COLLEGE STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP FOR THEIR LEARNING DISABILITIES

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Abstract. **Eighty-six university students with learning disabilities (LDs) completed measures of self-esteem and of perceptions of their LDs. In addition, they rated their willingness to seek help from academic services in response to two experimental manipulations: (a) they read vignettes about a student requesting help from professors or peers and receiving positive or negative reactions; and (b) they listened to audiotaped radio advertisements for academic services on a college campus, emphasizing either learning or performance goals. Participants reported the most willingness to seek help after reading about a positive reaction from a professor and the least willingness to seek help after reading about a negative reaction from a professor. In a nonsignificant trend, participants were more willing to seek help after hearing the ad emphasizing performance goals, such as improved grades. Students who viewed their LDs as more stigmatizing, nonmodifiable, and global were less likely to report a willingness to seek help in response to negative situations and had lower overall self-esteem. These results suggest that learning services departments could bolster use of academic support by (a) intervening with faculty to try to prevent negative reactions to requests for accommodations and (b) attempting to destigmatize LDs among students themselves.**

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College students with learning disabilities (LDs) can benefit from academic support services, but only a minority use these services. To increase utilization of effective services, it is important to determine what influences help-seeking among college students with LDs. The purpose of the research reported in this article was to evaluate individual differences and situational manipulations derived from the general help-seeking literature as possible predictors of utilization of academic support services.

Review of Background Literature

The estimated prevalence of learning disabilities (LDs) among students in two- and four-year U.S. colleges has increased to about 3% as of the mid-1990s (Henderson, 1995). These data are based on student report, and therefore may reflect higher numbers than institutional data, which include only students with LDs who have been identified by the school, generally those seeking formal services. For example, a survey of a representative sample of colleges and universities

revealed that 0.7% of enrolled students had identified themselves to institutional staff as having an LD (Vogel et al., 1998).

Thus, it appears that only a minority of college students with LDs utilize academic support services available to them (e.g., Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, & Yahaya, 1989; Mellard & Byrne, 1993). This is of concern, as college students with LDs demonstrate significantly poorer academic adjustment to the college setting than their non-LD peers (Bursuck et al., 1989; Dunn, 1995; Hughes & Smith, 1990; Reiff, Hatzes, Bramel, & Gibbon, 2001; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). There is, however, evidence that students with LDs benefit from academic services provided by postsecondary education institutions (e.g., Keim, McWhirter, & Bernstein, 1996; Vogel & Adelman, 1992; Yanok, 1993).

Although studies consistently find service utilization to be associated with better academic performance for college students with LDs, this association cannot be interpreted with confidence as a causal relation in the absence of random assignment to receive vs. not receive services (Hughes & Smith, 1990). One study did use random assignment to conditions and found evidence supporting the utility of untimed testing, a common accommodation offered to college students with learning disabilities (Alster, 1997).

Given the impact that utilizing support services may have on academic achievement, it is important to examine how students with LDs decide whether or not to seek out the services available to them. Our study evaluated several potentially relevant factors. First, the literature on help-seeking in general (not specific to LD services) suggests that an individual's goals are important to consider. Holding *task-focused goals* (having the desire to learn for the sake of increasing skills or knowledge) was associated with adaptive help-seeking in a general population of seventh and eighth graders in a math class, while holding *extrinsic goals* (the desire to learn to avoid punishment or to receive rewards) was related to avoiding help-seeking (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Perceived benefits and threats (e.g., negative reactions from teachers or peers) of help-seeking partially mediated the relations between type of goal and help-seeking. It stands to reason that holding extrinsic goals is particularly likely to result in avoidance of help-seeking if one believes a negative social interaction will result.

The relevance of type of goal for active adaptive behavior more generally has been studied experimentally. For example, Elliott and Dweck (1988) manipulated task instructions to emphasize the importance of either looking competent (*performance goal*) or actually increasing competence (*learning goal*). When performance goals were highlighted and children held low estimations of their ability, they demonstrated helplessness. Conversely, when performance goals were emphasized and children believed they had high abilities, they demonstrated greater persistence in attempts to solve problems. However, regardless of perceptions of ability, when performance goals were emphasized, children chose not to take the opportunity to improve their skills on a task that involved the risk of making public mistakes; in contrast, children in the learning goals condition sought to increase their skills regardless of their perceptions of their ability.

In summary, the motivational goals students hold provide a backdrop for their coping behavior, and may influence the decision to seek help when difficulties are encountered. Holding extrinsic or performance goals is associated with poorer coping and a decreased likelihood of asking for assistance when faced with a challenge, especially if public criticism for mistakes appears likely.

