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THE EFFECT OF A MENTORING PROGRAM ON THE  
SELF-ESTEEM OF FIRST YEAR, LEARNING  
DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENTS

By  
Nathanael I. Barnes

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree  
Of  
The Graduate School  
At  
Rowan University  
April 20, 2004

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

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## Abstract

Nathanael I. Barnes

THE EFFECT OF A MENTORING PROGRAM ON THE  
SELF-ESTEEM OF FIRST YEAR, LEARNING  
DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENTS

2003/2004

Dr. John Klanderman and Dr. Roberta Dihoff  
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of a mentoring program on the self-esteem of first year, learning disabled, college students. A self-esteem assessment was administered prior to the start of the mentoring process. After the students participated in the program for a semester and a half the same self-esteem assessment was given again to determine the change, if any. Also during this time the self-esteem assessment was given to a group of non learning disabled students in the same manner. The participants attended Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. The participants varied in socioeconomic, race and major backgrounds. They were all first year students and attended college full-time. Statistical analysis showed that there was a significant increase in the pre and posttest self-esteem scores for those students with learning disabilities. However, these scores were found to be significantly lower than the scores of the non-learning disabled control group.

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## Chapter 1 The Problem

### Need

Think back to the readers' first year of college. Try to remember all the anxiety that was felt about being in a new setting, being independent, meeting new people, and adjusting to the greater expectations placed upon the typical first year student. For the average first year student the transition from high school to college can be a difficult one. For the learning disabled students this transition is compounded by the students' disability. Whether the disability involves difficulty in reading, problems with writing, attention issues, etc, these students must adapt to the college environment with the loss of the support systems from the students homes.

The Mentoring program that has been established at Rowan University is designed to become that support system, which the first year students may be losing in the transition to college life. There is the one on one function to help give the students the personal attention some of them may need to address specific problems. There are also the group exercises, which give the student an opportunity to network and use each other to develop a supportive environment. There group sessions also provide valuable information regarding such topics as study skills, time management, stress relief, and provide an orientation to the campus specific to the first year students needs.

This study was designed to look at the effectiveness of the mentoring system specific to the student's self-esteem. The researcher chose self-esteem because it



encompasses a global perspective. Students will feel good about themselves in a particular area if those students are doing well or excelling in a specific area. Self-esteem is a self-evaluation of the student by himself or herself. After all the overall goal of the program is to help the students adapt more effectively to the new environment that has been entered.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to look at the change in self-esteem of first year students with learning disabilities in a mentoring program. The intent of the study was to examine whether the mentoring program is having a positive effect on the students with learning disabilities who are involved in the program. Additionally, self-esteem evaluations were given to first year students without any learning disabilities, in order to better understand what the typical change would be in a first year students' self-esteem level. The information received can be used to make adjustments and improvements to the mentoring program at Rowan University.

### Hypothesis

The researcher believes that the students in the mentoring program would have an increase in the self-esteem scores. The increase in self-esteem will be attributed to the academic success that these students will achieve with the assistance of the mentors. In addition, the new friendships they made with the fellow program participants will increase the social self-esteem of the students. Also, this researcher believes that the increase in self-esteem of the first year students with learning disabilities in the

mentoring program will be higher than the first year students without learning disabilities. The researcher mainly attributes this hypothesis to the first year students in the mentoring program having lower self-esteem scores to begin with and thus having more room for improvement.

### Background

This thesis is the result of a previous study conducted by Robin Waltman (2002). The findings in her study showed that students with learning disabilities on Rowan Universities have several issues of concern. Among them are difficulties in adjusting with the transition from high school to college (Waltman, 2002). They experience difficulties with the writing classes, which are required by the University. The students did well in the classes that were smaller in size because they received the individualized attention that was required (Waltman, 2002). Finally, students with learning disabilities did “better in college if they received assistance in their first year in all aspects of college life and thereafter in any specific area in which they had difficulty” (Waltman, 2002).

As a result of this study a mentoring program was developed by the combine effort of several organizations, the center for the study of student life and the director of the Learning Center. The mentoring program is aimed at assisting the first year students in their transition from high school to college. To achieve this goal the program consists of one-on-one interaction between the student and a designated mentor. Also, the program consists of an orientation phase that the students meet once a week for a month and discuss various topics of concern. For example, organizational skills, study habits, stress management, an orientation to the campus, as well as the administration of several tests. These test review the study habits, learning capabilities, and self-esteem of the first

year students. After this initial orientation there are several voluntary programs offered throughout the year on various topics. These programs are open to all students and the topics range from study skills to social skills. The goals of these programs are to refresh important skills and techniques for the students. Second, it gives the students another opportunity to network with other students and meet new people.

The current study is a follow up to help determine the effectiveness of the program. However, it is not the only study as exit interviews will be conducted and the students will give us their input on what they thought was beneficial and what was redundant.

### Definitions

Learning Disabilities- includes a wide range of disabilities, from mildly detectable learning problems to severe handicaps, requiring constant attention. It usually interferes with an individual's ability to master skills such as, reading, writing, speech, and calculations with numbers.

Mentor- an individual with the task of working with students with learning disabilities in the social, personal, and academic areas. These people may act as counselors, advisors, or teachers in order to help the first year students meet success.

Self Esteem-is an individual's judgment of self worth in areas of social competence and academic achievement.

### Assumptions

The main assumption was that all the mentors would provide the same quality of care with each of the participants in the study. Therefore, no one student will benefit

more from a mentors personality and/or qualification than the other. Another assumption was that the students self-esteem rose as a direct correlation to the mentoring relationship. There are many things in the world that affects ones' self-esteem. This study assumed that it is the mentoring relationship that has helped these students.

### Limitations

The main limitation was the small sample size, as well as, the lack of randomization of the sample. This limited the studies ability to be a representative collection of the population of learning disabled students. Due to this no inferences can be made to the entire college population. There were also issues with a lack of diversity in the sample population.

Another limitation was that this study included those students who were committed to working with a mentor and performing well in school. These were self-motivated students who may have higher levels of self-esteem because of the motivation possessed.

### Summary

In Chapter 1, the need, purpose, hypothesis, and background information explains the importance of studies on a first year students with learning disabilities self-esteem. In Chapter 2, a review of the previous research on such topics as, self-esteem, learning disabilities, and mentoring programs will be reviewed in greater detail. In Chapter 3, the design of the study is described, as well as the sample and analysis. In Chapter 4, the results of the study will explained, including interpretation of results and statements of

significance. Finally, in Chapter 5, summaries and conclusions are made and implications for future research are presented.

## Chapter 2 Review of Literature

### Introduction

This literature review provides a discussion on the effects of self-esteem on the learning disabled and the effectiveness of mentoring programs. There has been much research done on self-esteem in high school students, but limited research on self-esteem in college students. Also, there has been few studies done regarding the effect that mentoring programs have on students self-esteem. Even though many articles have stressed the importance of the learning disabled having a support system.

The term “learning disability” is a relatively new term in education. Many believed it was Samuel Kirk that first introduced it back in the early 1960’s (Bradley, et. al., 2002). The modern day educators view learning disability as a disorder that affects the person’s ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain (Shin, 1998). There are many signs of learning disabilities, which can show up in the form of having difficulties with written or spoken language, self-control, coordination, or attention. Most often a person’s ability to learn how to read, write, or do math is effected. Learning disabilities are most often lifelong conditions, which effect a person’s academic career or their job (Shin, 1998). They can be overlapping disabilities or just one.

Due to the relatively new area of study, there is not much research on learning disabled college students. Especially with regards to self-esteem issues and the needs of

these students. It is imperative to conduct more research for these students because many will not consider college an option because of the problems they have in high school.

This review will explore learning disabilities effect on self esteem and how they differ from students without learning disabilities. Also, this review will explore the transition issues that students with learning disabilities face and offer some models that have been effective in smoothing the transition for students with learning disabilities. We will look at academic strategies that will aid in learning disabled students adaptation to college. Finally, this review will examine literature about the effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

### Learning Disabilities Effect on Self Esteem

Blake & Rust (2002) studied the relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy among college students with learning disabilities. The participants were undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities registered with the Disabled Student Service office. The students were asked to complete the Collective Self-Esteem Scale and the Self-Efficacy Scale. The finding supported the research, which states that learning disabled students are part of a typical distribution. Just like non-learning disabled students some learning disabled students have higher self-esteem, while others have lower self-esteem scores. There was not a significant difference between the students with learning disabilities self-esteem and that of the normative sample. However, there was a membership self esteem component which the learning disabled students scored higher on. The reason being is that the students of this University had a learning disabled fraternity and sorority. This provided them the social support that they

could use because they were getting involved with other individuals that face the same challenges. This social support system acts as a replacement for the system they left at home.

