Attitudes Toward Disability: The Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Disability and Frequency of Interaction with People with Disabilities (PWD)

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Methods

Participants

The Assessing Attitudes About Ability survey was distributed over five sections of a required health class, majority of the participants were in their first year (n=1506).

- Ages ranged from 17-45 (M=18.67, SD=1.812)
- 55% identified as male & 44.8% identified as female

Methods Continued

Participants Continued

- 7.9% identified as Hispanic/Latino & 9.15% did not identify as Hispanic/Latino
- 2.6% identified as Black/African American, 1.7% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 23.3% identified as Asian, 2.2% identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 76.7% identified as White, & 2.3% identified as Other
- Average frequency of contact was about once a month
- 9.9% identified as having a disability

Measures

The Assessing Attitudes About Ability survey consisted of:

- Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons scale (Yuker, Block, & Young, 1970)
- A single item assessing frequency of contact with PWD
- "How often do you interact with PWD?"
- The Darling (2013) social and medical model scales

Analysis Procedures

A mediation and path analysis was conducted using bootstrapping

Results

A partial mediation was found. There were significant indirect effects for both medical model, b = -.01, 95 CI [-.0145, -.0066], and social model, b = -.004, 95 CI [-.0080, -.0017].

Conclusion

Supporting our hypothesis, the medical and social models partially mediated the relationship between contact and attitudes towards PWD.

- Compared to the social model, the medical model was more strongly associated with contact and attitudes.
- This suggests that more contact with PWD can help decrease medical model beliefs in general, but may be slightly less effective at promoting the social model beliefs.

Limitations

- Large proportion of Caucasian participants
- Large proportion of higher socioeconomic status ($40,000 and up)
- Our survey consisted of a single contact item

Implications

Average frequency of contact with PWD was about once a month

- 13% of Americans have a disability (Braun, 2012)
- 10% of undergrads have a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)
- Only 2% of psychology faculty have a disability (Andrews & Lund, 2015)

Implications of this study may suggest that institutions need to accommodate to more PWD and provide education about the subject. Underrepresentation of PWD in institutions, such as universities, are caused by institutional and social barriers, which essentially creates insufficient opportunities for people to interact with PWD.

Future Studies

Future studies might focus on asking more questions that assess how certain types of contact or interactions with PWD change attitudes towards disability. This could serve as an alternative to the single item assessing frequency of contact with PWD.

- Allport’s contact hypothesis suggests asking questions regarding relationship building and social connection (Allport, 1954).

- Pettigrew’s Intergroup Contact Theory suggests asking questions that involve creating emotional ties with PWD, along with how increased education about the disability community might influence attitude change (Pettigrew, 1998).

Figure 1. Model testing mediational role of medical and social model of disability in the relationship between contact with disability and attitudes toward people with disabilities. The coefficient in parentheses is the total effect and the adjacent number is the direct effect. Values are β-coefficients. Higher ATDP scores denote more negative attitudes, while higher scores on all other measures denote greater amounts of each construct. * p < .1, ** p < .05, *** p < .001