Exploring the Relationships Among Disability Attitudes, Implicit Beliefs about Intelligence, and Motivation for Major

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Background

Many UWEC students will work with individuals with disabilities in their chosen fields of study. Therefore, it is important to examine these students’ disability attitudes as well as their implicit beliefs about intelligence (i.e., mindsets), given that both attitudes and mindsets can impact one’s interactions with the people with whom they work. Additionally, it may be important to understand one’s motivation for pursuing such fields, as their reasons for entering these professions can also impact their interactions with others.

The purpose of this study was to examine college students’ disability attitudes, mindsets, and motivation for choosing their major and the relationships among these factors. Understanding these links is important because many college students will subsequently work with individuals with disabilities. This study has the potential to inform the higher education community of the importance of mindset and major motivation for students who will subsequently work with individuals with disabilities.

Research Questions:
• Do disability attitudes, implicit beliefs about intelligence, and motivation for major vary across academic majors?
• Are students in “helping fields” (e.g., CSD, EDUC, NURS, KINS) more likely to have growth mindsets than students in other majors?
• Are students who are intrinsically motivated more likely to have a growth mindset and more positive attitudes towards disabilities?

Methods

Participants:
A total of 282 UWEC students (238 females; 103 freshmen, 58 sophomores, 44 juniors, 52 seniors) participated in this study.

Majors: The most commonly reported major was Kinesiology (n = 68), followed by Communication Sciences and Disorders (n = 67), Psychology (n = 43), Education (n = 29), Nursing (n = 17) and Business (n = 10). The remaining participants represented a variety of other majors (e.g., Biology, English, Undeclared, Social Work).

Measures:
• Disability attitudes were measured using the 20-item Counseling Clients with Disabilities Survey (CCDS; Strike 2001), which was modified to only include 18 items.
• Disability stigma was measured using the attitudes toward Disabled Persons Survey (ADTP; Yuker, Block, & Young, 1970).
• Implicit beliefs about intelligence were measured using Dweck’s (2000) 8-item survey on theories of intelligence.
• Motivation for major was assessed using an adapted version of the Survey of Student Choice of Major: Communication Sciences and Disorders (Keshishian & McGarr, 2012).

Procedure:
Participants were recruited through email or through the Psychology Department SONA system and the survey was completed via an online survey program (Qualtrics).

Conclusions

Fixed Mindset

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Disability Attitudes:
• Overall, students reported neutral to positive attitudes towards disabilities.
• Students majoring in CSD reported significantly more positive attitudes towards disabilities than did Business majors.

Implicit Beliefs About Intelligence:
• Overall, students more strongly endorsed growth mindset beliefs than fixed mindset beliefs.
• Business majors had significantly stronger fixed mindset beliefs than did CSD and KINS majors.

Motivation for Major:
• Students in all majors displayed high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
• All participants were more likely to be intrinsically motivated (e.g., scholastic challenge, desire to help others) than extrinsically motivated (e.g., projected earnings, high reputation career).

Relationships Between Disability Attitudes, Implicit Beliefs about Intelligence, and Motivation for Major:
• Disability attitudes were negatively correlated with extrinsic major motivation, disability stigma, and fixed mindset. This indicates that students who had less positive attitudes towards disabilities were more likely to be extrinsically motivated, exhibit negative stigma towards disabilities, and have a fixed mindset.
• Disability attitudes were significantly positively correlated with intrinsic major motivation and growth mindset. This indicates that students with positive attitudes towards disabilities are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and have a growth mindset.

References