

Gender Effects on Perceptions Towards People with Disabilities and Disorders

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Introduction

Disabilities and disorders are not new phenomena in the world or academics, yet many people are still ignorant to them. Collegiate life is difficult for anyone, but for the students who have a physical disability or mental disorder, collegiate life has other obstacles that the standard student does not have to manage. These select few students, in comparison to the general population of students, face ableism and other forms of discrimination each day that make it harder for them to navigate through college and collegiate social life. For example, Mariana, a student in a University in Portugal who suffers from chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia, shared that after disclosing her disabilities to the school she did receive educational help. However, it also made her a social outcast because students now judged her based on a label rather than herself (Bê, 2019). However, as important as it is to recognize that, it is also important to recognize what perceptions are had towards these students making it more difficult for them. Not only that, but who has what perceptions.

Research Question

- Does gender of a person without a disability or disorder effect their perceptions of those who have a disability or disorder? Are males more receptive, or are females? Who has the more positive perception?
- I hypothesize that females will have a more positive perception towards those with disabilities and/or disorders than men are.

- Terminology:
 - Gender: male, female, other (nongender specific, transgender, etc.).
 - Positive Perception: Understanding, empathetic, receptive, sees the person as another person rather than the disability or disorder that they have.
 - Negative Perception: lacks understanding, lacks empathy, not or less receptive, and views person as the disorder or disability that they have.

Background and Literature Review

Other studies have found that students with disabilities and/or disorders often do well with professors and faculty, however, often struggle most with their fellow classmates and peers on campus. A lack of support from classmates that can also lead to seclusion makes an already difficult task for some even harder. A young woman, Jane who attends a British University shares that her schools program for helping students with disabilities is very supportive and beneficial, however many of her classmates stigmatize her and put her down for needing extra help. She has often been told that she would do better if she tried harder or went to class more often, even though her disorders disallow that at times (Bê, 2019). Although her professors help her, Jane clearly lacks social support which does not help the college experience easier.

This makes it understandable why such a small portion of students disclose when they have a disability or disorder, and poses the question of how many students are not disclosing and just pushing through on their own? It is necessary to recognize every student and their needs, and when needs are not being met then college gets more difficult. Universities have special programs set up for students with disabilities and disorders that help them navigate their academics, but as mentioned above, that only does so much. If, for example, a group project is

assigned and a student who has a disability or disorder is last to be selected or has to be placed in a group by the professor because no one wanted to work with him or her. In extension, their peers may not know, but he or she has done the best on every test and is doing exceptionally well in that class. However, that student just faced discrimination for their disability or disorder and was left out.

That example shows the accepted perceptions by their peers that make classes more difficult, but not only that, simply going to class more difficult. It is also important to note that language plays an essential role in perceptions of people with disorders and disabilities. A 2016 study by Wood and Freeth found that the most common words associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are primarily thought to be negative in comparison to nondisorder associated words (Wood, et al, 2016). What words are used and how they are used matter and can effect both the person using the language and the person being spoken to or about more then they may realize.

Methods

Participants:

- 100+ Stanislaus State Students
- Age: 18-24
- Option of declaring “male”, “female”, “other”, or “prefer not to answer”
- Mix of college year/grade
- No requirements other than being a CSU Stanislaus student

Materials:

- Demographic questionnaire
 - Age

- Gender
- College Year
- Have a disorder or disability
- Know someone with a disability
- 7 Point Likert Scale Survey
 - Formed using other research findings and questionnaires
 - 30 Questions
 - Scale: “Strongly Disagree”=1, “Disagree”=2, “Somewhat Disagree”=3, “Neither Agree or Disagree”=4, “Somewhat Agree”=5, “Agree”=6, and “Strongly Agree”=7.

Procedure:

- Online questionnaire offered online to CSU Stanislaus Students
- Sent through email to fellow students
- Will make available to professors for students

Expected Results

When analyzing the results of the survey, all groups will be analyzed together. However, then participants will be sectioned out into three groups; “male”, “female”, and “other”. It is expected that there will be a significant difference in scoring of perceptions between the three groups, with males having the least receptive perceptions towards those with disabilities and disorders.

Females are expected to be most receptive, with those who responded “other” in the demographic questionnaire being in the middle of males and females score wise. It is important to note that age and whether the participants know someone who has a disorder or disability or

have one themselves may also effect the results, and their for will be taken into account for analyzation. However, it is not expected that those portions will skew the results.

Significance

Students do not legally have to disclose if they have a disorder and/or disability, however those who do receive great benefits from Universities. Professors often work with those students to better their quality of education and the experiences they have class wise. However, what about their peers and college social life? Many are often ostracized, left out, and misunderstood. This study provides college faculty, board members, professors, and other students the information necessary to make changes that can better students with disabilities or disorders college experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

It provides a way that helps make “well I did not know” unacceptable. If the general perception of people with disabilities or disorders was more positive, then more people, college students specifically, may be more willing to disclose or not fell as anxious while on campus or in class. Recognizing the treatment of others and limiting bullying behaviors is a predominant topic for all ages, and this study can help aid in the prevention of that.

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