Research Article

The Symbolic Ableism Scale

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Abstract: This study validates the Symbolic Ableism Scale (SAS), which examines subtle prejudice. The SAS has four underlying themes: individualism; recognition of continuing discrimination; empathy for disabled people; and, excessive demands. The SAS is a tool that can be used to help understand how contradicting disability ideologies manifest in modern society to determine how best to counteract them.

Keywords: Modern Prejudice; Ableism; Discrimination

Introduction

Although disabled people have gained significant strides when it comes to rights, services, and supports, they are still socially devalued (Gill, 2000). Groups are socially devalued when their difference is considered deviant as a result of social norms, roles, and expectations (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982). People who are devalued can be seen as pitiful, charity cases, menaces, sick, and/or subhuman. Those socially devalued groups face social distancing, segregation, and, on an extreme level, genocide. Shakespeare (1996b) also cites the "critical role" prejudice and stereotypes play "in disabling social relations" (p. 192).

As evidenced by decades of research, social oppression against disabled people – ableism – is extremely prominent, resulting in economic, social, environmental, and psychological disadvantages imposed on disabled people (Abberley, 1987; Barnes, 1997; Baynton, 2001; Kumari-Campbell, 2009; Linton, 1998; Shakespeare, 1996a). While ableism is still very pronounced, today it operates both overtly and subtly (Keller & Galgay, 2010). Yet, social psychology's study of subtle prejudice has mostly focused on prejudice towards people of color, especially Black[1] people, and women. Despite decades of literature noting disability discrimination's existence, social psychology has drawn less attention to subtle disability prejudice. However, disability's orientation as a social minority group, analogous in some ways to race, provides opportunities for similar theories about prejudice to be explored for their application to disability.

Social Psychology's Examination of Racial Prejudice

Social psychology's research on race in the United States first emerged to examine racial differences (Gamst, Liang, & Der-Karabetian, 2011). This research reflected and perpetrated prejudice – it 'naturalized' differences between races – while upholding assumptions of White racial superiority (Gamst et al., 2011). Dovidio (2001) divides social psychology's more recent racism research into three waves. The first wave (1920s) shifted research away from theories about white superiority and instead viewed prejudice as psychopathology (Dovidio, 2001). The second wave, which began in the 1950s, viewed

prejudice as a normative process thereby shifting the focus away from pathology (Dovidio, 2001). In this period aversive, and symbolic[2] racism theories emerged (Dovidio, 2001). Symbolic racism is expressed more indirectly and symbolically than traditional old-fashioned prejudice (Dovidio, Mann, & Gaertner, 1989; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Tied to conservative ideology, symbolic racists hold particular views on opportunity in America (e.g., work ethic, land of opportunity) so see the distribution of wealth and power reflecting effort and ability rather than being the result of structural inequalities (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Pettigrew, 1989). Aversive racists are those who believe they are not prejudiced—in fact, egalitarian values are important to their self-image—yet feel discomfort around Black people and often act in prejudiced ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Thus, this form of racism theory examines aversive racists' anxiety and discomfort around Black people, how this prejudice is inconsistent with their self-concepts, and the rationalized disassociated products of these inconsistences. These new types of racism theories "argued that, as a result of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, White Americans became more hesitant to openly express their racial hostility" (Gamst et al., 2011, p. 252).

The third wave, the 1990s on, examines both the perpetrators of prejudice and the targets of prejudice (Dovidio, 2001). This includes cognitive processes involved in stereotype formation and the psychological responses by targets (Dovidio, 2001). Aversive and symbolic racism research is expanded in this wave; racial microaggression research also grew during this time. Racial microaggressions are brief, everyday messages that degrade people of color because of their membership in a racial minority group (Sue, 2010). While symbolic racism or aversive racism research examine the perpetrators of prejudice, microaggression research examines the manifestations of discrimination and the experiences of those affected by it.

While there has been growing research on aversive ableism (Friedman, 2016) and disability microaggressions (Keller & Galgay, 2010), less attention has been drawn to symbolic ableism. Thus, this study adapted a prominent symbolic racism measure, the Symbolic Racism Scale (SRS), for disability so research can begin to explore and later work to combat this type of prejudice.