A second possible determinant of help-seeking behavior among students with LDs is their self-perceptions. Although they did not look specifically at students with LDs, Ryan and Pintrich (1997) found that adolescents with lower perceptions of their own cognitive and social abilities were less likely to seek help. These students also perceived more threat to their self-worth when considering asking peers for help, compared to students with higher perceptions of their own abilities. Students with higher global self-esteem are more likely to report willingness to seek academic help when necessary and less apt to report feeling threatened by having to seek help (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991).

Third, college students' beliefs about their learning disabilities in particular may also affect help-seeking. Students in one study who saw their LD as delimited, modifiable, and not stigmatizing rather than as global, nonmodifiable, and stigmatizing showed higher self-esteem and held more favorable views of their academic abilities (Heyman, 1990). If perceiving one's LD in a less negative way leads to better academic self-concept, and holding more favorable perceptions of one's academic abilities is related to greater likelihood of seeking help, it seems that the views students hold about their LDs could affect help-seeking behavior.

Current Study

Based upon the existing literature, this study was designed to increase understanding of how college students with LDs decide whether or not to seek assistance. Correlational information could be useful for identifying the students least likely to seek help and for providing additional interventions. Experimental data on the effects of others' reactions to requests for help and types of persuasive messages could provide guidance on how

postsecondary institutions can encourage more students with LDs to use existing services.

Both students who were currently using and students who had not used support services in college were included in this research. Students' perceptions of their LDs, global self-esteem, and self-esteem in specific domains (academic and social domains) were measured. Two experimental manipulations were also tested. First, to manipulate the risk associated with willingness to seek help, students were presented with hypothetical situations in which faculty and peer responses to an individual seeking LD services were varied. Based on the help-seeking research discussed earlier (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997), it was predicted that negative attitudes from others towards asking for help would decrease willingness to seek help. Second, participants were presented with advertisements for a learning services program, with two different types of motivational goals emphasized in the advertisements. That is, the emphasis of extrinsic goals for using academic services was compared to the emphasis of task-focused goals in order to determine whether highlighting the importance of a type of motivational goal affected a student's willingness to seek help for his or her LD. Highlighting task-focused goals was expected to increase willingness to seek help.

The following predictions were tested:

1. Having negative perceptions about one's LD (i.e., that the LD is global, not modifiable, and stigmatizing) is associated with less reported willingness to seek help.
2. Having negative perceptions of one's own academic, cognitive and social abilities is associated with less reported willingness to seek help.
3. An emphasis on performance-focused goals for seeking help in an advertisement for a hypothetical learning center is associated with lower reported willingness to seek help, as opposed to an emphasis on task-focused goals.
4. Being exposed to negative reactions from professors and peers in hypothetical situations is expected to reduce reported willingness to seek help.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 86 students from universities in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area who had been professionally diagnosed with an LD. Most of the sample consisted of students from American University (N = 77) or the University of Maryland, College Park (N = 6). Students were recruited by means of flyers posted on campus and advertisements in student newspapers. The mean age of the sample was 21.6 years (range 17 to 44 years); 46 participants (53.5%) were female. Of this sample, 69 (80.2%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 6 (7.0%) as Latino, 4 (4.7%) as Black/African-American, 1 (1.2%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6 (7.0%) as "Other." Seventy-three were undergraduate students (84.9%), 12 were graduate students (14%) and 1 was a non-degree post-graduate student (1.2%). Thirty (34.9%) of the participants were also diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Volunteers were offered the choice of being paid $20 or receiving extra credit in a psychology course (when enrolled in a course in which this was being offered by the professor) for their participation; most (86%) opted for payment.

Measures

Learning disabilities. LDs were assessed in two ways. First, students were interviewed to determine the nature of their LDs, which had been professionally diagnosed, and to assess how they had been affected by their LDs. During the interview, students were asked to rate the severity of LD on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "very mild," 7 = "very severe").

In addition, students completed the Personal Characteristics Rating Scale (PCRS; Dunn, 1995). This self-report measure taps into eight characteristics related to academic and social skills. Items are rated from 0 ("does not describe me") to 4 ("describes me well"), with higher scores indicating greater skills. There is evidence for the PCRS's validity as an assessment of impairment associated with LDs. That is, in a comparison of college students with LDs vs. low-achieving students without LDs vs. students who considered themselves to have an LD but were not formally diagnosed, the diagnosed students scored significantly lower than the other two groups in all areas of the PCRS except cognitive abilities and affective characteristics (Dunn, 1995).

