic success dynamic allows participants an increased sense of personal control.

Activation of New Strategies

The next phase of the academic success dynamic requires activation and refinement of new compensations and personal strategies. This often leads to a renewed sense of possibility. When participants began to understand where to put their hard work, many found their futures expanding. Zoey, as an example, feels if it were not for her new understanding about her ADHD she "probably would still be in business, kind of, trying to get it done, muddling through it...like, put my head down and getting it done, and not have to look back at school ever again." With the understanding she has gained, she has a zest for her more appropriate career direction and the possibility of graduate school. She knows more about her struggles and has a better understanding of where she can fit in; where her strengths and love for the outdoors can support her ambitions of working in the family business. She still works hard; however, the work does not seem so hard. As she puts it, "you turn it and apply it in areas, instead of having it work against you."

Acceptance is an ongoing process and interacts with the activation phase. While participants accept a label that makes sense to them, additional acceptance of compensations and both academic and personal strategies may be needed. This is not always an easy prospect, as learning disability veteran Naomi tells us:

I guess the hardest thing for me, I just had to realize that I had to give myself time, that I wasn't like everybody else. I need to give myself the extra time to get stuff done and accomplished. And, if I do that, then I'm OK.

From Naomi's account we see how important it is to recognize and work with weaknesses as well as strengths. Julia continues this conversation:

I think that it's definitely important to realize your strengths, as well as your weaknesses. With the weaknesses...you are able to recognize them, then you can work on them, and make them better...At the same time, know your strengths so that you can focus on those and not be overwhelmed by the weaknesses. You have to find...a good balance.

Acceptance of compensation strategies offers a sense of personal control. An example of the flexibility and personal control that acceptance brings is demonstrated by Naomi and Julia. Naomi, by accepting an explanation for her academic frustrations (a diagnosis of dyslexia) found herself free to use this information as a platform from which to develop a new compensation strategy that allowed her to read as fast as her peers and thereby avoid their scrutiny, as well as support her expectations of being a good student. Likewise, Julia, revisits her compensation strategies when she enters college and decides to change them in an effort to redefine the image she projects to her peers so that she will not be thought of as learning disabled.

Participants' acceptance of their learning strengths and challenges, and activation of personal and academic strategies provide the needed control they seek and allows their

experiences to meet their expectations. Additionally, they not only are able to manipulate their image and move towards their academic goals; many participants are filled with new academic possibilities such as graduate school. They can see their academic futures opening in front of them. Several of the participants in this study experienced a sense that their life had taken a new turn and that, as Maggie tells us “things are more possible”

Following is a model of the Dynamics of Academic Success (see Figure 6) and a brief recap.

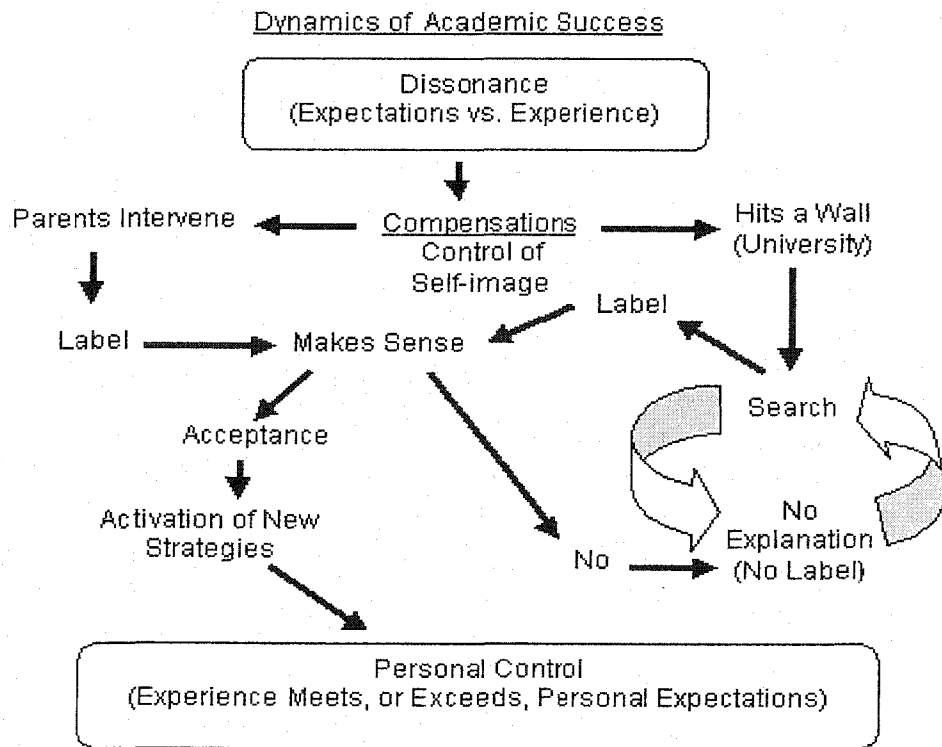


Figure 6 - Dynamics of Academic Success Model

Recap of the Dynamics of Academic Success Model

- 1). Discrepancy is felt between personal expectations and experience—This initial part of the process is experienced by girls with learning disabilities, but can be observed by parent/s. Recognition, and remediation of this discrepancy can be accomplished at different ages, often depending on involvement of parent/s and support of their educational environment. However, most study participants battled with this dissonance in silence, maintaining persistence in their academic efforts in the face of, often, extreme pressures and assaults to their self-image. Their learning differences were not discovered until they reached their university.
- 2). Control of self-image: Compensation strategies are developed (e.g. Julia pretends to read, Naomi teaches herself to read fast so they look like the other students, participants “melt into the background” by being quiet, and work extra hard, as well as skirt, skate, and slide)
- 3a). Search for answers by parents: Parents of girls with LDs, with the support of their educational system find potential answers. Successful labeling of siblings will also give rise to this search.

Or
- 3b). The *Hitting a Wall* event precipitates a search for answers by participants: The majority of study participants had to reach a point where it was impossible to continue the way they were and still reach their academic goals. For most of the participants in this study it was the rigors of a university setting that sent them looking for answers.
- 4). Labeling Event: Possible answers are identified

- 5). Making Sense—Integrates new reasoning. Logic behind possible answer/s is overlaid on past and present experiences. If reasoning fits, it is accepted, if not, search for answers is revisited and a new labeling event considered.
- 6). Acceptance: May go through a period of adjustment. Self-image becomes more cohesive. Reasoning fits—more control over experience.
 - (a) Individual strategies and compensations are developed that fit with renewed self-image.
- 7). Activation: New compensations and personal strategies are used and refined. Experience meets, or exceeds, personal expectations.