Saracoglu, Et. Al. (1989) investigated the relationship between a learning disabled students adjustment to college and self esteem. The participants in this study all filled out self-reporting questionnaires. The findings reported that students with learning disabilities reported significantly poorer academic adjustment than the non-learning disabled peer group. The students with learning disabilities were not prepared for the rigors of college academic life. Thus, the learning disabled students reported lower self-esteem and emotional adjustment. However, the social adjustment scores indicate that these students may not be socially inadequate. The students are very sociable, but because of their struggles in their academic lives their social lives suffer. Their feelings of inadequacy transfer from the academic to the social system.

The next article deals with the self-perception of a learning disability and its relationship to academic self-esteem. Participants in this study completed the Self Perception of Learning Disability instrument. The results supported the hypothesis, which was that self-perception of a person's learning disability would be related to self-esteem (Heyman, 1990). The study also emphasized the importance for learning disabled students to have a clear understanding of their disability in order to achieve a higher self-perception score. A low understanding of the disability leads to low academic self-perception. This low self-perception would then lead to low academic success and poor test scores and in effect become a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, improved self-perception will lead to improved self-esteem and academic achievement.



Schafer (1996) studied the transition into college's effect on self-esteem. The author found that with the initial failure the students with learning disabilities face comes a struggle with self-esteem. The students began to question why they had gone to college, why they had distance themselves from their family and support system, even why they chosen their major. Since, many of the students did so poorly, so early in their academic career, than they had a difficult time recovering. They spiraled into low academic self-esteem, which in turn led to low social self-esteem as they saw their peers meeting with more success. Lastly, the low self-esteem hurt their perception of their potential abilities and distorted their knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses.

Searcy (1988) studied the affect of having a learning disability on a child's self-esteem. She found that children were less interactive with their environment and less engaging with the people around them. These children were less likely to feel pride in the activities they had completed, or the chores they finished. They also required simple and clear directions for their chores. By giving them clear directions the children understood what was expected of them. The study also found that by displaying the child's achievements there was a positive correlation with an increase in self-esteem.

So what does the term learning disabled mean to those with whom it is attached? That is the question Wilczenski (1992), set out to answer. Through several group counseling sessions Wilczenski explored the personal meaning and the social stigma it carries with a group of learning disabled students. By "owning" their disability on an emotional and factual basis Wilczenski (1992) found that the students were better able to make an accurate assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. With a deeper understanding of their disability students formed more positive self evaluations. Also,

through a deeper understanding of their disability and the people who share their challenges, the students recognized other students with learning disabilities as people they could call on for support.

Goss (2001) examined metaphors that adults with learning disabilities use to describe their disability. By examining 23 adult college students Goss hoped to gain a better understanding of how students with learning disabilities view their problems. The metaphors chosen by the students with learning disabilities had common themes: some dealt with the persisting negative effects of learning disabilities, others emphasized restraints or obstacles imposed by learning disabilities, and some metaphors stressed the difficulty of traveling through life with a learning disability. A by-product of this research found that by creating metaphors to explain the students' disability, students were able to gain a sense of control over the learning disabilities. It was a therapeutic activity for those students who participated.

MacMaster, et. al. (2002) examined the relationship between being diagnosed with a learning disability and self-esteem. The authors found that after being diagnosed with a learning disability the self-esteem of the participants increase. The results seem to contradict what most other research has found. These findings were believed possible because the participants viewed their disorder as manageable through remediation. However, a limitation must be placed on these results in that the authors did not follow the participants for long periods of time. Therefore, it is unclear if the response was a result of denial or if it was a perception that this disability was manageable.

Continuing the research of the importance of self understanding and self-esteem Cosden, et. al. (1999) determined that contrary to MacMaster, et. al. increased knowledge

of the learning disability does not necessarily yield increase in self-esteem. This study tried to examine the participants understanding of their disability by examining the way in which the participant was told about the disability. The authors hypothesized that after being told by the teachers the students would understand the disability more because the teachers would have more of an understanding of the disability, initially, than the parents. So because of this understanding the students would have a higher rate of self-esteem. However, it was determined that those who were told by their parents had a more positive perception of themselves than those that were told by their teachers. This study also brought up the point that children may have an inflated self-esteem after diagnosis because they do not fully understand their disability, thus contradicting MacMaster, et. al. Cosden, et. al. (1999) also concluded that perceptions of learning disabilities were associated with academic performance, but global self esteem was associated with other non-academic areas.

Glazer (1997) examined how to build self-esteem in learning disabled students in high school and younger. The results showed that teachers should not be afraid to seek help as some had been prone to do. The teachers should also be encouraged to seek out information on the learning disabled to better equip themselves in their effort to educate these students. Teachers should not assume that all children learn the same way and be open to varying their teaching styles. They should also be open to adjusting their grading procedures to accommodate the learning disabled. By giving out projects and not relying on tests alone, teachers give those with learning disabilities an opportunity to display their knowledge of a given subject without the anxiety of taking a test. Also, they should not use language that would belittle a learning disabled child, such as, "Your lazy, I said

it once I am not saying it again, If you studied hard enough you would have learned more.” (Glazer, 1997). They should be encouraging and specific with their praise (Stringer, et. al., 1999). By following these simple steps teachers can ensure the positive self-esteem of their learning and non learning disabled students.

Harrison (2003) attempted to look at the ultimate environment that would foster and support successful learning for students with learning disabilities. The results of the study indicated the need to prepare students to confront real world problems. Students need to be taught about the issues that concern us in our everyday lives. It is necessary to teach them the importance of working with others, building on their strengths and seeking new possibilities and challenges in their work. The concept of learner centered instruction was presented, which is where the focus is on the individual and their particular learning style. This method focuses on understanding how each child learns and adapting the teaching style to fit the students’ needs. It does not entail lowering the grading standards, they must be applied equitably in a way that does not adversely affect students with learning disabilities. This strategy empowers the students as learners.

Another of part of Harrison ‘s (2003) strategy involves teaching students different learning strategies and incorporating those strategies with the content being taught. By embedding effective learning strategies within the instruction an accessible, responsive, and diverse learning environment is created. Learning strategies must be taught to the students with learning disabilities. The teachers must explain how to best use the strategies so that they may be of some use to the learning disabled. Then when used with content the students can see the relationship between content elements and learning processes.

## Differences in Self Esteem between the Learning Disabled and the Non Learning Disabled

Blake (1989) studied the self-esteem and anxiety levels in learning disabled students versus those levels in non-learning disabled students. Each group was administered the Million Adolescent Personality Inventory and the State Trait Anxiety Inventory. The results found that students with learning disabilities had low academic confidence and high anxiety, however, the study did not find any significant difference between learning disabled and non-learning disabled with respect to self-esteem, academic confidence, or trait anxiety. One of the reasons that the author believes that this research is contrary to other findings, that learning disabled students have a lower self esteem score than their non-learning disabled counterpart, is that there is a special program in place to support the learning disabled students. The design of this program is to bolster self-esteem and reduce anxiety. Therefore, these students may be influenced by this program and thus have higher levels of self-esteem, higher confidence levels, and lower levels of anxiety.

Cosden & McNamara (1997) examined the self-perception of college students with and without learning disabilities. The authors administered the Self-Perception Profile for College Students and People in my Life. The findings supported the research that students with learning disabilities had lower grades, test scores, and perceptions of their scholastic and intellectual abilities than students without learning disabilities. However, students with learning disabilities did not differ in the amount of importance that they place on academic achievement. Also the two groups were equally comparable in global self-esteem and self-worth. Cosden & McNamara (1997) found that the

students with learning disabilities felt strongly supported from friends and overall felt more socially accepted than their non-learning disabled peers. The learning disabled students indicated the importance of a program called the Disabled Students Program, which provides academic counseling, arranges tutorial assistance, and serves in an advocacy role for all students with learning disabilities on campus.