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was assessed with the Self-Perception Profile for College Students (SPPCS; Neemann & Harter, 1986). This 54-item self-report measure, normed for use with college students, measures 12 specific domains (four items each) and independently measures global self-worth (six items). For each item, participants are provided with two statements about different types of students. Participants select the statement of each pair that seems most like themselves, then indicate whether that statement is "really true" or "sort of true" for them personally. Each item is scored on a 4-point scale, with low scores indicating lower perceptions of competence or adequacy. In addition to the Global Self-Worth scale, the following subscales were of interest in the present study: Intellectual Ability, Scholastic Competence, and Social Acceptance. These subscales have been found to have good internal consistency (alphas of .80 to .86; Neemann & Harter, 1986).

Table 1
Descriptive Data[a]

Variable	# items	*mean*	*median*	*SD*	minimum	maximum
Rating of Severity of LD	1	3.79	4.00	1.42	1.00	7.00
Rating of Current Services	3	5.23	5.50	1.33	1.00	7.00
Rating of Past Services	3	4.69	4.92	1.47	1.00	7.00
PCRS[b]	93	246.26	249.00	41.74	158.71	370.00
SPPCS[c]						
Global Self-Worth	6	2.92	3.00	.78	1.00	4.00
Intellectual Ability	4	2.98	3.00	.86	1.00	4.00
Scholastic Competence	4	2.59	2.50	.77	1.00	4.00
Social Acceptance	4	3.04	3.00	.81	1.00	4.00
SPLD[d]	25	18.35	19.00	3.02	10.86	24.00
Willingness to Seek Help						
Overall[e]	30	5.10	5.18	.92	2.93	6.87
Advertisements	10	4.78	4.65	1.32	1.30	7.00
Task-Focused Goals	5	4.60	4.80	1.57	1.40	7.00
Performance Goals	5	4.97	5.40	1.67	1.00	7.00
Situations	20	5.27	5.23	.97	2.55	7.00
Negative Situations[f]	10	4.98	5.15	1.25	1.70	7.00
Positive Situations	10	5.55	5.80	1.18	2.20	7.00

[a]Numbers represent item scores, with the exception of SPLD and PCRS data, which represent total scores.
[b]Personal Characteristics Rating Scale (Dunn, 1995).
[c]Self-Perception Profile for College Students (Neemann & Harter, 1986).
[d]Self-Perceptions of One's Learning Disability (Heyman, 1990).
[e]Overall willingness to seek help includes reported willingness to seek help in response to advertisements and in response to hypothetical situations.
[f]Ratings for negative and positive situations are collapsed across professor and peer reactions.

Perceptions of learning disability. The Self-Perceptions of One's Learning Disability (SPLD; Heyman, 1990) is a self-report measure that assesses the degree to which students perceive their LDs as circumscribed, modifiable, and nonstigmatizing vs. global, not subject to change, and stigmatizing. This 25-item scale has a true/false format, with a lower score indicating the perception of one's LD as more global, unchangeable, and/or stigmatizing. The coefficient alpha of the scale has been found to be .70, and all items have been found to have item-total correlations of at least .20 (Heyman, 1990). As this measure was originally used with younger students, some items were reworded slightly to be appropriate for college students.

Previous and current experience with seeking help. A brief interview was conducted that asked students about their previous experiences seeking help. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their experiences with using services in the past (prior to their current college setting) and their current experiences with using services on three scales: how easy the services were to access, how helpful the services were, and whether accessing the services was a positive or negative experience. All scales were rated from 1 to 7, with lower scores indicating a poorer experience. Participants who had not previously used any services were asked to rate their perceptions of the help available to them in previous academic settings, and students who were not currently using services were asked to do the same for the current services available to them.

Faculty and peer reactions. Hypothetical situations were presented in written form (see Appendix A). Each situation depicted a student with an LD asking for assistance or accommodations in an academic setting. Four different situations were presented (negative response from a professor, negative response from a peer, positive response from a professor, positive response from a peer). A 5-item scale was designed for the purposes of this study to assess how willing a student would be to seek help for an LD in response to the experimental situations (Appendix B, items #1-5). Each item was scored on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating

greater willingness to seek help. The average rating of these five items for each situation was used in analyses; for analyses comparing ratings for negative and positive situations, situation ratings were collapsed across type of respondent (i.e., peer or professor).

As a manipulation check, students were asked to rate how positive or negative they perceived each situation to be on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "very negative," 7 = "very positive") (Appendix B, item #6). The mean rating for each was on the expected side of the midpoint: for negative situations 2.51 (SD = 1.17) and for positive situations 6.24 (SD = 0.89).

Motivational goals. Students listened to two audiotaped advertisements for a hypothetical academic service on a college campus (Appendix C). One advertisement emphasized extrinsic goals as reasons for getting assistance, while the other emphasized task-focused goals. After hearing each advertisement, students were asked to rate how willing they would be to go to the provider using the 5-item scale described above, with items slightly reworded (Appendix D). Similarly, the average rating from the five items for each advertisement was used in analyses.

