

To Say or Not to Say: Different Strategies of Acknowledging a Visible Disability

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Individuals with visible disabilities can acknowledge their disabilities in different ways, which may differ in effectiveness. Across four studies, we investigate whether individuals with visible disabilities engage in different acknowledgment strategies (claiming, downplaying) and how and why these different strategies affect evaluations from others. Specifically, we draw from the Stereotype Content Model and Stereotype-Fit Theory to articulate a process whereby claiming and downplaying differentially affect others' perceptions of competence and warmth, which subsequently affect overall evaluations of the individual with a disability. We found that individuals with visible disabilities intentionally manage others' impressions by engaging in claiming and downplaying. Claiming strategies (relative to downplaying or not acknowledging)

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resulted in higher evaluations because they activated perceptions of competence and warmth and the benefits of claiming were stronger for jobs higher in interpersonal demands. We discuss the implications of these results for individuals with disabilities and for organizations.

Keywords: *disability; acknowledgment; identity management; Stereotype Content Model; stigma*

When you have an obvious disability, however, it's often a good idea to talk about it.
—NOLO Law for All (2015)

I don't have a dis-ability, I have a different-ability.
—Robert M. Hensel

A great deal of evidence suggests that individuals with visible disabilities face barriers to both employment and inclusion in the workplace. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), in 2010 only 40.8% of adults with physical disabilities were employed, compared to 51.9% with mental disabilities and 79.1% without disabilities. In addition to facing barriers to employment, experiences after obtaining employment can be challenging for individuals with visible disabilities, as they face overt and subtle discrimination at work (Snyder, Carmichael, Blackwell, Cleveland, & Thornton, 2010) and have difficulty hiding their stigmas from others (Goffman, 1963). Further, the typically instantaneous categorization and stigmatization of individuals with visible disabilities may inhibit others' perceptions of their suitability for certain jobs—particularly jobs involving frequent face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1963; Gouvier, Steiner, Jackson, Schlater, & Rain, 1991; Gouvier, Sytsma-Jordan, & Mayville, 2003; Stone & Colella, 1996). In an effort to deflect potential discrimination, reduce negative stereotypes, and make interpersonal interactions smoother for themselves and others, individuals with visible disabilities are faced with choices about how to manage their identities and communicate information about their disabilities to others (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Roberts, 2005).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are benefits to discussing a disability with current or future employers that go beyond ensuring necessary accommodation. This is highlighted in the quote at the beginning of this article, which recommends that individuals talk about their visible disabilities (NOLO Law for All, 2015). GettingHired.com suggests that talking about one's disability verbally (e.g., at a job interview) or in writing (e.g., in a personal statement) may help employers feel more comfortable and reassured about a disabled applicants' abilities to perform (Hasse, 2013). Additionally, Monster.com suggests those who talk about their disability are seen as more confident, which in turn can lead to more positive evaluations (Lipow, 2015). Even though individuals with visible disabilities may consider shying away or avoid discussing their disabilities in order to avoid potential discrimination (Jans, Kaye, & Jones, 2012), it may be strategic, at times, for such individuals to talk openly about their disabilities. Although the onus to combat discrimination should not fall entirely, or even predominantly, on the shoulders of those with disabilities, identity management strategies are effective ways for targets potentially to increase opportunities within employment contexts and gain a sense of control over others' perceptions.

Thus, there are benefits to acknowledging or openly discussing versus not acknowledging one's visible disability (for example, see Goodman, 2008; Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). For instance, employees have reported more positive evaluations about working with individuals who acknowledge, versus do not acknowledge, their disabilities (Hastorf et al., 1979; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Mills, Belgrave, & Boyer, 1984). This may be due, in part, to the fact that acknowledging one's visible disability helps others overcome their initial negative reactions and attributions of the target individual as fragile, ineffectual, or pitiful (Davis, 1961; Weiner, 1995; Wright, 1983) and helps to shape others' perceptions, activate positive stereotypes, reduce negative stereotypes, avoid discrimination, and gain acceptance (Jones & King, 2014).

Previous research also has examined some factors that influence the extent to which acknowledging a visible disability is more or less beneficial, such as the timing of the acknowledgment and the perceived controllability of the disability (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). Specifically, Hebl and Skorinko (2005) found that individuals with physical disabilities who acknowledged their disabilities early in a job interview (compared to later) were evaluated more positively. Further, Hebl and Kleck (2002) found that applicants who acknowledged their visible disabilities in their interview were evaluated more negatively when their disabilities were perceived as controllable (obesity) versus uncontrollable (wheelchair).

Although previous research has identified some of the aspects of acknowledgments that influence their success, there are still many questions remaining in this area. One such factor that has yet to be examined is *how* one discusses his or her disability. Extant empirical research has considered the decision of acknowledgment as binary—that is, to acknowledge versus not acknowledge—and has not fully investigated the extent to which different ways of acknowledging one's disability may be more or less effective in influencing others' impressions. Indeed, individuals use different tactics to discuss their disabilities. The second quotation at the beginning of this article highlights one such strategy: Robert M. Hensel, the Guinness World Records holder for the longest nonstop wheelie in a wheelchair at 6.18 miles, discusses his disability not in terms of limitations but in terms of how it positively influences his life. Similar to Hensel, in a recent qualitative study, some employed individuals with disabilities recommend talking about disability in interviews by proclaiming how it has helped them overcome difficulties (Jans et al., 2012). However, in the same study, others recommend de-emphasizing the negative aspects of having a disability. Sandra, a computer specialist with a mobility impairment, describes her approach to interviewing:

Part of being disabled is ... you have to do extra work. You have to be assertive without being aggressive. ... You have to act like you don't have a disability. (Jans et al., 2012: 161)

In light of such diverging perspectives and opinions on how individuals should acknowledge their disabilities, it is important to shed light on what strategies are effective in increasing positive evaluations of and interactions between the individual with a visible disability and others and under what conditions they are effective. Recent theoretical models and qualitative research have articulated how individuals can acknowledge their stigmatized identities in different ways (Roberts, 2005; Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013; Taub, McLorg, & Fanflik, 2004), including *claiming* positive aspects of the identity (Hensel's strategy) or *downplaying*

negative aspects of the identity (Sandra's strategy). Although previous research has shown that people do discuss their disabilities differently, not much is empirically known about the outcomes of the various acknowledgment strategies. Thus, in the current study, we build upon existing work by specifically elucidating and testing how two specific ways of acknowledging one's visible disability (claiming and downplaying) influence others' evaluations. Based on previous literature, we define *claiming* as deliberately accentuating positive aspects of the disability and reframing negative stereotypes associated with the disability, and we define *downplaying* as both attempting to lessen the undesirable characteristics associated with disability and shifting attention away from the disability (Goffman, 1963; Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013; Taub et al., 2004).

We also investigate a mechanism that can explain *why* these two acknowledgment strategies may affect observers' evaluations differently. To do so, we draw upon the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) to examine how particular acknowledgment strategies may activate stereotypes concerning competence and warmth, which in turn may affect others' evaluations of individuals with visible disabilities. Further, we consider job context as a boundary condition of this stereotype process. Specifically, we are guided by Stereotype-Fit Theory (Colella, DeNisi, & Varma, 1998) to examine how job interpersonal demands (high vs. low) may moderate the role of stereotype activation stemming from different acknowledgment strategies.

We address our research questions across four studies. As very little research has investigated the adoption of different acknowledgment strategies, we set the foundation for the importance of addressing this topic in Studies 1 and 2 by demonstrating that individuals with visible disabilities do engage in different acknowledgment strategies and that visible disabilities activate mixed stereotypes from others. Specifically, in Study 1, we examine the extent to which individuals with visible disabilities intentionally manage others' impressions of their disability by engaging in claiming and/or downplaying. In Study 2, we aim to corroborate the SCM and show that individuals with visible disabilities are viewed with paternalistic biases—that is, relatively low in competence and relatively high in warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). Next, using two experimental designs, we examine how the different acknowledgment strategies are related to others' evaluations through warmth and competence stereotypes (Study 3) and how this process is moderated by job interpersonal demands (Study 4).