Summary

In spite of numerous roadblocks in different aspects of their lives, these participants have persevered and are determined to reach their goal of obtaining their college degrees. Participants demonstrate self-determination and dedication to meeting their own expectations.

To begin, participants felt a dissonance in their academic experiences. Their experiences did not align with their expectations. This dissonance encouraged participants to begin developing compensation strategies to mediate their academic struggles. Even the very young students found dissonance in their experiences. Other study participants went through the feeling that something was not right also. They recognized they needed answers to their struggles if they were going to complete their academic goals. While not always by their own hands, participants were able to find

answers that made sense to them. Most study participants had to ferret out answers to their puzzling experiences through their own persistent efforts. However, even participants who were supported by parental interventions, while being offered a possible solution, had to painstakingly make sense of the new possibilities. The women in this study integrated their new understanding by overlaying it onto their past and present struggles. Only then did they accept their label. The new information had to make sense of their learning struggles in order for them to begin to take control of their circumstances. Once their academic (and often personal) experiences made sense, and preliminary acceptance had been attained, strategies and accommodations were developed to support their academic goals. Armed with understanding, participants were able to have more control over their experiences. Study participants met, and in many cases, exceeded their own academic expectations.

CHAPTER VI

Final Thoughts

Spurred on by welfare reform, a changing workforce, and the need for lifelong learning, this study was initiated to understand the underlying dynamics of the academic success of women with learning disabilities. It was felt that by understanding their paths to academic success, supports could be developed for other girls and women who are frustrated in their academic pursuits because of their learning differences. Additionally, it was anticipated that a better understanding of the needs of girls and women with learning disabilities could be gained to guide teaching staff, support staff, educational institutions (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary), and human service providers. This work has gone far toward satisfying these objectives.

This study has explored the journeys of 13 women with learning disabilities who have attained the success of at least junior standing (60 credit hours) at a four-year public research university. Their journey stories reveal the compensations strategies that mediate their learning frustrations as well as their paths to making sense of their academic struggles. These paths also show the difficulty that can accompany acceptance of their learning disability label and the need to be provided information that will allow them to make up their own minds about a direction to travel. We also see that developing and refining compensations is an ongoing process as they actively engage in their use.

While participant journey stories reveal these underlying dynamics of their academic success, it is also evident that these women are self-determined and have fought for control of their academic experiences. In this respect, their self-determination has

provided persistence when support was not available. This causes one to stop and ponder the priorities that have been set for children with learning disabilities, as well as all students. While, remedial programs have helped, programs that will support the use of, as well as teach self-determination skills are necessary if we are to consider the lessons of this study. These women have faced almost insurmountable obstacles to their goal of achieving a college education. They have been called stupid and have been treated as though their intelligence did not matter. They endure gender bias, a lack of support from other women, and a lack of understanding from faculty. They have been passed by and passed over, and yet, they have accepted their struggles and persevered. They have persevered until they could make sense of their experiences. Participants in this study have faced numerous roadblocks, both personal and academic, and have continued on toward their goals. They know this road and their advice should be heeded.

Implications for Practice

The women of this study have spoken clearly. The need for more information is a common theme in participant accounts. These women need information and expect it to be supplied. They want services to be more visible, and information about their specific learning challenge/s to be readily available. They want to have the information available to them that will allow them to learn how to respond and integrate an adjusted understanding of themselves. This includes being able to locate available resources, and being given, and directed to, reliable information about their learning challenges. Not only do they want to have access to the information themselves, they want professors, graduate assistants, staff, and tutors to understand about learning disabilities, as well as

differences in learning for all students. As Christina explains, she finds it hard to understand how teachers could not know about learning disabilities when you “can't work in the food industry and not know what a tomato is.” Christina’s practical thinking brings up a valid point that Naomi suggests when she refuses to “hassle” with teachers over testing accommodations. The question might be asked: Why is it necessary for students to know about accommodations, and professors are not expected to know about accommodations and learning differences? This imbalance leads to professors being aggressively informed of student’s rights (see Freya’s, and Christina’s accounts), or, in the very least, pleaded with, to allow women with learning disabilities the opportunity to show that they know the information they are being held accountable for. As this study shows, students may need different vehicles to prove their understanding. Some professors understand this, as illustrated by the professors that have taken matters into their own hands and have explored possibilities with students such as an oral examination. Many do not.

Suggestions for Colleges and Universities

Following are suggestions for colleges and universities:

- 1). Train graduate assistants to be more sensitive to the needs of women with learning disabilities and their process of *Making Sense*.
- 2). Advise university helping professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, graduate students, staff) to be more sensitive to the needs of women with learning disabilities and the possibility that they will need extra support as they begin to *Make Sense* of what their diagnosis will mean to them.

- 3). Provide educators with an understanding of learning disabilities and learning disorders as well as possible accommodations and means of receiving accommodations.
- 4). Encourage appropriate classes to include a basic understanding of learning disabilities in their curriculum (e.g. psychology, sociology, human development, social work, etc.).
- 5). Make public, accounts of educators who have gone the extra mile in helping their students with learning disabilities so there are examples to draw from.
- 6). Engage in research with professors who have gone the extra mile, and widely disseminate their stories and recommendations so that educators will have examples to draw from.
- 7). When providing tutors, make sure they understand that there is variability in learning styles, and provide them with a general understanding of different learning disabilities.
- 8). Follow-up with student evaluations so that tutors can be provided with important feedback and training, if necessary.

Addressing Differing Learning Needs

In addition to suggestions for changes to postsecondary educational institutions, participant accounts show that addressing differing learning needs must be accomplished early on. A learning approach on the horizon that may prove useful is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (for in depth information on UDL see <http://www.cast.org/>). Taking a page from the Universal Design (UD) movement that promoted the incorporation of

access into architecture, UDL differentiates accesses to information from the process of learning.

There were two factors that contributed to the birth of Universal Design, the usefulness of these alternatives for the population as a whole, and the problems caused by retrofitting buildings (Rose, 2000). Accommodations created by UD, such as curb cuts, proved useful for the population as a whole. People with strollers or shopping carts, luggage, bicycles, and skateboards, all benefited from alternatives to stairs and curbs. In terms of retrofitting buildings, however, costs were high, and often, the end product was less than desirable. It was far more constructive to begin with the end in mind -- easy use by all. Universal Design for Learning recognizes that learning materials such as books are analogous to stairs. For many learners, printed books provide access to the knowledge of our culture, but for students with learning disabilities, books can present insurmountable barriers. Print presents information one way for everyone, yet students' have varied learning needs and styles that can benefit from having access to alternative formats (Goldman & Gardner, 1997; Rose, 2000). While assistive technologies exist that improve access to the content of books, as the participants in this study demonstrate, technology is often like a retrofitted building, expensive and awkward to use.

