

Clarkson University

Spring 2022 David A. Walsh '67

Arts & Sciences Seminar Series

Friday, November 11th @ 12pm in SN 214

College students with food allergy: From hypervigilance to disclosure fatigue

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of food allergy (FA) on the daily lives of young adults who recently transitioned to attending college away from home. Design and Methods: We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews using a grounded theory approach to data collection, data analysis, and theory development. For recruitment, we posted a flier on a FA Facebook group and reposted approximately monthly for one year. We completed and recorded 16 interviews that ranged in duration from 30-90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed with the intention of developing mid-range theory. Results: Several interrelated themes were identified during the analytical process, including hypervigilance, misunderstood risk, and stigma management. Notably, a series of cascading effects eventually lead to what we call “disclosure fatigue,” where students with FA tire of talking about their invisible disability with people who misunderstand it, and they eventually develop strategies to avoid conversations. The consequences include a narrowing of social networks and activities and even risky food behaviors. Conclusions: Research is needed in other settings, for other conditions, to consider and ameliorate the negative health consequences associated with disclosure fatigue. Practice Implications: In addition to focusing on physical aspects of FA, including avoiding exposure, practitioners in pediatric settings should emphasize social aspects of FA that gain influence during the transition out of high school and away from home. Disclosure fatigue provides one explanation for why individuals with FA may choose to ignore best practices and engage in risky food behaviors.

Dr. Alisha Ohl received a Master’s in Occupational Therapy from Ithaca College and a PhD in Occupational Therapy from New York University, where her dissertation focused on friendship and nonverbal communication in adolescents with autism and their typically developing peers. Before joining Clarkson University, she worked clinically as a senior occupational therapist for the New York City Department of Education and as an Assistant Professor at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University. She is currently an Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy, as well as the Chair and Program Director of the Occupational Therapy Department at Clarkson. In addition to her research on food allergies, her research focuses on disability disclosure and pediatric occupational therapy assessment.

Dr. David Schelly received a Master’s and PhD in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he studied ethnomethodology and grounded theory. His dissertation focused on the social spread of the autism diagnosis in Costa Rica, where geographic clusters of cases can be explained by referral patterns among clinicians. He is currently an Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy at Clarkson University, with research on clinical relevance, social determinants of health, and disability disclosure.



The Arts & Sciences Seminar Series is a weekly colloquium series that has been supported by the School of Arts & Sciences Advisory Council at Clarkson University especially through generous gifts from David A. Walsh '67. Please contact ansseminar@clarkson.edu

SA&S 300: Arts and Sciences Seminar is a one credit course intended to foster an interdisciplinary outlook in undergraduates majoring in the School of Arts and Sciences.