Chapter 14
Stereotypes of People with Physical Disabilities and Speech Impairments as Detected by Partially Structured Attitude Measures

Steven E. Stern
University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, USA

John W. Mullennix
University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, USA

Ashley Davis Fortier
University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, USA

Elizabeth Steinhauser
Florida Institute of Technology, USA

ABSTRACT

Partially Structured Attitude Measures (PSAMs) are non-reaction-time based measures of implicit attitudes. Participants' attitudes are measured by the degree to which they react toward ambiguous stimuli. The authors developed a series of PSAMs to examine six stereotypes of people with disabilities: asexual, unappealing, isolated, dependent, entitled, and unemployable. In two studies, they found that PSAMs detected implicit endorsements of stereotypes toward people with a physical disability, speech impairment, or combination of the two. Compared to people without disabilities, stereotypes were endorsed for people with disabilities, with unappealing, dependent and unemployable being more prominent for physically disabled targets and dependent, entitled and isolated being more prominent for speech disabled targets. Implications for understanding the stereotyping of people with physical and speech disabilities are discussed.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-725-1.ch014
**INTRODUCTION**

Disability has been long recognized as a stigmatized condition in our society (Goffman, 1963; Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh, & Straight, 2005). There is anecdotal as well as experimental evidence that people are prone to avoid, physically distance themselves from, speak down to, and experience psychological discomfort when interacting with people with physical disabilities (Comer & Piliavin, 1972; Crawford & Ostrove, 2003; Hart & Williams, 1995; Hebl & Kleck, 2000; Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000; Olkin & Howson, 1994; Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979). The psychological discomfort can manifest itself in motoric inhibition (Comer & Piliavin, 1972; Kleck, Ono, & Hastorf, 1966), verbal inhibition (Kleck, Ono, & Hastorf, 1966), and arousal as detected by Galvanic Skin Response (Kleck, Ono, & Hastorf, 1966). Able bodied and people with disabilities report that interactions between the two are often awkward and unbalanced (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000; Makas, 1988) and people with disabilities report that they are frequently treated as if they were invisible (Crawford & Ostrove, 2003). Some people with disabilities report able bodied people respond to them with oversolicitousness (Hart & Williams, 1995), which is tantamount to being treated as a permanent child (Phillips, 1985).

Speech impairment is also stigmatized (Weitzel, 2000). Interestingly, there is evidence that people with speech impairments are less accepted and less liked in comparison to the people with physical disabilities (Anderson & Antonak, 1992). People with communication disabilities find themselves excluded from participating in activities that involve communicating and experience a highly debilitating loss of power and leverage in the speaking world (Simmons-Mackie & Damico, 2007). They also have fewer social contacts than able-bodied people (Cruice, Worrall, & Hickson, 2006; Hilari & Northcott, 2006).

Stigmatized groups that are relegated to outgroup status are frequently subjected to stereotyping. The influential social and personality psychologist, Gordon Allport (1958) among others stressed that people tend to categorize themselves and others like themselves into ingroups and people unlike themselves into outgroups. In turn, members of an outgroup tend to be seen as sharing similar psychological and physical attributes with each other. This process of automatic categorization and subsequent generalizations can be seen as a heuristic or mental shortcut that makes it possible to make quicker decisions regarding people based upon their group membership (Fiske, 2005).

As with many heuristics, stereotyping becomes more likely when a person is cognitively busy (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Of particular importance when considering the experience of computer synthesized speech (CSS) users, there is evidence that listening to CSS involves using more cognitive resources on the part of the listener (Luce, Feustel, & Pisoni, 1983; Ralston, Pisoni, & Mullennix, 1995). Taken together, these findings suggest that while CSS is designed to aid people with speech impairments to communicate more effectively, it might simultaneously and unintentionally promote stereotyping by the listener.

The present study is focused on the specific stereotypes that able bodied persons hold toward people with disabilities. While much research on attitudes toward the disabled has focused on the measurement of global attitudes toward disability (e.g., Yuker & Block, 1986) or the distinction between affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of attitudes toward the disabled (Findler, Vilchinsky, & Werner, 2007), there has been less of a concerted effort to examine the specific stereotypes that are frequently applied toward people with disabilities, particularly people with physical disabilities. In the present research, we identified specific stereotypes in the disability literature, selected six that were particularly prominent, and used both measures of explicit and measures of implicit attitudes to detect these stereotypes.