Symbolic Racism and the Symbolic Racism Scale

Unlike traditional old-fashioned racism that looks at overt and dominant prejudice, symbolic racism is a form of subtle prejudice linked with conservative values. Symbolic racists believe racial discrimination is no longer a serious issue, disadvantaged Black people are just unwilling to take responsibility for their lives, Black people are demanding too much too quickly and thus going beyond what is 'fair', and the special treatment of Black people is not justified (Henry & Sears, 2002; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & McConahay, 1973). Symbolic racism is rooted in abstract beliefs about socialized values, which Black people supposedly violate (Henry & Sears, 2002, 2008; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000). However, it is symbolic racists' values that feel threatened not their personal welfare or self-interest; symbolic racists fear the direction of the nation (McConahay & Hough, 1976). In order to be subtle and not overt, symbolic racism is typically expressed through symbols, such

as opposition to busing or opposing affirmative action. These acts "are justified (or rationalized) on a nonracial basis but that operate to maintain the racial status quo with its attendant discrimination against the welfare, status, and symbolic needs of Blacks" (McConahay & Hough, 1976, p. 24). Symbolic racism is related to racial antipathy and conservative values, especially because "it is based on the belief that blacks violate key American values, particularly the idea of individualism, the belief in working hard to get ahead in life" (Henry & Sears, 2008, p. 111).

Because of its subtle nature and the way it is justified, symbolic racism is not necessarily recognized by the perpetrator as prejudiced. McConahay, Hardee, and Batts (1981) found White people perceived symbolic racism items as having lower levels of perceived racism than old-fashioned racism. Moreover, in their study, old-fashioned racism scores were significantly lower when the experimenter was Black than White while symbolic racism scores were unaffected (McConahay et al., 1981). While old-fashioned racism scores were reduced because of an attempt to limit expressions of antipathy for social desirability, symbolic racism scores were relatively similar regardless of experimenter race because symbolic racism items were viewed as prejudice-neutral (McConahay et al., 1981).

The SRS was created in the 1970s in order to measure the complex interplay between modern subtle racial prejudice, abstract beliefs, and conservative values (Henry & Sears, 2002). The SRS has been continually refined over time after use with thousands of different participants; it has since become the most prominent measure to examine symbolic racism. One of the largest critiques of symbolic racism and the SRS is whether it measures an anti-minority affect or just conservative ideology because of how it combines ideology and prejudice (Blatz & Ross, 2009). According to some suggestions, those high in symbolic racism may just refuse policies because of justice-based principles (Blatz & Ross, 2009). However, research has found that symbolic racism predicts racial policy opposition, such as affirmative action opposition, even when conservative ideologies are controlled (Blatz & Ross, 2009). Moreover, McConahay and Hough (1976) also found old-fashioned racism, symbolic racism, and sympathy scales were all separate dimensions of racism. Blatz and Ross (2009) suggest "it is time to 'lay to rest the notion that White opposition to racially targeted policies is primarily motivated by nonracial considerations'" (p. 258). While it is not uncommon for symbolic racism to influence political attitudes, symbolic racism operates separately with conservatism; symbolic racism determines "racial policy attitudes, rather than that opposition to race-based programs, determines symbolic racism" (Henry & Sears, 2008, p. 113).

As the SRS is a prominent method to explore subtle prejudice against Black people, particularly in relation to abstract beliefs, we believe the SRS would be similarly useful for exploring complex prejudice against disabled people. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to validate a version of the SRS that has been adapted for disability – the Symbolic Ableism Scale (SAS). To do so, this study utilizes a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) to determine the underlying structure of the SAS, to determine composite scores for the factors underlying the SAS, and to determine if any of the variables needed to be removed.

Methods

Participants

In attempt to get a sample with a wide range of attitudes towards disability for this pilot study, participants were recruited from a variety of sources, including: undergraduate students; clinical professionals; siblings of disabled people; and, graduate students specifically in the field of Disability Studies. While the undergraduate students were intended to parallel the unexperienced general public, the remaining groups represent unique experiences with, relationships to, and knowledge of disability that should produce a range of attitudes towards it. There was no financial compensation for participating – all participants were volunteers.