The next study focuses the perception of students with and without learning disabilities of each other. Kelly & Sedlacek (1994) studied 80 college students with learning disabilities and 76 without learning disabilities. The students were asked to rate themselves and members of the other group. Also, the students were asked how the members from the opposite group would rate them. The students were given a 24-item personality instrument that assessed five different factors of personality: agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability, culture, and conscientiousness. The result found that the two groups rated the other in a stereotypical manner. The students with disabilities were viewed as more cultured and conscientious than students without disabilities. Students without disabilities were viewed as more extraverted and emotionally stable. When the two groups rated themselves there was no significant difference found.

In the study conducted by Heiman & Precel (2003) some main academic differences between students with learning disabilities and non-disabled students were presented. The study specifically was looking at areas of difficulties experienced by students with and without learning disabilities. The areas examined were academic coping during examinations, learning strategies, and factors that might help them succeed in their academic studies. In this study 191 college students with learning disabilities and 190 student without learning disabilities participated. The study found that there was no

major difference between the two groups with respect to their grade point averages, number of courses taken, and family status. Students with learning disabilities reported needing more time on tests and having trouble with written examples. These students preferred oral or visual explanations as opposed to written out examples. They also showed concern about the lack of time during a test, as well as, experiencing stress, nervous, helplessness, and uncertainty during tests.

Colangelo, et. al. (1987), studied the difference of self-concept between gifted, general, and special learning needs students. In this study the participants were 243 junior high school students. The school grouped the students into three separate groups to meet their learning needs. Using these grouping guidelines, the authors administered the School Aptitude Measure and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale at two points in the school year. The first point was at the beginning of the year and the second point was at the end of the school year.

The results indicated that gifted students had higher scores on both the academic and social self-concept tests. The gifted students performed better than the general students and the special learning needs students. Furthermore, the results show that the general students performed better on both self-concept tests than the students with special learning needs. Colangelo, Et. Al. (1987) concluded that academic difficulties contributed to the students' with special learning needs low self-concept scores. The authors believed that the academic difficulties suffered by the special learning needs group put these students at risk to future developmental problems.

Cooley & Ayres (2001), studied self-concept and attributions made about academic success and failure compared between learning disabled children and non-

learning disabled students. There were 46 participants with learning disabilities and 47 students without learning disabilities. Each student completed a Piers-Harris Children's self-concept scale assessment in the child's regular classrooms. Results showed primarily because of academic short falls, students with learning disabilities have lower self-concept scores than students without learning disabilities. When the academic component was removed within the Piers-Harris assessment, the global self-concept differences disappeared. The authors concluded that interventions should be aimed at increasing the students with learning disabilities perception of the students' academic ability.

The next study focused on comparing the experiences of the learning disabled students with the normally achieving peer group and the lower achieving peer group. McPhail (1993) studied three groups of juniors and seniors from a suburban high school. One group of 18 students was learning disabled, another group of 17 was low-achieving students and the final group of 20 was average-achieving students. Each student was given an electronic pager and booklet for 1 week. The participants would receive a signal once every 40 minutes during school and then once every two hours after school. As soon as possible the students were to open their booklets and answer questions contained in the booklets. The booklets contained subject matter regarding level of affect, cognition efficiency, activation, self-esteem, motivation, and feedback from others. The results of this study showed that students with learning disabilities reported feeling more positive and active than either of the other groups during school hours. However, after school hours there was no significant difference. The author was unsure as to the reason why this study differed from other similar studies and concluded that the learning



disabled students enjoyed the accommodations that are given to them and thus felt more positive while in school.

### Transition into College for the Learning Disabled Student

The transition from high school to college is difficult for anyone, however, it is particularly difficult for those students who have a learning disability. Schaeffer (1996) identified the student's poor study skills as one attribution to the difficulty in transitioning from high school to college. Since, these students arrive with poor study skills many have unrealistic expectations of the rigor of college courses. They also have such poor reading ability that many do not even purchase a textbook. The author found that these students were able to perform at a high level in high school because they could listen carefully and memorize the material presented by their teachers. Also, many reported receiving assistance with homework from their peers. Now that they are in college they have lost the teacher/parent support system, merely listening in class is not enough, and they don't manage time well. With all the sheltering going on in high school many of these students do not realize that they are at a high risk of failure. So they take courses that are more difficult, get caught off guard, and end up in academic trouble before their careers have even started. Schafer (1996) found that the students wanted help establishing academic goals, help with time management, and they required another support system to replace the ones they lost when they left home.

Janiga & Costenbader (2002) examined the college student services perception of how well the students, whom they served, had been prepared for the college transition by the high schools. This survey was sent to 74 universities and colleges in the New York

State area. The college student service representatives believed that the students had poor self-advocacy skills, had a limited understanding of their disability, poor study skills, were undeveloped independent learners, and had inadequate reading and writing skills. Also, the students and parents were uneducated about the laws and different organizations out there to help them. The learning disabled students had poor time management and were unfamiliar with assistive technology. The study also showed that the college student service members believed that the high school student service members are responsible for this deficient ability in the students with learning disabilities. The college student service members believe that the responsibility lies on their high school counterparts to get the students ready for college. The study also calls for an increase in communication between the high school and college levels.

Smith, et.al.. (2002) highlighted many of the issues concerning students in their transition into college. There are both social and emotional issues, some of which have already been covered. Issues such as being unprepared for responsibility, being overwhelmed by the work load, having difficulty making new friends, and missing the academic support of their parents. In Smith et. al. a study of the parents' involvement was particularly highlighted. In particular the students with learning disabilities felt dependent on their parents for help academically and even as far as needing the parents help choosing the course work. The parents did not effectively help their children transition toward an independent self-advocacy role (Smith Et. Al, 2002; Ericksen, et. al., 2001). Smith et. al. (2002) suggest the use of an Individual Transition Plan for students, which helps the parents' help the students become more prepared to be independent and become their own advocate. Some other skills the parents can teach their children are

self-disclosure enhancement skills. These skills involve helping the child understand how and when to let people know about their disability. Also, it aids in helping the child understand their disability so that they may better explain it to others.

Ericksen-Radtke, et. al. (2001) echoed Smith et. al. comments about parents need to teach a child how to develop self-advocacy skills. They also placed importance on the students' clarifying their educational goals, finding the support services on campus, and having the parents encourage the students to see the school counselor. Also, parents need to stress the importance of academic planning from as young as elementary school (Beale & Ericksen-Radtke, 2001). By doing this students learn how to organize their academic careers.

### Transition Models for Learning Disabled Students

One of several models that aid in a students transition from high school to college, as well as through college, is the Three-Stage Transition Model. Siperstein (1988) describes this model as aiding the students transition into college, helping the student manage the academic and social changes during college and helping the student leave college and achieve employment. When helping a student make the transition from high school to college Siperstein (1988) stresses the importance of supporting the students interest in college, which stresses going to high schools and promoting the options that are after high school to learning disabled students. Also, by incorporating individualized college plans for incoming first year students as part of the learning disabled students planning process, the transition is made easier for those first year students whom have learning disabilities (Siperstein, 1988; Cantu, 2002).

Once a student has entered college there is no guarantee that they will be successful. To aid in the learning disabled students chance of success the author suggests five steps: effective delivery of support services, compensatory skill workshops, social functioning workshops, student initiated projects, and faculty awareness workshops. A college can effectively deliver support systems by improving the ease with which the students can access and utilize the services they need. For example, assistive technology has been found to empower a students abilities (Goldberg & O'Neil 2000). By using these different technologies a student is better able to effectively complete assignments and remember details regarding material covered. The student initiated projects are intended for students with learning disabilities to design activities to help their fellow students with learning disabilities (Siperstein, 1988). The projects range from teaching study skill habits, time management, or other skills necessary for collegiate success or teaching the learning disabled students more about their disability. The projects can also be used to help develop social skills for the students.

Finally, once the college student has successfully navigated toward graduation, the final stage includes aiding in the students search for a career. This is accomplished by holding career awareness workshops, job search strategy workshops, and job maintenance skills workshop (Siperstein, 1988). By implementing these procedures colleges can ensure the overall success of the learning disabled students.

