Quantifying the Awareness of Sex-Based Disparity in Mental Health Treatment in Adolescents via Implicit Association Testing

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Once a person is labeled as being mentally disordered, all of their behaviors and characteristics- even those that are not manifestations of their mental disorder- are contextualized by that label. As such, certain words and behaviors that are often associated with mental disorders have obtained sex-based associations. This project intended to quantify how aware the general public is of sex-based disparities within the field of clinical psychology and their own biases regarding mental disorders. Further, it intended to assess how the sexes attribute certain mental disorders to males and females. Students from Salem High School, of varying ages and both sexes, completed two Google Form surveys and a variation of Harvard's Implicit Association Test. The hypothesis proposed that males are more likely to have negative perceptions about mental disorders than females. The data supported the hypothesis, as females were significantly less likely to attribute internalizing or externalizing disorders to the sex they are typically stereotyped with and had much shorter average times on the IAT. Now, knowing who is more likely to have negative biases and who is less likely to be aware of them, an educational program or website/app with improved guidelines for descriptive language regarding mental disorders can be developed to prevent these negative associations from forming.

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