A total of 155 participants completed the study. Most participants were women (n = 133, 85.8%), with fewer men (n = 21, 13.5%). 126 participants (81.3%) were nondisabled, 22 (14.2%) disabled, and 7 (4.5%) preferred not to say. Slightly more than half of participants were White (n = 83, 53.5%), with the remainder being Asian or Pacific Islander (n = 29, 18.7%), Hispanic or Latinx (n = 21, 13.5%), Black (n = 10, 6.5%), Middle Eastern (n = 5, 3.2%), interracial (n = 6, 3.9%), and other (n = 1, 0.6%). Participants ranged in age: 18-25 (n = 86, 55.5%); 26-33 (n = 33, 21.3%); 34-40 (n = 17; 11.0%); 41-48 (n = 8, 5.2%); 49-56 (n = 8, 5.2%); 57-64 (n = 5, 3.2%); and, 65-72 (n = 1, .06%). Participants came from four groups: undergraduate students (n = 68; 43.9%); siblings of disabled people (n = 48; 31.0%); graduate students in Disability Studies (n = 16; 10.3%); and clinical professionals (n = 23; 14.8%).

Measure

Items for the SAS were adapted from the SRS (Henry & Sears, 2002). To do so, research on all versions of the SRS were reviewed; based on SRS research, and research on disability prejudice (e.g., Abberley, 1987; Barnes, 1997; Baynton, 2001; Keller & Galgay, 2010; Linton, 1998; Shakespeare, 1996a), applicable questions from each of the themes of the SRS (i.e., denial of continuing racial discrimination; Blacks should work harder; demands for special favors; undeserved outcomes; individualism) were selected. In each of the questions ‘Black people’ or ‘Blacks’ was replaced by ‘disabled people’ while the rest of the sentence structure remained the same. Questions that were very specific to prejudice against Black people (e.g., “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class” (Henry & Sears, 2002, p. 261)) were not directly adapted. As such, an additional disability specific question following the nature of the SRS items was added (i.e., disabled people should stay hidden) to capture a missing, yet critical, part of disability history in the United States – segregation and institutionalization. The resulting adapted SAS items were:

1. Discrimination against disabled people is no longer a problem in the United States.
2. If disabled people would just try harder they would be as well off as nondisabled people.
3. Disabled people are demanding too much from the rest of society.
4. Disabled people do not complain as much as they should about their situation in

society. (Reverse keyed)
5. Over the past few years disabled people have gotten less than they deserve. (Reverse keyed)
6. It is easy to understand the anger of disabled people in America. (Reverse keyed)
7. Disabled people should stay hidden.
8. Even if disabled people try hard they often cannot reach their goals. (Reverse keyed)
9. Even if disabled people are ambitious they often cannot succeed. (Reverse keyed)
10. If disabled people work hard they almost always get what they want.
11. Most disabled people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame.
12. Hard work offers little guarantee of success for disabled people. (Reverse keyed)
13. Any disabled person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.

The SAS measure uses a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a number of reverse keyed items. The adapted scale was reviewed by five experts in disability studies, prejudice, and/or social psychology.

Procedure

After ethics approval from the University's institutional review board (IRB), participants were recruited through emails describing a study on disability attitudes. The emails were forwarded to potential participants through applicable listservs. If interested, participants visited the online survey link where they were presented with the informed consent and began the survey thereafter. Participants completed the SAS then completed information about their demographics. Finally, they were thanked for their participation and given the principal investigator's contact information if they should have questions or need debriefing.

Results

Data Screening

The data were screened for administrative errors and missing data. With a final sample size of 155 there was a ratio of approximately 12 cases (subjects) per variable (n = 13), satisfying the minimum amount of data for factor analyses (Garson, 2008).

PCA of the Symbolic Ableism Scale

A PCA with varimax rotation was conducted to determine which factors loaded into each determined component of the adapted SAS. Sampling adequacy using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure was .73 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant (χ^2 (78) = 522.30, $p<.001$). PCA results revealed that factors loaded into a total of four components with eigenvalues that exceeded 1.00 and accounted for 60.44% of the total variance for the 13 items' scores (see Table 1, for factor loadings). In addition, a visual examination of the scree plot confirmed that there were four unique components present.