Another model is Dalkes' (cited in Vogel & Adelman, 1993) project assist transition model aiding in the transition from high schools to college. There are three levels to this program: an orientation, summer transition program, and a follow-up program. This program begins with an orientation program in high school for

prospective students and their parents or guardians. One purpose of this orientation program is to provide an overview of the goals and objectives of the summer transition program. Also, information is provided concerning the costs of the program and activities that will take place. Finally, expectations are given and any concerns given by the parents or students are addressed.

The next stage is the summer transition program that helps prepare the students with learning disabilities for the rigor of college life. Topics include study skills, campus and community awareness, psychosocial skill enhancement, fall course advisement, and career awareness and exploration. The follow up stage occurs during the fall semester where the assessment of how well the first semester went for the student takes place. Also, the students concerns are addressed and the students answer a follow-up evaluation that rates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the summer transition program. The case study provided showed the effectiveness of this program and illustrates all the components more effectively than will be covered for the purposes of this literature review.

The previous models are nice theories, but would the students be willing to seek out the assistance of the programs? In Hartman & Haaga's (2002) study, the authors examined the students with learning disabilities willingness to seek help for their disability. In this study college students were asked to complete measures of self-esteem and of their perceptions of their learning disability. In addition, they rated their willingness to seek help for their disability after reading about a student who requested help and received both positive and negative reactions from their peers. Also, the students listened to audiotapes that played advertisements, which emphasized the

learning and performance goals. Participants were found most willing to seek help after reading positive reactions from faculty and peers, than they were after receiving negative reactions. Also, they were more willing to seek help after hearing about the positive effects that could be achieved, such as improved grades. The students that viewed their disability as a negative situation had lower self-esteem levels and were less likely to seek out help for their disability, regardless of the circumstance. This could be attributed to the perception that their disorder was not treatable and therefore, the students felt that they could not be helped.

#### Academic Strategies for Learning Disabled Students

Vogel & Adelman (1992) examined factors that influenced the educational attainment of learning disabled students. Again the need for a support system was acknowledged in their study. One of the important reasons for this is the need for assistance in identifying what coursework the student needs. As previously discussed in Schaeffer (1996) when students do poorly academically it is because they have been able to slide by in high school and have unrealistic expectations when choosing their course load. Vogel & Adelman (1992) stated that the advisor could not only assist them in choosing their courses, but the advisor could reevaluate the coursework for the students and help them deal with the difficulties that they were having. The authors also found that when the students meet on a regular basis with an advisor the advisor could help them problem solve when the students are having difficulties on assignments. The advisors could also aid in basic skills, such as time management (Cobb, 2003). By

evaluating the students' strengths and weaknesses the advisor can help the student become a better learner.

Wachelka & Katz (1999) examined the effect of cognitive behavioral therapy on the test anxiety levels of students with learning disabilities. College and high school students were involved in an eight week long treatment, which consisted of guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, self-instruction training, and study and test taking skills. The students were given the Test Anxiety Inventory, which measured the levels of anxiety the students felt when taking a test. The inventory was given in a pre and post- test format, before and after the eight week long cognitive behavioral training. Also the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory were administered. The results showed that test anxiety was significantly reduced compared to a control group, which received no training. Also, improved study skills and academic self-esteem were a result of the training. Wachelka & Katz (1999) further proved that these goals might be accomplished in a fairly quick period of time using the cognitive behavioral approach.

Yuan (1994) developed a course for students with learning disabilities. The course centered around providing the students with answers to basic questions about learning disabilities. Also, the course analyzed the students learning style, their strengths and weaknesses, in order capitalize on those strengths. They also analyzed what strategies the learning disabled students were incorporating in their studies already. Lastly, the program taught self-advocacy skills and helped the students incorporate them into their everyday lives. One of the tools that were used was the Individualized Learning Profile, which was completed at the end of the course. This tool served as an

overview of the students' strengths and weaknesses and profiled the students' behavior. These techniques could be incorporated into a college level mentoring program.

### Mentoring Relationship

Through this literature review we have touched on some of the literature that explained the importance of a mentoring relationships on students self-esteem. Many listed this topic as future research for their studies. Muscott & O'Brien (1999) found that the mentoring relationship had an extremely positive effect on students with learning disabilities. The authors found that learning disabled students took more responsibility for their actions. They learned to make new friends, which addresses the social concern that surrounds students with learning disabilities. The other result is that the students found that learning in teams or with a mentor was fun and they encouraged the continued use of this format. Although the curriculum taught was character education, the results are encouraging and could be applied to normal curriculum.

Nevin, et. al. (1982) studied the difference between group and individual settings for learning. The goal was to determine whether children work better in a group environment or by themselves. The results showed that when working in a group, academic achievement is higher for student than if working by themselves. Also, this study found that children would show more socially acceptable behavior when in a group setting. By working in a group format the children with learning disabilities were also more socially accepted. Since, they were forced to engage with others the learning disabled students were more out going and thus more well liked by their peers. Self-esteem was also higher for those students that worked in the group environment, whether



this was a result of being more accepted or having higher achievement scores or a combination of the two was not clear. The overall conclusion from the author was that group settings were more conducive for learning disabled students to academically perform.

Mentoring has been found effective with learning disabled children as evident in the LEAD program. Pocock, et. al. (2002) explains how the LEAD program helps promote self-advocacy and self-esteem. The philosophy of the program promotes ownership of oneself and responsibility for ones own actions. Students with learning disabilities run the group in a partnership with faculty members. The students learn about their disabilities through school psychologist and other experts. They put together presentation and use case studies to gain a better understanding of the different learning disabilities. For example, the students used student folders as guides for understanding their disabilities. They looked at IEP's, test results, IQ scores, and other data. This was effective because they learned that they were intelligent, but just learned differently, thus increasing their self esteem. The LEAD group also acts as a support group for other students with learning disabilities to come together and help one another. Since, these students all share common disabilities, they share similar experiences and are valuable resources for each other to consult. This group also mentors younger students and acts as guides for them and use their experiences to help others. Finally, this group goes out into the community and educates teachers, parents, administrators, and other members of the community about learning disabilities. By doing this they are gaining some empowerment because they are not letting their disability become a negative in their lives.

Elbaum & Vaughn (2003) conducted a study to determine if these interventions were effective for students with learning disabilities. The intervention used was designed to promote the learning disabled students self-concept. The general, academic, social, and personal self-conceptions were the areas focused on in the intervention. The findings revealed that there was a significant increase in self-conception after the interventions. The study also found that students with low self-concept scores benefited more than those students with normal or high self concept scores.

### Summary

The literature showed that learning disabled students, as a whole, have difficulties with self-esteem. Whether it is a result of their academic difficulties or social difficulties, many students do not have a high self-perception of themselves. This is a critical issue that needs immediate attention.

When moving to college the learning disabled students lose their support system, which often times is critical to their academic success. The literature showed the steps that need to be included in a transition program, whether it be a mentoring or otherwise. The literature also showed how effective these programs can be in helping the students make the adjustment. Research also shows how a mentor excites the students about learning and helps them adjust more effectively, than having a central office where the students go to get help. Many students are apprehensive about getting help for fear that it will cast them in a negative light. By assigning them a mentor, a one-on-one atmosphere, deflects that negative image.

The review of the literature supported the need for the current study. Many of the studies reinforced the need for some type of support system for students with learning disabilities. The research showed the positive effect that these programs could have on learning disabled students self-esteem.

## Chapter 3 Design of the Study

### Sample

This study included two groups of participants who were college students. The first group of students consisted of 9 first-year students with identified learning disabilities. There were 5 male and 4 female. These students were participating in a mentoring program for students with learning disabilities. The second group or control group, of subjects in the study consists of 19, first-year students who are not classified with a learning disability. There were 6 males and 13 females.

All the participants attended Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. The participants were varied in race, socioeconomic backgrounds, and majors. Also, they all attended college full time.

### Measures

The assessment tool used in this study was the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory Form AD (Battle, 2002). This assessment examined general self-esteem, which the test defined as an individuals' overall perception of self-worth. Also the test examined Social Self-esteem, which was defined as the individuals' perception of the quality of the relationship with peers. Finally, personal self-esteem was defined as the aspect of an individuals' self-esteem that refers to an individuals' most intimate perceptions of self-worth.

