Changing attitudes about employing the disabled: What works and why

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Changing Attitudes about Employing the Disabled: What Works and Why
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Previous research on attitudes towards disabled individuals have found inconsistencies that have been reported in studies that use the Interaction with Disabled Persons Scale (IDP). This research paper attempted to show that the IDP scale is as reliable as the Attitudes towards Disabled People (ATDP). The IDP scale did have a lower than expected Cronbach's alpha = .62, but moderate to strong relationship was found between the two scales, \( r = .44, p < .001 \). In order to further understand attitude differences and to help disabled individuals succeed in the workplace, the research conducted analyzed three different variables that could have an impact. Differences in education using both scales were analyzed. The IDP scaled proved not to be consistent analyzing this variable. The ATDP scale was approaching significance, \( F(2, 70) = .2.882, p = .06, \eta^2 = .08 \), and a larger sample size could change the results. The experimenter in this research is disabled and used that to understand if his presence would have an impact on results. In terms of the IDP scale there was no statistical significance between those he gave the scale to and those who received it from someone else, but using the ATDP scale there was a statistical difference found using \( t \) test, \( p = .02 \). Interactions with individuals were also analyzed but found no statistical significance. Further research in quality of life in individuals with disabilities could prove to be beneficial when bridging the gap between those with disabilities and those with no disabilities.

Keywords: disability, scales, attitudes, employment, education

Background

According to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), about 56.7 million people, 19 percent of the population, had a disability in 2010, a broad definition of disability, with more than half of them reporting the disability as severe. Individuals with disabilities face stereotypes, discrimination, and social prejudices in every aspect of life. However, the individuals with disabilities receive far less attention than those who suffer from other forms of prejudices (Towler and Schneider 2005; Soder 1990). Given the high number of people in the United States living with a disability, it is worth considering how stereotypes and attitudes impact a person's life, and where these stereotypes come from (Coleman, Brunell, and Haugen, 2015). Some attitudes and stereotypes are triggered by portrayals in TV and by other unfavorable mass media depictions of individuals with disabilities. Reinhardt, Pennycott, and Fellinghauer (2014), found that the media, in general, has a consistent structure for portraying disability, leading to restricted public interpretations, and also lowering the value of the disabled, causing low expectations and poor attitudes about the disabled, when compared to the nondisabled. The majority of stories centered on an individual with a disability are shown in a negative manner. If a story has nothing to do with being disabled, but involves a disabled person, you hear words such as, the disabled, the severely handicapped, the disabled confined to his wheelchair, the crazy, and so on, when describing the individual (von Sikorski and Schierl, 2014). You can find moments in a film, where most people are influenced by stereotypes, and how disabled people are shown in a negative way. People in wheelchairs are often seen as homeless, drug addicts, and begging for
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change. There are exceptions but remember, these are exceptions.

Being disabled is not a prison sentence that forces you to confinement, nor does it banish you from society. Ali, Schur, and Blanck (2010) show that the disabled not only have the same desire to work, but their desire to spend “much more” time in paid work is significantly higher than non-disabled people, showing that disabled people want to be productive members of society. U.S. Census Bureau (2010) shows that 41 percent of those age 21 to 64 with a disability were employed, compared with 79 percent of those with no disability. Along with the lower chance of having a job, comes the higher likelihood of experiencing persistent poverty, that is, continuous poverty over a 2 year period. In people age 15 to 64 with severe disabilities, 10.8 percent experienced persistent poverty; the same was true for 4.9 percent of those with a non-severe disability but only 3.8 percent of those with no disability. Therefore, if the individual was disabled, they were almost twice as likely unemployed and in poverty. A lack of coordination among employers, health-care professionals, and social welfare workers may complicate the return to work and social interactions of people with disabilities (Clayton et al., 2012). These kinds of attitudes have an impact on why disabled people are discriminated against. One such attitude held by employers that impacts hiring is the accommodation factor. Hazer and Bedell (2000) found that over 40% of the Fortune 500 executives who were surveyed said that the cost of accommodation was a negative factor in hiring individuals with disabilities.