Table 1
Principal Components Analysis of the Symbolic Ableism Scale (SAS)

Items	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
8. Even if disabled people try hard they often cannot reach their goals.	.76			
9. Even if disabled people are ambitious they often cannot succeed.	.85			
10. If disabled people work hard they almost always get what they want.	.58			
12. Hard work offers little guarantee of success for disabled people.	.72			
13. Any disabled person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.	.74			
1. Discrimination against disabled people is no longer a problem in the United States.		.63		
2. If disabled people would just try harder they would be as well off as nondisabled people.		.65		
3. Disabled people are demanding too much from the rest of society.		.75		
7. Disabled people should stay hidden.		.57		
11. Most disabled people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame.		.58		
5. over the past few years disabled people have gotten less than they deserve.			.82	
6. It is easy to understand the anger of disabled people in America.			.82	
4. Disabled people do not complain as much as they should about their situation in society.				.72

The authors examined the four identified components, compared each to the SRS (Henry & Sears, 2002), and determined themes. The first theme, individualism, included questions 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13. Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 11 were comprised in the second theme, recognition of continuing discrimination. The third theme of empathy for disabled people contained SAS questions 5 and 6. Question four completed the final theme, excessive demands. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to ensure internal consistency for each of the first three components. Cronbach's alpha could not be conducted for the final theme given that only one item loaded on the component. Cronbach's alpha was adequate for each scale: .80 for individualism, .65 for recognition of continuing discrimination, and .69 for empathy for disabled people.

Descriptive Data

An analysis was conducted to examine the percentiles of each participant's average score to enable interpretable results. Scores of .23 or less (25th percentile) were considered to have little to no symbolic ableism. Further, scores between .24 and .31 (up to 50th percentile) were considered to have slight symbolic ableism, scores of .32 to .40 (up to 75th percentile) moderate symbolic ableism, and scores .41 and above as strong symbolic ableism. Table 2 provides descriptive data for the SAS across participants. The mean score of participants on component 1 (items 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13) suggests that participants are moderately symbolic ableist towards disabled people regarding individualism (M = .53, SD = .23). Component 2 (items 1, 2, 3, 7, and 11) showed that participants believe that there is continued discrimination against disabled people in society (M = .06, SD = .09). For the third component (items 5 and 6) of empathy, participants report low levels of symbolic ableism towards disabled people (M = .24, SD = .24), suggesting they do have empathy for disabled people. Finally, component 4 (item 4), excessive demands, participants' responses suggest a moderate level of symbolic ableism towards disabled people (M = .53, SD = .29).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the SAS Across Participants (N =155)

Items	M	SD
Component 1: Individualism	.53	.23
8. Even if disabled people try hard they often cannot reach their goals (R)	.57	.34
9. Even if disabled people are ambitious they often cannot succeed (R)	.64	.34
10. If disabled people work hard they almost always get what they want	.41	.27
12. Hard work offers little guarantee of success for disabled people (R)	.49	.31
13. Any disabled person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding	.54	.30
Component 2: Recognition of Continuing Discrimination	.06	.09
1. Discrimination against disabled people is no longer a problem in the United States	.09	.15
2. If disabled people would just try harder they would be as well off as nondisabled people	.07	.17
3. Disabled people are demanding too much from the rest of society	.06	.15
7. Disabled people should stay hidden	.01	.05
11. Most disabled people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame	.09	.17
Component 3: Empathy for Disabled People	.24	.24
5. Over the past few years disabled people have gotten less than they deserve (R)	.25	.27
6. It is easy to understand the anger of disabled people in America (R)	.22	.28
Component 4: Excessive Demands	.53	.29
4. Disabled people do not complain as much as they should about their situation in society (R)	.53	.29

Note. All items were scaled from 0 to 1. Higher scores reflect greater symbolic ableism towards disabled people. (R) indicates items that were reverse coded.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics by Average Composite Score for the SAS (N = 155)