Study 1

To provide a better understanding of the use of claiming and downplaying strategies, we surveyed employees with disabilities and asked about (a) their motivations to manage others' impressions of their disability and (b) the frequency with which they engage in different types of acknowledgment strategies to do so. We were interested in the extent to which these individuals reported engaging in claiming and downplaying strategies as this has yet to be established clearly in empirical research.

Individuals with disabilities make conscious, strategic decisions about how to communicate their disabilities to others based on a variety of factors. Some individuals with visible disabilities recommend acknowledging the disability early in the employment process and highlighting one's ability to perform the job (claiming), and others recommend minimizing the impact of one's disability in life (downplaying; Jans et al., 2012). Other research suggests

that those whose disability is more central to their identities are more likely to value their disability as a source of strength, which is more consistent with claiming strategies. These individuals were less supportive of minimizing their disability status in a fashion similar to downplaying (Nario-Redmond, Noel, & Fern, 2013).

Identity management decisions reflect a process of impression management in which individuals with stigmatized identities aim to influence others' perceptions of their personal traits and characteristics by communicating their connection to a social identity (Roberts, 2005: 693). Concerned about the ways that stereotypes affect how others view their competence, character, and abilities, individuals with visible disabilities may engage in claiming and/or downplaying strategies in an attempt to rectify such concerns and manage others' impressions. Although implicit in theoretical work (Roberts, 2005), extant research has not investigated empirically how intentions to manage others' impressions relate to engagement in different acknowledging strategies. It could be that individuals intent on managing others' impressions are more likely to engage in one strategy over another. We explore such a possibility in Study 1. Based on previous research, we believe that individuals will report engaging in both claiming and downplaying acknowledgment strategies. Furthermore, we expect that intentions to manage impressions will be related positively to the use of both acknowledgment strategies.

Hypothesis 1: Intentions to manage others' impressions will be related positively to the use of claiming (H1a) and downplaying (H1b).

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and limited participation to those who worked in the United States and who self-identified as having a visible disability. Participants were asked if their disability symptoms were visible to others (i.e., readily observable or observable to others when one moves), and we removed any individual who did not have a visible disability. Hence, rather than categorizing the visibility of one's disability ourselves, we allowed participants to disclose both the type and the visibility of their disability, which included mobility and neurological impairments (e.g., use of wheelchair, paralysis of limb), vision impairments (e.g., use of walking stick or eye trauma), diseases apparent on the skin (e.g., lupus, cancer, psoriasis), and hearing impairment (e.g., use of hearing aids).¹ In total, there were 85 employed individuals with visible disabilities (mean age = 38.80 years, $SD = 12.93$; 60% women; 80% White; average work experience = 12.20 years, $SD = 20.42$; average age of disability onset = 26.30 years, $SD = 14.4$ years).

Participants completed measures concerning the extent to which they have attempted purposely to manage others' impressions of their disability and their perception of the frequency with which they engage in claiming and downplaying acknowledgment strategies.

Measures

Intentions to Manage Impressions Scale. We developed an Intentions to Manage Impressions Scale with items based on Roberts's (2005) model of Social Identity Impression Management. Roberts (2005) suggests individuals with devalued social identities are concerned

with how others view them and intentionally engage in impression management tactics in order to improve others' perceptions and to manage potential stereotypes. As such, we included items that measured one's intentions to manage others' perceptions (see the appendix for a full list of items). Participants indicated their agreement with four items using a 7-point rating scale (1 = *do not agree at all* to 7 = *very strongly agree*). A confirmatory factor analysis showed that a one-factor model fit the data well, $\chi^2(2) = 2.47, p = .29$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .99, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05 (.00, .23). The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = .85$.

Identity management scales. We developed the claiming and downplaying scales based on theoretical conceptualizations of identity management strategies and previous qualitative research on claiming and downplaying (Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013; Taub et al., 2004). The final scales consisted of three items for claiming and five items for downplaying (see the appendix for a full list of items). For each item, participants indicated how often they engage in each behavior while at work (1 = *never* to 7 = *always*). Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability was .84 for claiming and .82 for downplaying.

A confirmatory factor analysis showed that a model in which all items for claiming and downplaying loaded onto their respective latent constructs, $\chi^2(19) = 36.38, p < .001$, CFI = .93, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .10 (.05, .16) fit the data better than a model in which all items were loaded onto a single latent construct, $\chi^2(20) = 127.53, p < .001$, CFI = .56, TLI = .39, RMSEA = .25 (.21, .30); $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 91.15, p < .001$.

Results and Discussion

As seen in Table 1, which provides the means, standard deviations and correlations of all Study 1 variables, individuals engaged in both a high degree of downplaying (66.2% responded with > 4 on the 7-point scale) and claiming (47.7%). By considering specific response options we can observe this trend in more detail. When asked how much they engaged in claiming items, 19.5% of participants indicated "Never" (1), 14.3% "Usually Do Not" (2), 16.7% "Infrequently" (3), 13.2% "Occasionally" (4), 14.3% "Often" (5), 13.5% "Usually" (6), and 8.4% "Always" (7). When asked how much they engaged in downplaying, the opposite pattern emerged: 6.3% of participants indicated "Never" (1), 3.6% "Usually Do Not" (2), 5.7% "Infrequently" (3), 10.2% "Occasionally" (4), 14.6% "Often" (5), 27.2% "Usually" (6), and 32.5% "Always" (7). As these percentages suggest, individuals engaged in significantly more downplaying ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.41$) than claiming ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.67$), $t(83) = 6.94, p < .05$, Cohen's $d = 1.10$.

In order to test H1a and H1b, we regressed claiming and downplaying onto intentions to manage impressions to examine the extent to which people used each strategy to manage how others perceive them. We controlled for gender and age of disability onset because previous research has indicated that women may be more likely to self-disclose than men (Dindia & Allen, 1992) and that age of disability onset may affect coping strategies (e.g., Smith, Langa, Kabeto, & Ubel, 2005). Results showed that intentionally managing impressions was related significantly and positively to claiming, $\beta = .26, p < .05$, and downplaying, $\beta = .22, p = .05$. Thus, both H1a and H1b were supported.

Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients
for Study 1 Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	0.60	0.52					
2. Age of onset	26.32	14.42	.21				
3. Intentions to manage impressions	4.80	1.52	.02	.18	(.85)		
4. Claim	3.63	1.67	.03	-.11	.27*	(.84)	
5. Downplay	5.34	1.41	.23*	.04	.18	.02	(.82)

Note: Reliability statistics are on the diagonal; gender coded as female = 1, male = 0.

* $p < .05$.

Overall, these results are in line with previous theory (Roberts, 2005) and qualitative research (Nario-Redmond et al., 2013; Taub et al., 2004) and help support further the notion that individuals with disabilities do engage intentionally in both claiming and downplaying strategies with the goal of managing others' impressions. These findings support the need to examine the use of different acknowledgment strategies as opposed to treating acknowledgment as a binary construct in order to determine if and how these acknowledgment strategies do indeed influence others' impressions in different ways. We believe that one way these strategies influence others' perceptions is through the activation of stereotypes. Thus, using the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) as a theoretical framework, we next investigate in Study 2 how people generally perceive individuals with visible disabilities. This sets the foundation for an examination of how stereotypes may drive the effect of claiming and downplaying on others' perceptions.

Study 2

Although visible disabilities can cue the activation of negative stereotypes, acknowledgments may counteract this activation by cueing more positive stereotypes. The framework of the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) is helpful in understanding exactly how acknowledgments might bolster perceptions of others. The SCM posits that most outgroups are stereotyped along two dimensions: evaluations of warmth (e.g., "do others intend to do me harm?"), which are predicated by perceptions of (low) competitiveness; and evaluations of competence (e.g., "are they capable of enacting their intentions?"), which are predicated by perceptions of (high) status. Thus, groups can be categorized in one of four possible quadrants within the SCM: high in both warmth and competence, low in both warmth and competence, high in warmth but low in competence, and low in warmth but high in competence.