Digitizing tools, multimedia, and hypermedia make it possible to provide alternatives to books that allow access, just like a curb cut, to more learners.

Microsoft.com (http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/experiences/glossary_h-n.asp)

describes hypermedia as:

The combination of text, video, graphic images, sound, hyperlinks, and other elements in the form typical of Web documents. Essentially, hypermedia is the modern extension of hypertext, the hyperlinked, text-based documents of the original Internet. Hypermedia attempts to offer a working and learning environment that parallels human thinking—that is, one in which the user can make associations between topics, rather than move sequentially from one to the next, as in an alphabetic list. For example, a hypermedia presentation on navigation might include links to astronomy, bird migration, geography, satellites, and radar.

We can see, with advancements in technology, it has become possible to explore electronic alternatives to printed books with "built in" means of access that address varied learners' needs (e.g. students with learning, physical, or sensory disabilities) as well as enrich learning for all students. These electronic books provide options for students with disabilities and offer useful features for all learners (Rose, 2000). Learning within the understanding of UDL, then, is not merely that children have access to materials and information, but that children have access to the learning itself. They experience changes in their knowledge and skills and grow in their capacity to learn more (Rose, 2000).

The essence of UDL is flexibility and the inclusion of alternatives to adapt to the myriad variations in learners' needs, styles, and preferences. UDL could be considered a toolbox filled with many different kinds of neural learning tools; each devoted to a specific purpose (Rose, 2000). This method of learning achieves the goal of meeting individual needs by providing alternatives, not by seeking a single solution for all. UDL offers flexibility by providing adaptable software. Rose offers as an example:

History texts that are provided in standard print formats are inaccessible to students who are blind and present barriers to students who are dyslexic or for whom English is a second language. The same material in universal-designed electronic format can offer options for different learners. It can be read aloud by a computer or screen reader, printed on a Braille printer,

offered in spoken or written translation, presented with highlighted main points and organizational supports and include hyperlinks to definitions, elaboration, and related media for more in-depth understanding. These options, in some cases critical for students with disabilities also offer new learning opportunities for students with a range of learning needs, interests, and abilities (p. 4).

While these educational products are offered mainly for children in lower grades, considering its present popularity, future higher education students may expect to have many of the same options. Indeed, we can see that the interest is there as increased use of the World Wide Web by learners of all ages indicates. This use provides many of the same advantages of UDL in a less structured way.

Self-determination Skills

Universal Design for Learning provides opportunities for all students to learn and use self-determination skills that allow them to become self-directed learners. These opportunities must be incorporated into curricula early in a child's education. Journey stories are filled with examples of participant self-determination. This characteristic has been requisite to enable participants to make the choices that allow them to gain and maintain control of their academic success. Many of the participants in this study have needed to make decisions in their best interests, in spite of formidable pressures. They had to take control and be the experts in their own lives. In this regard, instruction that promotes self-determination is an imperative for girls and women with learning disabilities. They need to understand choices and their ability to engage in choice-making from an early age (see Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000; and Reiff et

al., 1997, for ideas on incorporating strategies for teaching choice-making and self-determination skills in the classroom).

Parental Support for Self-determination

Parents should be provided information regarding self-determination and should be enlisted to work with their children at their earliest convenience. The necessity of these skills has begun to be widely recognized. In a discussion paper for the National Capacity Building Institute, held in Portland, Oregon, on July of 2001, Izzo and Lamb (2001) reported that stakeholders (professionals, parents, and consumers) found that the need to support student empowerment, self-advocacy, and self-determination to be dominant topics. In their determination, students need to be empowered to act as causal agents towards their own future. They need to be self-determined and have an internal locus of control. (Agran, 1997; Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, Sands, & Doll, 1997; Wehmeyer, 1996).

Social Service Providers

As research indicates (Giovengo, 1995; Giovengo, Young, & Moore, 1997; Giovengo, Moore, & Young, 1998; Health & Human Services, 1992; Moore & Snyder, 1994; Young, Gerber, Reder, Cooper, 1996; Young, Kim, Gerber, 1999; U. S. Dept. of Labor, 1991), women experiencing poverty may have learning disabilities that are not discovered in their early school years. This study emphasizes the need for women to understand and accept their learning difference in order to meet, or exceed, their personal academic goals, as well as future work expectations. Understanding their learning differences helped the women in this study to integrate a new description of themselves

and identify their learning needs. Participants who were not identified in their early years, apart from feeling "stupid" and out of step, eventually hit a wall that could not be hurdled. It is likely that women who are venturing into the workforce will also hit a wall as they attempt to meet workforce, and lifelong learning demands, without the necessary understanding of their learning needs. In a perfect world, girls would receive training in self-determination skills and would have the ability to approach learning as an individual adventure. Their learning differences would be brought to light, as a matter of course, along with all of their peers. All young learners would have an opportunity to explore their individual learning needs, as well as meet course requirements in a way that satisfies educational goals. Absent this opportunity, social service providers should be aware of compensation strategies that can mask learning disabilities and learn to seek these women out. Information should be provided for women with suspected learning disabilities so that they can begin to make sense of their past and present academic and personal frustrations. Additionally, they should be offered mentors and exposure to other women with learning disabilities so that they can have models that will help them understand their unique abilities and begin to heal their pain.

Developing Compensation Skills

The final point to be made concerning this study is the development of compensation skills. Compensation strategies have been important for women in this study. In this regard, girls, and women with learning disabilities should be offered mentoring and instruction in developing effective compensation skills. Raskind et al. (1998) agree with this position. In addition, researchers (Cowen, 1986, 1988; Gerber,

Schnieders, Paradise, Reiff, Ginsberg, & Popp, 1990; Hammill, 1990; Rogan & Hartman, 1990; Spreen, 1988) have shown that learning disabilities continue over the lifespan.

Participants will be compensating for their learning differences all their lives. With this information in mind, more attention should be paid to development of effective compensation strategies that will use strengths to circumvent frustrations, rather than just focusing on deficits and their remediation.

Further Research

The rich descriptions of participants' journeys have suggested many avenues for further research. As mentioned earlier, research concerning successful interventions and supports offered by professors should be a priority. It is important to understand how professors are supporting women, and all students, with learning disabilities.

Additionally, further study that focuses on coping strategies of women with learning disabilities at different stages in their lives, as well as the coping strategies of boys and men with learning disabilities could offer a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Finally, research on the teaching of self-determination skills, as well as the use of self-determination skills by children and adults at various stages in their lives should be continued.

