



The Effect of Psychological Perspectives on Stigmatic Thinking Regarding Mental Disorders

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Introduction

This study examined how an individual's psychological perspective affects stigmatic thinking regarding mental disorders. Several research studies have examined how different explanations for mental disorders contribute to stigmatic thinking. For example, research done by Lebowitz et.al (2013) found that biochemical and genetic attributions for depression were associated with prognostic pessimism. Another study done by Lebowitz & Ahn (2014), found that mental health clinicians who held a biological perspective reported less empathy towards those who experience depression than did those that held psychosocial perspectives. Up until now, researchers have only differentiated between broad biological and psychological perspectives. This study went beyond previous research by breaking down both the biological and psychological perspectives into narrower theoretical explanations; and by attempting to assess the individual theoretical perspectives of each participant. The goal of this study was to determine whether different psychological perspectives of mental disorders related to stigmatic thinking.

Hypothesis: Some theoretical perspectives will be more related to stigmatic thinking than other perspectives.

Method

Participants

101 college students from a midwestern university participated in this study, with an average age of 19.19 ($SD = 2.143$). Out of the pool of participants 77 identified as female, 22 as male, and 2 as another gender. At the time of the study, most of the participants (68.3%) had completed less than 30 college credits. The majority were enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences (38.6%) and the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (35.6%).