The test was found to be reliable using test-retest reliability measures. One hundred students enrolled in an introductory educational psychology course were used in the initial test-retest reliability study. A test-retest correlation was found to be .81 for all participants. When determining the scores for gender, it was found that for males the correlation was .79 and for females the correlation was .82.

The test was found valid using content validity testing and concurrent validity testing. According to Battle (2000), content validity was built into the instrument by developing a construct definition of self-esteem and by writing items intended to cover all areas of the construct. A factor analysis also indicates that the items in the subtest possess acceptable internal consistency.

Research showed that the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory also showed significant correlation with other similar inventories thus showing significant concurrent validity. The assessments used to prove concurrent validity were Beck's Depression Inventory and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.

Also, a study was conducted for academically successful students with learning disabilities and results show that successful students found higher self-esteem scores than the less successful counterpart. Which is a relevant finding for the current study

### Design

The Office of Disability Services at Rowan University submitted a list of 42 students with a variety of disabilities. A letter was sent to these students by the Director of the Office of Disability Services to inquire if they would be interested in participating in a mentoring program developed for these students. The letter explained that the

program was aimed at improving academic success and increase social competency. In addition to this letter, the Director of the Office of Disability Services held an informational meeting during orientation for the parents of students with learning disabilities. The objective was to get the parents involved and to encourage the student's participation. This tactic yielded the best results as the majority of the students present in the first meeting of the mentoring program indicated that the parents played a crucial part in convincing them to come and participate in the program. Finally, when the student's came to pick up the special needs letter, which explains the special needs and accommodations that are to be made for the students. The Director of the Office of Disability Services reminded the students again about the program and when the first meeting would be held. A total of 12 students showed up to the first meeting for the mentoring program.

The control groups were all students in an introduction to Psychology course. These students were fulfilling a requirement as psychology majors that required participation in some research project. The class contained 23 students of which 19 students were willing to participate.

Before the test was administered, each student signed an informed consent agreement. A brief description of the study was given to the participants, along with assurance that all answers would remain completely anonymous. The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory was administered, which took about 15 minutes. The assessment was given twice, once at the beginning of the semester and once toward the end. Both times the assessment was given after the introduction to psychology class for the control group and during the mentoring programs group meeting for the experimental group.

The study followed all guidelines and procedures set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Authorized and approval for this study was obtained.

The difference in the level of self-esteem was the dependent variable. The independent variables of this study were the participants in the mentoring program or the traditional students.

### Hypothesis

The Null hypothesis for this study was that there was no difference in the pre-test and post-test self-esteem scores for the learning disabled students. The alternate hypothesis was that there was a positive difference between the pre-test and post-test self-esteem scores for the learning disabled students. The second null hypothesis was that the learning disabled students had lower increases in the self-esteem scores compared to the non learning disabled students. The alternate hypothesis was that the learning disabled students would have a higher increase in the self-esteem assessment scores than the non learning disabled students.

### Analysis

An analysis was conducted where descriptive statistics were run to determine mean, median, etc. The mean for both the pre-test and post-test self-esteem scores were found and reported for both the experimental and control groups.

The pre-test and post-test methodologies were used to track the progress of the participants' self-esteem from before involvement in the mentoring program to after a semester and a half of being a mentee. The results were analyzed using a 2 X 2 ANOVA.

A comparison between the experimental group, those with learning disabilities, and the control group, those traditional students, was made to determine several factors. First, if there was an increase in self-esteem within the experimental group. Second, to compare that increase with the results of the control group to aid in illustrating that the increase in self-esteem of the experimental group is a result of the mentoring program and not a natural increase.

### Summary

This study included two groups of participants: 1) were first year students with identified learning disabilities, and 2) were traditional students with no learning disabilities in an introductory psychology class. All the subjects were full-time students attending Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey.

The subjects participated by completing the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory that measure the participants overall self-esteem. The information was then analyzed in order to determine if the self-esteem of the students with learning disabilities rose as a result of the mentoring program or due to natural forces.



## Chapter 4 Analysis of Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a mentoring program on the self-esteem of first year, college students with learning disabilities. It was hypothesized that there was a positive increase between the pre-test and the posttest of the learning-disabled self-esteem scores. However, it was further hypothesized that the students with learning disabilities in the mentoring program will have a greater increase in self-esteem levels, than the non-learning disabled students.

The assessment used was broken down into five subsections: Total Self-Esteem, General Self-Esteem, Personal Self-Esteem, Social Self-Esteem, and a lie subtest. Figure 4.1 illustrated the total self-esteem T scores for the pre and posttests for the experimental and control groups. These pie charts illustrated the increase in self-esteem scores for the experimental group, as well as, the difference compared with the control group. For scores of 60 and above the self-esteem was deemed very high. Scores ranging from 56-59 had high self-esteem; scores from 45-54 had intermediate self-esteem. Finally, scores from 35-44 had low self-esteem and any score below 33 had very low self-esteem.

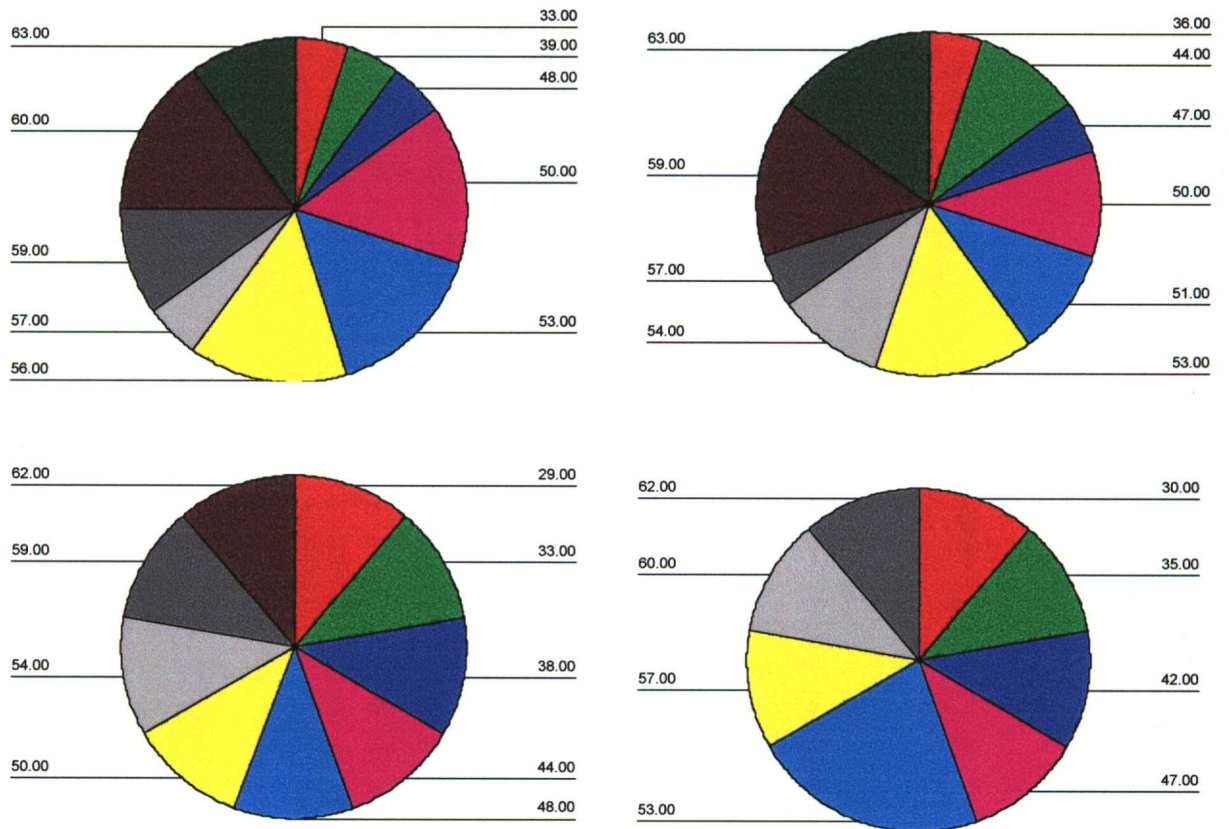


Figure 4.1 The T score results for the total self-esteem for the pre-test control group (upper left), posttest control group (upper right), pre-test experimental group (lower left), and posttest experimental group (lower right).