The SCM characterizes stereotypes associated with individuals with disabilities as paternalistic—that is, relatively low in competence and relatively high in warmth. Similar to stereotypes related to the elderly and housewives (Fiske et al., 2002), paternalistic stereotypes associated with disability are thought to evoke pity, which encourages sympathy, compassion, and social support (e.g., seen as in need of help), but simultaneously diminish perceptions of competence and expectations of job performance (Fiske et al., 2002; Stone & Colella, 1996).

Although past research on the SCM has not formally articulated stereotypes of those with visible disabilities along warmth and competence dimensions, some evidence suggests that those with visible disabilities are perceived as helpless, inferior, lacking in task competence, and being in need of help from others (e.g., Louvet, 2007; for a review, see Stone & Colella, 1996). Similarly, there is evidence that although those with visible disabilities are not perceived as particularly agentic or efficacious, they are regarded with warmth and a “kindness-to-the-handicapped” norm, and they are perceived to be, honest, softhearted, nonegotistical, and undemanding (e.g., Elliott, MacNair, Yoder, & Byrne, 1991; Gershaw, 1996). Furthermore, individuals with visible disabilities are typically regarded as relatively low in status and are not seen as competitors for resources (Stone & Colella, 1996). Given that previous research has not examined explicitly visible disability in terms of warmth and competence, the goal of Study 2 is to establish clearly how individuals with visible disabilities are conceptualized within the SCM framework. We anticipate:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with visible disabilities will be perceived as relatively lower in competence than in warmth.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited a total of 98 participants via Amazon’s MTurk. Eighteen participants were removed for providing no variability in their responses for a final sample of 80 participants. Of the remaining participants, 53% were men; mean age was 35.49 years ($SD = 12.30$); 77.5% were White, 10% were Hispanic, 8% were Black, 3% were Asian, and 3% were biracial. Also, 66% were employed full time, 29% were employed part time, and 4% were volunteers. Eight percent of participants indicated they had a visible disability themselves. The exclusion of participants with visible disabilities from the analyses did not affect the results, so we maintained them in the sample.

Participants rated their perceptions of individuals with visible disabilities on the extent to which the individuals were competent and warm. Perceptions of competence (e.g., “Individuals with visible disabilities are intelligent”; $\alpha = .89$) and warmth (e.g., “Individuals with visible disabilities are tolerant”; $\alpha = .75$) were measured using nine items from Fiske and colleagues (2002) and assessed on a 5-point rating scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). A confirmatory factor analysis showed that a model in which the warmth and competence items loaded onto two factors, $\chi^2(26) = 43.24, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .09 (.04, .14)$, fit the data better than a one-factor model, $\chi^2(27) = 85.58, p < .001, CFI = .81, TLI = .74, RMSEA = .17 (.13, .21); \Delta\chi^2(1) = 42.34, p < .001$.

To test further whether individuals with disabilities are stereotyped as relatively high in warmth and low in competence, participants provided perceptions of warmth or competence with respect to four other groups: White individuals (representative of the high-competence, high-warmth quadrant), Asian individuals (representative of the high-competence, low-warmth quadrant), poor individuals (representative of the low-competence, low-warmth quadrant), and elderly individuals (representative of the low-competence, high-warmth quadrant) (Fiske et al., 2002).

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and *t*-Test Results of Perceived Warmth and Competence of Disability Group vs. Other Groups (Study 2)

Group	Warmth				Competence			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Disability	3.40	0.71			2.58	0.87		
White	3.16	0.78	2.24*	79	3.92	0.62	-11.37***	79
Asian	3.03	0.88	3.41**	79	4.14	0.61	-13.80***	79
Poor	2.90	0.71	5.06***	79	2.18	0.86	3.74***	79
Elderly	3.45	0.71	-0.41	78	2.53	0.72	0.52	78

Note: *t*-tests represent within-subject comparisons to the disability group.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Results and Discussion

A within-subjects *t*-test showed that individuals with visible disabilities were rated significantly higher in warmth ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.71$) than in competence ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(79) = 8.53$, $p < .001$. Table 2 displays the results of within-subject *t*-tests comparing the perceived warmth and competence of individuals with visible disabilities to that of the other groups representative of the four quadrants of the SCM. These results show that individuals with visible disabilities were rated significantly higher in warmth and lower in competence than White individuals and Asian individuals, significantly higher in warmth and competence than poor people, and not statistically significantly different on either warmth or competence than elderly people.

Taken together, these results suggest that Hypothesis 2 was supported and individuals with visible disabilities can be categorized as being relatively high in warmth and low in competence within the SCM framework. Such stereotypes are in line with paternalistic notions of individuals with visible disabilities as low in status, not competitive, dependent on others, and therefore to be treated with kindness (Stone & Colella, 1996). These perceptions may in turn undermine the professional image of these individuals (Roberts, 2005) as having the ability and character to perform well on a job. Acknowledgment strategies are thought to be helpful in counteracting these negative perceptions (Jones & King, 2014). Studies 1 and 2 laid the groundwork for illustrating how individuals with visible disabilities are stereotyped and what behaviors they engage in to manage others' impressions of them. In Study 3, we examine how the acknowledgment strategies of claiming and downplaying influence others' perceptions of competence, warmth, and subsequent evaluations.

Study 3

We expect that acknowledgment strategies generally should enhance others' perceptions of the competence levels of those who have visible disabilities. Given the societal norms and legal guidelines that often prevent employers from asking questions about applicants' and employees' visible disabilities, we posit that acknowledging demonstrates intuition, introspection, and awareness in those with visible disabilities. As Davis (1961) stated,

acknowledgment helps individuals “break through” and be seen beyond their disability. Further, when examining the different acknowledgment strategies, those who use the strategy of claiming (versus downplaying) particularly may be more likely to be viewed competently. Individuals who claim can redefine the stereotypes associated with the disability by counteracting negative stereotypes of incompetence and by emphasizing (or claiming) competence (Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013). For example, individuals in wheelchairs may counteract perceptions of dependency and fragility by claiming they are independent and strong (e.g., by overcoming obstacles). Downplaying a visible disability involves de-emphasizing association with the disability by attempting to place its negative effects in the background. For example, individuals in wheelchairs may say that they are not like other people in wheelchairs and have strengths in other areas, despite their use of a wheelchair (Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013). However, compared to claiming, downplaying does not specifically redefine the disability or address concerns of incompetence (Goffman, 1963; Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013; Taub et al., 2004). Not addressing concerns of incompetence particularly may be unhelpful for individuals with visible disabilities in evaluation and selection contexts where they are susceptible to automatic stigmatization. As such, we expect claiming to be more effective in elevating competence perceptions than downplaying.

Second, we believe that acknowledgment strategies also will enhance the perceived warmth of those with visible disabilities. The “kindness-to-the-handicapped norm” already provides employees/others with strong guiding norms to treat those with disabilities nicely and not to view them as competitive threats (e.g., Elliott et al., 1991). Given this norm and evidence from Study 2 indicating somewhat higher warmth perceptions for individuals with visible disabilities, there may be some restriction in the extent to which acknowledgment further elevates warmth perceptions. Yet we believe that acknowledgments of any kind will heighten perceptions of warmth because those who acknowledge will be perceived as well-adjusted to the disability and easier to get along with (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). In terms of comparing the two strategies, we propose that engaging in claiming (versus downplaying) strategies will be particularly beneficial (Belgrave & Mills, 1981). Roberts (2005) notes that claiming involves attempts to redefine others’ concerns about the potential for the stigma to disrupt relationships: claiming sheds light on the value of getting along and having a positive relationship with the stigmatized individual (i.e., seeing an individual with a visible disability as a potential friend). Downplaying, on the other hand, may signify some level of discomfort with the disability and therefore may not directly reduce others’ concerns about the individuals’ propensity to be a friendly coworker.

In accordance with our above theorizing, we thus expect that individuals who acknowledge will be perceived as more warm and competent; however, those who claim (versus downplay) will receive a higher boost in ratings because they are intentionally counteracting concerns about ability. Specifically, we expect:

Hypothesis 3: Individuals with disabilities who claim (versus do not acknowledge) will be rated higher in competence (H3a) and warmth (H3b).

Hypothesis 4: Individuals with disabilities who downplay (versus do not acknowledge) will be rated higher in competence (H4a) and warmth (H4b).