In an effort to challenge society to be more accepting, both socially and in the work force, attitudes must change. People need to be taught that the days of oppression on the stereotyped are over. Shapiro (1999) tells us “attitude change does not occur simply because integration has taken place. Positive attitudes cannot be mandated, they must be taught. Nor can legislation guarantee ‘least restrictive attitudes.’ True integration can be achieved only through planned intervention” (p. 30). Teaching about the problems of negative attitudes toward the disabled begins with recognizing the behaviors by those who discriminate. Robert Loo (2001), in order to gain knowledge about the attitudes that influenced a disabled person getting hired, looked at business undergraduates, using the Interaction with Disabled Persons (IDP) scale (Gething, 1991) to predict the attitudes of the professionals and managers who will hire and work with employees or clients with disabilities.

Loo’s sample consisted of 231 Canadian management undergraduates (129 men and 102 women) ranging in age from 19 to 51 years. Ten participants self-identified as disabled, 117 reported having either a family or a friend with a disability, 94 reported having worked with a disabled person, and 72 reported no interactions with disabled people. Loo distributed the IDP scale, developed by Gething (1991), in a neutral setting of a scheduled course coverage of the disability topic (scores can range from 20 to 120, where higher scores reveal greater discomfort in social situations with disabled people). The scored IDP and a feedback sheet were given back to the students at the next class, and discussion time was set aside to talk about disability. Loo’s results were fascinating, finding that the scores were less favorable than anticipated. There was no sex difference on IDP scores, and age was independent of the IDP scores also. The T tests indicated no significant differences between the groups who had a disability, had a friend or relative with a disability, worked with a disabled person, and had no contact with disabled people.

Four hypothesis were tested. First, Gething’s scale had been questioned in other studies due to inconsistencies in the
Cronbach’s Alpha score. According to Findler, Vilchinsky & Werner (2007) the Cronbach’s Alpha for the IDP scale fluctuated between .54-.86. In contrast, Yuker et al. (1966), found that the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) had a higher, more stable Cronbach’s Alpha, .74-.91. By using both scales I looked for reliability between the two and expect results to show both scales measure consistently. Second, attitudes between education majors were examined to show that, by collecting data from business majors and psychology majors, psychology students, through a difference in education or pre-selection of the major, have more positive attitudes toward disabled individuals. Expected findings could show the need to incorporate psychology courses in business programs. Third, my presence during the collection of data is expected to yield more positive scores. Fourth, it is also expected that interactions with disabled people will provide more positive results also. This will be in part to familiarity with those individuals that have disabilities.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 73 students registered at Guilford College (38 women and 35 men) ranging in ages from 18 to 46 (M = 23.45, SD = 6.88). Race of the sample were 44 Caucasians, 16 African Americans, and 13 who indicated other races. The sample consisted of students from two business classes and volunteers from psychology extra credit day. Seventeen participants were psychology majors, 15 participants were business majors, and 41 were listed as other, a category that included biology, health sciences, history, and arts majors. No participants self-identified as having a disability, 29 reported having a relative with a disability, 46 reported having worked with persons with disabilities, and 71 reported general interactions with persons with disabilities, with only one having no interaction with an individual that was disabled.

Materials

An informed consent form was given prior to data collection (Appendix C). Demographic questions about age, sex, interactions with the disabled, (including family, friends, working, and general interactions) and education major were asked (Appendix D). All participants took the IDP (Appendix A) questionnaire and the ATDP (Appendix B) questionnaire.

Design and Procedure

When it came time to have the surveys answered, I selected some times that I would, and other times that I would not be present when the surveys were answered. During psychology extra credit day I was present for the first day. The second day another classmate handed my questionnaires out. When it came to the business classes I was present for one of the data collection days, the other data collection day was performed by the professor without me there. The questionnaire packets were randomly put together, alternating which scale would be administered first, either the IDP scale or the ATDP scale. Participant’s majors were recoded as psychology, business, and other. Familiarity with disabled individuals were coded as yes or no (family, friends, work, other interactions, and self-identifying). My presence was coded as present or not present. Scale order was also coded.