References

- AAUW Educational Foundation (1992). How schools shortchange girls: Executive summary. Retrieved August 1, 2002 from <http://www.aauw.org/2000/hssg.pdf>
- AAUW Educational Foundation (1998). Where the schools still shortchange our children: Executive summary. Retrieved August 1, 2002 from <http://www.aauw.org/research/GGES.pdf>
- Agran, M. (1997). *Student-directed learning: A handbook on self-management*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition* (2000). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)*, PL 101-336. (July 26, 1990). Title 42, U.S.C. 1201 et seq.: U.S. Statutes at Large, 104, 327-378.
- Anderson, W. C. (1994). Adult literacy in the LDs. In P. J. Gerber, & H. B. Reiff (Eds.), *Learning disabilities in adulthood: Persisting problems and evolving issues* (pp. 121-129). Stoneham, MA: Andover Medical Publishers.
- Alster, E. (1997). The effects of extended time on algebra tests scores for college students with and without learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 10, 2, 222-227.
- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Aune, B., & Kroger, S. A. (1997). Career development of college students with disabilities: An interactional approach to defining the issues. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38, 4, 344-356.
- Baxter-Magolda, M.B. (1992). *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beilke, J. W., & Yssl, N. (1999). The chilly climate for students with disabilities in higher education. *College Student Journal*, 33, 3, 364.
- Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., and Tarule, J.M. (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books.

- Benz, M., Doren, B., & Yovanoff, P. (1998). Crossing the great divide: Predicting productive engagement for young women with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 21,1, 3-16.
- Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities: findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Exceptional Children*, 62, 5, 399-413. Retrieved November 8, 2001 from Expanded Academic ASAP <http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com>.
- Blacqua, T. C., Rapaport, R. J., & Kruse, B. G. (1996). *Perceptions of classroom accommodations among college students with disabilities*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400 640.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Taylor, S. J. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A phenomenological approach to the social sciences*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Brinkerhoff, L. C., McGuire, J. M., & Shaw, S. F. (2002). *Postsecondary education and transition for students with learning disabilities (2nd. Ed.)*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED
- Brinkerhoff, L.C. (1996). LD Support Services at Boston University: A personal perspective. *Postsecondary Disability Network News*, 27. Retrieved from LD Resources on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ldresources.com/education/buld.html>.
- Brown, D. S., & Gerber, P. J. (1994). Employing people with learning disabilities. In P. J. Gerber & H. B. Reiff (Eds.), *Learning disabilities in adulthood: Persisting problems and evolving issues* (pp. 194-203). Stoneham, MA: Andover Medical Publishers.
- Buchanan, M., & Wolf, J. S. (1986). A comprehensive study of learning disabled adults. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 19, 1. 34-38.
- Burkauer, R. V., Daly, M. C., & Houtenville, A. J. (2001). How working-age people with disabilities fared over the 1990s business cycle. In P. Budetti, R. V. Burkhauser, J. Gregory, and A. Hunt (Eds.). *Ensuring Health and Income Security for an Aging Workforce*. (pp. 291-346). Retrieved on March 2, 2002 from http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/extension/files/download/How_Working_Age_People.pdf.
- Clayton, M. (2001). A "gender effect" in college learning? *Christian Science Monitor*, 94, 3, p. 14, Op, 2c.

- Covey, S. R. (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Cowen, S. E. (1986). *Characteristics of coping strategies of learning disabled university students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Illinois University, Illinois.
- Cowen, S. E. (1988). Coping strategies of university students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 21, 3, 161-165.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dalke, C. (1991). *Support programs in higher education for students with disabilities: Access for all*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen.
- Deshler, D. D., Ellis, E. S., & Lenz, B. K. (1996). *Teaching adolescents with mild disabilities*. Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company.
- Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975*, PL 94-142, 20 U.S. C. Sec 1400 et seq. Retrieved October 7, 2000, from Lexis-Nexis at <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>.
- Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women*. New York: Crown, 1991, pp. 259-256.
- Fichten, C.S., Barile, M., Asuncion, J.V. (1999). *Learning technologies: Adaptech project: Students with disabilities in postsecondary education*. Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Dawson College, Office of Learning Technologies Human Resources Development Canada.
- Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1996). Promoting self-determination in school reform, individualized planning, and curriculum efforts. In D. Sands, & M. Wehmeyer, M. L. (Eds.), *Self-Determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities*. (pp. 3-16). Baltimore: Paul. H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Flowers, L., Osterlind, S. J., Pascarella, E. T. & Pierson, C. T. (2001). How much do students learn in college? Cross-sectional estimates using the College BASE. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 72, 5, pp. 584-612. Retrieved on September 26, 2002 from Library.northernlight.com.

- Frazier, N. & Sadker, M. (1973). *Sexism in school and society*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Gajar, A. (1998). Postsecondary education. In F. R. Rusch and J. G. Chadsey (Eds.) *Beyond high school: Transition from school to work* (pp. 383-405). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Gajar, A. H., & Smith, J. O. (1996). Service delivery models effective with adults with learning disabilities. In S. Hoy & N. Gregg (Eds.), *Adults with learning disabilities* (pp. 298-328). New York : Guilford Press
- Garfield, C. (1986). *Peak performers*. New York: Avon Books
- Gartin, B., Rumrill, P., & Serebreni, R. (1996). The higher education transition model: Guidelines for facilitating college transition among college-bound student with Disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 28, 5, 30-33.
- Gerber, P. J., Ginsberg, R. J., & Reiff, H. B. (1992). Identifying alterable patterns in employment success in highly successful adults with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 25, 475-487.
- Gerber, P. J., & Reiff, H. B. (1994). *Learning disabilities and adulthood*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Gerber, P. J., Reiff, H. B., & Ginsberg, R. J. (1997). Reframing the learning disabilities experience. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29, 1, 98-101.
- Gerber, P. J., Schnieders, C. A., Paradise, L. V. Reiff, H. B., Ginsberg, R. J., & Popp, P. A. (1990). Persisting problems of adults with learning disabilities. Self-reported comparisons from their school-age and adult Years. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23, 9, 570-573.
- Getzel, E. E., Stodden, R. A., & Briel, L. W. (2001). Pursuing postsecondary education opportunities for individual with disabilities. In P. Wehman (Ed.), *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*, (3rd Ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Gilson, S. F. (1996). Students with disabilities: An increasing voice and presence on college campuses. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 6, 263-272.

