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Students' Perceptions and Stigma Toward Those with Intellectual and Physical Disabilities

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Students' Perceptions and Stigma Toward Those with Intellectual and Physical Disabilities

BACKGROUND: Previous research has shown that there is a negative impact on those who are labeled as having an intellectual or physical disability (Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh, & Straight, 2005). The purpose of this research was to learn more about the stigma against those with disabilities and how one can cope with this stigma.

METHODS: The subjects of this study were 80 General Psychology students. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, which differed in which vignette received. The four vignettes described individuals with the disabilities of (1) Autism, (2) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, (3) Paralysis, and (4) Blindness. After reading, participants were given three questions to ensure that they had read carefully. Participants then completed the 17-item Community Living Attitudes Scale (CLAS), which measures general attitudes towards disabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: A Chi-square test was used to test the hypothesis that participants would differ in their ability to recognize different disabilities. Indeed, the data shows that participants incorrectly diagnosed Autism and Blindness more frequently than Attention Deficit Disorder and paralysis, $\chi^2(3, N=80) = 15.075, p < .01$. Additionally, One-Way ANOVAs were run to examine differences in the CLAS scales between the four vignettes. Results indicate that participants differed in their ability to recognize different disorders. Additionally, results indicated varying levels of Empowerment, Exclusion, Similarity, and Sheltering between conditions. This indicates that stigmas may be diminishing. Future research should further examine why stigma occurs against these and other disabilities. Results will be discussed in more detail during the presentation.

Keywords: Attitudes, Physical Disabilities, Intellectual Disabilities, Stigma