Results

Scoring and Calculation

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliability analyses were performed on the IDP and ATDP scores using SPSS.
combined the scores of the IDP scale. Scores range from 18 to 108, with lower scores having a more positive attitude toward people with disabilities. The ATDP scale had questions 2, 5, 6, 11, and 12 were recoded, so that, for example -3 changed to +3. After the items were recoded the scores were combined, taking the negative and positives into account. Scores were between -60 and +60. The sign of the sum then had to be reversed and added the constant of 60, resulting in the final scores being between 0 and 120, with higher numbers indicating more positive attitudes.

Hypothesis 1. On the expectation that both scales were reliable, a Cronbach’s alpha was ran on the IDP scale and yielded an alpha = .62 which is lower than anticipated. The Cronbach’s alpha was also ran on the ATDP scale and yielded, alpha = .74, which shows good reliability. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between scores on the IDP scale and the ATDP scale. A moderate to strong relationship was found, \( r = .44, p < .001 \).

Hypothesis 2. On the expectation that a person’s education path would yield different attitudes toward the individuals with disabilities, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the IDP scores for students who are majoring in psychology \( n = 17 \) (\( M = 53.65, SD = 6.19 \)), majoring in business \( n = 15 \) (\( M = 50.80, SD = 5.58 \)), and other majors \( n = 41 \) (\( M = 51.90, SD = 6.77 \)). There was no significant difference between the scores of the different majors, \( F(2, 70) = .819, p = .45, \) \( \eta^2 = .02 \).

A one-way analysis of variance was also conducted to compare the ATDP scores for students majoring in psychology \( n = 17 \) (\( M = 83.76, SD = 12.06 \)), majoring in business \( n = 15 \) (\( M = 84.33, SD = 11.49 \)), and other majors \( n = 41 \) (\( M = 76.71 \)). There was no significant difference between the scores of the different majors, however, it did approach significance, \( F(2, 70) = .282, p = .06, \) \( \eta^2 = .08 \) (see table 2).

Hypothesis 3. In order to assess the effect of my presence during data collection, an independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether my presence had an effect on their IDP score. The participants attitude score were with me present \( (M = 51.46, SD = 6.53) \) or not present \( (M = 52.87, SD = 6.26) \). The difference between the two groups were not statistically significant \( t(71) = -.993, p = .35, \) \( \eta^2 = .01, 1\% \) of the variance in attitude was accounted for by my presence.

An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether my presence had an effect on their ATDP score. In this case the participants attitude score were higher with me present \( n = 41 \) (\( M = 83.20, SD = 11.88 \)) or not present \( n = 32 \) (\( M = 75.72, SD = 13.98 \)). The difference between the two groups was significant \( t(71) = -2.46, p = .02, \) \( \eta^2 = .07, 7\% \) of the variance in attitude was accounted for by my presence.

Hypothesis 4. To examine a difference in attitudes regarding familiarity to individuals with disabilities using the IDP scale, an independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having a family member with a disability affected attitude, \( t(54.58) = .35, p = .73, \) \( \eta^2 = .012, 1.2\% \) variance in attitude was accounted for by having a family member that is disabled. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having a friend with a disability affected attitude, \( t(54.18) = .31, p = .33, \) \( \eta^2 = .034, 3.4\% \) variance in attitude was accounted for by having a friend that is disabled. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having worked with an individual with a disability affected attitude, \( t(71) = 1.34, p = .189, \) \( \eta^2 = .031, 3.1\% \) variance in attitude was accounted for by having worked with an individual with a disability. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having general interaction with an individual with a disability
affected attitude, \( t(71) = -1.45, p = .15, r^2 = .03 \), 3% variance in attitude was accounted for by having general interaction with an individual with a disability. No test revealed any relationship between familiarity and attitudes.