- Giovengo, M. (1995). *Learning disabilities in homeless and runaway adolescents. Preliminary Report*. Youth Care.
- Giovengo, M., Young, G., & Moore, E. J. (1997). *Washington State Division of Employment and Social Services Learning Disabilities Initiative, Final Report, Phase I*. State of Washington, Department of Social and Health Services.
- Giovengo, M., Moore, E., & Young, G. (1998). Screening and assessment results of the learning disabilities initiative: Identification of individuals with learning disabilities in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program. In S. A. Vogel & S. Reder (Eds.), *Learning disabilities, literacy, and adult education* (pp. 179-194). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Given, L. (2000). Envisioning the mature re-entry student: constructing new identities in the traditional university setting. *The modern practice of adult education: a postmodern critique*, 69/70, 1, 79-93.
- Goldman, J. & Gardner, H. (1997). Multiple paths to educational effectiveness. In D. K. Lipsky and A. Gardner (Eds). *Inclusion and school reform: Transforming America's classrooms*, (pp. 353-374). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Goldstein, S. (1997). Children with learning disabilities grown up. In S. Goldstein, *Managing attention and learning disorders in late adolescence and adulthood: A guide to practitioners*. New York, NY: John-Wiley & Sons.
- Greenbaum, B., Graham, S. & Scales, W. (1995). Adults with learning disabilities: educational and social experiences during college. *Exceptional Children*, 61, 5, 460-472.
- Gregory, M. K., (1977). Sex bias in school referrals. *Journal of School Psychology*, 15, 1, 5-8.
- Gukenberger v. Boston University, 974 F. Supp. 106 (D. Mass. 1997).
- Hall, R., & Sandler, B. (1982). *The classroom climate: A chilly one for women?* Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women. Association of American Colleges.
- Hallowell, E. M. & Ratey, J. J. (1994). *Driven to distraction: Recognizing and coping with attention deficit disorder from childhood through adulthood*. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Hammil, D. D. (1990). On defining learning disabilities: An emerging consensus. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 23*, 74-84.
- Haring, K. A., & Lovett, D. L. (1990). A follow-up study of special education graduates. *The Journal of Special Education, 23*, 463-477.
- Hasazi, S., Gordon, L. R., & Roe, C. A. (1985). Factors associated with the employment status of handicapped youth exiting high school from 1979-1983. *Exceptional Children, 51*, 455-469.
- HEATH (1999). *Update on college freshmen with disabilities*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Henderson, C. (1999). *College freshmen with disabilities: A biennial statistical profile*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, HEATH Resource Center.
- Henderson, C. (2001). *2001 college freshman with disabilities: A biennial statistical report*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, HEATH Resource Center.
- Heyward, Lawton & Associates (1995). Faculty members and service providers: The unhappy alliance. *Disability Accommodation Digest, 4*, 3 & 4, 1-4.
- Hill, J. H. (1984). *Unrecognized learning disabilities in adulthood: Implications for adult education*. Minneapolis, MN. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Mental Deficiency. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 253 983.
- Hitchings, W. E., Luzzo, D. A., Retish, P., Horvath, M., & Ristow, R. S. (1998). Identifying the career development needs of college students with disabilities. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*, 1, 23-29.
- Holland, D., & Eisenhart, M. (1990). *Educated in romance: Women, achievement, and college culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Horn, L. (1998). *Stopouts or stayouts? Undergraduates who leave college in their first year* (NCES 1999-087). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved on April 13, 2001 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999087.pdf>
- Horn, L. & Berktold, J. (1999). Students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A

profile of preparation, participation and outcomes. *Education Statistics Quarterly: Postsecondary Education*. Retrieved on November 1, 2001 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/quarterlyfall99/4-Post/4-esq13-a.html>.

Houtenville, Andrew. (2000). *Economics of disability research report #1: Estimates of the prevalence of disability in the United States by state, 1981 through 1999*. Ithaca, NY: Research and Rehabilitation Training Center for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Cornell University.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), PL 101-476. (October 30, 1990). Title 20, U.S.C. 1400 et seq: U.S. Statutes at Large, 104, 1103-1151. Retrieved December 28, 2000, from Lexis-Nexis database on the World Wide Web: <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, PL 102-119, Title 20, U.S.C. 1400 et seq: Retrieved October 28, 2000, from Lexis-Nexis database at <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>.

Izzo, M., & Lamb, P. (2001). Discussion paper. The development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills: Essential keys for students with disabilities. Presented at the National Capacity Building Institute, 2001, sponsored by National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports and the National Center of Secondary Education and Transition. July, 2001. Portland, Oregon.

Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (1997). *Kansas Learning Disability Initiative*. Unpublished program document. Topeka, KS.

Kansas Department of Social And Rehabilitation Services (1998). *Learning Disability Initiative: Briefing paper. Preliminary results*. Unpublished program document. Topeka, KS.

Katz, J. (1998, April 17). Learning disabilities and true handicaps. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. B10.

Kaufman, A. S. (1994). *Intelligent testing with the WISC-III*. New York: Wiley

Kavale, K., & Reese, J. (1992). The character of learning disabilities: An Iowa profile. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 15, 74-94.

Kranstover, L. L., Thurlow, M., & Bruininks, R. H. (1989). Special education graduates vs. non-graduates: A longitudinal study of outcomes. *Career Development of Exceptional Individuals*, 12, 2, 153-166.

- Krupnick, C. (1992). Unlearning gender roles. In K. Winston & Bane, M. J. (Eds). *Gender and public policy: Cases and comments*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lehmann, J. P, Davies, T. G. & Laurin, K. M. (2000). Listening to student voices about postsecondary education. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32, 5, 60-65. Retrieved from WilsonSelect on 11/08/01 at FirstSearch@oclc.org
- Leinhardt, G., Seeward, A., & Zigmond, M. 1982. Sex and race differences in learning disabilities classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 74, 835-843.
- Levine, P. (1993). *Gender difference in long-term postschool outcomes for youth with mild mental retardation, learning disabilities and no disabilities: Myth or reality?* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle.
- Levine, M. D. (1989). Learning disabilities at twenty-five. The early adulthood of a maturing concept. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 1, 1, 1-11.
- Levine, A., & Cureton, J. (1998). *When hope and fear collide: A portrait of today's college student*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Levine, P. & Edgar, E. (1994). An analysis by gender of long-term postschool outcomes for youth with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 61,3, 282-200.
- Levine, P. & Nourse, S. W. (1998). What follow-up studies say about postschool life for young men and women with learning disabilities: A critical look at the literature. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31, 3, 212-233.
- Lewis, L., Farris, E., & Westat (1999). *An institutional perspective of students with disabilities in postsecondary education*. (NCES 1999-046). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved on April 13, 2001 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999046.pdf>
- Marty, M. A. (1997). *Daily life in the United States, 1960-1990: Decades of Discord*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Mather, N., & Healey, W. C. (1990). Depositing aptitude-achievement discrepancy as the imperial criterion for learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 1, 40-48.
- McIntyre, L. L. (1988). Teacher gender: A predictor of special education referral?

Journal of Learning Disabilities, 21, 382-383.

