Understanding Disability Self-Disclosure and the Impacts of Visibility and Discrimination

Jackie Yates and Kathleen Bogart, PhD.

OSU Oregon State UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Disability Self-Disclosure
Disclosing information about a stigmatized identity is associated with a variety of risks and benefits.
- **Benefits**: access to accommodations, development of intimacy in relationships, fostering a more unified sense of self, and gaining social support
- **Risks:** increased vulnerability to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination

Significance
The World Health Organization (2011) estimates that about 15% of the world's population live with a disability, but only a fraction choose to disclose their disability-status for a variety of reasons. To create an environment in which students with disabilities are able to comfortably request and access accommodations and support, it is essential to have a more complete understanding of the factors that influence disclosure of one's disability.

Present Study
The present study is a secondary analysis of data collected from Bogart, Rottenstein, Lund, and Bouchard's (in press) study on disability self-identification which found that stigma and severity of a disability were the strongest predictors of disability self-identification.
The basis of this research is to examine the role visibility of a disability and discrimination play in predicting whether an individual chooses to disclose their disability to supervisors, coworkers, family, or instructors in college settings.

Methods

Participants
- Participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk

Methods Continued

- 710 participants indicated that they had a health condition and were included in the final dataset

Measures
- Participants were asked how frequently they disclose or discuss their disorder(s) with family, friends, acquaintances, work supervisors, coworkers, and teachers or professors
- They were also asked how much they agree/disagree with a statement about being discriminated against
- Similarly, they responded to a question about how noticeable their impairment is to others

Results

- A one-way ANOVA revealed that teachers and professors were disclosed to least frequently $F_{(5, 3245)}=693.256$, $p<0.001$ (See Figure 1)
- A regression analysis was conducted with discrimination and visibility as predictors of self-disclosure for all groups. Results showed that both variables were significant predictors of disclosure, with visibility being the strongest, $F_{(2, 657)}=28.974$, $p<0.001$ (See Table 1)
- Both visibility and discrimination were significant predictors of disclosure to teachers and professors, with discrimination being the strongest $F_{(2, 702)}=17.61$, $p<0.001$
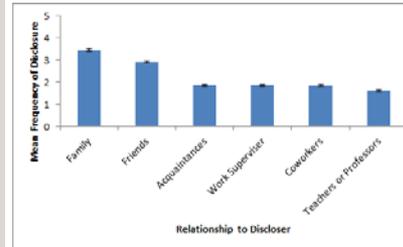
Results Continued

Figure 1. Frequency of Disclosure

Table 1. Regression Results

Predictor variable	Relationships Combined			Teachers or Professors		
	b	$SE\ b$	β	b	$SE\ b$	β
Visibility (mean)	0.18	0.04	0.17	0.20	0.04	0.17
Discrimination	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.16	0.03	0.19
ΔR^2			0.05			0.08

Discussion

Participants reported disclosing information about their impairment(s) least frequently to teachers and professors, indicating that a fear of negative outcomes (i.e. discrimination, stigma) may be heightened in higher education settings.

Overall, visibility was a stronger predictor of disclosure than discrimination. People with visible disabilities may disclose more frequently simply because they don't have the option of concealing their identity from others.

Focusing on disclosure to instructors, discrimination was a stronger predictor of disclosure to teachers and professors than it was for overall disclosure. This implies that discrimination has a heavy influence on university-related disclosure decisions.

Limitations:
- Since this was a cross-sectional correlational study, it is inot possible to determine the direction of causality
- Sample may not be representative of overall population (i.e. only available to those with access and ability to complete an online survey)
- Only examined two predictors of disclosure

Future Research

Since the present study was cross-sectional, it could not determine the direction of the relationship between discrimination and disclosure. Future research should examine both positive and negative outcomes of disclosure with a focus on discrimination and access to accommodations following disclosure. Additionally, an examination of other predictors of disclosure such as self-esteem, type and severity of disability, and age of onset should be studied. Together, these predictors and outcomes of disclosure can help inform disability policies in workplaces and on college campuses.