	Component 1		**Component 2**		**Component 3**		**Component 4**	
Description	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Total	.53	.23	.06	.09	.24	.24	.53	.29
Gender								
Man	.52	.25	.06	.11	.27	.28	.43	.21
Woman	.53	.23	.07	.09	.23	.23	.55	.30
Age								
18 to 25	.61	.20	.08	.10	.27	.24	.56	.27
26 to 33	.40	.26	.05	.09	.17	.19	.47	.32
34 to 40	.48	.20	.05	.09	.17	.21	.49	.29
41 to 48	.44	.29	.04	.04	.12	.15	.46	.39
49 to 56	.38	.22	.05	.09	.36	.41	.65	.35
57 to 64	.51	.29	.04	.05	.17	.18	.53	.40
65 to 72	.60	*	.10	*	.09	*	.67	*
Race								
White	.48	.24	.05	.08	.22	.24	.52	.31
Asian	.60	.24	.09	.12	.25	.21	.56	.31
Hispanic/Latinx	.56	.21	.08	.10	.30	.24	.48	.24
Black	.54	.21	.06	.11	.24	.32	.58	.21
Middle Eastern	.69	.12	.11	.13	.20	.17	.73	.19
Interracial	.58	.23	.06	.09	.14	.15	.58	.20
Other	.50	*	.10	*	.00	*	.17	*
Disability								
No	.55	.23	.07	.10	.25	.24	.55	.28
Yes	.43	.20	.04	.07	.18	.25	.43	.35

Participant group								
Graduate students: Disability Studies	.28	.14	.02	.04	.08	.14	.42	.39
Undergraduate students	.60	.21	.08	.10	.29	.24	.57	.27
Siblings of disabled people	.48	.24	.06	.10	.20	.24	.54	.31
Clinical professionals	.61	.20	.06	.09	.27	.24	.51	.21

Note. *Only one participant self-reported in this category.

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics of participant demographic data based on the average composite score for each of the four identified components. A means analysis was conducted to understand the differences among components for gender, age, race, disability status, and participant group. The results show that men reported slightly more symbolic ableism on the empathy component (M = .27 versus women M = .23); however, women's average score was higher on excessive demands (M = .30 versus men M = .21). People that identified as White (M = .48) had the lowest levels of symbolic ableism for individualism while Asian and Middle Eastern participants reported the highest levels (M = .60, M = .69 respectively). Moreover, people who were Middle Eastern exhibited high levels of symbolic ableism on excessive demands (M = .73). Across components, nondisabled participants reported slightly higher average symbolic ableism scores compared to disabled people. Of the four groups participating in the pilot study, graduate students in Disability Studies average symbolic ableism score was the lowest on each of the four identified components. Additionally, undergraduate students reported the highest symbolic ableism on components two (M = .08), three (M = .29), and four (M = .57). Undergraduate students (M = .60) and clinical professionals (M = .61) average symbolic ableism scores were greater than siblings of disabled people (M = .48) and graduate students in Disability Studies (M = .28). Scores were similar for undergraduate students, siblings of disabled people, and clinical professionals on components two (range = .06 - .08), three (range = .20 - .29), and four (range = .51 - .57).

Discussion

Because of the prevalence of subtle discrimination against disabled people and the need to tease out that complexity, the aim of this pilot study was to validate the adapted SRS – the SAS. To do so, a PCA was conducted to examine the components of the SAS. The findings revealed four underlying themes: individualism; recognition of continuing discrimination; empathy for disabled people; and, excessive demands.

Individualism

The first component was the theme individualism – the idea that success is dependent on hard work, and only on hard work (Henry & Sears, 2008). American dream individualism, or the idea that one can simply 'pull oneself up by the bootstraps,' relies both on a Protestant work ethic narrative wherein people have direct responsibility for their own outcomes, and a just-world theory wherein people are rewarded for noble actions. Not only is this upward mobility no longer common (Beller & Hout, 2006), individualism can also be particularly problematic when intertwined with narratives about disability, such as those that suggest disability must be 'overcome.' For example, inspirational disability portrayals often perpetuate the myth that 'the true disability is a bad attitude.' The inspiration narrative dictates that everything disabled people do is inspirational because they must 'overcome' their disability or that they succeeded 'despite' their disability. Not only does this not reflect the lived reality of most people, it also creates unobtainable expectations for disabled people by perpetuating the myth that their true disability is a bad attitude instead of institutional barriers (Tighe, 2001).

