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ABSTRACT

Even though there has been increasing awareness of and accommodations for college students with learning disabilities, many of them still face various forms of stigmatization from instructors and peers. In this research project, I exam the ways in students with learning disabilities are stigmatized in academic and nonacademic settings, how they responded, or accounted, for their disability when questioned by others, and the strategies which they used to cope with problematic situations. This research is based on qualitative interviews of twenty-three college students with learning disabilities. Although the respondents viewed their learning disability as a minor issue, they did report problematic and embarrassing situations during their college career. Individuals with LD were concerned about the negative perceptions that others had of their LD label. To cope with stigmatization, college students with learning disabilities strategically performed tasks in order to minimize the negative reactions from peers and teachers. They also developed a series of accounts to neutralize the questions of their actions or their disability status.

For this dissertation, I use Goffman's concept of impression management and information control to examine how college students with learning disabilities strategically use the performance of reading, writing, and other tasks associated with learning to present a positive self-concept. This dissertation looks at college students who are successful in managing the stigma associated with LD. While other learning disability narratives emphasize the all-encompassing, this study focuses on how individuals with learning disabilities attempt to control the effects and the significance of LD in everyday life.