Procedure

A description of the study was provided to all participants, and informed consent was obtained. Students completed a demographic information form and were interviewed about their LDs. They then completed the questionnaire packets. Participants were offered the choice of having measures read aloud to them (while they read along to themselves) or reading them themselves. They were then given the experimental manipulations (the two advertisements and the four hypothetical events described above). Within each manipulation, the advertisements and situations were presented in a counterbalanced order (no significant order effects were evident in subsequent analyses).

After the students had completed the study, the factors being examined were discussed in great detail. Students were also told how they could find out about the results of the study if they were interested, and were given information about available learning and psychological services. Both American University and the University of Maryland have learning services offices that provide tutoring, study skills workshops, academic advising, facilities for completing untimed tests in quiet settings, and other services to help students with learning disabilities maximize their academic performance.

RESULTS

A significance level of .05 was used in all statistical tests. Nonparametric tests were used for inferential analyses based on variables that were significantly non-normally distributed as indicated by a Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit test. Descriptive data are found in Table 1.

Fifty-six of the participants (65.1%) were currently using services for their LDs. The mean rating of current services was 5.23 (SD = 1.33), indicating a rating on the positive side of the midpoint. Sixty-five (75.6%) of the participants had used services at some point in the past; the mean rating of past services was slightly above the midpoint (4.69, SD = 1.47). The average reported GPA for students who had completed at least a semester of college (N = 75) was 3.11 (range 1.98 to 4.00).

The average self-reported severity of LD was 3.79 (SD = 1.42; range from 1 to 7). This self-report rating of LD severity had a negative relationship (r = -.21, $p < .07$) with scores on the PCRS (Dunn, 1995), an inventory of academic and social abilities. This relationship was in the expected direction; that is, students with lower self-perceived abilities rated themselves as having a more severe LD.

The mean scores for the four self-perception domains of interest in the current study (SPPCS measure; Global Self-Worth, Intellectual Ability, Scholastic Competence, and Social Acceptance) were all slightly lower than those reported by Neemann and Harter (1986), suggesting that the current sample reported somewhat poorer self-perceptions in these areas than did the norm group. One possible explanation for this finding is the extensive co-occurrence of ADHD in our sample. About one third of the participants reported having been diagnosed with ADHD in addition to their LD (30 participants; 35% of the sample). Self-esteem (SPPCS Global Self-Worth subscale) scores were lower for participants with ADHD (M = 2.65, SD = .94) than for those without an ADHD diagnosis (M = 3.08, SD = .64), t = 2.23, $p < .05$.

Conversely, the mean rating of perceptions of one's LD (SPLD score) was higher in the current study than reported by Heyman (1990; M = 16.81, range 3 to 23), indicating that participants endorsed somewhat less negative views of their learning disabilities than found in Heyman's study.

The major dependent variable was reported willingness to seek help, as measured by participants' ratings of their willingness to seek help from a campus learning service in response to the experimental materials (i.e., the advertisements and the hypothetical situations). No sex difference was found in reported willingness to seek help (male M = 5.17, SD = .92; female M = 5.05, SD = .94), t = -.63, p = .53. Also, no association was found between willingness to seek help and severity of LD (r = .08, p = .48), suggesting that other correlates of help-seeking are not simply proxies for a more basic and intuitive pattern such that those who need help the most seek it the most.

Relative to participants not using services (M = 4.70, SD = 1.12), students who were using learning services (M = 5.32, SD = .73) were significantly more likely to report willingness to seek help overall in the experimental manipulations; U = 544.5, $p < .01$. Although this finding is not surprising, it does suggest that the ratings of willingness to seek help are an appropriate analogue to actual help-seeking.

Presented below are the analyses performed to test our main predictions.

1. Having the perception that one's LD is global, stigmatizing and nonmodifiable is predicted to be associated with less willingness to seek help.

This prediction was tested by correlating SPLD scores (on which lower scores indicate more negative views of one's LD) with willingness to seek help. Spearman correlations were computed, as SPLD scores were not normally distributed. The relationship was examined separately for each type of written hypothetical situation (negative response from a professor or peer vs. a positive response from each vs. negative situations combined vs. positive situations combined vs. all situations combined) and each type of audiotaped hypothetical advertisements (performance-focused vs. task-focused vs. both combined). Complete results presented in Table 2 show that all correlations were nonsignificant with the exception of a positive correlation between SPLD scores and willingness to seek help in negative hypothetical scenarios (r_s = .24, $p < .05$), indicating that the more participants saw their own LD as circumscribed, changeable, and nonstigmatizing, the more willing they were to seek help in the face of unfavorable reactions from professors or peers.