Recognition of Continuing Discrimination

Unlike in the SRS where the component was 'denial of continuing racial discrimination,' component two in the SAS is the recognition of continuing discrimination of disabled people. Both historically and today ableism is extremely prominent. Conservative 'pull yourself up by your bootstrap' individualism and dislike for welfare systems may certainly interfere with their views of disabled people, however:

> "Unlike the experience of many minorities, opposition to disability rights seldom has been marked by overt displays of bigotry or hostility; and politicians have often been included to provide sympathetic endorsements for the goals of disabled persons, even when they have shown strong resistance to the claims of other disadvantaged groups" (Hahn, 2005, p. 42).

Unlike the denial of continuing discrimination of which Black people are subjected to by symbolic racists, this recognition of continuing discrimination may be unique to ableism because of roots in pity, paternalism, and empathy for disabled people – 'deservingness.' As such, it may be pertinent to explore the usefulness of an additional variable that directly addresses pity.

Empathy for Disabled People

Component three was empathy for disabled people; this theme also runs counter to the SRS, where the component was 'undeserved outcomes.' Similar to component two, component three recognizes that disabled people are subjected to unequal treatment. Yet, component three may be particularly intertwined with pity and paternalism, which may be why there were higher symbolic ableism scores than component two. Although having pity is not inherently negative, the pity narrative is harmful for disabled people because it assumes

that they are inherently tragic because of their disabilities, that they are incapable, and/or that they are victims (Reid, Stoughton, & Smith, 2006). According to the sick role, society accepts that disabled people are not responsible for their condition and disabled people can avoid (some) deviance if they fulfill the sick role that legitimizes their incapacity as a valid reason for unproductivity (Barnes & Mercer, 2003).

Pity towards disabled people relates to expectations about what it is like to be disabled as well as perceptions of incompetence. For disabled people, perceptions of low ability and high warmth often create lowered expectations simply because of group membership (Harris & Fiske, 2007). Thus, positive responses may be due to sympathy that marks disabled people as more deserving of help (Appelbaum, 2001). People tend to be biased towards favoring disabled people even though disabled people's disadvantages are often exaggerated (Susman, 1994). For example, Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, and Drout (1994) found disabled people and older adults were seen as more deserving of preferential treatment than Black people because their state was seen as outside of their control, called a positive response bias or the sympathy effect by Susman (1994).

Excessive Demands

The fourth component is excessive demands. Tied to individualism, according to SRS research, this belief that social minorities are demanding special favors:

> "Seemed to reflect a consistent internal logic: if the civil rights era had ended discrimination, Blacks' continuing disadvantage had to be due to shortcomings among Blacks themselves; and if that were true, both their demands for special attention and any special gains were illegitimate. Each falls under the umbrella of the 'blend' of negative affect against Blacks and conservative values, reflecting the idea that Blacks violate key cherished American values" (Henry & Sears, 2002, p. 256).

For disabled people, while the same logic may apply, excessive demands include an additional emphasis on their 'demand' on the welfare system. Attitudes towards welfare are often determined by self-interest, beliefs about justice (values and norms), socialization, and national welfare culture – cultural integration of dominant ideologies (Andreß & Heien, 2001). Anti-social welfare attitudes in the United States are often justified based on "the appeals to the values of individualism" (Feldman & Zaller, 1992, p. 272), which can also be problematic for disabled people, as described above, is reflected in the high SAS scores for this component.

However, there may be an additional reason component four received high scores. We believe one reason for this may be the wording of the only question under this component: "disabled people do not complain as much as they should about their situation in society." The question's wording is double-barreled as it could be interpreted to mean both disabled people should complain more, or complain less. Thus, the question is relatively ambiguous depending on how one interprets it. Even Disability Studies graduate students, who had the lowest symbolic ableism scores on average, scored in the strong symbolic ableism range for

this question. Because of its problematic wording we suggest this question be restructured for clarity; in its revised format it should be: "disabled people complain too much about their situation in society." The final SAS scale is:

1. Even if disabled people try hard they often cannot reach their goals. (Reverse keyed)
2. Even if disabled people are ambitious they often cannot succeed. (Reverse keyed)
3. If disabled people work hard they almost always get what they want.
4. Hard work offers little guarantee of success for disabled people. (Reverse keyed)
5. Any disabled person who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.
6. Discrimination against disabled people is no longer a problem in the United States.
7. If disabled people would just try harder they would be as well off as nondisabled people.
8. Disabled people are demanding too much from the rest of society.
9. Disabled people should stay hidden.
10. Most disabled people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame.
11. Over the past few years disabled people have gotten less than they deserve. (Reverse keyed)
12. It is easy to understand the anger of disabled people in America. (Reverse keyed)
13. Disabled people complain too much about their situation in society.

Future research should examine if the fourth component continues to score relatively high on symbolic ableism with the new wording, as well as if with the new wording the question actually falls underneath one of the first three components on a future factor analysis.

Descriptive Differences

While the aim of this study was to validate the SAS, and not to document symbolic ableism across the United States, our findings did reveal descriptive differences across groups that may serve as fruitful areas of future study. Women in our study had slightly lower symbolic ableism scores for the empathy component than men. This finding is reflected both in previous research which has found women tend to feel more favorably toward disabled people than men (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2005), and social roles of women in the United States. Conversely, women scored higher than men for the excessive demands component. This finding may be due to the fact that women are more likely to take on support and caregiver roles in general, especially women siblings who are more likely to support their sibling with a disability than men (Hodapp, Urbano, & Burke, 2010). In fact, on average, siblings in our study scored as high symbolic ableist for the excessive demands component. Another possible explanation may be the aforementioned issues with the wording of this question. Future research should explore this complex interaction between gender, disability attitudes, and the SAS components.

While disabled people scored lower symbolic ableism than nondisabled people on all four components, on average they still scored as moderately high on two of the components – individualism, and excessive demands. These findings may be indicative of the internalization

of the pervasive negative societal and institutional views of disability. This finding mirrors past research which has found disabled people commonly hold prejudiced attitudes about disability, especially implicit (unconscious) attitudes (Friedman, 2016; Nosek et al., 2007). Disabled people's understandings of disability are often colored by having to navigate ableism, including compulsory able-bodied/mindedness – the assumption and enforcement of able-bodied/mindedness and the marking of those outside this binary as deviant (Kafer, 2013). This internalization of social devaluation can negatively impact disabled people's view of disability, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (McCarrey, Piccinin, Welburn, & Chislett, 1990).

While there were not large differences across racial/ethnic groups, our findings revealed that White people had lower overall individualism scores than Asian, and Middle Eastern people. It is possible these findings were specific to these samples. However, these findings may also mirror ethnic and cultural differences, such as 'Western' versus 'Eastern' philosophical approaches to life. More research should be conducted to understand if these racial/ethnic differences are replicable with wider and more diverse samples. If similar differences result, future research should explore how to make the SAS more culturally relative to a diverse sample.

We wanted participants with a wide range of experiences with and knowledge of disability. For this reason, we had four participant groups which we believed would have different combinations of knowledge (none, clinical, Disability Studies) and experience (personal, relational, arm's length, none). Findings revealed a range of symbolic ableism from the four participant groups (undergraduate students; siblings; clinical professionals; Disability Studies graduate students) across the four components. Both the undergraduate students, and the clinical professionals scored comparatively high on individualism on average. While undergraduates had little disability knowledge or experience, clinical professionals have a very particular kind of clinical knowledge about disability. Disability Studies has long criticized the medical model for its individualized view of disability; when individualized and thus depoliticized, it "makes it easier for most people to read this kind of decontextualized paean to personal responsibility as apolitical and benign" (Kafer, 2013, p. 96). As such, it places the onus for change on the disabled individuals in direct alignment with individualism. Although graduate students in Disability Studies on average scored slight symbolic ableism on individualism, they had the lowest symbolic ableism scores across all of the groups for recognition of continuing discrimination, and empathy for disabled people. Similarly, siblings of disabled people also had lower symbolic ableism scores in the empathy component. Although more research is needed, these findings suggest the types of intimacy with, and understandings of disability can lead to reduced symbolic ableism.

Limitations

When interpreting our findings, a number of limitations should be noted. One limitation was the relatively small sample size of convenience. There is a chance of self-selection bias because all participants were volunteers. While there is a precedent for using undergraduate students to mirror the general population (Peterson & Merunka, 2014), their

results may not be reflective of the general population. While only slightly more than half of our participants were White, there was an unequal distribution of people of color that is not reflective of the United States as a whole and may have impacted our findings. This was a pilot study to validate the SAS; thus, only descriptive statistics were run to compare groups. Future research should use a larger and more representative sample, and statistical analyses to examine significant group differences.

It should also be noted that although this study focused on ableism using lessons from social psychology's research on racism, ableism and disability do not exist in a vacuum – disability and race are not mutually exclusive categories and these forms of prejudice very often intertwine. As such, this study is limited in that it focused only on disability; future research should explore methodologies that examine prejudice directed at people of multiple minority identities. Doing so is critical not only because of the limited research about these forms of prejudice that impact people from multiple social minority groups, but also because it is necessary before ableism can truly be dismantled.

Avenues for Future Study

Both symbolic racism and aversive racism theories explore not only subtle prejudice, but also ties to political orientation. While aversive racism explores prejudice among more liberal people, symbolic racism is purported to be a combination of conservative values, especially individualism, and political beliefs (Sears & Henry, 2003). Research suggests anti-Black affect and conservative values are cognitively connected and should be measured simultaneously as "symbolic racism is grounded about equally in both […] symbolic racism is the glue that links political conservatism to racial prejudice among Whites in the contemporary era" (Sears & Henry, 2003, p. 264). Because of symbolic racism's deep ties with political orientation, future research needs to explore the relationship between political orientation and symbolic ableism, both in terms of if the pattern is the same (conservatives are typically symbolic ableists, liberals are typically aversive ableists), and to determine if symbolic ableism is grounded in conservatism.

Disabled people seemingly violate individualism in two ways: based on stereotypes, they are seen as not working hard to get ahead (i.e., individualism); and, they can work hard and still not get ahead (i.e., recognition of continuing discrimination, and empathy for disabled people). Because of social desirability, this cognitive dissonance, the product of holding these conflicting ideas – belief in a just world, and recognition that disabled people face discrimination – manifests itself in subtle ways where the person is less likely to be 'caught' being prejudiced, that is where they have an alternative justification for their behavior (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). For example, in one study, when symbolic racists were presented with a letter that justified choosing White applicants (i.e., we want our employees to look like our customers) they selected significantly fewer Black job applicants than when they were not presented with the justification (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000). Future research needs to explore the many ways symbolic ableism manifests, including how symbolic ableists justify their beliefs.

While its subtle nature is a hallmark of modern prejudice, empathy and recognition of continuing discrimination were not only unique to the SAS, but contrary to the SRS where there is a denial of continuing racial discrimination. While we have suggested these differences may be related to the unique ways disability is conceptualized compared to race, more research is needed to examine the functions underlying these constructs, and how they operate in terms of prejudice, particularly in relation to symbolic ableism.

The aim of this study was to validate the SAS so it could be used for further exploration of symbolic ableism. Sears and Henry (2005) explain, "This is the problem that has animated our own [SRS] research agenda: how to understand Whites' continuing resistance to efforts to increase racial equality despite much evidence that in some measurable ways their racial attitudes have become substantially liberalized" (p. 96). The SAS is an attempt to understand how contradicting ideologies about disability, and conflicting attitudes towards disabled people manifest in modern society in order to determine how best to counteract them.

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Endnotes

1. A decision to use Black instead of African American was intentional in alignment with a

Black feminist and Black Studies pride/identity models (hooks, 1995; Kvasny & Hales, 2010; Smith, 1992). It is similar to the reclaiming of disabled by people with disabilities.
2. During early research there was a divergence between 'symbolic' and 'modern' racism theories. However, a significant bulk of the literature now considers these concepts to be the same (Henry & Sears, 2008).