Hypothesis 5: Individuals with disabilities who claim will be rated higher in competence (H5a) and warmth (H5b) than individuals who downplay.

Finally, it is clear that perceptions of competence and warmth are important because they influence the assessment of one's professional image, competence, and character (Roberts, 2005). Those who are seen as professional, in turn, also are expected to be better job performers and coworkers (Stone & Colella, 1996). Colella and colleagues (1998) note that stereotypes of individuals with disabilities as lacking competence and in need of help can explain others' poor performance expectations and subsequent negative candidate evaluations. As such, the extent to which acknowledgment strategies can counteract stereotypes are anticipated to bolster others' evaluations. Thus, acknowledgment strategies (claim and downplay) may positively influence perceptions of competence and warmth, which subsequently positively influence candidate evaluations.

Hypothesis 6: Ratings of competence (H6a) and warmth (H6b) will mediate the association between acknowledgement strategies (claim, downplay) and candidate evaluations.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from MTurk, were currently employed, and lived in the United States. In total, 168 individuals began the survey, but we excluded 43 who did not complete any of the survey items, answered the attention check question wrong (e.g., "Are you paying attention to this survey?") and who failed the manipulation checks. This resulted in a final sample of 125 participants. The mean age of participants was 35.30 years ($SD = 11.22$), 59% identified as female (41% male), 67% White (10% East Asian, 9% Black/African American, 7% Hispanic, 2% Middle Eastern, 1% Native America, and 3% other), 84% had either full-time (52%) or part-time (32%) employment, and those who were employed reported an average tenure of 5.50 years ($SD = 6.06$). Participants worked in a range of industries, the most common including retail sales (16%), education (12%), self-employed (10%), administrative support (6%), arts and entertainment (6%), and information technology (6%). Forty percent of participants had competed a bachelor's degree, 22% had completed some college, 15% had completed an associate's degree, 11% had completed high school, and 11% had earned a master's degree. Participants were compensated \$1 in exchange for their participation.

Procedure

Participants completed the experiment in an online survey. They were asked to imagine a scenario in which they were to begin working on a project with a partner. Participants were assigned randomly to read one of three different detailed aspects of this scenario: an individual with a visible disability either (a) used claiming, (b) used downplaying, or (c) did not acknowledge their disability. Finally, the participants gave ratings of the perceived warmth and competence of the partner, provided an overall evaluation of the partner, and then completed some demographic information.

Acknowledgment Manipulation

Acknowledgment strategies involved scenario-based vignettes. All participants read a description of the scenario that clearly indicated that the prospective coworker used a wheelchair

(a visible disability). The beginning of the scenario, which was standard across all three conditions read:

At your first meeting, your boss introduces you to each other and you notice that your new partner uses a wheelchair. You, your new partner, and your boss then discuss the project, set goals and timelines, and agree upon a completion date. Before leaving, your boss asks if there are any potential problems either of you might anticipate. Before you can respond, your partner says...

After reading this description, participants then received the manipulation, by reading how the partner responded to the boss's question. The manipulations were as follows:

Claiming response:

Well, it is probably obvious that I use a wheelchair to get around. *Although it can be difficult at times to do things others can do easily, I know that living with a disability has made me stronger than I would have been otherwise. I really feel like there is nothing I can't do at this point and I hope that others see that in me as well.*

Downplaying response:

Well, it is probably obvious that I use a wheelchair to get around. *Although other people with a disability may have difficulty, I try not to let that bother me too much. Everyone has their own things they have to deal with in some form or another. I try not to see it as a big deal and hope that others don't either.*

Nonacknowledgment response (control):

I don't see any problems at all at this point.

Measures

All variables were measured using a 7-point rating scale (1 = *do not agree at all* to 7 = *very strongly agree*).

Overall evaluation. We assessed participants' general impressions of the partner as a coworker with a six-item measure of Overall Evaluation. Specifically, participants indicated how much they would like to work with the partner ("I am looking forward to working with this person"), their general impression of how well the partner presented himself ("This person presented himself well"), how the partner would be as an employee ("This person will likely be a good employee"), how much they liked the partner ("I like this individual as a person"), their perceived challenges in working with this coworker ("I think it will be challenging to work with this person"), and if they would want to include the partner in social activities at work ("I would want to include this person in social activities at work"). A confirmatory factor analysis indicated adequate fit, $\chi^2(9) = 32.67, p < .001, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .10 (.07, .14)$. We averaged these measures to create a composite Overall Evaluation ($\alpha = .88$).

Table 3
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients
for Study 3 Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Claim	0.26	0.44	—							
2. Downplay	0.22	0.42	-.32**	—						
3. Control	0.52	0.50	-.61**	-.56**	—					
4. Competence	5.57	0.86	.25**	-.13	-.11	(.91)				
5. Warmth	5.37	1.01	.08	-.04	-.04	.67**	(.91)			
6. Evaluation	5.37	1.12	.05	-.07	.02	.53**	.66**	(.88)		
7. Age	35.28	11.22	-.01	.00	.01	.17	.10	.17**	—	
8. Education	4.10	1.29	.08	.14	-.19*	-.01	-.14	-.01	.06	—

Note: Alpha reliabilities appear on the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Competence and warmth ratings. Participants indicated their perceptions of competence (e.g., “The person seems intelligent”; $\alpha = .91$) and warmth (e.g., “The person seems tolerant”; $\alpha = .91$) using a nine-item measure from Fiske and colleagues (2002). A confirmatory factor analysis showed that a model in which all items were set to load onto their respective latent constructs, $\chi^2(26) = 119.24, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .11 (.09, .14)$, fit the data better than a model in which all items were set to load onto a single latent construct, $\chi^2(27) = 240.27, p < .001, CFI = .84, TLI = .78, RMSEA = .18 (.16, .20), \Delta\chi^2(1) = 120.88, p < .001$.

Results

There were no significant main effects of participant gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, or disability status on Overall Evaluation, competence, or warmth ratings, $F(6, 113) < 1.91$, n.s. However, age was significantly positively related to Overall Evaluation, $b = .23, p < .05$, and education was significantly negatively related to warmth, $b = -.15, p < .05$. Thus, participant age and education were entered as control variables in all subsequent analyses. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between all Study 3 variables.

Variable Coding

To test our hypotheses, the acknowledgment variable was dummy-coded to examine the particular effects of each strategy, relative to the others. Specifically, to test the difference between the claiming and nonacknowledgment conditions (H3) and the difference between the downplaying and nonacknowledgment conditions (H4), two dummy coded variables were created such that the claiming condition was coded as 1 for one variable and the downplaying condition was coded as 1 for the other (nonacknowledgment was coded as 0 and represented the reference category). To test Hypothesis 3, the claiming variable was entered as the independent variable and the downplaying variable was entered as a control variable. To test Hypothesis 4, this was reversed such that the downplaying variable was entered as the

Table 4
Bootstrap Mediation Analyses for the Effect of Acknowledgment Strategy on Employee Evaluations Through Warmth and Competence (Study 3)

	Est.MX	Est.YM	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Claiming vs. nonacknowledgment			-.01 (.15)			
Competence	.45* (.18)	.22* (.10)		.09* (.06)	.01	.26
Warmth	.21 (.22)	.65*** (.08)		.13 (.16)	-.22	.44
Total indirect effect				.23 (.19)	-.19	.57
Claiming vs. downplaying			.13 (.18)			
Competence	.58** (.21)	.22* (.10)		.13* (.09)	.02	.36
Warmth	.19 (.26)	.65** (.08)		.12 (.18)	-.27	.44
Total indirect effect				.25 (.23)	-.23	.69
Downplaying vs. nonacknowledgment			-.14 (.15)			
Competence	.02 (.23)	.22*** (.10)		-.03 (.06)	-.19	.04
Warmth	-.13 (.19)	.65** (.08)		.01 (.14)	-.26	.27
Total indirect effect				-.02 (.17)	-.38	.29

Note: Est.MX = bootstrapped estimate of path from acknowledgment strategy to warmth/competence; Est. YM = bootstrapped estimate of path from warmth/competence to employee evaluation. The estimates of Est.YM are the same across comparisons. Standard errors of the bootstrapped estimates appear in parentheses. One thousand bootstrap samples.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

independent variable and the claiming variable was entered as a control variable. Finally, to test the difference between the claiming and downplaying strategies (H5), one other dummy-coded variable was created such that the nonacknowledgment condition was coded as 1. In this analysis, the claiming variable was entered as the independent variable and the nonacknowledgment variable was entered as a control variable (the downplaying condition was the reference category; Hayes, 2013).

