



# Perceptions of People With Disabilities

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## Abstract

The negative views people have towards individuals with disabilities compared to individuals without disabilities were examined. Previous research found that people who suffer from physical disabilities, more specifically a person in a wheelchair, are seen in society as incompetent, unproductive, dependent and not as likely to succeed in their careers, compared to a person without any kind of disability (Louvet, 2007). It was hypothesized that having a physical disability, which can easily be seen, is viewed more negatively by people without a disability. This hypothesis was based on research that looked at how a person with physical disabilities are perceived more negatively when it comes to someone else grading their personal qualities and competence (Louvet, 2007). In the current study, participants were either exposed to the image of the individual in a wheelchair or of the same individual but in an ambulatory position. The results showed that the hypothesis was partially supported, there were some significant differences on how people rated the images. With the acquired data, it can be said there is discrimination occurring at the college campus that was studied. These results provide very important information that creates considerable opportunities for future studies.

## Introduction

- Past research found that individuals with physical disabilities are viewed by society as dependent, incompetent, and unproductive and therefore not as likely to succeed in a career in comparison to individuals without disabilities (Louvet, 2007).
- Although Acts such as the adoption of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 have been passed, that still does little to change the fact that individuals with disabilities are being viewed in a negative way and are given an image of being less capable and less successful (O'Keefe, 1993).
- Past studies focused on how Attachment Theory affected the views people have on individuals with disabilities. Concepts of this study were taken into our research by using a scale to measure if participants perceived a person with disabilities just as successful as a person without a disability using a variant of the modern sexism scale (Vilchinsky, 2010).
- Hypothesis: It was hypothesized that people with a disability would be rated as less successful by people without a disability.

## Materials and Participants

- Community College Students
- Between Subjects Design
- N=61 (Original Number)
  - Dropped 18 because they failed the manipulation check
- N=43
- Mean age between "18-22 years"
- IV: Disabilities (Ambulatory and wheelchair position)
- DV: Perception of Individual with disabilities
- Operational definition
  - Negative Perception, meaning participants rated individuals as less successful

## Method

- Demographics form consisted of questions asked about their age, race, gender, "and if they know someone with a disability or themselves had one."
  - "Disability Status"
- Modified Sexism Scale asked 8 questions that help measure the amount of discrimination against individuals with disabilities about the perception of people with disabilities
- Showed participants one of two images. Along with a questionnaire that consisted of 12 questions.
  - Ambulatory Position (1A)
  - Wheelchair Position (1B)



