

Conscious and Unconscious Disability Attitudes

In this study we examined patterns of explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) attitudes towards disability

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Ableism is “discrimination in favor of the able-bodied,” including “the idea that a person’s abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to nondisabled people” (Linton, 1998). Ableism manifests through pervasive institutional, systemic, and subtle discrimination.

Expanding our knowledge of attitudes helps us to understand social interactions, socialization, and prejudice formation. Attitudes operate on two levels – explicit attitudes are conscious ones, while implicit attitudes are unconscious ones. People’s explicit and implicit attitudes do not always align because of the ways explicit and implicit attitudes operate. For this reason, Son Hing et al. (2008) devised a method to categorize different types of explicit and implicit attitudes related to race into four categories; in [this study](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/61775/1/811-Article%20Text-5556-3-10-20181204.pdf) [.\(https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/61775/1/811-Article%20Text-5556-3-10-20181204.pdf\)](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/61775/1/811-Article%20Text-5556-3-10-20181204.pdf) we’ve examined this pattern of explicit and implicit attitudes for disability.

		Implicit Attitudes	
		High	Low
Explicit Attitudes	High	Symbolic ableism	Principled conservative
	Low	Aversive ableism	Truly low prejudice

Symbolic ableists have high explicit prejudice and implicit prejudice (see figure). Although they recognize there is still discrimination against people with disabilities and have some empathy toward people with disabilities, symbolic ableists score high in terms of individualism, including the idea that if people with disabilities try hard enough they can succeed. They also are more likely to believe people with disabilities produce excessive demands on the system and demand special favors.

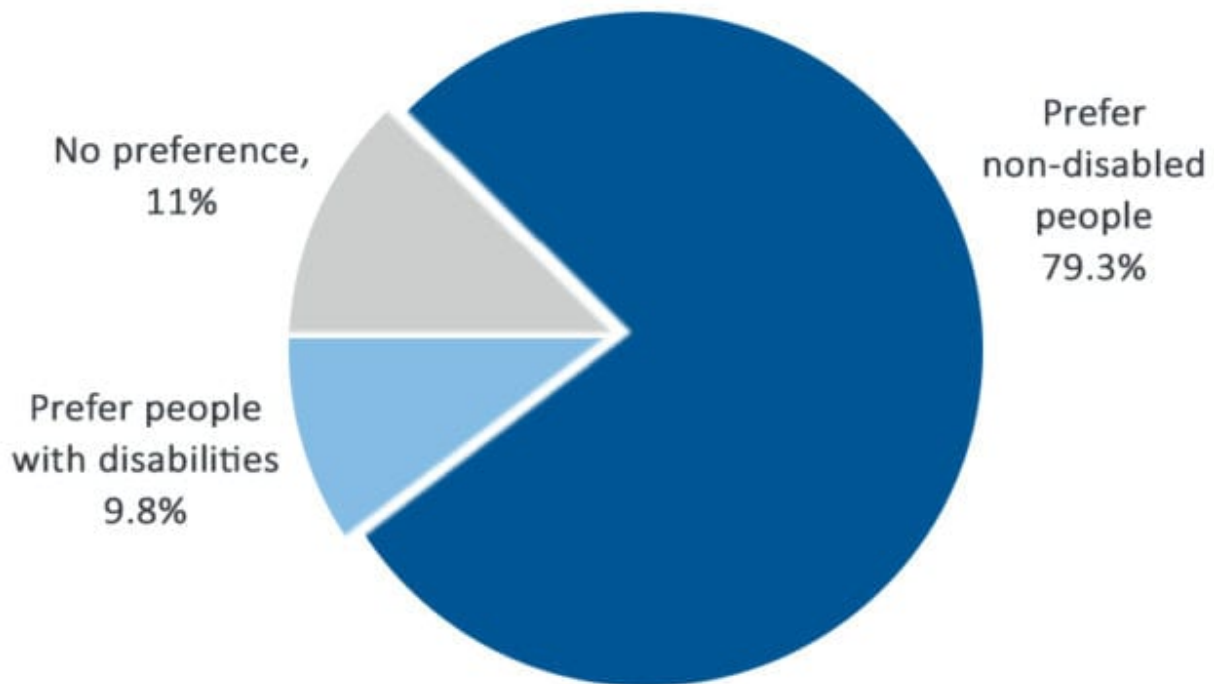
Aversive ableists have low explicit prejudice and high implicit prejudice. Aversive ableism focuses on those people who are progressive and well-meaning yet still participate in biased actions or thought. Aversive people believe they are not prejudiced—in fact, egalitarian values are important to their self-image—yet feel discomfort around people with disabilities and often act in prejudiced ways in scenarios where their prejudice is less overtly evident. Because of their egalitarian values, aversive ableists have low explicit prejudice. However, they still hold prejudice so have high implicit prejudice.

Principled conservatives are those who have high explicit prejudice and low implicit prejudice because they truly value abstract conservative ideals, which cause them to dislike policies that stray from tradition (Son Hing et al., 2008).

Finally, as the name suggests, truly low prejudiced people are those who truly have low explicit and implicit prejudice.

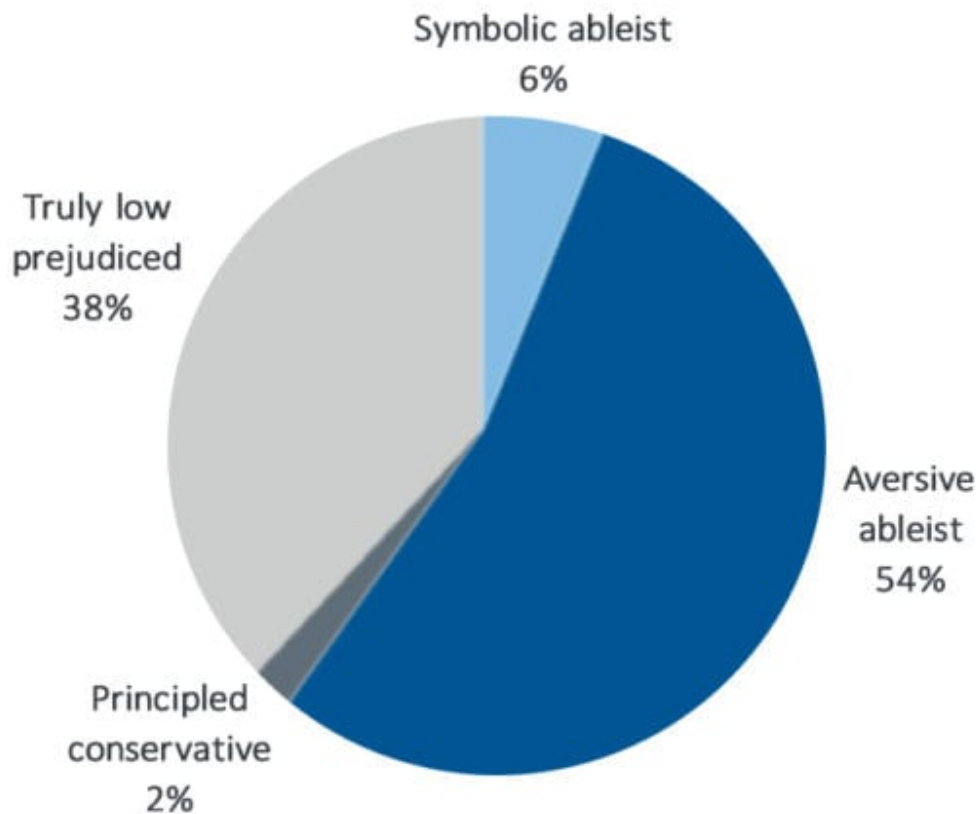
In [this study](https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/61775/1/811-Article%20Text-5556-3-10-20181204.pdf) (<https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10125/61775/1/811-Article%20Text-5556-3-10-20181204.pdf>), we examined peoples' (n = 82) explicit and implicit attitudes towards people with disabilities. Findings revealed most often people reported not being prejudiced explicitly. However, the overwhelming majority of people were implicitly prejudiced (see figure below), with most people strongly preferring nondisabled people.

Implicit Preferences of Participants



When we put people's explicit and implicit attitudes together, the majority of people, or 54%, scored as aversive ableists, 6% were symbolic ableists, 2% were principled conservatives, and 38% scored as truly low prejudiced.

Prejudice Styles



If we stop thinking about prejudice as a dichotomy – either someone is prejudiced or they’re not – and instead consider all its different forms, we can recognize the nuance, and how prevalent and interwoven ableism is. “Many participants in this study believed they viewed people with disabilities positively. Yet, the types of discrimination and prejudice that have been evidenced for so long in literature were still present among people who meant well. This pattern of prejudice – aversive ableism – may be one of the most prominent forms of ableism today. In order to combat it, we must first understand it. This study took one of the first steps by establishing aversive ableism as a two-dimensional construct, and reconceptualizing ableism as a spectrum. Next, the hard work of disrupting these unconscious processes can begin. Doing so is necessary to end the social oppression of people with disabilities” (Friedman, 2018).

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This article is a summary of the following journal manuscript: Friedman, C. (2018). Aversive ableism: Modern prejudice towards disabled people. Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal, 14(4).

References:

- Friedman, C. (2018). Aversive ableism: Modern prejudice towards disabled people. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 14(4).
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- Son Hing, L., Chung-Yan, G., Hamilton, L., & Zanna, M. (2008). A two-dimensional model that employs explicit and implicit attitudes to characterize prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(6), 971-987. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.971