- Mellard, C. F. (1990). The eligibility process: Identifying students with learning disabilities in California's community colleges. *Learning Disabilities Focus*, 5, 75-91.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Merriam, S. B. & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide. Second Edition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers.
- Moore, K. A., & Snyder, N. O. (1994). Cognitive attainment among firstborn children of adolescent mothers. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 612-624.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Naiden, N. (1976). Ratio of boys to girls among disabled readers. *The Reading Teacher*, 92, 432-442.
- National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1994). *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities: position papers and statements*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- National Science Foundation, (2000). *Women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in science and engineering*. Arlington, VA (NSF 00-327).
- NCSPEs (2000a) *National survey of educational support provision to students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A technical report*. National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPEs), Honolulu, Hawaii, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- NCSPEs (2000b) *National focus group project: perspectives of students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A technical report*. National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPEs), Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Nelson, J. R., Dodd, J. M., & Smith, D. J. (1990). Faculty willingness to accommodate students with learning disabilities: A comparison among academic divisions. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23, 3, 185-189.
- NICHCY (1990/October). Having a daughter with a disability: Is it different for girls?

NICHY News Digest, 14.

- Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insight from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Patton, J. R., & Polloway, E. A. (1996). Adults with learning disabilities: An emerging area of professional interest and public attention. In J. R. Patton & E. A. Polloway (Eds.), *Learning disabilities: The challenge of adulthood* (pp. 1-100. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd Ed.). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*, P.L.104-193, 110 Stat. 2105.
- Peters, T. J., & Austin, N. (1985). *A passion for excellence*. New York: Warner Books
- Peters, T. J., Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best-run companies*. New York: Warner Books.
- Raskind, M. H., Goldberg, R. L., Higgins, & Herman, K. L. (1999). Patterns of change and predictors of success in individuals with learning disabilities: Results from a twenty-year longitudinal study. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 14, 1, 35-49.
- Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, PL 93-112 (September 25, 1973). Title 29, U.S.C. 701 et seq: U.S.C. Statutes at Large, 87, 355-394. Retrieved December 28, 2000, from Lexis-Nexis database at <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>
- Reiff, H. B., Gerber, P. J., & Ginsberg, R. (1997) *Exceeding expectations: Successful adults with learning disabilities*. Austin, TX: Pro-ed.
- Reiff, H. B., Gerber, P. J., & Ginsberg, R. (1993). Definitions of learning disabilities from adults with learning disabilities: The insider's perspective. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 16, 114-125.
- Reis, S., Neu, T., & McGuire, J. (1997). Case studies of high-ability students with learning disabilities who have achieved. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 463-479.
- Rodriguez, E., & Ruppert, S. (1996). *Postsecondary education and the new workforce*. Report of the U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

- Rogan, L. L., & Hartman, L. D. (1990). Adult outcome of learning disabled students ten years after initial follow-up. *Learning Disabilities Focus*, 5, 2, 91-102.
- Rojewski, J. W. (1996). Educational and occupational aspirations of high school seniors with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 62, 5, 463-477.
- Rojewski, J. W. (1999). Occupational and educational aspirations and attainment of young adults with and without LD 2 years after high school completion. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 6, 533-524.
- Rose, D. H. (2000). Universal design for learning. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 15, 1, 67-70.
- Sadker, D. & Sadker, M. (1986). Sexism in the classroom: From grade school to graduate school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67, 1, 512-516.
- Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness: How our schools cheat girls*. New York: Touchstone.
- School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994*, PL 103-239, 20 U.S.C. 6101 et seq.
Retrieved December 28, 2000, from Lexis-Nexis database at <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>.
- Scott, S. S. (2002). The dynamic process of providing accommodations. In L. C. Brinckerhoff, J. M. McGuire, & S. F. Shaw (Eds.) *Postsecondary education and transition for students with learning disabilities* (pp. 295-332). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Seiler, N. (2001). *TANF & teen parents with disabilities*. Center for Law and Social Policy. Washington DC. Retrieved June 20, 2002 from the Center for Law and Social Policy Web site: www.clasp.org.
- Seymore, E. (1995). The loss of women from science, mathematics, and engineering undergraduate majors: An exploratory account. *Science Education*, 79, 437-473.
- Shaywitz, S. E. (1996). Dyslexia. *Scientific American*, 275, 5, 98-104.
- Shaywitz, S., & Shaywitz, B. C. (1985). Girls with attention deficit disorder: A silent minority? A report on behavioral and cognitive characteristics. *Pediatrics*, 76, 5, 801-809.
- Shaywitz, S. E., Shaywitz, B. A., Fletcher, J. M., & Escobar, M. D. (1990). Prevalence of

- reading disabilities in boys and girls: Results of the Connecticut longitudinal study. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 264, 998-1002.
- Shin, R. R., Tindal, G. A., & Spira, D. A. (1987). Special education referral as an index of teacher tolerance: Are teachers imperfect tests? *Exceptional Children*, 54, 32-40.
- Smith T. E. C., Dowdy, C. A., Polloway, E. A., & Blalock, G. E. (1997). *Children and adults with learning disabilities*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Spren, O. (1988). Prognosis of learning disability. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 836-842.
- Steward, J. (2000). *Did job security decline in the 1990s?* U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. Working paper 330.
- Stodden, R. A. (2000). The study of postsecondary educational supports: A formative approach to an emerging area of study. Published in *The National Review Forum Briefing Materials*. Center for the Study of Postsecondary Education Support, Rehabilitation Research Training Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Stodden, R. A., & Dowrick, P. W. (2000). The Present and Future of Postsecondary Education for Adults with Disabilities. *Impact*, 13, 1, 4-5. Retrieved on April, 2, 2002 at: [Http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/published/index.htm](http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/published/index.htm).
- Stodden, R. A., Dowrick, P. W., Kim-Rupnow, S., & Kelly, D. (2001). *The study of postsecondary educational supports: A formative approach to an emerging area of study*. Center for the Study of Postsecondary Education Support, Rehabilitation Research Training Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Swanson, H. L. (1993). Learning disabilities from the perspective of cognitive psychology. In G. R. Lyon, D. B. Gray, J. F. Kavanaugh, & N. A. Krasnegor (Eds.) *Better understanding learning disabilities: New views from research and their implications for education and public policies* (pp. 199-229). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Szymanski, E. M., & Trueba, H. T. (1994). Castification of people with disabilities: Potential disempowering aspects of classification in disability services. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 12-20.
- Trupin, L., Sebesta, D., Yelin, E., & LaPlante, M. (1997). *Trends in labor force participation among persons with disabilities, 1983-1994*. San Francisco, Ca: University of California, Disability Statistics Rehabilitation Research and

