

A Disability Identity Development Model: College Students with Disabilities

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Purpose of this Study

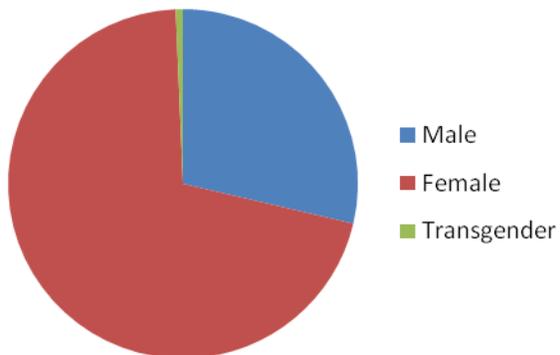
The purpose of this study is 1) to describe and analyze the perspectives of people with visual disabilities regarding their identity development as it is influenced by their disabilities, and 2) to test the Disability Identity Development Model (Gibson, 2006) survey on children and adolescents with visual disabilities to determine the survey's validity. Gibson's Model describes three stages of disability identity development: Passive Awareness, Realization, and Acceptance.

Survey and Data Collection

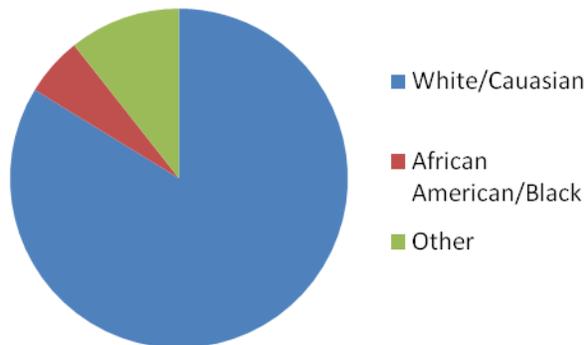
Using Gibson's Disability Identity Development Model as a guide, a 25-question online survey was developed by Dr. Jennifer Gibson to measure the level of acceptance of one's own visual disability. The survey was posted on Student Voice (an accessible site) and participants were solicited through Delta Gamma Center for Children with Visual Impairments in St. Louis, Mo, Lighthouse for the Blind, American Council for the Blind, various state agencies for adults with visual disabilities, and disability services centers on college campuses.