Tests of Hypotheses

Hypotheses were tested using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 4) for SPSS with both competence and warmth entered as simultaneous, parallel mediators. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the claiming strategy would result in higher evaluations of competence (H3a) and warmth (H3b) than the nonacknowledgment condition. As seen in Table 4, targets who engaged in claiming were rated significantly higher on competence, $b = .45$, $p < .05$, confidence interval (CI): .09, .80; but not on warmth, $b = .21$, n.s., CI: -.23, .64. Therefore, H3a was supported but H3b was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that using the downplaying strategy would lead to higher perceptions of competence (H4a) and warmth (H4b) than the nonacknowledgment control. Contrary

to our hypotheses, results showed no significant differences in perceptions of competence, $b = -.13$, n.s., CI: $-.50, .24$; or warmth, $b = .02$, n.s., CI: $-.43, .47$, between the downplaying and nonacknowledgment condition. Therefore, H4a and H4b were not supported.

Next, Hypothesis 5 predicted that using the claiming strategy would result in higher evaluations of competence (H5a) and warmth (H5b) than the downplaying strategy. Targets who engaged in claiming were rated significantly higher on competence, $b = .58$, $p < .05$, CI: $.16, 1.00$; but not on warmth, $b = .19$, n.s., CI: $-.32, .70$, than targets in the downplaying condition. Therefore, H5a was supported but H5b was not.

Mediation. Hypothesis 6 predicted that competence (H6a) and warmth (H6b) ratings would mediate the relations between acknowledging (claiming, downplaying) strategies and Overall Evaluation. As can be seen in Table 4, there was a significant indirect effect such that perceptions of competence explained the increase in Overall Evaluation ratings for participants in the claiming condition, relative to participants in the nonacknowledgment condition. A similar indirect effect was found such that perceptions of competence explained the increase in Overall Evaluation ratings for participants in the claiming condition relative to the downplaying condition. However, there was not a significant indirect effect of downplaying (vs. nonacknowledgment) on Overall Evaluation ratings through competence. Thus, H6a was supported partially. There were no significant indirect effects related to warmth with respect to the difference between claiming and non-acknowledgment, claiming and downplaying, or downplaying and nonacknowledgment. Thus, H6b was not supported.

Study 3 Discussion

The results of Study 3 suggest that claiming is more effective at positively influencing others' perceptions than both downplaying and not acknowledging the visible disability. These results support previous research showing that acknowledging (versus not) a physical disability can lead to more favorable perceptions (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005) and extend beyond this research to show that certain types of acknowledgment strategies are more effective than others. The results from this study also illustrate a reason why claiming may be effective at improving impressions of individuals with visible disabilities. Specifically, the results showed claiming led to higher ratings about the individual with disabilities' competence, which in turn led to overall positive evaluations. Although caution should be taken when interpreting null results, the fact that downplaying did not influence competence ratings suggests that acknowledging a visible disability is most effective for individuals when concerns of incompetence are addressed directly.

Further, contrary to our hypotheses, claiming or downplaying did not significantly influence warmth ratings. This outcome may be due to individuals with visible disabilities already being stereotyped as relatively high on warmth, so the potential for acknowledging to elevate warmth was more restricted. Moreover, acknowledging strategies may still affect warmth perceptions, but the extent to which they do may depend on the relevance of warmth to the demands of the job in question. That is, in line with theories of stereotype-fit (Colella et al., 1998), the nature of a task may focus participants' attention to characteristics of the partner that are more goal relevant (i.e., "is my partner capable of helping me perform well on this project?") versus relationship oriented (e.g., "will this person be my friend?"). The participants, then, might attend to acknowledging as a cue for competence (i.e., "can this person

perform well?") as opposed to acknowledging as a cue less relevant for the goal, such as warmth (i.e., "is this a nice person?"; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). It may be that competence (e.g., confidence, independence, intelligence) is viewed as relevant to performance across a broader spectrum of jobs (including those that are high and low on interpersonal demands) but warmth (e.g., good natured, tolerant) may be viewed as relevant for a narrower spectrum of jobs in which interpersonal demands are particularly high. This suggests the importance of considering how job demands affect stereotypic perceptions in response to acknowledgment strategies. We address this possibility in Study 4 by specifically examining how the degree to which a job requires interpersonal interaction influences the impact of acknowledgment strategy on evaluations of individuals with visible disabilities.

Study 4

According to stereotype-fit theory (see Heilman, 2001), individuals with certain types of disabilities may be perceived stereotypically as a better fit for certain types of jobs than others. Therefore, it is important to consider both the nature of the disability and nature of the job to understand how stereotypes may affect how individuals with disabilities are evaluated (Collella et al., 1998). Jobs requiring high interpersonal demands and contact with customers/clients are (often erroneously) believed to be a poor fit for individuals with visible disabilities (Gouvier et al., 1991, 2003; Stone & Colella, 1996). These poor fit expectations are based on assumptions related to perceptions that others (e.g., coworkers/customers/clients) would feel awkward interacting with individuals with disabilities (see Hebl & Kleck, 2000), not based on the individuals' actual job-related abilities. When a disability has poor fit with a job (such as a visible disability and a job with high interpersonal demands), evaluators are particularly attentive to stereotypic cues about how the individual with the disability will perform on the job (Colella et al., 1998).

Consistent with stereotype-fit theory, characteristics of the job—specifically, the level of interpersonal contact with others—should influence how claiming and downplaying strategies affect perceptions of warmth and competence (Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000), which in turn impacts evaluations of potential employees. As Stone and Colella (1996) note, the nature of the job elicits assumptions and expectations about the effective ways the job can be performed. With performance expectations in mind, observers use information about individual attributes to determine if the individual with a disability will be a good fit for the job (Colella & Varma, 1999). Indeed, environmental factors can affect the salience of certain stereotypes related to others (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Thus, the extent to which claiming and downplaying strategies affect warmth and competence perceptions should be influenced by the job context. Jobs with high interpersonal demands will make characteristics that demonstrate interpersonal skill, such as using claiming and downplaying strategies, more salient and impactful on stereotype activation and subsequent evaluations. For jobs with relatively lower interpersonal demands, claiming and downplaying strategies are expected to be less impactful in affecting competence and warmth perceptions because these qualities are not as strongly related to job performance.

Hypothesis 7: Job interpersonal demands will moderate the indirect effects of warmth and competence on the association between acknowledgment strategies (claim, downplay) and candidate evaluations such that the effects of warmth and competence will be more influential for jobs that are high (versus low) in interpersonal demands.

Method

Participants

We recruited 230 undergraduate students at a large midwestern university to participate in this study. Of these participants, 27 did not view the manipulation videos (due to either skipping it or technical problems) and 24 failed the manipulation check (i.e., they indicated the candidate was not disabled). After dropping these 51 cases, our final sample size was 179. The mean age of the remaining participants was 20.07 years ($SD = 3.47$); 65% were women; 83% were White/Caucasian, 7% Black/African-American, 4% American Indian or Alaska Native, 2% South Asian, 2% East Asian, 1% Hispanic, 1% Middle Eastern, and 8% did not indicate their race/ethnicity; and 50% had part-time or full-time work experience. Participants received partial course credit in exchange for their participation.