- Training Center, the Institute for Health and Aging. [Http://dsu.ucsf.edu](http://dsu.ucsf.edu)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General. (1992). *Functional impairments of AFDC clients*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services.
- U. S. Department of Education. (1998). *Twentieth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the individuals with Disabilities Education ACT*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.
- U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (1991). *The learning disabled in employment and training program. Report Series 91-E*. Washington, DC: The United States Department of Labor
- Virginia Commonwealth University (1993). *Results from the Board for Rights of Virginians with Disabilities' Survey of the Needs, Concerns, and Satisfaction with Services of Virginia's Post-secondary Students with Disabilities*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth university, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment
- Vogel, S. A. (1990). Gender differences in intelligence, language, visual-motor abilities, and academic achievement in students with learning disabilities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23, 44-52.
- Vogel, S. A. (1998). Adults with learning disabilities. In S. A. Vogel & S Reder (Eds.), *Learning disabilities, literacy, and adult education* (pp. 5-28). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Vogel, S. A., & Adelman, P. B. (1992). The success of college students with learning disabilities: Factors related to educational attainment. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 25, 430-431.
- Vogel, S. A., Hruba, P. J., & Adelman, P. B. (1993). Educational and Psychological factors in successful and unsuccessful college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 8, 1, 35-43.
- Wagner, M. (1992). *Being female--A secondary disability? Gender differences in the transition experience of young people with disabilities*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Ward, M. J. (1996). Coming of age in the age of self-determination: A Historical and

- personal perspective. In D. Sands, & M. Wehmeyer, M. L. (Eds.), *Self-Determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities*. (pp. 3-16). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Warren, E. M. (1998). *Impact of an initial learning disabilities diagnosis in college on an adult's sense of self as a lifelong learner*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1996) Self-determination as an educational outcome: Why is it important to children, youth, and adults. In D. Sands, & M. Wehmeyer, M. L. (Eds.), *Self-determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities*. (pp. 3-16). Baltimore: Paul. H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1998). Student involvement in transition-planning and transition-program implementation. In F. R. Rusch and J. G. Chadsey (Eds.) *Beyond high school: Transition from school to work*, (pp. 206-233). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Agran, M., Mithaug, D. E., & Martin, J. E. (2000). Promoting causal agency: The self-determined learning model of instruction. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 4, 439-453.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Sands, D. J., & Doll, B. (1997). The development of self-determination and implications for educational interventions with students with disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 44, 305-328.
- Werner, E. E. (1993). Risk and resilience in individuals with learning disabilities: Lessons learned from the Kauai longitudinal study. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 8, 28-34.
- Weingand, D. (1990). The invisible client: Meeting the needs of persons with learning disabilities. *Reference Librarian*, 31. 77-88.
- Whelley, T. (2001). Current challenges to successfully supporting and/or accommodating the desires and needs of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education to employment. Discussion Paper for the National Capacity Building Institute – Preparing youth with Disabilities for Successful Participation in Postsecondary Education & Employment, Portland, OR. July 22 – 23, 2001.
- Wolinsky, S., & Whelan, A. (1999) Federal law and the accommodation of students with

- LD. The lawyers' look at the BU decision. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 32, 4, 286-299.
- Wood, J. T. (1999). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture* (3rd ed.). Balmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Yesseldyke, J., Thurlow, M., Graden, J., Wesson, K., Algozzine, B., & Deno, S. (1983). Generalizations from five years of research on assessment and decision making: The University of Minnesota Institute. *Exceptional Children Quarterly*, 4, 1, 75-83.
- Young, G., Gerber, P. J., Reder, S., & Cooper, R. (1996). *Learning disabilities and its impact on poverty and adult literacy programs*. Literacy Online - Proceedings of the 1996 World Conference on Literacy. Retrieved August, 19, 2002 from <http://iliw.literacy.upenn.edu/products/ili/webdocs/ilproc/ilprocgy.htm>
- Young, G., Kim, H. J. & Gerber, P. J. (1999). Gender bias and learning disabilities: School age and long term consequences for females. *Learning Disabilities*, 9, 3, 107-114.
- Yelin, E. H., Katz, P. P. (1994, Oct.). Labor force trends of persons with and without disabilities. *Monthly Labor Review*, 117, 36-42. Retrieved from the OCLC FirstSearch Full Text Database on April 4, 2002 at: <http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org>.
- Yelin, E., & Trupin, L. (1997). *Successful labor market transitions for persons with disabilities: Factors affecting the probability of entering and maintaining employment*. Paper prepared for the conference on: Employment post the Americans with Disabilities Act. Sponsored by the Office of Disability, Social Security Administration, and National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Washington, D.C. November 17-18, 1997. Retrieved from the World Wide Web [gotowork.org](http://www.gotowork.org) on March 3, 2002 at: <http://www.gotowork.org/907354148.html>.
- Zwillinger, L. S. (1995). *An investigation of differences between those identified prior to entering college and those identified while attending college*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley.

EPILOGUE

I Will Stay in the Game!

By Catherine M. Blansett

This poem was written in dedication to the women of this study. I used their words to capture the spirit of their journey and illustrate their experience.

Confusing times. So much change. Behind in a race

Big people in high places say

Come follow us. We'll show you the way
We'll line you up in neat little rows and feed you with tubes about things to know
Then we'll test you, and test you, till success comes your way

But, I don't learn in rows from tubes of things to know?

You certainly don't fit, but you do not divide?
Little girls in your pretty pink dresses with your odd little ways
We'll pat you on the head and just set you aside

No, no, you won't. I am here! I am here!
I am smart and clever
I can do it!
I can do what I need to be heard
But, first I must stay in the game

I must not be seen for something I am not
I am too smart!
I'll show you
But, first I must stay in the game

I can slide. I can skirt. I can skate right on by
Go ahead and ignore me. I'll go where I want
I am here!
I can do it!
I can stay in the game.

I may be quiet, but I can make noise too. You can't ignore me
I am going to stay in the game

Look at me, I'm an athlete extreme in my ways. You can't ignore me
I'll stay in the game
Somehow I'll stay in the game

I may be discouraged and drop out for a while
But I'm going to stay in the game

There are just enough people who hear me
I'm going to stay in the game

The line gets bigger and the tubes bigger still
More tests in rigid manners that tell me I am more

Or less

How can I make them hear?
How can I hear?
I can do it! Somehow, I can do it
I'm going to stay in the game

I am told in my knower's class that boys are trained for science and math
I'm the more social type and must take a different path

And yet

I must be careful of my sisters or they will pull me down to the floor
Like crabs climbing over each other to get to more

I will prove I can do it
I will work extra hard
I will learn to line up and be heard
I will stay in the game

But the line gets straighter still
My voice is not heard
I must learn to line up and be heard
How can I line up to be heard?
I will stay in the game?