Figure 4.2 illustrated the general self-esteem T scores for the pre and posttests for the experimental and control group. The results showed an increase in self-esteem for the experimental group. For scores of 59 and above the self-esteem was deemed very high. Scores ranging from 53-56 had high self-esteem; scores from 37-54 had intermediate self-esteem. Finally, scores from 32-34 had low self-esteem and any score below 29 had very low self-esteem.

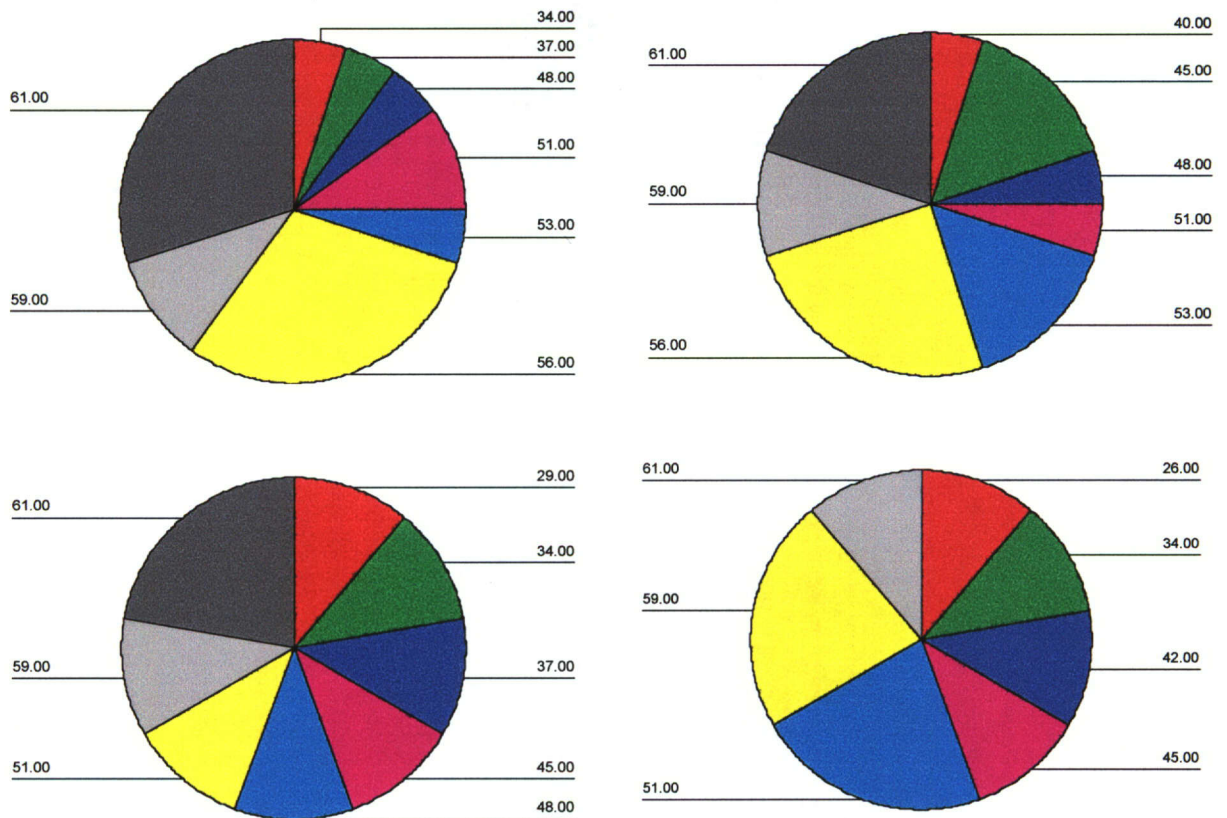


Figure 4.2 The T score results for the general self-esteem for the pre-test control group (upper left), posttest control group (upper right), pre-test experimental group (lower left), and posttest experimental group (lower right).

Figure 4.3 illustrated the personal self-esteem T scores for the pre and posttests for the experimental and control groups. The pie charts depicted the difference between the experimental and control groups. For scores of 64 and above the self-esteem was deemed very high. Scores ranging from 55-60 had high self-esteem; scores from 47-51 had intermediate self-esteem. Finally, scores from 39-43 had low self-esteem and any score below 35 had very low self-esteem

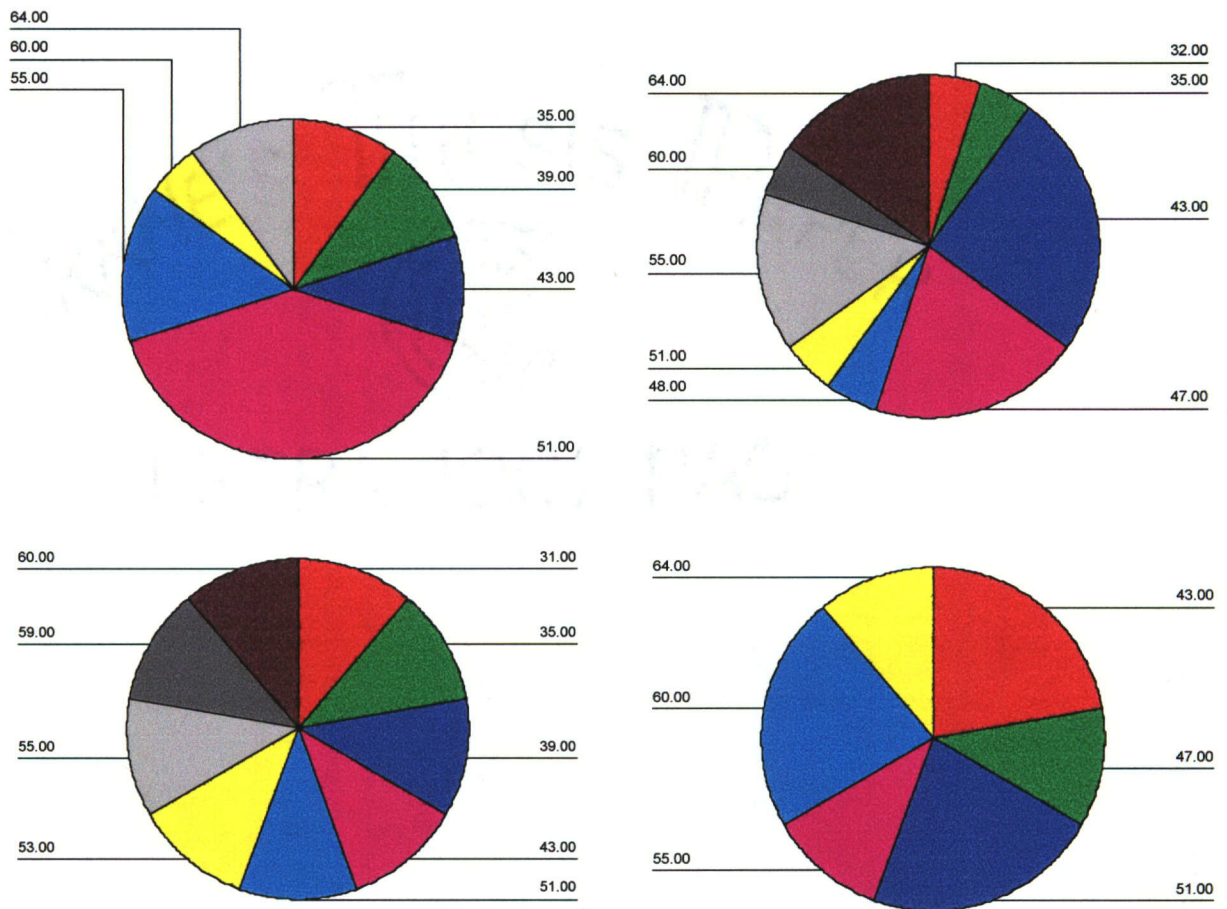


Figure 4.3 The T score results for the personal self-esteem for the pre-test control group (upper left), posttest control group (upper right), pre-test experimental group (lower left), and posttest experimental group (lower right).