The question whether overall self-esteem mediated the relationship between perceptions of one's LD (i.e., SPLD score) and help-seeking for the negative hypothetical situations was also examined. The SPLD (lower scores indicate seeing one's LD in a more negative way) and self-esteem (Global Self-Worth subscale, with higher scores reflecting better self-esteem) were correlated positively (r_s = .50, $p < .001$), as expected. Seeing one's LD as being more circumscribed, modifiable, and nonstigmatizing was thus related to better overall self-esteem. However, overall self-esteem as measured by the Global Self-Worth subscale of the SPPCS was not related to help-seeking in negative situations (r = .04, p = .73). Self-esteem, therefore, did not appear to mediate the relation between perceptions of one's LD and willingness to seek help in negative situations.

2. Having negative perceptions of one's own academic, cognitive and social abilities is expected to be associated with less willingness to seek help.

Reported willingness to seek help. The relations between self-perceptions of intellectual ability, scholastic competence, and social acceptability (as measured by the SPPCS, with higher scores reflecting more positive self-perceptions in these areas) and reported willingness to seek help were examined separately for each type of written hypothetical situation (negative response from professor vs. positive response from each vs. both combined) and each type of audiotaped advertisement (performance focused vs. learning focused vs.

Table 2

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficients Between SPLD[a] Scores and Reported Willingness to Seek Help

Overall[b]	.07
Advertisements	-.03
Task-Focused Goals	.01
Performance Goals	.00
Situations	.08
Negative Situations[c]	.24*
Positive Situations	-.06

[a]Self-Perceptions of One's Learning Disability (Heyman, 1990).
[b]Overall willingness to seek help includes reported willingness to seek help in response to advertisements and in response to hypothetical situations.
[c]Ratings for negative and positive situations are collapsed across professor and peer reactions.
*$p < .05$.

Table 3

Relationships Between SPPCS[a] Subscale Scores and Reported Willingness to Seek Help

Intellectual Ability	
Willingness to Seek Help	
Overall[b]	.01
Advertisements	-.02
Task-Focused Goals	-.09
Performance Goals[c]	.01
Situations	.03
Negative Situations[d]	.04
Positive Situations	.01
Scholastic Competence	
Willingness to Seek Help	
Overall[b]	-.12
Advertisements	-.13
Task-Focused Goals	-.13
Performance Goals[c]	-.12
Situations	-.09
Negative Situations[d]	.05
Positive Situations	-.19
Social Acceptance	
Willingness to Seek Help	
Overall[b]	.12
Advertisements	.04
Task-Focused Goals	.00
Performance Goals[c]	.04
Situations	.14
Negative Situations[d]	.15
Positive Situations	.08

[a]Self-Perception Profile for College Students (Neemann & Harter, 1986).
[b]Overall willingness to seek help includes reported willingness to seek help in response to advertisements and in response to hypothetical situations.
[c]Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient reported as ratings of willingness to seek help for this advertisement were not normally distributed.
[d]Ratings for negative and positive situations are collapsed across professor and peer reactions.

both combined). Self-perceptions were not significantly correlated with reported willingness to seek help overall (i.e., when situations and ads were combined), nor in response to the hypothetical advertisements and hypothetical situations (see Table 3).

Actual help-seeking. In order to test the prediction for actual help-seeking, three sets of comparisons were made. Results of the statistical analyses may be found in Table 4.

Scores on the SPPCS Intellectual Ability subscale (high scores = positive perception of one's intellectual ability) were compared for students who had sought help in the past and those who had not. No significant difference was found in self-perceptions of intellectual ability between participants who had sought services in the past (M = 2.97, SD = .86) versus those who had not (M = 3.04, SD = .87). Scores on the Intellectual Ability subscale were also compared for students who were currently using services and those who were not; again, no significant difference was found between those who were currently using services (M = 2.92, SD = .85) and those who were not (M = 3.09, SD = .88).

Scores on the Scholastic Competence subscale of the SPPCS (high scores reflect more positive perceptions of one's scholastic competence) were compared for students who had sought help in the past and those who had not. No significant difference was found in self-perception of intellectual ability between students who had sought services in the past (M = 2.57, SD = .77) and those who had not (M = 2.65, SD = .80).

However, students who were using services had a significantly lower perception of their own scholastic competence (M = 2.47, SD = .70) than those not currently using services (M = 2.81, SD = .87).

Scores on the Social Acceptance subscale of the SPPCS did not differ significantly between participants who had sought services in the past (M = 3.02, SD = .80) and those who had not (M = 3.10, SD = .89). A comparison of Social Acceptance scores between those who were currently using services and those were not also reflected no significant difference between the students who were using services (M = 3.05, SD = .85) and those who were not (M = 3.03, SD = .77).

3. An emphasis on performance-focused goals for seeking help in an advertisement for a learning center is associated with lower willingness to seek help, as opposed to an emphasis on task-focused goals.