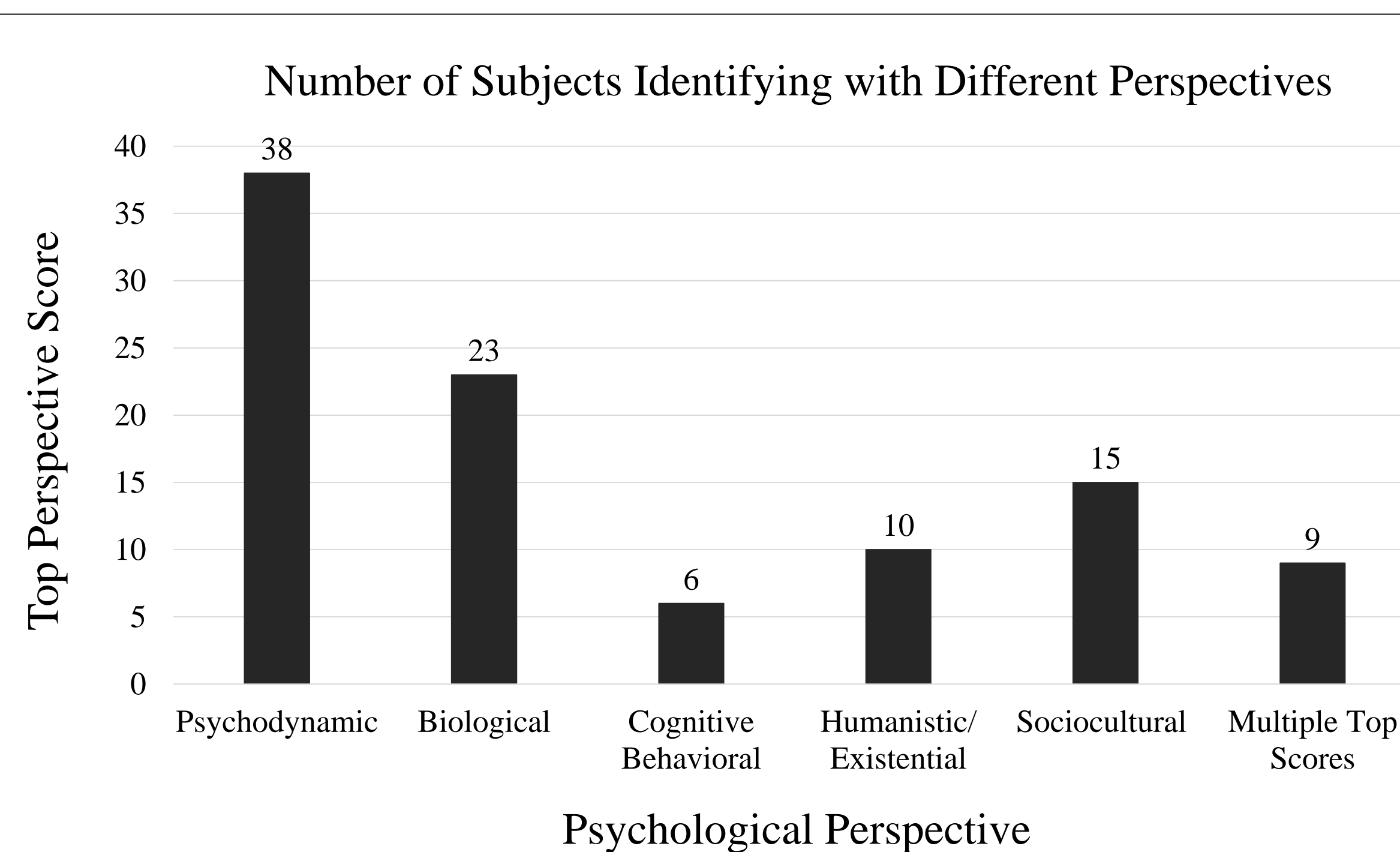
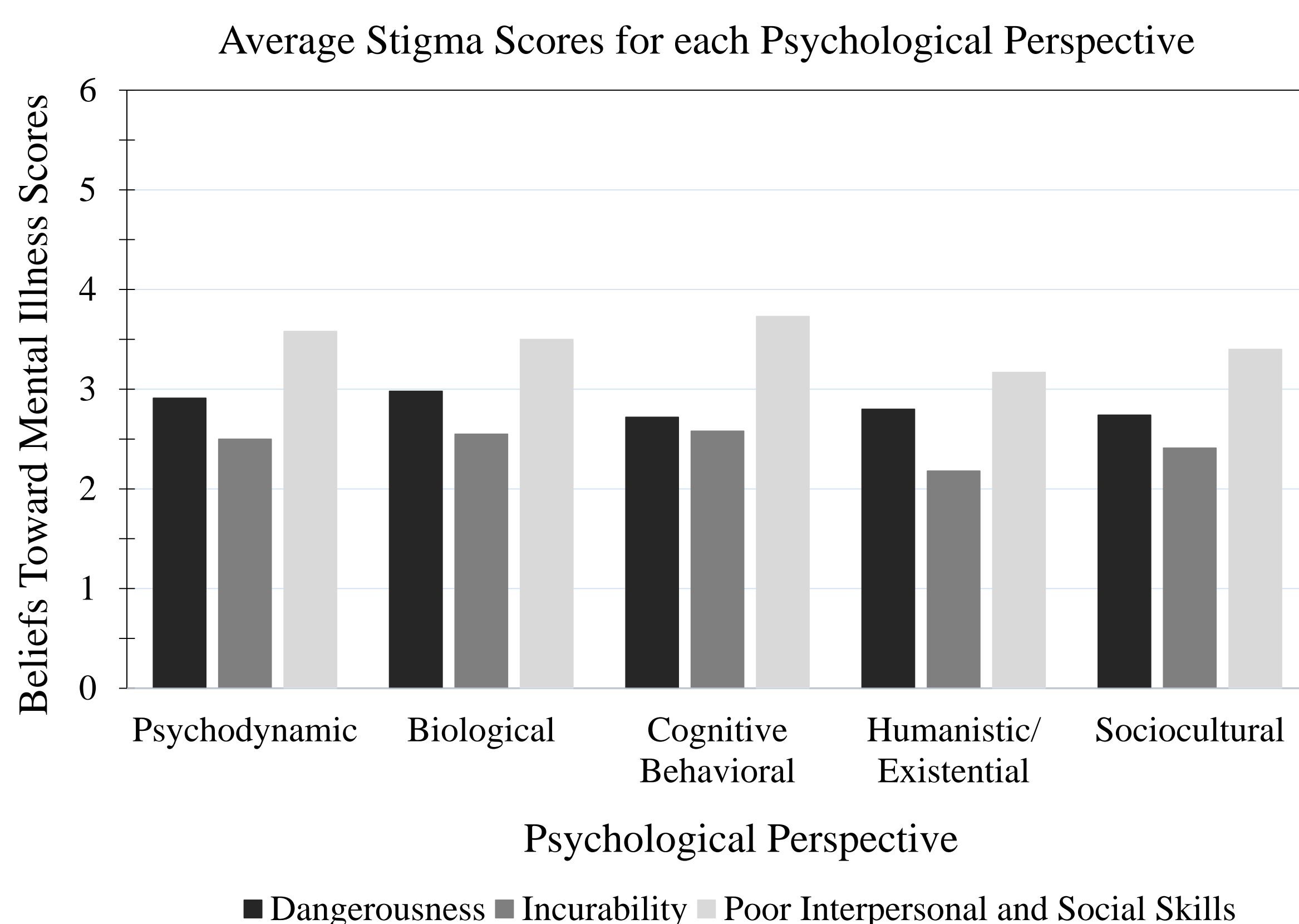
Questionnaires