Figure 4.4 illustrated the social self-esteem T scores for the pre and posttests for the control and experimental groups. These charts illustrated the increase in self-esteem for the experimental group, as well as, the decrease for the control group. For scores of 59 and above the self-esteem was deemed very high. Scores ranging from 46-53 had high self-esteem; scores from 32-39 had intermediate self-esteem. Finally, scores from 18-25 had low self-esteem and any score below 12 had very low self-esteem.

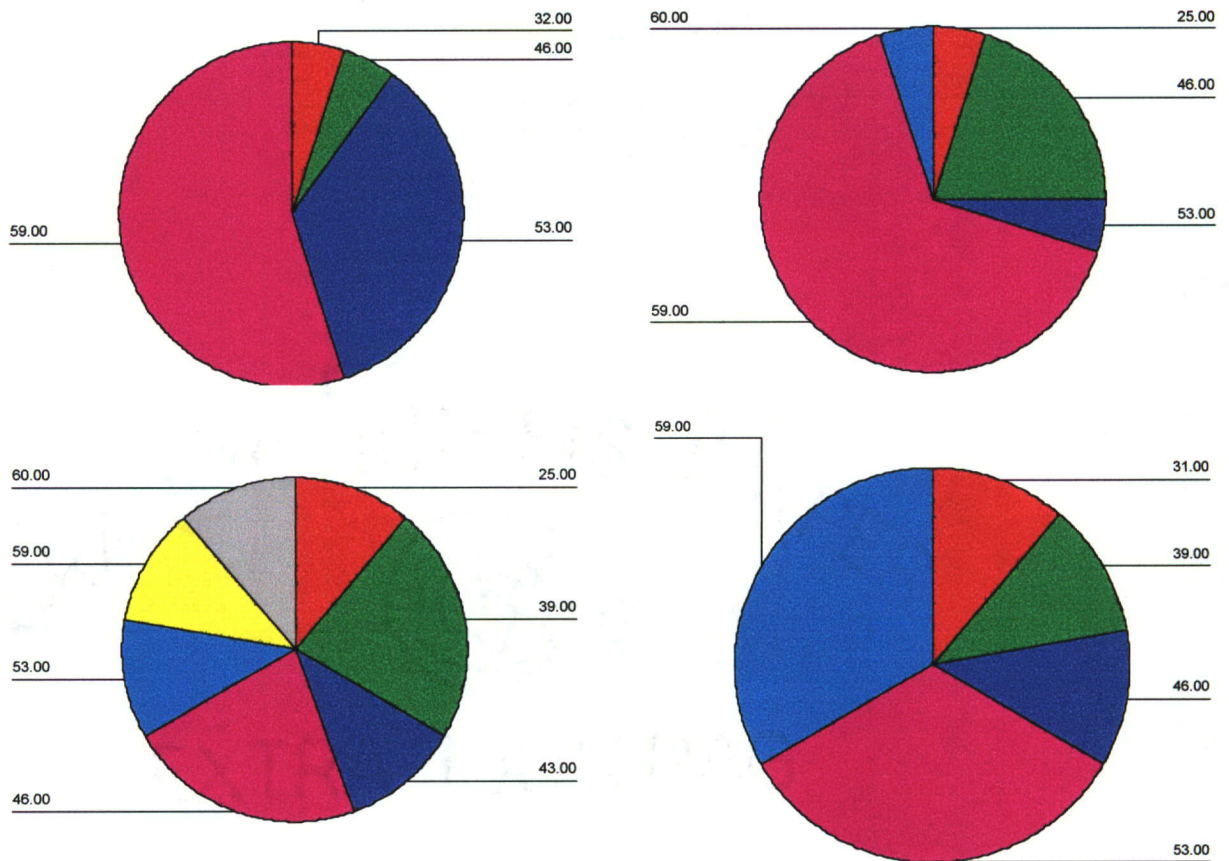


Figure 4.4 The T score results for the social self-esteem for the pre-test control group (upper left), posttest control group (upper right), pre-test experimental group (lower left), and posttest experimental group (lower right).

Figure 4.5 illustrated the lie subtest T scores for the pre and posttests for the experimental and control groups. For scores of 38 and above indicates that the participant was telling the truth. Score from 31 and below indicate the subject was lying. These charts illustrated that almost all of the participants told the truth.

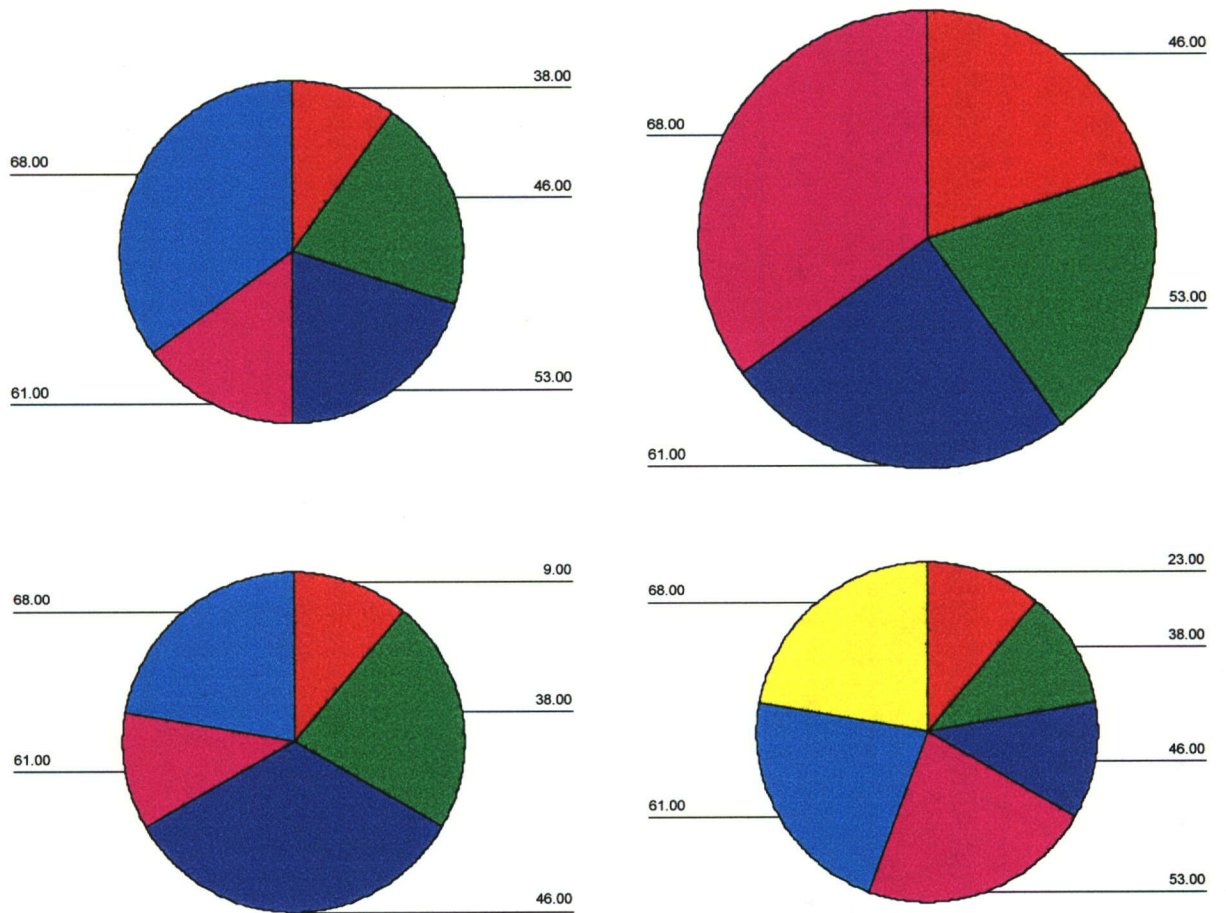


Figure 4.5 The T score results for the lie subtest for the pre-test control group (upper left), posttest control group (upper right), pre-test experimental group (lower left), and posttest experimental group (lower right).

The first question that was answered was whether there was an increase in the self-esteem levels of the learning disabled students. For the total self-esteem test the pre-test mean T scores were 46.3333 and the posttest scores were 48.7778. The general self-esteem T scores also increased from 47.2222 to 47.5556. The personal self-esteem T scores increase from 47.3333 to 52.6667, again showing a positive increase. Finally, the social self-esteem scores rose from 45.5556 to 50.222.