This prediction was tested by comparing the average ratings of willingness to seek help after listening to each audiotaped advertisement, one emphasizing task-focused goals as the reason to seek the center's service, the other emphasizing performance-focused goals. The trend was opposite from the predicted direction, with participants reporting slightly more willingness to seek help in response to the advertisement emphasizing performance goals (M = 4.97, SD = 1.67) than to the advertisement speaking to learning goals (M = 4.60, SD = 1.57). Results of a Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was not significant, Z = -1.75, p = .08.

4. Being exposed to negative reactions from professors and peers in hypothetical situations is predicted to reduce willingness to seek help.

A repeated measures 2 X 2 ANOVA (positive/negative response X professor/peer respondent) confirmed a significant main effect for the type of response received ($F(1,85) = 6.86$, $p < .02$), in that participants reported more willingness to seek help from learning services after reading about positive responses (M = 5.55, SD = 1.18) than after reading about negative responses (M = 4.98, SD = 1.25) to a request for help. There was also a significant main effect for respondent (professor vs. peer; $F(1,85) = 13.44$, $p < .001$), in that participants reported more willingness to seek help from learning services after reading about professors' responses (M = 5.37, SD = 1.01) than after reading about peers' responses (M = 5.16, SD = 1.08). Finally, there was a significant interaction of type of response and respondent ($F(1,85) = 9.98$, $p < .003$). Participants reported the most willingness to seek help from learning services after reading about a professor's positive response to a request for an accommodation for an LD (M = 5.80, SD = 1.25) and the least willingness to seek help from learning services when confronted with a negative response from a professor (M = 4.94, SD = 1.47). Willingness to seek help after receiving responses from peers was intermediate (for negative peer response, M = 5.01, SD = 1.31; for positive peer response, M = 5.31, SD = 1.30). Interaction residuals (cell mean-grand mean-row effect-column effect) are depicted in Figure 1, as suggested by Rosnow and Rosenthal (1989).

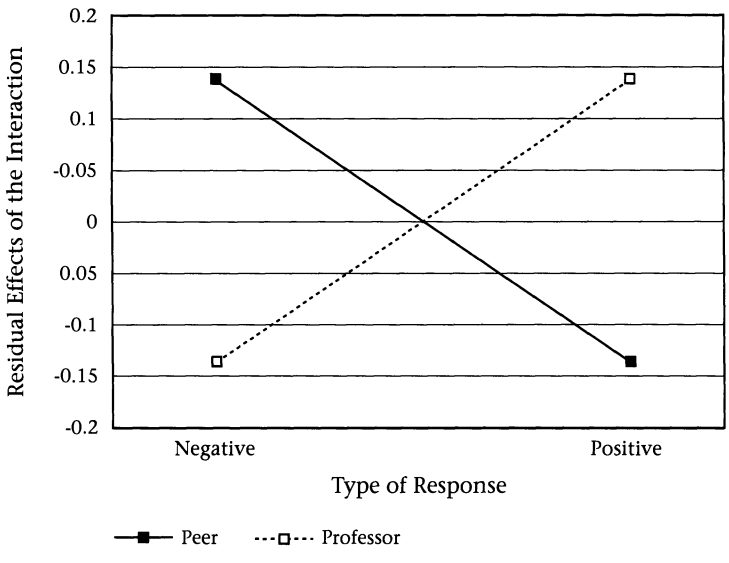
Table 4

Relationships Between SPPCS[a] Subscale Scores and Actual Use of Services

SPPCS Domain	
Intellectual Ability	
Prior use of services vs. no prior use of services	.33
Current use of services vs. no current use of services	.87
Scholastic Competence	
Prior use of services vs. no prior use of services	.40
Current use of services vs. no current use of services	1.97*
Social Acceptance	
Prior use of services vs. no prior use of services	.38
Current use of services vs. no current use of services	-.11

[a]Self-Perception Profile for College Students (Neemann & Harter, 1986).
*$p < .06$.

Figure 1. Residual self-ratings of willingness to seek help for type of response (negative vs. positive) X (professor vs. student).



DISCUSSION

The current research extends the previous literature on college students with LDs and how these students decide whether or not to access academic services when they are having difficulties achieving in school. Several factors that might play a role in this decision were examined.

Results demonstrated that the response a student receives to a request for assistance or accommodation for an LD, particularly from a professor, likely affects the student's willingness to seek help in the future. Participants reported the most willingness to seek help for their LD after reading a hypothetical situation about a student asking for help and receiving a positive response from a professor and the least willingness to seek help after reading a situation in which a student receives a negative response from a professor. Additionally, students who perceived their LD to be more global, stigmatizing, and/or nonmodifiable reported less willingness to seek help in the face of negative responses from peers and professors.