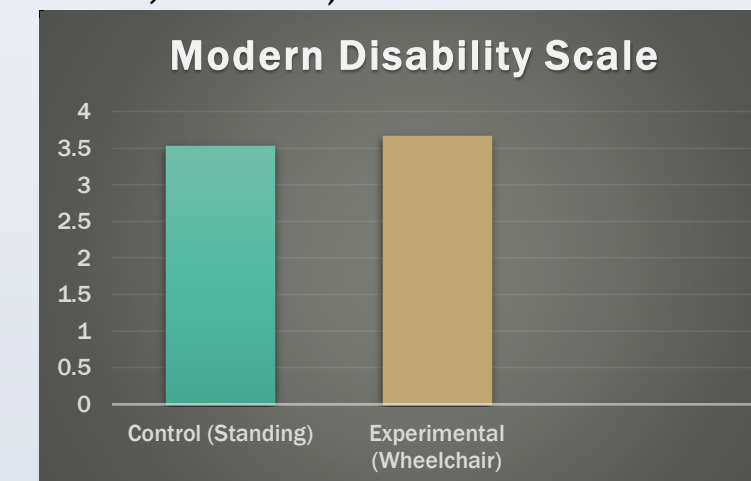
1A



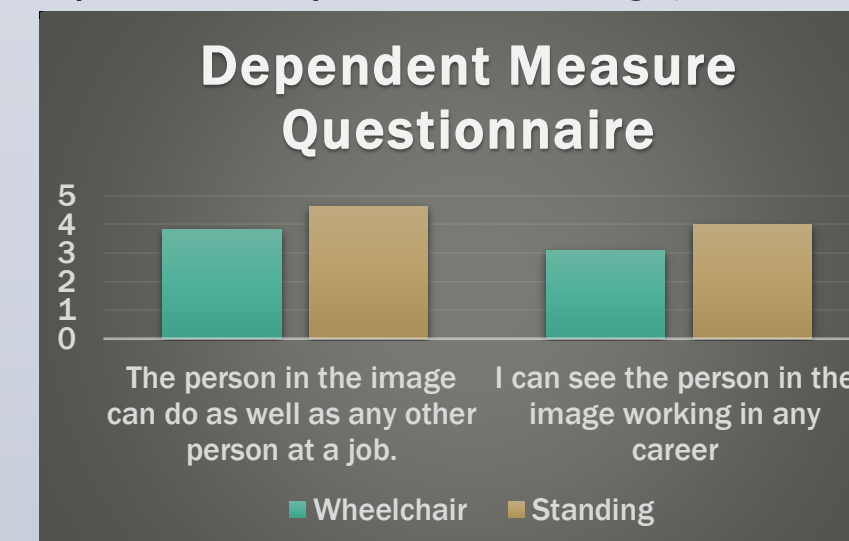
1B

## Results

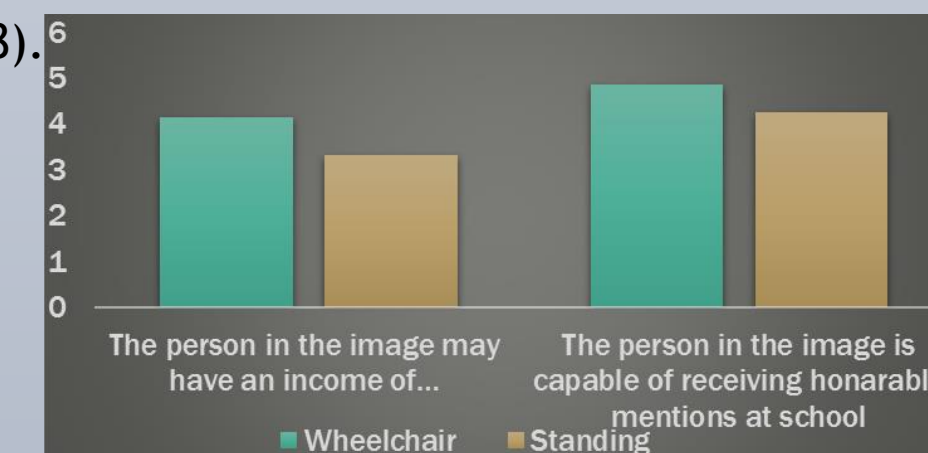
- No significant difference on the Modern Disability Scale
  - Used a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)
- Wheelchair group (M=3.67 SD=.46) to that of a person standing (M=3.54, SD=.46)



- There was significant difference from individual questions in the Dependent Measure Questionnaire.
- Data showed a person on the wheelchair would be significantly less capable (M = 3.81, SD = 1.20) compared to a person standing (M = 4.63, SD = .65).
- Data showed that a person in a wheelchair would be significantly less likely to work in any career (M=3.09, SD=1.44) compared to a person standing (M=4.00, SD=.87)



- Participants rated the individual in the wheelchair to have a higher income ( M= 4.14, SD = 1.27) compared to the individual standing up (M = 3.31, SD = 1.21).
- Participants also rated the individual in the wheelchair to be more likely to receive an honorable mention at school (M = 4.85, SD= .35) compared to the individual standing (M = 4.27, SD= .88).



## Discussion

- The hypothesis was partially supported.
- Modern Disability Scale showed participants from both conditions reported that they did not discriminate against individuals with disabilities
- Dependent Measure Questionnaire
  - When probed, the participants with an image of a disabled and non-disabled individual, rated people with disabilities as less likely to succeed.
  - Data revealed that people say that individuals with disabilities are capable of working as well as a non-disabled person to be false.
  - An interesting result revealed that participants answered that the individual in the wheelchair had a higher income (\$50,000 -\$80,000) in comparison to the image of the individual standing up (\$30,000 - \$50,000).
  - The individual in the wheelchair was perceived to be more likely to receive honorable mentions at school compared to the individual in the image standing.
  - The person in the wheelchair had a lower rating which meant participants did not believe he was capable of working in any career.
  - Individuals say they do not discriminate but according to the data they do discriminate.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

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