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Introduction

We recognize that the topic of this special issue does not focus directly on vocational rehabilitation. However, we do believe that it is time for professionals in vocational rehabilitation to learn more about and gain a better understanding of self-determination from the perspective of the disability community. Self-determination has implicitly been at the heart of the changes in the political and social definitions of disability which have occurred during the past 25 years.

For this issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* several scholars, leaders and activists in the disability movement were asked to submit articles related to the topic of 'Disability, Self-determination and Identity.' The special issue is both a celebration and an invaluable symbol of our collaboration as disabled scholars. We began by telephoning each other to share our frustration with the pervasive stereotyping of disability issues. In many of these conversations we discussed the need to have a means to pull together several discussions, by disabled people, about our perceptions of our community in terms of the issues of self-determination, empowerment, choice, advocacy, influence and control. We also recognized a sense of shared frustration due to our experiences of a lack of power, authenticity and credibility given to disabled scholars to dispel the myths commonly associated with many disability issues.

We realized that even though self-determination may have been at the core of the disability rights movement, it now needed to be brought into the academic research arena. The revolution in disability identity that first came to public attention in the United States with the Section 504 sit-in in 1977 and then culminated in 1990

with the passage of the ADA, has not been adequately researched or acknowledged. Borrowing from the history and experiences of other marginalized United States groups, the term self-determination captures the primary issues of institutional control, subservience and domination. Unfortunately, disabled people have often played a secondary role in guiding the definition of the problems and designing the responses to these problems. This is not surprising. The Americans with Disabilities Act, in explaining the need for disability civil rights legislation, notes that we have been 'victimized by pity, paternalism and charity.' These attitudes have resulted in parents, physicians, special education teachers, rehabilitation counselors and other professionals making decisions about the lives and welfare of disabled people often without our consultation and rarely with our direction. We believe that this special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* makes an important break from such occurrences.

But how do we know what self-determination is for us as disabled individuals and as a disability community? It is clear that differences in beliefs and differing perspectives exist within our community. We do not mean to suggest that the disability community is a monolithic community. There is great diversity within our community. However, it is important that we acknowledge that we are sometimes plagued by the effects of internalized oppression taking our hurts out on each other. Our problems come from discriminatory policies and environments not each other. It is with our struggle to identify and develop solutions to such issues that our need for true self-determination and empowerment become increas-

ingly evident. Another critical issue is our need to assist our allies to work with us and be tough partners in fighting disability oppression, and our helping them to develop approaches to supporting our struggle for greater self-determination and empowerment.

Disabled people have experienced a profound change in our conception of ourselves, our role in society and the contributions we can make. We need to keep both in mind as we move forward. We believe that the articles in this special issue will make an important contribution to the discussion of self-determination, empowerment, advocacy, choice and control.

Gilson, Tusler and Gill in an exploratory, non-experimental research study which focused on identity and self-determination report the analysis of responses to disability identity issues such as: 'who is us'; 'disability pride'; 'disability positive'; 'disability culture and community'; and 'self-determination'. Their discussion, 'Ethnographic Research in Disability Identity: Self-determination and Community,' highlights the importance of disabled people determining the interpretation of their experiences and relating their own stories.

Hahn provides a thought provoking and insightful analysis of the experience of disability and the critical importance of constructing a self-image of disability on the basis of life with a disability, rather than of loss of life in spite of a disability. Hahn again displays his leadership in helping to set 'An Agenda for Citizens with Disabilities: Pursuing Identity and Empowerment.' His review and analysis of the history of the disability community provides an excellent foundation for the discussions which follow.

Rogovsky's examination of the role that disabled and non-disabled people have played in organizing and establishing formal disability associations, provides a unique analysis of how these organizations have influenced our development of self-determination. In 'A Partial History of Self-determination and the Politics in the Disability Community,' Rogovsky suggests that development of self-determination has been linked to our: defining the collective self and experiences; self-naming; taking our message public through organizing; and establishing formal associations.

In 'Four Types of Integration in Disability Identity Development,' Gill provides an insightful and well considered model which supports a renewed effort to relate to society from a position of enhanced self-definition. The author presents an analysis of the processes of integration which include: integrating into society; integrating with the disability community; internally integrating our sameness and differentness; and integrating how we feel with how we present ourselves. This framework provides the basis for celebrating both our group affiliation and our personal integration.

The discussion by Miller in, 'The Politics and Experience of Disability: A View from the Blind Side,' combines an analysis of management and organizational studies with other social science literature to describe how people with disabilities experience organizational life. Using the self reference of the blind community, Miller takes us inside organizational life. We are made aware that a key to employment and career success is our recognition that we are the experts on what our talents, interests and needs truly are. It is such recognition that will lead to increased success and satisfaction and to self-enhancing employment and career choices.

Wilson provides a valuable European perspective on the development of self-determination and the emergence of an international disability movement and the provision of services in Europe. The author establishes a provocative and insightful analysis of the role that economic arguments play in any discussion of equality and citizenship in the field of disability. Just as we are often reminded that we live in a global economy, Wilson helps remind us that we live in a global disability community. With this recognition, we are better able to share with and learn from each other. A discussion of 'Self-determination, Empowerment and Community: A Perspective from Ireland,' is a long overdue and greatly appreciated celebration of our global linkages.

Wallace and Gilson, allies with the disability community, offer an interesting and much needed discussion of 'Disabled and Non-disabled: Allied Together to Change the System.' Their utilization of a case study format provides a concrete framework for a discussion of an issue of considerable

concern as we move toward greater self-determination and empowerment; that is what is the role and place of non-disabled people in the struggle for disability rights? The authors, providing a blended perspective, have sought to achieve the development of a balance between support and advice and not interfering. They point out that the role of non-disabled in the disability movement is often fraught with tension. Wallace and Gilson have achieved their goal of taking this discussion to a higher level without avoiding the difficult issues that are sure to emerge.

In their article, Seelman and Sweeney, provide a clear example of the role that governmental agencies can play in the promotion of a self-determining community and culture among people with disabilities. 'Empowerment, Advocacy and Self-determination: Initiatives of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research,' is an excellent analysis of the role that this very important agency has played as we move toward greater independence and freedom. As reflected

in their discussion, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research has played a key role not only in promoting scholarly inquiry in this area, but also with the social and emotional support so necessary for this discussion to progress.

We are indebted to Dr. Paul Wehman for his trust in us and in his willingness to support those of us with disabilities in presenting our voices in this discussion. Every effort was made to put forth the active voices, beliefs and opinions of people with disabilities in this very important area. We thank all of the contributors for their commitment of time and effort. We are also indebted to our disabled brothers and sisters around the world, without which we could not have taken the discussion this far. Thank you.

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Co-editors