Procedure

Participants completed the experiment in an online survey ($n = 139$; 77%) or on computers in a lab ($n = 40$; 23%). Participants imagined themselves in the role of a manager making a hiring decision. We manipulated two variables: disability acknowledgment strategy (claiming, downplaying, or nonacknowledgment control) and the job's interpersonal demands (high or low), resulting in a 2×3 between-subject factorial design. Participants were assigned randomly to one of the six experimental conditions. After consenting, participants were provided with a list of position tasks and a job description for a target job with either high or low interpersonal demands (see manipulations in the next section). Participants then were provided with a resume for each of two different job candidates (Candidate A or Candidate B) and asked to select their preferred candidate based on the evaluation of the two resumes. Allowing individuals to select a candidate to interview provided greater psychological fidelity to a multistage selection process. Candidates A and B had similar education and work experiences, but only differed in the names of their educational institutions and places of employment. In fact, regardless of which candidate (A or B) was selected, all participants viewed an interview depicting the same candidate and thus viewed the same video stimuli, except for aspects we manipulated. After selecting a candidate, participants viewed a series of videos of a man in a wheelchair engaging in an employment interview. Participants viewed a video, evaluated the interviewee (e.g., completed a hiring recommendation, interview evaluation, perceptions of fit, and perceptions of competence and warmth), and completed a demographics inventory.

Manipulations

Interpersonal demands of the job. Interpersonal demand was manipulated by selecting two jobs from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) that differ in the extent to which they involve tasks and require knowledge, skills, and abilities of an interpersonal nature (e.g., interacting with customers, persuasion, oral expression). Thus, participants in the high-interpersonal-demands condition were told that job candidates were applying for a retail salesperson job, and participants in the low-interpersonal-demands condition were told that applicants were applying for a machine assembly worker job. Participants in each condition read the corresponding O*NET job descriptions.

Identity management strategy. We manipulated the identity management strategy by varying how the job candidate with a disability responded to the third of four total interview questions (the other three responses were identical). The third question asked the applicant to describe himself as a leader. The candidate responded by either claiming his disability, downplaying his disability, or not acknowledging his disability.

The claiming response included:

I pride myself on my ability to work well with others. When people first meet me they obviously notice the wheelchair. *But soon I prove to them that people with disabilities can be just as strong of a leader as anyone else. There have been many disabled individuals who have held leadership positions in government and business.* I push others to achieve great things and have proven myself to be a leader with whom they can share ideas with openly and have an honest, friendly relationship.

The downplaying response included:

I pride myself on my ability to work well with others. When people first meet me they obviously notice the wheelchair. *But soon they see that I am a strong leader in spite of my disability. While some people with disabilities may have trouble in the workplace, I don't consider myself one of them.* I push others to achieve great things and have proven myself to be a leader with whom they can share ideas with openly and have an honest, friendly relationship.

The nonacknowledgment response included:

I pride myself on my ability to work well with others. The people I work with see me as a strong leader. I push others to achieve great things and have proven myself to be a leader with whom they can share ideas with openly and have an honest, friendly relationship.

Measures

All variables were measured using a 7-point rating scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Candidate evaluation. Overall candidate evaluation was measured across three criteria: hiring recommendation, interview evaluation, and perceptions of fit. Hiring recommendation was measured with one item: "I would recommend this candidate for this position." Interview evaluation was measured with one item: "I think the candidate did well during the interview." Perception of fit was measured with two items assessing how participants felt the interviewee would fit within the organization (e.g., "I believe that the candidate will not fit within the organization" [reverse scored]). These measures were created for purposes of this study. We averaged these measures to create a composite candidate evaluation ($\alpha = .74$).

Competence and warmth ratings. Perceptions of competence (e.g., "The candidate was competent"; $\alpha = .73$) and warmth (e.g., "The candidate was sincere"; $\alpha = .91$) were measured using nine items from Fiske et al. (2002). A confirmatory factor analysis showed that a model in which all items were set to load onto the two latent constructs, $\chi^2(26) = 39.97$, n.s., CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .05 (.00, .08), fit the data better than a model in which all items

Table 5
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients
for Study 4 Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Claim	0.36	0.48	—						
2. Downplay	0.32	0.47	-.51**	—					
3. Control	0.32	0.47	-.52**	-.47**	—				
4. Competence	6.09	0.70	.00	.01	-.01	(.69)			
5. Warmth	5.77	0.91	.02	.03	-.05	.62**	(.91)		
6. Evaluation	6.05	0.78	.08	-.11	.03	.59**	.60**	(.74)	
7. Age	20.07	3.47	.00	-.03	.03	-.04	-.14	-.05	—

Note: Alpha reliabilities appear on the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

were set to load onto a single latent construct, $\chi^2(27) = 81.12, p < .001$, CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .11 (.08, .13); $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 41.15, p < .001$.

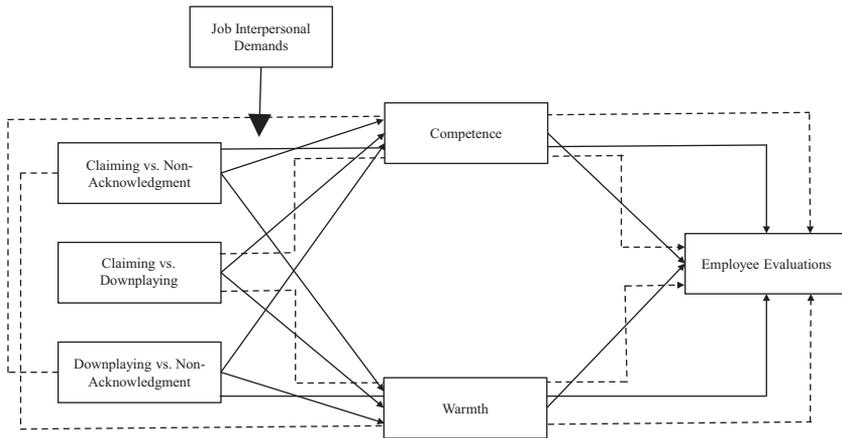
Results

Prior to testing the hypotheses, we examined the potential effect of participant characteristics on candidate evaluations. There were no significant main effects of participant gender, race/ethnicity, or disability status on candidate evaluations, $F(1, 114) < 1.57$, n.s.; warmth ratings, $F(1, 114) < 3.13$, n.s.; or competence ratings $F(1, 114) < 2.23$, n.s. However, there was a significant main effect of participant age on perceptions of warmth. Thus, age was entered as a control variable in subsequent analyses. There were no significant differences on any of the selection criteria between participants who completed the study online versus in the lab, $t(176) < 1.91$, n.s.; thus, all data subsequently were analyzed together. Table 5 provides descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between all Study 4 variables.

Tests of Hypotheses

In this study, we extend the results of Study 3 by adding job context as a potential moderator (Hypothesis 7). Hypotheses were tested using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Models 4 and 7) with both competence and warmth entered as simultaneous, parallel mediators and the same variable coding as used in Study 3. Hypothesis 7 predicted that the indirect effects of competence (H7a) and warmth (H7b) ratings would be stronger for the job high in interpersonal demands compared to the job low in interpersonal demands (see Figure 1). Moderated-mediation results are summarized in Table 6. With respect to the difference between the claiming and nonacknowledgment conditions, results indicated a significant conditional indirect effect of claiming on evaluations through competence stereotypes for the job high in interpersonal demands, $b = .12$, CI: .02, .26; and for the job low in interpersonal demands, $b = -.12$, CI: -.28, -.01. The difference between these indirect effects at their respective levels of the moderator (for each job type) was also significant. Specifically, the index of moderated mediation (which provides a formal test of moderated mediation; see

Figure 1
Graphical Representation of Study 4 Hypotheses



Hayes, 2015) for competence was .24, CI: .09, .48. With respect to perceptions of warmth, there was a significant conditional indirect effect for the job high in interpersonal demands, $b = .16$, CI: .02, .35; but not for the job low in interpersonal demands, $b = -.07$, CI: $-.24$, .09. The difference between these indirect effects at their respective levels of the moderator was similarly significant. Specifically, the index of moderated mediation was .22, CI: .03, .46. Therefore, claiming (relative to the nonacknowledgment control) resulted in higher candidate evaluations for candidates applying for the job high in interpersonal demands due to increased perceptions of warmth and competence, but not those applying for the job low in interpersonal demands. Indeed, for the job low in interpersonal demands, claiming resulted in lower perceptions of competence and did not affect perceptions of warmth.