These findings suggest that one significant factor in the willingness of students with LDs to seek help is how others in the academic setting respond to their requests. If a student is met with a negative reaction to a request for help, he or she will be less likely to seek further assistance, and further opportunities to provide needed services to that student are halted. A possible intervention would be to educate professors and college students about LDs and accommodations, as well as to help them understand the impact their reactions to students' requests for help or assistance may have on students' academic decisions. Limited systematic research has studied interventions to improve faculty attitudes toward accommodations for students with LDs, but anecdotal evidence indicates that such attitudes are highly variable (for review, see Scott & Gregg, 2000).

Some caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of the current study, pending replication. In addition, future studies could expand on these results by examining the real-life experiences of college students and the reactions they receive from professors and other students when they ask for assistance for an LD. This type of replication would increase the external validity of the relationships found in the present study. As it stands, we cannot be sure that self-reports of interest in seeking services after, for instance, reading of hypothetical responses from peers or professors correspond to actual help-seeking behavior after experiencing real reactions from others.

The findings suggest that how a student views his or her LD may also be an important factor in whether the student will persevere in seeking help after receiving a negative response; students holding more negative perceptions of their LDs were less likely to report willingness to seek help after reading hypothetical situations in which a student received a negative response to a request for help. This finding requires cautious interpretation, given that only one of seven conceptually related correlations was significant (see Table 2), and this may represent a Type I error. If this result does prove replicable, however, it implies that addressing how students view their LDs may be a useful point of intervention. A major obstacle may be in getting this subgroup of students with LDs in for services in the first place. Special effort may be needed to identify these students early, before negative experiences have deterred them from seeking help altogether.

Although no difference in reported willingness to seek help was associated with perceptions of academic, cognitive, or social abilities, students who were using formal services for their LD rated their own scholastic competence lower than did students not currently using services. One explanation could be that students with poorer scholastic skills (or a poorer perception of their scholastic skills, regardless of their actual abilities) are more likely to seek out formal academic assistance. An alternative explanation is that students who are using services have a poorer perception of their scholastic abilities as a result of using services. For some students, a stigma may be attached to using services, or some students may perceive use of services as indicating a lack of ability. Replication is needed to confirm this finding, but if it is found to be a robust relationship, future research on students' perceptions about seeking help could shed light on possible explanations for this finding. If seeking help has an effect on students' perceptions of their scholastic competence, perhaps some intervention to protect or improve their perception of their abilities can be part of the services they receive.

Willingness to seek help in response to two different advertisements did not follow the predicted pattern. While previous research (e.g., Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) has demonstrated that people are more likely to respond with adaptive behaviors, such as help-seeking, when a task-focused or learning goal is emphasized (vs. when a performance or extrinsic goal is emphasized), the opposite was found to be the trend for the current sample; participants reported somewhat more willingness to seek help in response to an advertisement emphasizing performance goals (vs. learning goals) for going to an academic assistance center. One explanation for the difference between the present findings and previous research is that the participants in the previous studies were children, while the current sample was from a college-aged population. It is conceivable that the response to having different types of goals emphasized changes developmentally. It is also likely that students in college are more concerned about their grades and others' opinions of their academic performance than were the seventh and eighth graders in the study conducted by Ryan and Pintrich (1997), and thus were more motivated by performance goals to seek academic help. Finally, it is possible that a combination of performance and learning goals would be optimal; however, our experimental design did not permit us to test this hypothesis (cf. Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001).

No sex differences in willingness to seek help were found. Although this is unlike findings of previous research on willingness to seek mental health services (e.g., Gove & Tudor, 1973; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987), it is in accordance with the lack of sex differences found in the study by Ryan and Pintrich (1997) on academic help-seeking in adolescents. Seeking academic assistance is different in many ways than seeking therapy or counseling, and gender differences may be less likely to be seen in academic help-seeking. Future replications of this finding and research into how males and females perceive seeking academic help vs. seeking counseling could shed light on this issue.

One limitation of the current study is that self-report was used to identify students with LDs; although students were interviewed extensively about their LDs, which had previously been professionally diagnosed, it is possible that students did not accurately report their LDs. Further, the experimental stimuli (i.e., the hypothetical situation descriptions and the hypothetical radio advertisements) were developed for the purposes of this study, and time limitations did not allow the use of several different examples of each category. These factors preclude confident conclusions about the categories in general as opposed to the specific examples in the study. Additional research with added stimuli would bolster the construct validity. Studies investigating actual help-seeking in response to advertising for learning services and to others' reactions to attempts to get help would shed further light on students' help-seeking behavior. Certainly, the results of the present study indicate that these may be important factors that should be further investigated.