To examine a difference in attitudes regarding familiarity to individuals with disabilities using the ATDP scale, an independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having a family member with a disability affected attitude, \( t(71) = .36, p = .36, r^2 = .012 \), 1.2% variance in attitude was accounted for by having a family member that is disabled. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having a friend with a disability affected attitude, \( t(70) = 1.53, p = .13, r^2 = .03 \), 3% variance in attitude was accounted for by having a friend that is disabled. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having a worked with an individual with a disability affected attitude, \( t(71) = 1.51, p = .14, r^2 = .031 \), 3.1% variance in attitude was accounted for by having worked with an individual with a disability. An independent samples t test was conducted to examine whether having general interaction with an individual with a disability affected attitude, \( t(71) = -1.04, p = .31, r^2 = .032 \), 3.2% variance in attitude was accounted for by having general interaction with an individual with a disability. Once again, no test revealed any relationship between familiarity and attitudes.

Discussion

The first hypothesis was that the IDP scale and the ATDP scale could be used to measure the attitudes regarding disabled individuals. After Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability, the IDP scale was slightly lower than the ATDP scale. However, the correlation between the two on the ability that they are measuring attitudes correctly was moderately to strongly powerful, showing the measures were valid.

The second hypothesis was that a person majoring in psychology would have more favorable attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. When using the IDP scale there was no significant relationship among which major the student was pursuing (Table 1). When using the ATDP scale, however, it approached a significance (Table 2). Perhaps using a larger sample could change the results to a more significant level.

The third hypothesis examined was how my presence could affect the results of attitudes of the participants during data collection. The t-test comparing scores on the IDP scale, based on my presence was not statistically significant (Table 3), but the t-test using the ATDP scale, did reveal statistically significant results. My presence yielded higher, more positive scores (Table 3). I feel that this can be important when changing the attitudes towards individuals with disabilities in the workplace. People seeing disabled individuals succeed in life can lead to favorable attitudes toward disabilities, as shown in this study.

For the fourth hypothesis several independent t-tests were run to assess the effect of people's experiences with those with disabilities. These categories were self-identifying, family members with disabilities, friends with disabilities, working with a person with disabilities, and general interactions. After analysis, it was found that there was no significant difference in any score. There was a category for self-identifying with disabilities but nobody self-identified. Since there were no individuals to fall under this category, no analysis was run for the question.

For further research to improve on these results, some questions on the IDP scale could be deleted to give it a higher alpha score. I think it would be beneficial to find out the kinds of attitudes the individuals with disabilities project to the ones who know them.
It could be that they project negative perceptions of disabilities. A person can only relate to what they see and know. If we are to change the attitudes of the way individuals with disabilities are seen, we may need to start with the attitude of the individual with the disability first. As shown earlier in the educational difference in attitudes, a larger sample size could show more favorable results for the need to incorporate training or classes about individuals with disabilities. My presence affecting the scores in a positive direction could show the need for further research. If, more individuals with disabilities were teaching those who will one day hire others, perhaps, their early interaction with a positive-minded individual with a disability could shape their attitudes in a positive direction. It could also be of interest to research how individuals with disabilities relate to mental health counselors that are disabled themselves.

References


Appendix

Table 1 Major Score IDP Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53.65</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.80</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>51.90</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>52.08</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
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</table>

Table 2 Major Score ATDP Scale

<table>
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<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83.76</td>
<td>12.08</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>84.33</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>76.70</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>79.92</td>
<td>13.29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Presence Score

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<th>Presence</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>IDP Present</td>
<td>IDP Present</td>
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<td>51.4634</td>
<td>6.52724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52.8750</td>
<td>6.26176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATDP Present</td>
<td>ATDP Present</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83.1951</td>
<td>11.88322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>75.7188</td>
<td>13.97517</td>
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