When comparing the effect of downplaying to no acknowledgment, results did not show a significant indirect effect of downplaying on evaluations through competence ratings for either the job low, $b = .04$, CI: $-.10$, .16; or high, $b = -.06$, CI: $-.27$, .08, in interpersonal demands. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the effect of competence as a mediator did not differ as a function of job type, $b = -.09$, CI: $-.32$, .08. Contrary to our hypotheses, a significant indirect effect of downplaying on evaluations through warmth ratings was found for the job low in interpersonal demands, $b = .14$, CI: .01, .36; but not the job high in interpersonal demands, $b = -.05$, CI: $-.27$, .08. The index of moderated mediation indicated that the effect of warmth as a mediator differed across job types, $b = -.19$, CI: $-.51$, $-.02$.

Finally, in examining the effects of claiming versus downplaying conditions, results showed a significant conditional indirect effect of claiming on evaluations through competence ratings for the job that was high in interpersonal demands ($b = .13$; CI: .01, .31), but not for the job that was lower in interpersonal demands ($b = -.09$; CI: $-.24$, .01). Importantly, the index of moderated mediation was significant across job types, $b = .22$, CI: .08, .44, indicating that there was a significant difference in the effect of competence as a mediator between

Table 6
Bootstrap-Moderated Mediation Analyses for the Effect of Acknowledgment Strategy on Employee Evaluations Through Warmth and Competence as a Function of Job Interpersonal Demands (Study 4)

	Interpersonal Demands	Est.MX	Est.YM	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Claiming vs. nonacknowledgment				.12 (.11)			
Competence	High	.32* (.17)	.37*** (.09)		.12* (.06)	.02	.25
Competence	Low	-.34* (.22)	.37*** (.09)		-.12* (.07)	-.30	-.02
Warmth	High	.44 (.22)	.36*** (.07)		.16* (.09)	.01	.35
Warmth	Low	-.19 (.22)	.36*** (.07)		-.07 (.09)	-.26	.10
Claiming vs. downplaying				.21 (.11)			
Competence	High	.36* (.18)	.37*** (.09)		.13* (.08)	.01	.30
Competence	Low	-.26 (.16)	.37*** (.09)		-.09 (.06)	-.24	.01
Warmth	High	.31 (.23)	.36*** (.07)		.11 (.09)	-.04	.29
Warmth	Low	-.33 (.21)	.36*** (.07)		-.12 (.08)	-.29	.01
Downplaying vs. nonacknowledgment				-.19 (.12)			
Competence	High	-.15 (.18)	.37*** (.09)		-.06 (.08)	-.27	.08
Competence	Low	.10 (.17)	.37*** (.09)		.04 (.07)	-.10	.16
Warmth	High	-.14 (.23)	.36*** (.07)		-.05 (.08)	-.22	.09
Warmth	Low	.40* (.22)	.36*** (.07)		.14* (.09)	.01	.36

Note: Est.MX = bootstrapped estimate of path from acknowledgment strategy to warmth/competence; Est.YM = bootstrapped estimate of path from warmth/competence to employee evaluation. The estimates of Est.YM are all the same across comparisons. Standard errors of the bootstrapped estimates appear in parentheses. One thousand bootstrapped samples.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

the job that was high and the job that was low in interpersonal demands. There were no significant indirect effects of claiming on evaluations through warmth ratings for the job that was high, $b = .11$; CI: $-.04, .30$; or low, $b = -.12$; CI: $-.32, .01$, in interpersonal demands.

In sum, the results partially supported Hypothesis 7. In general, claiming (compared to nonacknowledgment) led to higher candidate evaluations via perceptions of competence and warmth when the applicant with a visible disability was applying for a job that entailed relatively high interpersonal demands but not when applying for a job that entailed relatively low interpersonal demands.

Study 4 Discussion

This study builds upon previous research by providing a nuanced investigation of a stereotyping mechanism that can explain the benefits of different types of acknowledgment strategies in different job contexts. Consistent with stereotype-fit theory (Colella et al., 1998),

the results showed that the level of interpersonal demands associated with the job impacted the extent to which stereotypes about warmth and competence are influential in acknowledgments of visible disabilities leading to positive reactions from others. Specifically, the findings showed that when interpersonal demands of the job were high, candidates who claimed their disabilities were perceived to be higher in competence and warmth relative to candidates who did not acknowledge their identities, which in turn led to more positive evaluations of the candidate. As expected, demands of the job (and potential misfit between interpersonal demands and individuals with visible disabilities) may have cued evaluators to attend to information that signifies the candidates' ability to effectively perform in the job. Claiming, relative to not acknowledging, appears to signify that the person has the competence and interpersonal skills required for the job. When comparing the use of claiming to downplaying, the results showed that for jobs high in interpersonal demands, claiming led to a higher competence ratings, which positively influenced evaluations.

Consistent with Study 3, these results shed light on a clear explanatory mechanism that differentiates the effectiveness of claiming from downplaying: Claiming may specifically counteract concerns of competence by emphasizing competence, whereas downplaying does not have this benefit (Roberts, 2005; Shih et al., 2013). Extending upon Study 3, these results also suggest that the difference between claiming and downplaying is perhaps most pronounced when observers are concerned about the fit between the interpersonal demands of the job and the visible disability: They are more attentive to cues of the candidate's ability to perform on the job (Colella et al., 1998). Furthermore, these results suggest that competence, in addition to warmth, is viewed as relevant for jobs high in interpersonal demands. It could be that being able to perform well interpersonally also involves characteristics that are indicative of competence, including confidence and intelligence. Indeed, individuals higher in competence may be viewed as having characteristics associated with interpersonal skill, such as being able to exert social influence and having astute understanding of social interactions (Ferris et al., 2007).

Although the results showed a positive effect of claiming for jobs requiring high interpersonal demands, there was a negative effect of claiming (compared to no acknowledgment) on evaluations through competence ratings for jobs requiring low interpersonal skills. It may be that when fit between a disability and job requirements is not low (i.e., fit is not a concern), observers are less concerned about the disability. By specifically drawing attention to and emphasizing the disability in a context where it is not seen as relevant, observers may view such a strategy as an overcompensation tactic and question the candidate's competence. Further, we also found that downplaying (relative to nonacknowledgment) positively influenced warmth perceptions for jobs requiring low levels of interpersonal demands. It could be that by demonstrating that the disability does not affect the candidate like it does others with the disability, observers may view this as the candidate's attempt to "fit" into the culture of the organization where the disability in of itself is not relevant to job performance (Roberts, 2005). Future research can examine these phenomena in more depth.

General Discussion

Individuals with visible disabilities determine how to manage their identities, and the current research shows that they can do so by acknowledging their disability in different ways

in different contexts. The decision about how to acknowledge one's disability (or another stigmatizing identity) is one that must be made with careful consideration of the potential benefits (e.g., receiving accommodations, relieving interpersonal/intrapersonal tensions) and costs (e.g., experiencing discrimination) of doing so (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008). Across four studies, we investigated *why* individuals with visible disabilities engage in different acknowledgment strategies (Study 1), the stereotypes of visible disabilities that acknowledgment strategies may counteract (Study 2), and the *effectiveness* of engaging in different acknowledgment strategies (Studies 3 and 4). In Study 1, we found that individuals with visible disabilities do engage in both claiming and downplaying acknowledgment strategies as a way of intentionally managing others' impressions of their disability. In Study 2, we measured the baseline for how those with visible disabilities are perceived in the workplace along the SCM dimensions of competence and warmth. In Studies 3 and 4, we found that claiming and downplaying acknowledgment strategies have different effects on others' evaluations of an employee or applicant with a visible disability depending on the interpersonal demands of the job.

When we examine the results across studies, we see that individuals with disabilities report engaging in downplaying more so than claiming; however, downplaying may be less effective than claiming in improving others' perceptions across different employment contexts. Specifically, in a coworker-to-coworker interaction context (Study 3), downplaying did not lead to improved evaluations over not acknowledging; however, claiming led to more positive reactions than both downplaying and not acknowledging. These findings suggest that when navigating new relationships with potential team members at work, individuals with visible disabilities verbally can express positive aspects about their disability as a means of helping to shape team members' evaluations of them in a positive light. The use of claiming is related to increases in competence ratings (and in some instances warmth), which is likely to make a potential teammate feel that the individual will pull his or her own weight on the project. Furthermore, the benefits of claiming were seen in an interview context for jobs requiring higher levels of interpersonal demands (Study 4). Claiming may be particularly successful in interviews for jobs with high interpersonal demands if it leads to the impression that applicants are competent, friendly, and likeable; and may counteract stereotypes that would negatively bias performance expectations (Hebl & Kleck, 2000; Stone & Colella, 1996). Indeed, past research has shown that the relation between acknowledgment and interview success is mediated by perceived psychological well-being (Hebl & Skorinko, 2005).

Combined, the results support previous research on the use of acknowledgment as a useful identity management strategy and extend the literature by illustrating that the context surrounding the situation influences the effectiveness of different types of acknowledgment strategies. Thus, it is important that individuals with a visible disability can and do communicate about their disabilities in different ways depending on the audience and situational factors.

Practical Implications

When attempting to gain employment for jobs with high interpersonal demands, it may be beneficial for individuals to acknowledge their visible disabilities in interviews by highlighting positive aspects of the disabilities instead of downplaying the discrediting characteristics

or failing to acknowledge at all. Given this utility, vocational training for job seekers with visible disabilities may highlight how to use this strategy in interview and other interpersonal interactions. Such training can combine knowledge gained from this research along with what has been shown in other research concerning the timing of acknowledgment in interview settings (Hebl & Skorinko, 2005) to provide a comprehensive program on implementing this strategy. Such training should also note the potential negative outcomes associated with discussing one's stigma, including expression of discrimination, and help individuals develop a decision-making process for when and how to acknowledge a visible disability based on evidence-based research findings.

Although we believe and illustrate the usefulness of acknowledgment for current employees with visible disabilities, as well as job seekers, we caution that the onus of responsibility should not fall solely on individuals with disabilities to manage potential stigmatization. Regardless of whether candidates choose to acknowledge their disabilities or not, organizations can (and should) help to reduce bias against individuals with disabilities in their selection systems. Interviewers can benefit from diversity and interpersonal sensitivity training so as to reduce reliance on stereotypes (which in turn influence evaluations) when evaluating candidates. Interviewers also can be trained to conduct interviews in a warm and agreeable manner so that candidates can view their disabilities as characteristics that will be valued by the organization (encouraging claiming), as opposed to devalued by the organization (encouraging downplaying or failure to acknowledge).

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research has a number of strengths, including the use of both authentic targets' (i.e., individuals with disabilities) and observers' (i.e., individuals without visible disabilities) perspectives of the use of acknowledgment, which allows us to demonstrate evidence of external validity. The current results also provide value concerning how different types of acknowledgment strategies impact evaluations of individuals with visible disabilities in employment settings. Further, the use of experimental designs in Studies 3 and 4 allowed for a high degree of control and increase in internal validity, and allowed us to gain confidence in the causal link between acknowledgment strategies and evaluations. The current studies focused on evaluations of job applicants; however, the findings concerning the causal links between acknowledgment strategies, stereotype activation, and evaluations should generalize to other relationship contexts in organizations. Future research should examine how claiming and downplaying influence interactions between coworkers on similar status levels. Whereas we did not find significant links between claiming and evaluations through warmth ratings in the current studies, the warmth ratings may be more important in other types of employment interactions when the dynamics of the relationship between interaction partners is more balanced (Roberts, 2005).

As with all studies, this research has limitations, one of which is the cross-sectional self-report survey used in Study 1, which bears the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, the expectedly low correlation between claiming and downplaying ($r = -.08$) suggests that common method bias may not be a strong driver of the observed relations. Further, self-reports are perhaps the most direct way of assessing the constructs of interest (intentions to manage others' impressions, use of

acknowledgment strategies). Future research might separate measures of intentions and identity management in order to improve quality of possible causal inferences by time-lagged and/or experimental designs. Additionally, future research may use longitudinal or time-lagged studies to examine the dynamic effects of acknowledgment on future interactions between individuals who acknowledge and those who are recipients of the acknowledgment. The findings of the current studies illustrate how different acknowledgment strategies influence evaluations that occur relatively soon after the interaction. However, it is unclear the extent to which there are residual positive effects of a single acknowledgment on later interactions. That is, how does impression formation in an interview influence how subsequent identity management is responded to when the individual is in the organization? Previous research has noted the dynamic nature of discussing one's stigma in terms of revealing or acknowledging to different individuals (Jones & King, 2014); however, the long-term consequences of a single acknowledgment are not clear.

Another potential limitation is the use of MTurk and university student samples across studies. It could be that individuals with more experience evaluating others (e.g., selection decisions) are less prone to bias in evaluations and selection decisions. However, past research has shown that stereotypes are automatically activated (Devine, 1989) and perceptions of competence and warmth are universally shared (Fiske et al., 2002; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). Furthermore, although some have concerns about the generalizability of findings using student samples, scholars have noted that the use of such samples in applied research should not affect the generalizability of determining whether phenomena and relations can occur (Shen et al., 2011), which is what our findings illustrate. Given the value of the current findings, future research should examine the effectiveness of these strategies for job applicants in the field using organizational decision makers who are evaluating multiple applicants for a job.

Finally, although we have noted many of the positive benefits of acknowledging in the workplace (both through our findings and in our review of the literature), we recognize that feeling the need to discuss one's visible disability in order to manage others' impressions could be perceived as burdensome to some individuals. Future research should more closely examine what the psychological consequences associated with acknowledgment are for those who engage in these strategies. Based on our research we would expect that downplaying may be more cognitively taxing than claiming for individuals because they are distancing part of their identity in an attempt to get others to accept them, yet this is something that has not been fully examined in the literature to date. Understanding such psychological outcomes is important as individuals' attitudes and feelings are positively related to their workplace attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., productivity).

Conclusion

Across four studies, we have extended the understanding of stigmatized identity management by assessing the effectiveness of different acknowledgment strategies for individuals with visible disabilities. Our results suggest that openly claiming one's disability by framing the disability in a positive light is a particularly successful strategy for individuals with visible disabilities in influencing others' evaluations of the individual. Furthermore, claiming strategies are more influential in some job contexts, particularly those jobs with high

interpersonal demands. The successful identity management of disability is important as it may help curb potential discrimination that individuals with disabilities may face when at work or when attempting to gain access to accommodations.

Appendix

Intentionally Managing Impressions (Study 1)

1. I try to break stereotypes that others hold about people with disabilities.
2. I try to manage the impressions others hold about me based on my disability.
3. I try to manage the impressions others hold about people who have the same disability as do I.
4. I try to manage the impressions others hold about all people with disabilities.

Identity Management (Study 1)

Claiming

1. I tell my coworkers about how people with my disability can perform at their job just as well as anyone else.
2. I talk to my coworkers about how other people with my disability have gone on to be successful.
3. I tell my coworkers about certain positive aspects of having my disability.

Downplaying

1. In talking to my coworker, I downplay any negative aspects of my disability.
2. In discussing my disability, I try to minimize the effects it has on my work.
3. I try to minimize how my disability affects my work.
4. I try as much as possible to not let my disability affect what my coworkers have to do at work.
5. I specifically do things to show that my disability is not an issue for my work.

Note

1. We examined if a particular type of disability would drive the effects of intention to manage impressions on engagement in claiming and downplaying. To do so, we compared the means for the independent (intentions to manage impressions) and dependent variables (claiming, downplaying) across the different types of disability (i.e., mobility or neurological impairment, vision impairment, diseases apparent to the skin, and hearing impairment) using multiple one-way analyses of variance. We found that the means did not significantly differ across disability type for intentions to manage impressions, $F(3, 81) = 0.11$, n.s.; claiming, $F(3, 80) = 0.58$, n.s.; or downplaying, $F(3, 81) = 0.31$, n.s. We also included disability type as a control in the regression of claiming and downplaying onto intentions to manage impressions and the inclusion of disability type did not affect the results. As such, we did not control for disability type in our test of Hypothesis 1.

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