The results of this study pertaining to the students with both an LD and ADHD indicate that this subgroup of participants reported poorer self-perceptions. Further research on how this group of college students may differ from other students with LDs would expand our understanding of their help-seeking behavior. Given

the lack of extensive research on college students with LDs, future research may identify additional factors that play a role in how these students decide whether or not to seek help. The present findings, based on college students with diagnosed LDs, may not be generalizable to other groups; extending the current research to college students in general or to other types of help-seeking would increase the generalizability to other groups. However, current results do suggest that motivational goals for college students may create different responses than predicted in the literature, and suggest that other factors aside from motivational goals may predict help-seeking.

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APPENDIX A: HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS

Negative Response from a Peer

In your biology class, it is the professor's usual policy that students are not allowed to tape record lectures. You stay after the first class and explain to the professor that because of your learning disability, you have trouble keeping up with note-taking during lectures. The professor agrees to allow you to tape the lectures. Another student in the class who overhears says that it is unfair for you to be able to tape the lectures and that you should have to keep up with note-taking like everyone else. This other student seems angry at you for making this request.

Positive Response from a Peer

You and a friend are attending your first math class of the semester. Your friend starts to head for the back of the room, which is a large lecture hall. You say that because of your learning disability, you need to sit near the front, because it makes it easier for you to follow what the professor is saying and writing on the board. Your friend agrees to sit with you in the front, saying that it's probably a good idea to sit in the front. Your friend expresses admiration that you take your classes seriously. Your friend seems to respect you for making this request.

Negative Response from a Professor

Your learning disability makes it difficult for you to respond quickly to exam questions. At the beginning of the semester, your sociology professor announces that there will be three exams in the class, each consisting of essay and short-answer questions. You go to the professor's office and explain that you need some extra time on the exams. The professor tells you that if you are not able to handle the tests, perhaps you do not belong in the class. Your professor seems irritated at you for making this request.

Positive Response from a Professor

Because of your learning disability, you need to type your answers to essay questions on exams. When your history professor announces that the first exam of the semester is coming up, you go to the professor's office after class and ask for permission to type your exam in the history department office during the exam period. The professor agrees to set this up for you, and commends you for your willingness to take measures to do your best in the class. Your professor seems impressed with you for making this request.

APPENDIX B: RATING SCALES FOR SITUATIONS

1. How likely would you be to ask for help for your learning disability in the future after this experience?

very UNLIKELY to ask for help						very LIKELY to ask for help
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. How much effort would you put into seeking help from the campus learning services after this experience?

VERY LITTLE effort						A GREAT DEAL of effort
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. How likely would you be to go to the campus learning services for assistance after this experience?

very UNLIKELY to go to learning services						very LIKELY to go to learning services
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. What would your view of the campus learning services be after this experience?

UNFAVORABLE view of learning services						FAVORABLE view of learning services
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. How interested would you be in finding out more about the campus learning services after this experience?

NOT AT ALL INTERESTED in finding out about learning services						VERY INTERESTED in finding out about learning services
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. How would you rate this situation?

Very Negative			Neutral			Very Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX C: ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisement Emphasizing Learning Goals

Are you a college student who is having trouble with your classes? Why not visit the campus Center for Academic Assistance? The Center for Academic Assistance has a staff of professionals with experience in working with college students.

By coming to the Center for Academic Assistance, you will gain skills that will help you remember more of what you learn. You'll also understand more of what you read and what you hear in lectures. The services offered at the Center for Academic Assistance will also sharpen your mind. You'll learn skills at the Center that you will be able to apply to other areas of your life.

The Center for Academic Assistance is located on campus for your convenience, so come in! It will help you learn more in college!

Advertisement Emphasizing Performance Goals

Are you a college student who is having trouble with your classes? Why not visit the campus Center for Academic Assistance? The Center for Academic Assistance has a staff of professionals with experience in working with college students.

By coming to the Center for Academic Assistance, you'll improve the grades you receive in your classes. After utilizing the services at the Center for Academic Assistance, you'll find that your classes and assignments are easier for you, and you'll also make fewer mistakes. Professors have told us that they are impressed with students who take the initiative to come to the Center.

The Center for Academic Assistance is located on campus for your convenience, so come in! It will help your performance in college!

APPENDIX D: RATING SCALES FOR ADVERTISEMENTS

1. How likely would you be to ask for help for your learning disability in the future after hearing this ad?
2. How much effort would you put into seeking help from this campus learning service after hearing this ad?
3. How likely would you be to go to this campus learning service for assistance after hearing this ad?
4. What would your view of this campus learning service be after hearing this ad?
5. How interested would you be in finding out more about this campus learning service after hearing this ad?

Note. Response options are identical to Appendix B.

NOTES

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