

## RESEARCH PROJECTS/PROJETS DE RECHERCHE

### INTERACTION BETWEEN PHYSICALLY DISABLED AND ABLE-BODIED PEOPLE

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#### *Problem*

Our previous studies showed that while both able-bodied and physically disabled college students know how to behave appropriately with one another, each group experiences some discomfort during interaction. Problematic interaction with peers can hamper physically disabled students' academic progress. Since higher education is especially important for disabled people in order to allow effective competition in the work-world, the investigation of variables which facilitate interaction in academic settings is of considerable importance. Now that there is a greater awareness of the needs of physically disabled people, the number of disabled students in institutions of higher education is expected to increase. Therefore, it is timely to study means of making interaction between physically disabled and able-bodied students more comfortable.

#### *Objectives*

The goal of this research is the investigation of cognitive variables which affect social anxiety and facilitate or hamper social interaction between physically disabled and able-bodied college students. Cognitive variables to be investigated include self-efficacy beliefs as well as the content and sequencing of automatic thoughts and self-statements. Once the nature of facilitatory and inhibitory cognitions is known, a cognitive modeling intervention will be designed; the effects of this intervention on able-bodied students'

comfort interacting with physically disabled people will be evaluated.

#### *Methodology*

Two projects consisting of a total of seven studies will be carried out. The objective of Project A, which consists of three studies, is to validate the College Interaction Self-Statement Test (a questionnaire we developed in previous studies) and to compare able-bodied and disabled students' self-statements concerning interaction with each other. The goals of Project B are to investigate, in four studies, the role of different types of cognitions in determining able-bodied college students' comfort during interaction with physically disabled students. The effects of the valence (positive or negative) and of the focus of able-bodied and disabled students' cognitions (on self, on the other person, or on the situation) is investigated in two of the Project B studies. In two additional studies, the affective, cognitive and behavioral effects of different sequences of cognitions will be explored using both correlational and experimental designs.

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