Participants completed the Psychological Perspectives Questionnaire (PPQ, developed by the researchers), which assessed their theoretical perspective (see graph for distribution). Correlations indicated support for the structure of the factor pairings for this measure (e.g., Biochemical Imbalance was positively correlated with Heredity, $r(99) = .43, p < .01$, and was negatively correlated with Lack of Self-Awareness, $r(99) = -.36, p < .01$). Participants also completed the Beliefs Toward Mental Illness Scale (Hirai & Clum, 2000). This scale determined stigmatic thinking regarding mental disorders along three dimensions (Dangerousness, Incurability, & Poor Interpersonal and Social Skills).

Results

Correlational analyses were completed to assess the relationships between the theoretical perspectives and stigmatic thinking. There was only one significant relationship: The Sociocultural Perspective was negatively related to stigmas regarding Poor Interpersonal & Social Skills ($r(99) = -.26, p < .05$). When correlating individual factors with stigmatic thinking, there were two significant relationships: Maladaptive Learning was positively related to stigmatic thinking regarding Incurability ($r(99) = .23, p < .05$); and Destructive Social Forces was negatively correlated to stigmatic thinking regarding Poor Interpersonal and Social Skills ($r(99) = -.25, p < .05$).

A one-way analysis of variance revealed no significant differences between the mean scores on any of the stigma scales across the five theoretical perspectives.



Discussion

Previous research looking at the relationship between theoretical perspective and stigmatic thinking regarding mental disorders have assigned participants to think in specific ways about mental disorders. In contrast, our study focused on assessing preexisting psychological perspectives of each individual to determine whether those perspectives were related to stigmatic thinking. Previous research found that the biological perspective, when compared to psychosocial perspectives, led to increased stigmatic thinking and negative attitudes towards mental disorders (Larkings & Brown, 2018). The research we conducted did not support those specific findings. Our findings found modest support for the idea that having a sociocultural perspective was related to less stigmatic thinking regarding interpersonal and social skills, and that individuals attributing the development of mental disorders to maladaptive learning was positively correlated with the idea that mental disorders are incurable.

There are several reasons why our findings were rather limited. First, most all participants were not easily classifiable with regard to the theoretical perspectives. In other words, most participants scored rather high on two or even three different perspectives. Though there was some statistical support for the structure of the PPQ, its ipsative form of assessment proved problematic. In order to find more individuals who identify more clearly with one perspective over the others, it may be necessary to change the way a theoretical perspective is assessed.

Another potential reason for the limited findings relates to the method used to administer the questionnaires. The study was distributed via survey channels online (Qualtrics), instead of being conducted in person. This may have led to participants spending less time reading the directions and/or thoroughly choosing answers to the questions. The fact that most participants took less than 10 minutes to complete the study lends credence to this supposition.

Future research will need to find a better way to assess psychological perspectives and/or be sure that participants thoroughly understand the meaning of the items that constitute that measure.

References

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Psychological Perspectives Questionnaire

Beliefs Toward Mental Illness Scale

Which has a bigger effect on the development of mental disorders:

The behavior of people who have a mental illness is unpredictable.

- A. Emotional Trauma
B. Heredity

Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree