



The Impact of the *Realabilities* TV and Comic Book Series on Children's Cognitive Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions towards Children with Disabilities: A Consideration of Grade and Gender

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ABSTRACT

Realabilities is a children's TV show and comic book series aimed at positively enhancing typical children's attitudes and intentions towards their peers with disabilities. Participants showed significant changes in attitudes and intentions towards children with disabilities following the episode and comic book viewing of *Realabilities*. The results also highlight findings concerning grade and gender.

INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that the public may perceive children with disabilities negatively due to their poor depiction on TV (Sprafkin, 1984). Conversely, based on the Affect/Effort theory (Rosenthal, 1974), portraying the strengths of individuals with disabilities on-screen could bolster positive expectancies of typical children towards their peers.

In regards to strengths, research shows that 10% of children with autism have savant skills (Miller, 1999), deaf individuals may have greater peripheral vision (Bosworth & Dobkins, 1999), visually impaired people may exhibit musical talent (Matawa, 2009), while physically impaired people may have great upper body strength (Mulcahey, Gaughan, & Betz, 2009). Thus, this research seeks to determine whether *Realabilities*, a series portraying the strengths of individuals with disabilities, will improve typical children's perceptions.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

In Study 1, 17 (8 male, 9 female) elementary school students participated in the intervention. In Study 2, there were 152 elementary school participants (79 male, 66 female) from grades two to four in Brooklyn, NY. In both studies, researchers administered modified versions of the Shared Activities Questionnaire (SAQ) (Morgan et al., 1996), a behavioral intention measure, and the Adjective Checklist (ACL) (Siperstein, 1980), a cognitive attitudinal measure, to all participants before and after viewing an episode and two comic books of *Realabilities*.

PROCEDURE

The current study compared children's positive cognitive attitudes and behavioral intentions of children with disabilities before and after participating in the *Realabilities* program as measured by a modified version of the Adjective Checklist (ACL; Siperstein, 1980, Siperstein & Bak, 1977) and the Shared Activities Questionnaire (SAQ; Morgan et al., 1996). The researchers administered a modified 10-item version of the 32-item ACL to assess children's cognitive attitudes towards children with disabilities.

RESULTS

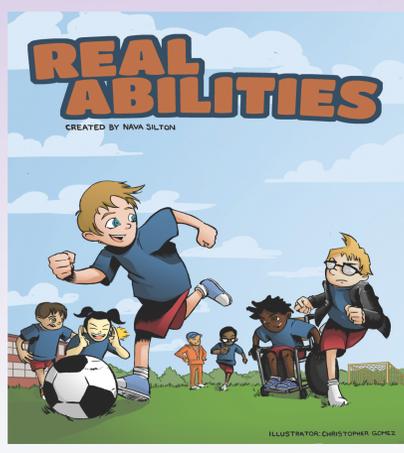
In Study 1, paired sample t-tests showed that children reported more positive cognitive attitudes post-test towards children with autism, $t(16)=-2.908, p<.02$, blindness, $t(14)=-3.300, p<.01$, deafness, $t(13)=.372, p=.716$, and paraplegia, $t(130)=1.962, p<.05$.

In Study 2, paired sample t-tests revealed more positive behavioral intentions towards children with autism, $t(125)=-4.033, p<.001$, blindness, $t(132)=.912, p=.364$, deafness, $t(128)=-3.146, p<.01$, and paraplegia $t(130)=1.962, p<.05$ following the intervention.

ANCOVA analyses examined how results differed by grade and gender. Children in grade 4 had more positive behavioral intentions for children with autism, $F(2)=4.31, p<.05$, and physical disabilities, $F(2)=5.45, p<.01$ following the intervention compared to second and third graders. Females reported more positive intentions than males for blindness on the SAQ, $F(1)=7.25, p<.01$, and on the ACL, $F(1)=8.15, p<.01$, and reported more positive intentions on the SAQ towards children with autism, $F(1)=4.17, p<.05$.

DISCUSSION

While other interventions have shown a minimal amount of success at enhancing behavioral intentions towards children with disabilities, very few have shown any substantial improvement in cognitive attitudes. *Realabilities* appears to have had a significant positive impact on both behavioral intentions and on cognitive attitudes.



"The Real Goal": The first *Realabilities* comic book that was used during this intervention.



A scene from a *Realabilities* episode with the characters in action!



New art, featuring Melody, RJ, Seymour, Uno, & Addy.