Demographics of Study Participants

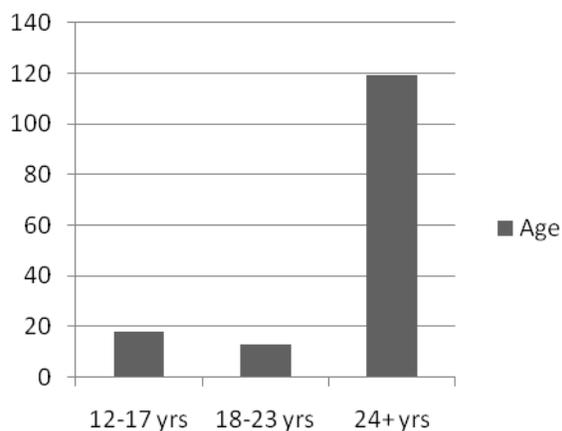
Gender



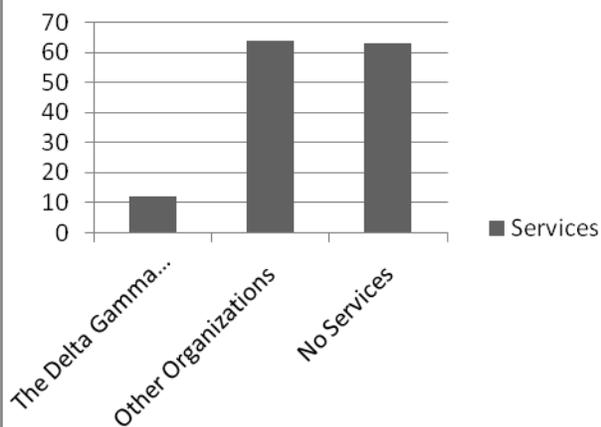
Ethnicity



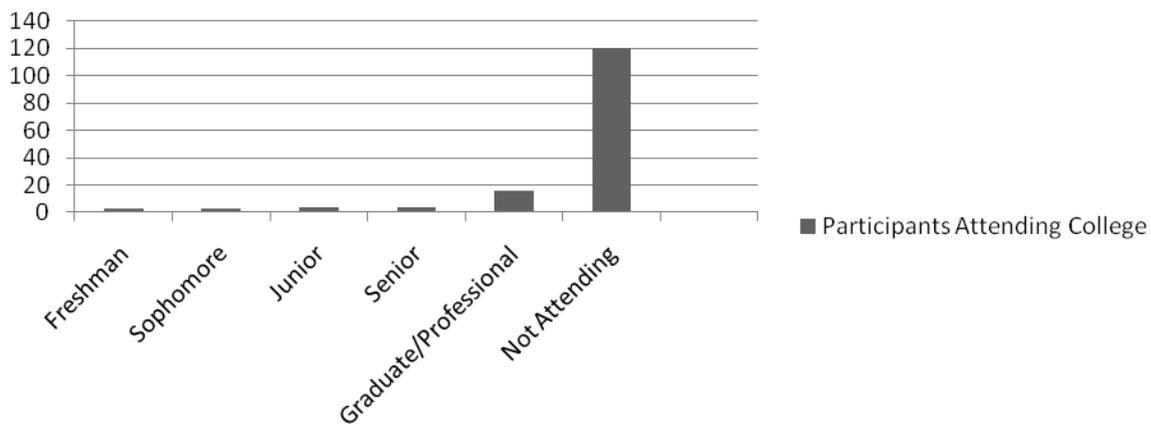
Age



Services



Participants Attending College



Background

Adolescent identity and social participation are shaped by the activities youths choose and the friendships they develop (Barber, Stone, Hunt & Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999). A significant amount of evidence suggests that participation in school and community-based activities is associated with short- and long-term positive development (Barber, Stone, & Eccles, 2003). However, although individuals with visual disabilities are taught compensatory skills, skills that can help them lead satisfying lives and live as independently as possible, adolescents with visual disabilities often experience social isolation and limited opportunities to engage in meaningful relationships. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) created more accessibility and attainability to post-secondary education for persons with visual disabilities as a result of disability legislation (Myers, 2009). Because of this shift toward equal opportunity and participation, it is important to consider how their identity development differs from that of individuals without disabilities. Dr. Jennifer Gibson (2006) developed a Disability Identity Model that facilitates one's understanding for persons with life-long disabilities and their identity development by giving insight into perceptions and struggles they may experience. Gibson's Disability Identity Model is explained in three stages: Passive Awareness, Realization, and Acceptance. Identity development of individuals with disabilities can be fluid and not all individuals fit into a particular stage. Individuals may have reached Stage 3 – Acceptance, but may revert to Stage 2- Realization upon the occurrence of negative experiences and stereotypes.

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Disability Identity Development Model (Gibson, 2006)

Passive Awareness: (12-18 pts on scale)

First part of life 0-? (Can continue into adulthood)

- No role model of disability
- Medical needs not met
- Taught to deny disability
- Disability becomes silent member of family
- Co-dependency/ "Good-Boy/Good-Girl"
- Shy away from attention
- Will not associate w/others w/disability

Realization: (19-35 pts on scale)

Often occurs in adolescence/early adulthood

- Begins to see self as having a disability
- Self-Hate
- Anger: Why me?
- Concerned with how others perceive self
- Concerned w/ appearance
- "Superman/woman" Complex

Acceptance: (36-48 pts on scale)

Adulthood

- Shift focus from "being different" in a negative light to embracing self
- Begins to view self as relevant; no more no less than others
- Begins to incorporate others with disabilities into life
- Involves self in disability advocacy and activism
- Integrates self into majority (able-bodied) world

Results

Participants were asked to rank their level of agreement (on a scale of 1-4) to statements related to their disabilities. Each stage of Gibson's Disability Identity Development Model was given a numerical range to correspond with participants' answers. The chart below shows the mean scores and corresponding stage of the model. **Passive Awareness: 1-1.3 Realization:1.4-2.9 Awareness:3.0-4**

Statement	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Mean Score	Model Stage
I am comfortable talking about my disability with my family of origin.	96	33	8	2	3.60	Acceptance
I have friends with disabilities.	102	26	8	3	3.63	Acceptance
Most of my problems are caused by my disability.*	22	50	42	25	2.50	Realization
I really do not ever think about my disability.*	12	46	58	43	3.23	Acceptance
Because of my disability, I often do more than others to prove my abilities.*	40	59	19	3	1.63	Realization
I want to work in the field of disability.	36	43	40	20	2.68	Realization
I feel responsible for most of my family's problems*	5	25	9	100	3.25	Acceptance
I care very much about what others think of me.*	43	50	35	11	2.10	Realization

Though I have a disability, I am as important as anyone else who does not have a disability.	119	17	2	1	3.83	Acceptance
My disability is only spoken of during doctor's appointments*	5	14	40	80	3.40	Realization
I appreciate who I am.	102	32	4	1	3.7	Acceptance
In regard to my disability, I often wonder, "why me?"*	9	27	24	79	3.24	Acceptance
TOTAL					36.79 pts	Acceptance

*Reverse coded

Results: Undergraduate College Students

Statement	Strongly Agree 4	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Mean Score	Model Stage
I am comfortable talking about my disability with my family of origin.	10	3	0	0	3.8	Acceptance
I have friends with disabilities.	5	8	0	0	3.39	Acceptance
Most of my problems are caused by my disability.*	2	6	1	4	2.53	Realization
I really do not ever think about my disability.*	1	5	6	1	3.53	Acceptance

Because of my disability, I often do more than others to prove my abilities.*	5	4	3	1	1.3	Passive Awareness
I want to work in the field of disability.	2	5	3	3	2.46	Realization
I feel responsible for most of my family's problems*	2	1	1	9	3.3	Acceptance
I care very much about what others think of me.*	4	5	3	1	2.07	Realization
Though I have a disability, I am as important as anyone else who does not have a disability.	12	1	0	0	3.77	Acceptance
My disability is only spoken of during doctor's appointments*	2	1	3	7	3.40	Realization
I appreciate who I am.	13	0	0	0	4	Acceptance
In regard to my disability, I often wonder, "why me?"*	0	4	3	6	3.15	Acceptance
TOTAL					36.7 pts	Acceptance

*Reverse coded

Summary

Our study showed that the majority of those surveyed are in the Acceptance stage of Gibson's model. Overall, 80% of people receiving services strongly agreed that they felt as important as anyone who did not have a disability. 100% of college students with disabilities surveyed stated that they had friends with disabilities. Of the traditional college-aged students, 62% agreed that most of their problems are caused by their disability. 69% agreed that, because of their disability, they often do more than others to prove their ability.

References

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