Must I put this label on for my voice to be heard?
Does this label make me more of me?

Or

Is it others who cannot see me differently?

I am smart

I am me

I will stay in the game

APPENDIX

Letter of Invitation

Hello:

My name is Catherine Blansett. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education. The reason I am writing to you is to invite you to be a part of my dissertation research. The study is called "Voices of experience: A phenomenological study of the academic journey of women with learning disabilities who are juniors and seniors at a public research university." That's a mouthful for saying I am interested in listening to, and writing about, your story of how you got to where you are today (a junior or senior at this university). If you were to think of this as a journey, I would want you to think back as far as you could and tell me as much as you can about that journey. I would also want to know who you felt helped you along the way, any roadblocks you have faced, the successes you have experienced, and the vision you have for your future. Finally, as the expert, I want you to share some thoughts on how the university could better help women with learning disabilities.

If you are a woman with one or more learning disabilities, a junior or senior, not on academic probation, and have used, or are presently using services from the RDS office, please seriously consider being a participant in this study. Your experience could be very important to others. Our meeting should last from 1 to 3 hours, depending on how much time you need to tell your story, and we can meet at a time and place that is convenient for you. With your permission, I will tape record our meeting, but will take every precaution to make sure that your name is never mentioned in the study. You will choose a code name that will be used instead of your real name (now is the time to pick that name you always wished you had).

If you are interested in being a part of this research please give me a call at 491-8809, or email me at blansett@holly.colostate.edu.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Catherine Blansett
Doctoral Candidate
School of Education

Jean P. Lehmann, Ph.D.
Project Investigator
School of Education

Informed Consent

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: Voices of experience: A phenomenological study of the academic journey of Women with learning disabilities who are juniors and seniors at a research university.

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jean P. Lehmann

NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Catherine Blansett

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:
Catherine Blansett-- (970) 491-8809

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is to understand how women with one or more learning disabilities describe experiences and factors that have supported their journey toward becoming a junior or senior at a public research university; how they describe their successes; and, the vision they have for their futures.

THE INTERVIEW: Thank you for participating in this research. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a woman with one or more learning disabilities, a junior or senior, not on academic probation, and have used, or are presently using services from the Resources for Disabled Students office. You will choose a code name that will be used instead of your real name (now is the time to pick that name you always wished you had). I will be using a microcassette tape recorder to record our conversation. This interview will take about 1 to 3 hours (if we can see that the interview will be longer than expected, we may choose to meet more than one time). The important factor is that you have enough time to tell me about your understanding of experiences and factors that have contributed to your present academic success. I will want you to tell me about your journey toward becoming a junior or senior at this school, your successes, and your vision for your future. I will also ask you to give your opinion on a short set of questions about your experiences. You are the expert in your life. **I am interested in your understanding of your experiences. Please feel free to give me a candid opinion.** Although the interview will be taped, your name will not be noted on the tape or transcriptions. Instead, a code name will identify these materials. If this research is published, neither your identity nor the exact location of the study will be disclosed.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES: You will be asked to describe roadblocks, if any, that you have faced. There is a slight risk that you may become disturbed during this process. If you find that you are suffering from significant distress from this, or any other process involved in our interview, please contact your counselor at Resources for Disabled Students at 491-6385. Your counselor is experienced in helping students with learning disabilities and can refer you to other support resources, if necessary. In addition, there is always a slight risk that your identity can be known. However, we are taking every precaution to ensure that your identity will be

Page 1 of 2 Participant initials _____ Date _____

protected (please see "CONFIDENTIALITY")

BENEFITS: You will have the knowledge of knowing you are contributing to a better understanding of women with learning disabilities. If you wish to be provided with an executive summary of the finished research report, please contact Catherine Blansett at (970) 491-8809, or at blansett@holly.colostate.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every effort will be taken to protect the anonymity of participants in this research project: (a) your actual name will not be used and you will be described by a code name of your choice; (b) all references to study participants will be referred to by your code name; (c) audio-taped materials will be identified by your code name; (d) your consent form will be stored separately from other research materials which will prevent coded materials from being indiscriminately identified; (e) when a satisfactory transcription of the tapes describing your story have been reached, the tapes will be destroyed by first erasing them, and then cutting each tape into several pieces; (f) consent forms will be held in a locked file for a period of three-years; and (g) after three-years, the consent forms will be burned and disposed of.

LIABILITY: The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of injury.

Questions about subjects' rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at (970) 491-1563.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Participant name (printed)

Participant signature

Date

Investigator or co-investigator
signature

Date

Page 2 of 2 Participant initials _____ Date _____

Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in my dissertation research. I understand that you are a student in good standing (not on academic probation), have one or more learning disabilities, and are either a junior or senior. I am interested in your story of your journey toward becoming a junior or senior. How did you get to this point? What were your personal experiences? I am also interested in where you see yourself in the future. I will ask you some questions, and, with your permission, I will tape record our conversation, as well as take occasional notes. Please feel free to be completely candid, your name will not be used to identify you. My purpose is to listen and record your story, so please feel free to talk about things that you think are important. In order to provide for your confidentiality your name will not be mentioned on the tape or in my notes. You will be identified by a code name that you choose. This name will represent our interview. Please feel free to stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Shall we get started? What name would you like to use? [When name is chosen, the audio recorder is turned on].

All right [code name]

History: Please go back as far as you can and tell me about your journey. How did you get to where you are now?

Tell me about when you were first aware you had a learning disability.

How did that affect your life?

Tell me about when you first thought about going to college?

Supports: Are there people who have helped you on your journey?

[If yes] Describe these people and how they helped you.

Have there been technical supports that have helped you?

[If yes] Describe these supports and how they have helped you.

What do you do to help you with class requirements such as tests or other class work?

Issues: Have you experienced roadblocks on your journey?

[If yes] Describe these roadblocks and how they affected you.

Success: Tell me about a time when you felt you were academically successful.

Tell me about another time when you felt successful

Can you think of another success?

Future: Looking past graduation, what do you hope to achieve or accomplish in your future?

Advise: What would you recommend to universities that could help other women with learning disabilities?

Thank you for your help.

Handout/Poster

Women with Learning Disabilities

I need your help!

Are you a woman with one or more learning disabilities?

Are you a junior or senior?

Are you a student in good standing (not on academic probation)?

Do you use Resources for Disabled Students?

Do you want to help other women with learning disabilities?

If so, I would like you to be a participant in my dissertation research

Voices of experience: A phenomenological study of the academic journey of women with learning disabilities who are juniors and seniors at a public research university.

Interested?

**Call Catherine at 491-8809
or email me at blansett@holly.colostate.edu**