The second question was would there be a significant increase between the pre and posttest in respect to control and the experimental groups. In figure 4.6 the comparison is illustrated between the mean T score changes of the control group and the mean T score changes of the experimental group. The chart illustrates that there was a greater change in the total, personal, and social self-esteem in the experimental group versus the control group. Whether the change was significant or not will be discussed later on in the chapter.

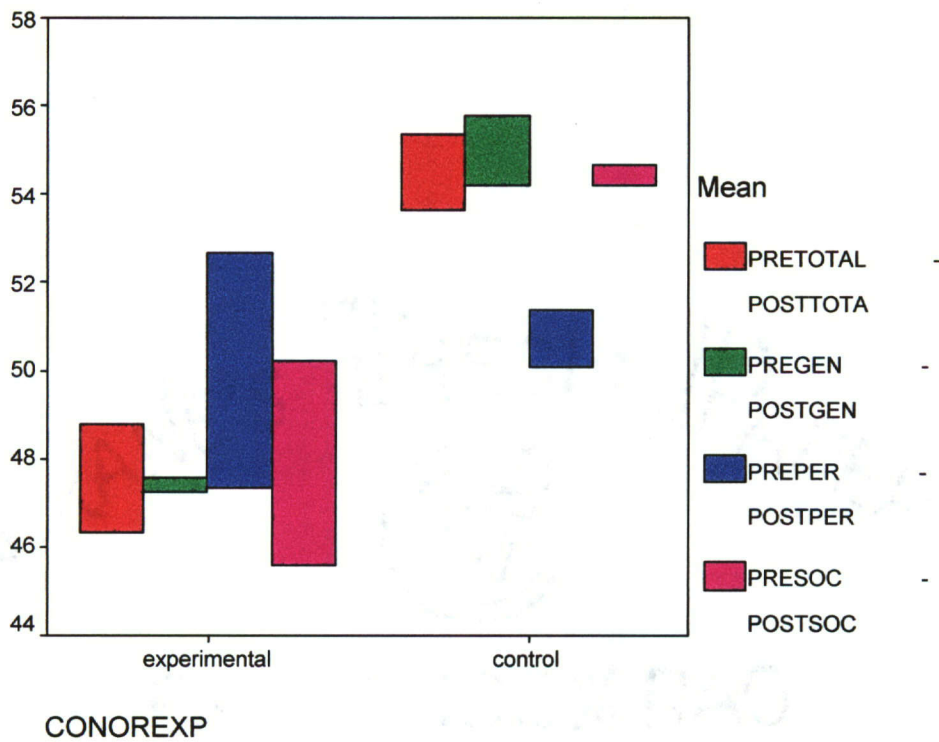


Figure 4.6 A comparison between the mean T scores of the experimental and control groups.

After a 2X2 ANOVA was run there was a significant relationship found between the change in the total self-esteem of the control group versus the experimental group,  $F(1)=4.404$ ,  $p<.046$ . Also, a significant relationship was found between the experimental and control groups from the general self-esteem results,  $F(1)=5.296$ ,  $p<.030$ . However, the personal self-esteem scores were not found to be significant. Finally, a significant relationship was found for the scores of the social self-esteem assessment,  $F(1)=4.210$ ,  $p<.050$ .



## Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusions

### Summary

The purpose of this report was to determine if a mentoring program for first year, college students with learning disabilities had a positive effect on their self-esteem. For a period of a semester and a half, students participated in a mentoring program at Rowan University. The students were given a self-esteem assessment before the program began and the same assessment when the program concluded. Results were gathered and analyzed, then compared with a control group also given the same self-esteem assessment.

The subjects of this study included 9 first-year college students with learning disabilities and 19 first-year students who were not classified with a learning disability. All of the participants attended Rowan University and varied in socioeconomic background, race, and majors. The 9 learning disabled students participated in a mentoring program with the main goal of increasing the chance for academic success and a secondary goal of increasing self-esteem and confidence.

Results of the study showed that the mentoring program was effective in increasing the total self-esteem of the participants involved. It further confirmed that the increases in self-esteem scores of the learning disabled were higher overall than their non-learning disabled counterparts.

## Conclusions

A review of the data showed that, in every aspect of self-esteem that the assessment measured, an increase was present. In this study an assumption was made that every participant received standard care and attention from the mentors and that there were no external event that would significantly alter the participants self-esteem. Thereby, confirming our first hypothesis that the mentoring program had a positive effect on the self-esteem of the participants.

A further examination revealed that overall the self-esteem scores for the learning disabled increased significantly more than the non learning-disabled students. This can be attributed to the learning disabled students have lower overall self-esteem scores and therefore more room to improve. A quick glance at Figure 4.6 in the results section illustrates the difference in three of the four self-esteem categories with the total, general, and social. While the personal self-esteem scores were the only area were the learning disabled students scored higher overall in self-esteem. Considering that this measure of self-esteem is the most intimate perception of self-worth, this was an interesting finding.

## Discussions

In the modern postsecondary educational world more and more students with learning disabilities are finding their way into college. It is up to the colleges to make appropriate preparations to accommodate this group of learners. Research has shown that one of the main problems a first year, learning disabled, college student faces is the loss of the support network they had in high school. Many times students move away from

their homes and have to adapt to an independent learning environment. Therefore, an already intimidating experience is intensified for these students.

This study observed the self-esteem levels for these students when they received assistance in the form of a mentor. The total self-esteem score for our assessment was the combine scores for general, personal, and social self-esteem, which will be explained later. The mean scores for the learning disabled students were found to have an intermediate level of self-esteem for both the pre and the posttest. This was significantly lower than the control group of non-learning disabled first year students. According to the research of Blake (1989), which found this is a normal occurrence.

The next category of self-esteem was the general self-esteem category, which looked at the overall perception of self-worth. Again there was a raise in the pre and posttest levels, but the scores were still significantly lower than the control group. The scores reflected a modest level of self-worth for the learning disabled students while the non-learning disabled students were found to have high levels of self-esteem.

In the personal level of self-esteem there was an interesting finding. This category of self-esteem measures the aspects of self-esteem that are most intimate to the perception of self-worth. The results again showed an increase in the levels of self-esteem between the pre and the posttest for the learning disabled students, however, there was no significant difference between the experimental and the control group. Each group was seen as having a high score for this category. Perhaps this shows that students with learning disabilities are internally happy with the people they are, but unhappy with social and academic areas of their personality. Research does support that academic self-confidence of learning disabled students is often lower than their non-learning disabled

peers (Hayman, 1990; Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Further research needs to be conducted to determine if this is an accurate representation of these two populations

Finally, the social self-esteem levels rose as well for the learning disabled groups. The results showed that the learning disabled students had high levels of social self-esteem. This does concur with the research because according to Cosden & McNamara (1997), student with learning disabilities often have an intense support network from which they draw confidence. Even though the social self-esteem levels were high for the learning disabled students, they were still significantly lower than the non-learning disabled group.

#### Implications for Future research

The results of this study showed that the mentoring relationship could be a valuable tool in helping students with learning disabilities meet success in increasing the self-esteem levels. However, this study left many questions that need to be answered to continue to improve the quality of education that these students receive. Therefore, this study provided many opportunities for future research.

First, this study needs to be done on a broader scale with more participants. In addition, the sample needs to be more diverse with respect to the different cultures and socioeconomic levels used. Since this was exclusive to students at a small rural university, it did not allow for the diverse and large participant sample required to become a more conclusive study.

From the results gathered a more intense study could be conducted to determine if there was any other extraneous source that may have affected the self-esteem results in

addition to the mentoring program. Obtaining academic grades and determining if that had any impact could draw a correlation. There are many major events that occur while in college that could drastically affect a participant's self-esteem. By taking these into consideration a more accurate representation could be gathered. A comparison between learning disabled students who use the mentors and those that do not could be run to determine what effect motivation has in the self-esteem levels.

Also, a study could be conducted as to why the personal self-esteem scores for the non-learning disabled were so low. This is the most intimate level of self-esteem so it would be interesting to determine if this was something specific to this control group or to all first year students entering college. There could also be more studies on the mentoring relationship itself and if this could be helpful to non-learning disabled students.

However, this is an entirely different line of study and the researcher will not follow this course. The study was a great first step, but more grandiose research needs to be conducted and continue down this path of research.

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